

The Attlee Governments in Perspective -
commitment and detachment in the writing of contemporary
history

Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

The early to mid-nineteen eighties saw the publication of several substantial studies of the two immediate post-war Labour governments, studies which - in claiming to meet all the requirements of scholarly history - also made out a strong case for the possibility of a value-free explanation of the recent past.

The basis for this assertion is examined in the present account by means of a preliminary survey of the changes through which the literature on the Attlee governments has already passed, drawing attention to the differing attitudes and presuppositions of the main schools of historical and other disciplinary opinion and the extent to which these differing approaches - exhibiting contrasting elements of commitment and detachment, and of insight and distortion - can be shown to have contributed to, or departed from, the notion of an enhanced understanding.

Evidence for the growth of a more objectively critical history is then explored in greater detail by tracing the development of some of the central problems and controversies relating to the period after 1945, clarifying the main points at issue, outlining the evolution of evidence and interpretation, and demonstrating the way in which empirically-based explanations have, by scholars working independently together, become recognisably accepted. That these arguments have given rise to a variety of alternative viewpoints, which it is has not proved possible to choose between or account for on empirical grounds alone, also lends support - however - to the continuing influence of personal, partial and evaluative considerations.

To this end, a framework of historiographical change is proposed which, in tracing the progress made towards a more dispassionate view of the Attlee years, and the reasons for the persistence of remaining disagreements, throws light upon the wider question of the possibilities and limitations of contemporary historical inquiry.

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Bibliography

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1: Commitment and detachment(1)

With the publication in close succession in the early part of the 1980's of several scholarly accounts of the immediate post-war Labour governments (1945-51), many of them from leading specialist historians, the study of the 'Attlee era' - itself an improbable title to earlier generations - was said to have come of age and been "stripped of the mythology"(2). Painstaking research began to take the place of conjecture and opinion, and more balanced judgements could prevail. It was only now, after a lengthy cooling-off period, that the real history of those years could be clearly discerned, free of partisan controversy. The publishing bulge of the early eighties, in terms both of range and quality one of the most productive in modern times, placed the Attlee governments squarely in the historical and not just recent past, providing a convincing demonstration, according to its exponents, of what the study of contemporary history is capable of.

What do these large claims of historiographic maturity imply?

The usual objections to any proper discussion of contemporary history are three-fold: that basic and reliable documentation about the recent past is not yet available; that the all-important advantage of perspective is lacking; and that the events in question are often still too bound up with current passions and interests.

So far as the early post-war period is concerned, the first two of these objections have ceased to have any

1 A condensed version of this thesis appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of *Contemporary Record*.

2 K.Laybourn, *The Labour Party 1881-1951* (1988), p.123.

validity. Source material is now plentiful, made up of official papers, private archives and oral testimony, from which the historical narrative can be reconstructed. Some, indeed, have remarked on the present, bewildering abundance of records(3). Many 'big' books have appeared, especially in the form of biographies and diaries, not always to universal acclaim(4). But the freeing up of evidence has meant that much more is now known and in greater and convincing detail, such that the years in question have even begun to lose any self-contained unity. Technical improvements have led to scholarship (in all its aspects - foreign, economic and social) outgrowing the conventional limits. Far more monographs and articles have appeared than any one person can digest. Wartime and immediate post-war Britain are even in danger of becoming over-studied.

And secondly, the gradual passage of time, and a knowledge of what happened next, has enabled historians to separate out the significant from the insignificant, and to gauge the long-run importance of what then occurred. Later Labour governments did not, or were not perceived as having, measured up to the expectations set in the 1940s; the ideas and policies of that time were gradually opened up to searching inspection; the full consequences of reform began to work themselves through. Labour's 'radical' claims were qualified by ideological and structural constraints. Attention turned back to the war, to the critical power shift of 1940, and the extent to which war and postwar formed a continuous whole. The subordination of domestic policy to external priorities was recognised. Welfare achievements, once hailed, came under heavy fire. Eventually, and controversially, 1945 emerged as the natural

3 H.M.Pelling, preface to *The Labour Governments 1945-51* (1984).

4 "Perhaps the time has now come when it would be interesting to know rather less about Edward Hugh John Neale Dalton..." E.Christiansen, 'Passion that's bred in the bone', *The Independent*, 29 January 1987, p.15.

starting-point - or at least major staging-post - in any analysis of the century-long descriptions of British recovery and decline. If anything, then, the period visibly grew in importance as time elapsed. Speaking to contemporary concerns, the "twilight zone" between the ending of news and the beginning of history was effectively closed(5).

It might be argued that the third objection to studying contemporary events has also fallen away, in view of the impeccably academic approach characteristic of most of the latest works. But this is a harder point to agree on. A lively debate about the achievements of Labour's six years in power stretches all the way back to the nineteen forties, and even before, fuelled in the main by internal party polemics, from which it is no easy task for the modern day historian to escape. Seen in this light, does the recent quantitative increase in published works also indicate a qualitative change in the nature of the historical discussion? Or can it be regarded as a further instalment in a much longer-running dispute spanning the political and academic worlds?

There is nothing unusual about the mixing of scholarship and polemic. It has to be recognized, even where it might be deplored. Many of the classic controversies of recent times have derived their impetus from just such a potent combination. It matches almost exactly the contrast between 'commemorative' (celebratory) and 'conceptual' history outlined by Furet(6). Each in turn represents a fundamentally different kind of attitude and approach to the subject in hand.

5 A.Seldon, 'Detachment myth and the up to date taboo', in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 31 July 1987, p.12.

6 F.Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (English edition 1981), Part I.

One approach rests upon the view that complete objectivity on the part of the historian is in reality illusory, and that studying the past as an end in itself amounts to little more than antiquarianism. What matters is the duty to be involved and engaged, not any presumption to a bogus impartiality. History is not meant simply to entertain, but has the power to excite and instruct and deliver a call to action. Commitment is all-important, even commitment in the service of a political idea. Bias is inescapable. The truth is sometimes partisan. Hence the radical challenge.

As against this, others take a poor view of those who write out of indignation or identify themselves with a cause. History, according to this approach, should be a purely academic exercise, something that is intrinsically interesting but which is, of itself, of no practical significance. The ability not to take sides is cultivated. One must endeavour to stand apart from fashion, or prejudice, or topical relevance, all of which are distorting. Judging an argument according to the motives of those proposing it is a mistake. History is not then to be assessed by its utility - it is, in the strictest sense, futile. We can term this the classical ideal.

Taken together, these two approaches - sharpened for the purposes of argument - offer quite different explanations as to how it is that historical understanding advances: the former by implying that strongly-held beliefs, born of conviction, can do much to open up new lines of inquiry, the latter by suggesting that the possibility of a dispassionate viewpoint, and therefore the validity of an account, increases over time. The one seeks out, not agreement, but contradiction and the exchange of ideas. Competing interpretations do battle. Knowledge is seen as an ally of power. The other aims at the true essence of things. Good scholarship will drive out bad. The less

'contemporary' the history, the better.

This commitment-detachment polarity, as it has been called(7), is a familiar one in other areas of the human sciences. The notion of intellectual detachment is said to have first arisen in response to a reform-minded intelligentsia in nineteenth-century Russia. It was defined as such by its opposite - as a reaction to somebody else's commitment, nourishing the idea of the free-standing scholar, equipped by training and temperament to fend off the tyranny of passing influences. But the wish to dispel all forms of special pleading had already helped in the emergence of earlier, objective scholarly disciplines. A basic tenet of the classical view held that the intrusion of personal values into any scholarly field actively retards development. A key text in this regard was Julien Benda's *La Trahison des Clercs*, which first appeared in 1927(8). Benda extolled the virtues of men of learning in the past who had been entirely indifferent to the lure of political passions, or who had taken on the task of telling laymen about truths which were displeasing to them. The old clerks, he wrote, "put before the world a scale of values, in the spirit of philosophical reflection". The modern intellectual, by contrast, taught that the practical was by definition also the moral, having been won over by the craving for action, a preoccupation with desired ends, and the embracing of fixed ideas. The new clerks, in so doing, had betrayed their vocation. Although Benda found those to be "general characteristics of the present age", he attacked specifically the historians, many of them of German origin, who over the previous half century had begun to indulge in "fanaticism". Change in the social status of intellectuals was one of the causes of this, but there had also been changes in their thinking - a growing romanticism, the

7 J.Urry, 'Value-freedom in Social Science', *The Cambridge Review*, 8 May 1970, pps.146-149.

8 J.Benda, *La Trahison des Clercs* (1927).

exaltation of feeling at the expense of thought, and an overall decline in mental discipline. He emphatically parted company with those who wished for "the reign of the philosophers".

Benda's book was prophetic. Over the following decade, a large number of prominent European intellectuals voluntarily enlisted in the political struggle of warring ideologies, or else found themselves fatally compromised. Benda himself (a Dreyfusard in his youth), while lamenting the fact that "all the moderns, even the best of them, have respect only for action", succumbed to the urgings of the time, joining the anti-fascist camp. The dilemma that this involved, long appreciated on the continent, only came late to Britain(9). Even in the late 'thirties, and even at the London School of Economics, the prior 'claims' of politics(10) were energetically resisted. The hard classicist position was expressed in a variety of works. Robbins denied any normative status to economic generalisations, attempting to make it clear that statements about the way in which an economic system worked or *could* work did not in themselves carry any presumption that that was the way in which it *should* work(11). Hutt, in a further development, tried to establish some principles of objectivity, arguing that intellectuals were peculiarly vulnerable to forms of "power-thought" associated with the actions of interest, propaganda and custom, thereby inhibiting the accumulation of indisputable knowledge. What was needed, he suggested, was the build-up of an expert body of opinion, reached by logical inquiry, which would gradually diminish points of difference and gradually

9 W.Laqueur, 'Literature and the historian', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1967), p.12.

10 See 'The Claims of Politics', *Scrutiny*, September 1939, pps.130-167.

11 L.Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932).

increase areas of agreement(12). And Oakeshott, in his inaugural lecture at the LSE in 1950 (signalling an abrupt departure from the radical enthusiasms of his predecessor, Harold Laski) and in other writings, spoke out against what he called "practical" (ie. present-minded) history.

Ransacking the past for moral lessons or treating it as "retrospective politics" were both non-historical traits which destroyed any basis for rational discussion. The very pastness of the past had to be insulated, just as much for the near-contemporary as for the ancient. Intellectual opposition to the ideologising of politics has been traced back to this Oakeshottian moment(13).

There is, however, one fundamental snag with this line of thinking: it is open to the charge that the denunciation of ideology is in some sense an ideology of sorts too - not least in the passionate commitment to detachment. This was indeed implied in Max Weber's original conception of value-freedom (the scientist is not uncommitted, but committed to science). Karl Popper, in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, found a way to surmount the difficulty. Aspiring to impartiality, he saw, all too often begets the counterclaim that pure objectivity is unachievable, an argument which leads nowhere since one can never know when every last prejudice has been eliminated. What both these outlooks neglected, he continued, were the social aspects in the advancement of scientific understanding. Objectivity springs not from the psychological attempts of individual scholars to be 'objective', but from the co-operation of many scholars sharing the common methodology and accepted standards of publicised exchange and debate. The creative impulse may be subjective; critical evaluation is not. Personal biases are ironed out in the mass. As a consequence, "the authority of scientific opinion remains

12 W.H.Hutt, *Economists and the Public* (1936).

13 H.M. Drucker, *The Political Uses of Ideology* (1974), p.118.

essentially mutual; it is established *between* scientists, not *above* them" (Polyani, 1962)(14). Scientific knowledge was collegiate, and the product of a collaborative effort.

As in the natural sciences, so in the social sciences and the humanities. History too has its analogue, a 'community of scholars' or confederacy of intellects, whose collective aim, however partial and selective their individual wishes may be, "is to climb to an increasingly comprehensive view of the past"(15), and whose works of positive scholarship are only likely to endure in so far as they are able to "rise above the mere expression of prejudice"(16). It is this group nature of the advancement of historical understanding which circumvents the problem of commitment and detachment and which is held to be the true mark of a maturing discipline.

To what extent is this picture of free-flowing argument a reality? The existence of competing schools of thought formed around ties of loyalty, of age, and of common disciplinary approach allied to distinctive understandings and interpretations can be said - by, for example, propagating inflexible orthodoxies - to interfere with the habit of open discussion essential to academic progress. Schools that subdivide and delimit a field of study can also be partial and one-sided, as Popper had already demonstrated. He had in mind in particular certain forms of "historicist" (mainly marxist) analysis. But the malign influence of academic coteries, made up of schoolmen and copyists who are unable to go beyond what they have imbibed from their masters, is well attested to: The academy, then, is always a contested one. How much more liable this is to happen in the realm of contemporary argument about events

14 M.Polyani, *The Republic of Science* (1962), p.14.

15 J.R.Hale(ed), *The Evolution of British Historiography* (1964), preface.

16 G.R.Elton, *The Practice of History* (1967), p.105.

which have just passed by, where dogmatic advocacy and persuasion outweigh the discriminating, and where all talk is conducted against a backdrop of partisan feeling.

The special nature of Labour history and politics, and of the significance of the Attlee governments above all, is a further complicating factor. The Labour party is a party with a keen sense of its own past, and the intellectual left has always played a large role in influencing the party's self-understanding. But the influence has not only been cerebral. Sympathy with Labour's aims has involved "feeling as well as thinking, loyalty as well as argument, aspirations as well as principles"(17). For many of the party's early evangelical publicists the truth and importance of socialism were sufficient to explain its impact. Later writers were inclined to judge the party's achievements in relation to, or in supposed departure from, an abstract, even sentimental, socialist ideal. These attitudes have been most apparent in the reactions to Labour's crowning occasion in and after 1945, when the party was presented with the opportunity to fulfill its historic purpose. The gap between the circumstances of political life and the political literature of 'the party of the book' was never closer. The view taken by an author of the Attlee governments is still apt to be regarded as a touchstone of (unarguable) personal faith as much as intellectual conviction.

It is no surprise to discover then that, for all the technical changes in evidence, perspective and interpretation, a dynamic, living history can also be shaped by polemical and partisan opinion. Rival schools promote rival descriptions and prescriptions. In this case, instead of a tidy evolution towards the true character of the recent past, and the conquest of historical myth by historical

17 M. Shock, 'R.H. Tawney', *The Listener*, 20 October 1960, p.671.

reality, changing representations circle in apparently aimless variation, swayed by an attachment to a favoured method, doctrine or faith.

The chief intention - with these considerations in mind - is to explore the continuing tension between the demands of partisanship and the pursuit of impartiality, and to describe their effects upon the changing face of 1945. A 'second order' activity of this kind need not resemble a mere booklist spiced with comment, which generates nothing new, or a liberal evasion of the real stuff of history. A history of the histories is itself a legitimate contribution to the process of revising and refining an historical appreciation. The vigorous and voluminous output of studies on the immediate post-war period justifies such an overview. In what ways - and by what means - has the debate moved forward? What main schools have emerged and in what relation do they stand to each other? What have been the main thematic issues which have been argued over? What of the influence of fluctuating allegiances and passions? And what signs are there, if any, of the forming up of a critical consensus? Can a framework of historiographical change - along the lines of common scholarly endeavour conceived of by Popper - be satisfactorily constructed?

2: A History of the Histories

The dual purpose of this scene-setting chapter is to trace - in broad outline - the various traces through which the body of literature on the early post-war period has passed, and to identify, in the course of that evolution, the main currents of political, historical and other opinion out of which it has been composed. In so doing, the aim will be to point the way ahead to a more detailed examination of the most important themes and controversies, as and when they happened to arise, in Chapter 3.

The forces driving the argument (indeed any intellectual debate) along have been of several kinds. They have, in the first place, been technical - to do with the unearthing and compiling of factual information, the defining and refining of concepts, and the classifying and categorising of accumulated knowledge. They have been interpretative, involving attempts to give order and meaning to the receding past, influenced by the impact of topical concerns and changing historical circumstances. And lastly they have been subjective, reflecting the professional, social and cultural background of the principal writers and historians themselves. Put another way, some of the developments have been 'internal', thrown up from within; some have been largely 'external' in origin, but impinging upon the view of the past; and some have illustrated the way external events have been internalised(18). Though analytically distinct, these aspects are practically intertwined.

These forces have not operated in the abstract.

18 T.Hutchison, *The Politics and Philosophy of Economics* (1981), pp.23-24.

They have shaped, and in turn been shaped by, the emergence of distinctive disciplines and approaches, which have structured the subject-matter, established appropriate methodological ground rules and worked out which questions are most in need of explanation. The expansion and sub-division of the social sciences in the post-war period is the most notable development of this kind for the years with which we are concerned. It is the (often unphrased) presuppositions and assumptions of each of these ways of looking at recent history - which exponents do not so much 'see' as see the world 'through'(19) - which sets them off against each other, encouraging the rise of alternative, even competing schools of thought vying for supremacy. Typically, the actual grounds for disagreement may well be factual (in so far as the available evidence lends support to a variety of assertions) or evaluative (assuming that facts and values are easily separated) or a combination of both, and many of the arguments to do with the years from 1945 to 1951 fall within these terms. Progress is evident by open contradiction, as well as by more subtle shifts in the point of view. Wherever opposing schools share a common mode of inquiry, all such differences are deemed to be resolvable, so that, although the disputants are preoccupied with those matters on which they differ, the general intellectual tone is set by the accepted formulations on which they agree.

But this is not all. The debatable nature of the historical past is never exclusively confined to areas of evidence or interpretation. Differences may be not only logical or empirical but also philosophical. Approaches can be at such odds that they only begin to make sense once their underlying beliefs have been made explicit. In such cases, clashes of outlook emanate from different forms of argumentation which are not just incompatible

but incommensurable, and incapable of being measured against any common, objective scale. Dialogue is barely possible. The point at issue is not - given these characteristics - whether opposing arguments are right or true; the respective schools have first to make themselves understood.

Fundamental polarities are often taken to be essential to the creative process. "Without contraries, no progress", wrote William Blake(20). To complain about the multiplicity of viewpoints is to complain about the many-sidedness of reality. The orthodox can point to standards of assessment which do allow for valid comparison-making - correspondence with the facts, comprehensiveness, parsimony, explanatory power. But the sceptic will always draw attention to the lack of acknowledged criteria for choosing among rival attitudes or interpretations. Without such criteria, it is held, it is not possible to maintain that the pattern of historiographical change is an improving, advancing one, or that movement is always eventually forward movement - the basis, after all, on which the new-found prestige of contemporary history ultimately rests.

Although the influence of the opposing strains of objectivity and engagement are commonly recognised, even the best, as one historian of ideas recently wrote, have only nibbled at the matter inconclusively(21). In what follows, and in picking out and discriminating between the different senses to which they apply, it may help to establish what can be seen to be a fuller range of detachments and commitments, whose finer distinctions

20 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', in *Selected Poems of William Blake*, B. de Selincourt (ed)(1968), p.139.

21 J.Burrow, reviewing J.Clive's 'Not By Fact Alone' in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2-8 February 1990, p.125.

need to be drawn out, before going on to explore how far and in what way they might be functionally related.

The English Way

We have it from Messrs Collini, Winch and Burrow - in their discipline history of nineteenth century political science(22) - that the "noble study" of politics was always infused with mundane partisanship. The pioneers in the field (Sidgwick, Bagehot and Dicey were the best known exemplars) equated political life with the "magnetic pull" of the business of government. They behaved liked unacknowledged legislators, "alarmed at the boisterous and untutored energies of the new democracy" starting to take shape. Sound political judgement for them could only come from a firm grounding in history and philosophy, both of which brought the benefits of calm, intelligent reflection. The earliest Politics departments, in Oxford, Cambridge and London, were made up predominantly of historically-minded philosophers and theoretically-minded historians, presenting politics in a philosophical or historical light. This continued to be so until well into the twentieth century. There was little agreement as to whether politics as a sovereign, systematic subject actually did exist or not, even among those taking up Chairs(23). Coherent instruction stemmed from the fact that most teachers read the same small stock of classic books(24) and shared a distinct leaning towards the examination of institutions. Importance was placed on a

22. S.Collini, D.Winch and J.Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: a study in nineteenth-century intellectual history* (1983).

23. D.W.Brogan, *The Study of Politics* (1946): M. Cole, *The Life of G.D.H.Cole* (1971), p. 207.

24. D.N.Chester, 'Political Studies in Britain: Recollections and Comments' in *Political Studies*, 2 and 3 (1975), p.163.

sure grasp of the behaviour of real people in actual situations, of closeness to the texture of politics. Most had been brought up - and brought their students up - in the English empirical tradition which eschewed preconceived ideas and imparted learning in a comfortable, non-ideological manner, a tradition which Denis Brogan said - reviewing Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (25) - inoculated them against the lure of grand theory and absolutist creeds. In the hands of some, like T. D. Weldon (who had led the opposition to Quintin Hogg in the famous 1938 Oxford by-election) this could even extend to an abdication from discussion of any substantive issues at all (26). The way things had been in the 1930s and 1940s, however, had made it clear that there were some values that were at least worth defending. With the establishment in 1950 of the Political Studies Association (political "science" met with strong opposition), there was a marked reluctance to cut politics off from other allied subjects on which it had nourished, as well as a recognition of the place of commonsense wisdom with which to guard against erratic fluctuations in political opinion.

This was the context in which McCallum and Readman's descriptive case study of the general election of 1945, the first of its kind and a landmark in the observation of British elections, came to be written. It indicated the direction which the study of politics was to take, spawning its own secondary literature; and it hinted at the degree to which voting lent itself to sociological and statistical analysis. But it also (for its authors) reaffirmed the value of the older kind of philosophizing. Conveniently, the academic interest in the 1945 Labour government commenced with the 1945 election.

25. *Economica*, August 1946, pp.205 -207.

26. T.D.Weldon, *The Vocabulary of Politics* (1953).

Forerunners

"The rival doctrines of the 1945 general election", Lance Beales asserted in the weekly magazine *Leader* towards the end of the campaign, "were derived from the London School of Economics"(27). Beales - Reader in Economic History at the University of London - was referring to the unexpected role that had been assigned to two of his LSE colleagues - Friedrich ('Fritz') von Hayek, the apostle of economic liberalism, and the Labour party activist, Harold Laski, "that rare quantity in Britain - the professor-politician". Hayek's celebrated bestseller *The Road to Serfdom*, which resurrected the old equation between socialism and slavery and condemned attempts at planning in all its forms, had found an echo in Conservative party pronouncements and had been denounced in a radio broadcast by the Labour leader Clement Attlee. Laski, for his part, and in his capacity as Chairman of the Labour party, had released a statement - seized upon by the Conservatives - announcing that a future Labour government could not be bound by any decisions entered into by Churchill at the three-power conference which was to take place in Potsdam. Shortly afterwards, he was accused, in suspicious circumstances, of having advocated the use of violence for political ends at a public meeting in Newark. In an apposite way, as Beales meant to indicate, their notoriety was well deserved. The sharply contrasting opinions of Hayek and Laski stemmed from a personal and political antagonism extending back into the inter-war years about the growing influence of collectivist ideas and the degree to which their spread might be hastened, deflected or averted. The one was concerned to preserve the economic freedoms of the individual from governmental interference on which

27. Nathan Laski papers, Mocatta Library, University College London.

all else depended; the other to bring about a wider liberty without which economic independence was meaningless. Both of these themes - of liberty and of planning - were carried over into the post-war years, providing the backdrop to many of the running commentaries on Labour in office. Both had to do with an overall conception of the interventionist state for which no modern theory had been devised.

One of the core beliefs behind the foundation of the LSE was what Beatrice Webb called the impulse to discover and apply "the truths about social organization"(28). Academics were to be encouraged in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge; having established the facts, some kind of obligation existed to act upon what had been revealed. A critical examination of capitalist society was needed, from a sociological standpoint, to correct the imbalance in conventional academic circles. Laski, appointed to the post of Professor of Political Science in 1926, stood four square in this mould. In his inaugural lecture, and still in his liberal phase, he dismissed any pretence at an imaginary impartiality - social inquiry had to be based on the freest possible circulation of thought(29). In an age of crisis, he felt, there was no honour to be found in a cosy detachment which excluded certain types of argument. His Oxford instructors - Dicey, Fisher and Barker - had been far too aloof. 'Commitment' as he understood it meant not just taking up the public issues of the moment, but partisan commitment. In the supreme conflict between progress and reaction, the "crime" of the intellectuals

28. N. Mackenzie, 'The Diary as Literature', introduction to the Beatrice Webb diaries, British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES).

29. H. Laski, *On the Study of Politics* (1926), pp. 16-18.

was not (as Benda had thought) to go into battle; "it was the very different one of not knowing that a battle was raging or - worse still - of being willing to fight on the wrong side"(30). Laski liked to tell the story of how the nineteenth century historian von Ranke had advised a pupil who had taken up teaching "to serve truth first, and Germany afterwards"(31). There was no such inconsistency in Laski's own mind: the modern truths were self-evidently socialist. Once the iniquities of capitalism had been laid bare, the politically-aware could not fail to pass from neutral reflection into the practical realm.

Laski had started out with a precocious grasp of the actual working of political institutions, seen in their proper historical context. His earliest writings - on sovereignty and the decentralized state - were of a piece with tolerant English pluralism. Disturbed by the collapse of MacDonald's minority Labour government in 1931, he sought thereafter to apply marxism to British conditions, doubtful that socialism could come about by parliamentary means. Abandoning the notion of government by consent, he took to playing the game of predicting revolution without actually endorsing it. He knew that reforms were feasible, and that Britain might travel on a path different from other countries. Like Bassett (with whom he clashed) his starting-point was the historic continuity of Parliament. But he rejected outright "the factual error of arguing that the State-power is neutral as between contending ideologies"(32). Even the

30. H.Laski, *Faith, Reason and Civilization* - an essay in historical analysis (1944), pp.104-105.

31. M.de Wolfe Howe, *Holmes-Laski Letters - the correspondence of Mr Justice Holmes and Harold J.Laski, 1916-1935*, Volume 2 (1953), p.1280.

32. H.Laski, *Parliamentary Government in England* (1938), p.200.

monarch had a part to play in frustrating radical intentions. An admirer of Sir Stafford Cripps in the late thirties, he switched during the war to Ernest Bevin as the "fighting leader" that Labour required, before taking up with Herbert Morrison. The European conflict with Fascism revived his hopes of a domestic advance for Labour, against which he saw Attlee as a main obstacle, and he wrote to him on the eve of the 1945 election asking him to stand down. Laski appears in Edmund Wilson's account of his travels around liberated Europe, declaring to the voters in a North London constituency that "mass unemployment was incompatible with democratic institutions" and that they "must never again allow such a degradation of conditions as had occurred between the two wars"(33).

The modesty of Labour's subsequent achievements disheartened him. He had said that, if Labour did the right things, there would never be another Tory government. He lived to see, but was evidently perplexed by, the limits placed on the achievable, especially when it came to foreign policy. The 1945 victory might be hailed as a clear endorsement of Laski's form of radical socialism. But it left him worn out and vilified, never quite able to effect a synthesis of liberal and marxist ideas, the ambiguity in his thinking skilfully brought out by the defence lawyer in Laski's 1946 libel action against *The Daily Express*(34). He was the prime instance of the committed scholar(35), speaking in the radical accents of the day, able to state the dilemmas in aiming to "build a Socialist Britain" but incapable of

33. E. Wilson, *Europe without Baedeker* (1948), pp.132-135.

34. *The Laski Libel Action*, published by The Daily Express (1947).

35. J. Saville in *Collets, 50 Years, 1934-84*, pp.20-21.

solving them.

Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian whose early training was in law, originally came to the LSE as a Visiting Professor in 1931, remaining as the holder of the revived Tooke Chair in Economic Science and Statistics. No stranger to controversy, he was a firm advocate of wage cutting in the 1930s. Along with Robbins, Gregory and Plant, he formed an island of old-fashioned classicism, though he was reassured to see that the bulk of the LSE staff were non-political(36). He noted, however, and gradually became fascinated by, the Webbian conviction that "a careful study of the facts ought to lead most sensible people to socialism", and the intellectual hold which such progressive ideas obviously exerted(37). In their hostility to an open, liberal economic order, Hayek insisted, the leftist intelligentsia overlooked far too much that was good in it. Only capitalism made democracy possible. Any sort of planning necessarily became planning in favour of some and against others, which would have to be enforced by a dictatorial central authority. Already in the late 1930s he was indignantly firing off memoranda to William Beveridge, irritated by the common misinterpretation of Nazism as a last-ditch capitalist reaction to socialism. The similarity of Fascist and Communist regimes was to him steadily more obvious. With the wartime move of the LSE to Cambridge, Hayek - conspicuously not called into government service - decided to write a contribution to the war effort, an explicitly "political" book (as he wrote in the preface) dedicated to "the socialists of all parties" and warning of the perils involved in the conscious

36. F.A.Hayek, conversation with the author, 18 September 1984.

37. F.A.Hayek, 'The London School of Economics 1895-1945' in *Economica*, February 1946, pp.1-31.

reshaping of society for egalitarian ends(38). He, too, called Benda to his aid, inveighing against the worshipping of false gods by "the totalitarians in our midst" who, however sincere, were endangering freedom.

It was the outspokenness of his endorsement of unfashionable opinions that shocked and delighted Hayek's readers, leaving his opponents to lament - as Beales elsewhere put it - this "reactionary trend of thought"(39). A copy of the book was sent by the Duke of Devonshire to Churchill. Laski took it as an attack on him personally, and said so in his lectures. Hayek has since made it plain that he questioned Laski's mental sanity(40). He actually spent the 1945 campaign in the United States, appearing on the front cover of *Time*, embarrassingly feted by economic Tories and challenging, sometimes angrily, the new dealers on their home ground(41). The history of the influence of statist, progress-minded ideas - of how they came to be believed and of the harm that they had caused - not just in economics but across the whole range of the social sciences, formed the central topic of his later researches.

In contrast to these well-publicized differences, an alternative left-of-centre standpoint had been developing - out of the public eye - around a group of young 'New

38. *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). See also his 'Freedom and the Economic System' in *The Contemporary Review*, January-June 1938, pp.434-442.

39 H.L.Beales, *The Making of Social Policy* (1946), p.8.

40. 'Hayek on Laski', letter in *Encounter*, June 1984, p.80.

41. *Washington Despatches 1941-1945* - weekly political reports from the British Embassy, H.G.Nicholas (ed)(1981), p.576; B.D.Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (1974), pp.289-292.

