New shifts in the old parties

The Present Political Scene in Britain

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American observers of the British political landscape have been known to register a certain sense of disappointment at its uniformity and flatness. Unlike its physical counterpart, it has struck them as presenting an identical aspect from Cornwall to Caithness, laid out under the iron rule of two great masters, the Conservative Central Office and Transport House (headquarters of the national organization of the Labour Party), with even its regional variations determined more by decisions taken in London than by any pressures from the provinces. The electorate has presented the appearance of a passive mass, capable of response but not of initiative, and interest has focussed on the twin energizing foci of Whitchall and Westminster, on the shifts of power and influence within the topmost levels of the two parties and their peripheral "establishments." In such a clearly defined and formalized process prediction was all
too easy. Attention concentrated on the great
general electoral contests, brief in duration,
national in organization and appeal, in
which a relatively small displacement of
opinion could result in a transfer of power
from one side to the other, with an assur-
ance that, so transferred, it would remain
safely in the hands of its depositories for
the ensuing four to five years.

All this was in striking contrast to the
normal diversities and unpredictabilities of
the American scene, where in addition to
the perpetual power struggle in Washington
there was a constant ferment at state and
local levels, with new issues and new forces
thrown up as reflections of local needs and
local pressures. A two-party system might
indeed give an appearance of national bi-
polarization, but even the most casual scrut-
iny would reveal that this accounted for
only a part, perhaps the smaller part, of the
forces which shaped both national and local
decisions. So, to understand tomorrow's
Washington it was necessary to explore to-
day's California, or Chicago or Little Rock,
and even the great quadrennial toursneys
could only be regarded as providing rough
pointers as to who would decide what for
the next four years ahead.

For Britain at the end of 1962 the broad
contrast still holds good. We remain the
small close-knit island that geography and
history have made us, and we shall not
sprout the rich local diversities that make
American politics a patchwork quilt. But
within the last twelve months unmistakable
evidence has accumulated that the existing
mold of British politics has cracked, that
the crack is broadening and that it may
not be possible to plaster it over again. At
the autumn general election of 1959 all had
appeared to be as usual—indeed even more
so; Mr. Macmillan's triumph in getting his
party re-elected for a third term with an
enhanced majority was without precedent in
British electoral history. The line of specu-
lation which his victory most encouraged
was directed at the comparative weakness of
Labour; how long could they survive defeats
at the polls and exclusion from office?
When, in the ensuing months, the Socialists
battled over how socialist they ought to be
and how they should react to the H-bomb,
these surmises were intensified. Could the
British system of government operate with-\nout a unified opposition? Would the Con-
servatives develop their own divisions, out
of the discontent which is born of too much
success? Were we in for an Era of Good
Feelings, which would be a field day for the
intriguing politicians of the ruling party and
a prolonged frustration for the ordinary
citizen denied even a choice of masters?

By the end of 1961 some of these sur-
mises, at any rate, began to look wide of
the mark. The Labour Party, it seemed, was
not going to split—or at least not yet. At
his party's annual conference Mr. Gaitskell
got, if not a complete endorsement, at least
a mandate to go ahead and try to reconstruct
the party in his own image of moderate re-
form. Mr. "MacWonder's" government, on
the other hand, ran into a succession of dif-
ficulties which damaged it in the eyes
both of its own supporters and of the electorate
at large. A case could be made out for the
contention that the weakening of the nation-
al economy which provoked a 7 per cent dis-
count rate, increases in customs duties and
purchase taxes and, above all, a "wages
pause," was not primarily the fault of the
administration; previous administrations,
Tory and Labour alike, had encountered the
same recurrent weakness and had resorted
to similar remedies. All this could be plausi-
ably argued—but not, unfortunately, by the
party which less than two years earlier had
campaigned on the slogans of Tory "pros-
perity" and "Life's better with the Conser-
vatives." Even the bracing tonic of competi-
tion, prescribed as one of the main justifi-
cations for the government's decision to seek
entry to the Common Market, looked unconvincing when the government simultaneously announced a "hands off" policy in face of the biggest attempted merger in British industrial history—the Imperial Chemical Industry's nearly successful takeover of Courtaulds. (Courtaulds, as most readers will know, is the largest synthetic-fabric manufacturer in Britain.) What was Conservatism? Free Competition? Paternalistic curbing of the consumer? Indulgence towards capital concentration in any form?

