

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE EEC 1960–67

The British Labour Party, the Scandinavian labour parties and Europe

Kristian Steinnes

(Session 82. kristian.steinnes@hf.ntnu.no). Not to be quoted from.

Introduction

The British Conservative Party's reappraisal of its European policies in the early sixties made it imperative to the opposition Labour Party and the labour parties in Denmark, Norway and Sweden to reassess its European policies too. As a consequence a (coherent) European policy was demanded within those parties by which the developments adequately could be dealt with. No such European policies existed neither in the British Labour Party nor the Scandinavian labour parties by the early 1960. A complex set of factors informed concepts of Europe in the ensuing years, and this paper concentrate on the policy formulation processes and the perception of «core Europe» in these parties 1960–67.

The main focus is put on the British Labour Party. Britain and her role as the far biggest member of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) unquestionably were an important determinant to perceptions and policy formation in the Scandinavian states. The debate on the British Labour Party's relations with Europe suggests that it is a history of ambiguity. Its perception of the European Economic Community (EEC) has, at least indirectly, been the subject of many studies, and is often based on an interpretation of an undecided party largely in conflict with itself. The conventional wisdom suggests however that a great deal of continuity existed from the Attlee government's rejection of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950 to Hugh Gaitskell's passionate denunciation of EEC-membership in 1962, just to be overturned by the Wilson government's bid to join in 1967. Although the Scandinavian labour parties also reappraised its position towards the EEC and endured internal conflicts and ambiguities over the question, it appears to be less clear-cut than in the British party. Yet historical research has brought nuances to the interpretations of the British Labour Party's European policies, especially by accession to official documents released by the Public Record Office, no fundamental reappraisal has been offered.

The argument that is to be developed in this paper will not completely contradict the conventional wisdom, as existing accounts of British and Scandinavian labour party relations with Europe is its logical and rational point of departure. However, it will differentiate it considerably with respect to the implications of the Westminster political system, the degree of policy continuity, and the role of transnational social democratic contacts. The argument

here is threefold. First, the situation profoundly changed in October 1964 when the Labour Party narrowly won the general election. Signs of reassessment in the party's European policies are evident shortly after taking office. Studies of the policy formation have not sufficiently taken the implications of this aspect into account.¹

Secondly, policy formulation during the two applications is not satisfactorily held together. Archival-based analyses tend to deal with Wilson's second application rather isolated from earlier Labour Party European policies, especially policy formulation during the first application debacle – apparently, and according to the conventional wisdom, by which it had little in common – and disconnected from the influences of the British political system and its dynamics. Yet studies of the Labour Party's policy formulating processes cannot be detached neither from a fairly expanded chronological perspective nor the system under which it was subjected and carried out.²

Thirdly, current archival-based historical studies of the Wilson government's application rely heavily on governmental and diplomatic sources stemming largely from the Public Record Office in London.³ As a consequence the debate mainly draws on governmental and diplomatic accounts, whereas other sources of information and influences as the parties, party organisations, individuals and transnational contacts largely are omitted. Neither Britain nor Scandinavia participated in the «core European» process until 1973, thus transnational contacts and conceptualisations between them are of special interest.

This paper consists for three parts. The first gives an account of British (and Scandinavian) Labour Party perceptions of Europe and policy formulation 1960–63. The second part focuses on the same actors and issues during the period 1964–67, while the latter part, based on empirical evidence given in the first two parts, develops the arguments the paper sets out to discuss.⁴

¹ Robins, L. J.: *The Reluctant Party: Labour and the EEC, 1961–1975*, G. W. & A. Hesketh, Ormskirk 1979, Lieber, Robert J.: *British Politics and European Unity. Parties, Elites, and Pressure Groups*, University of California Press, London 1970, Parr, Helen: *Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British Policy towards the European Community, 1964–67*, Phd, Queen Mary, University of London, London 2002, Young, John W.: *Britain and European Unity, 1945–1992*, Macmillan, London 1993, Delaney, Erin: «The Labour Party's Changing Relationship to Europe. The Explanation of European Social Policy» in *Journal of European Integration History*, Vol 8, 1/2002:121–138, Karvounis, Antonios: *An Analysis of the Labour Party's Discourse on Europe 1961–2000*, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle 2002, Kitzinger, U.: *The Second Try: The Labour Party and the EEC*, Pergamon, London 1968.

² See for example Daddow, Oliver J. (ed.): *Harold Wilson and European Integration. Britain's Second Application to join the EEC*, Frank Cass, London 2003, and Parr, Helen: *Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British Policy towards the European Community, 1964–67*, Phd, Queen Mary, University of London, London 2002.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The mere undertaking of studies of this kind, focussing on «soft factors» as perceptions and conceptualisations, are inspired by (new) Institutional approaches and is an argument against Rational Choice explanations.

Part I: The first application debacle

During the 1950s neither the British Labour Party nor the Scandinavian social democratic parties did show any enthusiasm towards European integration issues. Moreover, the lack of enthusiasm reflected a fundamental lack of coherent response to developments on the Continent by the process set in motion by the «core six». The British Labour Party's European «policies» were essentially decided upon and carried out by the party elite. However, the attitudes and responses toward European issues evolved throughout the decade. While the Attlee government declined to join the incipient ECSC, Newman suggests that the Party wanted close links with the new Common Market, though short of membership.⁵ The Labour Party moreover viewed the breakdown of the free trade area negotiations (FTA) with unease and supported the set up of the EFTA in 1959, hoping it would lead to a wider European understanding.

Towards the sixties individuals like Harold Wilson, mainly associated with the centre-left of the Party, admitted there were good reasons to join the Common Market, yet still reluctant towards closer European entanglements. The party leader and leading revisionist, Hugh Gaitskell, had apparently not made up his mind, but eventually accepted that closer European cooperation was inevitable.⁶

Thus, at the threshold of the sixties, the leadership in the British Labour Party had become more flexible in its attitudes towards European integration, although still influenced by perceptions and policies with which it rejected the Shuman proposal in 1950. More flexible did not, though, imply being more coherent. The lack of enthusiasm and carefully elaborated European policies were heavily influenced by the complexity of the issues and the incompatibility of positions within the party. As a consequence, the Labour Party leadership did not make any effort to carry motions on the FTA proposal at its 1957 or 1958 annual conferences. Indeed, Rippingale argues that the Labour Party did not respond to the FTA initiative until prompted to by the TUC General Council (Trade Union Congress).⁷ By the sixties, when signs indicated the government might be in the process of reviewing its

⁵ Newman, Micheal: «The British Labour Party», Richard T. Griffiths (ed.) *Socialist Parties and the Question of Europe in the 1950's*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1993:169–70.

⁶ The term revisionist is in this context normally associated with Gaitskell and his moderate centre-right policies in favour of restructuring the party along modern social democratic lines and get rid of its most fundamentalist inheritance as the famous Clause IV (nationalisation) most associated with the «Bevanites». The same processes took place elsewhere in Europe, notably in the West German SPD at its famous 1959 Bad Godesberg conference with which it got rid of its fundamentalist socialist heritage.

European policies, the Labour Party realised it had no choice but to «decide which course it should now follow».⁸ In a meeting in the Socialist International Contact Committee on European Free Trade Area issues in May 1960, Wilson frankly stated that Labour had no fixed European policy.⁹ Until then the Labour Party's European «policies» had very much reflected and been comparable to those of the government.

The prospect of increased tariffs imposed by a European customs union likely to be followed by tighter political cooperation spurred the British Tory government to reassess its stance towards the EEC. The same awareness became apparent in the Scandinavian countries. If the Conservative British government decided on closer association with, or even membership of, the EEC and thus embarked on negotiations, Scandinavian social democratic parties would certainly look askance to the British Labour Party and its judgement if the developments. All three Scandinavian governments were social democratic-led, and a reappraisal of British European policies would dramatically change the situation in the Scandinavian capitals and labour parties.