Fabians', presided over by Labour's Hugh Dalton. Evan Durbin - also an economics lecturer - had been busy throughout the nineteen thirties striving to map out a businesslike scheme of realistically attainable socialist objectives, grounded upon a firm base of financial expertise, which could command electoral support and be carried out within the lifetime of a single parliament(42). Much influenced by Bassett, Durbin had begun by explicitly rejecting the class struggle analysis of political action(43). Laski, Durbin saw, was "obviously wrong" (thus on a visit to the Webbs in 1937(44)) had strayed out of bounds. No genuine social reformer could be dogmatic, yet every marxist was. Indeed Durbin claimed a better understanding of Marx than most avowed marxists. Yet the classical approach was equally disappointing. Practical economics, Douglas Jay - a fellow 'New Fabian' - had written, contrary to the classical teachings, was not neutral between ends but had a built-in progressive intent(45). Durbin viewed with impatience other economists who were content, when faced with the evidence of social inequality, to busy themselves with unilluminating diversions. He posited a natural alliance between the yield of social service research and advancing socialism, which would lead to a "mastering" of the economic problem. The new social sciences were to be the great liberators.

The criticism of Hayek and Robbins - as Durbin recognised - had kept him thinking, but in reviewing *The*

42. E.Durbin, *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* (1940).

43. E.Durbin, 'Professor Hayek on Economic Planning', reprinted in *Problems of Economic Planning - papers on planning and economics* (1949), pp.91-106.

44. B.Webb diary, entry dated 15 July 1937, BLPES.

45. D.Jay, *The Socialist Case* (1937), especially Chapter 3.

Road to Serfdom (which he read through and extensively annotated) he reprimanded Hayek for failing to appreciate the work over the previous decade of his 'New Fabian' colleagues. There was no need to fear the growing power of the state, provided that there were only to be such controls as were necessary to overcome the lack of economic oversight and co-ordination. Planning did not imply "a Plan" introduced by an all-wise bureaucracy. Planning was "the distinctive tenet of his generation", making an important step towards fulfilling the democratic power of other common people for social progress, but it would always leave more to be done. Theirs was a philosophy of getting things done. As Hugh Gaitskell reflected in looking back some years later, the outlook of the group had been rational and practical, "suspicious of large general ideas which on examination turned out to have no precise content Above all, while accepting the ultimate emotional basis of moral valuation, they had great faith in the power of reason both to find the answers to social problems and to persuade men to see the light"(46). "Professor Hayek rejects reason", Durbin announced in 1945. "We accept it".

The relationship of the 'New Fabians' with the kind of ideas associated with John Maynard Keynes was an uncertain one. Keynes was obviously central to any discussion of employment policy - but his proposals were famously changeable. Besides, he was no friend of Labour. He envisaged a 'managed' rather than a fully 'command' economy. Nonetheless, and Jay was credited by Gaitskell with realising this(47). Keynes did provide a ready-made rationale for increased state intervention. Others,

46. H.Gaitskell, Foreword to the second edition of *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* (1954).

47. H.Gaitskell, *Recent Developments in British Socialist Thinking* (1955), pp.30-31.

like Cole, refused "to swallow Keynes whole" and doubted whether government manipulation of demand would do in place of a frontal assault on the key points of capital. What transformed the situation was the outbreak of war, and with it the introduction of a wide array of physical controls on imports, exports and the allocation of raw materials inconceivable in peacetime, conceding much of Labour's case in advance. The question then turned on how much - mindful of reconstruction - should be retained once the war was over. Hayek, for example, did not believe that the more in favour of greater intervention was pre-determined or even, as Schumpeter thought, likely but unwelcome - that was exactly his point. But the whole weight of scholarly opinion and the trend of wartime economic practice pressed in that direction. Given this open future, the positions already outlined did not exhaust all the possibilities. Not all enthusiasts for planning were self-proclaimed socialists, nor did all economists employed in Whitehall during the war draw the same favourable conclusions. Wartime planning was imperative. The argument was over whether it was also compatible - in view of the large bureaucratic apparatus it entailed - with the maintenance of a freely-functioning democracy in peacetime.

The State as Player

The planners' quarrel had its origins in the 1930s; but it was - the call for planning being only one manifestation of a general shift - also part of the playing out of a still older struggle about the onset of the enlarged state from the tail end of the Victorian era. From this direction came the other main contributing source to the growth of political studies - discussion of constitutional issues, couched in the form of legalistic

commentaries which, given the "special intimacy"(48) of law and politics in Victorian England, granted to Bagehot and others the status of high authority. These formal descriptions celebrated the activating principles and customs of the traditional constitution, thought to consist of the sovereignty of parliament, the importance of conventions, and the rule of law. This last tenet (which Dicey took from W.E.Hearn) governed the relation between the individual and the judicial power of the state, protecting the personal liberty and rights of the ordinary citizen. Departures from these constitutional principles might from time to time occur, in so far as everyday constitutional practice diverged from legal theory, but this only went to show the strength of the guarantees provided by a framework of living precedents that had arisen out of the common law of the land. The exercise of unchecked, arbitrary power by officialdom was the evil that most needed preventing.

The increasing practice - however - of conferring discretionary power on public boards and agencies, by allowing for administrative and quasi-judicial decisions to be reached outside the courts of law, was beginning to present problems. Infringements of personal liberty were all too likely to follow from rulings designed to equalize the impact of the law. The growth of a native body of administrative law Dicey regarded as an alien intrusion, which predisposed him to mistrust any extension of government. A Diceyan influence was apparent in Lord Hewart's *The New Despotism* (1929) and in the deliberations of the Donoughmore Committee on Ministers' Powers, which reported in 1932, both of them responses to the swelling delegation to Ministers by Parliament of legislative powers. They were much more than simply 'footnotes to Dicey'. But they differed in

48. S.Collini, D.Winch and J.Burrow, *ibid* (1983), p.359.

that the Donoughmore Committee - awkwardly attempting to distinguish the judicial from the administrative - collectively saw the rise of administrative law as being inevitable, subject to the "necessary safeguards(49) - the point being that Dicey's essentially static analysis had been overtaken by the speed of events. The strict separation of law and government was no longer seen as tenable. It was with this in mind that Ernest Barker was led to say that the lawyers had not been all that helpful to students of politics. Jennings, one of Dicey's strongest critics, was adamant that the growth of the new functions of the state had rendered most of his individualist assumptions irrelevant(50). To argue from history that new policies or actions were "unconstitutional" was to argue that they were contrary to tradition, when it was more pertinent to ask whether traditions had adjusted to the newer conditions. A new public philosophy was required to take account of the new 'public service' state. Liberal-minded constitutionalists looked elsewhere for their checks to offset the agencies of the state - in proposals for practical changes such as electoral reform, the encouragement of voluntary associations in civil society, and the general inculcation of government-by-discussion. As long as diversity of ideas and interests was maintained, the outcome would always look after itself. To the extremists of left and right, as Bassett - in 1935 - indicated, "there must be continuity of policy, even in 'fundamentals', even with 'capitalism'"(51). One of the difficulties with this position was finding the means to express the radical reshaping of modern government

49. Cmnd 4060, p.115.

50. I.Jennings, *The Law and the Constitution* (4th edition, 1952), Appendix II.

51 R.Bassett, *The Essentials of Parliamentary Democracy* (1938), p.230.

while still employing the old liberal vocabulary.

William Robson's attack on Dicey's formulation of the rule of law(52)(his book came out just before Hewart's) encapsulated the difficulty, attaching a value to the separating of judicial and administrative powers all the while that he was rejecting its legendary import(53). But his breakaway signalled a decisive step. Absolute rights of property and interest had had to give way to qualified rights, conditional on the extent to which they were regarded as compatible with "the common good". Administrative law had been formed to meet a need, and it was surely better to ensure that its operation was regularised. The way in which Robson expressed this was no less striking. Robson - according to his admirers - dispensed with the genteel, high-minded theory of the constitution in favour of the defensive, class-linked structure of the law, and the 'what actually happens' constitution that was not normally written about(54).

What lay at the back of all this was Robson's conviction that constitutional law and political science had failed to keep up with the widening reach of the state, which had - impelled by war and the pressure for reform - expanded almost beyond recognition, exposing the liberal-cum-socialistic accounts as inadequate. Change was so rapid that it was enough just to track the evolving scene, without standing back and explaining how

52. W.A.Robson, *Justice and Administrative Law - a Study of the British Constitution* (1928).

53. M.J.C.Vile, *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers* (1967), pp.235-237.

54. J.A.G.Griffith, 'Justice and Administrative Law Revised' in J.A.G.Griffith (ed), *From Policy to Administration - essays in honour of William A. Robson* (1976), pp.200-216.

the new institutions ought ideally to be functioning - a significant reversal of priorities. The new field of public administration ("there is no such subject in England", Robson was initially informed(55)) seemed to offer a more promising line of advance, examining the structure and functions of the new public authorities and the connecting link between politics and administration, of which constitutional law was only a subsidiary element. This did not mean that its *raison d'être* lay in 'training administrators'. That could only come with practical experience, through which public-spirited officials, acting (unlike politicians) in an expert fashion, would take on "the judicial mind". Tolerant of bureaucracy, service in wartime Whitehall reinforced Robson's desire to change things broadly in a socialist direction(56). He was no centralist (nor - he pointed out - were the Webbs), advancing the merits of decentralised decision-making to regional and local government. He has been called "the last of the Fabians", representative of those confident of the "rational good pursued in relation to the ends of state action".

The state, then, existed to define the common good, to discover the general will and to bring it into being. But what if the state, claiming to speak for all and to extend rights to many, instead defended the class interests of a privileged minority? Many left-wing diagnoses of the events of 1931 came to this conclusion. Laski became one of the foremost advocates of the view that the constitution counted for nothing if property were at stake. Legal interpretation had grudgingly

55. W.A. Robson, 'The Study of Public Administration Then and Now' in *Political Studies*, 2 and 3 (1975), p.195.

56. 'William Robson' in A. Watkins, *Brief Lives* (1982), p.158.

adjusted to the process of social change, but liberty under the law could have no meaning save in the context of equality, a long-held notion(57). The extension and enlargement of social and economic rights was bound to lead eventually to a programme of reforms that would challenge "the very basis of capitalism", expending the British talent for compromise(58). The basic issue was whether or not this new kind of social state would be allowed to take shape, unhindered by constitutional manoeuvring. Laski's marxism annoyed liberals, just as his liberalism exasperated marxists. Even so, Jennings, from a more moderate Labour viewpoint, wavered in his attachment to democratic values. Others, prominent in the Labour leadership after the fall of MacDonald, had seen no alternative to capturing the power of the state and the financial institutions and turning them to radical purposes(59). But much of this was short on specifics. The economic mobilization of war transformed the position, enabling Attlee (once well to the left) to deliver a quintessential Fabian riposte to Laski, judging Labour's progress "by the extent to which what we cried in the wilderness five and thirty years ago has now become part of the assumptions of ordinary men and women"(60). Planning was no longer scoffed at. Full employment was accepted. Big government had proved itself in adversity. Socialism and commonsense coincided more than Labour's opponents were prepared to admit. All the main parties were, to a greater or lesser extent,

57. B.Zylstra, *From Pluralism to Collectivism - the development of Harold Laski's political thought* (2nd ed. 1970), p.60.

58. K.Martin, *Harold Laski - a biographical memoir* (Paperback edition 1969), Chapter IV.

59. S.Cripps and others, *Problems of a Socialist Government* (1933); E. Bevin and G.D.H.Cole, *The Crisis* (1931?).

60. K.Martin (1969), *ibid*, pp150-153.

collectivist. Britain had become accustomed to the strong state and the general election of 1945, in Attlee's terms, determined whether that future role would be more rather than less substantial in the first years of peace. Pride of place went to Labour's plans for bringing into public ownership a range of basic industries and utilities. Increasing public control was continuing the pattern of wartime. But nationalization also raised issues of constitutional and administrative significance of a wholly new kind, which Robson set out to indicate. 'Friends' (61) of larger government insisted that the teething troubles of the new nationalized industries should not be allowed to detract from the way they were intended in time to work; 'enemies' saw in the development a line of thought that was fundamentally flawed. As in the opening shots fired in the debate on economic planning, the 'practical' argument made do as a substitute for the clash of grand ideologies of the type familiar on the continent.

Inside Views

The six volumes of Winston Churchill's history of the Second World War (1948-54) together amounted to an autobiographical substantiation of the author's own considerable part in the triumphant conduct of all-out military conflict. Churchill's version, one of his assistants confessed, was "rhetorical, romantic, exaggerated and to a meticulous critic somewhat inaccurate"(62); it was, moreover, carefully constructed so as not to impair post-war relations with

61. Used by L.Tivey, *Interpretations of British Politics - the image and the system* (1988), p.49.

62. M.Ashley, *Churchill as Historian* (1968), p.175.

the United States(63). But it honestly conveyed Churchill's view that it had been an 'unnecessary' war, brought on by a combination of folly and wickedness, out of which only the anti-appeasers emerged with any credit. This was indeed his own potent justification for accession to the highest office. Others opened out the indictment into a more generalised condemnation of the drift and waste of inter-war policy. The juxtaposition of Tory guilt with the national purpose and planning of wartime was the means by which Labour - to Conservative charges of fraudulent misrepresentation - rose to power in 1945.

Attlee, when he came to write his own recollections of the war and post-war years, could not hope to emulate the literary force of Churchill's writing. Serialised in 17 parts in *The Star*, and then in book form in April 1954, the terse, unassuming style of *As It Happened* - for which he was lampooned in *Punch* - reduced the passing show, dramatic and mundane, to Attlee-sized proportions. His difficulty, working on several drafts from as early as 1951, seemed to have been in finding enough to say. The account often consisted of little more than matter-of-fact notes and observations, unpressured by the sifting of his papers, something which his publishers had specifically warned him against(64). There was not the writing for effect or the attempt to give powerful shape to the immediate past that was so characteristic of Churchill's prose. Attlee was not one for recrimination. history of the party. Besides which, Labour had its own explaining to do on matters of defence leading up to 1939. Service in the Coalition under Churchill pushed

63. W.F.Kimball, *Churchill and Roosevelt: the complete correspondence*, Vol.1 (1984), pp4-5.

64. A.S.Frere (of Heinemann's) to Attlee, 28 October 1952, Attlee file, Octopus Publishing Group Library.

all past disagreements to one side - the unity of the politicians matched the unity of the country. As the war approached its end, however, so - in Attlee's view - the comprehensive plans for post-war reconstruction, worked out in common, began to be mysteriously blocked by hostile Conservative ministers, indicating that the coalition "formed to win the war would not survive its success". Churchill, he believed, meant to be returned at the head of a Conservative administration loosely committed to some measure of social reform. From his sketchy account, it was clear Attlee had had no inkling of the scale of the change in public sentiment. His description of the events of 26th July 1945 was a masterpiece of understatement:

"Lord Portal, who was Chairman of the Great Western Railway, gave the family tea at Paddington, and presently I was told by the Prime Minister that he was resigning. A summons to the Palace followed. My wife drove me there and waited outside for me. The King gave me his commission to form a Government. He always used to say that I looked very surprised, as indeed I certainly was at the extent of our success. We went to a Victory Rally at Westminster Central Hall where I announced that I had been charged with the task of forming a Government, looked in at a Fabian Society gathering and then returned to Stanmore after an exciting day" (65).

Of his own government and its record, Attlee was blandly uninformative. Aside from a long disquisition on cabinet making, there was next to nothing about the interlocking of cabinet, government, party and

65. C.R. Attlee, *As It Happened* (1954), p.148.

parliament. Important episodes were tantalisingly passed over in silence, or dismissed with one-liners. Platitudes - what was right in wartime was also right in peace - stood in for an exposition of the government's long-term objectives. The whole tangle of foreign affairs was dealt with in fewer than eight pages. Much the most space was given over to what Attlee regarded as his most important work, and in which he had taken the lead - paving the way for the independence of India, Pakistan and Burma. Otherwise, there was no reflecting on the overall idea of what his government had been about, other than to say that they had been dutifully executing (as the re-issue of his 1937 Left Book Club offering underlined) the party's long-standing aims. That so many changes had come into force in the teeth of acute circumstances only added to their timeliness. "Things happened to him", Bevan unkindly said after reading the book; "he never did anything". How Attlee had brought it off was never spelt out. Those left puzzling had to make do with his doodles.

That said, Attlee also won over some surprising admirers. Tories, for whom his very mediocrity had seemed a menace, found much to praise. G.M. Young, re-creator of the Victorian age, reviewed the book on the wireless(66), ready to forgive and forget "the grim Forties", and relieved that, having earlier taken fright, the upheaval had not been drastic as Conservatives had feared or radicals had wished. He was even happy to talk of "what might, with no exaggeration, be called a social revolution", a figure of speech that, in other circumstances, Young would have been more likely to apply to the coming of the railways, or a fall in the rate of infant mortality. Attlee's virtues -modesty and rectitude - typifying the Victorian idea of a Prime

66. Transcript in the BBC Written Archives, Caversham (transmitted 11 April 1954).

Minister, "an ordinary man in an extraordinary place", imply that Young found in him the model of probity that he had hoped but failed to discover in Baldwin.

Much more first-hand information could be gleaned from Roy Jenkins' "interim biography" (Jenkins senior had been Attlee's parliamentary private secretary) of a remarkably shy Attlee (1948)(67), which ended with him returning from Potsdam, Vincent Brome's homely profile (1949)(68) and - richest of all - *The Triple Challenge* (1948) by the newspaperman Francis Williams, who had only just stepped down as the prime ministers' public relations adviser. Charged with the presentation of policy to the national and international press, Williams pointed out how it had taken the alarms of 1947 (where government information campaigns failed) to instil a sense of social partnership and stimulate increased manufacturing output. Even with wartime paper restrictions still in force, a concerted effort was made by Labour-friendly journalists and pamphleteers to put across a sympathetic impression. Offsetting this were the reports of other, disillusioned former insiders: R.B. Thompson-Williams, one-time public relations officer at the Ministry of Supply(69), Ernest Watkins, who had been one of the 'New Fabians' before the war but now worked as assistant editor at *The Economist*, writing for Americans(70), and Alan Wood, an Australian journalist taken on by the Overseas Food Corporation, who was dismayed by "the failures, frustration, heartbreak, bad luck and bad blunders" that sealed the fate of the

67. R. Jenkins, *Mr Attlee*.

68. V. Brome, *Clement Attlee - a pictorial biography*.

69. *Was I Really Necessary?* (1947).

70. *The Cautious Revolution* (1950).

Groundnuts scheme in Tanganyika(71). Crossman's account of the Anglo-American commission of inquiry to Palestine, and Moon's re-worked narrative on the partition of India (which gave the first reliable estimate of casualties) fell into the same category(72). Their value was in their on-the-spot, eye-witness immediacy, flavoured with the tang of crisis. In such cases, the fact of direct involvement, with the writer as his own best source, made up for the fragmentary or incomplete picture, providing an authenticity that no 'library' history could match.

The limited usefulness of the earliest memoirs and accounts was due - in the first instance - to the nature of the craft. Most of them were ghosted by professional writers (Eastwood, who helped Attlee, had already written a life of George Isaacs, Kay worked on behalf of both Shinwell and Morrison), some were hindered by the laws of libel (Brome was held at bay by Bevan for several years) and all were subject to the Official Secrets Act. But, in the period after 1951, there was a further complicating factor - the internecine war inside the Labour party, which threatened careers and reputations, and gave a tendentious edge to the stories that began to go the rounds. The machinery of government had been Morrison's dry theme, to the exclusion of all else. But even he was constrained by his hopes of future leadership from saying too much. He had already pointed the finger for election defeat at Bevan's 'vermin' speech, breaching the PLP rule against personal attacks(73). Morrison's part in the abortive compromise plan for public

71. *The Groundnut Affair* (1950).

72. R.H.S. Crossman, *Palestine Mission* (1947); P.Moon, *Divide and Quit* (1961).

73. H.Morrison, 'Dangerous Illusions', *Socialist Commentary*, May 1954, p.118.

supervision of the iron and steel industry was now also authoritatively disclosed(74). Williams told - inaccurately - of a proto-Bevanite plot to unseat Attlee in 1947(75). Manny Shinwell returned, in his oddly-titled *Conflict Without Malice*, to the fuel crisis of the same year, maintaining that he had given the cabinet plenty of warning beforehand, blaming instead his official advisers, the poor collating of statistics, a legacy of private mismanagement, and finally the weather. He noted which of his colleagues had sprung to his defence at the time and which had not. Morrison (1960) was anxious to explain why he could not do so.(76) Nor did Morrison believe he had been at fault in the 1951 budget clash, standing in for the hospitalized Attlee ("he lost me three ministers", Attlee told John Mackintosh in 1958(77)). Thwarted and resentful, "a lament for a prize never within reach"(78), Morrison's version was of doubtful reliability. More than that, he added almost nothing about the inner workings of the government to *As It Happened*(79). Attlee himself called

74. 'Steel firms made pact with Labour', *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 March 1955, p.1, reporting a speech by Sir Ellis Hunter, who was President of the iron and Steel Federation from 1945 to 1953.

75. In March 1954 in *The People*, as recounted in *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, J.Morgan (ed)(1981), p.300.

76. H.Morrison, *An Autobiography* (1960).

77. J.Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet* (1962), footnote p.402.

78. 'The Lord with the Quiff', Lord Stansgate, *The New Statesman*, 1 October 1960, p.478.

79. 'Herbert Morrison looks back', R.McKenzie, in *The Observer*, 25 September 1960, p.8.

it "a fine work of fiction"(80). Shinwell and Morrison joined forces to oppose the Gaitskellite turn in Labour policy in the later 1950s. And Leslie Hunter, a lobby correspondent for the *The Daily Herald* and a confidant of Morrison (until the latter spurned him after losing out in 1955) recounted many behind-the-scenes conversations, mainly from 1951 on, all of which had an authentic ring(81). Hunter was the first journalist in whom Attlee confided his intention to retire; Hunter in turn saw in the remote and indecisive leadership of Attlee a cause of the Bevanite discontent.

The memoirs which made by far the biggest impact, however - not least because they were anything but pipe-and-slippers reminiscences - were those of Hugh Dalton, the second volume of which appeared in 1957 and much to Morrison's anger(82). But it was Dalton's third and closing volume, finished just before he died in 1962, which was - in view of what had gone before - lively, boisterous and, more than all, indiscreet. Drawing on the diary and papers which he had kept, and which his widow was to deposit with the British Library of Political and Economic Science, Dalton's window onto the Attlee years, from his central vantage point in the government, was unmatched. He quoted from State documents, disclosed advice from officials, and delineated the alliances and splits among cabinet colleagues. He returned, initially, to the mystery of his appointment to the Treasury, and not the Foreign Office. He provided a blow-by-blow

80. Attlee letter to A. Moyle, his former PPS, dated 14 August 1965, recorded in K. Harris, *Attlee* (1982), p. 560.

81. L.Hunter, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1959).

82. H.Dalton, *The Fateful Years 1931-1945*. J.Freeman, in *The New Statesman* ('Dalton by Dalton', 6 April 1957, p.446) spoke of "the wall of complaint from Mr.Morrison and a good deal of peevish muttering in the undergrowth of the Labour party".

chronicle of the 1945 American loan negotiations, which had come close to breaking off, and one of whose key provisions - the full convertibility of the pound - he knew to be unworkable, adding to Harrod's life of Keynes. He revealed a rare instance of budget alterations made after ministerial pressure, but as to his main policy of cheap money, this had never been brought before the full Cabinet. But by the Autumn of 1946, he was warning of the drain on the dollar loan, and together with Cripps pressed for tighter controls on spending and a reallocation of the Defence Estimates, fearing (as he told Attlee in a memorandum) that they were "drifting, in a state of semi-animation, towards the rapids". Much of what he had at this stage to say about the taking of decisions belied Attlee's later claim that his aim in Cabinet had always been to "stop talk": there were too many "rambling" discussions for Dalton's liking, with Attlee for much of the time, as over what to do about India, "speechless". Even Bevin told Dalton that he found it hard to get anything out of Attlee. Many ministers were close to exhaustion, but compulsively tied to their work. Shinwell's "thunderclap" announcement of the need for electricity cuts, in January 1947, and in the middle of a cold snap, was set out for the reader to draw his own conclusions. This first big dent in Labour's confidence sparked off (in one reviewer's phrase) "the dance of Cabinet intrigue"(83), when Attlee's position came under threat, before he was able, forewarned by the swirl of rumours, to emerge unscathed. His own accidental departure he associated with the downturn in Labour's fortunes, the contrast between the *annus mirabilis* of 1945-46 and the *annus horrendus* of 1947 occurring to him even as he sorted through his papers on leaving office. Despite the egocentric outlook, this periodization was convincing and, with

83. E.Powell, 'Those Fabian Follies', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 17 March 1985, p.14.

newsreels lending it visual force, generally taken up. After 1947, his record lost much of its fascination, although there were still occasional insights - Cripps in 1949, for example, wanting the new Governor of the Bank of England to be Sir John Hanbury-Williams rather than the eventual choice, the then Deputy Governor, Cameron Cobbold. Even as a self-confessed "exercise in egoism", Dalton was congratulated for having a keen sense of the goings-on around him(84), though it had long been known that the big five in the government had never really been "a band of brothers"(85). He did not, it now transpires, strictly adhere to his maxim, 'When in doubt, Publish' - D.C. Watt, the first to draw on Dalton(86), indicates that Dalton cleared everything beforehand with the Cabinet Secretary(87). This has not stopped historians from suggesting that passages of the book were in clear breach of the guidelines on confidentiality. Given that outgoing ministers have a distinct advantage in being at liberty to depict the way they saw things, the Dalton angle, rich in detail and mood rather than pedestrian, gained an early and deserved ascendancy.

Inflamed by these outbreaks of "ex-ministeritis" - and their all-embracing secretiveness - the boldest rejoinder came from two skilled controversialists, Richard Crossman, and the Hungarian-born economist Thomas Balogh, once close to the Bevanites and an old foe of

84. R.Jenkins, 'The Exuberant Chancellor', *The Spectator*, 9 February 1962, p.1977.

85. 'High Tide and After', *The Times*, 15 February 1962, p.15.

86. D.C.Watt, 'American Aid to Britain and the Problem of Socialism, 1945-51', reprinted in his *Personalities and Policies* (1965), pp53-80.

87. J.Naylor, *A Man and an Institution - Sir Maurice Hankey, the cabinet secretariat and the custody of cabinet secrecy* (1984), footnote p.392.

Hayek. Balogh's scathing critique of the Whitehall mandarin - in a book castigating the English "Establishment" (a term which had entered currency in the mid-fifties) - struck a chord(88). The institutional defects in economic policy-making, and the amateurism of policy-makers, went a long way towards accounting for the successive upsets after 1945 which had whittled away the popular goodwill Labour had won for itself. So far as he could tell these shortcomings remained to be corrected. In Balogh's eyes, it all went back to the Lloyd George-Warren Fisher minute of 1919 which had united the civil service under the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury. He entered a plea for more outsiders with drive and purpose to be brought into government. Something of this mistrust registered in Labour's brief attempt to dismember the Treasury in 1964.

Crossman's candid reappraisal, in a jubilee article celebrating "The New Statesmen" (Attlee's derogatory term for the self-regarding rebelliousness of that journal) was a more colourful and wide-ranging stab at hacking away "the jungle of complacent myth" which - in the long years in Opposition - had blunted criticism and obscure "the real record of the Attlee government from the eyes of the faithful"(89). Crossman took issue with Morrison's view that they had squandered support by attempting to do too much, and he pointed the finger at Attlee for going to the country in 1951 when, given that the economy soon picked up again, Labour might have stayed in for a decade. The upshot of these mistakes bore comparison with the after-effects of 1931, he asserted, if only because they had yet to be squarely

88. T. Balogh, 'The Apotheosis of the Dilettante' in *The Establishment*, H. Thomas (ed) (1959) pp83-126.

89. Reprinted as 'The Lessons of 1945' in *Towards Socialism*, P. Anderson and R. Blackburn (eds) (1965), pp146-158.

faced up to. He went on to isolate three shortcomings which had contributed to Labour's undoing - lack of preparation in the period prior to achieving power; the failure to reform Whitehall and to bring in talented experts; and the damping down of grassroots party aspirations. His hurried mention, in a final paragraph, of the positive side to 1945, looked half-hearted.

Crossman embarked on other forays at dislodging the official view. 'Austerity', not 'vermin', had cost Labour the most in 1950 and 1951, he maintained(90). The Bevanite attitude towards the rearmament budget still had, with hindsight, much to be said for it, having been (partially) corroborated by an independent study(91). As for the concealment of the decision by Attlee to finance and develop a British atomic weapon - he had no doubt that it should serve as a key historical exhibit in the growing tendency towards 'prime ministerial government'.

In part, this greater openness reflected the freeing up of party debate after the death of Gaitskell and his replacement by Harold Wilson ("At last we have a leader who can lie", Crossman, his campaign manager, is supposed to have said). But there was more to it. Crossman nursed the ambition to write the definitive account of British government at the centre which would - as he delicately put it - blow Morrison's exaggerated respectability out of the water. He was much taken by John Mackintosh's *Cabinet* (1962), which upbraided Morrison, and D.N. Chester, for following the established line of describing the machinery of the cabinet instead of - the real issue - "asking where power lies".

90. 'The Forties', *The New Statesman*, 18 October 1963, pp527-528.

91. 'Who was right in 1951?', *The Listener*, 18 April 1963, pp657-658.

Bagehot's distinction between appearance and reality still had its uses. Others at this time sought to locate the essentially private nature at public affairs in British society. Although Crossman reaped a dividend as the outsider looking in, his efforts did not always universally impress. Oakeshott wrote in *The Times Literary Supplement* that the suggestion "that the only way to study politics is to lift the lid and look at the 'works' is a view of the matter with which we are familiar, but I think everyone who has anything to do with teaching 'politics' has long ago rejected it"(92).

In defence of 'Crossman's disease', it was the case that government was still, even in the early 1960s, a closed political world, bound together by informal ties, the exercise of power expressed socially as much as institutionally. Politicians could travel unnoticed in public, and swap stories with journalists without having their trust betrayed. Only a privileged minority were in a position to see and know. Attlee, asked to review a set of affectionate essays by younger writers(93), found it difficult to understand the purpose of the exercise - most had still been at school when Labour was in power, and they all wrote from the point of view of comfortably-off, middle class Londoners; astonished by a character sketch of Cripps "by someone who never knew him", he specialised in giving the uninitiated the brush off(94). The earliest insight were intuitive and anecdotal, even (witness the Attlee 'enigma') apocryphal. Some mysteries began to be cleared up, especially when

92 *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1962, p.793.

