

Emrys Roberts

Born 22.9.1910. Lawyer and Member of Parliament.

Also available at www.livesretold.co.uk.



Contents

1. Childhood Memories
2. Career
3. 1945 Parliamentary Speeches
4. 1946 Parliamentary Speeches
5. 1947 Parliamentary Speeches
6. 1948 Parliamentary Speeches
7. 1949 Parliamentary Speeches
8. 1950 Parliamentary Speeches
9. A Stalwart Welsh Liberal MP

This account of the life of Emrys Owen Roberts archives material from several publicly available internet sources, for which we are grateful and duly acknowledge. These include the profile by Dr John Graham Jones in the Dictionary of Welsh Biography, Hansard, and the website of the Lloyd George Society. It also contains, as its first chapter, a note Emrys Roberts wrote personally about his childhood memories. The life story was compiled in 2021 by Alex Reid, editor of Lives Retold and son-in-law of Emrys Roberts.

1. Childhood Memories

The following was transcribed in 2021 from a manuscript among Emrys Roberts' personal papers.

Born 22nd September 1910 at “Is-Hendre”, Wellington Terrace, South Road, Caernarvon. Father was Owen Owens Roberts, then a partner in the Ironmongery firm of Griffiths Jones & Co, 9-11 Pool Street, Caernarvon. He was the elder son of Thomas Roberts of Caernarvon, a shipwright. Thomas Roberts had died before I was born. My father's mother died when he was very young: he did not remember her and he had been brought up by his aunt, a sister of his mother, in Garnon Street, Caernarvon, a Mrs Captain Pritchard. My father's mother was well connected, hailing from Plas Llangwnadl of Lleyn, Caernarvon. An uncle or great-uncle of his was Captain Owen Owens of “The Unicorn”, a portrait of which was painted in 1853 and is in my possession. My father was named after Captain Owen Owens. The Captain was from the same family as Sir Hugh Owen, the educationalist whose statue then dominated Castle Square, Caernarvon.

My mother, Mary Grace Williams, was the daughter of John Williams and Gwen Williams, both living when I was born. My grandfather John Williams was a retired butcher, living at Hendre, Vaynol Road, Caernarvon. He lived for two things - Siloh Chapel where he was a deacon, and my mother, whom he called to see at least once a day. White-bearded, strong, I always had great awe and affection for him. He looked after our garden, chopped the logs, did all the handy jobs around our house - work which my father did when strictly necessary with no joy whatsoever in it. My grandmother, rosy-cheeked and sharp-tongued, had never left her house since the death of her eldest son in South Africa in 1902 or so, except to go to Chapel or to see her daughter, my mother.

My grandfather died in 1923; my father on 31 October 1932; my grandmother in April 1940; my mother on 16 February 1953. Each occasion is vivid in my mind. I was having supper on a Sunday evening when my father came home to say my grandfather had died (age 72) and soon afterwards there were calls from sad faced Ministers and Deacons. I was an undergraduate at Cambridge when, one Monday morning, an express letter arrived from the Minister to tell me that my father was very ill. I went home by train the next day, to be met on arrival at the station by Gwynfor (my father's great friend) and was told he had passed away. His age was only 59. I was a Solicitor in Liverpool when a telegram arrived from my mother that Nain had passed away quietly. She was on the eve of her 90th Birthday. I was established in a post in London when my sister telephoned to say that my mother was very ill. I went home, returned for a day to London, and she died before I came back. She was 75.

Of each one of them, I treasure always the most tender memory and can think of no fault in any of them.

I have a few childhood memories of Wellington Terrace - a Georgian house with a cellar-kitchen, drawing-room and dining-room on the ground floor, and attics. The dining-room had yellow plain curtains with little bobs on them and I remember the sunny day on which my father's brother, Uncle Robert, came to say good-bye before leaving for America. I remember the green linoleum on the upper landings and attic, and falling out of bed one night. Just before the First War, my father built a house 'Penarth', in Llanbeblig Road, Caernarvon and I remember the workmen laying little coloured tiles in the hall, and the day the furniture was moved, going up the hill on a large horse-drawn open lorry, on which I was given a ride. This new house was noteworthy because it had electric light in the dining and drawing rooms and hall, but it was impressed on one that it was never to be switched on by me, because it was so expensive to use.

My recollections of the War years are few. I remember my mother's youngest brother, Tom, in the uniform of the Welsh Guards, and his leaves, when I would examine his gun, and be warned not to touch it or to disturb his sleep. I was just under 4 when the War broke out and I recollect dark green blinds being installed in the house. I was taken to the Infants School one morning but ran home at "Playtime" because I could not say "Mamma" every few minutes. I was taken again the next day and hated the school and my mother for taking me there. Soon, the school was taken over for some war purposes and our class was established in the School Room of Moriah Chapel and later in En, my own chapel. When the War ended, the Mayor of Caernarvon gave us a tea in the Boys School and there was a Procession to the Pavilion, to which we had each to take a flag. I was proud of the flag I bought, with the pictures of the King and Queen on it but was deflated when my mother pointed out that the pictures were of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra!

It was during the War, on 15th April 1916, that my sister Gwenno was born. I resented the intrusion of a baby into our home from the beginning. I was hurt that my mother wanted another child and my resentment was only slightly mollified when my little friends were invited to see the new baby and these passed favourable judgment on it!

My father had been rejected for war service and spent each week in Pwllheli in charge of a branch of his business there. After my sister's birth I joined him in lodgings there and attended school there – Ysgol Troed yr Allt. I remember the thrill of learning to spell for the first time; the word was CI = Ci (dog). By and large, however, my schooling was intermittent until the War came to an end and I spent periods at home in bed, unwell, from time to time.

After the War the time came to go to the Boys' Council School, the Head Master of which was Humphrey Evans, a deacon at Engedi. When I had been a year at the school, he moved to Llandudno and the new Head Master came, Lewis Jones - a great teacher. My own teacher for three years was a Miss Myfanwy Owen. At School, I was never distinguished but did once win a prize for reading aloud in Welsh.

From the beginning, Engedi Chapel was deep in my life. I have an early recollection of being taken there as a very young boy and being taken out for crying, with the people smiling at me - in sarcastic and disparaging style so I thought. I was introduced to morning service, to Sunday School, and to the evening service every Sunday from the earliest ages. On Tuesday nights there was the Band of Hope for Children and on Wednesday the Seiat. I liked the Sunday School and the Band of Hope - here there was opportunity for self expression. I hated the Seiat, it was one long bore. I tolerated the morning and evening Sunday services as a duty and preened myself on my ability to recite my verse at the end of evening service.

My father was not a deacon but yet faithful, though unorthodox and modernistic in his views. The minister was the Rev. John Owen M.A. later of Morfa Nevin, a man of strong character and, surprisingly, at his best in the Band of Hope with the children. Outside it, at that period, he was to me forbidding and even awesome. But as I grew up I developed an ever-deepening respect and even affection for him. His qualities were outstanding - intolerance of sham, humbug and sloppiness; direct in speech and possessing an acute sense of fun and humour which was all the more enjoyable because so unexpected. His services were masterpieces of economy and precision. Sentence followed sentence in a reasoned way to which it was pure joy to listen. There was no appeal to sentiment; on the contrary, sentimentality was deliberately excluded. There was none of the Welsh "hwyl" - which I have never been able to tolerate except in one case - that of the Rev. Philip Jones, in whom it was pure artistry. But in John Owen's preaching, a mellowing came with the years, a revealing of the great emotion which lay underneath and which, even to the end, was held in check. He was one of the four preachers I have been able to enjoy - the others were Philip Jones, W.D. Davies and Gwyn Evans of Charing Cross.

I shall never be free of the memories or influence of Engedi - nor would I wish to be. The great chapel, with its granite front and classical porch, its beautiful ceiling, the polished pine and brass rails of the round pulpit, the red and gold of the organ pipes - all these I can remember immediately and see in my inward eye at any moment.

Whether packed to the doors for those two preachers - John Williams, Brynsiencyn and Thomas Charles Williams, Menai Bridge (both of whom I remember by sight only) or for Y Gymanfa Ganu, or Eisteddfod, or with a

smaller yet dignified Sunday morning congregation, the memories are vivid. And I can always recall the peculiarly mellow and tuneful sounds of the Engedi organ; not a harsh loudness as so many church organs but having its special qualities of sweetness and softness - as was generally recognised in Caernarvon - for was not Engedi the first church or chapel in the town to instal a pipe organ - an additional proof of the progressive character of the church, were any needed!

The learning of verses, the preparation for one chapel event or another, the frequent parading of the children in the front pew “Y Set Ganu” of the big chapel seemed to be a constant feature of our lives and it is not just the distance of the years that leaves the impression of happy days. There was little irksome - the memories are of great activity, of being articulate, argumentative, gay and irrepressible. The Chapel did not dominate - there were too many exciting and occupying things for that; but it was something that was a great part, an important and long-lasting influence on all life.

There were so many other things - the Castle; the great square - Y Maes - dominated by the Castle; the Quay with the little schooners and steam ships; the Menai Straits, and the paddle boat that crossed it with its load of pigs, sheep and people - the ‘Arvon’, y “Stemar back Sir Fôn”. There was Twthill, the little hillock overlooking the town. There was the fascinating walk round “Caeau Bach” and the more venturesome one “round Gwaith Bricks”. And the occasional trip to Dinas Dinlle - by horse-drawn brake, or by walking from the bus passing along the main road. And later on, one was aware of the chain of mountains brooding in the background, from Yr Eifl, to Elidir, the sweeping of all Gwyrfaï. From Penarth, there was a wonderful view - if one craned one's head through the window - the architect of 1914 had no thought of making the best use of the site.

One never put the feeling into words but there was complete security, an affection of which one was all the more sure because its expression never passed the limits of decent restraint; there was comfort and complete assurance that Caernarvon was unique in its superiority over all other places. And from the beginning one grew up in the constantly mentioned fact that the Prime Minister of Great Britain was not just Welsh but the Member of Parliament for Caernarvon. This, I believe, was a great fact in building up the conviction of easy superiority which has been one of my weaknesses. It is a conceit, to conceal which I have cultivated a meek and mild demeanour, which turns into aggressiveness in times of stress.

But I can imagine no richer and finer background than that in which I grew up.

2. Career

This chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the Dictionary of Welsh Biography at www.biography.wales. It was written by Dr. John Graham Jones, and was published on 31st July 2008.



Caernarfon.

Emrys Roberts was born at Caernarfon on 22 September 1910, the son of Owen Owens Roberts and Mary Grace Williams, both natives of Caernarfon. He was educated at Caernarfon Grammar School, the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1st class honours in law in 1931 and the Sir Samuel T. Evans Prize) and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (1st class honours in both Part I and Part II of the Law Tripos, MA).



University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

He became a solicitor in 1936 and was awarded the Clements Inn Prize. He also attended the Geneva School of International Law. He was a Gold Medallist of the Cambridge and Wales Law Societies. He served in the RAF, 1941-45, where he became a squadron-leader. He was called to the bar from Grays Inn in 1944. He was made MBE in 1946 and CBE in 1976.

Emery Roberts had been short-listed as the Liberal candidate for the Caernarfon Boroughs constituency (Lloyd George's old seat) in the 1945 by-election. He was soon to be elected Liberal MP for Merionethshire in the general election of 1945 as successor to Sir Henry Haydn Jones MP, and he continued to serve until defeated by the Labour candidate, T.W. Jones, in the general election of October 1951.

He held a large number of directorships in various commercial companies. He was President of the National League of Young Liberals, 1946-48, and of the Liberal Party of Wales, 1949-51. He was a member of the Council of Europe, 1950-51. He was a member of parliamentary delegations to Germany, Yugoslavia, Romania and Sweden.



Although Emrys Roberts was MP for Merionethshire for only six years, his fellow MPs were impressed from the outset by the sharpness of his intellect and his conspicuous radical leanings. He focused on European affairs, the economy and Welsh affairs. Much of his time was inevitably taken up with internal party discussions on the political direction which the Liberals might take. Roberts generally shared the view of Lady Megan Lloyd George (Anglesey) and Dingle Foot (Dundee) that it should lean more to the left.

In this view he tended to be at odds with his more right-wing friends and neighbours, Clement Davies (Montgomeryshire) and Roderic Bowen (Cardiganshire). His defeat in 1951 was a harsh blow to a hard-working constituency MP. It was widely believed that Plaid Cymru had withdrawn their candidate as a tactical manoeuvre to facilitate a Labour victory at the election and thus allow Gwynfor Evans, the party president, a straight fight against a sitting Labour MP in future general elections. Most nationalists, it was said, had voted Labour in 1951 in order to defeat Emrys Roberts.

Roberts was also the chairman of the National Eisteddfod Council, 1964-67, and a member of the Council on the Legal Status of the Welsh Language in the Law Courts. He served on the Duke of Norfolk's Investiture Committee in 1969. He was a member of the Mid-Wales Development Corporation, 1969-77, and its chairman in 1977, a member of the Welsh Development Agency, 1977-81, and director of the Development Corporation of Wales, 1978-81. He brought to these positions a creative mind and considerable professional and political skills.

He was a member of the court and council of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1972-85, and the chairman of the Council of the National Eisteddfod of Wales, 1964-67 and its hon. counsel, 1957-74. He proved an extremely businesslike and progressive chairman of the council of the National Eisteddfod. He published jointly *The Law of Restrictive Trade Practices and Monopolies*.

He married Anna Elizabeth Tudor in 1948, and they had one son and one daughter. The son, Owen, predeceased his father. They lived at Bryn Dedwydd, Dolgellau, at Court House, Basil Street, London, and 8 Kent House, 62 Holland Park Avenue, London W11. His papers are at the National Library of Wales. He died on 29 October 1990.

3. 1945 Parliamentary Speeches

Chapters 3 to 8 are transcripts of speeches made by Emrys Roberts in the House of Commons. They were archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Hansard website at www.api.parliament.uk.

Maiden Speech

21.8.1945. Squadron Leader Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) On this first occasion when I have sought to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, I share in very full measure the deference, and sense of respect to this House, which have been so well expressed by hon. Members who have preceded me in making their initial contributions to the affairs of this great Assembly.

Yesterday we spoke of the situation in Europe, the Middle East, the Far East and many countries, and of the relation Britain has with other countries. It is right and proper that we should do so, and I know that this House will long maintain the esteem of free men everywhere when they know that it keeps a watchful eye on the interests of democracy all over the world.

I want to refer to-day to the interests of a country within our borders, when we are discussing the industrial and economic conditions of the peace and when we are embarking, as I trust we are, on the re-planning and reconstruction of the economic affairs of this island. I want to refer to the special position of my native land, Wales. The subject of industrial planning is of no more vital interest to any part of this island than to Wales.

We look back on the gloom of the inter-war years, when the average of unemployment was so much higher in Wales than in Britain as a whole—sometimes twice as high. The depression was not, as is commonly assumed, confined to the industrial districts of the South but was prevalent in the North Wales counties as well, and unemployment reached 36 per cent. in some areas. In the period of 12 years before 1939 there were 23,000 and more men and women who were forced to migrate to England in search of work from North Wales alone.

