CHAPTER I

THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY AND INDIA - A HISTORICAL SURVEY

The British Labour Party, whether in power or in opposition, has stood for certain principles of foreign policy, which were fundamentally different from those of the Conservatives and of the Liberals. Since its foundation in 1906, it assailed the traditional foreign policy of Britain. The Labour Party held that the traditional policy was based on "immoral power politics and arrogant imperialism". It promoted not the "well-being of the entire British people...rather the selfish interests and privileges of the capitalist ruling classes."¹

After coming to power in the twenties, the Labour pursued "socialist" foreign policy. Arthur Handerson, the then Foreign Secretary of the Labour Government in 1929 argued that "Socialism in any one country will live poorly and dangerously so long as the rest of the world is prey to capitalist anarchy."²

Michael R. Gordon, the author of Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy opines that "socialist foreign policy aimed at reforming the international system in such a way that it would come to embody those socialist objectives--

² Quoted in ibid.
economic organization, social justice, fraternity and cooperation that Labour stood for in Britain itself.\(^3\)

Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour leader, while presiding over a party meeting in Glasgow, in 1920, declared: "We socialists do not believe in the narrow concept of nationalism. Our ideal is the brotherhood of man. We will work always for the establishment of the democratic institutions based on justice and people's will everywhere in the world.\(^4\)

At its Annual Conference in 1920, the Labour Party pledged itself to the principle of self-determination and demanded its application "to all peoples that show themselves capable of expressing a common will....It denies the right of any government to govern a country against the will of the majority."\(^5\) Therefore, Michael R. Gordon, concludes that Labour's Foreign policy rested "on a powerful and inspiring vision of how relations among nations ought to be conducted.\(^6\)

**Attitude Towards India**

These professions and assertions of the Labour leaders influenced to a large extent their attitude towards India, and

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3 Ibid., p. 6.


they sympathized with the growing aspirations of the Indian people for self-government. At the time of his investiture as Prime Minister in 1922, MacDonald declared: "I hope that within a period of months rather than years there will be a new dominion which will find self-respect as an equal within the Commonwealth. I refer to India."7 In spite of powerful opposition from the Conservatives, the Labour Government supported the Indian claim for "Dominion Status". MacDonald showed keen interest in the development of self-government in India and was to a large extent responsible for Lord Irwin's declaration that "Dominion Status" was the goal of British policy. In his declaration of 31 October 1929, Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy of India declared:

It is the desire of the British Government that India should in the fullness of time, take her place in the Empire in equal partnership with the Dominions....I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state that, in their judgement, it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status.8

Later, he took keen interest in summoning a Round Table Conference in 1930. However, the Indian National Congress refused to participate in the First Round Table Conference


because Lord Irwin's promise of "Dominion Status" was "undated and undefined". Gandhi was willing to attend the Conference only if the British agreed to the drawing up of a constitution based on "dominion status" which should come into operation immediately. However, Lord Irwin was of the opinion that it was impossible to pre-judge the action of the conference or restrict the liberty of Parliament.  

During the Second World War the Labour Party criticized Chamberlain Government's decision of making India a party to war without consulting her. Labour leader Attlee described it as a "grave mistake". He said: "It promoted the general feeling that it wasn't India's war, so that when Japan came in, there was a good deal of Asianism and certain amount of wanting to go in with the Japs. It didn't extend very far, but meant some distance."  

At its Annual Conference at London in 1942, the Labour Party adopted the Charter of Freedom of Colonial Peoples, pleading the abolition of all forms of imperialist exploitation. It adopted a resolution which inter-alia asserted that "in all colonial areas there should be organised a system of democratic government, using the forms of indigenous

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institutions in order to enable the mass of the people to enter upon self-government by the modifications of existing forms of colonial administration. 11

The formation of the first all Labour Party Government under Clement Attlee in 1945 raised high hopes in India. The Indians expected an early realization of their goal. Their hopes were not baseless. Soon after, Lord Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, announced in a broadcast on 1 January 1946:

I want you to realise that myself, the British Government and, I believe, the whole of the British people earnestly desire to see India rise to the free and full status of an equal partner in the British Commonwealth. We will do our utmost to assist India to attain that position. There is no longer any need for denunciation or organised pressure to secure this end. 12

The Labour Government thereafter started making efforts to transfer power to Indians. It sent a Parliamentary delegation 13 led by Professor Richards to India to discuss the method of framing a constitution for India with the elected representatives of the Indians. The delegation started its work on 9 January 1946. On its return it impressed on the


12 N.N. Mitra, ed., The Annual Register (New Delhi, 1947), vol. 1, p. 27.

13 The Delegation consisted of ten members--eight from the House of Commons and two from the House of Lords. Hansard, HOC Debates 416, 4 December 1945, cols. 2102-4.
Government the need for a big and positive step towards the constitutional settlement. The delegation also revealed the differences among the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.