93 M.Sissons and P.French (eds), *Age of Austerity* (1963). *The New Look*, by Harry Hopkins, a light social history of Britain in the years from Dunkirk to Suez, appeared in the same year.

94. C.R.Attlee, 'When Labour had the Whip Hand', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 13 October 1963, p.18.

the memories of participants conflicted, but no real reconstruction of the course of events was possible - it was too soon to say, there was too little to go on, too much was still at stake. The working reporter and the new type of political correspondent had the advantages. Most wordspinning was immediate, accurate and - where it relied on intimate acquaintance - well-informed. It also displayed a keen and instinctive sense of the comic-serious untidiness and irrationality of political life (exemplified in Fairlie's account of Attlee deciding to let Turkey join NATO(95)), an activity not really susceptible to academic theorising.

A More Equal Society ?

The ministerial presentation of Labour's six years in power - in speeches of the time as well as in later memoirs - was one of dour, embattled achievement, brought about in the most forbidding of circumstances. Reconstruction was given the highest priority. Full employment was never endangered. To this was added what Cripps called "the greatest programme of social services ever undertaken in any country in so short a period of time". Labour's historic objectives - originally devised, it should be said, to combat conditions of slump - had reached fulfilment. The Opposition parties accused Labour of having dogmatically carried out changes wholly unsuited to the post-war realities. But what nobody could provide was a comprehensive account of what the new social order of mixed economy (Attlee was already using the phrase while the war was still on) and public

95. H. Fairlie, *The Life of Politics* (1967), pp.78-79.

provision was leading towards. T.H. Marshall was one of the few to articulate an historical theory of the slow expansion of rights by the British state - civil and legal in the seventeenth century, political in the nineteenth and early twentieth, and finally social up to the present time, a process he regarded as still unfinished(96).

Marshall also contended(97) that, even in this new setting , the main dividing lines of philosophical opinion - marked out in late Victorian times and "deeply rooted in the very nature of modern society" - still persisted. In each case, moral conviction both informed and was reformed by social change.

Of the three prevailing schools, the fundamental socialist position, starting from the overriding importance of abolishing private ownership, contained the strongest ethical element. The elimination of poverty, an end to hierarchy and privilege, and the inauguration of a society without classes were all held to be vital aspirations in their own right, even leaving aside the belief that inequalities were also economically dysfunctional. 'Facts for socialists' implied socialist facts. Firm on moral purpose, the socialist was otherwise wanting in detailed analysis of practical problems, since it was assumed that once the total changing of society had occurred, all manifestations of greed and injustice would disappear. The Labour party - imperfect instrument as it was - existed to bring this about.

Many leading Fabians, although initially of this

96. T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950).

97. *Social Policy* (1965), Chapter 2.

mind, eventually came round to a more moderate view, unsure of just how far collectivist principles might carry them and persuaded that reforming legislation could do much to humanize capitalism without the impossibilist need for its complete overthrow. Identifying a wrong and pressing for it to be alleviated meant they could reach out to other progressives, but it left them open to charges of backsliding. Confidence in the slow supersession of the old economic arrangements by a hard-headed commitment to reform was an attitude opposed to - and indeed in time actively antagonistic towards - those threatening revolutionary upheaval. But the progressivist cause was ultimately no less radical in merit. Beveridge, who wanted only the mildest of income transfers, stretched things to the limit in putting the right to work before all else. The strategy was one of tying acceptably moderate means to far-reaching ends.

The anti-collectivists, although declining in importance, set their face against an enhanced role for the state. They disliked the unrelenting pressure for change, convinced that every extension of government power entailed a further restriction on individual liberty. They attacked the confusion of poverty with inequality, a confusion attributed to leftists who wanted to blacken the present in order to strengthen the push for reform. They were hostile to what they saw as the Fabian assumption of moral virtue and heightened intelligence. The anti-collectivist was convinced by the historically-proven superiority of private enterprise and initiative, which no degree of market failure or social need could shake.

One effect of the reforms introduced after 1945 was that the revolutionary alternative to the left - briefly entertained in the 1930s - was closed off; Labour was a party for socialists, but it was not for all-out

socialism. There was also a muffling of differences in outlook between liberals and conservatives, some recognising the dangers of bureaucratic bigness, others that there were social ills that had in the past been neglected. It was commonly accepted, and became an important element in the reformist thesis, that British society had been altered in fundamental, though as yet indefinable, ways, and in particular that there had been a substantial redistribution of income from the better to the less well off. An 'income' revolution was the point from which all analyses - favourable and critical - started out, until in time this central tenet too was opened up to questioning, by a Fabian challenging other Fabians. The old socialist idea that the power relations in society covered and concealed class inequalities made its reappearance. Though cast in a statistical form, the issue always returned to the basic question of ultimate values, about which - since there was no principle by which to judge other principles - agreement was unattainable. Moral protest was enlightened by the findings of social inquiry, indicating a key stage in the increasingly sophisticated study of social policy. But academic discussion was also - and just as importantly - swayed by the urgencies of overt political argument(98).

American Influences

An interval usually follows the memoir-writing stage, during which time the leading protagonists, who have had the first say, are able to hold the field. Only with the opening up of the State archives can the received picture begin to alter. This interval is usually a lengthy one (when Hugh Dalton's last volume

98. M.Gowing, *Richard Morris Titmuss 1907-1973* (1975), p.21.

appeared in 1962, the official papers on 1945-51 were not due for release until the late 1990s). But it is striking that, with the literature on the Attlee governments, there was no gap to speak of.

The primary reason for this was that interest was sustained by the growing number of American scholars who were drawn to post-war British politics and found in it both the subject-matter for research and a ready-made setting for the application - especially by the new breed of political scientist - of new approaches and methods.

Specializing in U.K. policies had many attractions. Some Americans had been Rhodes scholars before the war, or were stationed in Britain during it. Anglophile ties were strong. Overseas research, for American graduates, was increasingly well-funded. To the long-standing practice of comparing and contrasting British and American institutions was added a natural curiosity about a Britain embarked on 'building socialism'. Two main areas of interest were identifiable - Anglo-Americans bilateral links during and after the war, and the workings of the British party system.

i) Britain and American foreign policy

The first main body of writing took as its object of study Britain's reliability as an alliance partner in war and peace, an issue still largely undeveloped in Britain itself. Indeed the earlier English studies were also the most American in outlook(99). Instead of an historical analysis of post-war changes, there had been an almost exclusive attention paid to the person of Labour's Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, lionized by Francis Williams for his obstinate single-mindedness in defending

99. See, for example, the writings of Max Beloff.

British interests(100). That Attlee had given Bevin a free hand was already clear. There was - as Morrison had made known - no foreign affairs committee of the cabinet for Bevin to contend with. The only instructions he had were those he gave himself. Bevin - former Foreign Office officials revealed(101) - found no difficulty in carrying his colleagues, feared nothing from the parliamentary party (as long as the trade unionists were solidly behind him), paid no heed to unpopularity in Parliament and was oblivious to criticism in the press. This very fact made it harder for contemporaries to grasp what it was that he was trying to do. After his death, there was no Bevin 'testament', other than what was contained in his tidied-up House of Common speeches.

Much more could be had by way of American sources. James Byrnes spoke frankly in 1947(102), defending himself against allegations of lack of firmness in his dealings with the Soviet Union and the describing the way in which his 'growing confidence in Bevin came about. The Forrestal diaries confirmed the image of a Bevin who kept his word, but of an uncommunicative prime minister and a party over-influenced by its left-wing (Forrestal had a particularly irrational paranoia about Harold Laski(103). The Vandenberg papers (1952(104)), following Forrestal, established Bevin's agreement to the stationing of American B-29 bombers in Britain in 1948,

100. F.Williams, *Ernest Bevin* (1952).

101. Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (1956); Sir I. Kirkpatrick, *The Inner Circle* (1959).

102. J.Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (1947).

103. W.Millis (ed), *The Forrestal Diaries* (1951); A.A.Rogow, *James Forrestal: A Study of Personality, Politics and Policy* (1963).

104. A.H.Vandenberg (ed), *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg* (1952).

the revelation of which Attlee - until his attention was drawn to it - was unaware. Publication in 1955 of the US State Department documentary record of the Yalta conference went ahead in spite of British objections. There was also a series of accounts, drawing on interviews with Marshall, Acheson and others, recounting the American accomplishment in pulling Europe back from the brink in the late 1940s - Jones's racy *The Fifteen Weeks*(105), Mallalieu's informative narrative of the winning of American public and congressional approval of the European Recovery Programme(106), and the account by Price of the operation and organization of the Marshall plan(107). In a self-styled study of "international economic diplomacy", Richard Gardener (using the papers of Harry Dexter White and Will Clayton) demonstrated the creative statesmanship on both sides of the Atlantic that helped to set up the post-war international and multilateralist economic order(108).

That American interest in Britain was driven by American foreign policy concerns was evident in the disproportionate coverage given over to the 'problem' (for it was seen as such) of the Labour party's left-wing. Fitzsimons, in his short and longer pieces, was unconvinced by slogans of internationalism and peace, or by the attempt to rally democratic Europe as a third force(109). Epstein, in an important case study of British political and public opinion in the years from

105. J.M.Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (1956).

106. W.C.Mallalieu, *British Reconstruction and American Policy 1945-55* (1956).

107. H.Price, *The Marshall Plan and its Meaning* (1955).

108. R.N.Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy* (1956).

109. M.A.Fitzsimons, *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government* (1953).

1945 until 1952 - and sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation (which also at this time supported many institutes set up to research into Soviet and East European politics - carefully traced the fluctuations in attitudes and responses to foreign affairs, when American admiration for Britain was at a peak but the hostility of the left to the United States had been reawakened(110). British insecurity stemmed from its sharp decline in status relative to the U.S., and the humiliation of economic dependence. The difficulty for Labour's leaders was squaring party doctrine with actual necessity(111). Bevanism, however, was no more than "a bundle of objections", unlikely to win over the great majority. He referred to, without pursuing, the finding of another American study, which implied that trade union MPs, on their voting record, were more antipathetic to American policy than Labour's intellectuals(112). In the management of future relations, Epstein concluded, greater sensitivity was needed in ensuring that allies would be able to carry party and public with them. Meehan, lastly, in an unusual monitoring of left-wing views overseas by Bassett(113), examined the supposed violations of socialist principle levelled by the left at Bevin, and found their behaviour to be highly - and quantifiably - predictable, a consistent view of the

110. L.D.Epstein, *Britain - Uneasy Ally* (1954).

111. Rose was to point out that the left, in claiming a role of 'moral leadership' for Britain in the world, also took it to be a major world power: R.Rose, *The Relation of Socialist Principles to British Labour Foreign Policy, 1945-51* (PhD, University of Oxford (1959)).

112. M. Bremner, *An Analysis of British Parliamentary Attitudes concerning the United States in the Post-war Period*, PhD, University of London (1950).

113. E.Meehan, *The British Left Wing and Foreign Policy - a study of the influence of ideology* (1960).

world but only because it was a systematic distortion of reality. It was doubtful, in that case, whether the United States or the Soviet Union of left-wing ideology ever existed. Although, as each of these assorted works implied, the potential for future left-wing influence was there, the overall verdict as a reassuring one: the extent of left-wing activity had been talked up. Neither left-wing ideology, nor the left-wing as a loosely organized grouping, determined the conduct of Bevin's Foreign policy. Indeed, Bevin's occupancy of the post of Foreign Secretary helped, if anything, to minimise, the degree of opposition.

The insight gained from those mid-Atlantic accounts were valuable. The framing of official American thinking and judgements about Soviet intentions saw the light of day, suitably packaged. The relatively confined circle of opinion-formers and policy-makers in Britain simplified each author's task, while allowing them to distance themselves (in a way, it was suggested, British observers could not(114)) from the attitudes of the English governing elite. But strong points imply weaker points. Many of them read like Department of State position papers. Key British interests - the colonies and the Commonwealth - were not understood. They were unavoidably Americo-centric, British viewpoints being conveyed only indirectly, so that the British side of the debate (with British academics still hindered by a restrictive policy on the retention of official papers) went begging.

When, in 1963, a homegrown account of one of the decisive turning points in post-war Anglo-American relations - the rearmament crisis of 1950-51 - was

114. A.King, citing A.Hacker in his introduction to *British Politics - People, Parties and Parliament* (1966), p. ix.

completed by Joan Mitchell, a lecturer in economics and a former civil servant in the Board of Trade, it developed out of a distinctly British point of view, in the context of an altercation about the performance of the British economy in the nineteen-fifties(115). We can say that the economic growth debate was the real spur. The absence of sharp policy reversals after 1951 had persuaded many Fabians that the party battle was turning into one of governmental competence, particularly in the handling of the economy. Popular policies had come to be expressed largely in economic terms. Keynesian ideas held out the prospect of both increased output and greater welfare, since rising government spending could be used to offset social inequality. But the whole strategy necessarily depended upon a steadily expanding economy, about which Keynes had said little. Britain's growth record after the war had been remarkable, the 'long boom' taking most economists completely by surprise. But its record did not compare so favourably with other West European countries which had had their own economic miracles and - as liberal commentators pointed out - with far less state control. Connections were made between the high costs attaching to the American alliance and continuing military and defence commitments, the turbulent American business cycle, and Britain's reluctance to join in the formative stages of the European Common Market. There began a period of national self-doubt, marked by a greater readiness to question the so-called 'renewal' of Britain after the war which, to many now seemed to be nothing of the sort. Tony Crosland - a leading revisionist - was an enthusiastic growthman, so that the growth debate was a searching test of revisionist precepts.

It should be noted that this new broadly Keynesian

115. J. Mitchell, *Crisis in Britain - 1951* (1963).

understanding of political economy - of economics explicitly tied to policy - entailed a particular view of the nature of economic thinking. While the central propositions of economics might well be value-free, their real importance lay in their practical application. Economics was conceived of as an exercise in working out the likely consequences of certain courses of action, out of which policy recommendations would flow. It was about the making of choices which a self-correcting view of the economy had held to be unnecessary. Economics was in this sense utilitarian, action-oriented and operational. The object in mind was serviceable knowledge, a wisdom of diagnosis and cure. It was the pervasive influence of this brand of Keynesian thinking which caused many to speak of a new and unchallengeable economic orthodoxy, bolstered by a flattering biographical portrait of Keynes and the textbook distillation of his teachings, as well as ritual dismissals of opponents like Hayek who - having taken himself off to Chicago - had locked himself in a shuttered room(116). The only puzzle for Keynesians was why the new thinking had not been taken up more quickly than was in fact the case. Post-war difficulties were traced to the misapplying of the master's theories, or to misunderstandings on either side of the Atlantic, as Mitchell - covering the "strained anxiety" of British-American relations in her economic interpretation of 1951 - set out. But that the revolution in economic theory had forged new instruments of policy was not any longer in doubt. Only the doctrinaire failed to see this.

ii) The American science of politics

The second tranche of American-inspired works, coinciding with the post-1945 development of the social sciences, was made up by the findings of political

116. D.Winch, in a review in *The Economic Journal*, Vol 77 1967, pp903-905.

science - a science, that is, which purported to provide a comprehensive, general theory of political activity. The political scientist used empirical observation and the comparative method to isolate the common characteristics of all political systems and to illustrate the different kinds of 'structure' which performed the requisite 'functions' in any given country. Progress consisted in forming well-defined hypothetical propositions which could be made to run the test of reality, proving or disproving their explanatory and predictive value. Evidence was systematically - or schematically - arranged, especially wherever it was readily quantifiable. For the large number of North American students and scholars (many of whom were to go on to greater things) visiting Britain, is provided a proving ground for verifiable theories of power and process in politics. This burst of intellectual energy, forming a captivating showcase for the newer methods, was what really got the discussion of 1945 off the ground.

The emphasis which political scientists gave to the informal aspects of politics was a sign of an important shift away from the older tradition of devoting attention to the formal, legalistic institutions of government *per se*. Indeed, the drive to establish political science as a respectable - and progressive - form of inquiry derived in part from a reaction to the institutional and philosophical approaches to the study of politics, which were felt to have exhausted their usefulness(117). A far wider range of political phenomena had to be examined, in as impersonal and objective a way as possible. The difficulty, when it came to British peculiarities, was of generalising meaningfully from the well-known informality of British political arrangements

117. P.Abrams, 'The Sociology of Political Life' in T.R.Fyvel (ed), *The Frontiers of Sociology* (1964), pp41-73.

(once the "close-mouthed" discretion of the governing clan had been breached(118)) without losing sight of the pomp and ceremony of constitutional restraints which were always of much more than symbolic significance. This problem was at the heart of the dilemma for those wishing to make of political science a subject of study in its own right. Politics was being regarded as a socio-cultural product, the outcome of the interaction of social forces and influences, but in the context of a long-run modernizing of the nation-state, implying the indispensability of a perspective on the past. The claim of political service to self-sufficiency was qualified, then, by its reliance on something outside of itself - and that something was a sociological and historical dimension.

Its leading exponents did not make the mistake of claiming a start from a position of ethical neutrality, however. Values could not, as Easton put it, be shed in the same way that one took off one's overcoat. In formulating a problem for research, in the selecting of evidence and in the interpreting of results, values steered the creative impulse. The ultimate value of any theory was its correspondence to the facts of the real world. But the political scientists' outlook was strongly coloured by an affinity to democratic practices. The study of politics was 'American' as much as 'scientific'(119), "a policy science in the service of democracy"(120). Democracy was not free of all imperfections. The "double commitment" of

118. E. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy* (1955), p.63.

119. B. Crick, *The American Science of Politics* (1959).

120. M. Cranston, *The Mask of Politics* (1973), p.17.

Americans(121) - their acceptance of scientific techniques and their attachment to democratic ideals - was seen as paradoxical wherever, as was often the case, research uncovered defects in the good society. The point was that these were remediable. The contrary pull of detachment and engagement meant that most political scientists could not be classed as guilty of innocence.

American attitudes to the British political system were clearly altered by these considerations. The rise of 'strong' parties, and most of all, the Labour party and movement, was an overriding preoccupation. Interest in the British party system was an old concern, phases of approval going hand-in-hand with periodic dissatisfaction with the state of American politics. Britain was thought to offer the prototype of responsible and disciplined two-party system, even though it was unclear whether it was parliamentary devices or country-specific norms which fostered stability. Even so, the British and American forms of liberal democracy were both, in their respective ways, held up as models of consensual government - an exacting, decidedly Western standard by which less developed countries were judged.

To this should be added the growing inquisitiveness about the emergence and transformation of the British Labour party - a nominally socialist party for which there was no direct American equivalent - into a fully-formed party of government. Relating ideas to the life of party structures was one of the biggest problems confronting the political scientist(122). Making sense of party labels was a source of considerable Anglo-American confusion. The historical forces which had

121. D.Ricci, *The Tragedy of Political Science* (1984), pp24-25.

122. J.Gould, 'Common Ground', *The New Statesman*, 3 December 1965, p.883.

shaped the Labour party, its organization and its programme were factors calling for bold analyses of impressive interpretative sweep. But there was always the question of whether Britain was coming to resemble the American pattern of ideologically-free party political conflict with its unstated premise - emancipation from ideology as an indication of the mature polity.

The 'McKenzie' thesis - that parliamentary requirements dictated the oligarchic nature of party forms because of the need to succeed electorally - was the best known of these analyses. In challenging the democratic credentials of, in particular, the Labour party, the McKenzie view was quickly established as a central point of scholastic discussion, setting in train what was to become one of the classic disputes. The subdivision of the argument into separate strands - how party policy was made, what the exact role of the party conference was, and how influential the trade unions were believed to be - all came from the attempt to subject McKenzie's arguments to closer scrutiny. In the process, the actual 'testability' of the thesis was thrown into doubt. The debate also carried normative elements, since the way the party was seen as working had a bearing on what it could be said to stand for. The discovery of pressure groups and the elaboration of pressure group theories, and the fusing of 'party' and 'group' into an integrated socio-historical account tracing the origins of the 1945 programme, eventually led to the stiffest objection to the McKenzie's line. The immediate issue - who had bested whom - was counterbalanced by an assessment of what had usefully come out of it, the invigorating merits of political science (with its assumption that what was new was also true) set against advocates of the older ways who still could see no final

answers(123). Arguing as to what the Labour governments of 1945-51 had been about was also a means of finding out how far the scientific study of politics could be taken.

Anglo-Marxism

The arrival of the 'New Left', as distinct from the 'Old' (the newness of its ideas was always disputed(124)) coincided with the founding in 1959-60 of *The New Left Review*, itself formed out of a merger of two earlier journals, *The New Reasoner* and the *Universities and Left Review*. Two impulses had been at work - the post-1956 exodus of many members from the Communist Party of Great Britain, and a more generalised dissatisfaction with the complacent Fabian thinking of the 1950s which had, it was felt, contributed to the deadening of partisan argument(125). A 'regeneration' of radical thought was required, a revival of 'socialist humanism' liberated from the stifling conformity of established political agencies and structures. Most of all it involved a polemically barbed description of what the Labour party - even now abandoning all radical pretence - had come to be.

One part of the loose and disputatious association which made up the 'New Left' was still attached to the bright, shining hopes of 1945, not least the unfulfilled

123 J.Barents, *Political Science in Western Europe - a trend report* (1961), pp.80-81; W.J.M.Mackenzie, *The Study of Political Science Today* (1966), p.34; M.Vile, *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers* (1967), Chapter XI.

124. G.L. Arnold, 'Britain: The New Reasoners' in *Revisionism - essays on the history of marxist ideas*, L. Labedz (ed)(1962), pp.299-312.

125. R.Williams, 'The New British Left', *Partisan Review*, Spring 1960, pp3441-347.

vision of a British middle way between capitalism and communism. Those who subscribed to this had lived through the war and post-war years, and had seen how the opportunity to dramatically reshape society - a real possibility given the popular will at the end of the war - had been ground down by solemn declarations about the dollar gap and finished off with the fall of the Iron Curtain. The expectations of 1945 and the downturn of 1947-48 they saw as being of a piece with the struggles of the inter-war period. But they refused to go along with the subsequent despairing withdrawal from active politics, reduced by now to the be-all-and-end-all of electoral and parliamentary "psephopolitics". As for the revisionist alternative, this was little more than advanced liberalism, shorn of any jacobin threat. "My own view [of Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*] is that the book is thoughtful, well argued, stimulating - and wrong", Norman Birnbaum announced at the height of the 1959 general election(126). What Crosland was engaged in was revising Fabianism, not marxism. The priority was to reassert and reinforce the old opposition to capitalism, not wonder at its endless mutation. This 'New Left' strain shared with the old Tribuneite left an acute sense of what the forties had represented ("Did Lord Attlee really free India? Did Lord Morrison of Lambeth wrest the pits from the coal owners?"(127)). Where they parted company was in their uncompromising indictment of the limitations of the Labour party's radicalism.

Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism - A Study in the Politics of Labour*(1961) has been called "the only

126. B. Birnbaum, 'Ideals or Reality?', *Socialist Commentary*, September 1959, p.5.

127. E.P. Thompson, 'Revolution' in *Out of Apathy*, E.P. Thompson (ed)(1960), p.307.

genuine post-Laski book"(128). Miliband, to recall, had been a junior colleague of Laski, wary however of the grand illusion that one could readily turn Labour into an authentically socialist party. Victory in 1945 had restored Laski's faith in the parliamentary road. The Attlee reforms would constitute the first stage in an eventual social transformation. Seen at a distance, from the other end of the 1950s, it was the earlier Laski - Laski at his most marxisant - that Miliband resurrected:

"It has long been the fashion to deride the fears Laski voiced as of no relevance to Britain. It has even been claimed that the experience of 1945-51 has conclusively proved how unwarranted these fears were. The claim rests on a naive misreading of what the Labour Government attempted to do. Its experience only proved that a genuine but modest degree of economic and social reform within the framework of capitalist society need not impose intolerable strains upon the parliamentary system"(129).

For Miliband, Laski's error had not been to explore in the wrong areas - the issues he raised continued to be of paramount importance. Where Laski had been mistaken, where in fact the entire parliamentary left had gone astray, was in assuming that Britain was more 'socialist' in 1950 than in 1945, and that Labour deserved the credit for this. The 'New Left' critique, so far as Miliband was concerned, sprang from the view that, in spite of Labour having held office, the basic nature of British society had not been profoundly altered.

128. N.Mackenzie, conversation with the author, 19 November 1982.

129. R.Miliband, 'Voices of Socialism - Harold Laski', *Tribune*, 12 June 1964, p.12.

Miliband arranged his history of the Labour party around the history of a long-running argument about the party's fundamental purpose, an argument as old as the party itself, the dilemma of social reform or socialism. This inherent ambiguity of purpose made internal disputes unavoidable. The point about these ideological differences was that they concealed the true character of the party. For a one-time Bevanite about to make the break with Labour, the party's record was hardly one of conspicuous radical accomplishment. The leaders were parliamentary-minded. Socialist intentions had gradually disappeared. Labour now seemed to be a most effective bulwark against fundamental change. This had its parallel in "the growing integration of the trades unions into the framework of modern capitalism". The term Miliband used to describe Labour's role as a safe party of reform - its "Labourist" nature - was fittingly applied to the triumph of 1945.

The plot in Miliband was not, however, a conspiratorial one. If the leaders were bourgeoisified, if party programmes were emasculated, and if conference echoed to the cry of betrayal, this was only a symptom of a deeper malady, which the left would not begin to understand unless they first tried to connect Labour's attitude "to wider socio-economic forces which have had a determinant influence in shaping the reality of the party's role"(130). It was not that past Labour governments did not have the political will to impose their wishes, although this might (as the self-incriminating memoirs of Morrison and others made abundantly clear(131)) often have been the case. More profoundly, Labour lacked the power to dismantle the

130. R.Miliband, 'The Transition to the Transition', *The New Reasoner*, August 1958, p.37.

131. R.Miliband, 'Footnote to Labourism', *The New Left Review*, March-April 1961, p.65.

capitalist economy. Willing to control industry and bend it to public purposes, the Attlee administration had had no real intention of going beyond an administered and regulated type of state intervention, enabling it to evade the more fundamental issues. The left, weakened by constant appeals to loyalty and unity, whilst simultaneously clinging to the forlorn hope that the parliamentary party could be won for socialism, needed to be told it like it was. The Bevan of legend was "the most glittering that the labour movement in this century has produced"(132), but, even so, his life was a "tragedy", full of the imperfections of leftism. The real enemy were the Gaitskellites and their new-fangled liberalism.

A full-length, solidly documented, linear party history - which upset a lot of people - allowed Miliband to track the creeping paralysis of 'Labourism', feeling quite out of sympathy with "a BBC world of minor disagreements"(133). He also had something to say to those brought up on the McKenzie view. McKenzie had attacked a party constitution based on "an archaic doctrine of inter-party democracy" which facilitated "the perpetuation of internal party disputes". Miliband was certain that MacKenzie had missed the point. McKenzie, he reasoned, had made it into a structural problem of whether or not the Labour party was democratic, arriving at this point by assuming that politics was rightfully the province of the elected few, that all party activists were extremist, and that the "basic issue" was how the one contrived to contain the other. For Miliband it was - to reinforce - primarily an ideological matter, to

132. 'The Reluctant Rebel' in *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, Spring 1963, pp.37-41.

133. 'The Sickness of Labourism', *The New Left Review*, January-February 1960, p.8.

do with "the ideological division between leaders and activists" about the party's ultimate aim. Structure and purpose were inseparable.

What Miliband had in mind in the way of 'direct action' as an alternative to parliamentary politics was never spelled out. But as a further variation on the well-worn leftist theme of social democratic failure, Eric Hobsbawm - one CP stalwart who had stayed in the party - found it to be entirely effective. "The very misrepresentation of Miliband's book by his critics demonstrates their embarrassment", he wrote(134). If anything, and much as it was passionately composed, it could - Hobsbawm considered - have been even more strongly worded. This was not all. Labour, for all its faults, did still have a socialist element, which could compete on more or less equal terms, and which "can never quite be extinguished". Whether Labour ever could be turned into an authentically socialist party the Miliband of 1961 - drifting out of the Labour orbit - left an open question.

The acrimonious takeover of *The New Left Review* by a newer 'New Left' grouping in 1963 - spearheaded by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn - had the effect of shunting their "archaic", populist colleagues off to one side(135). Fashioning a type of high-level theorising, based around Gramscian concepts, Anderson and Nairn sought to come to terms with the massive proportions of "Labourism" in its "historic totality" that others, both in and out of the Labour party, had not managed to achieve. They introduced a private language of domination and subordination, of "vast impersonal forces" and

134. E.J.Hobsbawm, 'Parliamentary Cretinism?', *The New Left Review*, November-December 1961, p.64.

135. B.D.Palmer, *The Making of E.P. Thompson's marxism, humanism and history* (1981), Chapter 4.

"underlying social determinants" immune to detailed refutation(136). The peculiarly weak nature of the Labour left, scarred by "an infinity of compromises", had to be thought through afresh. Tom Nairn's two-part extended thinkpiece on the nature of the Labour party, published as Harold Wilson's government took office in October 1964, was an imaginative *tour de force*(137).

They were also, and this had to do with age as much as approach, free of any emotional attachment to the memory of 1945. "Untouched by the afterglow of the war", Anderson explained, "we never knew the popular elan of the Forties"(138). Instead they had spent their formative years in the "awful decade" following the Attlee government, conscious of the paralysis in thinking on the left, and convinced that Labour's inner turmoil was a sign, not of ideological vigour, but of sterility. The 'Old Left' had plainly run out of things to say. The adolescent, pedagogic fervour of the Laski, Tawney and Cole of the 1930s was no longer of any practical use(139). Impressive moral stature could not hide the superficiality of their ideas. They had, when all was said and done, gone along with the flattering image of British political and historical uniqueness. Anglo-

136. P. Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *The New Left Review*, January-February 1964, pp. 26-53; T. Nairn, 'The English Working Class', *The New Left Review*, March-April, pp. 43-57.

137. T. Nairn, 'The Nature of the Labour Party', *The New Left Review*, September-October and November-December 1964, pp. 38-65 and 33-62.