Then in the spring of 1962 came the harsh reactions of the constituencies. So far the Conservatives had been fortunate at the polls. Like all governments, they saw a falling-off from their general election peak; each by-election of 1961 showed a drop in their support. But this was never enough to endanger a single seat, and politicians are trained to think in seats, not in percentages. Then in March of this year a vacancy occurred in the outer suburbs of London, in Orpington, a dormitory constituency of unimpeachable respectability which, not so long since, had been represented by Sir Waldron Smithers, whose position on the British political spectrum was about as far left as Barry Goldwater's. For this very attractive "safe" seat, where Tory majorities normally run above 10,000 and even in the dark year of 1945 fell only to 4,500, the Conservatives nominated one of their brightest "new look" candidates, Mr. Peter Goldman of their Publications Department, a protege of R.A. Butler and Iain Macleod, and the virtual embodiment of the glossy public-relations technique on which the party so heavily relied for victory in 1959. The Liberal candidate was a local man, Mr. Eric Lubbock, who belonged to one of those large upper-middle class clans with professional, scholarly, and business interests who sprout so thickly across the face of English public life. But he was himself a virtual unknown; he had never before stood for any office beyond that of local councillor.

When the Orpington poll was counted Mr. Lubbock was an easy victor, with a majority of nearly 8,000 over Mr. Goldman. Labour in Orpington traditionally runs second but this time finished-up at the bottom of the poll.

The experts hustled forward with their explanations. These were all quite convincing—except that no one had propounded them, or would have been credited if he had, before the result was known. One did not have to be a cynic to rate them on a level with that advanced by the simple student of English place-names, who pointed out that Liberals do well in constituencies that end in "—ton." (In 1958 Mark Bonham-Carter won a Liberal seat in a by-election in Tolworth.) There are 53 constituencies with this fine old Saxon suffix on the British electoral map, which may perhaps provide as good a pointer as any to Liberal strength in the next parliament.

Obviously, however, there were two possible attitudes to Orpington. One could regard it as a flash in the pan, to be explained by a conjunction of purely local and ephemeral factors, or one could read it as signifying a major shift in British political attitudes. Was it, as Mr. Macmillan put it to a rally of his Conservative supporters, "a fixed star or a flying saucer"? A couple of months later the local government elections in boroughs throughout England and Wales provided a further set of pointers. Under the British system a third of the local government councillors retire each year; thus the seats coming up for contest in May were those which had last been filled a few months before the Conservative general election triumph in 1959. In any single local government contest in Britain, personality and parish pump issues are likely to count for as much as anywhere else, but if a clear pattern prevails in voting across the face of the country, that can only mean one
thing—national issues provoking nationwide responses. In contests for about 4,700 seats the Conservatives lost over 800, Labour gained nearly 400, and Liberals appearing in many places for the first time gained over 500, to emerge with a total strength of almost 700. Even when appropriate discount was made for the low poll which is always a characteristic of such elections, it was sufficiently obvious that this represented a large-scale movement of opinion against the government in power and, to a substantial degree, in favor of the new "third force."

Did this mean that the whole territorial basis of Liberalism had shifted and that it had exchanged its "Celtic fringe" for the dormitory suburb? The answer to this question was important. In the long lean years when the brutal weight of the British single-member, first-past-the-post voting system had been thrown against a Liberal party which could always muster a decent national total of votes but only received a handful of parliamentary seats, it was these fringe seats in Wales and Scotland which kept the party alive; there and there only was there a sufficient concentration of Liberal strength to win a voice in parliament. To move out of the Celtic redoubt into the great open plains was splendid, but to lose the base before establishing a sure forward line could be catastrophic.

Accordingly when Mr. Clement Davies—the old-style Welsh liberal leader, link with the great days of Lloyd George and the heyday of Nonconformity and Free Trade, the Cordell Hull of British Liberalism—was gathered to his fathers in the spring of 1962, there was a good deal of speculation about the future of the seat in Montgomery which he had held since 1929. How much of his Liberal vote was personal and habitual? How much of it could be transferred to his young would-be successor, Mr. Hooson, even though he too met the twin requirements of local residence and the Welsh tongue? Would the small but explosive force of Welsh nationalism, for which fifty long years ago the Liberal Party had been the chosen instrument, now burst out and split the Liberal vote? Would the hill farmers of Montgomery, no longer strangers to televisions, tractors and farm subsidies, throw in their lot with the Tory big battalions whom their opposite numbers across Offa's Dyke habitually favored? Or would rural Welsh radicalism follow the road which its urban counterpart in South Wales had taken and switch to the party of Nye Bevan and James Griffiths?

