

Oral History Interview
with
WILLIAM P. N. EDWARDS

During World War II and during the years of the Truman Administration, was Assistant to Chairman of British Supply Council, Ministry of Supply, 1941-45; head of Industrial Information Division, Ministry of Production; alternate Director of Information, British Supply Council, Washington, DC 1943-45; Director, Overseas Information Division, Board of Trade, London 1945-46; Counsellor, British Embassy, Washington, DC in charge of British Information Services, 1946-49; Deputy Overseas Director, Federation of British Industries, 1949-51, and Director, Promotion and Information, 1951-65.

London, England
August 12, 1970
by Theodore A. Wilson, University of Kansas

NOTICE

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WILSON: You were in Washington at some extremely interesting and eventful times both during the war and then after for three years.

EDWARDS: Yes.

WILSON: One of the most difficult questions in studying this period is the matter of the change in American opinion which took place. I wonder if you might give me your impressions, since

you were in Washington in the later stages of the war, on what you found to be the general American attitude about the postwar period.

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EDWARDS: Perhaps I could start by going back a little bit earlier, because it so happens my first connection with America was rather unusual for those days. I was a student at Princeton as a Davison scholar. Davison scholars came from Oxford and Cambridge in pairs to Harvard, Yale or Princeton. That was in 1925-26; I'm called the class of '26, and in fact I'm going back for my 45th reunion next year, so I have kept up my associations. This means that I'm able to look at the United States, as I might as well confess at once, as a devoted admirer; I love your country, and I have an immense admiration for it.

I have seen a complete change of attitude and opinion towards the outside world in the 45 years that I've known the States. So, if you don't mind my just going back a little earlier?

WILSON: No, please, yes.

EDWARDS: In 1925-26, when I was first there, you were

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going through a period of what looked like unprecedented boom and it looked almost like unending boom. You virtually thought you'd found a clue to ever increasing prosperity. You paid out more wages; as you paid out more wages, demand increased; as demand increased, production went up to meet it; and that meant more wages still. That was the wonderful theory until, of course, 1929, when Wall Street crashed and suddenly the world in two years was involved in the most appalling depression that the world has ever met, starting from that Wall Street crash.

A figure I'll always remember -- of significance to those of us who have to think in world terms - is that British exports to the outside world in 1931-32 fell by 50 percent, which I think was exactly the same percentage as the fall in the American economy. Such was the influence of the American economy on world trade even in those days. This is significant, from the opinion point of view,

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because your exports then, and some say even now, are still such a marginal part of your total turnover, your total gross national product. In those days it was probably even less than now; I'm not quite certain of my facts there but it was somewhere in the neighborhood of 5 percent. The average American didn't really think about exports -- or imports for that matter. He didn't think they were particularly important, and therefore world trade didn't seem very important to you in those days. But this was the effect you had on us, for instance. When your economy went down, our exports to the whole of the rest of the world went down in almost the same proportion as your own GNP went down. So even in those days the world was much more interdependent, economically, than the majority of Americans realized at that time.

In the war, I was mainly with the Ministry of Production, as we called it, which was the coordinating ministry at the top of our three

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separate war production ministries. They were the Ministry of Supply, which was responsible for military equipment; the Ministry of Aircraft Production; and the Admiralty which was responsible for the building of ships and other things for the Royal Navy, as well as for the running of the Navy itself. The Ministry of Production was a small, coordinating ministry, a planning ministry, basically, and therefore it dealt a great deal with Washington, at the higher levels, in particular, the WPB -- War Production Board -- and of course we sat upon the Combined Production Resources Board and the Combined Raw Materials Board which were, I think, Anglo-American...

WILSON: Yes.

EDWARDS: So we kept in Washington what was called the British Supply Office, which was the counterpart of the Ministry of Production in London, and it was through that office that I first became involved in information or public relations work

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in America. The object of our endeavors at that time, which was welcomed by your people, was to show that Britain's war production effort, although obviously small in comparison with American war production, was nevertheless still significant. And even though lend-lease was enormous and invaluable for us, reverse lend-lease -- what we did for you -- was far greater than Americans thought and understood, in the Pacific as well as in the European sector of the war. So I became involved in a lot of Anglo-American things at that time; I was half the time in Washington and half the time in London. I commuted across the Atlantic in those funny old flying boats which we used to fly across the water. It took 17 and a half hours I think non-stop from Ireland flying at 200 feet above the sea all the time. A most extraordinary performance. I don't know how we managed.

