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and now . . . nuclear hypocrisy in Britain

It has been a quite remarkable two months in which the issue of nuclear weapons testing has emerged from the shadows in which it has been lurking for ten years. The United States and Soviet Union have made noises about a further treaty; India has detonated her first device; China has fired another one (her sixteenth); France has ventured on a new series. It was only Britain of the nuclear powers who had not contributed to the drama, and now she too has obliged in characteristic fashion—by being found out.

The revelation by Mr Chapman Pincher in the *Daily Express* that there was shortly to be a British test in Nevada was greeted officially by refusals either to confirm or deny. Now Mr Wilson has announced that the test has already taken place. He must have strong feelings of *déjà vu*, as he found himself with a similar legacy from the Conservative government in 1965 when he last stopped Britain's testing activities.

Since this test surfaced as the result of a leak—and not a government orchestrated one at that—one is bound to ask whether this really is the first for nine years or whether previous testing in Nevada has been kept more effectively behind a security screen. There is really no way that anyone can find out, as testing in Nevada goes on so regularly that there would be nothing untoward to the outside world about the occasional additional test. Obviously whilst Mr Wilson was in power in the sixties there would be ideological objections, but Mr Heath was Prime Minister for nearly four years and would have no commitment to self-restraint. It seems inconceivable that it would take four years from the brakes being released until as vigorous an organisation as Aldermaston could find time to test.

The tragedy of the recent revelations is that this British obsession for secrecy in all matters of defence has rebounded so vigorously on prospects for British diplomacy. A few weeks ago *Nature*, along with almost everyone else in the West, was rebuking India for becoming a nuclear power, and the main line that most, including ourselves, pursued was that it was simply hypocritical to talk of a nuclear explosive as capable of being labelled peaceful. Britain, of course, could be particularly smug since she had renounced the provocative gesture of firing nuclear devices years ago. Our restraint was an example to the world. Now we find ourselves with much the same sort of hypocrisy on our doorsteps—a failure to be at least elementally honest about nuclear affairs; worse, a willingness to have our own test labelled, by default, as American. It is difficult

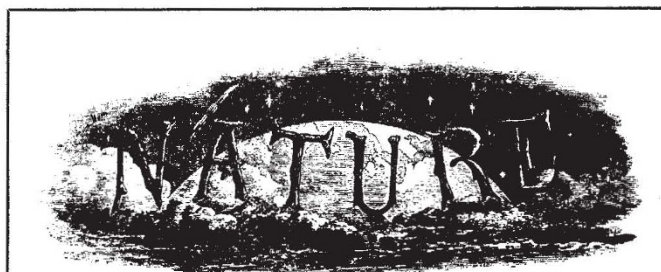
to see why secrecy should extend this far. Obviously the Labour Government were not going to reveal the hot potato they were passed, but surely the Conservative government would have been in no danger in giving prior notice. The announcement of a test would barely have stirred a ripple; the discovery is bound to make waves.

The real significance of recent events, however, is that they show how inextricably intertwined are British and American nuclear interests. It is just not possible for one country to detonate explosions at another country's facility without there being such a high degree of liaison that one is bound to conclude that the two countries act as one in nuclear matters. Of course, the possession of Polaris submarines already ensures this to a large extent; the nuclear test simply brings it once more to our attention. This liaison reduces Britain's independence in the discussion of nuclear issues on a world stage to an ineffectual level. This is very unfortunate at a time when the two superpowers appear to be on the verge of agreeing between themselves on some form of nuclear test treaty.

The form most widely discussed is of a threshold agreement, restricting tests not to exceed a certain seismic magnitude. There have been strident objections to this throughout the scientific community, based on a feeling that such a treaty is easy to find loopholes in, leaves room for ambiguity and has not been given a fair debate in wide enough a community. It is possible to sense qualms in British circles too, but what hope is there of an independent and questioning line under these circumstances?

The entanglement, however, does not simply constrain Britain in nuclear matters. It is impossible to see how Atlantic and European relationships on all diplomatic matters can fail to be influenced to a degree by the nuclear commitment. It is high time that the nuclear relationship and its influence on foreign policy was looked at with great care.

100 years ago



MR. JAMES LICK, of San Francisco, California, having in the course of his life accumulated a large fortune, has recently concluded a deed by which he conveys all his property to seven persons upon trust to be applied to various worthy objects. Among these, 700,000 dols. are to be applied to the construction of a more powerful telescope than any yet made, to be erected at an observatory in California, and 300,000 dols. to found, in California, a school of the mechanical arts.

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