However, the internal disagreements over the question in the British Labour Party required careful considerations. The issue clearly had the potential of a new damaging and far-reaching split through the party just when it was about to recover its shattered unity after emotionally charged debates over disarmament, defence policy and Clause IV (nationalisation). Even the simple fact that the National Executive Committee (NEC) did not outright dismiss the FTA proposals had provoked substantial response from the left. In 1957 Aneurin Bevan stated that socialists could not call for economic planning and simultaneously accept the verdict of a dogmatic free market economy.¹⁰ On the other hand, individuals like Roy Jenkins and George Brown increasingly emphasised the advantages of closer economic and indeed political cooperation with the Six.¹¹ Moreover, internal pressure groups were increasingly ready to influence the Party from inside, and thus threatened to make a split

⁷ Rippingale, Simon: *Hugh Gaitskell. The Labour Party and Foreign Affairs 1955–63*, PhD, School of Humanities and Cultural Interpretation, University of Plymouth, Plymouth 1996:221.

⁸ Labour Party Archives, The Labour History Archive & Study Centre in Manchester (LAM), International Dept., «Problems of European Unity», 25 May 1960:5.

⁹ Labour Party Annual Conference Report (LACR) 1960, Rippingale 1996:223. LAM, International Dept., PLP meeting at the House of Commons, 4 May 1960.

¹⁰ Aneurin Bevan, in *Tribune*, 30 August and 14 October 1957. From Newman 1993:171 and Rippingale 1996:219.

¹¹ See for example Roy Jenkins in the *Sozialistische Europa-Korrespondenz* autumn 1960. The *Sozialistische Europa-Korrespondenz* was published in Luxembourg by the Liaison Office of the Socialist Parties of the Member States of the European Communities. IISH, SI, SII, vol. x, 1960. Rippingale 1996:222.

fatally damaging.¹² The EEC issue thus had the potential to drive a dangerous wedge into the Party. According to the prominent Labour Party politician, Richard Crossman, any attempt to lay down conditions by the Labour Party would have split the Movement from top to bottom.¹³

Electoral concerns pushed the issue up the agenda, too. The opinion of the electorate had to be taken closely into consideration. Labour had lost three successive general elections, and the polls showed close race between Macmillan and the Tories and Gaitskell and Labour. Gaitskell had however managed to close the gap between himself and the Prime Minister on personal ratings.¹⁴ In this context the Scandinavian experiences appeared appealing. In Sweden, Norway and largely Denmark the Labour parties had stayed in power throughout the period the British Labour Party had been marching «in the dark». Apparently, it was not the optimal time «entering into a federal Europe» as Gaitskell eventually expressed himself in the House of Commons on 2 August 1961 – clearly with reference to the electorate – «British opinion is not ripe for this».¹⁵ These considerations and requirements eventually led the Party to take action on two fronts.

First, the Labour Party's International Department issued a paper in May 1960 in which the need for a carefully considered policy on the European issue was strongly demanded.¹⁶ Second, the NEC restructured its internal policy-making machinery early in 1960 to meet those ends. Hence from early summer 1960 onwards, the British Labour Party requested a carefully considered and well-defined European policy by which the full implications of Britain's relations with Europe was to be addressed.

«Wait and see» attitude

Thus the British Labour Party recognised the need for a coherent European policy, and steps had been taken to deal with the demand. However, it is a far more delicate undertaking to

¹² On the left groups like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Victory for Socialism, the Tribune Group and the Forward Britain Movement opposed British membership of the EEC, while on the right of the Party the Campaign for Democratic Socialism and the Labour Common Market Committee, the latter led by Roy Jenkins, supported the government's initiative in 1961. A few individuals from the left supported the CDS. The CND was set up by a handful of intellectuals and pacifists in 1958.

¹³ Crossman Diaries 13 July 1961, quoted from Rippingale 1996:227. See also Robins, L. J.: *The Reluctant Party: Labour and the EEC, 1961–1975*, G. W. & A. Hesketh, Ormskirk 1979:31–34.

¹⁴ Wybrow, Robert J.: *Britain Speaks Out 1937–87. A Social History as seen through the Gallup Data*, Macmillan, London 1989:64–66.

¹⁵ Hansard, Vol 645, 2 August 1961, Col. 1501–06.

identify what informed the policy-formulating process, which might be seen as a complex mix of influence by party elite and factions, the PLP, the policy-making machinery, rank and file members, pressure groups, the economy, its transnational partners – and the political system. Moreover, a similarly complex mix of considerations had to be taken into account in the policy formulating process, not only the terms of membership, internal disagreements, party unity and electoral considerations, but the much debated and emotional Commonwealth connections, the EFTA obligations, the transnational contacts, and the future freedom to conduct an independent foreign policy and to carry out socialist policies in which planning and welfare measures were crucial.

Although the Labour party had realised the necessity to come to grips with what should be its European policy, the extensive deliberations in the policy-making machinery did not bring about an unambiguous, coherent policy by summer 1961. Neither was it able to unite the leadership behind a consistent European policy. It rather demonstrated the divergence and uncertainty within the Labour Party elite, stressing the need for further clarifications and highlighting the dangers of new damaging internal splits. The decision whether or not to join the Common Market was considered one of the «most important and difficult political decisions since the second World War». In the Commons Wilson suggested the importance of the issue transcended even «that of the Free Trade issue of 1846».¹⁷

Under these circumstances it was very difficult to decide what should be official party policy. Consequently, the initial debates resulted in an agreement that the NEC should take a «wait and see» stance and not make any statement committing the Party either for or against joining the Common Market until more information was available about the government's negotiations. The main reason for the Labour Party's «wait and see» approach was tactical with regard to the unity of the Movement as a whole, and thus the power of the Party in the next general election. The timing of the difficult and potentially party-divisive European issue was thus probably as bad as it could be. The Party had merely recovered from the negative effects of highly emotional divisive issues, and was certainly not ready for new. Primarily, the role of the Party was to rally support for its policies and seize governmental power.

Neither was the Labour Party solely divided along traditional factionist lines, as were the Scandinavian parties. The revisionist right was indeed on the whole more inclined to support closer link with continental Europe and social democratic parties in the six than the

¹⁶ LAM, International Dept., *Problems of European Unity*, 25 May 1960.

¹⁷ International Institute of Social History (IISH), *Socialist International*, 585, *European Unity*, Wilson in the Commons, 3 August 1961.

fundamentalist left who saw the community created largely by commercial and capitalist forces. It should nevertheless be noted that the right-wing did not hesitate to criticise the EEC if it was considered to be justified, but the EEC was not in their view bluntly put down as reactionary and capitalist device *per se*, as by the fundamentalist left. Moreover, parts of the right-wing opposed entry, while some left-wingers favoured British entry. Yet positions were not inflexible, thus the interpretation of the Rome Treaty and the conceptualisations of the Common Market had the capacity to influence the perceptions of membership in the party.

Moreover, the Party was still in the process of hatching out a policy, and as such it was premature to commit itself one way or another and the terms of membership would not, of course, be known until after the negotiations were completed. Lastly, if Britain was to join the EEC she would have to accept the Rome Treaty «with all [its] obligations and duties», as emphasised by Walter Hallstein, the President of the Commission.¹⁸

In June 1961 a comprehensive report was issued in order to provide the British Labour Party with more information on the Common Market. It assumed among other things that membership of the EEC was expected to involve «the progressive weakening of national economic control».¹⁹ How serious this would prove to be for a Labour government would eventually depend on the balance of political forces in the community and the pace at which its economic integration would proceed. The Community had initially been set up and still was dominated by catholic and Christian democratic forces, but as stated in the Home Policy Committee, this would not necessarily continue to be so in the future, «especially if the EEC is joined by Britain, Denmark and Norway».²⁰ Thus from the British Labour Party point of view in 1961, much would therefore hinge upon if and to what degree social democratic parties and policies would gain power inside the Community, and if the Scandinavian countries would follow Britain.