The Liberals need not have worried. In an exceptionally high by-election poll of 85 per cent Mr. Hooson exceeded even the margin of his predecessor. Labour and Tory divided the rest between them, while the representative of Welsh nationalism was left standing at the post.

Thus was confirmed the impression of a Liberal advance on a broad front, in which they built on their traditional strength while moving into fresh territory. How solid was this advance?

The by-elections of 1962 have fallen into two groups—those of the spring to which Orpington and Montgomery belong, and those of late November. In the twelve by-elections fought before the turn of the year the Liberals were the only party to show solid gains in popular support. By comparison with their performance in the same seats at the last general election the Conservative share of the vote was down by almost 20 per cent and the Labour down by 4½ per cent, while the Liberal share was up by 18 per cent.

All this scared the Government, as well it might, and Mr. Macmillan in July took the sensible, if ruthless, decision to prune his Cabinet of some of its deadwood, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, and to introduce newer and younger faces. Unfortunately the experiment pro-
duced only short-run benefits. When in November the electors were again consulted, in five by-elections, the Government lost two seats to Labour. Each loss was excusable. Woodside represented one of those typically run-down districts of Glasgow where a rise in the unemployment figures means an almost automatic Labour gain. In South Dorset a local 'revolt' led to a rival candidate splitting the Tory vote on the Common Market issue and letting Labour in. But in Chippenham, where a true-blue Toryism has immemorially flourished under the patronage of the Marquis of Lansdowne assisted by one of the smoothest electoral machines in the country, a Liberal challenger pressed the Conservatives so close as to be within 1,600 votes of victory. Overall, on the basis of comparisons with 1959, the pattern was much as it had been in the Spring—the Conservative share of the vote down by 16 per cent, the Labour down by 3.5 per cent and the Liberals up by just over 12 per cent. This is a slower rate of growth for the Liberals than they promised in the Spring; however, it still leaves the party enjoying the backing of 20-30 per cent of the voters in the average constituency.

But how reliable are these new Liberals, how firm in the faith, how serious in their resolve? Are they, as their opponents argue, mere "antis," English Poujadists? Do they simply "want to blow off steam," and does the Liberal party perform for them the valuable function of "the exhaust pipe in a motor-car," as the Prime Minister put it in a metaphor which nicely blended the railway age of his childhood with the internal combustion menace of his prime? The voter who irresponsibly plays his fancy in a by-election and returns to his basic loyalties when it is a matter of choosing a government is a familiar enough phenomenon to encourage the hope that when the general election comes round—in 1963? 1964?—the two established parties will recover some of their truants. But how many? And will they recover them equally? Recently the British Gallup Poll put two questions to their sample; the first, in effect, asked how they would vote in a by-election, the second how they would vote "when your vote might decide whether we had a Labour Government led by Mr. Gaitskell or a Conservative Government led by Mr. Macmillan." The answers in percentages were:

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<tr>
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<th>By-election</th>
<th>General</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't know, etc.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
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The implication of these figures is clear; the hard core is less than half the Liberal whole. Yet the question itself is loaded in favor of the existing duopoly; no doubt this faithfully reflects the pressures which both the great party machines would bring to bear in 1963 or 1964 against the Liberal "interventionists," and previous experience reveals how powerful the "wasted vote" argument can be. But the Liberals have now a counter-argument which has not previously been open to them. In a third of recent by-elections it is the Liberals who have run in first or second place, either to Labour or to the Tories; their claim that in many constituencies they are the only serious challengers has begun to seem no mere oratorical extravagance but sober fact.

It was this fact, of course, that prompted talk early in the year of "Lib.-Lab." pacts. The most considered proposal was that put forward by Mr. Woodrow Wyatt, the jaunty local newspaper publisher and television commentator who holds a Leicestershire seat for Labour with a precarious majority of 1,393. He produced a national plan for Liberal and Labour to abstain from oppos-
ing each other in selected constituencies where, if both stood, they would simply let the Conservatives in. He drew, of course, on the figures of 1959, and could point to the fact that the “threat” or the “waste” involved in Liberal “intervention” would be much greater in the next general election, when they propose to run 400 candidates, than in the last, when there were only 216.

