

SOME POLITICAL EVENTS OF 1951

This text is probably a draft of part of a contribution on political developments in 1951 to Britannica Book of the Year 1952, which for some reason was never published. (That volume contains Berlin's 'Nineteen Fifty-One: A Survey of Cultural Trends of the Year'.) It is based on an uncorrected carbon copy found in the Berlin Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, at MS. Berlin 429 fos 119–31. Obvious transcription errors have been corrected, but some unclarity remain, and suggestions for further emendation will be gratefully received.

I

GENERAL MACARTHUR was dismissed on 11 April 1951 and arrived in San Francisco on 18 April. From the moment of his arrival, his procession through the United States was a triumphal tour. Cities, states, legislatures vied in paying him homage. The Republican section of Congress succeeded in causing him to be invited to address both Houses of Congress on his return, and he did so – in a speech which even his opponents were compelled to describe as a masterpiece of political skill.

General MacArthur denounced incompetence, weakness and subversion in the administration, and became the focal point around which gathered all those who, from widely separated points of view, felt inimical to the policies or persons of the government of the United States. The nucleus of his followers appears to be composed of those ex-isolationists who were still dominated by fear and distrust of Europe, looked upon the foreign policy of the United States as dominated by fellow travellers, or at any rate persons anxious, for one reason or another, to appease the Soviet Union and to view its policies in a rosy light.

General Chiang was represented as the only real anti-Communist champion in Asia, betrayed and abused by those blind or politically subversive agents of the United States who preferred to lean upon his left-wing enemies. General MacArthur was represented as a military genius and a stout-hearted patriot,

ISAIAH BERLIN

recalled solely because he had had the moral courage to denounce the suicidal policies of the President and the Secretary of State. Senator McCarthy, who throughout the year was busily denouncing members of the State Department and other offices for allegedly following the Communist line, either now or in the past, went so far as to accuse the sacrosanct figure of General Marshall himself of having betrayed his duty during and after his China mission. This went too far even for those who were only too ready to make as much political capital as could be made out of any well-delivered attack on the Democratic administration. But besides professional Republicans or bitter opponents of the party in power, the arrival of General MacArthur appeared to release a great deal of feeling, long pent up, against the administration for reasons very remote from foreign policy.

The Democratic Party had been in power continuously for almost two decades. The acute frustration which this in itself had created suddenly burst through Republican dreams and in the heroic figure of the splendid old soldier it found a hero, homage to whom was in itself an act of protest – an expression of the many real and imaginary grievances against Mr Truman's regime. Moreover, the undeniably romantic air of the General stood out as a patch of bright and brilliant colour in what had for too long been a procession of drab events in a country addicted to pageantry and heightening of the emotions.

General MacArthur found among his allies such out-and-out isolationists as ex-President Hoover, who lost no opportunity during this period to say that ground troops, at any rate, should on no account be sent to Europe; that Europeans, at any rate, could or at least should be in a position to defend themselves without a perpetual drain on American lives and treasury; in various ways this was echoed also by Senator Taft, who was known to have clear personal ambitions. General MacArthur did not, it is true, support this point of view: indeed, he made it clear that he favoured every means of stopping Soviet expansion, and was in favour of an aggressive policy of resistance and not isolation; nevertheless, he was the natural hero and champion of the anti-Truman front.

The swift conquest of China by the Communists lent plausibility to the view that the United States administration had

SOME POLITICAL EVENTS OF 1951

been guilty of the double crime of letting itself be hoodwinked by Communists posing as mild agrarian radicals, then, when it was too late, offering inadequate aid to the unfortunate Chiang. Chiang, indeed, became almost a Republican hero, and Senators travelling abroad made a point of visiting him and identifying themselves with his grievances and his claims. European countries, especially those in any case only too prone to look on the United States as emotionally unstable and in the grip of mounting war fever, needed only to point to the cult of MacArthur as evidence for their diagnosis. Conversely, those who favoured MacArthur found in this European attitude fresh evidence for the old thesis that the countries of Europe were ungrateful, corrupt, either too cynical or too frightened to resist Communist penetration, and in any case not capable of being successfully defended by American arms, which they did not have the spirit to use, and perhaps not worth being defended or spoken to by a good, strong, young republic, anxious as they were to defend the enemies of all that had made it great.

Presently the administration struck back. Congress examined witnesses to uncover the causes of General MacArthur's dismissal. Mr Acheson presented the administration's case with an impression of thorough sincerity and skill; but as he was one of the many targets of attack, and inasmuch as his very appearance and background and origin stood for the values which the attackers regarded as most deplorably un-American, his testimony would not by itself have counteracted the far more formidable speeches of the General. The tide turned when the Defense Department – service officers – began to testify to their belief in the disastrous consequences of MacArthur's policies; the Secretary of Defense, General Marshall, and the Chief of Staff, General Bradley, finally placed their immense authority in the scale against the great recalcitrant; they denounced the policy of defensive war against the Soviet Union, which they conceived that MacArthur's plan would have made inevitable, and for which by implication he stood.