Eventually, as this paper suggests, this turned out to be an important strand of the longer-term policy formation processes on whether or not to join the European venture in the British Labour Party as in the Scandinavian parties. Thus the social democratic stronghold in Scandinavia, it may be argued, considerably contributed to the conceptualisations of the EEC and thus the policy formulating processes within the British Labour Party.

¹⁸ Walter Hallstein in a speech on 29 June 1961. LAM, International Dept., Finance and Economic Policy Sub-Committee. RD 162/July 1961.

¹⁹ The conclusions in such reports were of course heavily dependent on the individuals they comprised.

²⁰ LAM, International Dept., Home Policy Committee, «The European Commitment»:5. RD 162/July 1961.

Gaitskell – and the «five conditions»

When Macmillan announced the government's decision on 31 July 1961 to apply for membership, the Labour Party's response was as commented by Robins «ambivalent, uncertain, vague and cautious».²¹ Viewed against the above presented internal considerations and inconsistencies it is understandable. The conventional wisdom the following period, tells a story where the Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, held the party on the fence for over a year. After vacillating between making pro- and contra-European statements, he suddenly went against entry in a highly emotional speech at the Annual Party Conference of 1962 in Brighton. Thus the party turned out to disapprove the Conservative application. In his well-known speech, Gaitskell declared that membership of the EEC would mean «the end of Britain as an independent European state. I make no apology for repeating it. It means the end of a thousand years of history. You may say, 'let it end', but my goodness, it is a decision that needs a little care and thought».²²

In August 1962 the Conservative British government had presented its «White Paper», by which the outline agreement of the Brussels negotiations, intended for presentation to the Commonwealth Prime Minister' Conference in September, were accessible. It made it possible for the Labour Party at least to assess the direction to which the negotiations were moving. Yet the negotiations were not completed, the information indicated the NEC and the Labour Party perceived them as a «grave disappointment».²³ At the time the Labour Party was about to commit itself on the question, and at the end of September the NEC issued the *Labour and the Common Market*, eventually overwhelmingly approved by the Brighton Annual Conference in October. The core of the document consisted of five «essential» conditions which had to be met if Britain should join the EEC.²⁴ Interestingly, though, only one of them could be labelled socialist, namely the right to plan the national Economy.

Gaitskell's speech on 3 October is well known. Yet nobody did know exactly what course he was about to take, even as late as the evening before he delivered his speech. George Brown, anxious to avoid being embarrassed as he was set to wind up the debate, repeatedly asked him if he could have a look at the speech the evening before, but he was not

²¹ Robins 1979:16.

²² LAM, Report of the 61st Annual Conference of the Labour Party, Brighton, 1–5 October, 1962:159.

²³ LAM, NEC, RD325, August 1962.

²⁴ LAM, NEC, «Labour and the Common Market», 29 September 1962:1. (1) «Strong and binding safeguards for the trade and other interests of our friends and partners in the Commonwealth», (2) «Freedom as at present to

allowed to. Gaitskell nonetheless assured him that the line taken in the NEC statement would not be changed.²⁵ However, it is clear that his speech went beyond the remit of the statement on the Common Market. Rippingale has pointed out that Gaitskell faced the dilemma that while many of his closest allies wanted his support in their struggle for British membership and against the anti-Marketeers, also in the TUC, many of his strongest critics shared the same sceptical view as his policy advisers, the PLP and the Shadow Cabinet.²⁶

According to Featherstone, Rippingale, Robins and Lieber Gaitskell's position on the EEC question was indeed crucial.²⁷ It is not difficult to agree with their suggestions. Brian Brivati is among those who argue that the effects of the Brighton speech were tremendous and that he united the party behind his leadership in a single speech.²⁸ A small minority of devoted EEC supporters, grouped around individuals like Roy Jenkins, George Brown and Anthony Crosland, appeared after that largely isolated as the overwhelming majority of the party united against EEC-membership. An explanation along those lines does not, however, tell the full story of the process towards the Brighton Conference and indeed up to de Gaulle's veto in January 1963. Nuances and perspectives have to be added.

Gaitskell had all the way since the preliminary conclusions had been drawn in mid-1961 by the policy-making processes in the Party been cautious not to commit himself one way or another on the issue, and carefully sought to prevent as many Labour MPs as possible from committing themselves. On the whole Gaitskell had appeared slightly positive to Britain joining the EEC.²⁹ So, how should his decision to «go against entry» on the Labour Party Annual Conference in October 1962 be understood? Although his speech did not rule out joining the EEC on good terms, the effect of it was clearly anti-EEC. Douglas Jay called it an «intellectual massacre» and Wilson a «historic speech».³⁰ The left were delighted, and the pro-marketeers on the right shocked. Bill Rodgers, the organiser of the CDS, remained seated with his arms folded, during the standing ovation after the speech, while Roy Jenkins stood,

pursue our own foreign policy», (3) «Fulfilment of the Government's pledge to our associates in the EFTA», (4) «The right to plan our own economy», and (5) «Guarantees to safeguard the position of British agriculture».

²⁵ Brown, George: *In my way: The political memoirs of Lord George-Brown*, Victor Gollancz, London 1971:212.

²⁶ Rippingale 1996:262.

²⁷ Featherstone, Kevin: *Socialist Parties and European Integration. A Comparative History*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1988:53, Rippingale 1996:214–16, Robins 1979:1, 3, 27–28, Lieber, Robert J.: *British Politics and European Unity. Parties, Elites, and Pressure Groups*, University of California Press, London 1970:175–76.

²⁸ Brivati, Brian in Jeffreys, Kevin: *Leading Labour. From Keir Hardie to Tony Blair*, I.B.Tauris, London 1999:111–12.

²⁹ This impression is evident for example from communication between Gaitskell and David Ennals in 1961, LAM, International Dept., box Common Market, EEC memoranda etc, 11, 12 and 20 July 1961, and from a TV-broadcast wholly devoted to the EEC question on 8 May 1962.

³⁰ Rippingale 1996:254.

without applauding. The Danish delegates to the Conference clearly got the impression too that the Labour Party in effect had taken a decision to oppose membership.³¹

One remarkable observation is that Gaitskell's wife, Dora, is reported to have said to Charles Pannell during the ovation that «all the wrong people are cheering».³² It may be a clear indication of where Gaitskell's allegiance really was. Held together with other signs, it might indicate that Gaitskell had fairly positive perceptions of the Common Market project, despite his rhetoric. In that case, his speech must have been designed to serve other ends.

Transnational perceptions might have influenced Gaitskell's and indeed the Party's conceptualisations of the Common Market. Robins argues along Lieber that the September meeting with the Commonwealth socialists was pivotal.³³ He suggests that there were «a definite change in the political atmosphere after Gaitskell's meeting with the Commonwealth socialists», and in November he refers to a newspaper article where Gaitskell is reported to indicate himself that the meetings with European and Commonwealth socialists had been critical in his opposition to entry.³⁴ His meetings with them respectively in July and September 1962, called upon by Labour's Annual Conference in October 1961, allegedly made him move progressively closer to opposition.³⁵ Yet Rippingale claims Gaitskell did not come of the fence towards the 1962 Annual Conference but adopted a strategy that appealed to both sides of the Party until he was strong enough to head off any potential challenge. I will however argue that the meetings with European and Commonwealth socialists were important. Not in the sense that it made Gaitskell changed his mind and went against entry, but in order to formulate both strategy and tactics to meet other ends.

After the conference, it is now «a matter of historical 'fact'» as Robins states, he was more or less back «on the fence» and was anxious to confirm his «wait and see»-attitude.³⁶ Rippingale has made the same observations. Hence in a few months Gaitskell seems to have moved from a relatively uncommitted, even positive attitude towards EEC-membership if the negotiations proved to secure acceptable terms of accession, to highly emotional opposition at the Brighton Conference, and then back to a more moderate position in the PLP and

³¹ The Swedish Labour Movement's Archives and Library, Stockholm (ARAB), Swedish Labour Party (SAP), E5, International Secretary's Archive, Report from Labour's 61st Congress, 1–5 October 1962:4.

