

The British are promoting a new Entente Cordiale with Russia

by Edward Spannaus and Mark Burdman

In the period leading up to and immediately following Vladimir Putin's election as Russian President, there has been an intensive diplomatic effort by the British to insert themselves as Russia's principal interlocutor with the West. Since February, three senior British officials have been in Russia: Lord George Robertson, Secretary General of NATO; Robin Cook, the U.K. Foreign Secretary; and Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Then, on April 10, it was announced that Putin will visit London on April 16-17, as his first foreign trip since he became acting President last December. Putin will meet with Prime Minister Blair, Foreign Secretary Cook, and then with Queen Elizabeth II herself, the latter meeting to take place at Buckingham Palace.

British overtures

During a speech in Bonn on March 28, former Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei V. Fyodorov, who purports to be part of an advisory team to Putin, said that "Britain is now trying to replace Germany, as Russia's chief dialogue partner in Europe. . . . The upgrading of Britain [by Russia] is the result of the downgrading of Germany. The initiative for upgrading comes from the British side, but the British overtures have been received with great pleasure from the Russian side. . . . The Blair-Putin relationship is very good, and Russia counts on Britain as a partner, in matters dealing with the G-8, global issues, disarmament, and the like, especially as we don't know now who the next American President will be."

In a discussion with *EIR* on March 30, a senior British strategist commented that Blair's entourage sees a "moment of opportunity" to establish Britain as the privileged partner in Russia's relations to the West. As the American President is in his last months of power, and U.S. foreign policy is somewhat stalled, Britain can step forward as "the leader of the West." Additionally, Blair sees his Russian diplomacy as a useful deflecting maneuver, from his growing domestic political problems in the United Kingdom.

Further elaboration was provided by former British Ambassador to Moscow (1988-92), Sir Roderic Braithwaite, during a seminar in Washington on March 31. Braithwaite frankly admitted that, whenever the Russians are having problems with the Americans and the Germans, the British take the opportunity to move in.

Braithwaite, when asked about Fyodorov's remarks, responded by noting that "there have been three times in the recent past—the Russians are unable to talk to the Germans or the Americans." And, he added, "it's at that moment that the British, or the French, compete with one another to get the ear of Moscow."

Braithwaite provided three such examples. "Mrs. Thatcher's shaking hands with Gorbachev is the obvious and most interesting example," he said, noting that "it was a period when, for a whole variety of reasons, relations between America and Russia were not very good, and relations with Germany were complicated." Braithwaite said that Thatcher had "filled a gap for about three years," but then Thatcher "completely misjudged the situation and blew it, and the British ceased to be important. . . . She didn't accept what was happening in the center of Europe."

The second example cited by Braithwaite in which Britain had a special role, was in 1991 when Prime Minister John Major was chairing the Group of Seven, at the time of the coup, and Major continued to be pivotal in the G-7 at the beginning of 1992 for about four months. Braithwaite said, "The British were the only people that were really talking to the Russians at that time."

The third example is Blair's recent trip to St. Petersburg. "The American and the Germans, for different reasons, aren't much talking to the Russians, and Mr. Blair saw an opportunity and took it," Braithwaite said. "From Putin's point of view that was very nice. The question really is whether Blair can sustain it, and I have some doubts about that. . . . At the moment, he is in the position of being the most interesting leader in western Europe. . . . For the Russians, he is somebody interesting in himself, he has a new approach to politics, and he is willing to act as an interlocutor."

A 'special relationship'

Giving some insight into what Blair is up to, a Blairite analyst in London, Dr. Peter Truscott, wrote a gushing article in the April 11 *Guardian* entitled "In Bed with Putin," which proposes that the emerging personal relationship between Blair and Putin could lead to a new Entente Cordiale between Britain and Russia. Truscott boasts that Blair's Britain "has been one of the first Western countries to pursue a critical engagement with the new man in the Kremlin," noting the

trips to Moscow by Cook, Robertson, and then Blair. "With the U.S. focussed on its Presidential elections," Truscott wrote, "Tony Blair is best placed amongst the heads of EU [European Union] member governments to build a personal relationship with Putin."