The situation was highly paradoxical. The bulk of General MacArthur's followers came from those who were opposed to foreign entanglements and who suspected the administration of carrying on the late President Roosevelt's, to them excessively warlike, policies. Yet this was what the General himself in some sense appeared to stand for. He declared he had no political

ISAIAH BERLIN

ambitions, and that made him a figure to be set in sharp contrast with scheming and unscrupulous politicians. He denounced the present conduct of the Korean War, and of that his Republican followers approved; he was the symbol of war against Communism, and that attracted to his side anti-Communists of all shades and such powerful organisations as the American Legion and the Roman Catholic Church. Yet in some sense he stood for aggressive warfare, and that confused at any rate some of his potential supporters. Moreover, the immense moral weight of such men as Marshall and Bradley disposed of the image of MacArthur as opposed only by politicians and left-wing intellectuals; and so, in the end, as the year wore on, this episode receded into the background.

The Korean War had not been lost; a general war had in fact been averted. The great armament orders had prevented such possible economic recession as might have caused international melees; prices were rising, and so to some extent were wages. Strikes occurred, but none of them too lengthy or crippling to industry; there was great prosperity in the land, greater perhaps than at any previous period; there was a good deal of political discontent, and much suspicion, some of it evidently justified, of corruption due to the retention of power for too many years in the hands of the same interests, which had perhaps willy-nilly become infested. Senator Kefauver conducted a campaign designed to expose sinister collusion between politicians, police and racketeers of various brands. He had uncovered much general corruption. Government agencies in Washington were systematically exposed as harbouring men who behaved, if not always in a corrupt, yet often in a highly incorrect and disreputable, manner; Mr Truman's administration lost much prestige thereby; efforts to purify public life were held at times to be less energetic than they could be because of the President's passionate sense of personal loyalty to his own friends, some of them considered unfit for the offices they held.

Republicans and some Democrats attacked Washington as a sink of dreadful corruption. The President defended his administration with much force; there was doubtless exaggeration on both sides; but this mood, however politically prejudicial to the Democratic Party, did not contain that mixture of fear and despair

SOME POLITICAL EVENTS OF 1951

in which strong men are raised to power by great waves of popular feeling. The United States was too prosperous for Boulangerism of this kind. It is true that the production of weapons, airplanes, tanks and the like under Mr Charles E. Wilson reached those peaks which he and the President had foretold in a sanguine moment; on the other hand, consumer goods – cars and washing machines, refrigerators and television sets – had poured out with a prodigality never before seen in the history of the world. Food and clothing were produced in prodigious abundance; the backbone of the country – the farmers, the industrial workers, the middle classes – were not dissatisfied. Scandal – symbolised by the mink coats worn by wives of government officials as a result of their ill-gotten gains – caused excitement, disgust and indignation, but not the ferocious sense of injustice which leads to radical political changes. There was naturally much talk of the spiritual dangers of such unbridled materialism; nevertheless, it remained the cynosure of many wistful eyes in almost every other part of the world.

Apart from the scandals and the flurry caused by General MacArthur's return, and by Senator McCarthy's violent and vituperative campaign against Communists, who, according to him, infested every branch of the administration and indeed of national life, Mr Truman's regime was not seriously shaken by events at home. Inflation had to some degree been tricked. The hoarders of goods who had banked upon an imminent war found themselves foolishly overstocked with goods; the great stores lowered their prices in precipitous competition with each other, to the astonished gratification of the general public. The only serious clouds to be observed darkened foreign skies.

The two outstanding problems of the year were the troubles of the Middle East and of Germany. The Muslim countries of the Middle East still presented an almost ideal example of the orthodox Marxist model of countries on the eve of revolution. One regime was dying, another, invited in by technologically superior empires, was still waiting to be born. New economic enterprise had begun to break down in Persia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt; and, as a result of the influx from Palestine, in Jordan, too, the picture was much the same. A rich, corrupt, astute, traditionally semi-feudal ruling caste; a depressed, illiterate and largely starving peasantry; and between these a nascent middle class – merchants, factory owners, manufacturers of various types,

and members of liberal professions, some risen from below, some emancipated from above, but for the most part frustrated for lack of opportunity to develop their skills, or live the kind of life of which their knowledge of more advanced civilisations had made them acutely aware. The dissatisfaction of this bottled-up middle section of the population poured itself into both Communist and international channels; and, if allowed to fester uncontrolled, would clearly soon overthrow the obsolete regimes of the pashas and their equivalents, with their ramshackle temporary alliances with this or that centre of power – the army or religious heads – much as they had done in the Balkans and indeed in Russia herself.