Then after the war -- I was not a career civil servant -- the Foreign Office asked me if I would head up the British Information Services in the

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United States. I said I would for three years, and that's how I came to be there, 1946 to '49. Now the interesting part of this was that the Foreign Office asked me to do this because they thought the major postwar problems of Anglo-American relations would be economic and industrial -- and this was the side of life I had dealt with most of my life. This was the main reason I was chosen for it.

In fact, of course, almost the first thing I was thrown into when I started the job was the issue of Palestine, followed by Greece. In other words, I was being called upon to deal with issues of foreign policy rather than economics. That was my first baptism. Later, however, the economic field took over. First, there was the British loan, then the Marshall Aid Program which of course,

was the big thing. Finally, I was lucky enough to see the North Atlantic Treaty [establishing NATO] actually signed by Harry Truman.

WILSON: Oh, you were?

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EDWARDS: I was actually present when it was signed. This was, from my angle as an Anglo-American so to speak, the consummation of all I'd ever hoped to see.

WILSON: Yes, a commitment of the United States.

EDWARDS: The United States for the first time was formally entering into the outside world, and abandoning isolationism, which was the predominant attitude before the war.

WILSON: Did you think that some such commitment would come at the time, say in the late stages of the war?

EDWARDS: Well, one way to answer that question is to reveal the way one worked. I used every year, sometimes every six months, to draw up strategic objectives for our information policy. These obviously started with the main objectives of British foreign policy. Insofar as America was concerned, the leading objective was to help America to become

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involved in a political and military alliance with Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty as we know it. When that actually was signed, right at the end of my three years, I did feel I had seen a complete revolution in American public opinion in my short life.

WILSON: Very interesting. One of the first points that you made raises a question which confuses me in a way. It concerns this matter of the lack of awareness of the United States in the years before the war, and to some extent after, of its role in the international trading picture -- of its passive and to some extent active importance in world trade. There has been some speculation and some pseudo-historical analysis in recent years that one of the chief motivations of American policy in the postwar period was that of fear of the recurrence of depression, and that American business groups, during and immediately after the war, believed and took actions to insure that the

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United States would replace its war production by increased trade, by increased markets. Is that a correct analysis? Was there this sort of rather open fear of depression and thus...

EDWARDS: Yes, I think there was always that fear of depression. I think it took quite a while to break down, actually. The contrast between American thinking now and what it was during the Truman administration, to my mind, is very marked. I mean, now you are completely a part of the international scene -- not a part, but the leader, the acknowledged, accepted leader. You're involved at every point, but in those days you were still only beginning to come in; there was still a lot of suspicion of the outside world, even in the era of Mr. Truman. I remember how

astonished I used to be at the number of times American businessmen in particular used to use the phrase, "Well, you British, you always outsmart us." It never occurred to me that we could outsmart anybody, let alone that we could outsmart

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the Americans. But it was absolutely engraved in their minds that somehow we had such long experience in foreign affairs, in economic affairs, and world trade, investment, and all the rest of it, that we knew much more than they did and they were mere "babes in the wood," whereas we were very experienced and ready to "outsmart" them. This was the phrase that kept on coming up. Now this to me was quite an astonishing concept. I couldn't get the idea of...

WILSON: It came up I suppose, in the controversy about Palestine and also...

EDWARDS: Palestine was a very different problem. I don't know if you would want to talk about that for a moment.

WILSON: Yes, I would...

EDWARDS: This has little to do with economics. This time we are talking almost wholly about foreign policy. I can only give you my memory of it.

I think it was the most difficult public

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relations thing I've ever had to handle in my life. We were responsible, after all, for Palestine under the Mandate of the League of Nations, which was subsequently transferred to the United Nations after it was set up. We were responsible for Palestine whether we liked it or not. We'd also been responsible, of course, for the Balfour letter of 1917, which gave our pledge of setting up a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine. Nobody ever knew what that meant, which was one of the difficulties. We had historically, from the foreign policy point of view, been very much obsessed with the importance of the Middle East, not because of oil, which has only just begun to be important, but because in those days it was the line of communication with the rest of the British Empire, India above all, and with the Far East and Australia.

Here's an interesting point for any American to ponder on. I see these things as one who has had to study public opinion. If you look at any

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British school map, drawn on Mercator's Projection, i.e. a straight flat map and not a globe, you'll see we always put the British Isles, because of Greenwich Mean Time, in the middle. If this is the world on Mercator's map, and you put the British Isles in the middle, America over here, and Asia over here, the Middle East is there. It's on a very central and straight line from us to India and Australia, and indeed, to the Far East. It's a vital line of communication.