Commenting on this, a knowledgeable Russian source told *EIR* that there is the definite possibility of Britain and Russia forming such a new Entente Cordiale. British foreign policy is now at a critical juncture, he explained, since relations with the European continent are not good, and there are certain "ill feelings" between Britain and the United States. Under these conditions, leading British strategists are thinking in terms of a "special relationship between Russia and Britain."

There are several factors in this, he noted. One, is that there have been good relations between Russia and the "London Club" of creditors. Second, Putin has promised to create a good climate for "British investment in Russia, particularly in the sectors of oil and gas. In Russia, we need \$5-10 billion in investments, to renew the oil industry. Within four to five years, those British firms investing, will receive good dividends."

'Russia 2000'

Indicative of what may be in the works, is a major conference on the topic of "Russia 2000: A New Reality," which is planned to be held at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Center in London, on April 19-20 — right after Putin's trip to Britain. The conference is being organized by the Russo-British Chamber of Commerce, a channel of British influence into Russia dating back to 1916. Its patron is Prince Michael of Kent, a first cousin to the Queen. The conference is also being sponsored by the British telecommunications firm Cable & Wireless, and the London *Financial Times*.

Speakers from the Russian side will include former Prime Minister and Gazprom chieftain Viktor Chernomyrdin; "free market" privatization fanatic Anatoli Chubais, now prominent in the Russian energy industry; Alfa Bank head Pyotr Aven, who told the London *Guardian* recently that Putin would become a "Russian Pinochet"; and loudmouth Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

British speakers will be representing BP-Amoco, Salomon Smith Barney, and other leading firms in the financial and energy sector. The sponsors are now claiming that 600 people will attend.

As background on the affinity between the Russian "reformers" and circles in Britain, the reader should consult Jonathan Tennenbaum's article on the "national liberals" trying to kidnap Russian economic policy, in the April 7 *EIR* (p. 42). It is notable that a number of the "reformers" now promoting the "Pinochet option" for Russia, were members of the group who were trained at the knee of Lord Harris of Highcross during the late 1980s, in Mont Pelerin Society-style radical free-market economics.

Pope brings message of peace to Holy Land

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Pope John Paul II's pilgrimage to the Holy Land on March 20-26, encompassing Jordan, Israel, and Palestine, is of a spiritual nature, the fulfillment of a life-long desire by the Pope, to visit the sites where Christ was conceived, born, lived, died, and was resurrected. But, precisely because the Pope has marked the second millennium since the birth of Christ, with a spiritual pilgrimage, he has raised the level of deliberation between Israelis and Arabs, to a higher moral and philosophical plane, redefining the parameters of the peace process.

The central theme of the Pope's pilgrimage, which formally began on Feb. 24-26 in Egypt, and included a trip to Mount Sinai, is the continuity of the three great monotheistic religions, unfolding historically from Abraham, through Moses, and culminating in the fulfillment of the Covenant and the Law, in the mission of Jesus Christ. The Pope thus elaborated the notion, first expressed in his visit to the Rome synagogue in 1986, that Judaism represents the "elder brother" of Christianity. By emphasizing the primacy of love in the relationship between God and man, and the dignity of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God, the Pope established this as a principle in the ecumenical dialogue among the three Abrahamic religions, which, in turn, should be an ideal and moral framework for social, political, and economic relations among the nations and peoples of these religious traditions. On this basis, peace is possible. And on this basis, his interlocutors understood the significance of his mission.

Visit in Jordan

In Amman, tens of thousands of Jordanians filled the streets to greet him, and over 30,000 filled the stadium to participate in the mass, including large numbers of Iraqi Christians who live in Jordan. At the mass, 2,000 Jordanian children, symbolizing the 2,000 years since Christ was born, were to receive their first communion from the 15 bishops who con-celebrated the mass with the Pope. His visit was also welcomed by Muslim leaders, including the head of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Jordan's King Abdullah warmly greeted the Pope as he arrived in Amman on March 20, telling him, "Your presence reinforces our determination to seek peace. It is a call for those believers in peace not to lose hope," and welcomed him