

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Through 12 months dark with conflict, 1949, like all years, leaves its message for posterity. It was written in Washington by the representatives of 12 nations. It was countersigned across the freedom-loving world by 330 million people. "Strength in peace for the prevention of war." That was the message of the Atlantic Pact. The message of the year.

Results from this "show of strength" came quickly. The effectiveness of the giant airlift - allied with the Western world's determination to stand firm, forced the Russians to lift their inhuman blockade of Berlin. The international horizon seemed suddenly brighter on that April night on the Autobahn when, after 11 months of fingers-on-triggers, East was again linked with West. The Atlantic Pact nations had proved themselves powerful enough to enforce Europe's right for peace. That was the lesson of Berlin.

Normal conditions returned to the city. But not law and order. Soon, German was fighting German, with a railway strike - trumped up by the Russians - the cause of it all.

The Reds were busy, elsewhere, too. In China, Communism scored its greatest victory since the coup in Czechoslovakia. Troops of Mao-Tse-Tung marched into Shanghai unopposed. Within weeks, they were at the gates of Hong Kong. Troops went out from Britain to reinforce the garrison. Hong Kong was determined to stay British. With China almost theirs, Moscow and the 14 men in the Kremlin found 1949 mixing the bitter with the sweet. Though they possessed the world's biggest army and the secret of the atom bomb, they were faced by a united Western world - ready to halt the spread of Stalin's empire - by force, if need be.

Stalin had to face trouble within his camp, too. Yugoslavia - the Red's gateway to the Mediterranean - stepped out from behind the Iron Curtain. Tito became independent and the West moved cautiously to help him in his stand against Stalin.

But it was in a more positive, progressive manner that the Atlantic Pact nations found their true strength. At Strasbourg, Europe's leading statesmen (among them the man who made their meeting possible) fulfilled a long-cherished dream. They set up a Council of Europe - a Parliament of 12 nations. Overshadowing the discussions was the problem of Germany, unrepresented in the Council, yet geographically the heart of Europe. Under Chancellor Adenauer, Germany had its first free parliament for 16 years. But its future was bleak. The heart of Europe was ailing. Germany was split in two. The Eastern half - firmly in the Communist grip - had all the trappings of the police state. On the Nazis old stamping ground -

Unter den Linden - Berlin echoed again to the rhythm of the jackboot.
Were the lights of Europe to go out again?

Among the gloom, there was also a lighter side. After a decade of darkness, Britain got lit up!

Back to normal, too, was Epsom and the Derby. Not so normal was the way jockey Elliott scored his triumph. For the first time in history, only the camera could sort out the winner. And the camera gave the verdict to white-banded Nimbus - over Swallow Tail and Amour Drake.

Charles Elliott gave Britain the race of the year. And from another Charles - Prince Charles of Edinburgh - come the pictures of the year. They were taken at Windlesham Moor - where Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip spent some happy days with the world's most famous baby, before naval duties called the Duke to Malta.

Still unaware of the great destiny that is his, the young Prince bears with him - like his family - the deep affection of the British people. That affection was borne out again at the year's Royal wedding. There was a warm greeting for the King's nephew and his pretty bride from Vienna - Earl and Countess of Harewood.

The King and Queen were the centre of another ovation from the crowd. The King's presence showed that he had fully recovered from his long troublesome illness. For the King's Ministers, 1949 was not such a healthy year. Like all democratic governments, they were assailed by one side, acclaimed by the other. Only a General Election - due within six months - can give a nation-wide verdict on who's been right. Pre-election year had kicked off favourably. After nearly eight years on coupons, clothes came off the ration. Yet there was no rush to buy. For rationing was there in a more telling form: Money.

Good news number two came with a sticky end to sweet rationing. For nine years, mouths had watered for this great day. But it was too much of a tummy-ache for the country's economy. And soon, personal points came back.

From the industrial front, too, came a setback to the nation's resources. Four thousand London dockers went on strike - causing chaos among exports and imports. The dispute (known to have been Communist-inspired) centred on the Canadian ship "Beverbrae." After two weeks of deadlock, the Government proclaimed a state of emergency and called in the services to unload the ships.

To a troubled nation, relief came in an unexpected form. The weather - that most popular of British institutions - was honoured with a heatwave label. Millions sweltered and summer's password was just Phew!

And even the weather went for export. Governor and Mrs. Tom Dewey headed thousands of American visitors. Tourism became our biggest dollar

industry. Yet it was not enough to satisfy the exchequer. Returning from America, Sir Stafford shocked the nation by announcing the Government's fateful decision to devalue the pound, 18 years after Britain first went off the gold standard. While stepped-up production was still the long-term key to Britain's recovery, devaluation (in the Government's view) was the only way out of our present difficulties. Cheaper prices for our goods abroad were to mean bigger sales. And though our imports were to cost us more, inflation was checked by the Trades Union's formula for wage-freezing. Industry's response to the call for greater output was magnificent indeed. Export targets were set up, reached and overhauled. And amid this nation-wide achievement, there was achievement, too, for individual Britons. For "craftsmanship and courage" there were the Smith Brothers - Stanley and Colin - who crossed the Atlantic in a home-made yacht. For "endurance and pluck" there was Yorkshire schoolboy Philip Mickman - youngest-ever to swim the Channel. And for the mightiest in this year of achievement there were Britain's aircraft-makers. To win the world's endurance record for jets, a British designer perfected mid-air refuelling. By this means, a Meteor jet was able to stay up six times its normal flying time.

World record No. 2 was set up by the unique Comet - the first all-jet airliner. Built by De Havilland, it makes every other passenger plane out of date. 1950 should see it in operation. For the Comet's pilot, John Cunningham of night fighter fame, its maiden flight highlighted a year of triumph. For another test pilot - Bill Pegg - 1949 was also a successful year. The giant Bristol Brabazon was Pegg's baby. At Filton Airfield, the 130-ton colossus - largest plane in the world - took the air. It was a flight that made aviation history.

At year's end - as London and the nation honoured the men of Amethyst, there came a reminder of Britain's great destiny. For these men represented the countless thousands who, all over the world, are upholding Britain's name. It is they - the nameless heroes - who will keep up this country's proud history. Placing its faith in the ordinary people, Britain bravely faces 1950.