We do not want that period to return and I welcome the specific mention in the Gracious Speech of the special problems of Wales and the explicit assurance that they will have the attention of Ministers. I hope the Government will consider the special problems of Wales promptly and announce their policy promptly. I hope that policy will fully accept certain self-evident postulates. In the first place I beg the Government to have regard to the interests of Wales as a whole and not merely particular areas of it. In the second place, the logical inference of the language of the Gracious Speech

is such that we are right in demanding—we are invited to demand—complete equality of treatment with Scotland at all times and in all measures.

I make no reflection on our Scottish friends in suggesting that. By the same logic, it implies the early creation of a Secretary of State for Wales. I know that during the Election the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the House passed some criticisms on this proposal, but no doubt they were rather in the nature of controversial election exuberances than the considered view of the Government. I was fortified when the hon. Member for Central Cardiff (Mr. G. Thomas) said on Friday that there was unanimity on this side of the House in supporting this Measure.

Last among the essentials I have mentioned is that the Government will in all Measures treat Wales as a distinct nation and not merely as a territorial portion of these islands, and that they will assure to us the greatest freedom in developing its resources ourselves. We are a country of immense potential development, and I ask that, as an effective measure of decentralisation, the Government will consider the creation of a Welsh National Development Board as part of the plan to develop to the fullest extent the human and material resources of this country mentioned in the Gracious Speech.

The condition of Wales may be exemplified in the division which I now have the honour to represent, the county of Merioneth, which is a county of stock farming lands, holiday coastal towns and the great industrial district of Festiniog, where slates are hewn out of the rock by workmen, than whom there are no finer in skill and the daily courage they show. The hon. Member for Central Cardiff referred to the dread disease of silicosis as affecting coal miners. It affects no less gravely those engaged in the quarrying of slate, and for that reason I welcome the reference to the schemes for compensation for industrial injuries, social insurance and national health insurance set out in the Gracious Speech. I hope that there will be a truly comprehensive scheme which will alleviate the terrors of this affliction, because it is the first condition of the maintenance of any industry that it should not prejudice in any manner the health or happiness of those engaged in it. We also need light industries to provide alternative employment in those areas, as has been done in South Wales.

I thank the House for this traditional display of its kindness towards a new Member in dealing with a rather particular aspect of policy. I make no apology for referring to my native land in my maiden speech. I would not wish it otherwise. We Welsh are proud to belong to Britain, never more so than at this hour, but we have our traditional way of life—cultured, neighbourly, democratic and God-fearing—and we are anxious and determined to see it preserved and promoted.

We not only want to see the wild grandeur of our mountain lands and the unsurpassed beauty of our coasts protected against the ravages of both the private speculator and the lack of imagination of Government Departments; we want that sympathetic, economic approach and treatment which are necessary if the life of the Principality is to develop fully and freely. We ask for concrete measures from the Government. We are far from satisfied with either the attitude or the organs of the British Government in the period before the war. Therefore, we ask for these modest, proper and wholly reasonable measures—a Secretary of State and a National Development Authority—to bring us our due share of the blessings of peace and prosperity without harm or hindrance to any other part of this realm.

Mr. Pritt (Hammersmith, North) It falls to me for the first time in my Parliamentary career to congratulate a Member on his maiden speech, and I can do it with the greatest sincerity. The hon. and gallant Member enumerated a number of the virtues of Welshmen, but one of their virtues which the hon. and gallant Member was too modest to mention was that of eloquence, which he certainly possesses in good measure, even for a Welshman. I know his country pretty well. It is one of the most awful examples of uncontrolled private enterprise, and while I do not necessarily subscribe to all the remedies he desires, I desire remedies for it as earnestly as he does.

Offices of Profit Under the Crown

12.10.1945. Squadron Leader Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) This Bill in my opinion raises an important constitutional issue on which I should like to make one or two observations. With the particular effects of the Bill I think the House will agree, namely, that Mrs. Mann and Mr. Forman should be relieved of the consequences of inadvertently committing an offence against an Act of 1707. The constitutional issue involved is that of the relationship between the Executive and the Legislature, between the Crown and Parliament.

I had occasion yesterday to look up the fundamental Statute, the Succession to the Crown Act, 1707, and might I say in passing, as a lawyer, that I wistfully looked back to a day when all the Acts of Parliament from 570 Henry III to Queen Anne were comprised in a single volume and no reference to statutory regulations made in any of them. The short Title of the Act indicates the intention of Parliament to assert its right to determine the succession to the Crown and to insist on its own supremacy by limiting the number of office holders and thereby limit and control those whose votes would be influenced by the patronage of the Executive. It is fundamental in the Constitution that the number of office holders in the House of Commons owing their appointment to the Executive must at all times be rigidly watched and controlled.

On that fundamental principle, two series of Acts have been built up. The first is a series of Acts which have enabled Ministerial or political office holders to be Members of the House in order that the House may maintain control over the proceedings of the Executive. A number of Statutes, of which the outstanding are the Election of Ministers Acts, 1919 and 1926, and the Ministers of the Crown Act, 1937, have enabled Ministers to sit in the House without the possible consequences of submitting themselves to re-election. These Acts do not infringe the principle that non-Ministerial offices are incompatible with membership of this House.

A second series of Acts have been the Indemnity and Relief Acts to relieve innocent offenders and it is in this particular that the present Measure departs from precedent of previous Indemnity Acts. The Under-Secretaries of State Act, 1939 and the Arthur Jenkins Indemnity Act, 1941, not only relieved persons who were already Members of the House if they accepted an office against the penalties but also allowed them to keep their seats in the House. The novel feature of this Bill is that it makes valid by retrospective action the election of persons who at the date of the election were disqualified by law from membership of, and election to, the House. It is quite true that this so-called office of profit which they held has been of very little profit, and that the two Members in each case acted with complete inadvertence and in good faith and public spirit. Nevertheless, the view taken by the Select Committee on Elections, 1945, on the recommendation of which this Bill is based, is that the appointments they held were in fact offices of profit under the Crown. Therefore, the effect of this Bill is that Parliament is in fact making 571 Members of the House of Commons persons who could not have been so elected because they were holders of office under the Crown. That is a very important constitutional development. It is entirely at variance with the fundamental theme of the 1707 Act. It for the first time negates those words in Section 24 of that Act which says that holders of office of profit shall not "be capable of being elected." It is the first time that a Bill has been directed at those particular words in the 1707 Act.

Nevertheless, we agree that as regards these particular persons, it is entirely right and proper that the Bill should be passed into law. How are we to overcome the unsatisfactory position that the justice of the individual case requires a Bill to be passed which is at variance with the constitutional principle? The whole difficulty is that of determining what constitutes an office of profit. It is almost impossible at present to ascertain what constitutes an office of profit under the Crown.

For that reason I welcome the assurances and the appeals which have been made that the matter should be looked into on the lines recommended by the Select Committee on Offices of Profit, 1941, and I do appeal for a declaratory Act to be passed into law, after proper inquiry, setting out the criterion of an

office of profit, so that this House may preserve the fundamental principle that office holders shall be limited and controlled, so that all men may know what constitutes an office which would debar them from entry to the House, and so that persons who have acted in good faith throughout may be spared the anxiety of proceedings of this nature.

4. 1946 Parliamentary Speeches

Defence Policy

5.3.1946. Squadron - Leader Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I would like to make such contribution as I can to this Debate in the light of the considerations which have been in the minds of other hon. Members who have spoken. I think they have been troubled by the difficulty of reconciling two aims. The first is the necessity of producing an efficient fighting force able to guard this country against sudden attack, capable of swift expansion in an emergency, and able to take its part in the United Nations military organisation. The second aim, with which the first must be reconciled, is to fit that desirable force into our limited human, financial and economic resources. I think those two aims can be achieved if we follow four lines of approach.

As a preface, I should like to say that we should consider this whole subject in the light of the lessons to be derived from six years of war and, as a corollary, that we should ensure preservation of the most important liberties of the individual. The first line of approach is that the major concentration must be upon scientific research and technical training, and the use of the most modern technical equipment. The second line of approach is that the manpower must be the best that is available. The third is that we must achieve the utmost economy in administration of the Services. The fourth is that we must conceive of defence policy as depending upon foreign policy, and keep both within the framework of the United Nations. I do not wish to dwell upon the first two methods, except to stress again, as has already been done in this Debate, and as the "Manchester Guardian" says in its leading article today, that if we are to be extravagant in anything, we must be extravagant in research, and, on the second method, that we should concentrate not only on the best conditions of pay, but on the best conditions of service to which we can attain.

The White Paper on pay and conditions in the Services sets out in the main conditions of work and pay in the Services comparable with those in civilian employment, but I do not think it wholly achieves that end. I think we could go a long way towards simplifying the system of allowances, but I am sorry that the White Paper abolishes dependants' allowances since this penalises single men with dependants. I think we should pursue the general line of the White Paper so as to make, not only the pay, but the general conditions of life in the Services, as attractive as civilian occupations.

I want now to say a few words on economy in administration. Economy in administration goes hand-in-hand with efficiency in administration. During

the war I served in the Royal Air Force, and one must accept, rightly or wrongly, that there is a certain lack of confidence ²⁶⁸among serving officers at lower formations in the administrative efficiency of the Air Ministry. I think the same thing is true of the Army. I was serving at a group headquarters. There was difficulty in getting swift decision from the Air Ministry not on the operational side, but on the administrative side. There was lack of response to new suggestions.

There is a strong case for an inquiry into the administrative mechanism of the three Service Departments. For instance, the courts martial system is cumbersome and antiquated. It involves the use of about 24 forms; accused persons have to wait for many weeks, and sometimes months, before they know the results of their sentences. The system was framed in the days when the standard of intelligence among officers was far lower than it is today. In such things as courts martial and administrative procedure generally, there is room for reform in all three Departments.

A far more important aspect of economy in administration, however, is the integration of the three Services. The Prime Minister said that he has an open mind on these matters. I urge the Government to consider very strongly the possibility of a complete integration of the Service Departments. It would simplify the work of finance and administration. For example, during the war, in Britain and abroad, the Air Force and the Army in the same area often had to draw their pay and their supplies independently from different depots and headquarters. Further, a unified department would prevent that competition for materials and men which we saw in the early days of the war. I would like to see a single War Ministry with one political head, controlling all three Services. It is anomalous and out of date in these days that the Defence Ministries should each have political heads with places in the Cabinet. It is all wrong that there should be three Service Ministers in the Cabinet. Yet, the Minister of Food is not in the Cabinet; the Minister of Works is not there; the Minister of Supply is not there but all these represent vital Ministries at the present time. The Foreign Office has only one representative in the Cabinet; although foreign policy is fundamental and defence policy only ancillary to foreign policy. Yet each Defence Ministry has its political representative in the Cabinet. That is ²⁶⁹clinging to an outworn tradition which is not fit for the present day.

It seems to me that the figure of 1,100,000 as the total of our Armed Forces given in the White Paper, is very large for this country. In terms of economic effort it is more than one million men unemployed, doing non-productive work. The Military Staff Committee of the United Nations is meeting soon. The only sure way to reduce the figure of 1,100,000 is to integrate our defence services with the military mechanism of the United Nations. We heard the Foreign Secretary speak a little while ago about the ultimate ideal

being a Parliament of the world representing the peoples of the world. The logical corollary to that is an International Police Force. That conception should be kept in mind when defence policy is worked out in its later aspects.

I submit that we can solve the problem of defence along those lines without talking of bringing in conscription. Resort to conscription is a retrograde step and no argument at all for it has been brought forward. The production of an efficient fighting machine must depend on the conceptions of which I have spoken, and particularly upon generosity in research, and adoption of the most modern equipment, the most attractive terms of voluntary service, and upon constant endeavour to fit our commitments and our forces to the mechanism and the functions of the United Nations.

Liverpool Cotton Market

28.3.1946. Squadron - Leader Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I intervene with some diffidence in what might be regarded either as a domestic Debate between representatives of Merseyside on the one hand, or as a private war between the Government and the Conservative Party on the other hand. I cannot help feeling that there is more uncertainty in this Debate than there has been in any other Debate in this Parliament. There is uncertainty about the facts which this House ought to know. There is some uncertainty about the views of the cotton spinners; that is admitted on both sides.

It is also apparent that there is some uncertainty as to the number of people engaged directly and indirectly in the cotton trade. Uncertainty also prevails regarding the financial results of the operations of the Control Board, and concerning the manner in which the Control Board will function. All that uncertainty should not exist in a Debate on an industry which is so vital to the commercial standing of this country, and I cannot help reflecting that that uncertainty is the fault of the Government. It should have been removed before the Government made their original announcement to the House.

My natural disposition when I hear of the gambling and the large scale speculation that have been bound up with this industry, is to come down on the side of the Government and agree with the abolition of an institution which often has played so lightly with an essential commodity with resulting hardship to the consumer and also when firms overreach themselves, has resulted in unemployment far and wide, in Lancashire. But I have tried to consider this matter as dispassionately as I can. The Lord President admitted that there is a speculative element inherently bound up with the cotton trade, because, whether or not one closes the Liverpool Cotton Market, we shall still have to deal on the cotton exchanges of the world, and the Cotton Control Board itself will have to face that element of risk.

I asked myself certain questions before deciding what line I should take in this Debate. First of all, it is essential that any change should result in our being able to secure the raw material for Britain on terms better than those under the old system; in other words, it is no use making a change unless it is for the better. The Lord President said nothing to convince us that we should obtain the raw material more advantageously. In his original statement all the President of the Board of Trade did was to say that the Control Board would get the cotton on terms at least as economical as under the old system.

That sort of argument is not sufficiently strong for changing this institution, for closing the Liverpool Cotton Market with its world wide contacts and its great repository of 635 experience—an institution which has performed important services for this country in a commercial sense.

I refer in particular to the earnings of foreign exchange; there again, there is a large amount of uncertainty which ought to have been cleared up. There should have been an inquiry into the position of foreign exchange earned. It is not a matter lightly to be dismissed. We know that the international Cotton Market at Liverpool earned considerable income for this country; first, by profit on the sale of cotton by merchants to overseas buyers; secondly, by brokerage commissions on cotton sold from an overseas grower to an overseas buyer on a Liverpool contract; thirdly, through substantial arbitration fees; and fourthly, through the visits of people from all over the world to buy cotton from Liverpool and who inevitably became involved in other transactions.

Further, as the hon. Member for Wirrall (Mr. Selwyn Lloyd) said, there are other important ancillary services to consider, such as banking, shipping and insurance, dependent to a large extent on the Cotton Market. I cannot help feeling that the Government are throwing away an institution which has been a valuable source of invisible income to this country. Having examined these proposals for public ownership, I cannot think that the Government have made a convincing case for dispensing with this important source of income and foreign exchange. We are told by the Government it is important for this country to export as much as possible, and yet here is a valuable source of income for this country which we are throwing away without any sound case made out for it.

I would like the Government to say what is the relation of this experiment—as experiment, indeed, it is in peacetime conditions—on the International Bretton Woods Agreement. How does State trading fit in there? Is it altogether fortunate that we are embarking on it at this particular time? I would like to know the answer to those points, because I feel that the Lord President skated very lightly over them.

He did say the Liberal Party had long ago left the 10th century laissez faire which dominated the Conservative benches, but I may inform him that we are also far ahead of the specious blandishments which pervaded the Lord 636President's speech. We want to know how this Control Board will work. Whether or not you eliminate competition at Liverpool, and blot out this picture painted by the Lord President of a mass of men struggling for markets and cutting each other's throats, we shall still have other world markets and world-wide oscillations in price. Even though 'the spinners are supplied by the British Government or by a public board, these oscillations are bound to affect them because there will still be competitors in the foreign markets.