By contrast, American maps usually put America in the middle, not unnaturally. Say, [pointing to map] America's here, a bit of China and so on over here, and the British Isles and Europe here,

then the Middle East -- a little bit of it's there and a little bit is down here. You never see the Middle East as a whole; no American child ever sees the Middle East as a line of communication. What the inference of that is I don't know, but I believe it is considerable.

WILSON: Certainly a way of looking at it. That's very good.

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EDWARDS: So we in Britain have always had to deal with the Arabs. We have had to deal with them because we have to preserve this line of communication; hence, we have these outposts on the Persian Gulf and in India. In those days there was also a connection with Egypt. Therefore, we built up, over a long period, a considerable understanding of the Arab world. Now, unfortunately, American opinion in those days didn't understand the Arabs at all, and that misunderstanding was made all the greater because the media of opinion in America are very largely controlled by Jews, or were then. The *New York Times* was dominated by the Sulzberger family, a Jewish family. Many of the other great papers, not all, but many of them were too. When you think of the radio stations in those days, they almost all were Jewish-owned. Again, if you think who were the largest advertisers in the newspapers, it was the department stores which, almost without exception, were owned by Jews.

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WILSON: The motion picture industries, newsreels...

EDWARDS: Yes. The lobby, the Jewish lobby -- not only in Washington but in New York and other centers which influence opinion -- was so strong that it was very difficult to get anybody even to begin to understand that there might be an Arab side to the Palestine question, or that the Arabs had anything to be said for them, really. It was just, "there ought to be a Jewish state and to hell with the Arabs" -- that was the attitude.

I'm a great admirer of Mr. Truman. I think the only criticism almost of his Administration that I would make was that when a very famous report (whose name I can't now remember), came out during his administration about Palestine, which made about fifteen recommendations, one of which was that the rate of increase of Jewish immigration into Palestine should be stepped up by us. Truman immediately came out and welcomed that particular proposal. He welcomed the proposal to increase

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the immigration rate and virtually never mentioned any of the other highly and equally important recommendations, many of which were pro-Arab. Thereby, from the British angle -- we were still discharging this unbelievably unpleasant responsibility of trying to keep the peace in Palestine -- it made our job even more difficult. We accepted the report too, but we accepted it in toto. I suppose he did really. I think it was because of the pressure of the Jewish vote he had to put it that way. What I've read about him is his courage. It's the one occasion when I think he didn't show courage, or alternatively, he himself was so influenced by this immense Jewish pressure that he could only see the Jewish angle.

WILSON: We're not entirely sure which. The two problems which you suggest were certainly there and exerting pressure, and how much importance one places on each is not yet known. This continuing controversy, I suppose, colored American attitudes toward Great

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Britain in this area.

EDWARDS: Yes -- although that is one of the strange things about Anglo-American relations. We could be at loggerheads over a thing like this, although I should say that the State Department was with us all the time; they understood the Arab problem, if no one else did. But although we might be at loggerheads over this problem of the Jewish state and Palestine, we would be intimate on everything else, working together to the utmost in a spirit of cooperation.

WILSON: When you took this assignment in 1946, you had -- maybe I'm putting words in your mouth and please correct me -- it does seem you had a very difficult job, because there was rather less understanding of Britain's position than one might desire. That is, of Britain's economic position and Britain's political position.

EDWARDS: I think that is very true, yes.

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WILSON: How did you go about correcting this lack of understanding?

EDWARDS: Well, the line I always took, and probably what anyone who does this kind of work must take, is that you can only hope to influence the people who make opinion and not the public at large. You would have had to spend billions of dollars to try and persuade the American public at large, 150 million in those days, that we had a case on Palestine, or that the Arabs had a case. What one did try to do was to keep continuous contact, in Washington and New York, in particular, with all the leading commentators, columnists, and editorial writers. We knew them very well, and it's not leaking a secret, but I think they found it very useful after meeting with the State Department sometimes, to come around to the British Embassy and say, "Well, what's your viewpoint?" We informed them and in the case of those that we knew particularly well, we would show them our own

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telegrams from the Foreign Office. We'd tell them, "After you have read that, don't tell anybody you have. But that will tell you what the official British view is." We worked in that sort of way. We didn't ask for any publicity for the BIS [British Information Services]. All we wanted was an understanding of our point of view; we didn't ask that they necessarily agreed with it, but at least that they understood it and why we thought the way we did. I think one can say one was reasonably successful on a thing like Palestine. We wouldn't claim any greater success because we were up against a wall, the Jewish lobby.

WILSON: Yes, I can appreciate that. To go back a moment, you mentioned lend-lease; was the abrupt termination of lend-lease in 1945 a reflection of a lack of understanding of what was Britain's true position, or did you interpret it at the time that way?