The Labour Government made yet another serious effort to solve the Indian problem and despatched a mission consisting of three members of the British Cabinet, popularly known as the "Cabinet Mission". The Mission, in the course of its discussions with the Indian leaders, was convinced that the differences between the Congress and the Muslim League were insurmountable. Consequently, the Cabinet Mission recommended the creation of a loose federation in India with the Centre dealing only with defence, foreign affairs, and communications. They also recommended creation of three groups of Provinces--two of the areas claimed by Pakistan in the East and West, and the third of the rest of the subcontinent. Their proposals also envisaged a treaty between the Union Constituent Assembly and Britain to provide for matters that arose out of transfer of powers. All this resulted in a state of uncertainty in the political sphere in India.

To end the uncertainty, on 20 February 1947, the British Labour Government issued a White Paper on India. It stated:

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14 The three members of the Cabinet Mission were Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India; Stafford Cripps, President of Board of Trade; and A.V. Alexander, First Lord of Admiralty.
The present state of uncertainty is fraught with danger and cannot be indefinitely prolonged. His Majesty's Government wish it to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take necessary steps to effect transfer of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948. 15

Simultaneously it appointed Louis Mountbatten as the Viceroy of India in place of Viscount Wavell, with specific instructions to transfer power to the Indians by June 1948. Explaining the reasons for setting this time-limit, Attlee, the then Prime Minister, says in his Memoirs:

I had come to the conclusion that it was useless to try to get agreement by discussion between the leaders of the rival communities. Unless these men were faced with the urgency of a time limit, there would always be procrastination.... Indian leaders were constantly reminded that the sands were running out. 16

The Labour Government's decision to transfer power to Indians was not merely to fulfil its promise. After the Second World War, the British power was considerably reduced. And in the face of the persistent and vigorous demand for national independence, Britain was not in a position to keep its effective hold over India for long. In other words, the British withdrawal from India had in the circumstances of the time become a force majeur. Furthermore, the British Labour

Government also realized that it could concentrate best on national recovery only when it was free from new anxieties which were concomitant to the continued colonial rule in India. Still further, the Party's major commitment was for ameliorating the living conditions of the working classes in Britain itself. It would thus be seen that under the ever-growing pressure of national independence movement within India and the domestic commitments and compulsions, the Labour Government was left with no choice but to quit India.

The indisputable fact about the Conservatives' opposition is that it did not favour grant of independence to India so soon. It stood for progressive and phased grant of self-government to India. Perhaps it would have at the most conceded "Dominion status" and that too at some distant date. Further, it stood for the "protection of the rights of the minorities" and of the Indian princes before taking any decision regarding withdrawal. Winston Churchill, leader of the Conservative Opposition criticized the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission and observed:

The present Labour Government went beyond the offer of 1942. They instructed their delegates to offer full independence directly instead of Dominion Status which left the final decision to a fully constituted Dominion of India after they could see how they got on and how their general situation lay. The result, so far as I can see it, which is not put before us, is the immediate independence of India and severance of all the constitutional ties uniting our former Indian Empire to the British Commonwealth of Nations.
I wish to register my dissent from this short-circuiting of the original offer. 17

Later, when the Government made an announcement that the power would be transferred to the Indians by June 1948, it met with severe criticism at the hands of the Conservative leaders like Churchill, John Anderson and R.A. Butler. In the course of the debate in the House of Commons they contended that the announcement was in essence a complete departure from the original proposals submitted by the "Cabinet Mission". Winston Churchill particularly maintained that power should be handed over only to a "united India" and that Britain should stay in India until such time an agreement was reached between the two main parties—the Congress and the Muslim League. It may also be observed here that there were some Conservative members who supported the cause of self-government for the Indians. John Anderson, for example, in a speech in Parliament on 13 December 1946 argued that "one British community democratically organized and ruled could not in fact indefinitely hold in subjection another Indian community ripe for self-government". 18