How will bulk purchase work when the markets are falling? How will the Government afford cover to the spinners? Will this create another burden for the taxpayer? It may be that the Board will have so much profit that it can well afford to pay out of the profit, as the Lord President said it would, but he said nothing to relieve my anxiety that it may merely make losses. That means that the taxpayer will have to pay for the spinner's cheap raw cotton. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Lyttelton) inquired whether the Cotton Control Board were, in fact, dealing in futures in the New York futures market at the moment. I would like to know whether the Government is hedging on the New York futures market. The hon. Member who asked that question rather conveyed the impression that that was being done. If I misapprehended him, I am sorry, but that was my impression.

Broadcasting in Wales

9.4.1946. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I do not know whether it is an impertinence for a Welshman to intervene in a Scottish matter, but I should like to support the request made by the hon. and gallant Member for Perth and Kinross (Colonel Gomme-Duncan) for an independent and open inquiry before the B.B.C. Charter is renewed. I have very great sympathy with the demands of Scottish hon. Members in this respect, because our problems in Wales are very much the same. We must accept the great importance of the B.B.C. in the realm of culture and the fact that it has a cardinal part to play in that respect.

At the moment, the hon. and gallant Gentleman finds the same difficulty as I have found in obtaining from the Minister the cost, for example, of running Scottish and Welsh organisations. The figures we need can only come to light after an inquiry. The so-called Scottish and Welsh Regional stations are not really regional; they are national, with their own traditions and their own way of looking at things and, in the case of Wales, with their own language. I must emphatically deny the allegation made by the hon. Member for South Edinburgh (Sir W. Darling) that there was more interest being taken in Scotland than in Wales. At the present time one local authority after another

are passing resolutions asking for a separate Charter to be accorded to Wales, and for a separate Welsh Broadcasting Corporation to be established. The request made tonight by the hon. and gallant Member for Perth and Kinross that an inquiry be made before the Charter is renewed, at which these things can be investigated and ventilated, is a very modest one. Therefore, I as a Welshman, accord him the fullest support in his request.

National Health Service

30.4.1946. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I want to deal with a particular aspect of this Bill—which I, with my colleagues, warmly welcome—namely, the provision of consultant services in the rural areas. The aim of any comprehensive Measure of this description is that all parts of the country shall be effectively served by efficient hospitals, properly staffed and adequately equipped. They should be properly staffed by consultants readily available in sufficient numbers, and with sufficient skill, to attend to the people who need them. In that respect the rural areas in particular have suffered in the years gone by.

I would like to say a special word for North Wales, which is mainly a rural area. In the three counties of Merioneth, Caernarvon and Anglesey, with a population of 200,000, I believe the minimum number of beds for an efficient service is 2,000, one for every 100 of the population. Yet I doubt if at the moment there are 500 beds in that area. The result is that patients are waiting for from six to nine months for admission to hospital. People who should be treated as in-patients are being treated as out-patients. In the whole of Merionethshire there is not a single fever hospital, and people have died on the way to a fever hospital which was a considerable distance away. That is a disgrace in a civilised community.

There are some consultants resident in the area. but others have to be drawn from Liverpool and Manchester, a comparatively long distance away. 136It is an area where much of the housing is bad, where there has been ill nourishment as a result of unemployment before the war and where the slate industry accounts for a high rate of respiratory and rheumatic diseases. Incidentally, I regret that industrial diseases and services are not included in this Bill. I am anxious that this bad state of affairs should come to an end, and I see the possibilities of it in this Bill. But that will depend upon its administration. Much of this Bill is left to regulations. I hope the Minister has not yet decided how he will constitute his regional hospital boards. I want to make this point now in case I do not get another opportunity. If we tie up the rural areas with the great industrial centres too much we shall not get an efficient medical service in the rural areas.

In regard to North Wales, in particular, if we link it up with the great industrial centres of the North West I do not see the possibility of an adequate, self-served area and medical unit being developed. We have a Welsh National School of Medicine. I ask the Minister when he comes to draw up his regions to treat the whole of Wales as one region. Let us have a transitional period, by all means, during which we can draw on the services of surgeons outside, from Liverpool or elsewhere. But I ask the Minister to consider with the greatest concern the provision of a full consultant service for this area, which has been so badly neglected in the past.

There is the possibility in this Bill, if it is properly administered, of the poorest family—and I hope it is only a short space of time before poverty is banished from this realm—living in the most remote hillside farm or in the most isolated hamlet, being able, with swift ambulances at their disposal, to call for the finest skill which highly trained surgeons can give, and being given the best treatment that modern hospitals can give, without fear of the cost in money.

Iron and Steel Industry

28.5.1946. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I will not detain the House many minutes in giving the decision to which we on the Liberal bench have come, after profound and anxious consideration of this vital industry. We cannot help feeling that there is an element of the unreal in this Debate and in this Motion. The House has been asked to approve of a decision by the Government to bring forward certain proposals, but there is a great deal of uncertainty hanging around the nature, the extent and the date of those proposals.

I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Gateshead (Mr. Zilliacus) mention the possibility of the nationalisation of the armaments industry, a proposal which we on these benches would welcome. But that is not implicit in these proposals, and has not been mentioned by a single Government front bench speaker. At the same time, it is evident that this industry has many of the qualities of a monopoly, that it needs reorganisation in the public interest, and that public ownership may well enter into that reorganisation. I have not seen the plans in sufficient detail to come to a verdict upon that; in fact, no plans have been produced. The industry is in need of organisation. It has sheltered behind a tariff wall for years; a tariff protection afforded in return for a promise of organisation, which, up to the present time, has been carried out purely on paper.

The Liberal Party is always prepared to examine proposals for public ownership when they are put before this House in a concrete form. The plans have not assumed that form, and we suspect that doctrinaire considerations have entered into the attitude of both the Government Front Bench and the

addresses of the Conservative Party. There is no immediate issue before the House; there is no present proposal before the House; there is no 1090 legislation before the House. Therefore, we on these benches do not feel it proper to vote on this Motion. [Interruption.] I am not looking for precedent among hon. Members of the Labour Party or the Conservative Party. If I were to do so, I have heard advice given by the Government Whips to their Members to abstain. I have also seen the party above the Gangway on this side of the House abstain from voting on an immediate, even urgent, issue like the American Loan. There is no immediate issue tonight before this House; there is no legislation before this House—

Mr. Jack Jones (Bolton) There will be.

Mr. Roberts I am glad to have the assurance though only from the back bench opposite that there will be plans. Until then we cannot be called upon to express an opinion on a purely abstract Motion on this important matter.

Regional Board for Wales

22.7.1946. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I beg to move, "That the Clause be read a Second time."

The purpose of this proposed new Clause is to make sure that, when the regions are framed, Wales is treated as an individual region. Subject to what I have to say, I think that is the wish of the people concerned, and of medical opinion in the Principality. I recognise that there are, and will be for a period of years, some practical difficulties if this region is to be administered with headquarters at Cardiff, particularly so far as North Wales is concerned, because the bulk of the consultant service at the moment is provided from Liverpool. What I am anxious about is, that the rural area shall have an adequate medical service. At the moment there is a woeful shortage of beds, and there is no area more in need of an adequate health service. In North Wales at the moment consultants are summoned from Liverpool. That is not an adequate substitute for an adequate health service.

For a while there may be transitory or temporary arrangements. When these arrangements have been sorted out, I have no doubt it will be practicable to administer this scheme with headquarters at Cardiff, and with, say, a sub-area in North Wales, which will enable us to develop to the full an adequate health service. We are looking forward, not merely to a health service but to adequate and full employment plans to prevent the decline of population which is confronting us, which is one of the worrying features of the economic life of that part of the country. It will come to nothing unless we also have an adequate health service. We shall not get that in North Wales if we are tied up with the populous district of the North-West, but we shall have

it, if Wales is administered as one region. This shows a most pleasing confidence in North Wales towards our brethren in the South. It shows we are at one in the matter. I do ask for sympathetic consideration from the Minister.

Highway Code in Welsh

31.7.1946. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I have tried to approach this question with as fair a mind as possible, and I cannot help feeling that the arguments directed to the Minister to withdraw this document and reconsider it merit his consideration. I wish to associate myself with the remarks of the hon. and learned Member for the English Universities (Mr. H. Strauss) and the junior Burgess for Oxford University (Sir A. Herbert), and to dissociate myself from the remarks of the hon. and learned Member for Brighton (Mr. Marlowe). In particular, I want to ask the Minister to hearken to the plea made by the hon. Member for Caernarvonshire (Mr. G. Roberts).

There are over one million people who read and speak the Welsh language, and a very large number of them are persons to whom words convey their full meaning only when written in the Welsh language. This is important to Welsh people. The Minister of Transport has said that the numbers do not justify the issue of this publication in Welsh. That is a fantastic statement. Here is a document which will have a circulation of a million among a Welsh-speaking population. Is there any author in the country who would say that a book which can attain that circulation, is not worth issuing?

I would like to ask hon. Members who are not so fortunate as to come from the Principality to consider this, because they take their cars and come on holiday to that most beautiful country of Wales, and the way in which the Highway Code is observed by the people of Wales is of the utmost importance to all who come to the country. I do ask for most earnest consideration of this request that, not a Welsh translation of this document be issued—Heaven forbid—but that a Welsh version, drawn up by persons distinguished in the study of the Welsh language, should be made, in due course, of the Highway Code, in whichever form it may be issued. I feel certain there can be no democratic refusal of that plea.

Defence Organisation

30.10.1946. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I, like the hon. Member for South Cardiff (Mr. Callaghan), venture with some trepidation into this dangerous field. I welcome the reference in the White Paper to collective defence because I feel that the only real defence is that entailed by collective security. I look on the Armed Forces of this country as being necessary only during a transition period, the aim of which is the establishment of an international armed force.

Nevertheless, while we are striving towards that object, we must devote our attention to the perfection of its machinery—collective defence, and Imperial defence within that system of collective defence. There is a strong case for the inclusion of the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in the Defence Committee, but I feel that, if he is included, an unanswerable case is made out for the inclusion of the Colonial Secretary as well. I do not see how one can be put in without the other, because one of the greatest tasks of the Defence Committee will be to arrange the dispersal of war potential. In the days of atomic war—and this is a lesson which we learned even during the last war—the dispersal of war potential all over the world will be a condition of our not being obliterated in the very first days of the struggle. On balance, I think that the Prime Minister's argument, that they can be called in as and when occasion requires, is a sound one.

I welcome the effect which this White Paper has on the Cabinet in that the three Service Ministers are now excluded from permanent membership of the Cabinet and one Minister of Defence is substituted. Now that we are in the period of reconstruction, it is inconsistent with the problems of that period that the three Service Ministers should be included. I think that it makes for a neater Cabinet arrangement that one Minister should speak to the Cabinet for all the defence Ministries and, in that respect, I think the White Paper is a valuable step forward. Another statement to be welcomed in the White Paper is that the Government have not entirely rejected the conception of the amalgamation of the three Services. It is, no doubt, premature to welcome that at the moment, but a greater integration, both administratively and otherwise, is, surely, a most desirable object.

I suggest that that integration should not be merely at the highest levels, but at all levels. This was one of the lessons that took time and pain to learn during the war. Friction was involved when people of different Services had to work together. I remember that, during a certain combined exercise in 1941, the Army commander had one map on one wall and the Air Force commander worked on another map on the opposite wall because the one liked the Army map and the other the Air Force map. We do not want to have to learn those lessons all over again.

I suggest that much can be done by integration during training and, perhaps, at all levels. The hostility between airmen and soldiers suddenly thrown together into a new unit is quite as apparent as at higher levels, and we know that such hostility does exist at higher levels. It can exist in respect to articles in common supply. During the war it was a common thing for an Army and an Air Force unit to have to draw supplies from different sources with different duplicated organisations.

It would not be a bad thing if integration went even further still, and resulted in such things as the common numbering of Army, Air Force, and, perhaps, naval forms. There is much to be said for a review of military titles and ranks in all three Services. I think that administrative uniformity can best be secured, not as the hon. Member for South Cardiff suggested, but by an administrative committee working under the Minister of Defence. We are much more likely to pick out the best in each Service if the integration is done by an impartial Minister.

Another thing for which there is much to be said is a greater uniformity in the disciplinary code. At the moment, the Navy works under one court-martial system and the Army and the Air Force under another. In some important particulars, the Naval court-martial system is superior, such as in the pronouncing of the sentence at the conclusion of the trial. With due respect to the different units in which the men work, there is much to be said for having a common disciplinary code and a common court-martial system. I hope, now that the court-martial system is to be looked at, that this point will be borne in mind. It should be remembered that the men enter the Services as civilians, and it is important that their right before the law, whether it be civil, military, naval or air force, ought not to be affected by the kind of Service or tribunal which is to try them.

Finally, I want to touch on one matter which has not been mentioned so far during this Debate—the question of economic intelligence. It was perhaps one of our outstanding administrative achievements during the war that we had the Joint Planning Committee and the Joint Intelligence Committee both working under the Chiefs of Staff. In the Joint Intelligence Committee, of course, the Ministry of Economic Warfare played an important part. This was a lesson which we learned after much difficulty, just as we learned the lesson of cooperation between the Services. It was one of the most vital lessons, namely, the gathering of economic intelligence and the application of economic power in negotiations with neutral countries, to make economic elements effective in warfare. Much valuable matter was amassed during the war and many valuable lessons learned.

The Ministry of Economic Warfare has, of course, been disbanded and much of the wartime staff which formed that Ministry has melted away. I wonder if we are now studying the lessons of the Ministry of Economic Warfare—lessons which might be gathered from the work of the Contraband Committee, or from our negotiations with Sweden whereby we were able to prevent her contributing to the might of Germany even though she was surrounded by alien territory, or how we were able to deal with the problems of supply of coal from Germany across Switzerland to Italy. Will there be an economic intelligence section studying the lessons learned from the last war and applying them to any future emergency? Such an economic intelligence

department, I think, is essential. Such activity materially affects the outcome of a war as effectively as bombing and other forms of military activity.

I do not suggest that this work should be done by the Service Departments—I do not think the soldiers, sailors and airmen always have the right kind of approach—and I do not think it can be done by the Foreign Office. I am not sure that the technique of the Foreign Office is the correct technique to apply. There is an overwhelming case for an economic intelligence department working under the Minister of Defence, and I would like the Minister in due course to say something about that.

Army Training Areas

20.12.1946. Mr. Roberts The trouble is that most hon. Members have not learned the "language of Paradise." The other day the Secretary of State for War told the hon. Member for Denbigh (Sir H. Morris-Jones) that the War Office held about 500,000 acres of land in Wales; at least, I believe that is the figure. We are very much concerned with the large amount of land in Wales held by the Services. There is no demand that the War Office should hold no land at all in Wales, but the holding of some of this land constitutes not merely a threat to agricultural production or to some of our scenes of incomparable beauty but, in some locations, to our national way of life. Therefore, I would like to associate myself and my Welsh colleagues with all that has been said today on this subject.