The Soviet Union did not need to do very much beyond general encouragement of this natural process – both nationalism and Communism were natural centres of xenophobia and resistance to the West, much exacerbated by the triumph of the state of Israel, which embodied sophisticated, alien Western ways of life and was a strong symbol of a humiliating defeat of backward Arabs in the hands of scientifically trained Jews supported by American and other Western countries.

Wounded and bitterly resentful nationalism boiled over in Persia in the course of the year, when a Muslim fanatic assassinated the Premier, General Razmara, on 7 March in the name of national independence, which took the form of demands for the nationalisation of the oil which was Persia's chief economic resource, and whose control by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was the bitterest stigma of national degradation and exploitation. After a brief interlude under a pro-Western Premier, accompanied by somewhat unimaginative compromises by the company, behind whom the British government was conceived as a major stockholder by the Persians, the international hero, Dr Mossadeq, took office as Prime Minister on 29 April. Full nationalisation was decreed on 2 March, and after that a debacle followed. Dr Mossadeq was a picturesque figure who almost at once captured the half-amused imagination of the world public. He was (and is) a rich landowner of aristocratic birth, liable to weep uncontrollably at every emotional crisis; courteous, high-strung, shrewd and exceedingly tough.

Dr Mossadeq presently declared his life to be in danger from Muslim bigots, for whom, evidently, he was not fanatical enough;

SOME POLITICAL EVENTS OF 1951

reclining in a bed in the sanctuary provided by a room in the Persian Parliament, he declared himself unalterably opposed to any concessions to the oil company. The oil was Persia's birthright: she must possess and control it all. The British government took some time to realise with whom it was dealing. During the previous dispute, satisfactory compromises had as a rule been reached. The British government laid its case before the Hague's International Court of Justice, which issued an injunction freezing the status quo. The Persians denounced the Court, declined to be bound by its jurisdiction, and refused to retreat before the British threat to move out, bag and baggage, with their experts and their tankers, leaving the greatest oil refining industry in the world to be managed by the incompetent natives of Iran.

The United States did its best to mediate between Persia and Britain. The case, it was thought in Washington, had not been too competently handled during Mr Bevin's illness, and Mr Morrison, who succeeded him as Foreign Secretary in March, did not seem to handle it any better. Mr Harriman was sent to Teheran to mediate; Mr Richard Stokes, Lord Privy Seal, was sent at the head of a British mission to negotiate with the Persian government. Concessions were made by the British, condominium was offered, and after that more was conceded. Dr Mossadeq wept, fainted, but remained adamant, and was cheered violently by great throngs of his countrymen who felt the day of liberty was dawning at last.

Dr Mossadeq journeyed to Lake Success to lay his case before the Security Council, but all that happened was that the dispute was adjourned. The United States refused economic help to a country so perversely intent upon damaging the interests of the West; nor was it prepared to put such pressure on Britain as would give Dr Mossadeq the whole loaf. It was pointed out to him by Mr Harriman in Teheran that he was only accumulating grist for the Soviet mill, represented by the Tudeh Party; it was reported by Mr Harriman's oil advisor, Mr Walter Levy, that Persia did not hold a monopoly of world oil, and would lose far more than she gained by making life impossible for her British specialists.

Dr Mossadeq throughout behaved somewhat like a powder-barrel or a bomb. If pushed too far he might explode and ruin others – the West – in the Soviet holocaust which this might bring about. The Persian frame of mind seemed to be that of people humiliated too long by foreign domination and therefore not to be

ISAIAH BERLIN

talked out of the shining goal of liberty and independence by larger considerations of world stability and prosperity, or peace. It behaved like a child that had been cheated too often out of what it had set its heart on by appeals to extraneous and irrelevant issues; stubborn nationalism might lead to economic ruin and consequent collapse and disappearance into the gaping jaws of the Soviet Union – that must be for the West to worry about. Persia had no choice but to seek its liberty from an intolerable yoke.

Dr Mossadeq in effect warned Western statesmen not to irritate him beyond endurance. He explained Persia's strategic position to the fullest. He drove British and American statesmen to despair by his mixture of charm and refinement with blind obstinacy and exasperating nationalism; on his way he was greeted in Egypt as a conquering hero, as a champion of the Muslim world against the old imperialist oppressor, although he was coming home with empty hands. The British experts withdrew from Abadan in safety, after much talk about having to be rescued by warships, and a demonstration of strength. The oil flowed uselessly and was wasted.