³² Quoted from Jenkins, Roy: *A Life at the Centre*, Macmillan, London 1991:146.

³³ Lieber 1970:176.

³⁴ Robins 1979:28 and *The Guardian* 1 November 1962 (from Robins 1979:42).

³⁵ LAM, NEC, Resolution on the Common Market of the Labour Party Annual Conference, 5 October 1961.

³⁶ Robins 1979:29.

elsewhere after the Conference. One of his closest friend and allies for a decade, Roy Jenkins, was estranged by his performance, but soon their relations were restored.³⁷

Some strong reservations concerning Gaitskell's «opposition» should therefore be born in mind. He might have spoke as he did at the Conference in order to please the electorate, oppose the government, consolidate his position and most importantly unite the party. There is strong evidence that Gaitskell did not decide against entry at all. Most likely, his speech had widely unintended effects as it came out and were received in considerable more negative terms than initially intended by the Party Leader. Hence, his behaviour should to be explained in terms of tactical and strategic moves in order to achieve other ends in anticipation that firstly, the issue was unlikely to materialise, and secondly, if so, the Party would remain intact, united and strong under his leadership. If the British Labour Party would loose another general election, the situation would be deeply dramatic for the party and his leadership. No party is granted eternal life, neither the British Labour Party, clearly demonstrated by the developments in the early 1980s. If the increasingly unpopular Tories should win the next general election, the way back to power could prove to be very, very long for the Labour Party. Yet the tide did not turn against Labour.

Part II: The Second Try

After Gaitskell's sudden death in January 1963, Harold Wilson was elected leader. In mid-October 1964 the Labour Party won a wafer-thin majority of five seats. Thirteen years of Tory government had come to an end. Long last the Labour Party «could lie down in green pastures» as the «walk through the darkest valley» had come to an end. Wilson thus became Prime Minister, and was given the opportunity to turn the page in the Party's recent gloomy history. However, the parliamentary majority was insufficient to last for a full term, and after 18 months of government on 31 March 1966 the PM sought and won re-election with a landslide majority of 96.

The European policies of the new Labour government were still largely built on internal party deliberations carried out from 1960 onwards, ultimately embedded into the NEC statement *Labour and the Common Market* in September 1962. Yet after de Gaulle's 1963-veto the question of British entry into the EEC was put dead for some time in the UK.

³⁷ Jenkins 1991:145–48.

The attempt had failed and nobody would seriously invoke the question in the 1964 general election campaigns. Thus the European question played little part in the long run-up to the important election, which was fought largely on domestic issues; except for the issue of the nuclear deterrent. Neither was the EEC question central to the Labour Party 1964 General Election manifesto, where it merely was stated that Britain would seek to achieve closer links with Europe.³⁸

In its first weeks in office the Wilson government did little to change the perception on the continent that Britain and the Labour Party largely was somewhat detached from Europe. The new government immediately got its hand full. It became apparent it had to deal with a huge balance of payments deficit of almost 800 million pound, and it rushed into a decision to impose a 15 per cent surcharge on imports in order to cope with the damaging balance of payments situation. It produced immediate and sharp reactions from abroad, especially and with most justice from its partners in EFTA. And the decision brought the organisation on the brink of collapse.

However, in early 1965 the new Labour government started to present its European policies in new terms. It may be argued that the question was boosted by the difficult economic situation, as the single most important factor in the serious balance of payments situation was Britain's deteriorating export to the EEC. The European market had in recent years been the most promising, and leading industrialists in Britain had increasingly questioned future developments outside the EEC. Moreover, the Conservative Party front bench, which recently had been responsible for Britain's failed membership negotiations, openly began to advocate British membership of the EEC, and soon elected the «European» Edward Heath as party leader. He had headed the Macmillan government's negotiations back in 1961–63. Of course the economic situation was difficult, yet it does not adequately explain the reappraisal and abandonment of previous held beliefs, perceptions and policies. It has to be supplemented by taking the political system and the Labour Party's changed position in that system into account – namely its accession to power.

In the Scandinavian countries the changed attitude did not pass unnoticed. The Swedish Ambassador in London, Gunnar Hägglöf, sent a confidential memo to Torsten Nilsson, the Foreign Secretary, as early as 9 February 1965, drawing attention to what he perceived as new tendencies and perceptions in Britain towards the EEC. Market questions were increasingly discussed, he noted, and «I am convinced that this brainwork eventually

³⁸ *The New Britain*, the Labour Party manifesto for the 1964 General Election.

will result in new attempts to arrange in some way Britain's relationship with the European market. It may take some time, yet we should not exclude it will take place rather sooner than generally believed». ³⁹

He should prove right. Reappraisals in the British governments were soon to become evident. The feeble economy and confused international situation spurred Wilson and his government to search for action in which the situation could be facilitated, and the idea of closing the gap between EEC and EFTA emerged with force. Interestingly, the opening gambit was not taken along traditional diplomatic lines, but on the transnational arena. ⁴⁰ On 24–25 April leaders from twelve European countries was invited by Wilson – not the British state – to attend a meeting of the Socialist International in London. They dined together at Chequers, the British Prime Ministers official country residence outside London. The main topic under discussion was the EEC–EFTA question. According to Miriam Camps and supported by Olof Palme's report from the meeting, the issue was initially discussed in fairly general terms by the whole group. The latter part of the meeting Wilson dedicated to examine the issue in considerably more detail by a smaller group, consisting of the leaders of the social democratic parties in EFTA. ⁴¹ They stayed at Chequers overnight.

The effect of their transnational network was to read in the press. Swedish newspaper reported in bold headlines that European social democracy had agreed «on vibrant future». ⁴² The newspapers also purported that the tension between social democrats in the EEC and EFTA were reduced, and that the general conditions for future relations thus had been improved. ⁴³ The *Sunday Times* suggested «if there is one single linking thread running through the ill-knit fabric of European Socialism, it is that of the wish for a more united Europe, and in particular a closer British association with that Europe». ⁴⁴ The more left-wing the *Guardian* portrayed the meeting as an important political step in Britain's future diplomatic relations with Europe, and Wilson's role as «deft and effective». ⁴⁵ If Western

³⁹ ARAB, Tage Erlander's Archives (TEA), box 079, Gunnar Hägglöf to Torsten Nilsson, 9 February 1965.

⁴⁰ This is largely ignored by archival based studies dealing with the process leading up to Britain's second application. See for example Parr, Helen: *Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British Policy towards the European Community, 1964–67*, Phd, Queen Mary, University of London, London 2002 and Daddow, Oliver J. (ed.): *Harold Wilson and European Integration. Britain's Second Application to join the EEC*, Frank Cass, London 2003.

⁴¹ Erlander, Krag, Pittermann, Bratteli and Brandt ARAB, Olof Palme's Archives (OPA), box 002, meeting Chequers, 24 April 1965.

⁴² *Aftonbladet* 26 April 1965.

⁴³ *Dagens Nyheter* 25 April 1965.

⁴⁴ *Sunday Times*, Quoted from IISH, SI, SII, 1965:108.

⁴⁵ The *Guardian*, Quoted from IISH, SI, SII, 1965:108.

