



The British Goldwater

Terence Prittie

THE BRITISH ARE NOTORIOUSLY unwilling to interfere in the affairs of other nations. It was not, therefore, surprising to find the liberal (in British politics, meaning "middle of the road") *Economist* writing on July 18 that the Republican Party's selection of Goldwater as its presidential candidate was "America's own affair." The view of the *Economist* was that, while it did not regard Goldwater as a good choice, nothing should be said or done on the British side to make the prospects of the Anglo-American alliance any worse.

The *Economist* regarded Goldwater's nomination at San Francisco as a misfortune, but hardly a disaster. The paper implied that it would hold precisely the same view if Goldwater became President because, even then, "the need for the Anglo-American alliance will not be one whit diminished." The duty of thinking Englishmen, the *Economist* concluded, was to guard against a swing-back to the sort of glum, head-in-the-sand anti-Americanism to which the British Labour Party was so prone under Clement Atlee's leadership. In the second place, everything possible should be done to discourage an American reversion to isolationism — always remembering that "isolationism is the original sin of all nations, not the special vice of any one nation."

This reasoned article in one of Britain's leading weeklies helped a little to dilute the atmosphere of gloom, tinged with real alarm, which prevailed in Britain after Goldwater's nomination. The British are not often alert to what happens in other people's countries, and there has always been a traditional British tendency to see both sides of the case (it was the main reason for Britain's pre-war policy of appeasement of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy). But Goldwater's nomination aroused apprehensive, even emotional interest, for a number of reasons. The following were the most important.

Goldwater has said enough to suggest that he is an

isolationist, of a far more dynamic and therefore more dangerous kind than, for instance, Taft. The great majority of people in Britain believe in the Atlantic Alliance and accept American leadership of it, although sometimes grumbling about it. The thought of an American withdrawal into a role of highly-armed independence cannot fail to alarm them.

Europe would be left temporarily rudderless. In the longer-term, Europe would fall back on the feeble alternative of union under de Gaulle's leadership. Even if this did not happen quickly, de Gaulle's isolationist theory of a self-contained, ultimately neutral "Little Europe" of the Six would become far more credible than it is to most Europeans today. His dream of grouping the other West Europeans round a Franco-German *entente* would become a reality. That, at any rate, is how Britons see it.

Goldwater, again, has implied that he would forsake the policies of compromise and common sense pursued by a long line of American Presidents. How else should one explain the Goldwaterism which has most affected British public opinion — "Extremism in pursuit of justice is no vice"? Goldwater has more recently sought to explain this cracker-motto by saying that "extreme action" by one man means his killing another — which may be necessary (as in war). But extremism and extreme action are not necessarily the same thing at all. Goldwater seems, in British eyes, to exemplify right-wing radicalism which is inimical to democracy of the Western pattern. This, and not the shot fired in defence of one's country, is what Britons understand by "extremism."

Extremism could well be applied by a President Goldwater in the field of foreign affairs. Joseph Grimond, the leader of the British Liberal Party, believes that Goldwater's nuclear policy could be a major danger to civilization. He might treat nuclear bombs as just one more weapon in the nation's armoury. An-

other British fear is that Goldwater's extremism might result in the revival, in a more acute form, of John Foster Dulles' theory of a "roll-back" of communism. This could lead to American insistence on a radical solution of nagging east-west problems (South-East Asia, Berlin, and Germany), and possibly to a relaxation of efforts to secure general, controlled disarmament.

IT COULD LEAD to the ending of the present East-West *détente*. There is a tendency in America to regard Britain as a "soft" partner in the Western Alliance, readier than others to accept a bad compromise solution rather than remain firm and resolute. I believe this view is mistaken. Britain, certainly, does not want a bad compromise with the Soviet Union. But she does believe in the possibility of further *détente* because Mr. Khrushchev's insistence on economic weapons is having an effect on the Soviet leadership as well as on the Soviet people and because the Sino-Soviet quarrel is forcing the Soviet Union to adopt a more circumspect attitude towards the West.

What are Goldwater's views on the East-West *détente*? He has delineated himself as the Republican Party's foremost crusader against communism. There is only a handful of Britons who feel anything but dislike, or even loathing, for communism. But the view generally held in Britain is that Soviet communism—based on the nationalism and vigorous patriotism of the Russian people—cannot be "exorcised" by external pressure. It will cease to be a menace to the western world only when economic well-being gives the Russian people a vested interest in peace which cannot be ignored by the Soviet leaders.

The supposition in Britain is that Goldwater is too ignorant and too impatient a man to understand this concept. Nor is he likely to have any regard for its corollary—that the west can only influence the development of the Soviet Union in the (to us) right direction by diplomatic finesse and perseverance. The Rusk policy of persistent diplomatic probing is, to Britons, the right one. And it is right, too, that it should be conducted by the United States, as the leader of the Western Alliance. Nor should it be abandoned if it does not produce quick results. The Russians are notoriously slow to change their views, but they did so over the Austrian State Treaty and they will do so over a major problem again.