Refuting the allegations of the Conservative members, Attlee contended that the Labour Cabinet was mindful of the

17 Mitra, n. 12, p. 27.
18 Edwardees, n. 7, pp. 31-32.
rights of the minorities to be free from fear of the majority, but they could not "allow them to place a veto on the advance of the majority". 19 Attlee emphasized that "the danger of delay was as great as the danger of going forward" and asserted that the latter was not betrayal as the Conservatives held, but "fulfilment of an honourable promise". 20

The grant of independence to India, according to Leonard Mosley, the author of The Last Days of the British Raj, was a "spontaneous desire to set people free as they were free. It was as simple as the action of a child who sees a bird in cage and wants to open the door and let it fly away". 21 It seems to be more a fanciful flight of 'imagination'. There is no difference of opinion in saying that the British were not as childlike as Mosley makes out. The remarks made by a well-known British publicist, Michael Edwards, are worth noting. He said that the Labour Government had -

no choice of its own and, even if the Conservative Party had been in power, it too would have been forced to recognize the fact. The British people ceased to be interested in the British Empire, in its glories, responsibilities, virtues, or vices, because they were concerned with their own welfare above all other and were at last in a position to

19 Rao, n. 4, p. 270.

20 Ibid., p. 272.

demand that their wishes be given priority. 22

The foregoing statement seems plausible. Yet the modalities of the British Labour's withdrawal from India attract greater grace, when one keeps in mind the vain-glorious efforts of the French and the Dutch to perpetuate their colonial rule in other parts of Asia. And after prolonged colonial wars they also had to exit from their colonies, but disgracefully. Therefore, it is difficult to agree completely with Michael Edwards' view.

Whatever may be the reasons for the Labour Government's withdrawal from India, it cannot be denied that this act was "without precedent or even analogy in history". It was an act of statesmanship since it earned a lot of goodwill towards the British Government from the Indians. After the British left India, Indian hostility towards the hated masters was considerably reduced. This is evident from the statement of K.M. Munshi, then a prominent Congress leader, who said: "No power in history but Great Britain would have conceded independence with such grace, and no power but India would have so gracefully acknowledged the debt." 23

The "graceful" withdrawal paved the way for India to accept "Dominion Status" within the "British Commonwealth

22 Edwards, n. 7, pp. 31-32.
23 Mosley, n. 21, p. 242.
of Nations by which she continued even after she became a Republic in 1950.

One of the decisive forces which pulled India towards the Commonwealth was, however, the economic importance of the Commonwealth. In 1947-48 India's imports from the Commonwealth area formed 41.2 per cent (of which 30.1 per cent came from Britain alone) and exports to this area formed 49.6 per cent. Further, Britain owed a large debt to India, who built it up as a result of the supplies made to Britain during the War. It was desirable for India to have friendly relations with Britain both for the settlement of this debt as well as to preserve the value of Sterling. Whatever the reasons which guided India's decision to remain in the Commonwealth, it was welcomed by the people of all shades in England, and hopes were expressed that relations between the two countries would grow on friendly lines.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

1. Hyderabad Question

Their attitude towards the problem of the Indian sub-continent immediately after independence was, if not

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25 This debt stood at £1,178.4 million in July 1947. See *Hansard*, HOC 439, 7 July 1947, col. 1772.
pro-India, certainly one of neutrality. The British Labour Government considered the question of the accession of Hyderabad to the Indian Union, purely a domestic matter of the Indian Government and advised the Nizam of Hyderabad to come to terms with the Indian Union. In complete contrast thereto the Conservatives held a diametrically opposite view. They supported the Nizam in his bid for "independence" and "sovereignty of state". They held that with the "lapse of paramountcy" the state of Hyderabad had automatically reverted to its original status of a sovereign and independent state. They also accused the Labour Government of committing a breach of faith by not supporting the case of Hyderabad. Churchill wanted the Labour Government to play the role of a mediator between India and Hyderabad. On 30 July 1948 he said in the House of Commons:

I warn Ministers... they have a personal obligation which affects their honour and good faith not to allow a state which they have assured has a declared and sovereign independent status to be strangled, stifled, starved out or actually overborne by violence. To sit by after all they have said and to allow that to happen, to shrug their shoulders and say, 'It is not a matter for us, it is a matter for the Indian Dominion' would be to commit an act of shame with which their names would be burdened for generations which otherwise might not have paid attention to them. 26

Similarly, Anthony Eden, another prominent Conservative leader, described the Indian "police action" in Hyderabad as "an act

26 Hansard, HOC 454, 30 July 1948, col. 1733.
of aggression. In view of the mounting pressure and criticism from the Conservative members, the Labour Government had to modify its stand on the Hyderabad question. This is reflected in the following statement of Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, in the House of Commons on 15 September 1948:

"I do not propose to say anything more about Hyderabad at the moment except that I regret, as every one must regret that this war like spirit has developed in these Dominions."