138. Quoted by J. Silverlight, 'Coming to the rescue of the free-born Briton', *The Observer*, 12 April 1981, p. 27.

139. G. Stedman-Jones, 'The Pathology of English History', *The New Left Review*, November-December 1967, p. 37; A. Macintyre, 'The Socialism of R.H. Tawney', reprinted in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (1971), pp. 38-42; S. Hatch [pseudonym], 'Harold Laski: An Old Reasoner?', *The New Reasoner*, Autumn 1957, pp. 67-76.

marxism was superseded by a dizzying Euro-marxist narrative. There were 'New Left' projects which embraced a variety of left-wing standpoints, especially when 'Old' and 'New' temporarily came together behind Harold Wilson, the "restorer" of Labour's self-belief, in the brief revival of 1964-65. But the methodological separation - to do with the radical interrogation of history in the present - ran deep.

All of this had a direct bearing on the commitment to the 'good old cause'. For Thompson, praising the facility and virtuosity of Anderson and Nairn, it was their lack of attention to particulars - the essence of the historian's vocation - which found them wanting(140). High theory was all very well. An analytical model of the past was to be welcomed. But it should not be used to stretch and pull the historical fabric into a preconceived frame. "The real history will only disclose itself after much hard research". It was incumbent upon them to maintain an openness to evidence. Evidence should inform concepts, just as concepts lend significance to factual material. There was always the danger that facts would be pre-selected to order. But without the creative dialectic of model and actuality, "intellectual growth cannot take place". They had to submit themselves to the logic of the historical approach. Moreover, to argue a case was also to take a stand against present injustices, not retreat into profound obscurity. The programmatic implications of any analysis had to be followed through. The politics of the "long haul" (Miliband's expression) need not be incompatible with the injunction to "get in and push", whether it be CND or other organizations. Above all, they had to "engage", just because there was too much to

140. E.P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', *The Socialist Register 1965*, in R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds), pp.311-362.

oppose.

Anderson's reply and counter-attack fastened on to Thompson's "pseudo-empiricism"(141). History should - this was true - relate to theory, and back again. But it had to be a totalizing account, a drawn-out meditation across time and space, not a fragmentary history split up by academic specialization. A vapid invocation of "the people", backed up by moralistic rhetoric, would not do. 'Labourism' was cramping the imagination. A new socialist strategy had to be developed, abstracted from the immediate situation. The theory must be got right. Theory must precede action.

Miliband, and John Saville, who had - as he confessed - sat "open-mouthed" at the feet of Laski as a student before the war (and whom Kingsley Martin, quite wrongly, thought was the real author of *Parliamentary Socialism*) formed a new outlet with *The Socialist Register*, edited annually from 1964 onwards and in which Thompson was first given space to strike out at the new 'New Leftists'. Saville rebuked the faithful who celebrated the 1945-51 government because of their over-sentimental reading of what was accomplished(142). He applauded Titmuss's handiwork in taking apart the inflated claims about the post-war redistribution of income and wealth, but pointed out that another conclusion could also be made: Labour's leading ideologists of the 1950s, heralding the advent of the 'post-capitalist' society which Crosland had continued to

141. P. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', *The New Left Review*, January-February 1966, pp2-42.

142. J. Saville, 'Labourism and the Labour Government', *The Socialist Register 1967*, R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds) (1967), pp.43-71.

propagate, had got carried away(143). Labour was a coalition - the pluralists were right. But it was one which the left might join but never lead. Attlee's alleged 'left-of-centre' views was a piece of misinformation. The left ought not to be afraid to look back for fear of being shown to have been wrong. The destruction of Tribunate legend, the stripping away of fanciful illusions and alibis, Saville regarded as an unavoidable first step toward a reinterpretation of British history in marxist terms, a political rather than just a high-flown marxism. By the time of the *May Day Manifesto* (1968), Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism*, along with Thompson's 'Revolution Again', were already established as key texts in the New Left denunciation of Wilson's first and second terms in office. The Old 'New Left' enjoyed a second wind.

The distinction which Thompson made between marxism as a living tradition and marxism as (in his rendering) a sectarian method - a distinction between marxisms - made it difficult to talk in any well-defined way about a 'school' of Anglo-marxists as such. Others preferred, in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, to think of a family of interpretations, emphasizing 'history from below', the importance of social class and human agency, and, joining them to other historians welcoming the retreat of conservative ideas, a generalized belief in constructive progress in history(144). It is possible to argue that their similarities outweighed any differences, since they all shared the conviction that history was pre-eminently political, and that in understanding the turn of events one had to look beyond the superstructure of the state to

143. 'Labour and Income Redistribution', *The Socialist Register 1965*, R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds)(1965), pp.147-162.

144. E.J.Hobsbawm, 'Progress in History', *Marxism Today*, February 1962, pp44-48.

the power relations in the economy and society. The dearth of interpretative theories they ascribed precisely to a neglect of, especially but not exclusively, class as a determining factor in social change. It was this assertion of the primacy of *a priori* presuppositions over the specific and the particular which non-marxists found hardest to accept. But it was in these terms that the originality of the "collective contribution" of British marxist historians has been valued, in not only influencing the writing of history but also in attempting to alter the entire conception of the historical process(145). Examination of the concept of 'Labourism' - an explanatory tool in the politics of Labour as well as the debilitating ailment of Labour politics - points up where marxist and non-marxist paths intersected and diverged.

Labour History

When The Society for the Study of Labour History came into existence in 1960, its links with the giants of the past were clearly secured. Tawney was invited, but declined, to be the Society's first Chairman. A volume of essays dedicated - in the event posthumously - to the grand old man of Labour history, Douglas Cole, had just been completed(146). Files passed on by Margaret Cole to John Saville were to form the basis of the multi-decker *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (1972 etc). In an opening address to the Society, Asa Briggs - already the author of several acclaimed recent histories - praised the earlier contributions made by the Webbs and the Hammonds, before going on to map out suggested lines of

145. H.J.Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians* (1984), p.231.

146. A.Briggs and J.Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History* (1960).

future research and the preservation of relevant historical records(147). Traditionalists were said to regard the subject as dubious and unworthy, as an avenue for special pleading(148). To become fully established, as Briggs pointed out, it was imperative to maintain the highest scholarly standards. At the same time, much of the earliest and most outstanding work had been carried out outside the universities, written in an untutored, radical spirit. By the end of its second year, however, membership of the Society already had a pronounced academic learning. Most -though not all - subscribers were in broad sympathy with the left, including a strong 'New Left' contingent, so that from its earliest days the Society "brought together scholars from the old committed tradition with scholars who find this commitment strange or even improper"(149).

Many of the pitfalls of Labour history were technical ones. Archival sources were patchy, either through carelessness or out of reticence, some of those approached exhibiting "an aversion to publicity which almost rivals that of the bureaucracy at Whitehall"(150). The whole field was encrusted with mythological beliefs about the past of Labour - unravelling these might lead to unpalatable conclusions. And there was no immediately identifiable scope to the subject-matter. Attention paid to the official institutions and leaders of the labour movement was increasingly offset by the counterattractions of class

147. *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No.1 1960, p.3.

148. *BSSLH*, No. 4 1962, pp1-2.

149. E.P.Thompson, 'History From Below', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, p.279.

150. F.Bealey and H.Pelling, *Labour and Politics 1900-1906* (1958), p.vii.

and culture.

The unimaginative orthodoxy of labour history was an early bone of contention. Royden Harrison had, for example, been driven to distraction by the balancing of platitudes in Ben Roberts's study of the early TUC(151). Stedman Jones complained, in dealing with Roberts and *Magnificent Journey* by Francis Williams, of a plebian variant of the onwards and upwards of the Whig interpretation of history - "Cole and his followers", he added, "applied much the same approach to the history of trade unions and Labour movements that their predecessors had applied to the history of the constitution"(152). Roberts, on the other hand, was more interested in relating the past history and role of organized labour in the virgin field of industrial relations. He has attested to the importance of Goldstein's work on the Transport and General Workers Union (written after prompting from Laski, in 1952) which gave a disquieting description of widespread apathy, high membership turnover, and ballot box malpractices by an inner circle in the running of one London branch of the union, and which created a fuss at Transport House(153). Roberts had once been of the view that business-union conflict need not preclude a common interest in responsible behaviour, but that, as public concern mounted in the 1950s, the unions should look to reform their own practices before the state was drawn in to imposing changes on them. Influenced by Bassett, Robbins and Oakeshott, he warned, in one of the first pamphlets from

151. R.Harrison, 'Practical Capable Man', in *The New Reasoner*, Autumn 1958, pp.105-119.

152. G.Stedman Jones, 'The Pathology of English History', *The New Left Review*, November-December 1967,

153. J.Goldstein, *The Government of British Trade Unions - a study of apathy and the democratic process in the Transport and General Workers Union* (1952).

the Institute of Economic Affairs, that the modern union movement would have - sooner rather than later - to face up to the full, coercive implications of socialist ideology(154), his writings a perfect foil to the meticulous studies of strong but musclebound unionism prepared (when, Roberts wrote, the author was talking in a more serious vein than he did in *Tribune*) by V.L. Allen, a former bricklayer and WEA student who held a research post in the Sociology Department at the LSE(155). It was Allen's personal background in the unions, allied to his wide-ranging talks with former ministers and trade unionists, which most impressed reviewers, as in his recounting - using General Council minutes - of strains between the Labour party and senior union leaders in the run-up to the 1945 election. His accounts were written, it was said, "from the inside", by someone who knew their way around. The expression was a significant one. To be active, and not just interested, to be "of" and "for" the interests of Labour, was a badge of allegiance, entitling the holder to enlist in the democracy of the committed, from whence the distaste - as labour history opened up and diversified - for its growing professionalization. In its extreme form, it meant that only some could claim to be writing on Labour's behalf. But this feeling of identification was not universal, or even considered inescapable. Briggs could commend Alan Bullock, Arthur Deakin's (second) choice as the biographer of Ernest Bevin, for very different reasons:

"Apart from the novelty of the scale [of

154. *Trade Unions in a Free Society* (1960).

155. V.L.Allen, *Power in Trade Unions - a study of their organization in Great Britain* (1954); *Trade Union Leadership - based on a study of Arthur Deakin* (1957); and *Trade Unions and Government* (1960). See also his article on the unions as a power within the state in *The Twentieth Century*, October 1957, pp.361-370.

the first volume of *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*], there is a second novel feature of this volume - the independence of the author. In many quarters the idea of such historiographical independence has long been suspect. The labour movement, it is claimed, can only be understood from within. Sympathy is no substitute for participation ... Mr Bullock has never been an 'insider', and his own social background is quite different from that of his subject. He has never been drawn far into the world which he describes in this volume. On the whole he makes good use of his independence"(156).

Bullock, in point of fact, had picked up a great deal about the way union business was conducted by attending several TUC and TGWU conferences. He had the good luck to see Bevin's use of the block vote to frustrate a conference majority in December 1944(157). But it was on the strength of his track record as a biographer that he had been asked to undertake Bevin's *Life*.

Henry Pelling, a student of Brogan at Cambridge and another founding member of the SSLH, also belonged with those thought of as having carved out "an area of research rather than a type of commitment"(158). He was economical and workmanlike, not a 'worker-intellectual'. History was to be found in the detail, in

156. A. Briggs, 'Bevin and the Movement', *The New Statesman*, 19 March 1960, p.419.

157. A. Bullock, letter to the author dated 9 April 1988.

158. Social Science Research Council, *Research in Economic and Social History* (1971), p.77.

the facts so far as they could be authenticated (and Pelling did all his own research), not in unwieldy abstractions. Labour's origins were far less explicable in terms of socialist principle than Cole, for one, had made out. Nor could Fabian self-publicizing be allowed to pass. It was simply not very helpful to regard the Labour party as an ideological vessel. The final verdict on the rise of Labour could still be a favourable one, as Bealey - his co-author - put it; the mistake was to overdo the "deliberateness" of its leaders' thoughts and actions. The remarkably wide and diverse range of motives and interests, and the success with which these disparate features were knocked into shape were of far greater note.

All the same, Pelling - and this was where some of Brogan's vigilance rubbed off on him - was not unused to controversy. He spent a year on sabbatical at the University of Wisconsin, the home of the school of American labour history, producing out of this American Labour and more pertinently *America and the British Left*, which traced (with the help of Epstein) a line of descent from nineteenth century "aristocratic" to twentieth century "radical" attacks on America(159). Left-wingers like Laski who had a prejudiced attitude came in for particular reproach. Pelling then attempted to bring the history of the British Communist Party out of the shadows, lending credence to many popularly-held suspicions about Soviet manipulation(160). Accused in *The New Reasoner* of "cold war trespassing" by John Saville (who had only just left the CPGB) Pelling stood his ground, countering that "Mr Saville is still too much of the politician that he cannot distinguish between a

159. H.M.Pelling, *America and the British Left - from Bright to Bevan* (1956).

160. H.M.Pelling, *The British Communist Party* (1958).

historical statement and a political judgement"(161). "It is, of course, very difficult to be objective about problems of recent history", he granted. "But does Mr Saville's review suggest that he is a good judge of objectivity?". This was to be followed by a chapter in the American book of the Month Club *The Strategy of Deception*, the gist of which was that Labour's federal structure and union connection made for vulnerability to far left infiltration(162). His slim compression of *Modern Britain* (1960) showed much cause for national satisfaction.

A brief, undramatic history of the Labour party, thereafter regularly updated, was similarly disregarding(163). Having locked horns with Robert McKenzie, Pelling rectified, with the historian's natural aversion to model-building, the picture of the true state of affairs in the 1930s when Labour - more than at any other time - had been "the General Council's party in Parliament. But, as recent work by Harrison and Allen had indicated, neither arm of the 'movement' - he too was much taken with the word - behaved monolithically. The ties that bound the parliamentary and trade union leaders at important junctures in the past, giving them effective control over the movement's many arms and wings, could not but be the principal theme - otherwise it was all but impossible to explain how and by whom the party was actually 'run'. McKenzie's book, although of "great value", dealt with this "inadequately", he warned the

161. Letter in *The New Reasoner*, Autumn 1959, pp.109-110.

162. 'Great Britain: The Communist Party and the Trade Unions' in *The Strategy of Deception*, J. Kirkpatrick (ed) (1963), pp.310-340.

163. *A Short History of the Labour Party* (1961 etc).

unwary reader(164). Pelling also thought Miliband unhealthily "opinionated" (sic), and his notion of the Labour left "ill-defined"(165). The essence of the party-union relationship he then filled out in the to-be-standard *A History of British Trade Unionism* (1963), a pull-together of secondary literature and studies of individual trade unions, rigidly historical in method and painting a portrait of a union movement acted upon as much as freely acting - a work composed without any desire "to influence what is happening now or in the future"(166), and tilting to the right the centre of gravity, as Pollard put it, of "this predominantly left-wing branch of historiography"(167). With A.J.P. Taylor, he faulted him on factual grounds (for Pelling the worst sort of offence), implying that entertainment should always take second place to accuracy. A succinct and astringent entry on the Trades Union Congress was published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, at Roberts's invitation. And the innate "good sense" of the ordinary working class Pelling then championed in a challenging book of essays(168), comparing popular attitudes to welfare and social change in 1900 and 1945 and noting some resistance to state action, a climate of indifference and xenophobia, and the slow formation of a class-conscious outlook, these traits together - in Pelling's view - marking a shift from an attitude of revolt to one of passivity. None of these results were

164. Letter in *The New Statesman*, 7 July 1961, p.13.

165. Review in *Political Studies*, Vol.10 1962, p.110.

166. A.Briggs, 'Ancient City', *The New Statesman*, 1 November 1963, p.620.

167. S. Pollard in *History*, 49 1964, p.101.

168. H.M. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (1968).

likely to endear him to the left.

Describing without overtly taking sides, but mildly Labourish, Pelling's meticulous, almost pedantic assembling of evidence did not mean that his prose was unobjectionably transparent. There was plenty of criticism, leftwards of Pelling, that charting the party's rise was also in some tacit sense to confer approval (a more unscholarly attitude Pelling could not imagine), and that the 'right-wing' emphasis on organization and machinery was to be regretted. Often, however, he was most revealing when reviewing the work of others. He would admit to errors of fact. He would not allow his standing as an historian first and foremost to be slighted(169)..

The writings of Pelling, set alongside the 'Anglo-marxists', and this was true of the SSLH even in its early days, put the opposing values of political commitment and professional detachment at their sharpest. The 'New Left', in its various guises, was impatient, explicit, emphatic, and bound up with an historical and ideological project for which Miliband's book on *Parliamentary Socialism* was the last word(170). Pelling - the exemplary scholar's scholar - was conventional, austere by design, starting out free from preconceptions, of a piece with the English empirical approach referred to quite genuinely by Brogan(171), above all, with no axe to grind, and an illustrator of the case best advanced calmly instead of outspokenly. He

169. See the exchange of letters with E. Genovese in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 November (p.1457) and 26 November (p.1486) 1976.

170. 'Draft statement for May Day', May Day Manifesto Committee, microfilm archive in the British Library.

171. D.W.Brogan, *ibid*, August 1946, p.205.

deployed these attributes in the field of labour history in the same way as in any other field, their deployment indeed being all the more important here. He set a standard by which all others were appraised. There was with Pelling a past to be unearthed, separate and apart from whatever one thinks of it, a history - in Acton's ideal - independent of historians. With Pelling we reach the threshold of contemporary history, of history in its own time but academically objectified.

Contemporary History

Modernists, treating the modern period as a fit object of historical concern, first grew in numbers during and shortly after the Great War, when people were "thrown back upon the past" in search of the origin of recent troubles(172). The commercial success and 'irresponsible' debunking of historical popularisers - like H.G. Wells and Lytton Strachey - added to the impetus. But contemporary history, according to one of its earliest detractors, only really began to flourish shortly after the end of the Second World War when the general public became more than ever before "history conscious"(173). Even though the edited documents on inter-war diplomacy then being published were hardly regarded as absolutely reliable, and the intrusion of moral judgements was all too evident, the clamour for topicality had proved irresistible, distracting serious scholars from their proper tasks. In due course, the author argued, this would reduce "the power of real history to pierce deep to the marrow of things". The pitfalls of officially-inspired history were no less

172. C.H.Williams, introduction to *The Modern Historian* (1938), pp11-32.

173. D.Williams, 'Some Aspects of Contemporary History', *The Cambridge Journal*, September 1949, p.738.

apparent. Because contemporary history - of all histories - was the most liable to drastic reshaping, to "large-scale structural revision", as first impressions slowly gave way to more mature reflection, so it was to be the least trusted(174). All too often the mistake was made of allowing present-day preoccupations and interests to determine a view of the recent, not yet fully historical past. It need not necessarily be a case of obvious partisanship, although the pernicious effects of committed writing were always a risk. It was more a matter of taking care to avoid "reading the past backwards"(175) or unwittingly allowing transient fashions to ensnare the researcher. The argument moved perceptibly on to the territory of the historian. This had been the gist of Butterfield's objection to E.H. Carr's Trevelyan lectures - that he had overlooked the discipline of training oneself to transcend the opinions of the moment. Without a ready-laid deposit of accumulated historical reflections, the modern historian was more than likely to be swayed by the passing show. There were clear dangers in this kind of history becoming too popular. Contemporary history, one young scholar was advised, ought not to be studied(176).

The availability of source material was anyway haphazard. Private papers were subject to the law of copyright, and also usually a lengthy embargo. Otherwise, access was granted according to the discretion of the holders, leading to accusations of favouritism.

174. H.Butterfield, 'Official History: its pitfalls and criteria', reprinted in *History and Human Relations* (1951), p.210.

175. M.Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (1962), p.47.

176. D.C.Watt, 'Contemporary History: problems and perspectives', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, October 1969, p.512.

With the public records, an informal fifty year rule operated. The problem was the lack of an agreed and consistent policy covering all archives. The position was only formalized in the Public Records Act of 1958, which laid down a statutory fifty-year rule, the matter to be looked at again after five years or so. The restrictive time period was justified on the grounds of "the preservation of unselfconsciousness" on the part of ministers and officials in the drafting of Cabinet and departmental papers(177).

Apparent breaches of this rule - most notably in the memoirs of Anthony Eden - led to the forming of a campaign by a group of historians from Oxford, Cambridge and London universities calling for a reduction in the closed period. Complaints were made that governments put "endless obstructions" in the way of scholars, while documents were spirited away by outgoing ministers. After the elapsing of half a century, all that would be left was "dead knowledge". It might be that civil servants were being spared from embarrassment over, to take one example, the background to the Munich agreement. But silence, H.G. Nicholas (a noted Americanist and author of the second Nuffield election study) pointed out, meant that "our first version goes by default", leaving the door open to foreign researchers(178). Journalists, meanwhile undeterred, would carry on rushing into print with uninstructed, inaccurate and misleading but profitable accounts(179). If recent history was going to be written, come what may, it should at least be handled professionally.

177. R. Rhodes-James, 'The Fifty-Year Rule', *The Spectator*, 21 August 1964, pp.233-234.

178. *The Times*, 11 July 1964, p.6.

179. Eg. L. Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj* (1961).

Although the argument was addressed in the first place to the pre-1939 and wartime period, these strictures also applied with no less force to the state of the literature on early post-war Britain. Attlee, Shinwell, Morrison and Dalton, uninformative as many of them were, had scooped the pool ("Did you see he [Morrison] left £28,000!! How did he manage to acquire so much?" Attlee exclaimed in 1965(180)). There were no British sources to match the insider accounts of Byrnes or Forrestal; nor was it easy for writers who were not hand-picked or 'friends of the family' to overcome the reservations of relatives. An unadventurousness in seeking out other archival material only began to be put right when the Nuffield project to locate and list the whereabouts of papers of prominent politicians and political organizations started life - with SSRC money - in 1967-68. Mitchell had shown, from a particular angle, what could be achieved, which was why Pritt's unreconstructed Stalinism was such a let-down(181). To cap it all, the Britain of 1945 had taken on something of a remote look, almost forgotten and yet to emerge out of a "curious obscurity", which even novelists had had a hard time re-creating. Historians were slow to exploit the possibilities, and in no position to compete with the "massed typewriters" of North America(182).

180. Letter to Arthur Moyle, in K. Harris, *ibid* (1982), p.560.

181 D.N.Pritt, *The Labour Government 1945-51* (1963). Pritt's was an historical curio which, along with his three volumes of autobiography, contained the views of an 'Independent' Labour MP who was also an unreconstructed and unrepentant fellow-traveller of the Soviet Union. His history disseminated the post-1948 Moscow 'line' calling for outright condemnation of Labour for its anti-Soviet dealings, even though he had - in 1945 - tried to re-join the party and voted for the 1945 American loan.

182 S.Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (1951), preface.

There was one compensating advantage which contemporary historians did have and which Alan Bullock, one of their number, was exploiting to the utmost. 'History' and 'politics', in his view, could not be separated by the mechanical application of a fifty-year rule. History was defined more by its method than its subject matter, a method just as useful in exploring recent events as distant ones (although, in this case, the "precocious disillusionment" of the *Age of Austerity* essays had not appealed to him(183)). Moreover, as he had found with his life of Bevin, which he was midway through, he had had the opportunity to question and cross-examine participants in the incidents he was describing:

"How much would the historian of the Nineteenth century not give to be able to question Metternich or Cavour, as - to take a personal example - I have been able to discuss with Lord Attlee the history of the post-war Labour government..."(184)

The great value of oral evidence, in Bullock's mind, was that it taught the historian to be sceptical of written sources (these were plentiful in the case of Bevin) and this at a time when the argument was still to be heard that good history required full access to all the records. Bassett had made a point of *not* talking to the survivors of 1931(185). Norton Medlicott, charged with the documents on British Foreign Policy series, and

183. A. Bullock, 'Only Yesterday', *The Spectator*, 1 November 1963, p. 564.

184. A. Bullock, 'Is it Possible to Write Contemporary History?', in *On the Track of Tyranny - essays presented to L.G. Montefiore*, M. Beloff (ed)(1960), p. 69.

185. R. Bassett, *1931 - Political Crisis* (1958).

Bassett's next-door-neighbour at the LSE, was by contrast a keen enthusiast for making contact with living witnesses, and using what was divulged - in conjunction with whatever other material was available - to provide "the first orderly and objective analysis of public events", the first rough draft of history(186). The practice of interviewing was, for some, the distinguishing feature about the study of the contemporary past(187).

That contemporary history presented a special problem to more traditionally-based historians was underlined by the unsettling effect of other voguish trends which threatened to do away with the conventional understandings of history. Developments in philosophy had called into question any assurance the historian could have in knowing an historical description to be true in a watertight, objective sense, without value-laden notions being consciously or inadvertently smuggled in. And social science - in its diverse forms - seemed to be predicated on the assumption that all constructive research, however esoteric or antiquarian, ought - if it was to have any use - to be guided by considerations of social relevance. The general fissiparousness of arts subjects contributed to the disorientation of older disciplines, history included, weakening their capacity to establish accepted orthodoxies. One consequence was a spate of books justifying history's old ways.

Antipathy to sociological theorising, to history-by-thesis, helps to explain in part how little use was made

186. W.N. Medlicott, introduction to *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary History*, in B. Krikler and W. Laqueur (eds)(1972), pp1-12.

187. J. Barnes, 'Teaching and Research in British Contemporary History', in D.C. Watt (ed), *Contemporary History in Europe* (1969), p.40.

by historians of the very substantial body of social science research on 1945-51 that by now existed. Even one of the best known examples, McKenzie's study, was felt to have been far too quickly hailed as a classic, while Beer's *Modern British Politics* was not reviewed in any of the major historical journals. Pelling was the only one to take McKenzie at his word, and that was in order to point up the severe limitations of his argument. It was the historian's truth - or conceit - that it was wrong to try and make history scientific. Besides which, historians already had what they took to be a well understood idea of sociology and politics, made up of narratives and episodes, which they saw no need to relinquish(188). Hence the declaration by Geoffrey Elton, in his pronouncements in 1970, that "old-fashioned" political history, because of its essential attention to the chronological storyline (and political history above all tells a story) must take precedence over any other form of history - history "need not stop there, but unless it starts there, it will not start at all"(189). The political side of the past needs to be known first. More crudely put, the historian's job was to tell the social scientists when to shut up. The need, therefore, was to confront the new rivals by defining some principles of good practice and by reiterating the common, agreed criteria about the aim, validity and methods of historical study to which, as Max Beloff argued, "most of the historical profession would give assent"(190). His own preference, following David Thomson's *Aims of History* guidebook, was to re-emphasize the autonomy of history, by which he meant "the proper

188. D.Thomson, *The Aims of History* (1969), pp.79-80.

189. G.R.Elton, *Political History - principles and practice* (1970), Chapter 1.

190. M. Beloff, 'On Thinking about the Past', *Encounter*, October 1969, p.43.

freedom of historical inquiry from any subservience to a particular national or party objective". This was a characteristic, he went further, that held good - irrespective of schools or approaches - for "the Western intellectual community" as a whole.

The standard of measure was not one by which many would be excluded. Even so enthusiastic an advocate of the new history as Arthur Marwick, writing a lively book about the state of the art of history, had no difficulty in showing how variety and conflict contributed to the sense of dynamic, developing subject reaching out towards an enhanced understanding(191). But along with this went a much less exalted view of a historian's obligations. Writing about events that had recently occurred did not mean that all hope of objective discussion had to be set aside. Objectivity was still an ideal worth aspiring to, even if it was not thought to be largely attainable(192). Belief in "absolute truth" no longer held sway, as the editor of the pilot issue of *The Journal of Contemporary History* expressed it in 1967(193). Bias could, in some circumstances, even be beneficial. It was possible to be too coldly detached. Commitment was really a non-problem. There was no reason why historians need be so disagreeable. With the era of 1945-51 just becoming historical, it was now up to the contemporary historian, casting around for sources, short of perspective, and aware that his or her account could only be provisional, to be the first to construct a framework which colleagues and successors "must either

191. A. Marwick, *The Nature of History* (1970).

192. R. Morgan, 'The Writing and Teaching of Contemporary History - the historian speaks', in *Since 1945 - aspects of contemporary world history*, J.L. Henderson (ed)(1966), pp.11-24.

193. Editorial note, *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 1 No. 1 (1966), p. iv.

follow or controvert"(194).

i) General histories

One manifestation of the student-led popularity of contemporary history was the publication of several textbook surveys or 'general histories' of Britain in the modern era. The main purpose of these general texts was to provide a lucid, balanced and dependable one-volume overview (often the last in a commissioned series) of the profound changes which Britain had undergone since the turn of the century, picking out an overriding theme or set of themes around which to construct the narrative flow.

General histories of this type do several things. They bring to a wider public the recent labours of historians, summarising the current state of research. They show how different phases or periods relate to one another, drawing attention to passages of continuity and discontinuity. They indicate the principal points of contention and the areas where issues are still outstanding. Because the problems of emphasis and selection are magnified, general histories also call for the strictest standards of critical training - openness, scepticism, a lack of dogmatism and never coming to the point with the mind already made up. It is through general histories that an orthodox account of the past is established and confirmed. They present a distillation of wide reading and rumination, all things considered and at a given stage in historical understanding.

It follows however that general histories, being so evidently products of their day, are always provisional, written in the certain knowledge that they will have to stand up to the disintegrating effects of later discoveries. This applies equally to points of detail and to the larger interpretative frame, the latter often deriving its force from prevailing political interests and preoccupations. It is these transitory influences which so clearly date a work. A Whig outlook is said to have coloured the histories of Victorian and Edwardian England, imparting to the narrative a stately advance in the unfolding of liberty and good government, aided by a happy blending of traditional institutions and national character. Other later writers, in the search for low motives or class struggle, did attempt to disturb the picture of unique progress. Although given to liberal despair by the disruptive impact of war and crisis in Europe, historians of a middling disposition were still inclined to regard the coming mass democracy and the growth in the scale of government as only the latest stage in a consoling success story, validating the British way of life, and vindicating - during and after World War Two - British values. Admiration for Crown, parliament and the common law protection of individual rights was joined to a welcoming for the enlargement of socio-economic rights guaranteed by the extended state. In this way, Britain's diminishing world status and economic power could be balanced against its exceptional social stability and domestic social harmony over the same time span. All were confident if chastened progressives.