I am glad to know that a public inquiry will be held in respect of each particular establishment, but it is also important that we should have soon an overall plan for the country as a whole and for Wales as a whole. Although I do not wish to develop this theme, it is a matter for serious consideration whether the Army which is proposed, with its large size, does not make such demands in personnel, equipment and land, as a result of military conscription, to an extent to which this country cannot afford in men, money, equipment or land, if the country is to survive and be reconstructed in the postwar world. With those remarks, I wish to endorse and associate myself generally with what has been said this afternoon.

5. 1947 Parliamentary Speeches

Duration of National Service

8.5.1947. Mr. Emrys Roberts I want to mention only two arguments in respect of this Amendment. When anyone is introducing in peacetime such a tremendous innovation as compulsory military service, it is essential to set before the country the terms on which it is being introduced. Therefore if the only power we have of prolonging that Measure is by Order in Council, we are not setting a definite term to the operation of compulsory service. We on this bench are against this innovation. There should be a definite term set to it, and at the end of that term the Government should come before the House with a new Bill. My second point is this. It has been argued that the House will have an opportunity of discussing the principle of the draft of the Order in Council and, therefore, will be able to discuss it year by year, but we consider that conscription is such an infringement of civil liberty and such a big thing that the impulse to introduce an Act of Parliament would surely be far greater than the impulse to introduce an Order in Council.

Exemption from National Service

9.5.1947. Mr. Emrys Roberts In the Debate on the Address on 18th November last the Chancellor of the Exchequer said, of military service: in our view, it is more democratic that all should bear their share ... we reject any suggestion of favouritism or privilege in regard to any of those called up to take this service. The hon. Member for the University of Wales is quite wrong in thinking that, if he had a coalminer instead of a university teacher, he would have got off ... we do not propose that there should be any favoured classes—neither colliers, nor railwaymen, nor university graduates. My hon. Friend the Member for the University of Wales (Professor Gruffydd) then said: My suggestion was that economic circumstances would compel the creation of favoured classes.

The Chancellor replied: We do not believe that circumstances will compel us to do anything of the kind. Conscription, however, will apply to all men."— [OFFICIAL REPORT, 18th Nov. 1946; Vol. 430, C. 636–637.] The Minister of Labour defended his rejection of the new Clauses on the grounds that he could not make provision in the Bill. He said that we were dealing with a difficult economic situation and must deal with difficult problems, as they arose, by administrative measures. That is a dangerous principle on which to proceed in time of peace. In war time it is inevitable that we should allow the Executive flexibility in deferring a class or postponing a call up in particular circumstances. But when you are instituting a measure for long-term peacetime conscription, totally different considerations apply.

Mr. Roberts The right hon. Gentleman defended his action by saying that in not calling up certain classes that was not exclusion, but deferment. Are deferments total exclusion, or are they not? Large classes of people are deferred from year to year until they attain a certain age, and then are not called up as they are beyond call up age. Thus, in practice, what has happened has been the exclusion of those people. The Government have said they are going to do that in the case of coalminers. I am against the exclusion of any class at all if there is to be conscription. On the other hand, I would be prepared to put down Amendments specifying the 3,000 or 4,000 trade classes recognised by the Ministry of Labour. If you admit the principle that those working in a particular industry should be deferred, you are entitled to look over the whole field of industry and argue that those engaged in the production of food and textiles and so on should be excluded. Food is every bit as important as coal, and there should be exclusion for those engaged on the land if there be exclusions at all.

Let me refer to the Minister's own argument, that the necessary result could be achieved by administrative machinery. I suggest seriously to the Committee that that is a dreadful and dangerous power of oppression to give to the Executive. I know that we have no need to fear oppression from the right hon. Gentleman, but in peacetime, when we have conscription on a permanent basis, it is dangerous to give the Executive a power of that character. The Government of the day can roam over the whole field of industry—I am not suggesting that this Government would do that—and select certain classes of people for deferment from the Services, thereby, in fact, saying to the rest, "You will go into the Forces". If there are to be any deferments, or exclusions, they should be incorporated in the Bill. If there are to be any exclusions food should be ranked with coal, and the necessary provision 1023 made in the Bill. The matter should not be left to the discretion of the Executive.

Electricity Bill

30.6.1947. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) We on this bench welcome this Measure. On the whole, we think it is a good Bill which will make for cheaper and more widespread use of electricity. One thing about which I am sorry is that it has not been found possible to make the consultative councils elective bodies. As the Parliamentary Secretary rightly said, it would be wrong to think that these councils would always be in friction with the area boards. At the same time, it is important that they should be independent bodies and not dependent on ministerial appointment. Their position would be stronger.

I appreciate the difficulty of making them elective because they represent a rather artificial kind of area. Although one recognises the Minister's

difficulties—the areas cut across so many 1047 county boundaries—nevertheless, it would be far better if they were independent bodies. I am also sorry that it was not found possible to make Wales one entity for the purpose of the area boards. In spite of all that, on the whole, I think that public ownership of electricity in this country is an essential condition of bringing electricity at a cheap rate into the rural areas., We have heard quite a lot today about the great municipalities, and not so much about the extension of electricity into the rural areas, but it is because of the possibilities of its extension into the rural areas that we on this bench welcome this Bill.

I would like the Minister to say something about the price policy which will be pursued by the Central Electricity Authority. I have always believed that there is really no reason in the world why a man living in a remote valley in Wales, Scotland or England should pay more for his electricity than a man living, say, in the middle of Birmingham or one of our larger cities. We think that electricity should be brought into every home in the land, and that no house or housewife should be without it.

Now that we are bringing all the resources for making electricity —both coal and hydro-electric resources —under one ownership, I ask the Government to regard it as a national obligation to supply the homes of the people at the same rate wherever they live. There is no other thing, except perhaps water, which is required so much in the country districts as electricity. It is the means of reviving those areas which are at present being denuded of their populations.

That is the goal and aim of public ownership, as we see it, and I should like the Minister, when he replies to the Debate to give us an assurance that it will be regarded as a national obligation under national ownership to bring electricity to every home in the country on the same terms and conditions, and without those conditions concerning the cost of carrying the lines and so forth which limited the extension of electricity under private ownership. Unless that fresh approach is made, and unless electricity is regarded as essential in every home, the real benefits of public ownership will not be achieved.

Restaurant Car on Train from Euston to North Wales

21.7.1947. Mr. Emrys Roberts asked the Minister of Transport the reason why, since June last, there is no restaurant car on the 1.30 p.m. train from Euston to North Wales; and whether he will make representations to the railway company to restore this facility in view of its importance to the tourist traffic.

Mr. Barnes To provide a dining car would reduce the accommodation which is already heavily loaded. The train leaves at a rather late hour for lunch and

passengers for North Wales have half an hour to wait at Crewe during which they can obtain refreshments. The 11.15 a.m. from Euston direct to North Wales has a dining car.

Mr. Roberts Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this train is invariably half an hour late at Crewe, that there always used to be a dining car on it, and that L.M.S. services to North Wales continue progressively to deteriorate?

6. 1948 Parliamentary Speeches

Recruitment of Coloured Men as Miners

8.7.1948. Mr. Cooper asked the Minister of Fuel and Power if, in view of the recent incidents of coloured men from the Colonies being turned down in their application for recruitment to the coalmining industry, he will exercise his powers of direction to the National Coal Board to get this policy altered, thus enabling volunteers from the Colonies to be trained as miners.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Fuel and Power (Mr. Robens) No, Sir. I am informed by the National Coal Board that they raise no objection on racial grounds to the employment of individuals suitable and willing to take underground work.

Mr. Cooper Is my hon. Friend aware that although that may be the policy, it is not, in fact, being carried out in practice, and would he look into incidents which have recently been reported to see if, in fact, practical expression cannot be given to the theory that these men are on an equal citizenship basis with ourselves?

Mr. Robens From the point of view of the National Coal Board there is no objection at all, but in some parts there is objection by the local mining community and we must take into consideration their views on this matter.

Mr. Emrys Roberts Could the Parliamentary Secretary say how many coloured men have been accepted for employment and in what collieries?

Mr. Robens Not without notice.

Mr. J. Lewis If there is any objection made at any time to these men, is the Parliamentary Secretary aware that they are welcome in the cotton industry in Lancashire, where many of them are employed and where they are doing a good job?

Mr. Oliver Stanley When the Parliamentary Secretary says we must take into account the views of the mining community on this matter, surely he is not going to allow a view contrary to every feeling and expression of this House to persist without making some effort to break it down?

Mr. Robens It is not a question of what the right hon. Gentleman says. The fact is that in relation to the employment of people underground there is an agreement that the local lodges of the National Union of Mineworkers will be consulted concerning E.V.W's. and other people. There have been one or two objections for various reasons and we have to take into consideration all these

factors, but it is not general throughout the whole coalfields. It is gradually being broken down and where we can use our influence we certainly do so.

Mr. Emrys Roberts Can the Parliamentary Secretary say on what grounds objection is taken to the employment of coloured people?

Mr. Sylvester Is the Parliamentary Secretary aware that if he had been at Doncaster at the Yorkshire miners' demonstration a fortnight ago he would have found a coloured man walking behind his local lodge banner, as he has done for a great many years?

7. 1949 Parliamentary Speeches

Rent Control

24.1.49. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) After I had read this Bill and digested its rather obscure provisions, I saw in the Press that the Opposition intended to oppose it on Second Reading. I cannot understand why. The two major objects of this Bill are, (1) to remedy the injustice caused to tenants who were deprived of the protection of the Rent Restrictions Acts because they shared a kitchen with other tenants or with the landlord, and (2) to enable people who have taken houses or flats for the first time since August, 1945, to apply to the tribunal in order to have the rent fixed on a reasonable basis.

I find it incomprehensible that a Bill with those objects in view should be opposed by a responsible party in this House. Not only did the right hon. and gallant Member for the Scottish Universities (Lieut.-Colonel Elliot) fail, in my opinion, to justify the reasons for his party opposing this Bill, but in a speech of about 40 minutes he did not say where his party stood on either of those two points. In an interjection during the speech of the hon. Member for West Leicester (Mr. Janner), we gathered that the right hon. and gallant Gentleman was in favour of tenants being able to apply to a tribunal to have their rents fixed on a reasonable basis, but we still do not know where he stands on the question of whether it is right for tenants to be protected when they share a kitchen.

Mr. Quintin Hogg (Oxford) Actually, he answered that point.

Mr. Roberts The hon. Member for Oxford (Mr. Hogg) says the right hon. and gallant Gentleman also agreed with that object of the Bill. If the Opposition do support the two objects of this Bill, then it is really incomprehensible—

Mr. Hogg I think the hon. Gentleman is misunderstanding me. He asked whether my right hon. and gallant Friend had acceded to that part of the Bill which dealt with the sharing of accommodation. I replied, perfectly truthfully, that he had. I was not saying that he had acceded to the other part of the Bill with regard to new lettings; I was simply dealing with the question he had raised.

Mr. Roberts The position now is that the Opposition are not in favour of tenants being able to apply to a tribunal in order that their rents may be fixed on a reasonable basis. We are gradually finding out where they stand in this matter. The hon. and gallant Member for Pollok (Commander Galbraith) looks at me as if he is not sure whether I am misrepresenting the position of the Opposition.

Commander Galbraith (Glasgow, Pollok) The hon. Gentleman is.

Colonel Dower Many of us feel that this should have been done a long time ago and that, because of the laziness and lackadaisical attitude of the Minister over this matter, a great deal of hardship and uncertainty is going to be caused in connection with the "mucking about" with contracts.

Mr. Bevan It is very interesting to hear what is now being said. The application of the Bill is not, of course, retrospective at all; it does not recover anything which has been paid. Do I understand, therefore, that the view of the Opposition is that it is all right, but that it ought to have been done earlier?

Mr. Roberts I am trying to find out where the Opposition stand, and doing so in a spirit of honest inquiry and as one who wants to cast his vote in the proper way. I do not want my speech to be interrupted by a dialogue between hon. Members and the Minister of Health. Although the Bill is belated, and although it is an obscure Bill in its actual draftsmanship—I am not blaming the draftsmen; the subject matter of the Bill may be the cause—my hon. Friends and I must support it tonight.

There are certain criticisms which may be made. It is a pity that Bill is overdue, but the fact that a reform is long overdue is no reason for voting against it when it is proposed. My main criticism of the Bill is that it does not go far enough. I am not sure that, at the moment, there is not a good case for extending the ambit of rent protection to a greater range of houses instead of merely confining it to houses in London with a rateable value of £100 and to houses elsewhere of a rateable value of £75. The opportunity might well have been taken to cast the ambit of the protection given by the rent Acts over a wider range of houses.

I do not like the way in which the Bill deals with the question of charging a premium. I believe that the Ridley Committee unanimously recommended that it should be made illegal in all cases for a premium to be charged. I should have liked to see that done, and I do not see what there is to prevent it being done. It should be clearly understood that, up to the moment, it is not, in the great majority of cases, illegal to charge a premium. I would say that the number of cases since 1945 in which a premium has been charged by the landlord for a new letting represents only about one-tenth of the total number of cases where a premium is charged.

By far the greater number of cases where a premium has been charged to a new occupant are those where this has been done by an outgoing tenant. In such cases, the outgoing tenant has abused the protection given him by the Rent Restrictions Acts. Such a tenant occupies a property the rent of which was controlled. He can then either sell his tenancy at a premium fixed at an

extortionate figure, having regard to the scarcity of dwelling houses, or, in more despicable instances, could say to the poor incoming tenant in search of a house or a flat, "Look here, I have a flat which I am renting at £150 a year. You can have my tenancy, but you will have to buy this carpet which I value at the nominal figure of £700." I have come across that kind of case. Here again the right hon. and gallant Member for the Scottish Universities, leading the Opposition, refused to commit himself as to whether he would support the insertion in the Bill of a provision to the effect that the charging of a premium by an outgoing tenant to an incoming tenant should be made illegal in the case of rent controlled property.

I think the provision for the return of premium will work injustice to landlords in one case; if a landlord, who has charged a premium, sells a house to a new owner and the tenant then applies to a tribunal to have the rent reduced to a reasonable figure and to have the premium repaid to him in the form of instalments to be deducted out of the rent payable for the remainder of the lease, it is the new landlord who suffers that deduction. Yet it was the old landlord who received the premium. Let us say it was £1,000. The new landlord did not receive that money. He paid a purchase price for the property on the basis of the rent that was to accrue from it, and he may now find that the tenant can recover from him the premium which the tenant paid to another landlord, and if that premium was substantial and the rent was low, then the rent may be cut down to nothing in order that the new landlord shall repay a premium which he, in fact, has never received.

Colonel Dower Who gets away with it in the end?

Mr. Roberts The man who gets away with it in the end is the landlord who originally charged the premium. That can operate not merely as between people who invest in property; it may operate against a class of persons whom we are seeking to protect. For example, it sometimes happens that the only way in which a man can get accommodation for himself and his family is by buying a house in which there are two tenants living. He enters into, let us say the ground floor part of the house and collects rent from the persons occupying the first floor, who are in fact his tenants. He has had to buy that house in order to get any accommodation at all. It may be that those tenants of the upper part of the house have paid a premium to the landlord from whom the incoming occupier of the lower part of the house has bought the house. This new owner-occupier may then have an application by the other tenant against him, as the landlord, for repayment of the premium. We can even find still more intricate cases.