Mr Churchill and other Conservative leaders duly denounced the Labour government for ignominious withdrawal, deplorably damning alike to the pride and the standard of living of Great Britain; the Tudeh Party, despite occasional clashes with the Nationalists, appeared far from displeased with the recent development. There were demonstrations of hysterical gratitude to the Persian statesman who brought about the disappearance of the hated alien invader. Persia was free but in a state of economic chaos and far poorer than before.

In this condition the year ended. Meanwhile the neighbouring Iraqis saw no reason why they too should not obtain concessions from the Iraq Petroleum Company, and this time the oil company hastened to comply. Iraqi directors were created, the royalties of the Iraqi state greatly raised; King Ibn Saud made demands upon the Aramco Company, which holds monopolies in Southern Arabia; the sultans of the Persian Gulf in their turn extracted higher rates from their concessionaires. The Arab world was plainly going to assert itself. Syria and Israel had a prolonged clash with the Huleh concession, and both complained to the Security Council, which on the whole spoke more severely to Israel than to

SOME POLITICAL EVENTS OF 1951

the Syrians, although it upbraided both and instructed its Conciliating Commission to patch things up; this it failed to do, but after a time the quarrel appeared to expire from natural causes.

Nationalism, partly stimulated by the discontented embryonic middle class, led to violence elsewhere. After the assassination of a Lebanese statesman in Jordan, the celebrated King of Jordan, Abdullah, was murdered as he was about to enter a mosque in the Arab section of Jerusalem. This was plainly stimulated by the opponents of his traditionally pro-British policies, and his relatively moderate and tolerant dealings with even so detestable a foe as Israel. His murder was punished, but the son who succeeded him was clearly less good-humoured and judicious than his father.

Meanwhile national sentiment in North Africa had succeeded, under British auspices, in creating the new federated state of Libya, consisting of three provinces governed by Idris, King of the Senussi. Egypt, which had long smouldered with violent anti-British hatred, finally, after much rumbling toward the end of 1950, denounced the 1936 treaty upon which the presence of British troops guarding the Suez Canal, and the Anglo-Egyptian government of the Sudan (established in 1899), rested, and, inspired by the example of Dr Mossadeq's successful intransigence, and perhaps by the manner in which the state of Israel had come into being in the teeth of almost universal opposition, and consequently refusing to listen to British arguments, provoked an incident by detaining and searching a British ship, the *Empire Roach*, in the Suez Canal, on the plea that it was carrying goods for Israel, denounced the United States for its ostensible support of Britain, and, amid rising popular fury with all foreigners, attempted to seize control of the British military installations in Suez.

This attempt was arrested by force and led to some bloodshed. Nevertheless, the Egyptian resistance did not possess the stamina of the Persian; and towards the end of the year began visibly to crumble. The King, having allowed the passions of his subjects to exhaust themselves, appeared in the mood to restore order by some species of compromise with Great Britain, who alone, with the United States, would protect him from possible Soviet invasion. Apart from Israel, where the mid-year elections restored the anti-Soviet Labour Premier, Mr Ben-Gurion, to power, and which seemed in no position to control its own left-wing and

ISAIAH BERLIN

nationalist zealots, Turkey was the only power upon which the Western nations could rely in the Eastern Mediterranean. The scheme for Middle East defence was devised to be shared by the Western powers, the United States, Britain, France and Turkey, and a place of equality in it was offered to Egypt, which could surrender Suez to this federated body rather than to Britain alone. Iraq and Syria seemed to favour such a bulwark against the Soviet Union, but Egypt sharply and haughtily refused, and Cyprus seems now the likeliest seat of the united Middle East commission, as it were – the equivalent in the Western Mediterranean of the great NATO organisation of the Atlantic powers.

Violent nationalism and defiance of the old imperialist masters was a safety valve which no Middle Eastern government, except in the very primitive states such as Yemen or Saudi Arabia, could afford to dispense with; but the social and economic causes which created the tensions which exploded in this manner were clearly not to be cured by mere displays of national pride and independence, and it became increasingly clear as the year developed that unless some opportunity for effective social development, satisfying the ambitions of the frustrated young men, could be provided to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the old forms of imperialism and the decay of the feudalism which had lived in a queer and disreputable alliance, the Marxist prophets would sooner or later turn out to be right and social revolution against the West, and of political profit to the Soviet's fear alone, would transform the Eastern world. Consequently, more and more began to be heard in the West about the necessity of exploding this bomb harmlessly, and compatibly with the interests of the democracies, by radical transformation of the decrepit little Eastern regimes rather than a hand-to-mouth policy punctuated by national outbursts of increasing violence, until the final eruption, likely to bury all that is generally progressive in the Middle East under its ruins, as had happened in the Balkans and parts of the Far East.

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