Memorandum outlining the Foreign Secretary E. Bevin’s vision for British foreign policy objectives, dated 5 March 1948

TOP SECRET

WESTERN UNION

As a result of today’s Cabinet meeting at which his paper on the wider conception of the Western Union was approved, the Secretary of State now proposes to go ahead on the following basis. He wishes to have an Office meeting on Monday at which he will set out his ideas more fully.

The Secretary of State’s general conception is that under the umbrella of the new five-Power treaty which we hope to get in the near future, we should work out a much wider scheme for the general coordination and defence of the whole world outside the Soviet orbit. What we should in fact be aiming at is a U.N.O. as it should have been had the Soviet cooperated. Since we could not rely on Soviet cooperation we must, without actually doing away with the U.N.O. machinery, develop on more practical and realistic lines a world organisation which would gradually be extended from the Western European nucleus. Thus alone would we be able to provide genuine collective security. Among the objectives at which we should aim would be

(a) To bring South America into our scheme, mainly on an economic basis, the idea being that South America would have to provide food and raw materials – in case of need, i.e. if we should ever be involved in another war, on lend-lease terms if other countries were bearing the main burden of defence.

(b) India and Pakistan to be brought in; and the Secretary of State hoped that as our cooperation developed with India and Pakistan, and indeed with the whole middle zone stretching to Indonesia and Malaya, our Middle Eastern problems would fall into place in this wider perspective.

(c) We should have to consult the United States and make them face up to their responsibilities at an early stage, but we should have to time very carefully the moment for consultation with them.

The Secretary of State has in mind the following practical steps to carry forward his objective:

(1) Commonwealth Cooperation. In addition to informing the Commonwealth Governments as rapidly as possible of the ideas in today’s Cabinet Paper and of the conclusions reached by the Cabinet, we should at once obtain the advice of the Commonwealth Relations Office on the best way to arrange for early consultation between the Commonwealth Governments on the new policy approved by the Cabinet. The Secretary of State is ready to consider any form of consultations provided they are urgent and effective. He feels, however, that it is unrealistic for him to be consulting with foreign governments at a high level while he is only able to deal with the Commonwealth Governments at long range by telegram.

(2) Defence. The Chiefs of Staff should be asked to make an early study of the whole problem, dividing it under the following three main heads:

(a) defence problems of the Western Union;

(b) the defence problems of the Atlantic approaches. This would bring us into close cooperation not only with America but also with Eire and Iceland, and the Secretary of State considers that we should bring Scandinavia into our scheme on this Atlantic basis and not in the context of the narrower Western Union now being worked out with France and Benelux;

(c) collective security, embracing the Americans, Africa and Asia in the wide sense discussed above.

(3) Spiritual and Cultural. The Secretary of State thinks that the moment has now come to harness spiritual forces behind the whole concept of Western Union in the widest sense. The freedom of the individual is so closely bound up with religious freedom and general spiritual values that all the great religious faiths, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, etc., can be brought together on this plane in opposition to Communism. Before, however, attempting to organise Islam and Buddhism it is essential to arrive at some unity among the Christian Churches. The difficulty at the moment is that the Roman Catholic Church has remained outside the International Council of Christian Churches[[1]](#footnote-1). The Secretary of State feels, however, that in the present crisis a further effort must be made to get all the Christian Churches together on the basis of the defence of religion, peace, liberty and social justice. He therefore proposes next week to see individually the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Griffin[[2]](#footnote-2), the heads of the Free Churches and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and he will consult with the Archbishop of Canterbury about bringing the Orthodox Church into his concept. The objective which the Secretary of State has in mind is a world congress of Christian Churches to be held e.g. at Geneva later this year. It is of course essential that the Foreign Office should remain well in the background and that the lead for this should come from the Churches themselves.

(4) The role of Socialist Parties. The Secretary of State aims at strengthening the Socialist parties under British leadership and under the slogan of “Democratic Socialism” as distinct from “Social Democracy” (with its Marxist associations). This is an issue which will have to be discussed further within the Party, and in the first place no doubt with Mr. Morgan Phillips[[3]](#footnote-3) and Mr. Healey[[4]](#footnote-4).

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Keywords: post-war order, post-war USSR

1. International Council of Christian Churches, an international organisation established in 1948 to counter communism and unorthodox trends in Christianity. It presented a conservative opposition to the more liberal World Council of Churches, which was established that same year, and which included representatives from almost all denominations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Griffin, Bernard William (1899–1956), British clergyman. Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster (1943–1956). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Phillips, Morgan Walter (1902–1963), British trade union and political activist, General Secretary of the Labour Party (1944 - 1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Healey, Denis (1917 - 2015) - British politician and statesman, an ex-communist who became an important source of information for the Foreign Office on international labour affairs in the post-war period. (See Wilford, H., *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp. 54-6.) Healey served as Secretary of the International Department of the Labour Party (1945 - 1948), Member of Parliament for Leeds South East, and later Leeds East (1952 - 1992), Secretary of State for Defence (1964 - 1970), Chancellor of the Exchequer (1974 - 1979), Deputy Leader of the Labour Party (1980 - 1983), Shadow Foreign Secretary (1980 - 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)