Europe was to be led by socialist, *The Times* noted, the meeting at Chequers «may prove to have been a very useful beginning».⁴⁶

The Chequers agreement set out to reduce or eliminate altogether the present European deadlock. «The time for such an initiative seemed near», Bruno Pittermann claimed on his return to Vienna. «West Germany should be ready to make its contribution towards bridging the gap between the Common Market and EFTA», Willy Brandt stated following his return to Berlin. He claimed the Labour government was now «the keenest among the European Socialist leaders...in spite of their attitude» in 1962–63. They did not any longer perceive the Rome Treaty as «a hindrance to greater unity in Europe», Brandt continued, «they had formed their own conclusions about the likelihood of political progress and were chiefly interested in practical problems in bridging the gap».⁴⁷

Thus the Chequers meeting gives a clear indication of perceptions and conceptualisations within the British Labour Party. Apparently, these had changed quite remarkably since Gaitskell's talk about the «end of thousand years of history». Britain was now «poised to take a new initiative in European economic cooperation», Wilson declared after the meeting, less than six months after taking office.⁴⁸ The shift is evident long before January 1966, with which Helen Parr claims «marked the moment at which Wilson agreed to begin studies of eventual membership» and the July 1966 sterling crisis by which she attributes «the decision to begin an approach to the EEC».⁴⁹

The Scandinavians were brought in close contacts with the developments in the British Labour Party too, within an institutional setting in which common perceptions and values to a great extent were shared. The Chequers meeting also agreed to raise the forthcoming EFTA meeting in Vienna from ministerial to prime ministerial level, an initiative apparently taken by Krag and supported by the Swedes. The forthcoming EFTA head of government meeting in Vienna could in Pittermann's view, prove to serve as a forum for concrete discussion on new initiatives in this field. «Suggestions for this were put forward at Chequers».⁵⁰ The Chequers meeting is thus a good account of the role of transnational network.

In less than 18 months time trade within the two organisations would be freed and the full effects of the market schism thus a matter of fact. In Vienna Wilson indicated that joining

⁴⁶ *The Times* 26 April 1965.

⁴⁷ IISH, SI, SII, 1965:120.

⁴⁸ IISH, SI, SII, 1965:134.

⁴⁹ Parr, Helen: *Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British Policy towards the European Community, 1964–67*, Phd, Queen Mary, University of London, London 2002:23–24.

⁵⁰ IISH, SI, SII, 1965:120.

the EEC would end the problems for Britain, while the Scandinavians believed that the British government was using the EFTA as an instrument of getting closer to or even joining the EEC.⁵¹ Reunited in Copenhagen in October, the social democrats had discussed the issue at the end of July at Harpsund, the Swedish Prime Ministers residence outside Stockholm.⁵² Prior to that meeting, Erlander and Krag had held talks on the issue at Harpsund in June, just after Krag's return from Bonn and Erhard.⁵³ Despite continuity and coherence among transnational social democratic contacts over the issue, no solutions had been found by the end of the year. Moreover, the first reactions from the EEC were despondent. Late May 1965 the Dutch Foreign Minister, Joseph Luns, emphasised the EEC might not approve Wilson's proposals at all.⁵⁴ And behind him loomed de Gaulle.

«Time for Decision»

The 1966 election campaign confirmed the impressions. Increased interest was put on the subject. Arguably, it was the first election campaign ever in Britain where this issue played an important part. In *Time for Decision*, the Labour Party manifesto for the 1966 General Election, the Party's attitude to EEC entry was more specifically laid down. It stated that the Labour government «has taken the lead in promoting an approach by EFTA to the countries of the European Economic Community so that Western Europe shall not be sharply divided into two conflicting groups. Labour believes that Britain, in consultation with her EFTA partners, should be ready to enter the European Economic Community, provided essential British and Commonwealth interests are safeguarded».⁵⁵ The election greatly enhanced the working conditions for the government as it got a comfortable overall majority. After the election Wilson stated that the government's intention was «to probe in a very positive sense the terms on which we would be able to enter the European Economic Community and its related organisations».⁵⁶ To its socialist friends, the British Foreign Secretary-to-be, George Brown, stated on the May 1966 SI Congress in Stockholm, that «The question then is not whether we should join the EEC but when and on what terms».

⁵¹ ARAB, TEA, box 080, report EFTA meeting Vienna, 24–25 May 1965.

⁵² IISH, SI, SII, 1965:200.

⁵³ ARAB, TEA, box 080, secret summary Krag–Erlander, 20 June 1965.

⁵⁴ *Daily Telegraph* 28 May 1965.

⁵⁵ *Time for Decision*, the Labour Party manifesto for the 1966 General Election. See for example IISH, SI, SII, vol. 14, 5/1966.

The intentions appeared now crystal clear, and the Swedish *Dagens Nyheter* bluntly wrote that the UK «struggles to join the EEC, yet it will drag on before pushes towards negotiations are taken».⁵⁷ Britain, at least mentally, «are on their way from distant skies to Europe», wrote Reiulf Steen in the Norwegian Labour Party (DNA).⁵⁸ Brown's message was well received by Krag and to a large extent the Swedish Minister of Trade, Gunnar Lange. In the latter's view, benefits that possibly could be reaped from EFTA and EEC had largely been extracted. The stage was reached where the division between EEC and EFTA was «beginning to affect us adversely, slowing down the progress and the rate of economic growth».⁵⁹

Eventually, on 10 November 1966 Wilson – in accordance with signals gradually more evident since the government had taken office in 1964, the Chequers initiative in April 1965, the Queens speech in April 1966 and Brown's signals at SI's Congress in Stockholm in May – announced to the House his government's intention to explore on a «high-level approach» on the part of the British government, to see whether the conditions existed for fruitful discussions on the possibility of joining the EEC. In the following two-day debate in the House on 16–17 November, Brown, now Foreign Secretary, reiterated what Wilson had emphasised on 10 November, «'We mean business'», and added: «And we do».⁶⁰

The discussion in the Cabinet the day before the statement had according to a well-informed Swedish Ambassador, Gunnar Hägglöf, been both protracted and lively.⁶¹ The Cabinet was still divided on the issue. Yet all of them, even Brown, seemed to have been surprised by Wilson's apparently sudden initiative. Thus, a core question is why Wilson and the government did choose to embark on its «high-level approach» towards the EEC. *Le Monde* suggested that the British government's initiative was «une opération intérieure». The newspaper thought Wilson's statement was prompted by two basic reasons: first «au vœu de l'industrie britannique...remonter sérieusement le moral de tous les chefs d'entreprise actuellement affectés par la politique de deflation du gouvernement», and secondly «un but de clarification politique intérieur».

The Danish government followed by declaring that they would resume negotiations with the EEC «latest at the same time» as the British government. This created once again a difficult and challenging situation in Norway where a centre-right coalition government,

⁵⁶ Hansard 21 April 1966.

⁵⁷ *Dagens Nyheter* 7 May 1966.

⁵⁸ The Norwegian Labour Movement's Archives and Library, Oslo (AAB), Finn Moe's Archives (FMA), box 008, report from 10th Congress May 1966, 20 July 1966. My translation.

⁵⁹ IISH, SI, 258, Lange's speech, 10th Congress, May 1966.

⁶⁰ IISH, SI, 589. Brown's speech to the House of Commons on 16 November 1966.

headed by the Centre Party leader, Per Borten, had replaced the DNA in 1965. The International Committee of the DNA (Internasjonalt utvalg) underlined that Norway's relationship with the EEC was about to emerge again. «We thus have to prepare us. Our position in principle is clear: We want to commit ourselves to take part in the development of an ever-closer cooperation among the European countries...The consequences of the divided market in Europe is now more tangible. The political implications of membership have changed too...France has declined to accept the principle of supranational decisions, while the social democratic parties has worked hard to strengthen the parliamentary bodies in the Community».⁶² Thus, in order to deal with this important foreign policy issues, the International Committee of the DNA agreed to establish contacts both on governmental and transnational level, with a special view to take advantage of the SI-network.⁶³

The application «is in and will remain in»

As announced in his statement to the House of Commons on 10 November, Wilson met with the EFTA Heads of Government in December and made a round trip of probing talks with the Head of Governments of the EEC in the first part of 1967.⁶⁴ According to Brown's memoirs, Wilson took a «surprisingly firm line in favour of Britain's applying to join» the EEC on their European tour.⁶⁵

Yet it came as no surprise that the main opposition to Britain's joining the EEC was France and de Gaulle. In Brown's and Wilson's meeting with the French President on 24 January 1967, there were «no shaking de Gaulle's opposition to having Britain in the Common Market», Brown recalled in his memoirs, «but again he was friendly and he went out of his way to say how impressed (as he put it) he had been by his meeting with me in the previous month».⁶⁶ He had recently had an hour-long talk with de Gaulle face to face, only with his interpreter present and no minutes kept. «It was very clear that de Gaulle was adamantly against us», Brown noted. «He regarded the Continent as France's place and the

⁶¹ ARAB, TEA, box 083, Hägglöf to Torsten Nilsson, 15 November 1966.