However, in politics rationality is not everything, and no doubt it was a sound instinct that provoked Mr. Wyatt’s leader to pour down the vials of his wrath on his head and to make it plain that any further talk of “Lib.-Lab.” deals would be regarded as treason to the cause. No doubt also Mr. Gaitskell remembered that it was the agreement between Ramsay MacDonald and Herbert Gladstone in 1903 not to oppose each other’s candidates in a selected number of constituencies that laid the foundations for the Labour Party’s breakthrough in the 1906 election. Why should the grown child of the 1960’s reward the rejuvenated parent by a costly return in kind? (Historians all to the end; they will remember that even in the innocent days of 1903 the deal was kept a secret between the Chief Whips.)

Deals apart, is it Conservatism that has most to fear from Liberalism’s renaissance? It is broadly true that at present Liberal candidates draw two votes away from the Conservatives for every one they win from Labour. As a party of protest the Liberals naturally level most of their present fire at the party which has the responsibility for government. More than this, Liberal leaders have also committed themselves on more than one occasion to professions of “radicalism” and “reform” which eschew all relics of Whiggery. As Mr. Jo Grimond told the American Chamber of Commerce in London recently, a party of the center has no place in British politics; he saw the place of his Liberal Party as on the “left.”

Equally, if one may judge by the comments which Liberal successes have evoked, it is the Tories who feel themselves most aggrieved. Whether they dismiss their new rivals as mere fly-by-nights or denounce them, in Mr. Iain Macleod’s terms, as “faceless men” (a phrase which may yet return to haunt its inventor as did the late Aneurin Bevan’s description of the Tories as “vermin”), there is a vehemence about the Tory attack which begins to revive memories of the years before the First World War. This vehemence perhaps reflects the obvious fact that, quite apart from what may happen at the general election, a spread of Liberal by-election victories will have its effect on more than one career at Conservative headquarters; there is already a demand for a few scapegoats.

By comparison, Labour’s attitude has been almost benevolent. The exhortation of Mr. Mulley, a minor member of the National Executive, to “kick the Liberals in the teeth” has not so far been acted on by his colleagues. After all, it is not Labour which has so far been hurt. As yet no Labour seats have been lost to the Liberals. Liberal and Labour alike are in opposition and so both have a common first aim, to turn the rascals out. There is, moreover, in many Labour breasts an easy assumption that the Liberal rise will work to their advantage by hurting the Tories twice as hard as themselves. “Let Jo Grimond do our job for us”—this is their counterpart to the Tory slogan, “If you really want Socialism then vote Liberal.” As far as short-term electoral advantage is concerned the reasoning is plausible. By the votes that Liberals draw away from the Tories there are perhaps thirty or more marginal seats which might fall to Labour. Add to these the seats that Labour hopes to recover anyway and it is easy to envisage Mr. Gaitskell back in office.

Those—and there are many of them—
who cannot quite believe in a Labour victory next time, sometimes draw comfort from the long-term view. They see Liberalism’s rise as a by-product of Labour’s own internal divisions combined with the evanescent appeal of new young faces such as Mr. Grimond’s. When Labour has recovered unity and momentum all the advantages, they argue, will be on its side. It has the solid backing, of numbers, finance and organization, that the trade unions give it. It has the great blocks of inexpugnable Labour safe seats in South Wales, the Midlands, Yorkshire, Durham, Scotland (where the Liberal challenge has hardly been felt). If the party can just ride out present discontents, the massive strength it draws from its traditional elements will be certain to see it home.

But will it? Is Labour’s present plight a passing phase, or does it reflect an endemic weakness? Three sets of figures should give Labour pause. They represent three different ways of viewing Labour’s performance in the last three elections.

However these figures are viewed, they portray a steady decline in the pulling power of Labour to a point where the “party of the workers” is now supported by only about a third of the population. Moreover, this third, tenacious though its Labour loyalties have been, itself represents the older, declining—indeed literally the more conservative—elements in Britain’s working class. It is in those areas of Britain which still bear the painful pockmarks of the Industrial Revolution, as well as the more recent (though now, one must remember, over a generation old) lesions of the poverty and unemployment of the interwar years, that “solid” Labour is still to be found. But this kind of support is being eroded all the time by policies which governments of both parties are committed to—by rehousing (which breaks up close-knit communal loyalties), by full employment, good wages—by the affluent society in fact. If Liberalism has not invaded the back streets and the coal tips so beloved by British film directors of the “realist” school, this should afford slim comfort to Labour. The Liberals are picking up their recruits from those who are leaving the back streets untenanted and the coal mines short of labor, exchanging them for the new towns and suburbs and the new industries of the electronic and atomic age.