This is really an obscure Bill. I do not think the facility in speech of the Minister, which we all admire and for which we envy him, need deceive us into thinking that this is anything but a very difficult Bill. Judge after judge,

in one case after another, has said that the Rent Restrictions Acts are the most difficult and complex spheres of all the Statute law.

Mr. S. Silverman It is the judges who have made them so.

Mr. Roberts The hon. Gentleman interrupts and says that it is the judges who have made them so. I am sure that he will agree that any practitioner finds great difficulty in understanding these Acts from day to day, even in cases where there has not been a decision of the courts.

Mr. Silverman I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but I took note of the last part of his remarks and I should like to ask him whether he agrees with me that the difficulties which practitioners find in interpreting the Acts are largely occasioned by the long variety of highly complicated and often conflicting decisions in the courts.

Mr. Roberts I think some part of the difficulty arises from decisions of the courts, but nevertheless let it be remembered that there are nine Rent Restrictions Acts on the Statute Book, and even granting the hon. Member's point, there is really all the more force in a plea for consolidation. If judicial decisions on nine Acts make this part of the law difficult, there is all the more ground for a consolidating Statute now. A consolidating Statute need not await a full evaluation of fair rents all over the country. A Statute could be introduced to consolidate the law as it will have been amended by the present Bill. I hope that after this Bill has been passed into law, the Minister of Health will consider the introduction into this House of one comprehensive code of law covering the question of rent restrictions. This is not a matter to be evaded by a specious speech. It is not a matter for lawyers, because no sphere of the law touches ordinary men or women more intimately than the Rent Restrictions Acts, and it is the duty of this House to give to ordinary men and women of this country a code of law which they will be able to understand.

National Parks

31.3.1949. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) In common with hon. Members in all parts of the House, I support wholeheartedly the objects of the Bill. I should like to say one or two things in support of the machinery of the Bill. I think I am the first, apart from the Minister himself, to commend its actual machinery. I am not one of those who want to see established a strong central National Parks Commission in London with powers of direction to local bodies. If we look at the way the Bill may work in practice when it becomes an Act, there are very strong arguments for believing that the Minister has taken the right course in this respect.

I am particularly interested in this matter from the viewpoint of my constituency. If in course of time the National Parks Commission accept the view of the Hobhouse Committee that North Wales should be regarded as a national park, no less than four-fifths of my constituency—the county of Merioneth—will be a national park, in addition to forming about two-thirds of the whole of the national park in North Wales. If we deal with that great proportion—almost the whole—of a county in any way except by a joint board as indicated in the Bill, we shall virtually nullify the planning powers of the local authority, the county council. If the joint body comprising the four counties in North Wales, were subject to direction from a central commission and also the central commission had equal representation with the local authorities on the joint board, we should make quite impossible the work of the local planning committee.

It is far better for the initiative to come in the first place from the locality itself. We must set a vision before them. Let there be one-fourth representation of the central body on the joint board, and then leave the initiative to the locality. I would deprecate it very strongly if local bodies in charge of the national park in North Wales were subject to overriding positive direction from a Commission established in London. After all, the area in North Wales, and particularly Merioneth, which it is proposed should be a national park, is the area where the Welsh culture and way of life flourish at their very best.

Any possibility of constant, positive direction from a strong Commission in London would be fraught with danger for that way of life. It is far better for the national park in the area to be developed by people who know the locality and its needs, who approach the matter with a vision set before them and with advice, not direction, from the Commission.

Having said that and commended the Bill in that respect, I now come to the criticism. This point of criticism goes right to the root of the Bill. The criticism concerns finance. The local joint board or committee will have to do positive work of a very wide character and range. To mention a few of its activities. it has to provide a great number of facilities, including, for instance, facilities for car parks, bathing, sailing, fishing and camping; it has to remove disfigurements, to restore derelict land and to take all measures to preserve and enhance the beauty of the land. It has a positive duty in the preservation of woodlands. It has to attend to the maintenance of footpaths—not a very easy matter in a sparsely-populated area, but a vital task—and be responsible for the condition of certain roads. In Merioneth, for example, access to the national park will be by some scores, if not hundreds, of miles of third-class and unclassified roads, many of which are in a shocking condition.

A penny rate in the County of Merioneth produces £560. If that is not the lowest, it must be very near to the lowest figure for any county in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the County of Merioneth will have to carry out all the work I have mentioned, in its area. It is true that according to the Bill a grant not exceeding 75 per cent. will become available. There is, however, no security that the grant will be as much as 75 per cent. And even if it is 75 per cent., that is not enough; the remaining 25 per cent. may be a substantial addition to local finances, having regard to the large scale of the work which is involved. In this particular instance, I see no reason why there should not be a 1527100 per cent. grant. The normal arguments against a 100 per cent. grant to a local authority are not applicable here, because the money is to be spent for national purposes, for the development, it is true, of the region itself, yet for the benefit of the nation as a whole; and it can only be spent on projects and in a manner approved by the National Parks Commission and the Minister.

I do not think there will be the real impetus or incentive to carrying out all the work which a national park involves unless the grant is made 100 per cent. There is a parallel for that in the trunk roads the work on which is carried out by a local authority, yet the Ministry of Transport pay the full cost of the local highways staff responsible for trunk roads.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning (Mr. King) The long-distance footpaths mentioned in the Bill are comparable and 100 per cent. grant is to be paid in respect of those. The hon. Member's observation that 25 per cent. would have to be borne by the local authority is not correct; they would get more.

Mr. Roberts So far as I can see, the long-distance footpaths are not very common. The Minister mentioned two, one of which is the Pilgrims' Way. I do not know that there will be any in North Wales. The figure of 75 per cent. is the figure mentioned in the Bill. The Minister said that somehow or other, having regard to the equalisation grant, the total grant would be equal to 90 per cent. He also said that the total cost of any work carried out would have to amount to £150,000 before the lowest rated county—I take it he meant Merionethshire—would have to expend the product of 1d. rate. I do not understand those figures. If one works that one out, one gets the result that the Minister would make a 99.7 per cent. grant. There is something wrong with the arithmetic. I would like far more assurance that the grant will amount to 90 per cent. before I believe it. At the moment, I have to take the figure in the Bill and I am very doubtful if the local authority or the local joint board will be able to exploit the possibilities in the Bill to the fullest extent.

We shall not get all the enthusiasm that this subject deserves if those who have to work the project in the national parks, feel that interests which are

inimical and hostile to national parks are taking precedence over them. I thought the senior Burgess for Oxford University (Sir A. Salter) was right when he said that the greatest and gravest threats to the national parks may now come from the activities of other Government Departments. In particular, the worst trespasser is the War Office. The North Wales national park is to cover 870 square miles, always assuming that the plans follow the lines recommended by the Hobhouse Report, and of those 870 square miles, 510 square miles are in Merionethshire. The War Office hold 8,400 acres and are proposing to acquire another 8,800 acres, making a total of about 17,500 acres, right in the heart and centre of that national park.

This will be an area from which the public are to be excluded, according to the Minister of Defence, in reply to a Question in this House last year. At the regional consultation held to discuss this War Office proposal, a gentleman representing the Standing Committee on the National Park said that, if carried out, the proposal would tear an irreparable hole in the national park area. In this area, we were told, there would be three infantry brigades from May until August, weekend camps, artillery training regiments practising twice a week throughout most of the year, and tank exercises. I cannot believe that that is the best way to promote peace and quiet and to give the people of the crowded towns the recreation they deserve when they go to a national park.

It is interesting to note that the Merionethshire part of the North Wales proposed national park comprises the first experiment adopted by the Government in taking over agricultural land in lieu of Death Duties. Part of the proposed national park is the Glanllyn Estate which measures about 39,000 acres and contains some of the most beautiful part of the area, namely, the upper reaches of the River Mawddach. I was glad that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was on the Front Bench during most of the Debate, because, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was responsible for the acquisition of this estate for the nation. He wrote a very cheering letter to the local people and I think it is worth while quoting from it, because I know he is interested in the project of national parks.

He said: We are taking this estate over primarily in order to preserve its great beauties for the people and to prevent it being spoilt. You can be sure, therefore, that we shall not come to any decision about the way in which it should be managed without first giving the tenants full opportunity to put forward their views and to discuss with us how its unique character will best be safeguarded. I am confident that I can rely on you ... to co-operate with my officers in doing all we can to preserve this singularly beautiful part of your native land. The right hon. Gentleman wrote that on 9th July, 1946, and the next thing that happened was that the War Office came along and said they wanted to take this singularly beautiful part for a training area. Unless that proposal is resisted—and no decision has yet been come to—it will make

a mockery, not only of the right hon. Gentleman's letter, but of the determination to have a national park in North Wales, or anywhere else for that matter.

The Hobhouse Report was very emphatic on this point. Paragraph 151 said: It would be no exaggeration to say that the appropriation of a number of the particular areas now listed for acquisition by the Service Departments would take the heart out of the proposed National Park areas in which they are sited, and in certain cases render our proposals for the designation of individual national parks entirely nugatory. Service Departments occupation and use will also involve other subsidiary objections, such as the disturbance by gunfire of the peace and harmony of far wider areas than those actually appropriated, the disfigurement of the landscape by camps and military buildings, serious detriment to agriculture, interference with wild life, the inevitable defacement of the surface of the land and destruction of its vegetation by tracked vehicles, and the danger and annoyance occasioned on narrow roads by military traffic.

We know something in Merioneth already of the disturbance by gunfire and explosions. The Report went on to say: For the future we consider that the appropriation of land in national parks for military training should be permitted only on grounds of proved national necessity and after careful consideration of all possible alternative areas. In view of this, it is extraordinary that at the regional consultation, when we discussed the project of the War Office, the representative of the War Office said that, although this proposed training ground was in a national park area, no alternative site had been considered at all by the War Office.

Therefore I implore the Minister, if he wishes to make these national parks a reality, not only in North Wales, but all over the country, to stand up in all cases against the demands of the Service Departments. There will also need to be, as is indicated in the Hobhouse Report, continuous liaison between the Forestry Commission and the National Park Commission, and locally. The Forestry Commission are naturally addicted to the planting of conifers and may sometimes be in conflict with what is necessary for a national park.

Finally, it is essential that national parks shall not be sterilised into national museums. The rural life, agriculture, light industries and all other activities of the people must go on in these national parks, and even be increased, because there will have to be greater provision for the tourist industry. There is some fear in some of the districts which may become national parks that all further development will be sterilised. On the contrary, if they are properly administered, a new life may well come into these areas, and for the people of this country there will be opening up real opportunities to enjoy the beauties of what is, in very truth, the land of the delectable mountains.

War Pensions

26.4.1949. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) In this Debate a great deal of heat was very quickly developed. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardigan (Mr. Bowen) said that we should try in the course of the Debate to avoid partisan points, and I think he tried to do so, although for the greater part of his speech he was subject to constant interruptions. I thought myself that the Parliamentary Secretary struck a truculent note when he referred to the demand for an inquiry as being partisan politics. We are indebted to the hon. Member for Lonsdale (Sir I. Fraser) for his wise speech, which I think cooled the atmosphere in the House. I shall myself try to be moderate in what I have to say.

In my opinion, the case for an inquiry has been made out by the speeches of the hon. and gallant Member for East Hull (Commander Pursey) and the hon. Member for Dudley (Mr. Wigg). That case is for an inquiry over a very wide field, and I think there are at least four arguments why an inquiry into the scale and administration of war disability pensions should be instituted. My first reason is this. The hon. and gallant Member for East Hull made a very interesting suggestion, which was followed by the hon. Member for Lonsdale, when he said that the time had come or was approaching when we should integrate the war pension system with the scheme of National Insurance. That is a valuable suggestion. After all, we have moved forward a great deal since the time when these war pensions were first instituted. I pay my tribute to the Government for the steps they have taken in the direction of social security in which they have had our blessing and all our support—for we were pioneers. I think there is now a case for the merging of the two schemes.

We should look again at the question of what war pensions are really designed to cover because we have accepted the principle of the State being responsible for unfortunate people who are not able to fend for themselves. Of course, war pensions are more than that. The Parliamentary Secretary said that a war pension is a monetary compensation for loss of function due to war injury. I am not sure that there is not now a case for merging the two Ministries. I think that the administrative side of both Ministries would benefit by such merging, and that if we are to advance towards a really comprehensive scheme of social security in which the State accepts liability for all this suffering and for the maintenance of the sufferers, that kind of integration is necessary. The hon. Member for Lonsdale also contemplated this. An inquiry into this matter would be a real contribution to good Government and to progressive administration.

Welsh Affairs

24.11.1949. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I had not intended to intervene in this Debate. It is difficult to speak cogently in such a Debate, because it is impossible to cover the whole range of Welsh problems in a single day, and as a result the Debate tends to lack any shape or form. Indeed, if the Debate were to be effective, we should need the whole of the Cabinet to be on the Government Front Bench, but that would probably be too much to expect in a single day. I agree very much with the remarks made by the present Minister of Health, when he spoke in the Welsh Debate on 17th October, 1944, that, as a means of directing public attention upon particularly Welsh problems, the Welsh Day is a farce.

I felt I had to intervene because of a passage in the speech of the Minister of National Insurance, on the question of the co-ordination of Ministerial and Departmental activity in Wales. We have here evidence that there is still lack of co-ordination, amounting to administrative inefficiency, even at the highest level. I have given notice of this matter to the President of the Board of Trade, and he has been courteous enough to discuss it with me since, but I must raise the point here because it is important to my constituency. The House will be aware that one of the great efforts in my Division has been to establish a factory at Blaenau Ffestiniog for those unable to work in other industries. When that factory is finally established, with the assistance of the Government, no one will be more ready than I shall be to give to the Government their proper share of the credit.

The Minister said that the Treasury had approved a loan to the Ffestiniog local authority and that the local authority might now go ahead. The impression might be gained from that remark that all is now perfect, that the Government and the local authority understand each other, and that the Government say go ahead, in every sense, to the local authority. But that is not so. When the cuts in capital expenditure were announced in this House I wrote to the President of the Board of Trade and asked what the effect of the cuts might be upon the project to erect the factory. The people of this part of the country have for years, not just since 1945, sought some alternative employment to the slate industry for those unable to work in the slate mines.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade replied, on 15th November, saying that the cuts would not affect this projected factory, but he concluded his letter by saying: You probably know that the Ffestiniog Urban District Council have refused to accept a loan for this purpose on the terms upon which the Treasury have offered it. I was very surprised indeed to hear that the council, which had been yearning for the factory, had turned down the loan. I at once made inquiries and I found that on 12th July this year the local council had written to the Treasury raising a query about the terms of interest.

The fact is that they are still waiting a reply to that letter five months ago. It is in those circumstances that the Board of Trade tell me that the council have refused the loan and that the Minister, in yet another inconsistency, tells the House that the Treasury have approved the loan and that the local authority may go ahead. It is an instance to show that there is still a lack of efficiency and co-ordination in Government Departments in relation to Wales.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade (Mr. John Edwards) It will be within the recollection of the House that when my right hon. Friend was talking about this he was talking about two authorities. He said in respect of these two authorities that loans had been granted. I should like to clarify the position. I understand that the Gwyrfai Rural District Council has accepted the loan and started work but that the Ffestiniog Council object to the terms, and the position is that the Treasury are at present considering modifications in favour of the local authority. When my right hon. Friend said that the local authorities may now proceed, I think he was correct in that I believe the Ffestiniog local authority is in a position to go on with the practical work just as the other authority is. As the 592point has been raised I will certainly see that it is considered. I believe that what my right hon. Friend said is correct, but it requires further amplification.