Even in the Security Council the British delegate, Alexander Cadogan, showed excessive eagerness to take up the Hyderabad question and voted for its inclusion in the provisional agenda. This changed attitude was, however, severely criticized by some of the Labour members. They admired the restraint exercised by India in dealing with the Hyderabad question. The New Statesman and Nation, a left-wing paper, in its editorial argued that if the British were still in power in India, they would not have suffered the militaristic behaviour of the Nizam even for two months. It further added:

An army would have been despatched, order restored, the Nizam deposed, a successor found and warned to

27 Hansard, HOC 456, 15 September 1948, col. 77.
29 Hansard, HOC 456, 15 September 1948, col. 90.
be on his good behaviour and the trouble would have been settled promptly. The Indian Government have put up with the situation for a year. Can the British now blame them if they take the action albeit tardily, that we would have taken long ago. If the Indian Government hesitated now, then indeed they would justify the jibe that they were incompetent to succeed us. 31

The British Labour Government's official criticism of the Indian action in Hyderabad came as a serious disappointment to the Indian people. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India, is reported to have said:

I should like to tell His Majesty's Government that if they wish India to maintain friendly relations with Great Britain they must see that India is in no way subjected to malicious and venomous attacks of this kind and that British statesmen and others learn to speak of this country in terms of friendship and goodwill. 32

It is quite evident that while the initial attitude of non-interference on the part of the British Labour Government on the Hyderabad question was widely welcomed in India, its subsequent stand on the Hyderabad issue shocked the Indians. Commenting on the British support in the United Nations for Nizam, the Modern Review observed that "it has been rude shock to India even for those who still pine for

31 New Statesman and Nation (London), 17 September 1948.
32 The Hindu (Madras), 29 June 1948.
a continuance of political association with Britain and has fully justified the popular demand that India should completely sever her relations with that country". 33

V.K. Krishna Menon, India's High Commissioner in Britain, at a Press Conference expressed regrets over the misrepresentation of the facts regarding Hyderabad and cautioned them not to "create trouble that will separate the people of India from this (Britain) country". 34

2. Kashmir Issue

The British Labour Government initially adopted an attitude of neutrality and impartiality and expressed the hope that India and Pakistan would compromise their differences and find out an agreed solution by frank consultations. It turned down Pakistan's plea for a Commonwealth intervention in the Kashmir dispute. 35 In the Security Council also the British delegate initially treated the Kashmir problem fairly on its merits. Noel Baker, the British representative expressed the hope that the two Governments would settle the problem of Kashmir. He further added that it was "the task of the Security Council to formulate a plan which would enable the will of the Kashmiri people to prevail". 36

33 Modern Review (Calcutta), vol. 84, no. 4, March 1948, p. 257.

34 The Hindu, 23 September 1948.


36 SCOR, mtg 235, 24 January 1948, pp. 256-60.
After some time the attitude of the British representative in the Security Council underwent a change. He insisted on the solution of the long-term issues before Pakistan could be called upon to stop assistance. He pleaded that "plebiscite is a vital part of the whole settlement" because it would "inspire confidence in every body including those fighting". He also pleaded for "impartial interim administrative arrangements". 37

The anti-Indian stand of the British delegate in the Security Council was further apparent from the way he opposed the adjournment of the proceedings of the Security Council to enable the Indian representative to return to New Delhi for consultation. The British representative said in the Security Council on 11 February 1948: "I find it difficult to believe that in the early days of the League of Nations, when the Covenant was still being taken seriously the Council of the League would ever have agreed to such a course". 38 He took the stand that the members of the Security Council could arrive at a decision even in the absence of the Indian representative. However, on the opposition of the Russian and Ukrainian members the deliberations of the Security Council were suspended. 39