What is there in the new Liberalism which appeals to these new voters? It is not, so far as one can judge, its specific policies. Much vagueness exists in the minds of most voters as to what the party actually advocates; indeed one of the best performances put up at a recent by-election—West Derbyshire, where the Liberals ran the Conservative very hard for first place—was achieved by a candidate whose public pronouncements made it only too plain that even he was not too sure what his party stood for. Certainly much of the Liberal appeal proceeds from the simple fact that they are not as the established parties are; they are different; they reflect the vague conviction that

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Votes cast for Labour</th>
<th>Labour vote as a percentage of total eligible electorate</th>
<th>Seats won by Labour</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>13,948,605</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>40.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>12,403,254</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>12,216,166</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>34.5</td>
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“it’s time for a change”; they are not stuffy, not set in their ways, not worshiping shibboleths of left or right, not dogmatic, not incapable of admitting mistakes or learning as they go along. This fact makes them an ideal receptacle for the hopes and concerns of that large body of contemporary Britons who find themselves displaced—not always disagreeably, but shifted out of their traditional habits of thought and living, nursing vague aspirations, distrusting the too obvious certainties, conscious that they are citizens of a new Britain and indeed of a new world, but by no means sure what the burdens and privileges of such new citizenship are or ought to be.

It fits in with this that the party should be young and classless. It has broken completely with the image of Liberalism personified in a Gladstone, or even an Asquith or a Lloyd George. (There may have been some family laying on of hands—Mr. Grimond did not marry into the Asquith clan for nothing—but this is no part of the public face of the party.) It has a young leader, who surrounds himself with young lieutenants. It draws its support evenly from all classes of the community without the bias upwards or downwards that marks its rivals. Moreover, it has found and retained an un-self-consciously classless style which is new in English politics and which has perhaps as much to do with its appeal as anything else. By a natural extension of this it is the most consistently international in its outlook. Not weighed down by dreams of past grandeur or dependence on restrictionist interest groups, it has been free from the first to oppose a British independent nuclear deterrent and to advocate active British participation in the task of uniting Europe. If one asks what is distinctive about its social and economic policies at home the answer would surely have to be “not a great deal,” but Liberals could claim with justice that they have been more consistent in the priorities they have accorded to economic growth and competition than either of their rivals.

To have posed the question about the present state of British politics in terms of the Liberal challenge is merely to reflect the lines of debate and speculation that have dominated the British political scene in 1962. But it is also important to remember that the party which is causing all this stir has precisely six members at present in the House of Commons. It may indeed have a great future, but the present belongs to the established phalanxes of right and left, to Conservatism and Labour. How, in their own right, are they to be assessed?

It is still not quite clear what took the wind out of the Tory sails a year or more ago, and made them appear, suddenly, a devitalized government presided over by a mannered, tired Edwardian. Perhaps it was the inescapable fatigue at the end of eleven to twelve years of continuous Tory rule, perhaps the Prime Minister's own disposition to carry too much on his shoulders and to prefer uninspiring hacks like Mr. Selwyn Lloyd and Mr. Henry Brooks to less tractable but more forceful figures like Lord Hailsham and Mr. Enoch Powell. Perhaps the Prime Minister was paying the inescapable price at home of concentrating on British policy abroad. Whatever the reason, any criticism would be unfair which did not take account of the great difficulties that the government has had to face; some of them, it is true, are of its own making, the kickback on some of its electoral advertising, but they are difficulties none the less real for that.

Ever since Suez, Mr. Macmillan has been engaged in a series of tactical withdrawals. He has been pulling Britain out of exposed positions no longer tenable by a democratic power in a world made allergic to any relic of old-style imperialism—while being strangely insensitive to many manifestations of the same phenomenon in a Marxist dress.
One by one, in Suez, Cyprus, South Africa, the disengagements have been effected—in retrospect with a degree of adroitness for which adequate credit was not always given at the time. Simultaneously the normal processes of peaceful, evolutionary transfer of rule have taken place in Malaya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Tanganyika, and are proceeding in Kenya, Uganda, and the West Indies. The strains this operation has imposed upon the solidarity of a party which has invested so much in the imperial image should not be underestimated. In advance of the event no one predicted that Mr. Macmillan would so easily be able to shrug off the resignation of Lord Salisbury in protest against the decision of the Government to grant independence to Cyprus. The frustrations thus suppressed broke forth in fiercer and superficially more inflammatory form in the backbench revolts over Katanga and Rhodesia. The first, as it now appears, was not very effective, the second continues to harass the councils of the party, ready to burst into open flame whenever fanned by settler opinion or Cabinet concessions.