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EDWARDS: Well, I think it was a very abrupt termination. I don't think I was in Washington actually at the time. It did come as a blow. What I think was not realized was the unbelievably difficult economic plight of Europe as a whole, and Britain in particular, because we bore the greatest brunt of the war in Europe and were involved in it longer than anyone else. We were in it from the very start. We'd bled ourselves virtually white. I don't know whether you know this fact, but when lend-lease was started the gold and dollar reserves of the sterling area were down to three million pounds [sterling]. That was all that we had in the kitty. Lend-lease came just in time; it saved the war effort. We couldn't have gone on fighting the war without lend-lease.

WILSON: It was set up as a wartime activity. That was unfortunate in some ways because...

EDWARDS: Well, from one angle that was right. I

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don't suppose Roosevelt would have ventured to go through with it without making it a wartime activity. So in a sense it was understandable that it would be cut off the moment the war ended. What wasn't realized, as I said earlier, was the economic plight of Europe, in particular Britain, in the immediate postwar period. And what I think was never realized, coming to the next big economic issue we had to deal with, which was the American loan to Britain which only lasted a year and was 900,000,000 pounds -- the reason it only lasted a year was that most of it went to Europe rather than to us. We had to go on lending money to Europe because no one else was doing even that. This was before the Marshall plan, you see. That loan was invaluable; I mean Europe would have crashed way back in '46-'47 if it hadn't been for that loan. It saved Britain and Europe -- free Europe that is.

WILSON: But under rather strong conditions. It was

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certainly not nearly as generous on conditions for repayment as for later programs, and caused certain difficulties...

EDWARDS: If we ever come to this kind of thing again, we'll have to realize that it's got to be a grant. After the loan was finished, we went through a very bleak period of several months.

This brings us to the Marshall plan. I don't know whether this is of any interest, but I did play a minor part in this which has never been recorded because there's no reason why it should be. Before the Marshall plan was announced, we were beginning to get extremely worried in the British Embassy about the plight of Europe and of Britain. I remember using a phrase at one meeting that unless something is done soon -- and really only the United States could do something -- we shall have a crash. The world economy will crash, starting with Europe. And America, too, will probably crash. It was about that time that

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Dean Acheson made his speech; even now the world doesn't realize that he advocated the Marshall plan about six weeks or so before General Marshall made his famous speech. It so happened that I was due to come back on a three weeks "refresher" visit to U.K. [United Kingdom] just before Marshall made his speech. As was my usual custom, I invited out to lunch each day for a week or so before I left, the leading commentators and columnists of Washington to get their view of the situation so that I could relay it truthfully and fairly back here to London. I saw people like Walter Lippmann, the Alsop brothers, Marquis Childs -- all the then great commentators. All of them were beginning to talk in terms of something of this sort, i.e. "We (America) will help you (Europe), if you will help yourselves." The idea was not only essential but inevitably it would come. It was already being talked of in the highest circles of the U.S. Administration.

Well, I then arrived home and I thought this

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was so important that I went straight to the Under Secretary of State, whose name was Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, of the Foreign Office. I told him something like this is being talked of and is likely to happen and I thought you ought to know at once. There's nothing official yet; therefore, even the Embassy may not have felt they could report it. There is no doubt, however, from my contacts with people like Walter Lippmann that this is being seriously discussed now and we should be ready for it when the time comes.

He thought this was so important that he went that very evening to Ernie [Ernest] Bevin, our Foreign Secretary at that time, to tell him what was being discussed and what it might become. Well, almost within a few days the famous Marshall speech was made and you may remember Ernie Bevin was the first Foreign Secretary in Europe to respond. He virtually took General Marshall's proposals in his hands and said, "This is the salvation of Europe; God bless America and we must make this work; we welcome this great

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initiative," et cetera. That was what started the thing rolling. As it so happened, without this, even the United States economy might have been stopped for a while.

WILSON: That's very helpful because one of the things which I did not know or which confused me is why and how Foreign Secretary Bevin responded so quickly. So you say there was some preparation? Very good.

EDWARDS: It may conceivably be the only thing in history I contributed. It's possibly so, but I wouldn't like to make too much of it.

WILSON: There's a story that Bevin heard about the Marshall speech through the good offices of a radio commentator, a British radio commentator then in London, I can't remember his name, who gave an interview some years ago saying that other people had not seen the importance of Marshall's speech and played it down, but he did cable this through. And this is some

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additional information.

EDWARDS: Yes, it's quite possible that somebody -- you mean a British radio commentator in America?

