

As a result of the referendum and the joint campaigning of pro-EEC men such as Mr. Heath and Roy Jenkins, the Labour Home Secretary, a number of political commentators have been arguing that the national consensus could best find expression either in a coalition government or by the introduction of proportional representation and, through that, a multi-party system. The holding of the referendum was itself so much of a break with British traditions of indirect democracy that it would be unwise merely to shrug off these suggestions as impracticable, in particular since the country will sooner or later have to face some unpalatable economic realities. But so far there is no shred of evidence that a coalition will be sought, or the electoral system changed. All that has happened is that the fringe — on the left, on the right and in the various nationalist camps — has been exposed for what it is. Its influence has been rejected on a historic issue but has not been eliminated.

Prospects for Benn

The move of Anthony Wedgwood Benn (the champion of a "no" on the Labour side) to become Secretary for Energy is not of overwhelming importance in this context. But his longer-term prospects are already discernible. He used his position as Secretary for Industry and the referendum campaign to establish himself firmly as the leader of the Labour left wing. Had the vote gone against the EEC, he might even have seized control of the party. Had the vote been a faint "yes", he could have held himself in reserve for the day of disenchantment. Since the vote was so resoundingly for the EEC, Mr. Benn may be a spent political force until a moment of real economic disaster. His opponents taunted him with trying to establish a "siege economy" in an isolated Britain. Should events ever call for an economic state of siege, Mr. Benn might hope to be the man of the hour. But it is as well to remember that the Labour Party dislikes witchhunts, and that Mr. Wilson is not a fundamentalist; Mr. Benn may well escape for the time being with a glimpse of the wilderness, without actually being banished to it. In any case, there are those who remember that, not many years ago, Mr. Benn was a devotee of the Common Market.

Enoch Powell was Mr. Benn's Tory counterpart, though he had already broken with mainstream Toryism in 1974 when he accepted nomination to the House of Commons by an Ulster Unionist group. Conservatives, unlike Labourites, do not

have a soft spot for rebels; Mr. Powell is likely to remain isolated unless acute crisis overtakes the country.

Together with the devaluation of Mr. Powell and Mr. Benn there has been a great increase in the statures of Mr. Heath and Mr. Jenkins, who raised the campaign for Europe from the level of the argument about butter prices to the level of idealism. Mr. Heath surprised everyone with the enthusiastic response he aroused among university students. The conventional interpretation was that they had moved to the right; but one suspects the facts are not so simple, and that many young people are eager to be offered a vision worth becoming excited about. Whether the EEC, as constituted, will satisfy that wish is another question; the answer will be determined in part by the contribution Britain chooses to make to the workings and further development of the Community.

Jenkins dominant

Mr. Jenkins has re-established himself as the dominant personality of Labour's right. But it is as well to remember that, as a rule, the party is led by a man (such as Mr. Wilson) who can reconcile its two wings, rather than by the leader of either wing. The constitution of the party gives immense influence to the trade unions — especially the big ones — and, for better or for worse, they tend on balance to be against the EEC, which they look upon as a tabernacle for anti-socialist worship of inhuman Market forces. The Trade Union Congress, umbrella organization of the movement, has indicated that it will accept the verdict of the referendum; it remains to be seen whether the big anti-Market unions will at least acquiesce.

The confrontation in 1974 between the Heath Government and the trade unions provided some evidence that Britain cannot be governed against the determined opposition of the trade union movement. But there is some reason to hope that many union leaderships that opposed joining the EEC may now grudgingly concur. But there is a difference between concurring and actually embracing the Common Market. The result of the referendum may contribute towards a further worsening of labour relations in some industries, adding to the already serious economic problems the country faces.

The classic argument for joining the EEC has been that it would help to solve those problems. In the very short run that may be so; now that the referendum has ended the uncertainties, one barrier to

*TUC
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