Mr. Emrys Roberts I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification, so far as it goes. Perhaps he will look into it as a matter of urgency in view of the misunderstanding which has arisen. I am sure he will agree—his former experience at the Ministry of Health will tell him—that a local authority which goes on with a project before receiving Government approval for the expenditure would be doing a very foolish thing.

I want to refer to another aspect of coordination. I referred just now to co-ordination for administrative efficiency, but an even more important co-ordination is that of policy. That is particularly important to those of us who are concerned with the vital problem of rural Wales. There is a very great need at present for co-ordination between all the Government Departments which are seeking to use land in Wales. There are many claimants. There are the claims of agriculture, the Forestry Commission, military camps and hydro-electricity authorities. There seems to be very little sitting round the table in conference and co-ordination of all those demands. One by one these Departments are eating into the rural areas where the life of Wales flourishes.

No impartial observer would deny that, economically at least, the position of industrial Wales is healthier than it was in the middle '30's or the years between the wars, but to say that we are satisfied is quite another thing. There are still immense problems facing Wales. They are special problems of our own. They may be similar to English problems but it must be remembered

that in that part of the United Kingdom there flourishes a distinct way of life. We do not say it is a better one but we say that it is different.

We believe that preservation of that way of life will enrich the pattern of European civilisation. We must, of course, give it an economic foundation, but we say that we can never build economically in the best possible way, nor can we ensure the future of that way of life, until we have the power effectively to control our own Welsh affairs. This has been recognised and preached in this House and in all quarters at least since the beginning of the century. It was a point made by Mr. Asquith when introducing the Irish Home Rule Bill in April, 1912. In the Welsh Debate on 17th October, 1944, the present Minister of National Insurance used these words, and with this I conclude: I was very glad to hear the hon. Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. A. Bevan) expressing a view which I share completely; that is, that the time has come when the whole process of legislation and of administration in this country ought to be looked at, because I think devolution will be essential for the proper working of democracy in the future".

8. 1950 Parliamentary Debates

Responding to Churchill

Mr. Churchill (Woodford) I notice, Mr. Speaker, that you looked to the other side of the House, and I certainly fully comprehend the motives which led you to look in that direction. I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary was not willing to open this Debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"]—by making a general statement on foreign affairs to the new House of Commons. I should have thought that when a new Parliament assembled, the chief representatives of His Majesty's Government, either the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister, would welcome the opportunity of laying before us a full statement of their policy and theme. Nor can I recall any situation in which such guidance was more imperatively demanded, not only by the Opposition, but still more by the movement of events.

However, our request has been rejected. The object, I suppose, was a manoeuvre or tactics to draw whoever spoke for the Opposition into a statement of their views and then to pick out such odd points as emerged for debating purposes—and this on the subject of foreign affairs, which surely should be and can be lifted above the untimely and costly party struggles to which we are now condemned. In all the main issues of foreign policy the Opposition in the late Parliament supported, sustained and even pointed the course which the Foreign Secretary has pursued.

Mr. Sydney Silverman (Nelson and Colne) What were you worried about?

Mr. Churchill Then we were weak; now we are equals—almost. But our intention is to give the same help to His Majesty's Government in foreign affairs as we did in the years when we were helplessly outnumbered. In fact, it will be stronger help numerically. The Foreign Secretary need not, therefore—I trust that he is not in any way indisposed—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"]—but it does seem to me that as he is going to reply to the Debate one would have had the opportunity of his attention at this moment.

The right hon. Gentleman need not be afraid—perhaps someone will tell him when they see him—that any decision which he makes in the national interest will be obstructed or baffled by the votes of those over whom he has a majority numbered only by digits. On the contrary, he may feel assured that so long as he marches forward on the broad lines of policy on which we have been agreed, he has overwhelming Parliamentary support.

The fact that the Government have a precarious existence need in no way hamper him. The fact that we lie between General Elections need not induce him, or whoever is to take his place, to take weak courses or play for small

party gains. We do not intend that the national interest at a time so anxious and critical as this shall suffer from the equipoise of political parties. But let us make sure where our national interest lies and how our part in shaping world affairs can best be played.

I do not intend this afternoon to occupy too much time in the Debate in which so many Members wish to take part. I shall, therefore, not refer to a great many topics and episodes which are in our minds or attempt to deal myself with the Far Eastern problems, which, although they may be touched upon in this Debate, are so urgent and serious as to require a separate Debate as soon as opportunity can be found.

I shall now only attempt to deal with the crucial and cardinal aspects of the Western scene. I select the key problems, namely, the relations between Britain and France, acting together, and Germany, and of the bearing of all this upon Western Europe, its life, its hopes, and its self-defence. The whole of this discussion, of course, and the whole of my argument are sustained by the decisive strength of the United States as expressed by the Atlantic Pact. Thereafter it is my duty to refer to the relations of the Western democratic world with Soviet Russia. I am most anxious that the tremendous issues with which we are now confronted should be presented in a simple form.

The Prime Minister accused me last week of "irresponsibility" in raising the question of Germany—by which I mean liberated Germany—taking any part in Western defence. My feeling is, and I hope, the Prime Minister will allow me to say so, that I am as good a judge of these matters as he is. Certainly I should not like to be responsible for not stating my true and faithful belief and counsel to the House, as I have done several times in the past when it was not particularly popular to do so. I remember that during the last Parliament, not to go too far back, I made a speech at Fulton which became the object of a Motion of Censure signed, I think, by more than 100 Members of the Socialist Party. But shortly afterwards, the policy I had advocated was adopted on both sides of the Atlantic and by all parties in this House. So I shall not feel myself utterly extinguished by the Prime Minister's censure.

The Prime Minister also complained that such a question as that of Germany aiding in Western defence should have been "injected"—that is the word he used, "injected"—into a Debate on defence, but that was surely its natural and obvious place in the first instance. Other hon. Members, notably the hon. Member for Coventry East (Mr. Crossman), whom I see in his place, misquoted what I said and then criticised the distorted version. I picked my words very carefully and I do not wish to modify them in any way today. I said nothing about the re-armament of Germany or about recreating the German Army, but I see no reason why the Germans should not aid in the defence of their own country and of Western Europe, or why British,

American, French and German soldiers should not stand in the line together on honourable terms of comradeship as part of a combined system of defence.

I try to pursue, as it seems to me, a steady theme and my thought as far as I can grasp it, measure it, is all of one piece. It is the building up of effective forces of resistance to tyranny and aggression in any form, or from any quarter. The House of Commons is the foe of tyrants, whatever uniform they wear, whatever formulas they use. We must discern their character in good time and labour to resist their force with all our strength. But I am not concerned today only, or even mainly, with the military aspect.

We are nearly all of us now agreed in seeking the unity and restoration of Europe as a great hope for the future. We cannot do this without the aid of the Germans. The strong German race, which, during the last 40 years, we and our Allies twice fought and defeated, have now the opportunity of rendering an immense service to mankind. Having submitted to internal tyranny and brought measureless suffering upon us all, and especially themselves, they now have a chance of redeeming the German name by helping to repair what has happened in the past and by playing their part—and it might be a great one—in lifting the civilisation of Europe to a level where its old glories may revive and where the various forms of tolerant freedom and resulting happiness and culture may be restored.

There can be no hope for a United Europe without Germany, and there is no hope for Germany except within a free and United Europe. How can these vital conditions be achieved? Here is a problem in which you may wander around all sorts of tangled labyrinths of thought, but you will come back to the overpowering fact that Europe cannot be restored without the active aid of Germany and that without a restored Europe world peace cannot be established on sure foundations.

When I spoke at Zürich nearly four years ago, I said it would be the proud duty of France to stretch forth her hand and lead Germany back into the European family. I said at the time that this statement would create astonishment, and it certainly did. But since then we have made great progress. The whole structure of Western Union has developed. We thank the Foreign Secretary for the part he has played in it. We are presently to have a meeting at Strasbourg of the Council of Europe and the Assembly where, we trust, in spite of all that has happened, French and German hands will be clasped in concord. I recommend to the House that we should do all in our power to encourage and promote Franco-German reconciliation as an approach to unity, or even perhaps some form, in some aspects, of union. Let anyone who can take a point on this, beware how he mocks at such themes.

But France, after her tribulations and in her present disturbed condition, may not be strong enough to accomplish single-handed her mission. That is why the intimate and inseparable relationship between Britain and France and between the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations and France must be affirmed and asserted continually in the most effective manner. France and Britain, both sorely distressed, can combine together and, thus joined, have the superior power to raise Germany, even more shattered, to an equal rank and to lasting association with them.

Then these three countries, helping each other, conscious of their future united greatness, forgetting ancient feuds and the horrible deeds and tragedies of the past, can make the core or the nucleus upon which all the other civilised democracies of Europe, bond or free, can one day rally and combine. Woe be it to anyone in the free world, who, by lack of understanding, or by lack of goodwill, or by lack of world hope, or any more flagrant fault or blunder, obstructs or delays this essential combination.

There was a time when men thought that the conception of a United States of Europe would be resented by the United States of America, but now we have the American people, with their own heavy burdens to bear, sacrificing themselves and using all their power and authority to bring about this very system. In this lies the hope of the Western world and its power to promote beneficial solutions, perhaps, of what happens in Asia.

I do not wish to fall into vague generalities. Let me, therefore, express our policy as I see it in a single sentence. Britain and France united should stretch forth hands of friendship to Germany, and thus, if successful, enable Europe to live again. I am distressed when I read in the newspapers, for I have no other information on these matters except my own knowledge, about petty obstructive vexations which hamper this grand design. We read of the belated blowing up of the tail end of the German munition factories; and of the trial of aged and decrepit German field-marshal. We read on the other hand of an impudent Goebbels film improperly released in the 194American zone at which Germans cheer anti-British propaganda. How easy it is to mar large unities, how hard to make them.

We in this House and in these islands must rise above these pettinesses. It may well be that our safety depends on our proving ourselves capable of doing so. Follies on one side lead to misbehaviour on the other. Europe, at this moment of resurgence, cannot afford to make silly mistakes, or, if they are made, allow them to darken her thought or divert her aim. We here have all been busy in a General Election, and over us hangs another with all its preoccupations for our divided and harassed land. But meanwhile many things are happening abroad which should not pass unnoticed or unmeasured.

Almost at the same time that I spoke in the defence Debate, a statement was being made by General de Gaulle on Franco-German relations. As the House knows, I have not always seen eye to eye with that patriotic Frenchman, who represented in the war more than any other man, the will to live of France. Certainly there is no one in France who could have opposed with more vigour and injurious effect the reconciliation between the French and German people. He represents the most powerful forces which could have been arrayed on the wrong side. But what did he say? He spoke of the proposal which Dr. Adenauer had just made for an economic union between France and Germany. I shall read his words. He said: I have followed for 30 years the ideas of the German Chancellor. In what this good German has said I have found the echo of the call of Europe. Relations between the two countries must be viewed against a European background. In short the grand design of Charlemagne must be re-adapted to modern conditions. Why should not the Rhine become a street where Europeans meet, rather than a ditch dividing hostile camps? I must say that when I read this statement in the newspapers I hoped that it might be received throughout Europe, as it has been here in the House, to quote the lines of Rupert Brooke, with the silence following great words of peace. It certainly was treated with the utmost respect throughout the Continent. Some will call Dr. Adenauer's proposal for an economic union between Germany and France premature, unsure, only partly thought out. Surely, however, it lies near the root of the matter. What we want is far more than that, but these two speeches by General de Gaulle and Dr. Adenauer together constitute a memorable event.

Here is the forward path along which we must march if the thousand-year feud between Gaul and Teuton is to pass from its fierce destructive life into the fading romance of history. Here are two men who have fought and struggled on opposite sides through the utmost stresses of our times and both see clearly the guidance they should give. Do not let all this be cast away for small thoughts and wasteful recriminations and memories which, if they are not to be buried, may ruin the lives of our children and our children's children. It may be that this year, 1950, on which we have entered in so much perplexity and dispute, can be made the occasion for launching Europe on its voyage to peace with honour. Let us make sure that we play our part in turning thought into action and action into fame.

I am very glad to see the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. I can assure him that he has a great fund of good will among all parties. We know what a burden he has had to bear. Some of us had to bear that burden for five years; he has borne it at the same tenseness for ten. We speak of him always with great feelings of personal regard although it is our duty to criticise errors in the conduct of foreign policy rather than in its inspiration, which come to our notice.

I hope to hear from the Foreign Secretary tonight that no British party will fall behind in its duty in the European cause. People say that all these are visionary and sentimental ideas which ignore the practical realities. They say they blot out the lessons of the past and the difficulties of the present and thus will have no real application for the future. But it is a great mistake to suppose that nations are not led by sentiment. It takes too poor a view of man's mission here on earth to suppose that he is not capable of rising, to his material detriment, far above his 196day to day surroundings. The dominant forces in human history have come from the perception of great truths and the faithful pursuance of great causes.

I have always held that the cause of united Europe would not be helped, and might well be injured, by attempts to draw up precise and rigid constitutions and agreements too soon or in a hurry. The first stage is to create a friendly atmosphere and feeling of mutual confidence and respect. Even a day's delay in working hard for this is a matter for regret. Once the foundation of common interest and solidarity of sentiment has been laid, it may well be that formal agreements would take the form, not of hard bargains or weak compromises, but of setting down on paper the living basic truths and thoughts which were in all minds. Then difficulties, at present insuperable, might well become irrelevant.

In this field it is a practical and immediate step that can be taken, namely, the arrival at Strasbourg this summer of a German delegation to the European Assembly of the Council of Europe. More than two years have passed since the Germans came to the Hague on the invitation of our unofficial European movement. I had an agreeable and, to me, a memorable interview with them. It was there I met Dr. Adenauer, little knowing how soon he would be the German Chancellor at the head of a German Government. Since then great forward steps have been taken. The Council of Europe and the European Assembly are institutions formally and permanently established; young, but august; sustained by many freely elected Parliaments. The presence of Germany in our midst will be an event from which nothing but good can come.

It would be a great pity if doubts and further delays were caused by bogging and haggling, or the drawing up of conditions. I was sorry to see that the Germans had written out a number of conditions on which they would be prepared to join the Council of Europe. That is falling below the level of events.

Many voices are raised of provocation and false counsel on every side. I sincerely hope that Dr. Adenauer will show that the new Germany can rise superior to such distractions, no matter how or whence they come. I am glad to see that there is better news about this today, but I would say to the

Germans, "Let it 197all happen naturally and easily, and you will find that very soon Germany will take her proper pace, and that all questions of legalistic status will cease to be of any importance."

I have one more observation to make about the European Assembly. Substantial results flowed from that Assembly at Strasbourg last year. But the contrast between the activities of the Assembly and the apparent inaction of the Committee of Ministers, has created the impression that the Ministers are not wholehearted in their intention to promote the Union of Europe. Whether this impression is correct or incorrect it is gaining ground, and I say to the right hon. Gentleman, who is off on a journey there tonight, that only some positive unequivocal pronouncement by the Committee of Ministers when it meets next week can undo it. The situation is especially serious because our own position is called in question. It is widely thought on the Continent and in America that the British Government are lacking in zeal for the whole plan—"dragging their feet" is, I believe, the American expression. It is said that on the Committee of Ministers the Foreign Secretary is always amongst those who wish to advance less far and less fast. This is what is widely believed and it tends to weaken our general influence in Europe. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will clear away these misgivings when he speaks this afternoon.