WILSON: Yes.

EDWARDS: Yes, very possibly. All I can say is that I was one of the first to forewarn him, or forearm him, and this was important because as you remember the whole emphasis of the thing was, "We Americans will help you if you help yourselves." Therefore, the response from us had to be, "Well, we will help ourselves if you will help us."

WILSON: Jumping around, one of the questions which occurs to me concerns the matter of justifying or attempting to persuade American opinion in the period before the Marshall plan and even during the Marshall plan of the urgency of this aid. In a way, this meant that persons who were dealing with the media and dealing with opinion

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had to not exaggerate, but point to the plight of Europe -- that is, point to starving children, not in Great Britain, but point to the needs, if we use the British example, the needs of Britain for assistance. That must have been difficult and in a way perhaps very awkward for you, given British opinion.

EDWARDS: I don't think it was quite as awkward as you think. This was an occasion where fortunately we could feel that it would also help the American administration. And we worked to some extent with the American administration on this one in trying to involve those sectors of the American people which had a selfish interest in helping Europe to get back on its feet. The American farmer was an obvious one. He wanted to get his exports of wheat and grain, and so on, going back to Europe in the old way. But if we couldn't pay for it, that would not do any good. So, in this way the American Government was going to pay, until we

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could finance it ourselves. It was therefore in the interest of the farm community, for instance, to get Europe back on its feet, in particular Britain, which was the biggest single market. In industry and the trade unions, of course it varied a lot with the industry. The textile industry you know is always protectionist all over the world. But there were other American industries whose export content was quite important to them. All those who already had investments in Britain had a stake -- such as General Electric which even in those days had a big stake here. There were, therefore, a lot of people in industry and the trade unions who were on the side of the Marshall plan. So I supplied them with information which would help them put their case over, not our case. So this was the kind of way we worked. We didn't put much stress on the plight of Europe; rather we emphasized their own self interest.

WILSON: I wonder if I could get your view, going back

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to that time, of some of the more splashy efforts on the part of the Americans. The one which occurs to me, you may not remember it, is this Citizens Food Committee in 1947, chaired by Charles Luckman, head of Lever Brothers. It seems that was a crucial period when there wasn't enough food being provided to Europe; and, it seems, the administration opted for an all out public relations campaign using the media, relying on bringing the housewife into this. Yet it failed rather miserably. I wonder was this characteristic of the American administration; did it tend to take the approach, say, "If we put the word out on the radio and newsreels that we can...?"

EDWARDS: I think this was applying to public relations, at its highest level, the techniques that you use to market sofas and so on. It is, to my mind, something you can never do. The kind of public relations we were involved in then was trying to sell an idea, not a product. Selling ideas is a very different thing

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from selling products, and you can't use the repetitive "bang, bang, bang" technique -- "This is the best sofa in the world," whatever it is. It's no use saying that or applying those techniques in trying to influence men's minds. You've got to be much more subtle, much more clever, and above all, much more understanding of the public you are addressing.

WILSON: What you suggested is that you recognized the necessity of getting to, and influencing makers of opinion, that is, the groups which you've singled out. Did the Americans come to recognize this? In any study of public opinion, there is the division between the general appeal and of getting at...

EDWARDS: Yes. I'm not certain I'm very competent to answer that question. I'd say now there is a much better appreciation of it; whether it was happening then -- I think probably it did even begin then, yes. Do you remember Bill [William] Benton?

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WILSON: Oh, yes. He was in advertising.

EDWARDS: He was an awfully intelligent person. He wouldn't have made that kind of mistake. I don't think he was in charge of that in the State Department at that time, was he?

WILSON: He was in charge of the information programs in '46-'47, but then he went out in...

EDWARDS: Yes, I think he had left by then. I can't remember who had charge.

WILSON: In a way, it's a matter of duplication of the functions that a committee like the Luckman committee would have set up. The administration then as now placed a great reliance on polling techniques, the public opinion poll. What was your view of that at the time; did you use polls?

EDWARDS: Well, they were so much in their infancy right then. I don't think we used them at all. And may I say that the British Embassy was just

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as wrong as the polls and anybody else when Harry Truman won his great victory. We were all wrong, I'm ashamed to say.

WILSON: Well, there's a recent parallel for that, isn't there? I wonder; you mentioned in your letter that you singled out also the Greek-Turkish aid program. Do you have any comments?

