

last count, 1.7 per cent) — a firm promise of the irresistible ground-swirl of accelerated wage drift and price rise. The mild April budget does not seem to have curbed demand at all, nor the steady upward surge of public and private investment — the boom is well underway, and imports of manufactured and semi-manufactured goods, stimulated by the re-equipment taking place, have produced sinking hearts at the Treasury and faint tremors of nervousness in the Cabinet. Since there is little else to fight about (*pace* Keeler) the balance of payments is an innocuous crisis issue, and even perhaps could be the little shove that would topple Home.

The British election campaign, distinguished so far alike by its interminable prolongation and triviality, now faces the hurdles of long-summer boredom. Parliament has now reassembled for its last jog-trot before the polls — when it returns again, it will all be over and everyone will be sniffing the wind for the smell of blood from the Party Conference of the defeated Party. Home needs to win to prove the necessity of his leadership of the Conservatives — the sacrifices demanded of the backbench baronets recently (the erosion of Resale Price Maintenance, Southern Rhodesia, Cyprus) will be sharply limited by defeat. And Wilson needs to win to salvage his merry men from a further period of Opposition meditation — this time, the sacrifices the Left has made to keep the boat from rocking might produce a St Bartholomew's Night of vengeance on the failures of the Right to bring home victory. The nearer the election comes now, the less easy it becomes to discern exactly which party will be selected to bear all the strain of open political controversy within its midst — just to save there being any controversy between the parties.

Time to Go Home

PRSISING the British presence out of the non-British world has been as difficult as removing the French — in both cases, the rights of the majority have had to wait upon the agonised evolution of the imperial psychology. Whereas the French fought long and bitterly to retain Indo-China and North Africa, but, once removed, retained little foothold that could survive local opposition, the British, while launching, with much self-righteousness and congratulation, so many 'new nations' in good time, have retained a scatter of

footholds throughout their former territories to plague the lot of the newly independent. Hong Kong will one day be a *causis belli*, and Singapore already keeps temperatures high. Gan in the Indian Ocean has prompted increasing resistance from the islanders, Aden is notorious. To eject the British from Cyprus (still not fully accomplished) took a long and bitter war; ejecting them from the old Suez base caused a major international incident. On balance, there seems almost nothing to be gained by the rest of the world from these isolated spots of red on the multi-coloured patchwork of the new world, and an immense amount to lose.

Of course, the British argue predictably that Aden is needed to maintain world peace — Aden guards the oil routes from Arab depredations or Egyptian perfidy, and is a refuelling and servicing point for military traffic from Europe to both East Africa and the Far East — given the military revolts in Kenya and Tanganyika most recently, and the tension across the Straits of Malacca, it is suggested, Aden is vital. But the case is, at best, antiquated, and, at worst, rubbish. First, it is Albion, not Arabia, that is notoriously perfidious, but, in any case, international relations cannot be based upon the prejudices of the retired Colonel in Cheltenham. The Arabs, warts and all, have shown no peculiar or unique defect in the government of their countries or the maintenance of foreign relations that can be separated from the presence nearby of foreign Great Powers — and in the case of Egypt, they have shown considerable ability, despite British predictions to the contrary, in operating the Suez Canal. Relations between States can never in fact be equal politically until they are equal economically, but at least the practice of equity can be more actively pursued than this sly special pleading from London. The oil belongs to the Arabs, the Canal belongs to Egypt: and, superficial socialist appearances to the contrary apart, the law of private property must govern the use which the rest of the world makes of that oil and the Canal. That means that the highest bidder the Arabs are prepared to accept, and the promise of a good price, can alone be the effective means by which the rest of the world lays claim to Arab resources. The special policeman role over incompetent or malevolent foreigners, exercis-

ed by bored British army officers, has long been dead: it should now with due decorum be buried lest putrefaction irreparably damage the atmosphere.

The case for staging points is more complicated. Whether East African Governments should be protected by foreigners from popular uprisings is clear — they should not; and the introduction of British troops as the private bodyguard of an unpopular regime is no less reprehensible now than it was in the heyday of imperialism. Squabbles among East African soldiery are a different matter, but here the only ultimate safeguard is some African defence force, not summoning the British from half-way round the world.

Malaysia, by contrast, is a somewhat more gritty question. Here the threat is not domestic but foreign, and, so far as can be seen, Malaysia has as much right to exist as any other new Federation, and has no peculiar duty to preserve Indonesia's *status quo* by acting as a foil for its President. Sadly, Sukarno is the central pillar of British military power in South-East Asia — if he did not exist, the British would, with little plausibility, have to invent him. Of course, it would be much pleasanter if somebody else with a less hair-raising reputation than the British could be inveigled into supporting Malaysia — Australia, or, better still, a polyglot UN force. But there seems little chance at the moment that either Malaysia or the UN would welcome this relationship, and, given the awesome political problems of launching and maintaining such a force (itself relatively inefficient since it cannot be politically committed), it looks as if the Tunku will have to continue to lean on the British.

Which brings the account back to Aden. If there is any justification for the British retaining a foothold in South Arabia, sadly the responsibility rests with President Sukarno. This, of course, in no way supports British policy in Aden — the hastily stumped up Federation, the imposition of a regime of classical repression, the refusal to hold new elections, the brutal onslaught on the Radfan mountains. Sooner or later, the reappraisal must be agonising, and must reach some *modus vivendi* with President Nasser. Both Egypt and Britain are involved in foreign military adventures along both sides of the Yemen border, but the balance of justice rests clearly with the Egyptians.'