An important assumption of the general histories written in the nineteen sixties - therefore - was that the main historical outlines of post-war British history,

expressed in a kind of revamped Whiggery, were already evident and unlikely to be greatly altered. Even starting from scratch (since the bulk of what primary source material there was was often of the wrong sort), the impress of reduced foreign standing but social improvement at home, the rise of Labour combined with long periods of Conservative rule, and the binding of State, nation and people into an indissoluble whole, were truths which no serious historian could disregard. New imperatives operated, largely outside Britain's control, which there was little point in getting worked up about. Post-war governments had done the best they could, in testing conditions and with creditable results, in keeping with British traditions of gradualism and amelioration. Particular failures were excusable. The public rivalries of those years ought not to deceive. All the bitterest controversies, which had decided Britain's fate, belonged to the years prior to 1945. The prosperity of the 1950s had pushed the war and immediate post-war period even further into a strange and unfamiliar past of discomfort and scarcity, before the onset of abundance; the war, as Sissons and French pointed out, had only really ended in 1951. It was left to the general historian - adopting the tone of cool (though not entirely non-judgemental) detachment - to recount events within his or her own lifetime which now meant very little to a younger audience. Praise from reviewers testified to the success they had in pulling off what, because the making of the new Britain was closest in time, should have been the hardest to convey.

But reactions to A.J.P. Taylor's rousing, "populist" British history brought to life the question of the appropriateness of the received ideas of praiseworthy liberal advance. Wary of sliding into marxism, too much

had been made of the virtue of Olympian objectivity(195). The commonplace verities of British orderliness and civility were no substitute for a rigorous treatment of the social forces making for and holding back national advances. A contented account encouraged the exclusion of more disturbing alternatives, hindering necessary historical reappraisal. The textbook authors of a liberal descent could always argue that those taking a contrary view were allowing doctrinaire considerations to get the better of their judgement. More radical historians, unencumbered by the objectivist ideal, saw a very different past leading up to the present.

ii) War

A second - and more telling - demonstration of the advent of contemporary history came with the 'Home Front' controversy, the first self-consciously historical debate to touch on post-1945 Britain. Its purely historical characteristics were several.

It had, above all else, a genuine historical problem to address: the civil and not just the military impact of war, and particularly the Second World War, on British society, which the general historians (Taylor included) had left hanging in the air. Did the war interrupt, or did it accelerate, Britain's long-run development? To what extent did the events of wartime dictate the course of post-war politics? How did Britain make the transition from the thirties to the forties? Asking such questions prompted a clear debating move on from the origins of the war - recently revived in the early 60s -

195. J.H.Plumb (ed), *Crisis in the Humanities* (1964), p.37.

to its immediate and longer-term economic and social effects. But they also signalled a rolling backwards in time from the six-year struggle of the Attlee governments on to the war years, the importance of which the earlier literature had largely obscured. There was a growing impression that what had happened after the war could not be understood without a fuller appreciation of wartime. This shift of interest had implications for both historical periodisation and ideas of causation.

War - in all its aspects - also had considerable cross-disciplinary appeal. Military historians, concerned with the conduct and campaigning of war, were joined by students of political history, covering leadership, coalition politics and public opinion, and economic history, looking upon war as an economic event. Most strikingly, the social history of war enjoyed 'pop' status (the first chair in social history was created in 1967). War was recognized as having been crucial in the impetus for social reform, and ways were found to link the world of ideas of social reformers to the world of practical politics. Where a sociological influence was strongest, this encouraged the writing of history to a theory, and an attempt to attain a comprehensive understanding of the general relationship between war and social change in modern times. Not surprisingly, each of these approaches gave primacy to a different set of explanatory factors - even to the conviction that it was not the business of the historian to "explain" anything at all. Differences of interpretation often corresponded with rival kinds of history.

The history of the Home Front, finally, reflected the attitudes and assumptions of historians. Older scholars took the Whiggish view of war as a nasty,

ruinous interlude. More junior colleagues, by (often radical) upbringing and outlook children in the 1930s and 1940s, tended to look more at the constructive consequences of the conflict, to the good which came out of it, and - in some cases - to the thwarting of this energy with the coming peace. A new historical generation grew up less awestruck by figures of the past, and more insistent that history and social studies should serve a 'social purpose'. Taylor's much-quoted final passage ('England Arise') sat easily alongside the lyrics from 'Eleanor Rigby' (196). Contrasting attitudes were also very much age-related.

These characteristics help to account for the initial positions in the 'Home Front' discussion; they cannot be expected to have determined the direction which that discussion took. The fundamental test of the historicity of contemporary history could only be shown by the readiness of historians to observe the critical techniques and practices constituting historical inquiry (197). A model of the way historical reasoning works and historical argument typically proceeds was well-established, and was indeed being forcefully restated in response to various attacks throughout the 1960s. The controlling logic and standards of the discipline of history, with its close attention to methods and evidence, dictates that, however a controversy may have originally started out, and whatever the attitudes involved, discussion will eventually settle down to a detailed examination of their respective strengths and weaknesses. This does not mean that all

196. See *Writing in England Today*, K. Miller (ed) (1968).

197. M. Oakeshott, 'Historiography' in *A Spectator Miscellany* (1956), pp. 32-34.

viewpoints have to converge; it does mean that they are limited by, and have to be consistent with, a growing body of evidence. In so doing, the original predispositions (without which the opening questions might never have been posed) became incidental; they cease in time to matter. Recognition of bias is not then an insurmountable difficulty but a necessary step by which its effects are to be overcome. History - as a result - although the product of each historian, is also the common property of all(198). The authority of an historical account does not rely on the scrupulous care of individual historians; it resides in the processes of historical inquiry. Objectivity enters history through the common dialogue of its practitioners. It remained for contemporary historians to show that contemporary history was subject to, and definable by, the same sort of methodological conditions applying to history as a whole, whatever the particular subject matter or proximity to the present. The debate about Britain and the Second World War provided that first opportunity.

iii) H.M.S.O: the history of peacetime events

The lobbying efforts of the Oxford-Cambridge-London campaigners were crowned with some success when, in March 1967 and in fulfilment of an election pledge by the Labour party, the Fifty Year moratorium on the disclosure of State papers was reduced to thirty years, suddenly bringing the recent, documented past within historical reach. The Prime Minister, Harold Wilson - for one - instead of, as had been suggested, wanting to live down some of his enthusiastic outpourings as a junior minister under Attlee, was only too anxious to be around to answer

his critics when the time came. There were also advantages to be had in advertising what an earlier stint of majority Labour rule had accomplished. At the same time, as well, the government announced its intention to extend the officially-sponsored histories covering military and civil affairs during the First and Second World Wars into "peacetime" areas of outstanding interest, "enabling important periods in our history to be recorded in complete and authoritative narratives, written while the official records could still be supplemented by reference to the personal recollections of the public men who were involved". In December 1969, in the wake of this earlier statement, the first three peacetime histories were put into commission - a study of the formative years of colonial development; a work on environmental planning; and a text entitled 'Nationalization: An Analytical Account 1945-60', to be undertaken by D.N. Chester, Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford.

The initiation of a peacetime series was a novelty in several respects. In the past, various departmental memoranda had been prepared under the auspices of the Historical Section of the Cabinet Office, but these were meant purely for internal use, as a guide for future policy-makers. The lack of research into peacetime economic activities - as against diplomacy - was already the subject of comment. Some of the wartime civil histories had met with official disapproval (Titmuss's *Problems of Social History* sparked off a great row), there were no guarantees that the final work would be eventually published, and fears were expressed that the new project might founder upon official indifference.

This uncertainty matched the ambivalent attitude of

academics(199). Privileged and unrestricted access to the written record, in advance of the general opening of the government archives, had been used advantageously by qualified historians. But outsiders were kept in ignorance of the rules governing the status of the official historian. The official disclaimer notwithstanding, the HMSO wrappers suggested a cleaned-up account of past controversies. The written record was all too apt to be bland and uninformative, a "neat formula" in the minutes perhaps hiding sharp discord or helpless floundering. There was a natural tendency, as Pelling remarked, for histories to be written "from a predominantly administrative point of view"(200).

This was certainly the case with the purposefully inoffensive volumes of selected documents, edited by Nicholas Mansergh (one of the university campaigners) on the last years of British rule in India, which began appearing in 1970, catering for a growing historical interest in Indian sub-continent. The unfolding of high policy, and of what had gone into moments of decision and indecision, did not always make for cheerless reading, however. M.R.D. Foot's history of the SOE in wartime France had raised a storm. Margaret Gowing and Lorna Arnold, in their UK Atomic Energy Authority-commissioned account of the background to the development of British atomic power and the atomic bomb programme (two volumes, 1974(201)) showed that, by "pulling no

199. On this see J.M.Lee's editorial on public administration and official history in *Public Administration*, Summer 1976, pp127-131.

200. H.M.Pelling, *ibid* (1970), bibliography.

201. M.Gowing assisted by L. Arnold, *Independence and Deterrence - Britain and atomic energy 1945-1952*, Volume 1: Policy Making Volume 2: Policy Execution.

punches"(202), it was still possible to startle. They saw backfiles not seen by others, before or since, and confirmed that research into the manufacture of a British bomb had gone ahead in strictest secrecy, under the cover of the peaceful use of atomic power. There were, they agreed, sound strategic and 'status' reasons for this decision. But the manner in which it was reached, at a single, hurriedly convened *ad hoc* cabinet committee meeting in January 1947 which the scientists most directly affected knew nothing about, while the costs of the programme were hidden from parliamentary or public scrutiny, amounted to a distortion of constitutional government. It was one way of circumventing opposition from the economic ministers, Dalton and Cripps, who were known to be alarmed by the huge expense. But military considerations had been allowed to override all others, the enormity of the deception was such that George Strauss *et al* - though Gowing declined to say so in so many words - were quite mistaken. In so far as the relationship with the United States was concerned, the extreme secrecy had even been self-defeating, since the Americans assumed that British know-how was not all that advanced. "So now we know", John Barry exclaimed in *The New Statesman*, where the squabble with Crossman had originally broken out(203). One of the gravest of post-war decisions, claimed to be an "indispensable" action, was one which the country could ill afford and got little out of. As to the real motivation of ministers, most of them were now dead, leaving only a few surviving civil servants to pass comment.

202. 'Secret no more', *The Economist*, 14 December 1974, pp92-93.

203. J. Barry, 'Bomb Squad', *The New Statesman*, 13 December 1974, p.867.

Secrecy should not - Gowing went to argue - be invoked as an all-purpose alibi for other recent policy failures, however(204). Critics of the British higher civil service, in other words, would have to look elsewhere. The usefulness of official histories derived from their value as part of the "collective memory" of past choices and past events, illuminating present-day predicaments - but there was no requirement to point the finger of accusation. Others, less enamoured of the Whitehall view, drew their own conclusions. In addition to foreign and defence policy misadventures and miscalculations, confidence in the effectiveness of post-war economic management was also, by the early seventies, on the wane, undermining the generally heartening picture of the recovery of the post-war British economy. The attitudes contained in the official wartime histories, dedicated to the greater glory of the wartime service, came under renewed attack. Modern problems, to which there seemed to be no satisfactory answer, could be traced to the confusions and uncertainties of policies - like the Labour government's nationalization programme - that were present at their very inception. The wish, expressed on the HMSO dustjackets, that the official histories might help towards a better understanding and solution of contemporary problems, was only one - diplomatic - way of putting it.

iv) Biographies and biographers

Further to the developments already mentioned, a final instance of historical activity arose - contemporary political history in the form of political biographies, relating the political life of a prominent

204. M.Gowing, *Reflections on Atomic Energy History* (The Rede Lecture)(1978).

individual with the times in which they lived and worked. Often thought of as the English art, biography expresses an author's desire to do justice to the work of his or her subject, now in retirement or recently deceased. It is a memorial tribute from a small person to a bigger one(205). An 'authorised' biographer is granted a sight of private family papers which provide the means of entry to the closed period before government papers are opened. Biography also helps a writer to steer a course through the often unintelligible confusion of the immediate past. An exceptional individual who was at the centre of events over a prolonged period can even be said to have personified their epoch. History is not biography; it is not even the sum total of innumerable biographies. But the biographical mode can add an extra, and marketable, element to the activity of historical reconstruction.

Without gainsaying any of these attributes, past political biographers have also made clear that the composition of a biography is not as easy as it looks. A political biography treats with the substance of politics, but not quite in the same way(206). The subject needs to be singled out from and placed in the political circles they moved, the private and public aspects of their life being successfully fused. An older faithfulness to the facts (in which the biographer was plainly external to the person studied) had come to be replaced by the exploration and interpretation of personality and character, insight often coming straight out of a biographer's own powers of imagination. This

205. A.Bierce, *The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary* (1971), p.58.

206. R.R.James, 'Soldiers and Biographers', in D.C. Watt (ed), *ibid* (1969), pp19-31.

might open the door to the befogging influence of sentiment and prejudice; but the point was that even the taking of the interpretative approach to extreme lengths did not invalidate it altogether.

Political biography underwent something of a renaissance by the later 1960s, and had a direct bearing on the assessment of many of the key figures in the 1945 Labour government. Helped by "lorry loads" of documents from Transport House(207), Alan Bullock's two volumes on Bevin had been published in 1960 and 1967. The tale had grown with the telling and he now envisaged a further book covering Bevin's time as Foreign Secretary. Apart from endorsing the value of interviewing, Bullock had also steered clear of any over-affection for 'the People's party'. Authorised profiles of Attlee (who had become slightly more talkative in old age), Cripps and Gaitskell were "in preparation"(208). Michael Foot's follow-up on Bevan - left poised on the threshold of office at the end of volume one - was also awaited. Shinwell, always garrulous, appeared as a senior witness of the 1945 administration in Thames Television's *The Day Before Yesterday*(Summer 1970) in which old newsreel footage was intercut with talking to the camera, allowing contributors to speak in their own words. As to the cause for this revival, an explanation was forthcoming: no other recent government (in the view of Roy Jenkins, also a successful biographer(209)) contained so many politicians of the front-rank, in an admittedly elderly

207. Lord Bullock, 'Bookends', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 18 November 1983, p.12.

208. *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900-1951*, compiled by C. Hazlehurst and C. Woodland (1974).

209. E. Jenkins, *Nine Men of Power* (1974), p.xi.

ministry of all the talents. The 'Big Five' chose themselves. The difficult circumstances they had faced added to their aura, in comparison with the politics of earlier periods. "The curious thing", Medlicott wrote in a review of *The Dictionary of National Biography*,

"is that after 1945, when politicians were again struggling with adversity, and were no more successful than their predecessors, their reputations were evidently higher. The reason seems clear: the disparity between the nation's objectives and its resources had at last been fully grasped"(210).

The Dalton diaries apart - however - there was a basic shortage of private papers already available in the public domain. In Herbert Morrison's case, the want was acute - D.N. Chester, his literary executor, had been taken aback to find that only a suitcase of Morrison's papers survived him, to go alongside a plainly inadequate autobiography. With no time to lose, he approached two former Nuffield students then lecturing in Government at the LSE, Bernard Donoughue and George Jones, with a view to bringing together the recollections of those who had known Morrison or worked with him, so that the shortfall could be made up. *Herbert Morrison - Portrait of a Politician* (1973), marking a breakthrough in the use of oral information, was the result. On all counts it was an object lesson in political biography.

Both Donoughue and Jones were knowledgeable about Labour and especially London politics and politically

210. W.N. Medlicott, 'Contemporary History as Biography', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 1 1972, pp. 91-106.

classifiable as young Gaitskellites. Donoughue had worked previously for Political and Economic Planning, Jones stood as the Labour candidate at Kidderminster in the 1964 general election. They immediately put out a request for "letters, papers and reminiscences"(211) about Morrison, but did so "in some desperation and without any clear expectation of what benefit would be derived"(212). As it turned out, more than 300 interviewees were consulted, several important witnesses - Morrison's constituency agent, and the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury - not having long to live. Only Ethel Donald, Morrison's confidential secretary for the best part of his career, refused to meet them, as Grigg was quick to spot(213). The yield was invaluable. Revealing sections in the second half of the book, assigned to Donoughue and dealing with the years from 1940 to 1965, relied heavily on the memories of participants and protagonists - Morrison's working methods as Lord President, his part in the high-level plotting, an assessment of his unhappy showing at the Foreign Office - the information absorbed directly into the text. At times, oral was even favoured over what written sources there were, where there was room for doubt. Teaching the post-war period to undergraduates, Donoughue was in the position of having to write the books for himself as he went along. The biography of Morrison ("oral history at its best"(214)) provided

211. *Socialist Commentary*, February 1967, p. 23.

212. G.Jones, letter in *Oral History*, Spring 1974, pp83-84.

213. J.Grigg, 'His lost secrets', *The Evening Standard*, 2 October 1973, p.26.

214. A.Seldon and J.Papworth, *By Word of Mouth: elite oral history* (1983), p.142.

the richest account up to that time and in cold print of how the 1945 Labour government functioned.

One of most intriguing puzzles was why, much as the victory in 1945 was masterminded by Morrison, and much as the programme then enacted was 'Morrisonian' in spirit, Morrison himself did not reap the political benefits, but was continually frustrated and outclassed. Never having got over his defeat against Attlee in 1935 provided a clue to his subsequent, restless behaviour. Even in the flush of Labour's election triumph, his star could be seen to be on the wane, much earlier than historians had been accustomed to think, the attempt to push Attlee aside (about which his autobiography had been less than candid) especially reflecting discredit. But the wide responsibilities allocated to him, making him the chief co-ordinating minister in the domestic field, meant that his guiding hand was to be found everywhere. The hitherto "shadowy" network of cabinet committees which he oversaw and which carried the main burden of work - economic planning, the socialization of industry, future legislation - Donoughue brought out into the open. With his additional duties as party and parliamentary manager, Morrison's exceptional energies were fully stretched. Even a single-minded dynamo like Morrison could not carry the load indefinitely, and he was the first of the cabinet heavyweights to crack under the strain, in January 1947, removing him from the fray at a crucial moment. Spurning the offer from Cripps to join in unseating the prime minister, he then had his wings clipped in the reorganization of portfolios ("he easily gave up his empire") and was the chief loser. Donoughue's description of the confused and panicky intrigues of that year, in a situation in which no one was quite sure what was going on, was unassailable and -

in one reviewer's opinion - unlikely ever to be bettered. But if memory had to be taken on trust, Hugh Dalton's diary entries, deciphered from the original, added the necessary stiffening. Most of these moves, Jay has related(215), were unknown to those outside the government at the time, although Donoughue did dig up one press report from August 1947 predicting (wrongly) that Attlee as on the point of resigning. On the other hand, the detail involved lent substance to the growing view that cabinet relations at the highest level were anything but amicable(216). Deep-rooted rivalries meant that Morrison - but not only Morrison - did not emerge in a flattering light. All of which enhanced the abilities of Attlee, who - in Robson's observation, was unlikely to be seen in future "as the negative and futile figure presented in this book"(217).

Saddled with so much to do, and yet lacking a firm departmental basis from which to act, was ultimately the cause of Morrison's downfall. He had no well-defined sphere of responsibility and was easily outmanoeuvred by Attlee, who often (as with the attempted compromise over supervision of the iron and steel industry) encouraged him and then, when party opinion changed, left him holding the can. Had Attlee stepped down in 1950-51, the authors suggested, the leadership would still have been Morrison's "by natural right", despite evidence of his declining powers. There was no-one else to rival his mastery of the party and governmental machinery. But he

215. D.Jay, *Change and Fortune - a political record* (1980), p.165.

216. See also G.Brown, *In My Way* (1971).

217. W.A.Robson, review in *The London Journal*, May 1975, p.149.

was distracted and out of his depth at the Foreign Office, and uncharacteristically hesitant, after the narrow election result in February 1950, about the timing of a new appeal to the country. His hardline handling of the 1951 budget dispute - an important note of his hospital meeting with Attlee was among his few remaining papers - came at a bad time, when he was exhausted and preoccupied by other pressing problems. His chance was already, in effect, slipping by. Donoughue's case, that Morrison lacked the ruthlessness to go all the way - at least told us why Morrison so often lost his composure at the vital moment. It was also true that Morrison, being primarily a political fixer and operator, did not have the intellectual means to refurbish the Labour party's policies. His call for the party to consolidate its gains was treated sympathetically in the biography - he "opened the battle to abandon traditional dogma". But he could not reach beyond this. He was not a proto-revisionist (which begs the question of what the party would have done had it won again in October 1951(218)). That was the task of those who were to follow afterwards, in the Gaitskellite camp, among whom Donoughue could be counted. Morrison's socialism was the socialism of the 1945 Labour government - he expressed it, but was unable to transcend it(219).

On all the issues which mattered, the Donoughue-Jones biography was praised. Morrison's centrality was established. His relation to his times, and his

218. The 1957 'Industry and Society' document he regarded as "the most revolutionary policy deviation in Labour Party history": *Labour Party Annual Conference Report 1957*, pp.135-136.

219. D.Marquand, 'Mr Polly at Westminster', *The New Statesman*, 28 September 1973

contribution to Labour politics, was firmly fixed. And, an aspect of which the authors were particularly pleased, his public role was linked to his private life and personality - an unhappy private life made up for in a frantic political drive. "Bernard Donoughue and I", George Jones later commented, "after long immersion in the written evidence and interviewing many who knew him in different settings throughout his life, felt that we had pinned him down, like a butterfly in a display case"(220). Sympathetic but discriminating, they did not let their attachment to the left cloud their judgement or go further than the facts seemed to warrant. Here was Morrison and the pre and post-war Labour party - his dead eye and all - "the best political biography of recent years"(221).

Bullock had already been commended for his lack of sentimentality. Donoughue and Jones were equally averse to glorifying the Labour cause. Moreover, the ideological overtones of Labour were not made too much of (the life of John Strachey, by Hugh Thomas, and not the ideas-only book that his widow was hoping for, came out earlier in the same year). Biography - including Labour biography - was moving to the academy. Biographical details had to be sourced and verified. The biographer was bound not to over-identify with the subject, or indulge in anything that smacked of partiality(222). That was why Michael Foot's study of Bevan, a work of

220. G.W.Jones, 'The value of recent biographies, auto-biographies and diaries', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 34 1981, p.336.

221. G.K.Fry, review in *Political Studies*, 22 1974, p.228.

222. V.Bogdanor, 'A deeply flawed hero', *Encounter*, June 1975, pp.69-77.

unrestrained hero-worship, was frowned on. Volume two (1945-60) carried on in the same vein, Foot siding wholeheartedly with the philosophical creed he believed that Bevan had espoused. It was to be expected that Foot would return to the events of 1951, about which he felt Bevan to have been treated harshly. But his disfigurement of cabinet colleagues, in Bevan's favour, aroused old enmities. The sustained, point-by-point demolition of Foot's Bevan contained in the 1979 biography of Hugh Gaitskell by Phillip Williams was a more academically punctilious - though no less committed - response. The rearmament dispute had not gone away, because so much of the later evolution of the party obviously hung on it, re-imbuing it with ideological significance. The difference now was that it was in a biographical context - pitting one biographer against another - that the argument was joined. To the clash of personality and principle were added contrasting appreciations of the biographers' art, even different kinds of biographical truth.

Three Types of Engagement

Over the Winter of 1973 and Spring of 1974 the BBC recorded a series of talks arranged around the themes of equality and inequality in modern society, assembling invited guests to examine the issues from an economic, political and sociological angle and steered by the economist, educationalist and Fabian reformer John Vaizey, who had lately been discouraged by the disappointing results of government welfare policy in Britain and America. All shades of opinion (barring "the most extreme") were represented in pursuit of what Vaizey said was "dialogue, not confrontation"(223). To open,

223. J.Vaizey, *Whatever Happened to Equality?* (1975), p.8.

he turned for an historical perspective on equality to Lord Blake, the historian of the Conservative party, and the marxist academic Eric Hobsbawm, drawing out their respective readings of the evolution of an idea and an ideal. Hobsbawm, traced egalitarian tendencies in the labour movement to a striving for equality between classes rather than individuals, the more out-and-out socialist aspirations counterbalanced by the Fabian ethic of personal self-improvement. Alongside this had gone an argument on the left about the merits of practical, day-to-day reforms compared to a more grandiose restructuring of society on egalitarian lines. As to the former, Hobsbawm was not personally very impressed. The one exception to this was the Second World War - "on this I agree with A.J.P. Taylor". Wartime was the nearest the country had ever got to a form of war socialism which propelled Labour into power in 1945, after which the forward impetus was largely lost. But piecemeal social engineering, while it had removed the worst abuses and injustices, had no necessary connection to egalitarianism.

In the Conservative tradition, as Blake summarized it, greater emphasis was given to opportunity rather than equality, subject to the duty to alleviate the disadvantages of the less well-off. But one did not need to adopt the Webbian approach of the disciplined study of social questions in order to tackle poverty and distress. The Conservative party had - as it always must - made a realistic adjustment to political pressures. This was brought out in the, to Blake, puzzling contrast between the First and Second World Wars, the Second fostering a far greater sense of social egalitarianism across a wide field of policy and paving the way for the Attlee government. The Conservatives, in those conditions, had had no choice but to be seen to move with the times, recognizing that their electoral credibility was at

stake. The steam only eventually ran out of Labour's reforms because ordinary people grew fed up with shortages.

These two surveys, despite disputing the value of equality, could concur in the reasons for its, albeit attenuated, advance. They were reassuring evidence for Vaizey of civilised discussion, before, as he joked (a miners' strike, power cuts and the three-day week were in full swing) the lights finally went out. Closer inspection indicates that their likemindedness was more apparent than real and certainly open to a greater divergence of outlook than Vaizey was allowing for. Hobsbawm, although Vaizey chose not to notice, had clearly contrasted 1945-style Labour politics (which, however ambiguous, still had something to be said for it) with the more recent redrafting of the party's long-term goals which no traditionalist could conceivably entertain. "When Gaitskell and the Gaitskellites said socialism was about equality, what they meant was it was not about socialism". In other words, the nature and extent of egalitarianism, though it might cause difficulties for a Tory, was a far more divisive and unsettling issue on the left. It raised serious questions about the essential role of the Labour party and past Labour governments, and the effectiveness of policies of reform in a predominantly capitalist economic framework (those policies being based upon the findings of supposedly "detached social inquiry") that could not any longer be ducked. A strain of left-wing thinking involving a complete rejection of Labour's post-war parliamentary politics was already making inroads into the party's lower ranks. The full import of Hobsbawm's remarks was lost.

Changes were also afoot inside the Conservative party. Blake's description of post-1945 Conservatism had

the party adapting in a rational and understandable way to the realities of increased government intervention, for much of which it had been the original sponsor. There might be those maintaining that the move to greater equality should have gone further, and indeed - with Crosland and Titmuss - that it still should. But it was in his view neither practicable nor desirable. The English had always liked and embraced hierarchy. An urbane resistance to progressive ideas chimed with popular feeling. His analysis betrayed no hint of the more trenchant critique emanating from some liberals and conservatives to the effect that, since 1945, the Conservative party had in fact given up far too much, that if it was still opposed to socialism then it should openly say so, and that the whole post-war arc of government policy was to be condemned outright. The Conservative party's 1970 manifesto had, Blake agreed, been pretty rightish; but Powellite ideas had about them a "lunatic" quality(224). There was in all this no forewarning of the sea change in Conservative opinion that was about to break out.

To cap it all, Vaizey himself was having second and third thoughts, agonizing over the scientific pretensions of the new social sciences(225). The cause of social democracy had been so brilliantly championed by Crosland that any account of his creed read like a chronicle in the development of the science of society. A democratic socialist "sees a choice between evils", capable of solution by gradual, intentional action; "he does not see a Utopia". 1945 had been "the high point of social democratic euphoria", but even with the fall of that government the record was not all that rosy:

224. Quoted in J.Wood (ed)(1970), *Powell and the 1970 Election*, p.12.

225. J.Vaizey, *Social Democracy* (1971).

"Thus Western European socialism lost its leading socialist government. Its achievements were solid - full employment, a welfare state, a move out of empire and a Western alliance. But other European countries, notably Germany, achieved all these without a reputation for sanctimonious austerity and mindless bureaucratic controls. And it rapidly became apparent that Labour, by keeping Britain out of a European federation and involving it in enormous military programmes, had left a legacy which as to handicap the country for at least twenty years"(226).

Discouraged by student unrest (Titmuss, his guru, the heir to Tawney, was jeered during the 'troubles' at the L.S.E.), he was also frustrated by the UK's lagging economic performance. Under Wilson's leadership, Labour had lost all credibility. The original egalitarian goals remained, but how much more difficult they were to meet. The very process of change itself was inherently unequalizing. "Affluence created new distress at a rate possibly as fast as it was alleviated". This drove him to conclude that the complexity of economic arrangements was beyond the capacity of economists to grasp(227). Forecasting was bunk(228). Wider education made no contribution to a country's economic growth. The sociological boom years were over, he declared.

Marxist and anarchist ideas were on the increase. At the same time, the wave of opinion that had first come

226. J.Vaizey, *ibid* (1971), p.179.

227. J.Vaizey, 'Disenchanted Left', *Encounter*, February 1968, pp.62-68.

228. J.Vaizey, 'Forecasting is bunk', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 12 January 1969, p.25.

to the fore during and after the war - for which he recommended reading Paul Addison's fine account - was obviously withdrawing, in a once-in-a-lifetime shift of values of a fundamental kind.

Important consequences flowed from this. Vaizey presupposed that there were common understandings, and that the splintering of opinion in the 1970s was no more than disagreeable politics. But the rift went much further. There was a change not just in terms of the argument, but whether an argument was to be had at all. Participants increasingly talked past one another, discourse was internalised. Persuasion by discussion gave way to the authenticity of commitment.

i) The New Left

The New Left took off in the prolonged gap between the last Labour government, which fell in 1951, and the next. Wilsonian optimism in the run-up to the 1964 general election caught on, even on the farther reaches of the left. There is no reason to suppose that this support, though conditional, was not sincere. The breaking point, when it came, was different for different groupings. But the landslide re-election of the Labour government, in May 1966, quickly followed by the outbreak of the seaman's strike in July, is generally taken as some kind of watershed(229). The derelictions of the Labour leadership were roundly denounced, what with traditional Labour goals being sacrificed for the convenience of the financial markets. With each round of public expenditure cuts, there seemed to be no limit to the tolerance of the parliamentary left in going along

229. D. Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-68* (1974), p. 208.

with policy turns(230). Estrangement of Labour's working-class support, the persistence of economic problems, and Britain's subservience to American interests were run together in a connected critique - "a whole position" - and infused with moral outrage.