⁶² AAB, FMA, box 008, International Committee, *Norwegian Foreign Policy* (Norsk utenrikspolitikk), autumn 1966. My translation.

⁶³ AAB, FMA, box 008, minutes meeting International Committee, 15 November 1966.

⁶⁴ LAM, PLP, minute meeting 7 December 1966. See also Public Record Office (PRO), PREM 13/903, Meeting of Heads of Fin/EFTA Governments, 5 December 1966.

⁶⁵ Brown 1971:214–15.

⁶⁶ Brown 1971:215.

Atlantic Ocean and the United States as Britain's place». The General said that «he had a lot of trouble getting the five hens to do what France wanted, and he wasn't going to have Britain's coming in and creating trouble over again, this time with ten».⁶⁷

However, after completing their exploratory trips they persuaded the Cabinet to recommend to Parliament that Britain should make a formal application to join the EEC. To the PLP, Brown suggested none of the challenges Britain faced if she joined the EEC were insurmountable. The «Gaitskell conditions» were less relevant, as the interpretation of federalism was «far different» and the problem of EFTA is «very different indeed». The big question was whether de Gaulle would veto an application. Brown's judgement was, he told the PLP, that the situation in 1967 was markedly different to what it had been in 1963. On their trip the French had not been nearly as reserved as the press had reported. Neither he nor the Prime Minister had seen «nothing so far» that should «make us believe they would resist our entry, and the other Five have a general desire that we should go in».⁶⁸ This stands, however, in glaring contrast to what Wilson and his closest allies in the cabinet must have been aware of, and what Brown later wrote in his memoirs.⁶⁹

When Wilson on 2 May 1967 announced to the House of Commons the British government's formal application under article 237 to join the EEC, the Danish and (neutral) Irish government immediately followed Britain, while the Norwegian Prime Minister, Per Borten, took up a wait-and-see stance towards Norwegian membership and the British initiative. Yet the Norwegian government submitted its request on 24 July 1967, only after further considerations and after being pushed by the DNA and the trade unions (LO).⁷⁰

The Swedish government had not fundamentally changed its outlook, yet it is evident from governmental papers summer 1967 that it seriously considered applying for membership. The argument went like this: It would be easier to change a bid to join the EEC with an associated membership than the other way around.⁷¹ However, Swedish non-alignments policies still applied, and every change in Sweden's relation vis-à-vis other countries had to comply with this fundamental strand of Swedish foreign and security policy. Consequently, the Swedish government sent a rather elusive application to the EEC for negotiations on 26 July 1967. The application should appear as positive and comprise as much

⁶⁷ Brown 1971:214–15.

⁶⁸ George Brown papers Bodleian Library, Oxford (GBBLO), box c. 5015/161.

⁶⁹ Brown 1971:214.

⁷⁰ Norwegian Labour Party (DNA) biennial reports, 1965–66, 1967–68, minutes DNA biennial conferences 27–29 May 1965, 21–23 May 1967.

⁷¹ ARAB, TEA, box 083, memos 16 and 29 June 1967.

as possible, and ideally allow Sweden to participate in the Common Market while retaining neutrality.⁷²

However it only produced a new failure. Shortly after Wilson launched the second application de Gaulle had declared his negative attitude towards British EEC-membership. By his November veto the General did put a final blow to Britain's second attempt to join the European Communities. Frustration and humiliation were palpable in the British government and in the PLP over the way in which the EEC application had been treated. «We are not a weak country and our Government was not unworthy, and we must apply our energies to increasing trade elsewhere in the world».⁷³ They still hoped the Council of Ministers would not turn down the application, and that «the Five would be able to take a very tough line with the French...and be able to press for the opening of negotiations some time in January».⁷⁴

On 9 December 1967, Wilson summoned a social democratic Party Leaders Conference at Chequers, where he, Brown and others met with the most senior Northern European social democrats.⁷⁵ The core agenda was Britain's application. Brown assured his fellow social democrats that the British application was not as a short-term measure, but an indispensable part of a great and general movement towards European unity. The «first and most important reasons for our application are political...We see the widening of the Common Market to include us and other Western European countries as the means of bringing about...closer political unity [in Europe]». The application «is in and it will remain in. We do not propose to withdraw it».⁷⁶ The perceptions in the British Party seems thus to have changed quite significantly from its assessments six-seven years earlier.

However, de Gaulle's decision was confirmed by the Council of Ministers on 18 December. In confidential papers the British government was upset. The Maudling negotiations, which had amounted to the kind of relationship France and de Gaulle seemed to advocate in the latter parts of the sixties, was vetoed as Britain was told to seek full membership. When she did, she was turned down, and the political advantages, which arguably spurred the Wilson government to apply for membership, were not available under a scheme for mere association.⁷⁷

⁷² ARAB, TEA, 038, memo, draft EEC-negotiations application, 13 July 1967.

⁷³ LAM, PLP, minutes meeting 6 December 1967.

⁷⁴ GBBLO, box c. 5019/165.

⁷⁵ Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, Jens-Otto Krag, Trygve Bratteli, Tage Erlander, Olof Palme

⁷⁶ GBBLO, box c. 5019/165, Talking points, European Integration, Socialist International Party Leaders' Conference.

Part III: Changed perceptions and new conceptualisations?

This paper demonstrates that perceptions and positions towards the European Communities changed during the sixties in the British Labour Party, DNA and also SAP and SD. On the eve of the decade, all parties appeared largely unenthusiastic towards the EEC. Consequently the general level of knowledge on the subject was rather low. The former long-serving Norwegian Foreign Minister, Halvard Lange, certainly could have spoken on behalf of all three Scandinavian parties and indeed the British Labour Party, when he in 1966 stated to the Norwegian parliament, «we have not been sufficiently attentive to what has taken place in postwar continental Europe... We have not been adequately informed about the political and economic development, and the ideational debate which has taken and take place among the countries in the European Community and elsewhere on mainland Europe».⁷⁸

Apparently, in 1967 this had changed. The British Labour Party and the Danish SD was ready to join the European Communities. The Norwegian DNA, although out of office, was anxious to declare its positive attitudes and commit itself to the membership cause, and to influence the conservative centre-right government to join the European Communities. The Swedish government moreover seriously contemplated to apply for full membership, despite its adherence to its non-alignment policy.⁷⁹ The knowledge on the subject was greatly enhanced, too, as all countries had carried out extensive and far-reaching clarification and policy formulating procedures and thoroughly debated the issue. During these processes they had been in close contact and generously exchanged information across borders and between parties. Thus, this paper suggests that conceptualisations in these parties were reciprocally fertilised.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ GBBLO, box c. 5019/165:185–86.

⁷⁸ ARAB, TEA, box 082, Halvard Lange to Parliament (Stortinget), 22 February 1966. My translation.

⁷⁹ See for example ARAB, TEA, box 038, 29 June 1967.