38 SCOR, mtg 244, 11 February 1948, p. 104.
It may be observed here that the Conservatives were still more critical of India. Churchill deplored in the House of Commons the "attempt now being made to incorporate forcibly against their wishes, the Moslem population of Kashmir in the Hindu regime." 40

Their attitude on the Kashmir issue evoked severe reaction in India and open allegations were made against the British Labour Government for adopting pro-Pakistan attitude. The Hindu summed up this attitude in its editorial thus:

It is abundantly clear that the British policy regarding India and Pakistan in the international field is going to be precisely what it was as regards the Congress and the Muslim League in the domestic sphere--ostensible public profession of neutrality coupled with secret, but nonetheless actual and effective support for Pakistan and all anti-Indian and anti-democratic forces. Mr. Noel Baker evidently came here from long with a more or less clear-cut programme of "settlement" regarding the Kashmir dispute. From the very first day, he has been trying to push it through on the pretence of agreeing with India as to the urgency of the situation. 41

Compelled by the mounting criticism of the British Government in India, Mountbatten "advised the British Government to direct their delegate (at the Security Council) to take a less un-friendy line towards India". 42 This advice,

40 Hansard, HOC 457, 23 October 1948, col. 252.
41 The Hindu, 12 February 1948.
42 Bamzai, n. 39, p. 151.
however, had no effect on the British attitude. Following a deadlock over the Dixon Report\(^43\) on the Kashmir Question in the Security Council, the British representative suggested arbitration between India and Pakistan regarding the interpretation and application of the two UNCIP resolutions\(^44\) and moved a resolution to this effect in the Security Council. Explaining the reasons for this resolution, Gladywn Jebb, the British delegate to the Security Council said that the main intention of the resolution was -

...to place on record quite categorically that no reference to the people of Kashmir regarding the future accession of the State made otherwise than under the auspices and with the full consent of the United Nations can be regarded as constituting a settlement acceptable to this Council. \(^45\)

The British representative took initiative in submitting to the Security Council a revised resolution with the support of the USA which called for arbitration. \(^46\) This resolution was opposed by India. Criticizing the resolution, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, said:

\(^{43}\) The Dixon Report of September 1950 referred to the partition of Kashmir valley as the principle of settlement.

\(^{44}\) SCOR, mtg 532, 21 February 1951.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., pp. 1-9.

\(^{46}\) This resolution was adopted on 30 March 1951 by 8 to 0 votes with India, USSR and Yugoslavia abstaining.
Kashmir acceded to India when she was still a Dominion of the Commonwealth and the accession was accepted on behalf of the Crown by the then Governor-General. It is strange that His Majesty's Government should now agree that a Dominion had acted unconstitutionally; they were really blaming themselves. 47

Nehru's criticism was, legally speaking, correct. But it must not be forgotten that the dispute over Kashmir being between two "Dominions", Britain took a stand in keeping with its national and alliance interests. Pakistan was a member of the Anglo-American military pacts, whereas India had opted to remain non-aligned. Naturally the possession of Kashmir by Pakistan would have been in-keeping with the Anglo-American military strategy in this part of the world. Further, Britain had extensive oil interests in the Middle East, which was overwhelmingly Muslim. The Labour Government thought it advisable to support Pakistan which was contiguous to the Middle East and also predominantly Muslim.

The Labour Party remained out of power from 1951 to 1964. While in opposition, it consistently supported Pakistan's demand for plebiscite in Kashmir without insisting on the fulfilment of other conditions of the Security Council Resolution of 13 August 1948. This attitude of the British Labour party pulled down its credibility in India, and strained the Indo-British relations.

47 Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Foreign Policy; Selected Speeches, September 1946- April 1961 (Delhi, 1961), p. 467.
3. China

Among the West European countries, Britain under Labour Government was one of the first country to accord recognition to the Government of the People's Republic of China. Explaining the reasons which prompted Britain to accord this recognition, Bevin, the Foreign Secretary of Britain, said in the House of Commons:

We consider it was right to accept the facts of the situation in which that Government (People's Government of China) was exercising effective control over practically the whole Chinese territory and, for the better protection of our own interests to try to establish relations on a normal and friendly footing.... It would be better for us to help to shepherd China into United Nations rather than to oppose her entry and cause unnecessary frustration.... I believe that some of the difficulties with which we are now faced in the Far East would have been avoided if there had been those opportunities for mutual discussion of problem which membership of international bodies afford. 48