Miliband had previously left open the question of whether Labour might yet be turned into a fully socialist party. As the 1960s wore on, his attitude distinctly hardened. Developing a neo-marxist theory of state power, he saw the way in which governments of the left were forced to contain and subdue popular pressures, the 1945 government - among others - proving his contention that executive power had never held any serious threat to an advanced capitalist economy(231). His 1972 postscript to *Parliamentary Socialism* now had an air of finality about it. Labour was evolving into a wholly functional manager of discontent. The party was not, and was not capable of being transformed into the chosen instrument for socialism - one must say what one thinks. Eric Hobsbawm's disgust was equally evident. Even by the less demanding measuring rod of 1945, when it was still possible to believe in the historically ordained rise of Labour, there had been a disastrous retreat. No lasting legislative monuments were left behind by the administration of 1964-70. Wilson had not even had the good grace to step down(232). E.P. Thompson, reviewing Wilson's memoirs, spoke of the total devaluation of politics(233). The only problem for

230. A.Arblaster, 'The Limits of Loyalty - a dissenting view', *Tribune*, 6 December 1967, p.4.

231. R.Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969), pp 96-102.

232. E.Hobsbawm, 'No entry for socialism', *New Society*, 11 December 1975, pp.608-609.

233. E.P.Thompson, 'Yesterday's Manikin', *New Society*, 29 July 1971, p.202.

those starting to advocate a party of the independent left was that Labour was already there, taking up all the room.

The war years of 1939-45 took on - by extension - a different aspect. The reforming achievements of the Attlee governments were creditable, if limited. The popular mood had encouraged this, as recent studies were showing. But it was all the more certain, with the two decades that had since passed, that a dramatic shift in property relations had never really been on. It was not just that the party had failed fully to capitalize on the situation. It had never genuinely intended to. The assumption, then, strongly coloured by later, revisionist tendencies, was that Morrison and his colleagues had not been in earnest. Indeed, by war's end, the chance had probably already slipped away. The war - the mystic, resonant 'People's War' had been a "deep interruption". But by 1945 the revolutionary moment had passed(234). Wartime was the real danger spot(235).

Re-interpreting the recent past in this way plainly owed as much to Labour's experience in government in the sixties as it did to any rethinking about Attlee's own time. Events impelled New Left scholars in two main directions. Critically-minded accounts of Labour's past and present were extended to take account of the party's and the movement's absorption with an increasingly managed and regularized system of class collaboration, and greater notice was paid to the external, international scale of the capitalist economy within which Labour governments - all governments - were

234. S.Hall, 'The Social Eye of Picture Post', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 2 (Spring 1972), pp.107-108.

235. G.Stedman-Jones, 'History in One Dimension', *The New Left Review*, March-April 1966, pp.53-54.

required to operate.

Leo Panitch, reformulating the concept of 'Labourism' in the light of incomes policy legislation(236), confirms the point. Under the guidance of Miliband, he cast doubt on the Labour party's ability to act as an integrating force. Panitch did not see Labour's ideological "self-confinement" to parliamentary politics as the deciding factor. It was rather the propagation of a view of "the fundamental unity of society", and the stressing of class harmony by Durbin and others, allowing Labour to "shore up" some of the dominant social values. This ability was inhibited, however, by Labour's structural association with the trade unions. The strain between 'national' values and 'sectional' demands had been most apparent in the period of Labour government leading up to "In Place of Strife". Yet it also went further back, to the prototype Crippsian pause "stumbled" into in 1948-50, which Miliband had passed over in silence. What Beer had called the "transformation" of Labour after 1947, because of trade union resistance, was in fact nothing other than their opposition to the planning and control of wages while the rest of the economy was being freed up. The Labour party both advanced the claims of labour and at the same time contained them. Beer's attention to the socialist rhetoric of the working class thrust for power therefore missed the mark:

"It promulgated the coming of a new system, but it meant even then the humanization of the

236. L. Panitch, Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy - the Labour party, the trade unions and incomes policy 1945-74 (1976).

present one"(237).

Panitch regarded the incorporation of the trade unions into the fabric of capitalism, and the consequent turn, in Allen's view, to militant tactical bargaining(238), as a sign of incipient corporatism, first established by the "settlement" of capital and labour in 1945, a settlement, moreover, on certain very definite terms - this was the key that unlocked the essence of the 'Labourite' contract. The role of the dedicated scholar was to reveal this ambiguity at every point, and so helping to further the intellectual prosecution of the class struggle.

Taking Labour's 1973 programme as his starting-point, David Coates - again out of Miliband - deepened the analysis in several ways, reaching back into Labour's past for the "how" and "why" socialism had failed to, and indeed was never likely to, come about by parliamentary means(239). He retailed many of the handed-down anecdotes of the establishment embrace. Where he broke new ground was in drawing out the possibilities and limitations of the social democratic approach which, even in the years of success after 1945, when performance came closest to matching radical promise, was - for a witness to the Wilson governments -painfully obvious. The forces ranged against that government, "the interplay of American pressure, business opposition, civil service inertia and leadership conservatism", were too great to

237. L.Panitch, 'Ideology and Integration: the case of the British Labour party, in Political Studies, 1971, p.192.

238. V.L.Allen, 'The Paradox of Militancy, in The Incompatibles - trade union militancy and the consensus (1967), R.Blackburn and A.Cockburn (eds), pp.241-262.

239. D.Coates, The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism (1975).

overcome. The favouring of a national as opposed to a class-based appeal, built around gradualist, parliamentary politics, periodically endorsed by the electorate, severely hampered the party's vision. Later governments, lacking the power or the will to dismantle capitalism, found themselves in a world - emphatically a capitalist world - they had never made, but in which they were forced to act. Accelerating industrial concentration and intensifying international competition brought them into conflict with organized labour, and the collapse of Keynesian ideas made it even more difficult for governments to govern(239). The Labour party was immovably 'Labourist', with only a reforming tint. The fault lay with its original article of faith in the compatibility of parliamentary socialism. The only answer was to "resurrect" its earlier, uncompromising radicalism.

The fully articulated 'New Left' view, left speaking exclusively unto left, brought Coates into notoriety. His readiness to trade explanations was mistrusted, his assessment of Labour's reform tautological. His central charge that the party had been too dogmatic about the parliamentary system was thrown back at him by one middle-ranking Labour cabinet minister bent on launching an attack on Trotskyite influence in the party(240). Not only did he fall foul of the curse of trying to distil the essential ideology of the Labour party. He also invoked a super-historical, *ex post facto* standard, wise to the Crosland-type revisionism which only came later, damning the party for deviating from an absolutist

239. D.Coates, 'Politicians and the Sorcerer: the problems of governing with capitalism in crisis', in Why is Britain becoming harder to govern?, A.King(ed)(1976), pp.31-57.

240. S.Williams, 'Trotskyism and Democracy', The Guardian, 22 January 1977, p.6.

ideal which, as Crick was to put it, "nothing human can satisfy"(241), and leaving unanswered whether the movement as a whole ever did embody solidaristic, collectivistic values(242).

The more sophisticated party history by David Howell(243), reflecting the author's understanding of the complex, many-sided nature of Labour party politics, and its mixing of the practical and the utopian, owed much to the Transport House archives which were open to him. Howell's treatment of the growth, maturity and eventual demise of "the social democratic perspective" was, as he intended, historically specific and could only be approached historically. This perspective he saw as having grown out of the rethinking that had followed on from Labour's defeat in 1931. It was the brainchild of majority in the parliamentary and industrial wings. The contribution that left-wing intellectuals made to the "practicalities" of policy-framing was, according to Howell, negligible. However, Labour's much-vaunted commitment to a socialist commonwealth was left necessarily vague and indeterminate. When the Attlee government came to power in 1945, already rich in ministerial experience, this ready-made legislative programme was successfully enacted. Labour did what it promised it would do, and obtained a marked material improvement in the standard of living of the majority, even if the claim to having achieved a substantial re-distribution of income was now questionable. "The

241. B.Crick, 'After the fall', The Guardian, 24 July 1980, p.8.

242. For this see R.Currie's Industrial Politics (1979).

243. D.Howell, British Social Democracy - a study in development and decay (1976).

dualism of Labour's 1945 position", that of "moderate policies allied to potentially radical symbolism", was, however, inescapable. But much about 1945 remained supremely enigmatic. Pre-election support for a platform of 'progressive unity' was only narrowly fended off. In many city seats throughout the war the party had been in a very poor state - any electioneering improvements (much touted by others) had been made in realization of this. The campaign itself had been indistinct and elusive, so that resort is often made to stirring images.

What ministers thought they were embarking upon, compared with the way history might judge them, "dogs" any interpretation of that government. The National Executive Committee minutes indicated to Howell that they had assumed, from their earliest moments in office, the continued existence of a sizeable private sector. It was the cultivation of a partnership between the government and private industry, grounded on the belief in the viability of Keynesian techniques in a largely free enterprise economy, which accounted for the change that came over the party's thinking. Labour discovered that it could secure most of its chief aims - full employment, higher production, and the alleviation of poverty - without the need for undue interference in the operations of the market. There was in all this no sense of the leadership not really "believing" in socialism as it was conventionally understood, or of a conscious stepping-back from the brink; it was an adjustment to the imperative of power, still perfectly compatible, at least over the short run, with the genuine declaration that a new society was in the offing.

Since Labour's acceptance of the mixed economy was already, in Howell's view, an accepted fact during the lifetime of the Attlee government, the post-1951 ructions appeared very much as a doctrinal afterword. Neither

left nor right were willing to push their thinking to the point at which they might begin to put in doubt the party's basic purpose. Only much later, clearly distinguishing the new revisionism, was the attempt made to drop the theoretical pretence of "socialist transformation". Coates had juxtaposed Labour's promise with its historical performance; Howell, by tracking ideas through the policy papers of the party, and charting the interplay of doctrine, policy, and electoral strategy, conveyed more clearly what it was in the original ideas that caused them to evolve in the way that they did. Recent experience, culminating in the "exhaustion" of social democracy, forced a change of the relatively benign view of 1945 that Bevanites were once wont to propagate(244). None of this implied that Labour was at a disadvantage because it paid insufficient attention to the nuts-and-bolts of policy making(245). The folk memory of 1945, he told Addison, was very different(246). It would not do to try and deny Labour's other, more radical face. Important questions about how labour history should be written were being raised here, "in that twilight where the empirical and the normative merge".

Release of the official papers allowed the larger picture to be filled out in greater depth, in a search for shaming antecedents. The early days of comprehensive schooling were re-examined, and Ellen Wilkinson's record as Minister of Education defended by Billy Hughes, her P.P.S., faced with the charge that - given her social origins, her civil service advisers and her time in

244. D.Howell, The Rise and Fall of Bevanism (Labour Party Discussion Series No 5)(1979?).

245. D.Howell, 'Understanding Social Democracy', Government and Opposition, Summer 1979, pp.392-296.

246. D.Howell, review of Addison in Government and Opposition, Autumn 1976, pp.110-114.

office - she had "delayed and attempted to prevent [the introduction of such] a crucially important reform at a crucially important time"(247). The factors which went to explain her behaviour were understandable; but they did not excuse it. This was of a piece with the dismissal of the Labour left in the 1945-50 parliament for its general futility, "uncertain of its aims, confused about methods and weak in numbers"(248), several of its leaders - like the fiery 'Red Ellen' of interwar - cocooned in their departments. In another study, the roots of a "racist Britain" were uncovered in the attitudes of ministers towards the influx of coloured immigrants in the first years after the war, officially to make up for a labour shortage, but also seen - in the debate on the 1948 Nationality Bill and in a cabinet committee review of 1950 - as an administrative and political "problem", justifying, should numbers continue to rise, tighter entry restrictions(249). In both cases, contemporaneous concerns were projected onto the historical record. The onslaught on the post-war liberal trade and payments system - timed to coincide with the Labour party's exploration of an alternative (protectionist) economic strategy in 1980-81 - was the clearest expression of this.(250)

247. B.Hughes, 'In Defence of Ellen Wilkinson' and D. Rubinstein, 'Ellen Wilkinson Re-considered', in History Workshop, Spring 1979, pps.157-160, 161-169.

248. D.Rubinstein, Socialism and the Labour Party: the Labour left and domestic policy 1945-1950 (Labour Party Discussion Series No.3, 1979?).

249. S.Joshi and B.Carter, 'The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain', Race & Class, Winter 1984, pp.53-70.

250. T.Brett, S.Gilliat and A.People, 'Planned Trade, Labour Party Policy and United States intervention: the successes and failures of post-war reconstruction', in History Workshop, Spring 1982, pp.130-142.

It owed in part to the somewhat delayed impact of 'revisionist' histories of the Cold War, associated with protests against the increasing scale of American involvement in Vietnam in the late 1960s. A new wave of restive American scholars had denounced the American military-industrial complex which they held to have dictated U.S. foreign policy, polemically transferring the burden of guilt for the start of hostilities on to their own country. The American national interest was directed towards an imperial drive for overseas markets, concealed behind an anti-communist crusade on behalf of the free world, and episodes like the Yalta Conference, the 1945 Loan Agreement with Britain, and the inauguration of Marshall aid were re-interpreted accordingly. A new international economic regime had been constructed, reflecting - it was argued - the overwhelming bargaining power which the United States had come to possess and which, notwithstanding Soviet aggressiveness, was the ultimate cause of Cold War rivalry. One-sided revising though this was, it did not do away with the bipolar, East-West confrontation of mutual calculating advantage that was already an orthodox staple - it simply reversed roles. For students of international relations, the obsession with apportioning blame could only look like a backward step, exerting a psychological hold on the gullible in defiance of all the evidence to the contrary(251). But its effect was to invigorate large areas of the study of post-war political and economic diplomacy.

Britain had, according to British marxists and radicals, been able to maintain the semblance of independent action after 1945, but this was achieved only at the high price of assuming a new burden of responsibilities and commitments suited to American

251. A.B.Ulam, *The Rivals - America and Russia since World War Two* (1973), pp.93-96.

wishes, including support for the principles of a multilateral world economic order. The beguiling image of a 'special relationship', which even orthodox commentators had found difficulty in deciphering, obscured more than it illuminated. It was this external constraint on Britain's freedom of manoeuvre which explained much about the story of the 1940s and afterwards, as well as the compulsion by left-wingers in the Labour party to press for a reassertion of national economic sovereignty. The attention to outward developments - the move outwards, as capitalism itself had moved outwards - was, it was noted, a perspective almost entirely lacking from the established left-wing accounts of the period, most of which - as Jenkins, documenting the Bevanite surge of activism in 1951-53(252) - had come from the 'Milibanditti'. In Gamble's analysis of economic slide, the whole view was couched in terms of Britain's place as "the world island"(253).

The greatly changed - and changing - internal politics of the Labour party could not but reflect the movement in attitudes. When Lewis Minkin, a local party activist - turned - academic, began studying the Conference policy process at the end of the 1960s, he could find nothing new to say. He did not at first realize - not until the gradual re-assertion of conference authority soon afterwards - just how misleading McKenzie's account of the Labour party had become(254). McKenzie had attended the annual, respectful gatherings of the 'forties. Minkin, twenty-

252 M. Jenkins, *Bevanism - Labour's High Tide* (1979).

253. A. Gamble, *Britain in Decline* (1981), especially Chapter 2.

254. L. Minkin, The Labour Party: image, myth and reality, postgraduate conference paper, L.S.E., 1981.

odd years later, looked down on to a less orchestrated scene. "The rows of empty chairs" reserved in the hall for P.L.P. members signalled the withdrawal of the parliamentary party from the ideological fray. Minkin's good fortune was to catch the institution of party conference at the moment of its changing, when Labour's attachment to "intra-party democracy" - a fiction for McKenzie - was about to be re-established.

Minkin, a mature student at Leeds and, with his doctoral supervisor, David Coates, at York, started out with a model of oligarchic control, later discarded. His approach was analytical, and written in the language of political science. The 'parliament of Labour', contrary to the imagination of delegates, was best thought of as "manipulatory", open to adroit handling by right or left. The party's federal structure and pattern of divided authority consigned it to a condition of perpetual flux, at one stage (as in the 1920s and early 1960s) the parliamentarians declaring their independence, at the next (after 1931 and post-1970) tighter limits being fixed upon their elitist tendencies. The ambiguous ideological orientation of the party was reflected in its organizational set-up, being "riddled with uncertainties". In this sense, the doctrine of intra-party democracy, which he took to mean the diffusion of power between a variety of policy-making bodies, Minkin saw as the structural counterpart of Clause IV, the distinguishing aspect of party life, "a cherished symbol of differentiation from the party's political opponents on Left and Right". The recurring motif of ambiguity went a long way towards accounting for the party's past history(255). *The Labour Party Conference - a study in the politics of intra-party democracy*, which caught

255. L.Minkin and P.Seyd, 'The British Labour Party', in Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe, W.Paterson and A. Thomas (eds)(1977), pp.101-147.

the 1978 conference season, represented eight years of interviewing, studying of documents and pounding of corridors.

The very title jarred. Take 1945 as the baseline. McKenzie, to recall, considered the Mikardo putsch as an exceptional if double-edged incident, which by no means disproved his general case - Attlee's stewardship of the party had marked Labour's adaptation to parliamentary norms. The tightly-controlled conference "occasions" in 1945-51 showed that Labour had matured into responsibility. Minkin, conscious of the flouting of conference decisions by Wilson, cited the Mikardo case with admiration and was struck by the diligence with which Attlee and Morrison had carried delegates and the careful "non-assertion" of P.L.P. rights. They always spoke and acted as if conference was the sovereign body. But he recognized that it was the largest trade unions who had had the decisive voice at the turning point in 1948. 'Consolidation' had, it was true, signified "a loss of radicalism by the party leadership", yet it had also been "an expression of trade union satisfaction". When it came to the block voting of the major unions over the next decade, they registered heavily against further radical change. Some (he said in a 1974 article) were hypnotized by it:

"This pattern of support looked so rigid and so regular during the 1950s that both participants and observers often took it to be a feature endemic in the nature of the party. In fact, the support was always conditional even when it appeared to be automatic, which always left open the problem of what would happen if either that conditional support was removed or the party leadership chose, or was driven, to advance into the closed [i.e. no-go policy-

making] areas"(256).

The recent but fairly swift swing of the party away from revisionist precepts raised some doubts in his mind about the extent of the original conversion, particularly since he found it to have been largely a paper victory. The public disintegration of the "stable loyalist majority" only became evident after 1966, when key areas of trade union industrial freedom began to be infringed upon. These new configurations "were bound to have long-term consequences for the distribution of power in the party as a whole", he signed off. In a 1980 epilogue, the extent of the springing back took him by surprise. "The party's power relations have proved to be much more dynamic than once supposed...".

There was in Minkin a belief in the party activist that would have been unthinkable to the conference-watchers of former times. Miliband, Panitch and Coates assumed the fundamental weakness of the Labour's left-wing. Minkin could confirm that the activist did after all matter. The gulf between conference and the leadership had to be closed. Labour's constitution means what it says. The party, in the last resort, belongs to its members.

Although in need of revision, McKenzie never got round to finishing a new edition of his book that would - as he used to inform Tony Benn - keep pace with the havoc the 'Bennites' had wrought(257). In letters to the press, and in the last piece he wrote (published after

256. L.Minkin, 'The British Labour Party and the Trade Unions: Crisis and compact', in The Industrial and Labour Relations Review, October 1974, p.15.

257. D.Butler, 'Bob McKenzie, tutor of the British scene', The Guardian, 14 October 1981, p.2. Also the transcript of his B.B.C. interview with Benn reproduced in T.Benn, A New Course for Labour (1976), pp.2-5.

his death), he did not refer to Minkin directly, but talked of unspecified "political theorists of the left" who failed to see that leaders must - again the characteristic use of the injunctive - escape from any intra-party doctrines if they are to perform effectively in an increasingly pluralistic political system(258). Others could see that times had changed since McKenzie had been writing in the 1950s. Trade union allegiances had altered. Many local Labour parties had swung to the left. And there had been a weakening of the party system itself, an inconceivable development in earlier decades. Party, in corporatist circumstances, was becoming "irrelevant"(259). Minkin gave to this line of thought a stronger leftist slant, codifying Bennism. The world (for that was now the size of it) was not socialist enough. To change the world, one had first to change the party.

A special case ?

It was fundamental to many of these contributors that they were not just putting forward 'another view' - an alternative politics also brought with it an alternative rationality. Positivist social science, for the New Left intellectual, far from supplying a hard body of evidence and methodological precepts unsullied by political position or value judgement, was infused with presuppositions about which its exponents were only dimly aware. Facts and values were inseparable, as there could be no realm of facts separate and apart from the theories

258. The Times, 3 August 1981, p.11 and 4 September 1981, p.13; and 'Power in the Labour Party: the issue of 'intra-party democracy'', in The Politics of the Labour Party, D. Kavanagh (ed)(1982), pp.191-201.

259. H.M. Drucker, 'The Evolution of the Political Parties' in British Politics in Perspective, R.L. Borthwick and J.E. Spence (eds)(1984), p.114.

by which to select them and determine their meaning(260). An aversion to explanatory theorizing, such as of a marxist kind, had taken political forces out of their economic and social context, promoting academic conventionality and conformism. A 'community of scholars' existed only in the sense that ideas were employed to legitimize and control. The only 'schools' to be discerned were those schools propagating varieties of bourgeois scholarship, conditioned by the institutional dominance of consensual ideas. Even the stoical liberal reformer, by refusing to think in wholly new ways, lent resilience to existing modes of thought, furthering the notion that society had advanced into post-capitalist, ideologically-free affluence. Rival, contrary, 'conflict' models were marginalized. Since no synthesis between such incompatibles was possible, the only course of action was to expose ideas not for their truth-content but for their functional use in upholding established values. The argument had to be argued out from within a framework which contested the prevailing outlook(261). It was impossible to be agnostic or indifferent or noncommittal, least of all at a time when the country was in turmoil(262). Commitment - there was no getting away from it, however able or well-qualified the observer. Detachment by all means, but detachment from an orthodoxy which smothered free discussion. The committed and the detached were in a state of

260. R.Blackburn, introduction to *Ideology in Social Science - readings in critical social theory*, R.Blackburn (ed)(1972).

261. A.Gamble, *The Conservative Nation* (1974), p.vii.

262. R.Miliband, 'Teaching Politics in an Age of Crisis', *University of Leeds Review*, 18 1975, pp.129-145.

"dialectical tension"(263), vying for pre-eminence and driving the debate forward, only to be resolved by which - in ideological terms - was the stronger. In place of a natural selection of ideas, made up of defensible propositions (which could be refuted and discarded(264)) there was only a clash of mighty opposites between closed, self-maintaining, self-validating systems of thought. V.L.Allen's journey from the LSE of Hayek, Robbins and Laski in the 1940s, through the sociological radicalism of the fifties, and on into the full-hearted alternative rationality of the early 1970s, provided an autobiographical delineation of the New Left turn of mind(265).

ii) A Science of Society

The marked rise in unemployment, combined with an even more distressing growth rate in the years from 1964-67, as well as the regular resort to deflationary cuts in spending, shook the self-belief of many staunch Labourites. Loyalists argued that the government had been attempting to do too much in unfavourable circumstances. Long-time critics insisted that, in addition to Britain being the most highly taxed nation in the world, employment was still dangerously over-full. A report commissioned by the Brookings Institute, reviewing the past performance and future prospects of the British economy, dismissed the truth of this last claim, saw the principal problems of trade and growth very much as

263. A.Arblaster, 'Ideology and Interests' in R. Benewick (ed), *Knowledge and Belief in Politics - the problem of ideology* (1973), pp.115-129.

264. E.Gellner, 'Myth, Ideology and Revolution' in B. Crick and W.A. Robson (eds), *Protest and Discontent* (1970), pp.207-209.

265. V.L.Allen, *Social Analysis - a marxist critique and alternative* (1975).

inter related, and pronounced that the 'Stop Go' cycles of policy had been the outcome of policies geared more to correcting balance of payments deficits than the needs of domestic economic activity. It was not that Britain had fallen short of other nations; it was rather that they had outstripped her otherwise average rate of expansion(266). That said, the standard justifications to explain away slower growth (namely that Britain was less prone to social upheaval) were plainly beginning to wear thin. Growth had to be given the highest priority, Crosland maintained. But redistributing existing resource only provoked further inflation which as, he agreed, "becoming more and more our central problem"(267). Following Labour's defeat in 1970, he denied that revisionism needed substantially updating, even when - as old sympathizers pointed out to him - the income-levelling trends of post-war had been countered by Titmuss (whom Crosland cold-shouldered) so that firm statements about equality of incomes were no longer prudent given the state of present knowledge(268). And yet the conviction that a greater levelling had been taking place than was in fact the case had dampened down but not entirely removed a sense of "relative deprivation" among the manual working class(269).

Stephen Haseler, who had made a special study of the

266. Extracts from the report carried in The Times, 24 June 1968, pp.25-27.

267. C.A.R.Crosland, *Socialism Now, and other essays* (1974), p.56.

268. B.Walden, 'A Critique of Revisionism', The New Statesman, 25 June 1971, pp.874-875.

269. W.G.Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice - a study of attitudes to social inequality in twentieth-century England (1966).

less glamorous right-wing of the party(270), the "core" of the movement, saw a way of rekindling the flame with a populist spark. Morrisonian socialism, dependent on the unthinking loyalty of the main trade unions, was "dull but safe". It was doubtful if Morrison himself "saw clearly the changed nature of capitalist society, and the irrelevance of much of traditional socialist thinking". Gaitskell's election encouraged this "attack at the level of theory", though at the outset only cautiously, since his supporters continued to speak the language of socialist reform. A redefinition of aims, not their abandonment, was the intention. The showdown of 1960-61, proving that "Sovereignty resides at Westminster, not at the seaside", settled the issue, even if the actual part played by the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (he had not been able to gain access to their papers) had been over-rated. As a by-election candidate in 1965 and in the full election in 1966, Wilson's party was still his kind of party - forward-looking, "non-gimmicky", prepared for power, "a modern, revisionist Labour party in every respect. Briefly, he aspired to Crosland's eminence, but they had a falling out. New difficulties had arisen which Crosland, it was thought, declined to consider(271). The ultra-liberal Haseler of the 1970s was a changed man. The growing menace of the New Left was now joined by a Powellite return to first principles among discontented Conservatives, making it necessary to meet the challenge with arguments and not (as Winch had once dismissed Hayek) with jibes(272).

In a movement "starved of theory", Marquand - a Roy

270. S.Haseler, The Gaitskellites - revisionism in the Labour party, 1951-64 (1969).

271. See D.Eden, letter in *Encounter*, April 1979, pp.91-93.

272. D.Collard, *The New Right* (1968).

Jenkinsite recognised, left and right could rush in, giving vent to their prejudices(273). Public expenditure was nearing the point of maximum reach. The party goal of equality was compromised by the value the main, class-based trade unions attached to the maintenance of wage differentials. The load of expectations on the central authority of the state had become over-bearing. That governments had to cope with problems that had only arisen after Keynes's death did not thereby invalidate Keynesian assumptions. But there was not enough time for an academic-cum-politician to take on the task of a new analysis. In any case, it was unlikely that the kind of synoptic, all-embracing 'world in a book' that Crosland had written in the mid-1950s could still be brought off(274). The social science literature was so much broader, the problems of economy and society so much more intractable.

Uncongenial discoveries abounded. Attention was drawn to the perverse, counter-productive effects of welfare measures. Moderate affluence was by its very nature unequalizing. The spread of urban bureaucracies stifled those who they were supposed to aid. Educational expansion - on which Tawney had pinned most hopes - had not led to a more rational egalitarian society. Contrary to the Webbian project, much social research was defeating the initial purpose of the LSE's founders. Radicals who had been the main providers of intellectual ballast were thrown into disarray, having to argue against fundamental change (aside from schemes for institutional reform of the machinery of government) when change was all too obviously needed.

273. D.Marquand, 'Clause Four rides again', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 September 1975, p.1095.

274. A.King, 'Never Another Crosland', *Socialist Commentary*, May 1977, pp.3-4.

The career path of one maverick social scientist captures the loss of confidence in the liberating potential of social knowledge. As head of the Labour Party Research Department, Michael Young had had a hand in drafting the 1945 election manifesto, "packing into it as many P.E.P. ideas as I could decently get past Herbert Morrison"(275). He stuck it out until 1951, took another degree (at the L.S.E.) and styled himself from then on as a sociologist, becoming one of the first lecturers in the subject. He tried, and failed, to turn the Labour party away from being a 'producer's party' in the age - this was in 1960 - of the consumer, going on instead to set up *Which?* magazine. Founder of the S.S.R.C. and sponsor of the Open University, Crosland made him one of his advisers at the Department of Education, to whom - it is said - Crosland was inclined to defer(276). Nevertheless, "the tragic failure of the last [1966-70] Labour government to do more than tinker with the problems of social justice" ranked for him alongside Munich as one of the two greatest political setbacks in his lifetime(277). No-one, he complained, now looks at the grand design of society. This did not hinder him, when the break with Labour finally came, from appropriating Tawney for the fledgling Social Democratic Party's think tank in 1981. To the charge that this was dubiously promiscuous, and that what the new 'Americanised' party was really about was expunging radicalism from politics, Young was unmoved: the political agenda of 1945, and he had been "as much at fault as anyone", was through-and-through "statist", in

275. M.Young, 'The Second World War', in *Fifty Years of Political and Economic Planning - looking forward 1931-1981* (1981), p.96.

276. J.Vaizey, in Anthony Crosland and *Socialism, Encounter*, August 1977, p.87.

277. M. Young, *Is equality a dream?* (Rita Hinden memorial lecture, 1972), p.10.

everything from welfare to the economy; the modern day Labour party still clung to this kind of thinking, in defiance of everything that had since come to pass(278).

However contrived it may have looked as history(279), a new view of the receding past was being manufactured. The historic bargain of 1945 had certainly closed off the route to revolutionary politics, just as the New Fabian essayists had realized. But in retrospect the basic ambiguity about the Labour party's aims and objectives was never resolved. Social democrats should have faced up to this, and broken away in 1959-60 when the chance had presented itself. The revisionists were not, after all, pure milk-and-water socialists, so far as the term was traditionally construed, and they had never pretended otherwise. 'The party of Attlee and Gaitskell', the one they had originally enjoyed, was invoked in order to justify leaving it. The post-war settlement, seen in the longer view, had been a good recipe for a quieter life, characteristic of a time which now had about it an unreal, unimaginable tranquility; but it was also the period when Britain had fallen further and further behind. The economic shocks of the seventies had demonstrated the need for greater cross-national co-operation in an ever more interdependent global economy, just as it had (for those unconvinced that external threats represented the major worry(280)) highlighted

278. M. Young, 'Why the SDP are the true inheritors of Tawney's libertarian legacy', *The Guardian*, 10 May 1982, p.8, replying to R. Samuel's two-parter on 'Tawney and the SDP', *The Guardian*, 29 March (pp.8-9) and 5 April 1982 (p.9).