It would certainly be ungracious on my part if I left the subject without acknowledging the services rendered by the recent Colombo Conference in proclaiming that there is no incompatibility or inconsistency between Britain's part in a United Europe and her position as the centre and pivot of the British Empire.

Now I come to the last aspect of what I wish to say. I come to our relations with Soviet Russia. I will begin by stating the reason why I do not believe that another war is imminent or inevitable, and why I believe that we have more time, if we use it wisely, and more hope of warding off that frightful catastrophe from our struggling, ill-informed and almost helpless human race. Here is the reason. There never was a time when the deterrents against war were so strong. If penalties of the most drastic kind can prevent in our civil life crime or folly, 198then we certainly have them here on a gigantic scale in the affairs of nations. It is extraordinary. The penalties have grown to an extent undreamed of; and at the same time, many of the old incentives which were the cause of the beginning of so many wars, or features in their beginning, have lost their significance. The desire for glory, booty, territory, dynastic or national aggrandisement; hopes of a speedy and splendid victory with all its excitement—and they are all temptations from which even those who only fight for righteous causes are not always exempt—are now superseded by a preliminary stage of measureless agony from which neither side could at present protect itself.

Another world war would begin by both sides suffering as the first step what they dread most. Western Europe would be overrun and Communised, with all that liquidation of the outstanding non-Communist personnel of all classes, of which, I understand, in respect of several countries, elaborate lists have already been prepared—which are, no doubt, kept up to date in those countries by the Communist groups and parties in their midst. That is one side. On the other hand, at the same time, Soviet cities, air fields, oil fields and railway junctions would be annihilated; with possible complete disruption of Kremlin control over the enormous populations who are ruled from Moscow. These fearful cataclysms would be simultaneous, and neither side could at present, or for several years to come, prevent them. Moralists may find it a melancholy thought that peace can find no nobler foundations than mutual terror. But for my part, I shall be content if these foundations are solid, because they will give us the extra time and the new breathing space for the supreme effort which has to be made for a world settlement.

No one need delude himself by underrating the difficulties which stand in the way of a settlement or by closing his eyes to the gulf which yawns between the two worlds, now facing each other, armed and arming, reaching out for agencies which might eventually destroy the human race. As I said at Boston last year, I think it probable that the Soviet Government fear the friendship of the West even more than they do our hostility. The Soviet regime and the lives of its rulers might be imperilled by allowing free, easy and friendly inter-mingling with the outer world. An endless series of quarrels, a vehement and violent antagonism, the consciousness of an outside enemy in the minds of the masses, may be regarded by the Soviet as a necessary precautionary element in maintaining the existence of the Communist power. There indeed is a gloomy thought. There indeed is a reason for fear. But fear must never be allowed to cast out hope.

During the election I was most anxious that the return of a Conservative Government to power, which was a possibility, should not be taken as involving an exacerbation of the already tense situation that exists, and that we should make it clear, above all things, that we should strive faithfully for peace. I also felt, and feel, that we owe it to our consciences, all of us, that no door should be closed which may lead to better prospects. I do not, of course, take an over-sanguine view of the position whatever efforts are made, but it is our Christian duty to try our best. Moreover, the democracies of the West must be constantly convinced that those who lead them do not despair of peace if they are to take even the measures which self-preservation demands in case the worst should come to the worst.

Let me repeat what I said at Edinburgh—only a few lines: I cannot help coming back to this idea of another talk with Soviet Russia upon the highest level. The idea appeals to me of a supreme effort to bridge the gulf between

the two worlds so that each can live their life, if not in friendship at least without the hatreds of the cold war. I was answered by the Foreign Secretary that all this was a "stunt." Whatever this American college slang, as I find it is described in the dictionary, may have implied, it did not seem to me completely to dispose of the subject which had been raised. He also said that through the United Nations must be found our only process and resource. But three days later, on 17th February at a Press conference at Lake Success, Mr. Trygve Lie, the Secretary General of U.N.O., said he was in favour of great Power negotiations: 200all the time and on all levels—top level, middle level, and lower level—inside and outside the United Nations. The world would be a lot better today if there had been more real negotiations among the great Powers during the past three years. He added, what we shall all agree: The only people who can rightly judge the timing and form of negotiations and meetings are those who are responsible for conducting the foreign affairs of the countries concerned. We are all agreed, but those who are responsible, as the right hon. Gentleman and his principal colleagues are, must not fail to seize any opportunities. We cannot go on with a policy of hesitation and drift. Every day is precious if the chance occurs.

I have explained this afternoon the arguments on which I base my belief that a further spell of time will be granted to us. Even at the risk of afterwards being reproached for being wrong, I have not hesitated to state my view that it may well be that several years may pass before a war breaks out. I will take the chance of making that remark although I have no special information at my disposal. Certainly we must seek to negotiate from strength and not from weakness. We all agree on that. Certainly we must move hand in hand with our Allies, and above all with the United States, as the right hon. Gentleman has so far done.

We should do well to study the recent and most important announcements on foreign policy by the American Secretary of State, Mr. Acheson, whose gifts and services are so widely recognised. And here let me say how warmly we welcome in this House the news that that great American statesman, Senator Vandenberg, has recovered from his grievous operation and is able to exert again his clarifying and elevating influence on world events. The American people are fortunate in finding so many outstanding figures at a time when they hold the leading place among the nations.

But if there is a breathing space, if there is more time, as I feel and do not hesitate to say, it would be a grave mistake of a different order, perhaps a fatal mistake, to suppose that, even if we have this interlude, it will last for ever, or even last more than a few years. Time and patience, those powerful though not infallible solvents of human difficulties, are not necessarily on our side. When the last Parliament met, I mentioned four years 201as the period before any other Power but the United States would possess the atomic bomb. That

period has already gone by, and our position is definitely worse than it was in this matter both as regards our own safety and as to the conditions which are, I believe, effectively preserving the peace of the world.

There is no doubt now that the passage of time will place these fearful agencies of destruction effectively in Soviet hands, that is to say, where there is no customary, traditional, moral or religious restraint. Of course, there is an interlude between the discovery of the secret and the effective large-scale production of the article, and that also has to be borne in mind. Of course, the United States have their "stock-pile," as it is called, and it will be only by a gradual process that anything similar can be built up in Soviet Russia. The atomic bomb, though preponderating, is only one of the factors in the military situation before us, but it is the dominant factor. If, for instance, the United States had a "stock-pile" of 1,000 atomic bombs—I take the figure as an illustration merely; I have no knowledge of any sort or kind of what they have—and Russia had 50, and we got those 50, fearful experiences, far beyond anything we have ever endured, would be our lot.

Therefore, while I believe there is time for a further effort for a lasting and peaceful settlement, I cannot feel that it is necessarily a long time or that its passage will progressively improve our own security. Above all things, we must not fritter it away. For every reason, therefore, I earnestly hope that we shall hear from the Foreign Secretary a clear exposition of the facts and policy of His Majesty's Government upon matters graver than anything which human history records.

Man in this moment of his history has emerged in greater supremacy over the forces of nature than has ever been dreamed of before. He has it in his power to solve quite easily the problems of material existence. He has conquered the wild beasts, and he has even conquered the insects and the microbes. There lies before him, if he wishes, a golden age of peace and progress. All is in his hand. He has only to conquer his last and worst enemy—himself. With vision, faith and courage, it may still be 202 within our power to win a crowning victory for all.

Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) It is not an easy matter to follow the speech to which we have just listened, but I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House will agree with me when I say that, of all the speeches which the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition has delivered, that which he has give us today was one of his greatest. I think I ought to say that, because I cannot remember any occasion when the right hon. Gentleman was more successful in carrying the House with him and in expressing our thoughts and desires. As he was speaking, my mind went back to the first Foreign Affairs Debate of the last Parliament in 1945. How different the situation was in those days; how we all thought that we might somehow build

a peaceful world with all the Great Powers participating in that world. I still remember that one of the most significant features of that Debate was the acceptance by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Eden) and by the Foreign Secretary himself, of the idea that peace could not come in the long run unless each nation accepted the surrender of some part of its sovereignty.

Now, the deadlock between the Western world and the Soviet States baffles the statesmen and bewilders the common people all over the world. In spite of the armaments and in spite of the hostility which statesmen so often express, between the common people in every country there is only a deep yearning for peace. As I believe, whether they live in America, Britain, Europe or in the wide spaces of the Soviet Union, the common people everywhere want nothing so much as to live at peace with each other. Yet the sombre fact is, as was apparent from the speech of the right hon. Gentleman and is indeed known to us all, that the great nations of the world are devoting more of their energies and more of their resources to preparations for war than at any previous time in their history. They may call it defence, if they like, but, all the same, it amounts to preparation for war.

The Brussels Pact and the Atlantic Pact, though they may be necessary in the present state of the world, are the measure of the failure of the statesmanship of the different countries of the world to build a world-wide peace. While we may take the view that war in the next few years is not imminent, it is an historical fact that never have there been great armament preparations in modern history, without their leading to war. Sometimes we hear in this House the view that we should make ourselves so strong that no nation will dare to attack us. The history of our times proves the fallacy of that view. The dilemma of Great Britain was stated by Professor Gilbert Murray when writing in "The Times" recently, and quoting a Russia diplomat as saying to him: If you do not re-arm, we shall overrun you with no trouble. If you do re-arm, you will fall into our hands through economic misery. This is the great dilemma in which this country finds itself. In order to break the deadlock of the world and to break out of her own dilemma, we must answer the question of what contribution Britain can make to world peace. What can Britain do? The final decisions are outside per power, but, nevertheless, Britain can make decisions which would safeguard the peace of the world.

I think the first cardinal point of British foreign policy must be to support to the full the United Nations organisation and not to lose faith in it. There are people in certain sections of the community, and even certain hon. Members of this House, who have said from time to time that the United Nations is no good and that the delegations are simply wrangling in the Security Council. I think there is still hope of peace while statesmen are gathered round the council table, even though they are spending their time quarrelling among

themselves. It is when they stop quarrelling and stop the argument that war breaks out. The first positive step is to get the Security Council working again. At the moment, the Security Council is paralysed by the deadlock over China.

The British Government have recognised the new revolutionary Government in China, and I think they have acted rightly in doing so, because, after all, recognition of a Government is not and should not be a weapon of policy, but an action based on legal principles and a declaration of existing facts. China has 204a seat on the Security Council, but it is by a representative of the former Nationalist Government of China that that country is represented, and though that Government is no longer in effective control of the national territory it has the power of the Veto in the Security Council. Though we may regret the fact of the new Government of China, I feel that it is better to press for its admission to the Security Council because the present situation only increases the deadlock on that body.

I come next to the question of the atomic bomb. I feel that the nations can unfortunately only pursue a limited objective. It does not seem at the present time that the surrender of atomic bombs is likely or that destruction of the stockpiles is likely, either. Nor does it seem likely that certain countries will consent to international inspection of their atomic manufacture. As the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition has said, the possession of the atomic bomb by the United States is no longer a safeguard for the peace of the world, and it would be very unwise if we assumed that Russia is not manufacturing the atomic bomb. Like other hon. Members of this House, I have no special knowledge of that matter, but I think I can safely say, without any special knowledge, that we should be very unwise to make that assumption.

What can we do with regard to this atomic weapon? My hon. Friends and I placed a Motion on the Order Paper suggesting an international convention to ban the use of the atomic bomb and similar weapons. I know that the value of international conventions prohibiting the use of certain weapons has been doubted, and that there is a strong argument that it is only the fear of retaliation which prevents the use of such horror weapons as poison gas and the atomic bomb. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that, in the past, the mere existence of an international convention between the nations of the world has been a powerful factor in deterring the first use of such a weapon by an aggressor in the initial stage of his attack.

There is no doubt that the Geneva Protocol of 1935, which prohibited the use of gas, and which was ratified by over 30 States, including all the great European Powers, was a powerful de- 205terrent against the use of gas in the first onrush of the last war. At the very least, such an agreement would, I

think, be a positive step forward, and, if it could be reached, might be a basis for further advance. It might contribute—although perhaps only to a small extent—to some feeling of confidence among the great nations. At any rate, it seems to be the only positive step forward which can be achieved at the present time.

The Leader of the Opposition rightly said that never was there a time when the deterrents against war were so strong as at the present time. I think that is true, but I also think that that statement must be qualified by the recognition of the fact that at no time in modern history has the deterrent effect of the weapons of the day prevented an aggressor nation from rushing into war, because the nation which declares war first always thinks that it can overwhelm the other side before being overwhelmed in turn.

I will conclude my remarks by a reference to European unity. The energy that has gone into the movement for European unity and the positive results now being achieved are one of the most hopeful signs of the post-war era. The Leader of the Opposition referred to certain impressions regarding the Committee of Ministers. I think it is also true to say that there is an impression abroad that Great Britain has retarded rather than advanced the cause of European unity. I do not believe that that impression is completely correct. We have been concerned with practical aspects of European unity, and we have taken the leading part in many places for that unity—the Marshall Plan, the Brussels Treaty and the Italian Treaty. But the truth has recently been expressed by M. Spaak, the President of the Assembly, who said in an article in the "Daily Telegraph" that, somehow, Great Britain always seems to be on the side of those who raise objections, who advise prudence, and who damp down enthusiasm. I think it is very difficult to counter that criticism.

To what is that attitude due? It may be due in a very large measure to our relations with the Commonwealth, and it is high time that we honestly faced this question of the relation between a united Europe and the Commonwealth because there is no doubt that it does raise difficulties. It is no use trying to hide that fact. All parties say that there is no conflict between the two allegiances of Britain and the right hon. Gentleman said it again today. That is true in an ultimate sense, but there are immediate difficulties, and merely to repeat that there are no difficulties only makes progress more difficult.

I will give an illustration. The Assembly which met at Strasbourg was agreed that the economic integration of Europe, though necessary, could not go far without the setting up of a political authority with limited functions but real powers. A Committee of the Assembly was set up to report on the changes necessary in Europe's political structure in order to promote closer unity. But that view about European unity and those changes in the political structure of

Europe must imply an acceptance by this country of a tie closer to Europe than the loose tie—loose in a constitutional sense, so far as material bonds are concerned—which binds her to the Commonwealth.

There is no doubt that this problem of Great Britain's dual allegiance requires working out, and only this country can work it out. The Continental countries are passionately concerned that we should come into a closer unity in Europe, but their very concern makes them reluctant to put forward positive suggestions in regard to Britain. We should show our enthusiasm for a united Europe by putting forward concrete suggestions how we can reconcile our place in the Commonwealth with our place in Europe.

There is one other aspect of the European movement to which I wish to refer. The field of foreign affairs is so vast that one speaker can only pick out certain outstanding features. I wish to refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations Assembly. It was undoubtedly a landmark in the annals of human freedom, but there was a paradox in that declaration. On the one hand, there was practical unanimity among the members of the United Nations in stressing the importance of the declaration. On the other hand, most of the delegates repudiated the idea that the declaration imposed a binding legal obligation on the member States to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms which it proclaimed.