The British Labour Government's recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1950 found identity with India's similar demarche in this direction. Yet, the identity between the policies of these two countries was only superficial. For, at the behest of the United States, Britain opposed People's Republic of China's entry into the United Nations. 49

48 Hansard, HCC 481, 29 November 1950, col. 1167.

However, later when India and China clashed in 1962, the Labour Party, which was in opposition, extended full support to India. Labour Party Leader, Harold Wilson, said in the House of Commons on 31 October 1962:

There can be no doubt where our sympathies and interests lie in this matter. India is a Commonwealth country. Let us have no sneering about India's traditional neutrality because at critical moments in the history of the past ten years that neutrality has enabled India to exert a positive influence in securing peace. 50

Wilson emphasized the need of massive "lend-lease aid" to India to enable her to overcome her difficulties without compromising her position as an uncommitted nation. It may be observed here that initially the Conservatives adopted rather cautious attitude on the issue of Sino-Indian conflict. But slowly even they came to extend unconditional support to India.

4. Colonialism and Racialism

Though British Labour Party has professed to be an opponent of colonialism and racialism, in actual practice it has not been able to live up to these ideals. No doubt, as a result of the dissolution of the British Empire, the chances of clash between India, a leader of the anti-colonial bloc and Britain, a leader of the colonial powers, were greatly

50 Hansard, HOC 666, 31 October 1962, col. 168.
reduced. But there remained many an irksome issues which continued to strain the Indo-British relations. For example, on the Indonesian question, India and Britain adopted diametrically opposite stands. While India wanted to take the case to the United Nations, Britain favoured its settlement through "mediation". This difference of approach was mainly due to differences in their views on the question of UN jurisdiction. India held that UN had jurisdiction over the Indonesian question. Britain, on the other hand, considered the issue as one of domestic jurisdiction and disputed the right of the Security Council to hear the case.

This divergence of opinion naturally strained Indo-British relations. The British stand on the Indonesian question convinced the Indian Government that the British Labour Government was more concerned about the protection of its trade interests rather than doing justice to the colonial people. Again in December 1961, when India took police action to end the Portuguese rule in Goa and other enclaves, her action was not only condemned by the Conservatives, who were in power then, but also by the Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell. This greatly disappointed Indian leaders. Nehru pointed out at a Press conference:

> it is only when India goes to Goa they say we are hitting at the United Nations. When the U.N. is in the open field challenged
and obstructed in its work in the Congo, in Katanga, when all this is done, this is fair. 51

But with the liquidation of the Portuguese rule in the Indian enclaves, this friction between India and the British Labourites, faded away.

5. South Rhodesia

The anti-racial policy of the British Labour Party was also demonstrated in the case of Southern Rhodesia, where it opposed the idea of granting independence so long as the government of the country was in the hands of the "White" minority. Barely a fortnight before the "General election" of 1964, Harold Wilson, the chief of the Labour Party explained his policy towards Rhodesia in a letter to E. Mustasa, a member of the Rhodesian Committee against European Independence thus: "The Labour Party is totally opposed to granting independence to Southern Rhodesia so long as the Government of the country remains under a white minority." 52 However, the Labour Government was opposed to the use of force in Rhodesia.

6. South Africa

On the issue of the settlers of Indian origin in


South Africa also their attitude was in quite contrast to the attitude of the Indian Government. India contended in the United Nations that the treatment meted out to the people of Indian origin by the Government of the Union of South Africa was in complete violation of the principles underlying the preamble of the UN Charter. The British Labour Government on the other hand supported the contention of the South African Government that the matter was essentially one of domestic jurisdiction. This was naturally distasteful to the Indians who wanted Britain to judge the issue on merit, or at least to adopt an attitude of neutrality between the two Dominions. Later when the Security Council approved certain economic sanctions against the Government of South Africa's policy of racial discrimination, the British Labour party endorsed the decision and opposed the supply of arms to South Africa as long as apartheid continued. However, the British Labour continued to favour extension of trade with South Africa on the plea that it was their policy to expand trade everywhere. In 1962 when South Africa left the Commonwealth, the Conservative Party, which was then in power, continued the "imperial preferences". Even the British Labour Government continued these "preferences" when it returned to power in 1964. The attitude of the Labour Party towards South Africa was best summed up by Wilson in his speech at a meeting at Trafalgar Square in 1963. He said:
Under Hugh Gaitskell's leadership we condemned the supply of arms to South Africa as long as apartheid continued. This is the policy of the Labour Party today. It will be the policy of the Labour Government when we are called upon to form the government of this country. 53