EDWARDS: Well, I'd like only to use the Greek program as an example of how American opinion has changed. If you will forgive my saying so, how unbelievably wrong-headed Mr. Roosevelt could be at times. When we became involved in the civil war in Greece at the end of the war, the general American assumption was (and many of the commentators and columnists, if I remember rightly, were saying it too) that this was a form of British imperialism, and even a form of British monarchism trying to get the king back, because we believed in kings! We, Foreign Office in particular, of

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course, were saying, "Don't you realize there's a real Communist threat here?" The Communists were promoting this civil war. It didn't mean that every person on the rebel side was Communist, but the Communists were behind it. We were convinced that it was not in our interest to have a Communist country on the Mediterranean, in such a strategic position as Greece is. So we thought it essential to put British troops in to help the Greeks fight off this Communist threat. Could we persuade anybody in America this was so? It was almost impossible. But again I think the State Department had a much better idea of what was going on.

But we couldn't persuade public opinion about this, and Mr. Roosevelt himself seemed to be completely bemused by the idea that this was just a bit of the old British imperialist game which would have to be resisted. So in the end, as you know, it reached the stage where Ernie Bevin, who then had become Foreign Secretary, simply decided that we couldn't any longer afford the expense

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or strain, and we had just got to stop. And so we stopped our aid to Greece and handed the problem over to you, much to the annoyance of everybody in America, including even the State Department. I remember we were accused of "deadlineitis." I don't know when that word was invented; it was the first time I'd ever heard it. "'Deadlineitis' -- for God's sake give us more notice than that, if we've got to do this!"

Once you had become involved, then Truman did absolutely the right thing. The thing I admired him most about, I personally think, was the way he responded to the North Korean invasion of South Korea. He said, almost without hesitation, that this was aggression and must be stopped. Aggression must be stopped anywhere in the world.

WILSON: Many people I've talked to have pointed to that. And they've pointed to his courage in pursuing these programs -- Greek-Turkish aid, even the Marshall plan -- at a time when his political

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future was in a muddle, to say the least. I think that's been very useful to me, because looking back, we've been befuddled a bit by this notion of a bipartisan foreign policy which supposedly existed for sometime late in the war through 1953. How did you read relations? You had to deal of course with not only the administration, the executive branch, but also with Congress, and how did you read the chances for their support there?

EDWARDS: We always found Congress very, very difficult. So far as the BIS, British Information Service, is concerned, we kept right away from them. We didn't have anything to do with them and it was wise for us, I think, not to, really. There were other sides of the Embassy, of course, which knew them quite well, or at least some of them, and used often to be with them. It was never easy, but we had some wonderfully good friends -- people like Bill [J. William] Fulbright; Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg -- he wasn't originally a friend, but I think he ended up a friend. It was just the leading

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ones that we knew, we could attend to them more.

WILSON: Did this suspicion of British "imperial ambitions" continue on the part of some segments of Congress through the period you were there?

EDWARDS: Yes, all the time I was there. I can remember it was even more evident in the latter stages of the war when people were beginning to discuss what the peace would be like. I observed this in talking to industrial groups; I was then in war production, and therefore, was more likely to meet industrial groups than anyone else. One aspect of this suspicion of British intentions was the American attitude to the sterling area; it was always known as the sterling "bloc" as though it were compulsory. There was no compulsion about it at all, actually. The sterling area countries (Australia, for example), kept whatever gold reserves they wished to with the Bank of England, as the leading control bank of that time. They did it because it was convenient to do so. For Australia,

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for example, which traded with Britain far more than anyone else, it was very convenient for them to keep their reserves there and to have the right to draw on the other members' gold reserves when they required it rather than trying to rely entirely on their own reserves. It would have been an impossible task for Australia in those days to have built up sufficient reserves to cover all its requirements; it wasn't a wealthy enough country. It was very much a developing country, and it still is in a way. Through membership of the sterling area, they could draw on our reserves at anytime. So could everyone else, and there were times when what we called the "overseas sterling area" was drawing heavily on the reserves; in other words, the U.K. was financing them. At other times, they were financing us. That's all it was -- a mechanism. It could, I suppose, be looked upon as a way of keeping Americans out, and having an exclusive trading bloc. It was not, however, as exclusive as the Common Market is. I

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couldn't get Americans to understand that; I used to say it hundreds of times. I don't disagree with the Common Market; I agree that European unity must be the ultimate ideal. But I don't quite see why you are so keen on it from an economic as distinct from the political point of view as you are, because shortly it is going to surround itself with an outside tariff which, although not aimed at you, will affect you as the other greatest trading area more than anybody else. And you are pushing us into it.

WILSON: You suggested several questions to me, but how strong was this pressure for the economic integration of Europe? Some people have said that it was very strong, on the American side. Others have said it took definitely second priority behind recovery, and it was an afterthought.