279. D.Watt, 'British Socialism Re-defined', radio broadcast, 26 February 1984.

280. I.D.M.Little, 'Social Democracy and the International Economy' in D. Lipsey and D. Leonard (eds), *The Socialist Agenda - Crosland's Legacy* (1981), pp.63-

the need to strengthen institutions that could cope with the distributional conflicts in society. Unparalleled world prosperity had been undermined by a combination of external crises and the failure to come to terms with trade union power, for which a new governing philosophy was required. But Keynes's economic teaching was still valid and "in turning our backs on it, we have turned our backs on one of the most hopeful intellectual constructs of the century"(281). Social democrats had not abandoned their commitment to the ideological activity of social inquiry followed up by social action. It was just that the central economic claims which they had come to take for granted had been undone, leaving the old defenders of the 1945 consensus - the believers in the capacity of governments to do good - without a firm philosophical grounding.

The Gould report

Lacking the intellectual tools to combat the rise of assertive left-wingery (and reduced on occasion to squabbling over what Crosland had and had not said in 1956), social democrats were also alarmed by what they saw as the subversive denigration of reasoned academic discussion. The universities were engulfed by sit-ins, demonstrations and unofficial curricula. John Vaizey answered his own question ("Ought not moderates to be tough?"(282)) by helping another old Gaitskellite, Julius Gould - who had first seen the signs in America - to mount a defence of the "scholarly mode" of teaching against radical and extremist infiltration in higher

281. D.Marquand, 'Keynesian International', *The London Review of Books*, 5-19 July 1984, p.6.

282. J.Vaizey, 'Hail and farewell', *The Times Education Supplement*, 26 December 1975, p.4.

education(283). The Gould report documented the spread of ideas which its author held to be inimical to an open, plural society, detailing the stratagems marxist-influenced writers adopted to exploit academic freedom in order to undermine and destroy it. Where the Old Left of Strachey had accepted "the canons of rationality" and objectivity", the New denied any validity to these, playing on their "difficulty" and preying on the timidity of their softer academic colleagues. Freeform discussion was "pre-empted" by imposing conflict-centred frameworks studded with code words and emotive terms, in preference to liberal open-mindedness, creating confusion whenever these incommunicable outlooks operated together. Without a belief in facts independent of theory, no theory could ever be falsified or need be discarded, spawning an unsettling relativism. Marxist texts were "cascading" from the presses, in some cases being stuffed down the throats of students (Miliband was on all the reading lists) in what was put down to a politically-motivated campaign. Names were named in the report, which was publicly endorsed by Lord Robbins, alerting readers to what constituted "a clear and present danger".

Widely judged to be tendentious and intimidatory, even by those who shared its concerns(284), the Gould report arguably did more harm to the liberal case than good. The conviction that some frameworks of interpretation were acceptable and others not, allied to

283. J.Gould, *The Attack on Higher Education - marxist and radical penetration* (1977). Other consultants included Ken Minogue, David Martin and Stephen Haseler.

284. R.Dabrendorf, 'Witch-hunting alien to freedom', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 14 October 1977, p.7; R. Hoggart, 'Extremism in Higher Education', *The New Statesman*, 14 October 1977, p.505. The New Left reply was in *The Attack on Higher Education - where does it come from?* (1977).

the call for clean, uncorrupted concepts - the while dressed up in alarmist polemical garb - was regarded more as an index of anxiety. Some editorialists favoured a plurality of biases, or instead defended tolerance towards a wider section of progressive opinion. On the Tory right, it was brushed aside as a faction-fight amongst those who had lost out in the battle for the minds of the young. The attack on 'truth-in-doctrine' was a further pointer to the collapse of the common centre.

iii) Anti-progressives

"Social students as a class are 'progressives'. They look to the future; they are usually meliorists. The one development which seems to take them by surprise is reaction of any kind"(285). The "almost slavish subservience" to the works of Maynard Keynes was - the feud went back a long way - R.B. McCallum's particular bugbear, for which "the Conservative party [McCallum was still a Liberal voter] have much to answer for in their endless struggle to be up-to-date, intellectually fashionable, election-worthy". Ours was a "state-intoxicated" age(286). Only one person, he noted, was willing to shake the reigning orthodoxies and he, the

285. R.B. McCallum, *Universities and the State*, Unservile State Paper (1964), p.11.

286. R.B. McCallum, 'Why I Will Vote Liberal', *The Observer*, 4 October 1959, p.16.

Conservative M.P. Enoch Powell, was a former Classics don.

Although the reaction took many forms, two broad tendencies came to the fore. An older, philosophically-derived disposition had made doubt - and not faith - the grounding for a commitment. Some uncertainty was honest, and need not imply a heartless indifference, still less a sneaking regard for the established order of things. But there was (no contradiction intended) a high value to be placed on authority and tradition, which provided their own justification. Ideological writing, all writing to order, was necessarily bad writing. Scepticism of organized doctrines remained the wisest course. In the modern age, reason had been commandeered by rationalism, pushing for unrelenting change in the name of abstract ideals whose real basis was actually emotional. Unwilling to or uninterested in talking about economics, this High Tory conservatism found its affirmation instead in the restating of the ancient truth of what the progressive liberal finds hardest to abide : the paradox of material advance bringing spiritual impoverishment.

Adherents of the 'New Right' - the term was in use as early as 1965(287) - were of a very different stamp. Their interest was mainly to do with the market, the free economy providing the best guarantee for the free society. They concentrated their fire on exposing the political expediencies which governed each 'planned' extension of government interference in economic life. The overloading of the economy by unsustainable defence spending had concerned Shonfield and others in the 1950s; the expanding welfare burden of the 1960s attracted the attention of economic liberals. While intelligent socialists - renowned for their intellectual facility and

287. J. Blumler, 'New Left and New Right', *Socialist Commentary*, September 1965, pp.15-17.

occasional lack of scruple - were having to adjust to the breakdown of their favoured policies, there was no certainty that Keynesians would be brought low by their own shortcomings. The harm perpetrated by social engineering required actively undoing.

In this changed climate, the writings and warnings of Hayek, made to seem eccentric when state intervention was riding high, enjoyed a new - and to their author, pleasing - vogue. Hayek, unhappy with the connotations associated with continental Conservatism, had long since opted for the party of liberty(288). His objections to "the Keynesian delusion of everlasting prosperity" now gained a fair hearing(289). But Hayek's case did not stop at the economics of politics, ranging instead across many disciplines and forming an organic whole, built around an epistemological argument - reformers had neither the knowledge nor the competence to remake society from design. Socialism was simply in error. Given his premises, the logic was irresistible.

It has been said that there was very little that united these contrasting position - old Toryism and a newer libertarian outlook(290). Some found it a marvel that the two groups could, even within the confines of the L.S.E., co-exist and stay on speaking terms(291). Celebration of the marketplace was not easily reconciled with those for whom capitalism was

288. F.A.Hayek, 'Why I am not a Conservative' in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), pp.397-411.

289. S.Brittan, 'Hayek, New Right and Old Left', *Encounter*, January 1980, p.31.

290. A.Ryan, 'Left Standing', *New Society*, 28 November 1984, p.334.

291. E.Gellner, *ibid* (1980).

"the supreme irrelevance"(292). The one characteristic they had in common was their oppositional stance, accentuating the negative, impartially against everything to do with advanced, metropolitan opinion. More recent well-publicized converts to the anti-progressive cause added polemical *brio*.

Crossing the floor was an individual act(293). For some, rejection of earlier attitudes was unqualified. Norman Mackenzie, graduate of the L.S.E., a dedicated New Statesmanite who had written large parts of Kingsley Martin's Laski memoir, told his audience that he had "now [in 1978] come to criticize the Webbs for ideas which I once admired them"(294). The Harold Laski of his youth also came very badly out of it. Other prophets were toppled. "The rush to engage" by liberal reformers - Barbara Wooton(295), or Titmuss, his economics and sociology "purpose-built" for the attainment of questionable political and moral objectives(296) - had run its course. Keynes was blamed for having been blind to the possible misuse of economic finance, and there was condemnation for versatile left-wing Keynesians like Shonfield and Dow who had "straddled the borderlines between academe, journalism and the civil service"(297). Crosland - recently departed - had

292. M.Oakeshott, 'Conservatism: Foundations and fallacies', *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 1978, p.18.

293. See the contributions to *Right Turn*, P.Cormack (ed)(1978).

294. N.Mackenzie, *Socialism and Society* - a new view of the Webb partnership (1978 L.S.E. lecture), p.26.

295. D.Martin, 'Superior Savagery', radio broadcast, 26 July 1986.

296. D.Martin, 'Speaking for Welfare', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 December 1977, p.1400.

297. R.Pringle, *The Growth Merchants* (1977), p.viii.

recently departed - had simply "taken too much for granted"(298). The Fabian legacy was, in blunt terms, riddled with "treachery"(299).

Vaizey, a Wilson peer, moved in the same direction, making a full recantation in 1979 in an appeal to voters to endorse the Conservative party, blaming the country's economic ills on high taxation and excessive union influence. As for his own version of the social democratic creed - of theory preceding action in an ordered progression - "this process now seems to me to be fundamentally misconceived"(300). He had ceased to believe that a coherent body of social knowledge existed which was capable of securing a better tomorrow. The most spectacular failure was in his own field of economics where leading economists had been unable to agree about the principal causes of unemployment or inflation, or how they could best be remedied. In the intellectual contest which had been raging, Norman Stone later wrote:

"Vaizey himself recognised, after more than three decades, that his powerful voice had been used on the wrong side"(301).

But he did not, in rationalizing his switch of allegiance, go on to embrace Hayekian liberalism. He made the more pessimistic leap towards disbelief, with nothing but hunch and adjustment, in Oakeshott's thinking, to stand in its stead. His change of front was

298. C.Welch, 'Crosland Reconsidered', in *Encounter*, January 1979, pp.83-95.

299 G.Hutton, in *The Emerging Consensus?*, A.Seldon (ed)(1981), footnote p.6.

300. J.Vaizey, 'Inquest on a Movement', *Encounter*, January 1980, p.84.

301. N.Stone, 'Turning from Experience', *The Sunday Times*, 25 January 1987, p.58.

also - therefore - a change in the form of commitment, and away from certainty. He set about applying the power of reason to show up the falsity of the ideas of 'the famous five', the best of their generation whose views Vaizey had once upon a time shared, for their misguided dogma that they could maximize human happiness through state benevolence(302).

Quite why the bulk of the Conservative party had been ready to go along with the major changes in society during and after the war occasioned increasing comment. The academic neglect of the Conservatives and of Conservatism was something of a mystery. The lack of a serious modern history of the party had been, when McKenzie was writing up his doctorate, "an appalling gap"(303). Hoffman's book on the Conservatives in opposition, concentrating on the tactical and strategic outlook of the party from the point of view of various current "theories of opposition", had only highlighted the void(304). He had also argued that Woolton's reorganization and Butler's reorientation of the party made little contribution to restoring the Conservatives to office in 1951. Beer provided some new details, especially for the later 1950s, but was not so persuasive. Some of the most notable studies of the post-1945 party were exercises, from the left, in demystification(305). But there were inherent difficulties - difficulties which did not apply to the parties of left-wing reform - in understanding the open,

302. J.Vaizey, *In Breach of Promise* (1983).

303. R. McKenzie, *ibid* (1955), p.vii.

304. J.D.Hoffman, *The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51* (1964).

305. N.Harris, *Competition and the Corporate Society* (1972); B.Jessop, *Traditionalism, Conservatism and British Political Culture* (1973); A.Gamble, *The Conservative Nation* (1974).

sceptical and uncommitted attitude of the right poised between conservation and change. The standard view, put by Robert Blake in his Ford lectures(306), did not try to over-explain the party's transformation. The forties were "a bleak period as all who have lived through it can attest". But the historical lessons had been learnt. Historically the party had always been pulled leftwards, making it a test of character of the party leaders in negotiating this transition; above all, it was important, in the Disraelian manner, to prosper by adaptation. The pressures of war had made many of the larger changes necessary, changes that were perfectly acceptable to the party without in any way carrying an endorsement of socialistic or egalitarian aims. Gilmour responded to the growing clamour by underscoring how, in practical terms, Keynesianism was made "imperative". That the party had not been on the wrong track since the war was his main thrust(307).

The columnist Patrick Cosgrave, writing without rancour or with a taste for shocking American sensibilities, administered a sharp jolt to such "superficial" beliefs(308). Cosgrave uncovered three reasons that could account for the change of front by the Tories, after their heavy defeat in the 1945 election. They could rightfully claim part of the credit for the introduction of welfare reforms. The mood of the country in 1945, artificially magnified by the electoral system, was such that they were bound to accept Labour's proposals, and even look to improve upon them. On

306. R. Blake, *ibid* (1970), p:264.

307. I.Gilmour, *Inside Right - a study of conservatism* (1977), Chapter 1.

308. P.Cosgrave, 'The Failure of the Conservative Party', in *The Future That Doesn't Work - social democracy's failures in Britain*, R. Emmett Tyrrell (ed) (1977), pp.95-125.

returning to office again, they appreciated that the main body of legislation should not be overturned. All of these reasons, convincing at the time of asking, made the party leadership predisposed to adjust to the new situation. The "massive intellectual rethink" that was really called for never came about. The party yielded too much ground, lapsing into drift and surrender, avoiding making any clear repudiation of the principles behind the extension of the state. The same had been true in the years after 1964, though Heath had promised differently. This was not Macmillan's fault, any more than it had been Churchill's. Formed out of paternalist and radical wings(309), it remained the case that theirs was a socialist party, with Conservative grandees in charge. After the false start in 1970, Cosgrave had grown weary of the debilitating sameness of each party's response to the country's underlying economic problems. A powerful, up-to-the-minute, counter-history was volunteered, dovetailing with his story of the rise of Mrs Thatcher (a life and an attitude shaped by the 1940s privations(310)), coinciding with, in the words of his academic mentor, the business of formulating a distinctive Conservative political position(311).

It fell - however - to Max Beloff, a refugee from the modern Liberals, to count the full cost of post-war collectivism. A distinguished international scholar and ardent Americanophile, Beloff had to his name an extensive range of works devoted to the loss of Britain's international power and prestige - what he regarded as

309. P.Cosgrave, 'Musical Chairmen', *The Spectator*, 22 June 1974, p.758.

310. P.Cosgrave, *Margaret Thatcher: Prime Minister* (1979), especially Chapter 5.

311. M.Cowling, 'The Present Position', in M.Cowling (ed), *ibid* (1978), pp.1-24.

the dominating fact of his adult life(312) - which, when (*anno* 1964) medium power pretensions still prevailed, he could see did not owe entirely to factors "largely or wholly external to Britain itself". Prosperity rested upon empire; but the empire in turn, being artificial and precarious, was an expression of the determination and the means to preserve and defend it. The combination of fortuitous circumstances which had put Britain at the centre of a world-wide network of trade and finance began to alter, and with the installation of democratic government came a turning inwards to domestic affairs. The World Wars, but especially the Second, destroyed the imperial state of mind for good. But no less seriously, the philosophical divide between traditional liberal and socialist strands of thought had become confused, wakening the realistic appraisal of national standing(313). To centralize in the name of entitlement was to magnify all errors by creating a parasitic state, the late Lords Keynes and Beveridge the two individuals who had done most to damage the interests of their native country(314). Britain's relative decline having become unmistakable, the ameliorative left-leaning intellectuals who had championed the extension of state control would have to take a large share of the responsibility. Populist welfare, once celebrated by latter-day Whigs as more than adequate compensation for the UK's reduced world influence, had facilitated the breakdown of social cohesion at home(315). The problem of describing and analysing

312. M. Beloff, *Imperial Sunset - Vol. 1 Britain's Liberal Empire 1897-1921* (1969).

313. 'Facing the World', in P. Cormack (ed), *ibid* (1978).

314. 'The Future of the State: Why it should wither', *New Society*, 9 October 1975, p.74.

315. 'Britain since Beveridge', *Encounter*, June 1978, pp.49-56.

events just past was also an opportunity, in that the "angle of vision" was constantly changing, as the indirect consequences of events and actions made themselves felt(316). The pungency of Beloff's observations belied the diffident tone with which he had started out(317). The jettisoning of controls alongside the fostering of an enterprise culture, and the popular attitudes to go with them, had had to wait until the 1980s; but he wrote in the conviction that, with the election of Mrs Thatcher's Conservatives, the post-war era was finally over.

Although Beloff's distilled history dealt ostensibly with the years from 1914 until 1945, he was blunt in his denunciation of the increasing room for state action that the Second World War had made the space for, and how great "the underlying shift in political power and social values" that had resulted. Popular participation in war was the central influence in this, but he wished only to look at the internal politics of the situation. The public mood at the close of war was wildly "exhilarated" and "utopian", the high moral tone and uplift disguising deeper trends that would only become manifest much later - above all that government was to be increasingly control-minded, welfare-conscious and interventionist. Materially and economically exhausted by the war - losing by winning, in Vaizey's phrase - Britain's difficulties were compounded by the strong position which the forces of the left obtained. Hayek was not listened to. The social histories of consensus and improvement typical of the mid-sixties overlooked the fact that raised living standards had been

316. M. Beloff, *Wars and Welfare - Britain 1914-1945* (1984).

317. 'Mandrake', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 16 December 1979, p. 8.

the product not of the creating of new wealth, but the redistribution of old. Organized labour was brought unimpeded into the very heart of central administration, sharpening still further the conflict over resources, so that the unreformed political system corresponded less and less to the real centres of command and influence. A fashionable ideological priesthood, the unquestioning propagators of the new creed, held sway, "clasped to the bosom of the Establishment". Optimism now hardly appealed to any serious student of the contemporary scene. Not all reforms were positive, or all reformers sincere. There was much to be said for the anti's, even the diehards, like G.M. Young, who had resisted the advance of 'progress'. Howarth's account of educational folly and, had it not been for North Sea Oil, economic ruin, sang the same tune(318). Blake embraced the neoconservative message wholeheartedly. He never had, and never could have voted for any other party, but in hankering after change, it had ceased to be Conservative at all(319). Only with the rethinking of recent times had it transpired that the post-war course had been a deviation from long-standing beliefs - an impression no one could gain from his earlier Ford lectures. Macmillan had done them all a great disservice. The 1945 landslide had been caused by the conversion of opinion formers to Keynesianism, which dominated British politics for a quarter of a century before only recently breaking down. Conservative acquiescence had helped mask Britain's economic decay and inability to compete, which is what Thatcherism was attempting to correct(320). The longer the perspective one took, the more revolutionary

318 T.E.B.Howarth, *Prospect and Reality - Great Britain 1945-1955* (1985).

319. R.Blake, *Conservatism in an Age of Revolution* (1976), pp.19-21.

320. 'The Meaning of Thatcherism', *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1987, pp.iv-v.

1979 and after appeared to him to be.

The bias towards the study of 'party', and in particular of the Labour party - a partiality first established in the heyday of McKenzie and Beer - worked to the detriment of any historical understanding of the "long dominance" in this century of the Conservatives. The wide currency given to mainstream pluralist theory contributed further, Miliband and others had argued, to the poor theorizing capacity of students of British politics. Keith Middlemas, Reader in Modern British History at the University of Sussex, in a much praised outline sketch of *Politics in Industrial Society*, sought to remedy the deficiency(321). Profoundly dissatisfied with existing approaches to recent political history, whether of the journalistic, descriptive or case-study type, Middlemas intended, as he explained in a lengthy introduction, to view the past as a whole and all-at-once. A grand theory of governance was proposed, to be empirically validated.

Alone amongst the European industrial nations in the first half of the century, Britain had managed to avoid the turbulence of social disorder. Did falling back on evocations of "the British tradition" of wise tolerance - so beloved of Whig and transatlantic admirers - account sufficiently for this? Middlemas thought not. The form of parliamentary government elucidated by Bagehot may have endured, but the actual operation of power and policy had carved out new channels, robbing the ancient constitutional arrangements of their validity. The "extended state" lay at the heart of an answer.

State interference, in the years up until 1914, began as a means of ensuring industrial harmony. With

321. K.Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society - the experience of the British system since 1911* (1979).

the coming of war, the trade unions were given a measure of involvement in the political process. Faced by the threat of revolution, this new arrangement was carried over into the postwar period, creating a "distinctive form of triangular collaboration in the industrial sphere, between government, trade unions and the business class". There was periodic discontent in the 1920s, but so too a slow-moving, unending pattern of co-operation and accommodation built up to contain it. The "avoidance of crisis" took priority, kept in being by an informal, always mutating and interdependent, consciously willed yet largely improvised, tripartite brokerage. Fashioned in the years of 1919-26, it reached a point of supra-ideological equilibrium in the time of Baldwin and Attlee, "enabling governments of the 1930s and 40s to maintain order and consent and to survive the Second World War as no other European state did". This system was not corporatist, but one where - his term - "corporate bias" predominated, a hidden code detectable at all levels of political activity and as pervasive a phenomenon, Middlemas asserted, as the oligarchic tendencies identified long ago by Michels. The state, in all of this, did not hold the ring; it exercised an important directing function, not least in the manipulation of popular opinion, so as to conceal the essential fragility of the relationship. In return for which, capital and labour became "governing institutions", enjoying enhanced power and status. By sheer good fortune, it lasted intact, he believed, until the mid-1960s.

The practical outcome had been a lessening of class antagonism, the exclusion of the left, and - he saw a connecting link - the bypassing of party and parliament. This rejection of the primacy of party, dating its demise back to the 1920s, was one of the bolder statements. Industry and labour, he suggested, had typically looked

to the state, not the political parties. Representation was now effectively functional (Whitehall) rather than territorial (the Commons). The parties themselves were rivals only in the sense that they competed for the prize of manning part of the government machine. Oratorical disagreements had long since ceased to reflect the real politics of the nation. Earlier analysts had been looking in the wrong place. "Party is now king", Beer (in 1965) had Herman Finer saying. Middlemas dethroned party.

This idea of the neutralising of class conflict was an important element in the corporatist analyses of Britain that were flourishing. Social equilibrium was built around the mutual dependence of the government and organized employers and unions in reaching an informal concordat. The weak, centre-less state (in pluralist accounts) became stronger by incorporating rival institutions into the governing process. The state ceased to hold the ring but entered as an active player in the game. In so doing, however, the influence of powerful vested interests restricted the limits of the possible.

So that there was a further result, which had only recently become fully apparent - a drawing back, over the same period, from the making of hard choices, at the cost of "political compromise, industrial feather-bedding and low overall growth". But Middlemas was careful not to press the point too far. The revival of party forms in the seventies was a symptom of decline, left and right moving to an adversarial confrontation in an apparent attempt to "destabilize" the political order. Middlemas drew reassurance from the fact that, at least as far as the Conservative party was concerned, crisis avoidance had not been rejected in favour of ideological purity. After 1979 (when he acted for a time as an unofficial adviser to James Prior, the Secretary of State for

Employment), the tripartite understanding came unstuck. This did not alter the truth for him that it was the scope and not the fact of state intervention that was being decided, once that a minimal role for the state was conceded(322). It even helped, in what was regarded as the split in the Conservative party between upholders of the post-war settlement and the advocates of a growth strategy, in defining what was still "the real constitution"(323).

Although only a preliminary essay, taking the story as far as he could reasonably go without the official papers for the post-1945 years, Middlemas argued that his opening hypothesis had much to commend it, fusing (all too rare an experiment) political science concepts with the study of contemporary history, and with enough precision to make stringent testing feasible. But the enthusiasm shown by some reviewers for his model of "corporate bias" was strongly tempered by other reservations. His approach was said not to fit for particular policies in particular periods(324). It was said to have ignored the welfare side of the corporatist bargain(325). It was said, lastly, to have uncritically accepted, and therefore been led astray by, 'power' theories of political behaviour(326).

322. K.Middlemas, 'Will she had to listen this time?', in *The New Statesman*, 3 July 1987, pp.12-14.

323. K.Middlemas, 'The Crisis of the Tory Party', *New Society*, 6 October 1983, p.16.

324. R.Lowe, ''Corporate Bias': Fact or Fiction', in *The Social Science Research Council Newsletter*, November 1983, pp.17-18.

325. P.Addison, 'Parties and Pressure Groups', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 May 1980, pp.504-505.

326. A.Beattie, *Corporatism and English Constitutional Thought*, unpublished paper (1980).

Even allowing for the insightful purchase on the past which Middlemas afforded, history - the specialists told the generalist - is simply the wrong place to try out large-scale model building.

But the spectacle of an eclectic Conservative adopting a state-centred outlook was an intriguing one. Instead of envisaging the state as an abstract construction around which the political community is constituted, as the conventional Tory might have done, Middlemas cast it in the form of an involved agent pursuing aims of its own (survival, system maintenance) in partnership with other largely economic estates of the realm. Then again, he made no use of new 'public choice' arguments of liberal provenance which see the state composed of expansionist and exploitative bureaucracies - arguments which could have given his account a sharper cutting edge. It was a structural view of the state, and consequently an appealing one for the left - Middlemas's "Tory marxism", one commentator said(327), leading to the reflection that what was new about some of the New Right was that they had read the New Left(328). To this extent, opposites conspired in a beguiling symmetry, left and right combining to do down the post-war middle ground of the golden mean which had merged intellect with power and created - for its spokesmen - positions of authority and influence. The New Left were, in the shape of E.P. Thompson, "outside the whale". The New Right took up no less unyielding an opposition to the modern Leviathan. From this springs the strongest evidence for saying that their disparate writings - turned in on

327. F.Mount, 'The triangular economy', in *The Spectator*, 24 January 1979, pp.13-14.

328. R.Williams. 'The Politics of Poverty', *The Guardian*, 5 April 1984, p.18. See also B. Schwartz, 'Conservatives and Corporatism', *The New Left Review*, November-December 1987, pp.107-128.

themselves and self-referential - were part of a pattern. Both were responding to the rise of a professional, corporate society geared to reward and efficiency, but with modernizing dilemmas that left it vulnerable to criticism; it does not follow that they cancelled each other out(329). This energizing of the political debate found its way into the historian's inquest that was - by the late 1970s - in full swing. From one vantage point, it was an unwelcome return to dogmatics; from the other, a very necessary liberating effect if the understanding of post-war Britain was to move forward.

Keynes

Of all the disputations, none was more keenly fought than the controversy over the political and economic consequences of John Maynard Keynes.

The literature on what Keynes really said and meant, and the relation in which his work stood to the classical teachings of his predecessors, had developed into the paramount concern of historians of economic thought. *The General Theory* departed from traditional ideas of political economy in suggesting that self-correcting economic equilibrium at the level of full employment - an axiomatic presupposition to the classicists - was only a special case; but his thinking could also, as early critics noted, be quite easily grafted on to the existing corpus of economic doctrine. Designed to combat the inter-war conditions of industrial depression and mass unemployment, it was unclear whether his message would be applicable in the very different circumstances of excess demand brought about by the war. Oriented towards operational use in the real world of economy, its activism attracting those who favoured the investigation

329. H.Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society* (1989), pp.516-519.

of economic phenomena by the route of abstract speculation. Keynes' own intellectual fluency and shifting of ground - and the obscurities and inconsistencies in his writings - did not make the task of interpretation any easier; his obvious importance added to the competition to show how his ideas lent support to particular courses of action. The reaction to Keynes provides a useful indication as to how and why it is that economists disagree. The argument about the Keynesian apparatus of thought (his phrase from the introduction to the Cambridge Economic Handbooks) has also been an argument about the developing and refining of the discipline of economics.

Practically speaking, however, the theoretical force of Keynes's *General Theory* - a discussion mainly confined to fellow economists and economic historians - has spilled over into his influence on the shaping of wartime and post-war economic policy, an issue of far wider interest. The use and abuse of Keynesian economics has gone to make up what has been described as one of the major intellectual "tangles" of recent times(330). Policies approved by the disciples of Keynes are said to have gone far beyond anything Keynes himself would have countenanced. Keynesians have replied by maintaining that even Keynes did not seize the full import of his ideas. He helped to transform economics into a master science in the science of society that carried potentially revolutionary implications; but about this ultimate end Keynes avoided committing himself. For a long time, the view prevailed that there had indeed been a post-war revolution in economic management and that Keynes had shown governments how to achieve this - two decades of unparalleled expansion drove it home. The contrasting claim, that the revolution was neither

330. J.Vaizey, *ibid* (1983), p.10.

'Keynesian', nor especially 'revolutionary', grew in strength as the economy began to falter. Misgivings about the outcome of Keynesian economics happened to combine with a more generalised disquiet over the direction of post-war, state-inspired public policy, re-opening fundamental questions. Limitations in the Keynesian approach were used to promote a reversion to older, once discredited ideas. The incompleteness of the revolution left it wide open to economically informed attack. It also demonstrated that economics is lacking exact empirical ground-rules with which to discriminate between rival schools of thought, leaving room for considerations of a non-economic kind, unamendable to reasoned discussion. This was the striking paradox : the sharply differentiated explanations of economists which gave rise to the argument about the 'Keynesian revolution' were the very same reason preventing the matter from being argued to a finish.

Detail as a Unity

The awakening of interest in the Labour governments of 1945-51, beginning with the combined efforts of the 'Home Front' historians and numerous biographers, and helped along by the calendar, television and radio, and publishers' hyperbole, reached a peak in the middle 1980s, by which time a long-awaited biography of Attlee, the concluding volume of the life of Bevin, two major studies of the government 'in the round', and the first full-length account of its economic policies since J.C.R. Dow, had all appeared, backed up by an incoming tide of subsidiary monographs and articles. This intense coverage of an under-appreciated prime minister, a hard-pressed reforming administration, and of the permanent mark which it left on the wider society, was of a quality and a quantity to suggest nothing short of an historical

fascination. What had provoked such an academic effusion?

Political and economic circumstances - and the re-emergence of ideological controversy - had made the late nineteen-forties a flashpoint of contemporary debate. Conservative attacks on the statist trend after 1945 were countered by Labour's revivalist feelings for the one Labour administration around which the party could unite. But distance also lent disenchantment. The dashing of post-war expectations (for Marwick who was no longer a Labourite) had not been apparent beforehand; even in the general histories of the sixties there was little inkling of the shattering events to come. The revised accounts of the second and later editions, in which the country was "absorbed by anxiety and resignation" (Havighurst) and preoccupied with "the agony of eclipse" (Robbins), displayed a far clearer idea of what had happened next(331). Left and right lamented the missed opportunities and wrong turnings of the immediate post-war years, their strident criticisms rejecting all claims to neutrality. Competing visions of the national past put a radically different slant on 'our island story'.