In making the other great break with the British past—our entry into Europe—the crab-like tactics of the Macmillan government may seem by comparison crude and clumsy. Blowing now hot, now cold, trying in succession a free trade area for all Europe, then an EFTA of the Seven, and finally seeking admission to the Common Market, Britain may seem to have proceeded as much by error as by trial. But whatever problems this may have created for our negotiator in Brussels, it may well prove to have been the only tactics which would persuade a nationalist party to take this immense extranational plunge. Mr. Macmillan has brought his party to the brink of Europe after demonstrating to them that all other roads are blocked. As a result he has so far been able to keep the party united, for all practical purposes, while launching a venture wholly foreign to its ethos and inclination. In September he took the issue to the party at its annual conference and received its approval by acclamation. Old imperial loyalties seemed to have dissolved overnight in face of the alluring prospect of an early entry into Europe followed by a rapturous endorsement at an early general election. Mr. Gaitskell’s commitment of the Labour Party to an opposite point of view was interpreted as an electoral as well as a political blunder. Unfortunately the Six—or at least the Two at Paris and Bonn—seemed to have other views. The ensuring difficulties of our negotiator at Brussels, Mr. Heath, have robbed the Common Market issue of the tonic properties which it seemed to possess a few months ago. Even so, the fact remains that so far the dissidents have not been able to mount any significant movement against “going into Europe” and this to any student of Tory behaviour must remain one of the most remarkable aspects of the contemporary British scene.

On success in their Common Market venture the Tory leadership has obviously staked the electoral future of the party—on this and on an economic recovery and easement near enough to the general election to make the voters feel good—and grateful. But, of course, on the longer view there is no need to worry about the Conservative future; whether it wins or loses next time, there’ll always be a Tory party. Those whose aim is primarily to conserve, to protect established interests, to maintain something like the status quo, are not seriously in danger of going under, even if they become temporarily an electoral minority. The future of the Labour Party on the other hand is much less guaranteed. Their old-time certainty, rooted ultimately in Marxism, that
there would always be a working-class party, is going the way of other Marxist fallacies. It rings hollow and it no longer squares with the facts.

This, it is quite certain, is fully understood by Mr. Gaitskell. He realizes that the Marxist underwear of the Labour Party is about as sensible in the 1960's as a flannel undershirt in an age of central heating. He clearly rejects the idea of the state's owning, running, or even directing all major enterprises. Less openly but probably just as firmly he would like to scrap the whole working-class, cloth-cap ethos of the party. This, however, is where he is up against it. If one part of the British working class is on the move, another part of it is firmly rooted in its past. Partly this reflects the plain facts of obsolescence in some British industry and in much British housing and urban conditions. Live in Burslem or Jarrow and, however high your pay packet, you will feel working class and vote working class because your whole environment is working-class. Worst of all, if you are over forty, you may wear the whole panoply of proletarianism with a positive relish because it gives you a certain emotional security in a changing world.

With this goes the great structure of consolidated interest which is the Trade Union movement. Not that the central idea of organized labor, with all its indispensable benefits of orderliness, reliability, responsibility, is to be thought of as outdated. But its integral association with the Labour Party no longer carries the self-evident moral authority it once possessed. There is too much that now looks shabby and absurd —the card vote, the mass apathy in trade union elections, the jurisdictional strikes, the irresponsible shop stewards. Since Peter Sellers dared to satirize trade unionism in a popular movie, "I'm All Right Jack," the position of organized labor in the British scheme of things has never been quite the same.

These two factors—the clash between the realities of modern economic organization and the old working-class image, the strain of accommodating union pressure groups inside a political party—create deep fissures within the Labour Party. They exist at all levels—most obviously at the top, but no less damagingly at the lower levels where the hard, routine work has to be done. They could be patched over in one of two ways: by the emergence of a warm, great-hearted personality who would gather up all the squabbling elements in an inspired, emotional leadership, or else in the short-lived but temporarily adequate unity which is bred by a hunger for office or an instinct for survival. Neither the hour nor the man exists for the first. Can the party's crisis produce the second? He would be a rash man who would confidently answer Yes.