EDWARDS: Well, I think chronologically or even logically that was right. The first thing was to get Europe back on its feet again. Secondly, as a logical

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stage we all wanted to see a united Europe.

WILSON: Did you have to deal with, again, a certain lack of understanding? There was so much rhetoric at the time about, "just do it," "setup a United States of Europe," "follow our example," -- which is not very sensible in some ways.

EDWARDS: Yes, but this is where the sophistication of the United States has grown at a rate I've never seen anywhere. Really the contrast of America today with the America I knew in 1925-26 -- charming, delightful, wonderful place as it was despite its attendant evils -- is almost unbelievable. When it comes to sophistication, your civil servants, your university people, your industrialists -- are now among the most sophisticated people internationally that there have ever been.

WILSON: Would you say that this eight-year period was a sort of testing time or a time of development for this...?

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EDWARDS: Yes, I think this was when the change took place. As I say, during my three years at the Embassy in Washington, I saw in the economic field the British loan, the Marshall plan, and then finally in the political and military field the North Atlantic treaty. Those three represented a vast American move in three years; it was fantastic.

WILSON: Another question which occurred to me from what you said is this matter of the State Department's adherence to abolition of tariffs to the destruction of the imperial preference system. That was rather consistent through the period. That was a kind of a general principle Cordell Hull's State Department. Yet at the same time there were many exceptions to this general rule -- for example, the Agriculture Department the American agricultural community; and the Department of Commerce. They maintained some difficult restrictions, particularly for Great

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Britain. Did you attempt to point out the incongruity?

EDWARDS: Yes, indeed.

WILSON: I'm sure you did. How were these incongruities explained to you? "Oh, well that's just the State Department, the idealists over there?"

EDWARDS: To some extent it was that, and to some extent there were people who could really not see it. Others brushed it off, saying "That's what you have to expect; it's just the lobby. There's nothing you can do about it." That was not really a good answer, but it tended to be the answer.

WILSON: We had numerous amendments and riders to the aid bills, to the Marshall plan aid bills, which tended to be protectionist -- "buy American," "ship 50 percent of all goods in American bottoms." That caused considerable difficulty, I assume.

EDWARDS: Yes, they were very much disliked because

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one felt they were impeding what you were trying to do. With one hand you were helping, and with the other hand you were making it more difficult and to some extent taking away the means whereby we could help ourselves.

WILSON: Is it fair to say that this incongruity was the executive and Congress at loggerheads? That is, did the executive take, in your view, a more straightforward position than Congress because of the involvement with special interests and lobbies, e.g. tobacco lobbies?

EDWARDS: As a general proposition, yes. But of course, not all American departments would see eye-to-eye on a thing like this. Agriculture would almost inevitably have its special angle. And Commerce would be split between the textile type of protectionist, which includes the watchmakers and almost all other industries which were vulnerable to imports, and those industries which were prepared to face any competition and wanted freedom to move into export markets. The latter were mainly the

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more advanced technological industries. To some extent this is still true, and to some extent it's true of all countries, certainly, I think, so far as the "textile mentality" is concerned.

WILSON: Perhaps as a final question, you would respond to or comment on the reverse of that. There were in the period, particularly after the foundation of the Marshall plan, efforts to assist European industries recover their so-called productivity drive. Did you find after you came back to Great Britain difficulty in, first, getting across these points of view, and, secondly, was there concern about what we might call an "Americanization" of Europe, of Great Britain, as a result of these aid programs?

EDWARDS: No, to answer the last point, not in this country, at that stage at any rate; and I'm glad to say, not even now in this country. There is, of course, much more concern in a country like France; that's difficult to understand, since

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there's much less American interest in France than there is here. But for some reason the French are more afraid of it than we are. I don't think this country has ever been afraid of being "Americanized" -- if that's the right phrase.

WILSON: Terrible word.

EDWARDS: Yes, still I know what you mean. As far as the Anglo-American Productivity Council was concerned, it so happened that immediately after finishing my job in the Embassy, I went back to industry and joined the Federation of British Industries -- which we knew as the FBI! One of the jobs I was first given when I got there was the "dollar export drive." This was really the counterpart of the Marshall plan, its object being to earn enough dollars for ourselves to start paying for what we bought from you and so reduce the amount of aid we had to take. We were very successful in that, more successful, I think, than

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any of the other recipients of Marshall aid. The other problem was to improve our productivity. We recognized that, during five years of war, not only had much of our machinery become out of date, but many of our methods had gotten out of date, too. During the war we had had no time to do anything but just turn the stuff out with whatever we'd got. We therefore welcomed the Anglo-American Productivity Council and gave all the support we could to the various missions we used to send over. They were really extraordinarily successful -- industry and trade unions together. The trade unions were just as interested, and supported it as strongly as we did on the employers' side. It was a remarkable effort.