He further reiterated that "lest there be any doubt, we shall apply exactly the same policy in respect of arms supplied to the Portuguese government for use in territories they control in Africa." 54

7. Commonwealth Immigration

The question of imposing controls on the Commonwealth Immigration appeared at a time when the Labour Party was in opposition and it vehemently opposed all restrictions on the immigration from the Commonwealth. Arthur Bottomley, Labour Party spokesman on Commonwealth affairs, told the House on 5 December 1958:

We on this side are clear in our attitude towards restricted immigration. We are categorically against it. The central principles on which our status in the Commonwealth is largely dependent is 'open door' to the Commonwealth citizens. If we believe in the importance of our great Commonwealth we should do nothing in the slightest degree to undermine that principle. 55

53 Ibid., p. 272.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 251.
Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of the Labour Party, conveyed identical feelings in his reply to a letter of Cyril Osborne, a Conservative member, and a staunch supporter of immigration control. Explaining the policy of the Labour Party on the question of immigration, the letter pointed out:

The Labour Party is opposed to the restriction of immigration as every Commonwealth citizen has the right as a British subject to enter this country at will. This has been the right of subject of the Crown for many centuries and the Labour Party has always maintained it should be unconditional.

The National Executive of the Labour Party in its report of 26 September 1958 also asserted that the reports of the "flood of coloured immigrants and their impact on the life of the country were often exaggerated and misleading". There were difficulties but these could and must be overcome "by positive efforts based on goodwill and mutual understanding". The Labour Party unmindful of the short-term electoral popularity and gains preferred to uphold the moral principles. It offered strong opposition to the Immigration Bill of 1962, which introduced "colour" bar into the legislation. Hugh Gaitskell pleaded with the Government to

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56 The reply was sent by the Secretary of the Parliamentary Labour Party on behalf of Gaitskell.

57 Paul Foot, n. 52, p. 252.
drop this miserable, shameful, shabby Bill. Let them think, consult and inquire before they deal another deadly blow at the Commonwealth.58

It may be further noted that the Labour Party was not unanimous in its opposition to the immigration controls. There were substantial differences amongst the party leaders. For example, Wilson did not contest the need of control of Commonwealth Immigration, although Gaitskell stood for unconditional entry of the Commonwealth citizens.

8. European Economic Community

During the late 1940s the Labour Party was invited by the French Government to join the continental states in setting up European Coal and Steel Community, but the British Labour Government declined to participate in the continental ventures which entailed surrender of "national sovereignty". This refusal was partly due to the fact that the Labour Government was opposed to the supra-national arrangements and partly because it felt it was "incompatible with the Commonwealth ties". Later in 1961, when the Conservative Government decided to apply for membership of the EEC and initiated negotiations, the Labour Party pleaded for seeking certain safeguards for the trade and other interests of the Commonwealth countries. It also favoured consultations with

the Commonwealth Prime Ministers regarding the terms of negotiations. Gaitskell, the Labour Party leader, in the course of debates in the House of Commons on 6 June said that the government should agree to join EEC provided the negotiations were acceptable to the forthcoming Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference and dismissed the possibility of Commonwealth existing in parallel with the EEC should Britain enter. 59

In the Labour Party Conference of 1962 also, Gaitskell said: "We must be clear about this, I make no apology for repeating it. It means the end of a thousand years of British history. You may say let it end, but my goodness it is a decision that needs a little care and thought." 60

It is evident from the above survey that the attitude of the British Labour Party towards India fluctuated from friendship to hostility. While it showed great understanding and appreciated the Indian stand on anti-colonialism etc., strains developed between the two on a number of issues. However, one permanent issue which strained the relations between the two was the Kashmir question. Though the British Labour Government asserted time and again that they adopted

59 Hansard, HOC 676-7 June 1962, cols. 507-14.

an attitude of complete impartiality on the Kashmir issue, this contention cannot be substantiated by facts. The reality is that the Labourites were more favourably disposed towards Pakistan. This was probably due to the strategic importance of Kashmir and the British conviction that its possession by Pakistan would strengthen the Anglo-American military pacts.