⁸⁰ Many factors inflict upon a party's thinking and behavior, what are embodied in the party programs, and, indeed, what conduct its policies. Yet once policies are incorporated into a party's official documentation, it almost certainly will be condensed and associated with other values and ideas. However, a social democratic party's position within the polity may theoretically be determined by at least three factors. First, a political party will almost certainly be affected in its thinking dependent upon its distance from power – possible and actual alliances with other political parties, parliamentary pressure groups and parliamentary dependence, official opposition, being a minority or majority government, and the character and strength of conscious alternative government. Secondly, parties with declared intentions about changing or at least modify the economic system are affected by the performance of the economic system. As these parties traditionally have had strong ties with the trade unions the unions have had substantial influence on the policies, ideas and values of the parties too. A third factor might be described as «externality». Yet this might be sub-divided into domestic and foreign influence, coming from opponents as supporters. Cross-border cooperation, contacts and perceptions contribute to shape views of the system the party might want to change, and to determine its strategy and tactics. In the end,

To what degree was there a change, and why and how were new conceptualisations evident? First, the perceptions of the EEC changed far more than the EEC itself. In the late fifties and early sixties the Common Market was still perceived as a Community set up and dominated by conservative Christian and catholic democratic parties and forces. These were perceived to be at odds with both letters and spirit of the social democratic movement programmes; yet social Catholicism, who emerged as a popular reformist ideology in the postwar period – dedicated to marrying Catholic social teaching with the values and duties of the states, and strongly supported the integration process – was significantly more concerned with social security and solidarity than widely acknowledged, both by scholars and contemporary observers.⁸¹

From the mid-sixties this was about to change. When the twelve social democratic European leaders met at Chequers in April 1965, nine of them were in government in their respective countries.⁸² Out of Seven EFTA countries, six was governed by social democrats, and of six EEC countries four were socialist-led. If SPD should win the approaching German general election, its numbers would increase to five. This would profoundly change the situation prevailing only a few years earlier. When the EEC was set up in 1958 conservative and Christian catholic governments ruled all six countries. Thus, if four EFTA states eventually joined the EEC either as full or associated members, eight possibly nine out of ten members of an enlarged Community would be social democratic-led. Moreover, social democratic forces were on the rise in the European communities, and it was an articulated objective to strengthen these developments.⁸³ Certainly, this would be the case if a Labour Party government-led Britain and social democratic-strongholds in Scandinavia joined the Community.

Secondly, the internal crisis of the EEC, which began with the abortive Fouchet Plan for political cooperation in 1961–62, subsequently reinforced by de Gaulle’s veto of British membership in 1963, the disagreement over defence matters – which led to French withdrawal from the NATO military command structure – and the Empty Chair Crisis, had important implications on the perceptions of the Community too. The federalist aspects of the

the sum of impulses from external and internal factors, and by society at large, constitutes the prevailing intellectual climate by which the founding principles of a social democratic party might be modeled.

⁸¹ See for example Dyson, Kenneth and Featherstone, Kevin: *The Road to Maastricht. Negotiating Economic and Monetary Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999:88–92.

⁸² The meeting parties: Austria, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Island, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Canada and UK. The social democrats in Finland and West Germany stood good chances winning the next elections.

Community were *de facto* if not *de jure* played down by de Gaulle's concept of *Europe de Patries* and surely the January 1966 Luxembourg-compromise. This political stagnation could not have been foreseen in 1960–63. Yet perceptions of the EEC were influenced by these internal developments it was *de facto* a deferral rather than a definite abolition of federalism altogether. The Treaty of Rome was unabridged. On the other hand, the decision in July 1966 to set up a common agricultural policy (CAP) from July 1968 might have been viewed as a significant contribution to consolidate the Community.

However, seen from within the Northern European social democratic parties, the retaining of the veto if vital national interests were at stake was important to reluctant integrationists although rhetorically committed internationalists. All in all these developments made the future of the Community on the one hand give the impression of being more acceptable, on the other appear more undecided and open. The Swedish appraisal was that the undecided state of the integration issue made it almost impossible to work out reliable predictions for future developments.⁸⁴ The uncertain state of affairs made the Community more susceptible to influences and more likely to be pushed in desired directions. Thus, as the community was more likely to be perceived at «the crossroads» with social democratic forces on the rise, the likelihood of desired future influences were improving. Seen in light of these developments the timing of the applications could be perceived as ideal too, as the «undecided state» of the Community might be influenced and moulded by an increasingly influential social democratic movement.

Thirdly, the internal crisis of the Community had in effect overshadowed and effectively suffocating the April–May 1965 initiatives taken at Chequers and Vienna by which the gap between the EEC and EFTA should be reduced or altogether closed. The attention had thus effectively been directed towards a British application to join the EEC, followed by Danish and Irish and possibly Norwegian (and Swedish) applications. If the EEC was expanded it was likely not only to be more social democratic but more liberal and less protectionist too, since several of the EFTA countries to a greater extent depended on foreign trade than most EEC countries.

Seen from a British point of view, membership of the EEC could also solve some structural economic difficulties. The unsettled relations with the Common Market was about to reduce the investment rate in British industry, which again could jeopardise Britain's

⁸³ See for example AAB, FMA, box 009, statement by DNA, *European Cooperation* (Europa-samarbeidet), January 1967.

⁸⁴ ARAB, TEA, box 4, memo, Integration issue, 15 August 1966.

economic future, and thus shake the foundations for Labour's policies and aims, and its future chances by the polls. By joining British industrial investment rates might be stimulated. In the short term the difficult balance of payments situation might be aggravated, but in a longer perspective the opposite seemed likely. Moreover, the trade with the EEC had grown substantially, while the Commonwealth trade had more or less levelled out. Despite continued contacts with the Commonwealth throughout the sixties, the economic and political relationships declined rapidly in importance relative to Western Europe. Joining the EEC could therefore stimulate the British economy, and the economic arguments against were in decline.

Fourthly, «core European» socialist and social democratic parties (from 1992 Party of European Socialists, PES) were programmatically in favour of wider European integration despite having been initiated and created by conservative parties. On the 1961 SI Congress in Rome the French representative and former socialist Minister for Overseas Territories and executive member of the SFIO, Gérard Jaquet, supported by Spaak, said the «Marché Commun n'est pas pour nous une entreprise commerciale... nous n'avons jamais caché que notre but était politique... Nous avons toujours gardé au fond du Coeur l'espoir de construire la grande Europe. Ce jour est-il arrivé?». ⁸⁵

In 1967 the socialists of the Six forcefully as ever stated its ambition to struggle «effectively and indefatigably for the achievement of a Federal Europe», by which the economic unification of the Six was but an important step towards political union. ⁸⁶ In the mid-sixties the socialist parties of the six still pushed for more integration. They strongly supported the merger of the three treaties, institutions and communities into one forceful organisation, where the European Parliament should be elected by direct universal suffrage and the geographical extension of the Community should be carried out in accordance with the political objectives shared by the socialist parties of the six. ⁸⁷

Moreover, since its inception socialist parties of the Six had insisted that the EEC instead of preventing implementation of social democratic policies on the contrary contributed to those very ends. They had sturdily conveyed this message to their brethren inside the transnational social democratic network, especially through the SI. In the long run this might have smothered the perceptions of joining in the Northern European parties. Although nothing was profoundly changed in 1966–67, signals from within the British and Scandinavian parties

⁸⁵ IISH, SI, SII, vol 12, 1962:326, and SI, 252, 7th Congress, Rome, 23–27 October 1961, G. Jaquet:2.

⁸⁶ IISH, SI, SII, Documents; Resolutions of the 10th Congress of EEC Socialist Parties, 17–18 November 1966.

⁸⁷ IISH, SI, SII, Resolutions of the 10th Congress of EEC Socialist Parties, 17–18 November 1966.

indicated it was not perceived altogether impossible to carry out a mixed economy with a view to planning, full employment, Keynesian economics and social security as members of the EEC.

To the SI Party Leader Conference in January 1967, Foreign Secretary Brown said: «speaking as Socialists, it will have tremendous effect on what we want» if Britain, Denmark, and possibly Norway joined the EEC, and Sweden and Austria were brought into closer association with the Community.⁸⁸ Most of these parties clearly were more reluctant to «indefatigably» struggle for a federal Europe than their continental siblings; however they were ardent supporters of more social democratic policies. Yet as knowledge on a range of aspects were substantially enhanced and the social democratic forces inside the EEC had been strengthened, and was likely to be further strengthened if Labour-led Britain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden were brought into closer association with the EEC, the case against softened.