WILSON: Yes, I've come to recognize the importance of this setup.

EDWARDS: I don't know whose idea it was. It was a great idea.

WILSON: Well, I don't know. We've had access to

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Averell Harriman's papers, and apparently some people in his staff were very much involved in developing the notion, but it's difficult to trace down. Just one last question; how should I deal with the matter of anti-socialist bias as it affected relations between the U.S. and Great Britain? Did it exist? Was it important in American opinion?

EDWARDS: Oh, yes. Quite a bit I think. I used to notice it particularly in big industry, but also in my other contacts when I was head of the British Information Services. I used to go and meet groups like the Economic Club of Detroit; those sorts of clubs -- big businessmen. They made no bones of the fact that they were Republicans, almost, I think, without exception. Although they might admire, as a person, a man like Ernie [Ernest] Bevin, who was a great man judged by any

standards, they didn't like the Labour Government of which he was a member. At that stage of American

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opinion, people couldn't distinguish between socialism and communism. One of the points we tried to make was that the most ardent anti-Communists in Britain were the trade unionists, whatever the issue. Trade union leaders were the people who were afraid of communism and much more afraid of it than the average industrialist, because they knew what it meant. They had had to work against it. There were Communist agitators at work in the trade unions then as there are now. They're always there. The trade union leaders knew it first hand. I couldn't get this across very well.

WILSON: I wonder if in part that was because of the differences between trade unions of the United States and those in Great Britain -- the larger political role the trade union plays in Great Britain?

EDWARDS: Yes. They are much more political, unfortunately in my view.

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WILSON: Many Americans misunderstood, I gather, what this role reflected. That's very helpful.

EDWARDS: Of course, there were very active in America, at least in Washington, the Americans for Democratic Action with whom we had close relations, because they very much believed in the philosophies of the Labor Government. I, as then a civil servant, had no objection to expounding the British Government's point of view. But I kept off the more partisan things, for instance, the nationalization of the steel industry which is just finally taking place now. Stafford Cripps produced a bill to give effect to this while I was in Washington. Oliver Franks had then become British Ambassador [to the United States]. I remember Oliver Franks saying to me one day, "What on earth are we going to do about this? I don't understand the arguments for nationalizing the steel industry, do you?" The one conceivable argument I could produce in support of Stafford Cripps' bill was the strategic one. You cannot necessarily rely on, private enterprise providing sufficient surplus capacity and always having it available so that in wartime you've got something to fall back on. Why should private enterprise ever do that? If however the government thinks it's essential, it's up to them, but you don't have to nationalize the steel industry to achieve that. So we agreed that on this we wouldn't take sides. We would just simply say this is the Labor Government's argument.

WILSON: You saw American information activities, in a way, from the other side when you came back. There was a U.S. Information Service office in London during the Marshall plan. Was it well done?

EDWARDS: I'm not really very well placed to judge that; you should ask the newspapermen and radio people of that era rather than me, I think. But maybe I can make one minor criticism; I think they would have been wiser to have made use of me and

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people like me. They never sent me any information or background briefs.

WILSON: Maybe this is a manifestation, in a negative way, of a reliance on the media rather than on opinion leaders. I think we've found that there was this polling notion -- the heavy-handed approach toward changing opinion, rather than getting at the people who really make it.

EDWARDS: Well, maybe they're different now. I was always a great believer, realizing the limitations of resources, that all one could hope to do was to have a few friends in influential places and at least see that they and those others who make opinion received confidential background information on what our viewpoint was. Whether they agreed with it or not, was not for us. At least they could read it and understand it, or talk to us. That's why I should have thought someone like myself just back from that job with a known Anglo-American record might well have been gotten hold of by the U.S. Information Service. I

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don't mean gotten hold of in the wrong sense, but merely, "Would you like to get our stuff?" I would have said, "Yes," right away.

WILSON: Yes. Partly, it was probably a matter of rapid turnover. That was endemic, I think, in all American programs.

EDWARDS: That's probably what happened. By the time I came back, there was no one who knew...

WILSON: Yes. Well, I think this has been very helpful, and I hope I haven't taken too much of your time.

EDWARDS: Well, I do hope it has been. I feel I can only give you a particular slant on this question of the change in American opinion. It's been a fascinating one to me -- who's watched opinion-making all over the world.

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