Goldwater's attitude to *détente* is only one reason for distrust in Britain for his supposed foreign policies. Recently he was quoted as saying, "World government is certainly not something we should be advocating at the present-time." If this is not a mere cliché, then one must suppose that he views the United Nations with the disdain felt by some Englishmen—chief among them Sir Anthony Eden (now Lord Avon). In spite of its frustrations and occasional futility, the United Nations is an institution in which progressive Britons believe. Their view is that it can only be kept alive by

continuous injections of faith, purpose and common sense. Does Goldwater believe this?

There is the additional fear in Britain that Goldwater, as President, would cut the United States foreign aid programme. Although given far too little credit for it abroad, the United States has spent its money wisely, mainly in areas which have had to be bolstered against communism (India, Korea, Viet Nam, Turkey, the United Arab Republic). Will Goldwater seek to win votes by denouncing the waste of good American money on ungrateful and inept foreigners? If he does, this alone would be reason enough for most Britons to pray for a second term at the White House for President Johnson.

Here, then, are some of the reasons for British distrust of Goldwater (I have said nothing about Civil Rights, as I regard them as a strictly American concern). But it should not be thought that there has been a wild wave of anti-Goldwater feeling in Britain since his nomination. The man-in-the-street barely noted the event, and his awareness of Goldwater would date only from the day that he could become President. Moreover, responsible British voices have been raised against condemning Goldwater in advance. In the influential *Financial Times* George Cyriax wrote: "How will Goldwater respond to responsibilities? All the signs are that he would be moulded by them." John Grigg, the *Guardian* columnist, considered that "he is a realist too . . . if elected, he will surprise his critics and disappoint many of his friends."

And Alistair Cooke, the New York correspondent of the *Guardian*, complained that "the European caricature of him is of a fire-eating proto-fascist, an arrogant, gravel-voiced egomaniac." Cooke, evidently, did not share this view.

Britain will judge Goldwater by his deeds if he becomes President. At present he has to be judged by his words. And they are big, blunt words which grate on British ears and do not always make much sense. Is he as unsophisticated as he makes himself out to be? Does he really believe in his own trite, easy answers to problems of infinite complexity? Is he an 18th century individualist who has simply been born in the wrong epoch?

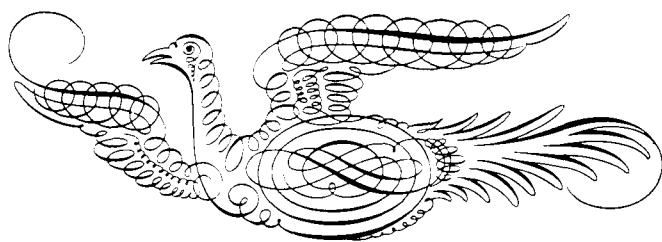
Here are a lot of questions which may be partially answered during the presidential election campaign, but could only be fully answered if Goldwater came to power. But for the present, one reflection is probably dominant in British minds: the office of American President carries vast responsibilities, not just to America but to the whole civilized world. It is an office of such complexity that the task of discharging it seems almost too great for one man. Senator Goldwater, if he practices what he preaches, does not measure up to that task. This, then, is Britain's concern, Britain's fear.

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THE COMPLEAT GOLDWATER

THE NOMINATION OF BARRY GOLDWATER struck Germany with stunning and dismaying force. That the reaction here was overwhelmingly one of horror and anxiety cannot be questioned. The Government, though keeping prudently silent upon "American internal matters" in public, is deeply perturbed, seeing in Goldwater's advance not only a major threat to its own laborious underpinning of an Atlantic defence community but also an immense tide of encouragement for its own internal enemies on the right — those who already are dangerously harassing Professor Erhard and Foreign Minister Schroeder for a return to the old, truculent posture towards Eastern Europe, for a favouring of Paris against Washington, and for a move towards national military autonomy which would slide uncontrollably towards Germany's possession of her own nuclear deterrent. The public at large, on what sampling may be made in a few weeks, simply fears that Goldwater will bring about war. One of the paradoxical but very striking results of President Kennedy's assassination was to bring to the surface much latent anti-Americanism: "How can Germany's safety and existence be entrusted to a nation which would let *this* happen to our protector?" This distrust, brewed partly out of shock and partly out of the lees of the usual post-war resentments, has been brought once more to the boil by the events in the Cow Palace. "Goldwater is just a cow-boy," one hears, and "we would be better off under France's wing!"

Yet, when one has recorded this shock, one must also write that to some degree Germany was better prepared for Goldwater's sudden arrival in the centre of affairs than, say, the British. For at least a year, Goldwater and his opinions have been matter for discussion in the press of the far right here, and even before the California primary, he was a figure far from unknown. It suited the book of the far right to present Goldwater as an intimate, one who sympathized with Germany's plight at the hands of leftists and weaklings. Even before his views on foreign policy attained what coherence they have, his internal struggle against "creeping socialism" and his supposed fondness for the John Birch Society earned the interest of the neo-Nazis. Between his announcement of candidature and San Francisco, a surprising and rather suspect flow of letters to the West German press began, in which Goldwater's virtues as a conservative were extolled and his unorthodox views on foreign policy cleverly played down. To what extent this was a using of Goldwater by unscrupulous and intelligent politicians, and to what extent a genuine two-way traffic between men who found each other's ideas sympathetic, is not easy to establish. One is inclined, however, to agree with the



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Neal Ascherson