Fifthly, this realisation has to be held together with the continuous contacts and closeness in perceptions held by the Northern European social democrats. The transnational social democratic networks were intensified during the first part of the sixties by taking up and institutionalising the SI Party Leader Conferences. The regular meetings staged by the SI were still an important arena, as were participation in sister parties' Conferences, and «social democratic discussions» in connection with meetings in NATO and WEU. In Scandinavia the Cooperation Committee of the Nordic Labour movement (SAMAK) was an important network. The Party Leaders Conferences were an effective and concentrated account of the transnational network, and a vital arena for sharing information. The applicant states were of course subjected to national interests, yet the bids to join was more concerted and reciprocally informed than apparent at first glance. The reason they did engage in the transnational network was first and foremost to be in close contact and share information with individuals and parties by which they shared common perceptions, ideas and policy objectives.

More specifically the networks contributed to the creation of cross-border social trust. For example, when suspiciousness rose in the Scandinavian labour parties after the surcharge crisis late 1964–early 1965, the informal transnational network eased tensions. Moreover, embedded to a great extent in a similar ideological tradition, the transnational party cooperation allowed the social democrats to coordinate their policy objectives according to what Peter M. Haas has argued are the effects of epistemic communities.⁸⁹ Developments of

⁸⁸ IISH, SI, 345, Party Leader Conference, Rome 4–5 January 1967.

⁸⁹ Haas, Peter M.: «Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination» *International Organization*, vol. 46, 1/1992:1–35.

ideas and conceptualisations of Europe were mutually reinforced by common structural incentives and regular contacts. The transnational network provided participants both with instruments by which individuals could be socialised into specific ideas, and with arguments to be applied both domestically and on the international stage. I have argued that Gaitskell's meeting with European and Commonwealth socialists in 1962 were important. Not so much to change his mind and go against entry as to formulate his policy strategy and tactics.

Individuals participating on the transnational arena were equally exposed to influence. Thus it is hard to prove who influenced whom. However, they might have been able to identify possible partners for implementing a particular policy or policies. Finally, as individuals and parties of the transnational networks were in government, the transnational networks were on the one hand able to be in close and continuous contacts with and influence intergovernmental relations and indeed support such contacts. On the other hand, the networks were able to maintain continuity in political relations irrespective of whether an individual or party was in or out of government. When the electorate rejected a government, as the case was in Norway after 1965, the individual relations tended to break up. Transnational network was able to bridge discontinuities and keep individual in touch by its very structures. As a consequence, policy formulation processes in these parties were reciprocal informed as well conscious and deliberately as unconsciously and unintended.

Evidently, and that is the sixth point, the policy-shift in the British Labour Party was considerably less obvious than widely recognised. It appears by juxtaposing the policy formulating processes inside the party during the two applications. The clarification process taken on from 1960 onwards – prompted by the Macmillan government's reappraisal of Britain's relation with Europe – still provided the party elite with information, and largely informed policy formation after October 1964. Besides, the NEC statement *Labour and the Common Market* and its adoption at the 1962 Annual Conference should be viewed in the light of Gaitskell and his priorities. Despite its five conditions the NEC statement was relatively open-ended, considerably more open than the impression given by Gaitskell's speech at the Brighton Conference in October 1962. Gaitskell expressed himself as he did – and evidently it came out considerable more anti-mode than originally intended – not only as an internal tactical manoeuvre, but conscious and unconscious as part of a particular political structure by which the main participants are incorporated into a highly challenging, two-party, bipolar system, rather different from the proportional representative and considerable more consensus seeking Scandinavian systems. Thus Gaitskell's and the Labour Party's

perceptions, positions and postures neither are separable from the political system at Westminster and its dynamics nor should be isolated from it. It might have spurred the Labour Party leader to distance himself and his party from an increasingly unpopular government and its policies.

This British political system may be captured by the adversary political thesis which became fashionable for the explanation of Britain's relative economic decline. It argues that the British electoral system favoured a two-party system which contributed to the phenomenon of competitive bidding of parties for votes. One of its alleged effects was excessive expectation among the electorate which had to be met by manipulating the economic cycle. The almost inevitable indirect consequence was according to the thesis economic failure.⁹⁰ Certainly, the system is applicable and influenced policies, political behaviour and (alternative) political perceptions on a broader basis. The system is described as «two rival teams of politicians in open contention which goes on before an election, during an election, and – above all – continues after the election, in the form of continuous polemic across the floor of the Commons where a powerless Opposition confronts an all-powerful Government, in the hope of winning itself a more favourable verdict at the next general election». Clearly this realisation has bearing on the parties, whether in or out of power.⁹¹ Thus, when the conservative Macmillan government applied for membership of the EEC, the system *per se*, its functions and effects imposed its own logic on the Labour Party and its perceptions and tactics as well as practical positions and policies.

On the other hand, the dynamics should clearly be applied the other way around when the Wilson government reassessed its European policies. Miriam Camps suggests that all British governments are subject to similar domestic pressures and face the same problem of how to match their resources to their responsibilities and aspirations. «There is very little real room for maneuver and far less scope for choice than there appears to be. In the end all British governments seem likely to reach much the same conclusions about the main thrust of British policy».⁹² The same logic is present in Helen Parr's study. She claims «Wilson's turn to the

⁹⁰ See for example Finer, Samuel E. (ed.): *Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform*, Anthony Wigram, London 1975 and Gamble, Andrew and Stuart A. Walkland (eds.): *The British Party System and Economic Policy 1945–1983: Studies in Adversary Politics*, Clarendon, Oxford 1984. Kaiser, Wolfram: «The Political Reform Debate in Britain since 1945: The European dimension» in *Contemporary British History*, Vol 12, 1/1998.

⁹¹ Finer, S. E. «Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform» in Finer, Samuel E. (ed.): *Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform*, Anthony Wigram, London 1975

⁹² Camps, Miriam: *European Unification in the Sixties. From Veto to Crisis*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, London 1966:194.

EEC was the result of the experience of office, catching up with the Conservatives».⁹³ These propositions might be justified as another effect of the system held together with the governing parties' national responsibilities. However, the new signals in the Labour Party's European policies were visible shortly after the new government had taken office in 1964, and was indeed reinforced during the following years. New signals and changed perceptions as regards European policies evidently emerged prior to most reasons and causes given in the previous paragraphs in this paper.

Viewed against the empirical evidence provided by this study, the reassessments in the British Labour Party is difficult to explain only because a year had elapsed since Gaitskell had been taken away and a new leader elected. Moreover, no new debates or clarifications on the subject took place. The only incident, by which the early changes soon after the election might be adequately explained, is the accession to power of the Labour Party. The continuities of individuals, institutions and policies have to be recognised. Thus the shift has to take account of and might be more fully explained by the built in dynamics in the Westminster political system. The fact that the Labour Party began to turn away from membership once it left office in the early 1970s further confirm these assumptions. Consequently, the endemic functions of the system should be taken into account when it comes to assessing the shifts in the Labour Party's perceptions of the EEC. Applied the inverse way around, this might contribute to the argument of substantially greater continuity in the European policies of the British Labour Party than normally believed. Here the argument supports Parr while suggesting that «Wilson's EEC bid was not a decisive break with the past».⁹⁴ The «systemic explanation» should not, of course, be overemphasised but held together with domestic events, foreign affairs, developments inside the EEC, the transnational network and the (Scandinavian) social democratic dimension.

⁹³ Parr, Helen: *Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British Policy towards the European Community, 1964–67*, Phd, Queen Mary, University of London, London 2002:333.

⁹⁴ Parr, Helen: *Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British Policy towards the European Community, 1964–67*, Phd, Queen Mary, University of London, London 2002:334.