One of the big achievements of the European Assembly at Strasbourg was to draft a convention on Human Rights into which States could enter and thereby guarantee to their citizens certain legal rights. I hope that His Majesty's Government will push ahead with the adoption of this draft convention by all European States, and certainly by all the States of Western Europe. It is natural and proper that Europe should take the lead in thus implementing the Declaration of Human Rights. With all our faults, the rule of law is the most precious part of our European heritage, and in a world where the great struggle emerges more and more clearly as one between tyranny and freedom, the adoption in Europe of a Convention of Human Rights binding on all Governments would uplift the hearts of men and women everywhere.

The Far East

24.5.1950. Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I am very glad we are having this all-day Debate on the Far East, but the subject is so vast that we can deal only with a particular aspect of it. I should like once more to refer to the position of China, particularly as that position is reflected in the deadlock at the United Nations.

The question of recognition of the Chinese Government was covered very adequately in the speech of the Foreign Secretary. It is no use bewailing now

that premature recognition was given to the 2108 Chinese Government by His Majesty's Government. I do not think that that recognition was in fact premature. It is a strange thing that no one has yet pointed out in this Debate that recognition of the Chinese Government at that time by the British Government was strictly in accordance with the rules of international law. At a time when it is so important to base world relations on the rule of law, it is vital that in these matters we should base our practice on the rules of international law.

After all, recognition of a new Government is not a question of political approval. It is a legal process, and recognition should be given always in accordance with the well-established rules of international law. The generally-accepted view is that if a Government enjoys the confidence of the mass of its subjects, and is in effective control of the national territory, it is entitled to recognition. I do not think it can be denied that the present Government of China has satisfied these conditions. How it obtained that control or what its political complexion may be are not relevant questions. They may be relevant to the extent of the diplomatic relations we have with that new Government, but that is another matter.

Indeed, refusal of recognition would mean that the British Government would be unable even to begin to try to use the ordinary international methods of protecting British nationals and British interests in the territory of China. The right hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Eden) said that it was awkward that other States and certain members of the Commonwealth have not recognised China, but he did not really explore the full extent of how awkward this divergent practice is, nor did he indicate what we might do about it.

The real difficulty is that China is a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, entitled to a permanent seat and the right of veto over its proceedings; and it is still the old Nationalist, powerless, Government of China that is occupying that seat. Accordingly, although I deplore the fact that Russia has walked out of the Security Council, I must say I have a certain sympathy with Russia's point of view. After all, why should they sit round a table at which there is represented a Government which has no control whatsoever 2109 over the territory of China, but which can veto the whole proceedings at any moment? The continuance of this position is becoming absolutely farcical, and it can add little to preserve, or indeed enhance, the respect in which a body like the United Nations should be held.

The Foreign Secretary indicated that, although the United States of America are not prepared at the present time to accord recognition to the Chinese Government, nevertheless they are prepared to take a reasonable attitude in this matter in that they will not exercise their veto if the question of the

admission of the new Chinese Government to the United Nations is brought up for discussion. What can we do in that situation? I regard it as imperative to resolve this deadlock forthwith. There could be no more dangerous tendency in the world than the discrediting of the United Nations. Whatever criticism we may have of that body, it is vital for the peace of the world that it should be kept intact as perhaps the only permanent meeting ground of countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

According to a report in the "Manchester Guardian" of 23rd May, Washington officials said on 22nd May that the British, United States and French Foreign Ministers had decided at their recent London meeting not to make any move, at present, for the admission of Communist China to the United Nations. It would be most regrettable if that were so. I understand that that position was not correctly stated by those officials, from what the Foreign Secretary said today, but I should like to have an assurance from whoever is to reply for the Government that the British Government will use every endeavour to persuade other members of the Security Council to admit the new Chinese Government into the Security Council. The United States, consistent with the position they have taken up, have made it easy for the British Government to give a lead in that respect and bring the Chinese Government into the agencies of the United Nations. Unless we do this, we shall not get the Security Council working again or have any other agency of the United Nations functioning.

I do not wish to cover the rest of the vast field, but I say that, taken by and large, the policy of His Majesty's Government since 1945 has been right and 2110 has been statesmanlike in the Far East in granting the wishes of the people of India, Pakistan and Burma.

Air-Commodore Harvey Even in Malaya?

Mr. Roberts I believe that if a Conservative Government had been in office since 1945 there would have been far greater bloodshed in the Far East; in India—there might be bloodshed today—and in Burma. I praise the Far Eastern policy of the Government for according independence to India, Pakistan and Burma. Of course, we would wish Burma to stay inside the Commonwealth, but that is a matter for the Burmese people themselves. British Colonial and Imperial policy at its best has always declared that the future of any far-flung territory should be for the people of that territory themselves to decide all the time and on all levels—top level, middle level, and lower level—inside and outside the United Nations. The world would be a lot better today if there had been more real negotiations among the great Powers during the past three years. He added, what we shall all agree:

The only people who can rightly judge the timing and form of negotiations and meetings are those who are responsible for conducting the foreign affairs of the countries concerned. We are all agreed, but those who are responsible, as the right hon. Gentleman and his principal colleagues are, must not fail to seize any opportunities. We cannot go on with a policy of hesitation and drift. Every day is precious if the chance occurs.

I have explained this afternoon the arguments on which I base my belief that a further spell of time will be granted to us. Even at the risk of afterwards being reproached for being wrong, I have not hesitated to state my view that it may well be that several years may pass before a war breaks out. I will take the chance of making that remark although I have no special information at my disposal. Certainly we must seek to negotiate from strength and not from weakness. We all agree on that. Certainly we must move hand in hand with our Allies, and above all with the United States, as the right hon. Gentleman has so far done.

We should do well to study the recent and most important announcements on foreign policy by the American Secretary of State, Mr. Acheson, whose gifts and services are so widely recognised. And here let me say how warmly we welcome in this House the news that that great American statesman, Senator Vandenberg, has recovered from his grievous operation and is able to exert again his clarifying and elevating influence on world events. The American people are fortunate in finding so many outstanding figures at a time when they hold the leading place among the nations.

But if there is a breathing space, if there is more time, as I feel and do not hesitate to say, it would be a grave mistake of a different order, perhaps a fatal mistake, to suppose that, even if we have this interlude, it will last for ever, or even last more than a few years. Time and patience, those powerful though not infallible solvents of human difficulties, are not necessarily on our side. When the last Parliament met, I mentioned four years as the period before any other Power but the United States would possess the atomic bomb. That period has already gone by, and our position is definitely worse than it was in this matter both as regards our own safety and as to the conditions which are, I believe, effectively preserving the peace of the world.

There is no doubt now that the passage of time will place these fearful agencies of destruction effectively in Soviet hands, that is to say, where there is no customary, traditional, moral or religious restraint. Of course, there is an interlude between the discovery of the secret and the effective large-scale production of the article, and that also has to be borne in mind. Of course, the United States have their "stock-pile," as it is called, and it will be only by a gradual process that anything similar can be built up in Soviet Russia. The atomic bomb, though preponderating, is only one of the factors in the military

situation before us, but it is the dominant factor. If, for instance, the United States had a "stock-pile" of 1,000 atomic bombs—I take the figure as an illustration merely; I have no knowledge of any sort or kind of what they have—and Russia had 50, and we got those 50, fearful experiences, far beyond anything we have ever endured, would be our lot.

Therefore, while I believe there is time for a further effort for a lasting and peaceful settlement, I cannot feel that it is necessarily a long time or that its passage will progressively improve our own security. Above all things, we must not fritter it away. For every reason, therefore, I earnestly hope that we shall hear from the Foreign Secretary a clear exposition of the facts and policy of His Majesty's Government upon matters graver than anything which human history records.

Man in this moment of his history has emerged in greater supremacy over the forces of nature than has ever been dreamed of before. He has it in his power to solve quite easily the problems of material existence. He has conquered the wild beasts, and he has even conquered the insects and the microbes. There lies before him, if he wishes, a golden age of peace and progress. All is in his hand. He has only to conquer his last and worst enemy—himself. With vision, faith and courage, it may still be within our power to win a crowning victory for all.

The British Government have recognised the new revolutionary Government in China, and I think they have acted rightly in doing so, because, after all, recognition of a Government is not and should not be a weapon of policy, but an action based on legal principles and a declaration of existing facts. China has 204a seat on the Security Council, but it is by a representative of the former Nationalist Government of China that that country is represented, and though that Government is no longer in effective control of the national territory it has the power of the Veto in the Security Council. Though we may regret the fact of the new Government of China, I feel that it is better to press for its admission to the Security Council because the present situation only increases the deadlock on that body.

Wool Prices and Marketing

Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth) I much regret that the Debate on this scheme is taking place at such a late hour, so late apparently that neither the Minister of Agriculture nor the Parliamentary Secretary has been able to stay for it. I am sure those Ministers mean no discourtesy and have had to catch trains.

Mr. McNeil That is not the explanation. My right hon. Friend is in the House and available, and he will be on duty tomorrow too. After a long session he is

having the customary cup of tea, which I hope the hon. Gentleman will not grudge him.

Mr. Roberts I should not like to grudge the Minister a cup of tea after his arduous session with his own so-called supporters, but the Minister of Agriculture has not heard a word of the discussion on this scheme, which I would consider even more important than the last one. I would particularly like him to be present because he recently made some disparaging and offensive references to the agricultural economy of Wales. The first point I want to make is the relation of Wales to this scheme. I would have given the Minister notice, of course, if I had known he would not be present.

Mr. McNeil I will report to him.

Mr. Roberts That is usually the attitude of Scottish Ministers to Welsh Members—they will report their speeches to other members of the Government.

It has been stated that Scotland is not satisfied with the position, but at least Scotland has three members on the 2663Board, whereas Wales has only one—there are five for England and one for Northern Ireland. The sheep population in England is 11 million and in Wales it is 4i million. Had sheep population been taken as the yardstick—

Mr. McNeil The hon. Member is not arguing for proportional representation of sheep?

Mr. Roberts I think the right hon. Gentleman misunderstands me.

Mr. Turton (Thirsk and Malton) I think the hon. Member will find that representation has strict regard to fleece production.

Mr. Roberts I agree, but sheep population has been taken as the yardstick for proportional representation in the election of members to the Board within each region, and I should prefer to see it taken as a measure for representation on the Board because of the special importance of sheep and wool production to Wales. I am pleased to see that there is a Welsh member and that his name is published, but I would point out that there is a spelling mistake. We are entitled not to have such mistakes in the production of Government schemes of this character.

My second point has already been made. I too, should like to see freedom of choice of merchants for the producers. The merchants and agents were frozen during the war, and there has been no freedom since for the farmer to make a change. The Board has power, as the scheme is drawn, to give selected merchants a monopoly of handling wool in preparation for sale, which means

giving these merchants an advantage. Producer co-operative organisations should be free to deal with the organisations if they can satisfy the Board that they are capable of discharging their duties efficiently as the Board's agents.

Such freedom of choice would safeguard the efficiency of the agents and merchants. Paragraph 75 (b) says that the Board may: Encourage, promote, or conduct agricultural co-operation, research and education in connection with the production and marketing of wool. I should have thought it would be better to insert the word "shall" for the word "may." Surely it should be the duty of the Board to encourage all these things?

The last point I wish to make is of a general character regarding the recovery of penalties. At this late hour I will not develop this point, which relates to substantial powers of fining producers. Whether the National Farmers' Union agrees with that or not, I think it is a bad thing. If people offend against the law, they should be dealt with by courts of law. I think producers should have the right of appeal to the courts if they are convicted by these tribunals. I will not develop that further.

All these points might have been developed at greater length, but, subject to reservations on these points, I think I can say that I welcome this wool scheme. It might be thought, because of the amount of time I have spent on criticism, that I do not welcome it; but I think that the advantage to the producers is much greater than the disadvantage of those points which I have criticised.

9. A Stalwart Welsh Liberal MP



This editorial article was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the Lloyd George Society at www.lloydgeorgesociety.org.uk. It was published on 11th February 2008.

Remembering the Liberal - SDP Alliance and a stalwart Welsh Liberal MP

On 10 February 1982, as the heady days of the Liberal-SDP Alliance were being exchanged for dips in the opinion polls, the former Liberal MP for Merioneth (1945-51), Mr Emrys Roberts, wrote to the Times from his home at Dwy Dderden on the isle of Anglesey. The autumn and winter of 1981-82 had seen trouble in the Alliance paradise as the negotiations between the parties over the allocation of seats for the next general election were entering rough seas. In his autobiography, Bill Rodgers, one of the original Gang of Four, who was in overall charge of the seats negotiations for the SDP, recalled that "The Liberals were sometimes leaderless and seldom adopted a common view.

Each of them was heavily committed to an individual constituency and had little conception of a bargain by which they abandoned one seat to the SDP in return for another. "(Rodgers, *Fourth Among Equals*, Politico's, 2000). Exasperated with what he saw as his partners' inability to agree or stick to an agreement. At the start of the Christmas recess of 1981, Rodgers suspended the negotiations unilaterally and went public on the story. The press seized on the splits and divisions in the Alliance as eagerly as they had once reported the surges of support and by-election victories of earlier in the year.

David Steel in his memoirs (*Against Goliath*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) recalled that the negotiations were "wearisome and debilitating". He conceded that the growth in opinion poll ratings had been brought about by the creation of the SDP but supported Liberal claims that it was the Liberal party which had the superior numbers on the ground and the better electoral management. Steel understood the reluctance of local Liberals who were refusing to hand over what he described in his book as "well-organised seats to the SDP newcomers".

Emrys Roberts was politically close to Lady Megan Lloyd George. He, Lady Megan and Edgar Granville, Liberal MP for Eye in Suffolk, had formed a small group in Parliament to fight for what they saw as the Radical Liberal tradition. But this did not mean they opposed attempts at realignment of the left through arrangements with like-minded parties. In his letter to the Times, Roberts said he hoped to see an eventual merger of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties, with a single leader. He went on to recall that in 1951, he and Lady Megan had approached Herbert Morrison proposing a working relationship with the Labour government, with its small majority of eight votes and the parliamentary Liberal party which then had nine MPs. Morrison was apparently well disposed but Attlee decided to call a general election, which the Tories went on to win.

Roberts looked back to the Lib-Lab pact of 1977-78, agreed by David Steel and Jim Callaghan with approval. Against the background of the seats negotiations disaster, but noting the optimism at the possibility of a left of centre government after the next election, Roberts made a case for strong, central control of the seats process by the party leaders and a move towards amalgamating Liberal and SDP constituency organisations on the ground to push forward moves towards a national merger of the two Alliance parties. Roberts did not say if his approach to Labour with Lady Megan in 1951 had been approved by the party leader Clement Davies or would have been endorsed by all nine members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party.

It seems unlikely that either is the case. Davies had no arrangement with the Conservatives in Montgomery but they did not usually stand candidates against him. A parliamentary pact with Labour would have threatened that. Bearing in mind the independent mindedness of some of his parliamentary

colleagues, notably Rhys Hopkin Morris who represented Carmarthen, it also seems far-fetched to imagine the nine Liberals all voting to sustain an increasingly stale Labour government. On the anniversary of the publication of Roberts' letter however it is interesting to recall the politics of the Alliance, the arguments over merger (now all safely settled) and the earlier attempts in 1977-78 and 1951 to come to political agreement across tribal party lines.
