Preface

Britain's response to the post-war movement for European unity was unenthusiastic and lukewarm. Neither in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) nor in that of the EEC the two major parties of Britain showed any significant interest. In 1961 however, the Conservative Government applied for membership of the Common Market and ever since, whether in or out of power, the party's policy in this regard has been the most consistent one. But this has not been so with the Labour Party. There had been several shifts in the party's position on Common Market, dictated by the exigencies of day-to-day politics. The researcher in this study endeavours to examine and analyse various forces that were at play in determining the Labour party's concept of "European unity" with specific reference to the Common Market.

In 1961 when the Conservative Government led by Harold Macmillan was negotiating for entry into the EEC, the Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell insisted on "five conditions" for the membership. The "five conditions" when interpreted in the then prevailing circumstances could effectively bar Britain's entry into the Common Market. However, when the Labour came to power in 1966 it changed its earlier stand and applied for the EEC membership. What caused such a conversion?
The Labour Government of Harold Wilson entered office with an enthusiastic policy of rebuilding Britain's world image in the aftermath of the Suez debacle and the latest French veto on Britain's entry into the EEC. To attain this objective the Labour Government wanted to attach greater importance to the "special relationship" with USA. Wilson was, however, soon disillusioned with the Johnson Administration. On many important issues, such as Vietnam and Britain's contributions to the conventional arms defence of Europe, both the Governments differed. Somehow, the kind of close rapport that existed between Macmillan and John Kennedy was lacking between Wilson and Johnson. The "special relationship" definitely remained undermined during the sixties.

Britain's relations with the Commonwealth during this period too were no better. The Labour Government's unwillingness to use force against the illegal regime of Ian Smith left the African states deeply annoyed with Britain, some of them even breaking off diplomatic relations with Britain. Economically also the Commonwealth declined as the traditional source of cheap raw materials and market for Britain. Several new countries, the United States, Japan and the EEC made inroads into the Commonwealth market and there was a considerable fall in Britain's trade with
the Commonwealth countries. On the other hand, the EEC itself was emerging as an important economic and political force on the world scene. Economically, staying outside the EEC meant for Britain losing a large market and being discriminated by the Common External Policy (CET) of the EEC. The EFTA was never a matching alternative for the Common Market, and moreover, the EFTA states themselves were not objecting to the British entry into the EEC.

Politically speaking, non-membership of the EEC for Britain also meant leaving the European affairs to be dominated by the Franco-German axis with little or no say for Britain.

On the domestic front, a severe economic crisis in 1965 forced the Labour Government to resort to severe deflationary measures. There was a general sense of disenchantment with the government in and out of the Labour Party.

After reviewing all the foreign policy options open to it, the Labour Government decided to apply for the EEC membership in 1967. It was during the course of his campaign around the European capitals for membership that Wilson called for the creation of a "European Technological Community." The proposed community would pool scientific and technological resources of Europe together and to be successful Britain with her rich scientific and technological potential would
play its role as a member of such community. But it was well understood that Britain's contribution to the Technological Community could be possible, only after Britain joined the EEC. De Gaulle rejected Britain's application for membership of the EEC for the second time. The French President expressed the fear that Britain's entry would Atlanticize Europe. The President surely did not want to disturb the Franco-German relationship on the continent by taking Britain in. When finally in 1973 Britain under the Conservatives entered the Common Market, the Labour Party showed tough opposition. The party questioned the terms of entry and vowed to renegotiate them. Thus when it returned to power in 1974 the Labour successfully renegotiated the terms and received their approval at referendum.

In a nutshell one recurring theme in Labour's European policy has been the need to preserve the party unity. Common market being a highly divisive issue, the party's European policy changed along with the dynamics of intra-party group politics. However, in late 1970s it is also seen that the Labour's realization of the twin objectives proved only to be ephemeral, so that the split in the Labour Party took place thereby giving birth to the Social Democratic Party, which, as the recent trends (indicated by the bye-election results) show is gaining increasing strength. However, it
difficult to make any exact prognosis with regard to the
future of the Labour Party. One can only say that as the
things stand today, the British Labour Party seems to have
been weakened so that its return to power in the next
elections seems to be a difficult if not impossible pro-
position.

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P. Venkateswar Rao

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