

BRITAIN AND THE CONTINENT

The last of four talks on British Foreign Policy given in the BBC's Third Programme by A. J. P. TAYLOR, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

I HAVE been talking these last few weeks about British relations with the two Great Powers, America and Russia. Perhaps you will feel that this is a very narrow way of discussing foreign policy, that I have left out in fact most of the world. The constitution of the United Nations recognises not three Great Powers but five; it includes France and China.

All the same, at present—and I have been trying to say all along that foreign policy is an affair of the present, not of the world as it used to be or as we should like it to be—neither China nor France is a Great Power like the other three; neither is great in power. I do not know enough about the Far East to know whether or when China will become a Great Power; I suspect that America would not welcome a truly independent and powerful China, and perhaps Russia would not either. But it is plain enough that world affairs would be made enormously easier if France recovered something of her old position.

The French have more diplomatic skill and experience than any of the present Big Three, and they understand different points of view better. France is both continental and maritime, both revolutionary and conservative, or, if you like, both communist and clerical; and—perhaps most important of all—the French have no illusions about Germany, and Germany is likely to be the second biggest problem in international affairs for a long time to come. China is the biggest, of course. It is easy to agree that the recovery of France should be one of the main aims of British foreign policy; but there is really not much we can do about it—only the French can restore the French spirit. I think—and caring, as I do, for France more than for any other foreign country. I have thought

(continued from previous page)

as well as you, even though he is now an American, but he is not a substitute for you."

"He is younger."

"A little younger, and a little straighter in the grain. But a tawa is one tree and a totara another."

"I can't write to order, and I can't tell the story of the Maori without giving offence."

"But I'm not suggesting that you should write to order—or to any orders but your own. I'm urging you to say what you know and feel and think standing in the No Man's Land that your people are now crossing."

"There is the time factor. I've always been busy, but find myself busier at 72 than I've ever been before."

"Yes, I apologise. I've no right to be talking to you like this. But tell me before I go how you feel in general about the future of your people. Not many can look as far back, and no one can look as far forward. Does the picture as a whole depress or cheer you?"

"I am hopeful. Not happy but not down-hearted. I think the Maori is finding his place. He requires more time, but he is fitting gradually into the pattern. He will not lose himself or disappear." (To be continued)

about it a good deal—we can influence French politics in two ways. One thing we can do is to show (I think the present Government is showing) that a planned economy can be built up in a free country—that is something that has never been done before. And the other (and this is more strictly a matter of foreign policy)—the other thing we can do to influence French politics is not to give the impression that we have slipped back into the policy of 20 years ago when we allowed the revival of a strong Germany in order to save ourselves trouble in Europe.

The French, and all the European countries who experienced German occupation, still live under the shadow of the German danger, and they are quite right—Germany has still all the resources of industry and manpower which made her the tyrant of Europe. France, too, made plenty of blunders in dealing with Germany before the late war; and the French perhaps emphasise our blunders in order to conceal their own. If we make the recovery of Germany the key to the recovery of Europe, we shall lose Europe and, in so doing, I think, lose our greatest source of strength.

Europe is Still Important

That brings me on to what I wanted to talk about here, British policy in regard to Europe. It is perfectly true that Europe is not so important in the world as it used to be, but it is still very important to us, in fact more important than it has ever been. What I have been trying to say in previous weeks is that the end of our naval supremacy must involve, sooner or later, a fundamental change in our foreign policy. The world is no longer our oyster. Certainly the more we plan our change of policy, the more gradual it can be. At present, it seems to me, British policy is without a guiding line in the world outside Europe—sometimes it tries to do too much and sometimes too little.

On the one hand, in the Middle East, we have been trying to carry a tremendous burden, and defending interests no longer essential to us; or rather not more essential to us than they are to others, that is, both to the Russians and to the Americans. On the other hand, in the Far East, as far as we can tell from reading reports of people back from there recently, we have abdicated altogether, ceased to count or even to try. It is really extraordinary to think that 100 or even 50 years ago we were by far the greatest of Far Eastern powers and now we carry as little weight as Holland, who for 200 years has not claimed to be a Great Power. We have acquiesced in the American monopoly of the Pacific, and of Japan; we have allowed America to become the protector of the present government of China and to impose on China American economic ideas.

Of course it is a mistake to think that we could oppose America in the Far East; and incidentally I thought that the Labour critics of foreign policy (with whose views, as you will imagine, I had a good deal of sympathy on other grounds), were asking the impossible when they wanted British policy to make a stand—diplomatically of course—against America in China and the Pacific. That is thinking in terms of a balance of

forces which no longer exists. All the same, we could count for something in the Far East and especially we could appeal to that part of American opinion which dislikes the present imperialistic course.

Passing of the Balance of Power

Still, whether we intend it or not, we are retreating in the outer world and that makes our relations with Europe all the more important. Losing command of the seas, we are fated to become part of Europe ourselves. In the past we asked only something negative of Europe, to be left undisturbed; and the method we used was the Balance of Power. Now the Balance of Power in Europe has gone, never to return. The result of defeating Germany is that we have to have a European policy; this is not a matter of choice, we are in Europe whether we like it or not—the only choice is between having a good policy and having a bad one. The only possible way in which we, and the Americans too, could withdraw from Europe, would be if there was a reconciliation between Germany and France, in fact between Germany and her former victims. Just think what that means: on the one hand, the Germans would have to give up all idea of renewing their career of conquest and they would have to give it up in such a way that we all believed it. Do you see any signs of that? Why, even at this moment of extreme prostration, the German political leaders are saying that they will not accept Germany's eastern frontier—that is a delayed action declaration of war. And the other condition of European union, even if this were achieved, is that the European peoples must be willing to acquiesce in the gradual German domination of Europe that is bound to follow from their economic supremacy. That will not happen either.

I have got here to the heart of the European problem: Germany, in my view, must cease to be the economic giant of the European continent. One way, the way that we have tried since Potsdam—though very half-heartedly—is to cut Germany down. Now, we have found that too difficult and, in making our recent bargain with the Americans we have turned against it: we are now preparing to put Germany back on her feet. But that is not a policy: it is a confession of failure. What we are preparing to do is to groom Germany for the third World War. But there is another way: not of cutting Germany down but of raising the rest of Europe up. That, in my opinion, is the only possible policy for this country to follow; when I say the only possible policy, I do not mean that we shall necessarily follow it, but that it is the only policy which will give satisfactory results.

America is Against Planning

Not that it is an easy policy: no policy is that, is trying to control events instead of being controlled by them. It is a policy which we cannot work with America. America, in her present political mood, has set her face against all forms of planning. American policy is the policy of Canning: "Every nation for itself and God for us all!" a policy possible only for the greatest industrial Power. The most we can hope from the Americans is that they will not oppose plans for the economic reconstruction of Europe—and even that I am not sure (continued on next page)



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