The opening up of the official archives - released in annual batches running to one mile of shelving, those on 1945 first appearing in 1976 - was the second main cause of the quickening of interest. The instant impression of events crowding in on the government excited journalistic attention. The austerity notepaper was itself evocative for scholars starting to work through the files(332). Quite early on it became possible to show up the inadequacy of the reported news

331. A.Havighurst (1979), pp.621-623; K. Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power* (1983), p.342.

332. M.Charlton, *The Price of Victory* (1983), p.9.

of the time, contrary to the view that everything can normally be deduced - or intelligently reconstructed - from a careful reading of the public prints(333). In several instances, access had already turned the argument, the documents imposing their own factual discipline. Their limitations did not pass without comment. Many papers remained closed, as Shinwell, referring to Palestine, guessed they would be(334), or were, as happened with the 'atom bomb' minute, temporarily withheld(335); others had been indiscriminately destroyed. Differing departmental standards in sifting papers for retention, and important gaps in an overwhelming mass of documentation, convinced several former civil servants - reading back over their thirty year old drafts - that a fully authenticated record could no longer be obtained(336). Scholars were anyway on their guard against an excessive or exclusive reliance on the public records. Growing private (including windfall) and oral sources ensured that, in addition to having a through knowledge of the current state of the secondary literature, there was a need to master a widening range of primary materials. On this basis the central claim was made that, possessed of an overview of the period in all its aspects, which no contemporary had had, the time had now come to present a mature, authoritative and historically considered account of early post-war Britain.

333. P.Hennessy, *What the Papers Never Said* (1985).

334 'Cabinet papers "were withheld to protect Bevin"', *The Times*, 4 January 1977, p.2.

335. P.Hennessy, 'Cabinet's atom bomb minute restored to file', *The Times*, 21 July 1980, p.3.

336. Lord Greenhill, quoted in *Contemporary History - practice and method*, A. Seldon (ed) (1988), p.81; J.G. Pater, *The Making of the National Health Service* (1981), introduction; A. Robinson, review in *The Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 10 1986, pp.165-185.

The claim was advanced, it is worth remarking, in full knowledge of the spate of highly politicized verdicts on the 'new past', and of the way in which a mix of styles, the "scholarly" and the more "engaged", had jointly contributed to forming the present picture. The attitude which historians took to this showed how far thinking had changed. Mindful of the bewitching appeal of a partial truth, many were also much less exercised by fears of contaminated history that an earlier generation, inbred with the dogma of impartiality, would have been. Aware of the truism that the past is socially constructed (that it is invented and discovered) did not mean that understanding never improved. The commitment - detachment polarity was a false opposition, because the tug of war of objective and subjective influences is one that affects all writers. Allowing for the individualistic reluctance among historians to join forces, however, made no difference to their common submission to the techniques and practices of historical research, of historians working independently together in pursuit of the same goal, the whole process aiding the shaking off of distorting prejudice. The influence of commitment was plainly, even boringly obvious. The more interesting issue was how a reputable, detached outlook comes to be established(337).

This should not be taken to mean that the historians, contrasted with the ideologues, did not revise the history that they wrote. 'Splitters' outnumbering 'lumpers', the professional delving into the microscopic detail of what could be shown to have been the case necessarily broke up old and introduced new interpretations. It was a frequently observed point made by those coming to the archives on the Attlee years that they had acquired a retrospective dramatic unity they had

337. P. Addison, 'When Neil Kinnock was in his pram', *The London Review of Books*, 5-18 April 1984, p.3.

not possessed at the time(338). The incoherent, hand-to-mouth, often fumbling governmental reaction to events belied the idea of planned economic recovery or an orchestrated policy of decolonisation. Scholars alighted on an intricate tale of mayhem that was both complicated and confusing. The Attlee governments, from the word go, had been overwhelmed by so many difficulties on such a broad front, that it became all but impossible to divine any central purpose or guiding thread.

That so much was eventually and eventfully accomplished, the interconnectedness of foreign, defence and economic affairs adding up to an overall sense of success punctuated by failures, only served to enhance the heroic scale of the era. Today, as one Attlee man could assert, there were grounds for arguing about whether the achievements of those years were good or bad - but there was no denying that the total effect had been one of fundamental change.

But the making of this judgement - measuring by results - needs to be seen by the manner with which it was conditioned. With few exceptions, it was reached on the basis of the standards of historian's history, adopting a governing perspective of 1945 which compared Attlee with other prime ministers, the government with other (and not just other Labour) governments, and its record in terms of previous reforming administrations. It was no longer a history of Labour, but a top-down view of that government and that period reminiscent of the 'high politics' approach, itself a corrective reaction to Whiggish uplift and sociological schema. One sure sign of this conventionality was evident in the reluctance to take up the tools of other disciplines. Others were far more conscious of the *differentness* of 1945, the

338. K.Burk, review in *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 1984, pp.450-452.

consequences of its actions reaching deep down into society and stretching far into the future - aspects which the critiques of left and right made much greater play with. The larger the impact, in their eyes, the more severe the mistakes and misjudgments. It was an argument about the best way of proceeding. The new abundance of evidence favoured a traditional historical approach, just as it enabled critics to stigmatize the type of history that tended to get written, bearing out the accuracy of the assertion that the Attlee governments of 1945-51 were, of all recent governments, the "most discussed and least understood"(339).

Consensus and Decline

The academic roundtable on the post-war consensus - developing only late on and clearly impelled by current politics - brought the debate to a culminating point, uniting several disciplines and approaches, illustrating the stages through which the literature had passed, and providing a further opportunity to set out political persuasions. But what gave it added impetus was its tying in with a very much older and long drawn out issue: the controversy of controversies about Britain's relative economic decline. This double theme absorbed many other concerns.

Consensus was clad originally in the garb of "Mr Butskell", a composite figure of fun popularized by an editorial in *The Economist* in February 1954(340), and later on in a Vicky cartoon. The author of the phrase was Richard Fort, the Conservative M.P. for Clitheroe who

339. Dustjacket comments, K.O. Morgan's *Labour in Power 1945-1951* (1984).

340. 'Mr Butskell's Dilemma', *The Economist*, 13 February 1954, pp.439-441.

had been among the new 1950 intake, had contributed to the 'One Nation' group's pamphlet on the social services, and was at the time Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Education. He had remarked over lunch with Norman Macrae - home affairs editor of *The Economist* - and the journalist Ian Trethowan that Butler and Gaitskell, both of whom he approved of, were beginning to resemble each other in manner and approach(341). Suggestions for a name to describe the phenomenon were tossed around, and Mr Butskell was the result. It implied, in Macrae's final formulation, a form of constructive and moderate centrist politics, the two front benches admonishing their more extreme and "irresponsible" backbenchers. But whatever disturbed one half of Mr Butskell was likely to redound to the electoral advantage of the other - hence "Mr Butskell's dilemma". Gaitskell knew who had written the article and rather enjoyed it; Butler, on the other hand, is thought to have felt that the nickname was detrimental to his reputation in the Tory party. It was a throwaway line from the journalistic, dinner table world of Westminster and Whitehall.

In the hands of the political scientist, "consensus" was transformed into a convergence of party structures and ideologies, a merging for electoral reasons that was in marked contrast to the heightened party struggle of the inter-war period. It was simply the way parties behaved in a predominantly two-party, parliamentary system. Conflict was to be found instead within each party (fuelling the academic interest in Labour's left-wing) rather than between them, or in the process of negotiation and bargaining with interest groups. Largely a broad-brush sociological generalization, and not easily verifiable, it was also highly normative. The agreement

341. N.Macrae, letter to the author, 23 February 1981.

about fundamentals at the political level was one that was thought to reach down into the shared values of society. In comparison with other - especially other European nations - this made Britain unusually blessed. Even those pushing an adversarial view of party politics in the 1970s had to concede that party differences had been far less pronounced prior to 1964(342).

The earliest contemporary histories also took up the term as an expression of the mood of postwar, and non-ideological writing about the 1945 settlement grew up as a consequence. A middle way was traced back to the 1930s, discerned in the morale-building of wartime and then - in Addison - rolled forward from the ending of military conflict. It was to Addison that the notion of consensus owed its permanent influence(343).

But the presumed demise of that same bipartisanship had a releasing effect upon political debate. Improving doctrines were satirized and postwar idols humbled. Consensus was elevated into a totemic abstraction, symbolizing the triumph of misrule.

The indisputable reality of decline - political and economic as well as moral - became the "leading problem"(344), and a "declinist" benchmark the one by which the performance of all post-1945 governments were measured(345). This, in time, influenced the consensual

342. S.E.Finer (ed), *Adversary Politics and Electoral Reform* (1975), p.12.

343. D.Kavanagh and P. Morris, *Consensus Politics* (1989), p.1.

344. M.Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981), p.3.

345. D.Walker, 'The First Wilson Governments 1964-70', in P. Hennessy and A. Seldon (eds), *Ruling Party Performance* (1987), p.189.

outlook of an earlier vintage. A consensus-view had been a way of looking at the past; now it turned into a facet of that past. The full, scholarly histories of the 1980s - which had nothing but praise for Attlee's laying down of the main lines of domestic and foreign policy that had lasted over the next two or three decades - began to appear inveterately nostalgic and insufficiently disapproving.

Gradually these "vast" amorphous constructs" were taken apart and analyzed, by political historians in the first instance, but also by interested academics from other fields who took exception to the double-hit of consensus and decline being used as a question-begging premise. The range of understandings of the terms, the duration of the periods to which they could be said to refer, and their causal connections and consequences all invited review. Discussion of the work of Marquand, Gamble and Middlemas carried out under the auspices of the Institute for Contemporary British History (formed in 1986 to encourage research and analysis of post-war British history) showed the degree to which, in talking about the same concepts, rival meanings were derived from different value judgements, drawing on contrasting empirical evidence and implying competing prescriptions for policy(346). Though not methodologically innovative, the argument had great political significance.

Several historians of social policy were the most active in chipping away at the 1945 edifice. Smith's volume on *War and Social Change* contained a number of short case studies covering life in wartime Britain which

346. *Contemporary Record*, Autumn 1988, Spring 1989 and Winter 1991. The "difficulties" of consensus are examined in R. Lowe, 'The Second World War, Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 1 No 2 1990, pp.152-182.

contested the assumption of war as a radicalizing force(347). Wartime effects often only reinforced existing structures or ideas, were restricted to special areas, or else left traditional practices untouched. Continuity with pre-war was much more apparent than with the years after 1945, where many fresh departures had been only marginal or short-lived. The warfare-welfare thesis was a major historical "misapprehension". In Webster's official history of the origins of the National Health Service(348), folklore was similarly swept aside by a carefully documented historical analysis in which the image of the NHS as the unique product of wartime agreement was redrawn. It had been the accidental outcome of a series of negotiated compromises struck by different interested parties agreeing to a temporary settlement which satisfied none of them, but around which a "spurious consensus" was subsequently erected, investing the NHS with the aura of a national institution and quite inadvertently legitimizing the expansion of the state. Webster did not go along with the new 'Tory' history aimed at blackening the past (he rejected the charge that resource had been wastefully directed away from productive investment(349)). But his findings fitted in with the historiographical fashioning of an unintended, ambiguous post-war legacy - of capital and labour held in an uneasy state of suspension, the social services enlarged without a philosophy of welfare, and reconstruction effected without thinking through the dimensions of public power. The artificial solidarity of the war had been carried over into peacetime, encouraged

347. H.L.Smith (ed), *War and Social Change - British Society in the Second World War* (1986).

348. C.Webster, *The Health Services since the War Vol 1 The NHS before 1957* (1988).

349. C.Webster, 'Is the health service safe?' in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 6 October 1989, pp.13-14.

by a vague but self-serving consensus(350). There was no accord on basic values. It was more a case of an inconclusive stand-off between warring interests. There had been an historic confluence of ideas (after all, Laski, Keynes and Hayek were all Liberals of one sort or another) bringing to command a new political class allied to the representatives of organised labour, but the extent of the 1945 project was neither as great, nor the retreat - currently underway - from it as complete as had been asserted(351). It was just that the post-war mood of heightened expectancy had made do in place of a firmer theoretical basis for reform, exposing it to longer-term attack(352). Victory in war had enabled Britain to escape the questioning that other defeated countries had had to confront, a process of national introspection and evaluation - about nationality, statehood and citizenship - which the British were only now embarking upon.

The toughest-minded of these studies was the work of a military specialist, Correlli Barnett, who, in a book given wide publicity in 1986, fastened on to the shambolic state of Britain's wartime production as a metaphor for the country's misplaced priorities after 1945. Explicitly relating consensus with decline, Barnett offered his own recipe for the kind of state-led modernization that ought to have been pressed with vigour immediately the war was won. Written with verve and conviction, the book was hard to ignore, even to those

350. R.Silburn, 'Beveridge and the war-time consensus', *Social Policy and Administration*, March 1991, pp.13-14.

351. K.Young, 'Where did the ideals of the class of '45 go?', *The Listener*, 10 July 1986, pp.11-12.

352. J.Harris, 'Political ideas and the debate on state welfare, 1940-45', in H.L.Smith, *ibid* (1986), pp.233-263.

who found its conclusions unpalatable. Because the whole thrust of the case, in defiance of accepted opinion, was inseparable from the author, it revived once more the doubtful nature of historical argument. It confronted full on the very claim to dispassionate impartiality which the historical profession had been making for its latest contributions to contemporary history. If one of the most balanced books - McCallum's - was also one of the earliest, the most hostile reception was reserved for an account that was closest to our own time.

3: Stepping Stones

We began this account by introducing the idea of an - admittedly contrived - antimony between a pure, presuppositionless, uncommitted form of inquiry and the contrary notion that all viewpoints are more or less committed, value-based elaborations of rhetoric. It was suggested that these rival outlooks were in fact reconcilable once it is accepted that an objective representation of the historical past is capable of arising out of a multitude of subjective versions of history, each of which is open to the critical and controlling effects intrinsic to the historical approach - that, to rephrase Edmund Burke, although the individual historian may be foolish, the historical species is wise.

A popular - Popper calls it the decisive(353) - way to measure intellectual advance is in terms of progress by disagreement, the frontiers of a subject being marked by disputes and altercations which, in time and as more evidence is unearthed, give way to greater comprehension as differing viewpoints come into closer conformity and outdated ideas are modified or discarded. In such a 'developmental' frame, it matters not from which quarter or for what reason an argument is first proposed, providing that the argument can be made to withstand the test of rigorous scrutiny. The creative urge, which may well be inspired by values or interests, is superceded by a critical, objectified testing, in what are not two opposing but "two successive and complementary episodes of thought that occur in every advance of scientific understanding"(354). In this

353 K. Popper, in conversation with B. Magee, *Modern British Philosophy* (1971), p.176.

354 P. Medawar, *The Art of the Soluble* (1967), p.118.

way, it is held, good theories are replaced by still better ones, each of the stages in the discussion acting as a stepping stone to an improved, and increasingly agreed-upon, appreciation of the past. Objectivity equates with a significant or marked degree of scholarly unanimity; it is not the source but rather the result of the socially organised objectivity of any subject.

This might, as sceptics like to point out, be a convincing account of how the academic study of history ought to proceed; but in practice it seldom does. Instead of a purely logical spur to knowledge, others draw attention to the different and ineradicable values which inform the work of different members of an academic community and which lead them to think differently, these values being what they bring to and use to interpret the information they have collected. Without such variations in value-outlook, all profitable dialogue would cease(355). The core values themselves may be not only beyond dispute; they may also imply widely varying estimations of what can be said to represent constructive intellectual advance, or whether indeed such a thing is possible. Incompatible explanations cry out for resolution; incommensurable accounts are, to all intents and purposes, incomparable. When truth is at issue, on this view, the majority principle plays no part.

From the foregoing history of the histories (Chapter 2), it should have become apparent that each of the most important ways of approach and modes of inquiry manifests and embodies - in and of itself - the alternating pulls of the detached and the committed, the descriptive and the normative, the factual and the evaluative. Each

355 T.Kuhn, 'Reflections on my critics', in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, I.Lakatos and A.Musgrave (eds)(1970), p.262.

embraces and illustrates, in other words, the possibility of and the limitations placed upon an enhanced historical understanding. A review of some of the major stages will remind us of this.

- * the naive descriptivism of the traditional English approach to the study of politics, which 'took the world as it found it', while imparting hidden liberal assumptions;

- * the quarrel - beginning in the 1930s - over the leftist belief that objective reason (employed to plan the nation's resources or define the public good) necessarily assisted the progressive cause;

- * the closed politics of 1945 and after, confined to the eye-witness immediacy of the first autobiographical and biographical accounts, qualified by party political considerations and motives of self-justification;

- * disputes about the philosophical meaning and statistical measurement of abstract values like equality;

- * the double-edged nature of political science, and of the new social sciences in general (pure and scientific, applied and policy-oriented);

- * the Anglo-marxist insistence on theory being only a preliminary guide to action;

- * the sharp distinction between labour historians sympathetic to the left, and those whose authority was thought to derive from the insignificance of their sympathies;

- * the rise of the early contemporary histories, and the arguments over relevance and perspective, the influence of younger, more engaged scholars, the ambiguity of official history, the dangers in the over-identification of biographer and subject, and the capacity of history to hold other disciplines (like those making up the social sciences) to account by having recourse to historical particulars;

- * the impact of partisan debate from the late 1960s

on, which made objectivity into a bias, spawned an alternative rationality, and fostered competing but exclusively self-validating outlooks;

* in its wake, the appearance of fully authenticated historical accounts which, in recognising and exploiting the radical perspectival shift, showed how great a degree of detachment was still realisable;

* the inter-disciplinary debate on post-war consensus and decline, and the role (if any) for the maverick historian.

To automatically assume a 'developmental' growth of the literature would be to adopt an as yet uncorroborated assertion. The purist will inquire whether, given the special difficulties attaching to the history of the 1945 Labour governments, an increasingly objective view of the recent past has indeed obtained - though this carries with it the unanswerable requisite of what a truly objective description would look like. But, although the influence of pre-formed attitudes is readily acknowledged on all sides (if only to be later discounted) it may also happen that the essential assumptions and opinions of a school or approach are hammered out in the course of debates about relatively specific issues at the time when they are being argued over. Controversies which are futile to some are fertile for others. Rival values might then form not just the start of an argument, but also be the motive force in determining the direction which an argument takes. Any assessment of the actual effect or non-effect of prior values and preconceptions must come down to a matter of empirical investigation of what can be shown to have been the case in particular contexts and instances.

The fifteen case histories which follow are taken as having constituted some of the salient points of contention between and within differing schools of

thought which have had a bearing on the historical debate surrounding the Attlee governments. They have been arranged in rough chronological sequence, with cross-referencing wherever individual themes overlap and interpenetrate, reflecting the importance given to the circumstances in which they were first brought to life. Although any attempt to impose an artificial pattern on the chaotic vitality of more than forty years of writing must appear somewhat arbitrary, it may be helpful to think of a succession of 'problems' with which the principal contributors have been dealing, the concentration on a genealogy of problems promoting cross-disciplinary exchange. Sharing the common aim of reaching an understanding about the recent past, the diverse outlooks and approaches unite in a joint historical enterprise.

1945

It was by good fortune - as much as astute foresight - that the "sensational reversal" in the general election of 1945 should have been the object of the first serious academic study of an electoral campaign in Britain(356). R. B. McCallum, Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, had been casting around for a research proposal to justify funding from Nuffield College and hit upon the idea of examining the imminent election, as it was lived through and as a guide to future historians(357). His suggestion at once accepted, McCallum, with his main collaborator Alison Readman, and a team of volunteer students, immediately set about amassing the published party literature and propaganda (including election addresses) and a selection of the local, regional and national press reports - supplemented by sketches of the electoral fight in a few hand picked seats - out of which a detached record of the six weeks of electioneering could be composed. But McCallum, a man of strong convictions, also had before him the harmful myth-making perpetrated by assorted radicals and writers of advanced opinion, including John Maynard Keynes, after the last 'Khaki' election, in 1918, which had - in McCallum's view - greatly contributed to the fatal denigration of the Versailles treaty(358). Concerned to thwart the emergence of similar misrepresentations after 1945, he wanted to photograph the election "in flight", as he later put it, before any falsehoods could

356. R.B.McCallum and A.Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (1947).

357. D.Kavanagh, 'On Writing Contemporary Electoral History' in *Electoral Studies*, 1 1982, pp.117-118.

358. R.B.McCallum, *Public Opinion and the Last Peace* (1944).

take hold. Disavowing any attempt at a full-scale work of electoral sociology - of the kind pioneered in France by Andre Siegfried - he nevertheless brought into being the inaugural volume in the post-war series of Nuffield-sponsored election surveys. Psephology (McCallum's half-serious word from the Greek for the casting of a pebble into an urn) was born.

Convinced that the ending of the war in 1945 marked a decisive turning-point, McCallum and Readman were otherwise suitably circumspect in their judgements, wishing only to provide a reliable account and commentary. If the great turnover was a surprise, reasons could be found for it. They discounted the importance of the Laski affair as an election stunt, arguing that, rightly or wrongly, the contest had been to a large extent a retrospective verdict on the events of the inter-war years. The popular perception of the recent past was what had mattered, although the ultimate justice of this charge would have to be left for others to determine later. Churchill's prestige had not proved sufficient by itself to overcome Labour's widely propagated and devastatingly effective denunciation of the 'Old Gang'. The issues which most exercised the voters - namely housing and reconstruction - were ones which enabled Labour to point up the broken pledges after 1918. The majority of the electorate, and even the younger parts of it, appeared to have been "fully resolved" long in advance, and were not swayed by any late appeals. As for the Services vote, blamed at the time by the Tories for their defeat, this had been relatively low, at around sixty per cent. Gallup polls taken during the campaign were reasonably accurate, but these aside (and they were not taken too seriously) the election forecasters had fared badly - it was their 'Waterloo' also. In terms of party politics, the authors saw the election as being on a par with the earth-moving

outcomes of 1832 and 1906, but they were unsure which would prove to be the more telling - Labour's rise to unshared office, or the historic conservative reverse. The squeezing out of the Liberal vote - McCallum's own party - had worked in Labour's favour. Either way there was no cause for concern. There had been a reassertion of "the two-party antithesis". With the peaceful and remarkably speedy changeover of government, the working of the parliamentary system was endorsed.

Finished so soon afterwards, the Nuffield study bore all the tell-tale signs of an 'instant' account. Something of the flavour and excitement of the hustings was conveyed to the reader, as when Churchill rose to address his audience in Glasgow. Good use was made of ephemeral election material that would soon have vanished. An account now existed of the climax of the democratic process. That it was impossible to arrive prematurely at a view of the longer-term importance of the election was no surprise. Historical reinterpretations were bound to follow. They would now at least have to accord with some basis of fact. This factual core was not, however, all that statistical. The national 'swing', as a rough measure of the changeover of votes from one party to another, was introduced in an appendix, in an attempt to point out how much less of a chance result it was and how little was needed to create a landslide. But the science of voting was still in its early stages. Judged by the original aim of nipping new myths in the bud, McCallum and Readman could claim some success. "Not all elections have labels", they wrote. The 1945 election remained thereafter "unnamed", incapable of easy encapsulation.

For all its novelty, the Nuffield monograph was not altogether cogent. Reviewers found it hard to distinguish between indisputable fact and the more

personal of the authors' observations, so closely were the two entwined(359). Insufficient attention had been paid to the important pre-election period, and to the manoeuvrings which had preceded the drama of the campaign itself. More discussion of the evolution of party strategy would have been helpful. Most seriously of all, there was next to nothing about the background influences which had driven the voters to vote in the way that they did. C.S. Emden - in arguing that the 1945 election was the straight 'man' or 'measures' contest *par excellence* (showing that he accepted the primacy of policy over personality in all but the most exceptional of circumstances) pointed out that "no convincing explanation has yet been given of the choice that the people then made"(360). This was not, it is true, an aim that McCallum and Readman had intended to pursue(361). But the absence of this aspect, and of what Lewis Namier called "the class element"(362) in voting, was evidence of the drawbacks in the Nuffield method.

The reasons for this reticence stemmed from McCallum's basic approach as much as from his own political outlook. McCallum was a rationalistic liberal of the John Stuart Mill type, entertaining a notion of the enlightened voter doing his civic duty, critically weighing up the issues, not to be looked at 'in the mass', and able - as the wartime sacrifices had shown - to rise above material considerations. The subdued mood

359. For example, L.Beales in *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 18 1947, pp.268-270.

360. C.S.Emden, *The People and the Constitution* (2nd ed 1956), p.243.

361. R.S.Milne, 'The Study of Parliamentary Elections' in *The Cambridge Journal* (August 1952), p.690.

362. L.B.Namier, 'Two General Elections: 1945 and 1950' in *Avenues of History* (1952), p.187.

of 1945 matched the hour. The pity was that most voters, although liberal, were not always Liberal. The motives of the voting public were not, however, something he wanted to delve too deeply into. He did not intend pushing the study of voting very far, nor did he think that it should be(363). To do so would be to take away some of the charm and mystery of what was still an "infinitely complex" process.

Even so, the development of electoral sociology towards regional and even constituency-level analyses was the next logical step. Campbell and Birch examined the political and social character of the North-West of England, homing in on Stretford in the 1950 election(364). Studies of Glasgow and Greenwich - hitherto a weathervane seat - were also carried out(365). More precise efforts were made to classify and quantify the gradations of social class along the lines of research in the United States. Out of all this, the survey results did little to confirm the ideal of the reasoning voter. Voting, in Birch's eyes, came about by force of habit rather than deliberate choice. Elections, it appeared, were not won or lost "on the issues". The vital floaters, who comprised anything up to one-fifth of the total electorate, proved to be relatively uninformed and uninterested. Voters were in some sense non-rational. The effect of these findings made the failure of the second Nuffield survey, written by H.G. Nicholas for the campaign of February 1950, to suggest what had caused so many voters to change their minds over the

363. R.B. McCallum, 'The Study of Psephology' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Winter 1955, pp.508-513.

364. 'Politics in the North-West' in *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, September 1950, pp.217-243.

365. S.B. Chrimes(ed), *The General Election in Glasgow, February 1950* (1950).

previous parliament still more apparent(366).

Interested students had to wait until the publication of Bonham's *The Middle Class Vote* (1954) for a clearer idea of what kind of voters had voted for which party in the elections of 1945, 1950 and 1951. Using sampling data collected by the British Institute of Public Opinion (a Gallup affiliate) in those earlier elections, Bonham was able to make a rough but better estimate of voting affiliations than could be derived simply from the voting returns. Although his class categorization was disconcertingly loose(367) - the middle classes being defined as all those other than manual wage earners and their dependants - he succeeded in knocking on the head what *The Economist* called "that old and dubious cliché"(368) that middle class voters held the balance of power at election time. The Labour party had certainly broadened its appeal in 1945 to attract white collar workers and lower professionals, particularly in the suburbs and the South, making up to 20% of its total vote, and helping it to forge a broad-based coalition of support. But those who floated were drawn from all the social strata. There was no such thing as a typical 'Labour' or 'Conservative' voter. Numerically the Conservatives commanded almost as many votes from the working class (6,200,000) as from the middle (6,500,000). If anything, it was the distribution of the by far larger working class vote which determined the outcome of an election, so that an investigation of the working class differential seemed most needed. It followed that neither of the main parties was

366. H.G.Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (1951).

367. See the review by J.F.S. Ross in *The Political Quarterly*, April-June 1955, pp.198-199.

368. 'The Results Analysed' in *The Economist*, 4 March 1950, p.468.

predominantly a class party in the way that had always been taken for granted (though many voters saw them as such). Thus it was - as others concluded - that party rivalry modified rather than exacerbated class animosity, indicating that class conflict "had not eaten too deeply into the British soul"(369).

In truth, the use of sample surveys could only be taken so far. An overall understanding of voting had necessarily to be impressionistic. As David Butler - who took over the Nuffield series in the 1950s - remarked about Bonham's study, "by themselves his statistics prove nothing":

"..... It is highly suggestive that the suburbs and the middle class swung disproportionately heavily against Labour between 1945 and 1950, yet, on its own, it remains merely an interesting fact. It only assumes major significance in an explanation of the events of the period that must perforce be based on qualitative observation and even intuition"(370).

In other words, the historical description of an election, of its antecedents and its circumstances of the kind which McCallum had initiated could not be dispensed with - this was the ultimate justification for the Nuffield works of contemporary history. To those seeking safety in the figures, there could be no "final answers", "no immaculate version of the swing". The subject had not developed as quickly as many had hoped, its

369. Variously, R. McKenzie in *The Twentieth Century*, July 1955, pp.82-83; 'Who Floats ?' in *The Economist*, 15 January 1955, pp.169-170.

370. D. Butler, *The Study of Political Behaviour* (1958), p.63.

limitations, in spite of the resuscitation of the idea of the 'party image', had not been overcome. Notwithstanding these disclaimers, the sceptics were adamant. William Pickles, a former speech writer for Attlee and Reader in Political Science at the London School of Economics - was foremost among those in arguing that the pollsters had taught very little, the psephologist even less, beyond providing "more systematic confirmation of things we already thought we knew"(371). The country was far more differentiated than students of voting implied. The problem was that too many veered off into punditry, which may - by making voters most conscious of what they were doing - by influencing opinions. This was not to suggest that experts were allowing their own preferences to intrude. It was simply that they were always trying to make more out of it than could be safely substantiated. They had fallen into the trap of assuming the statistical to be scientific. The poor record of the polling organizations in predicting election results in advance was sufficient proof to show how hazardous it was trying to measure the imponderable. The rise and fall of psephology, the Master of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, wrote, was an appropriate cautionary tale for traditional historians(372): No doubt the factors that affected voting behaviour were important; it was just, as Pickles lamented, that disappointingly little real progress as to why people vote the way they do had been made in the time since the Nuffield series had got underway - "And on that we are 'just as ignorant, or very nearly so, as we were in 1945'(373), which is where it

371. W.Pickles, 'Psephological Dyspepsia' in *The Twentieth Century*, July 1955, p.31.

372. D.Thomson, *ibid* (1969), p.85.

373. W.Pickles, 'Psephology Reconsidered' in *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 1965, p.466. See also the discussants in *The General Election of 1964* by H. Berrington et al, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*,

all began.

Planning: For and Against

Although the idea of economic planning of the nation's resources initially meant different things to different people - generating a highly structured argument(374) between protagonists in the course of adapting, revising and even abandoning their respective points of view - the so-called post-war debate of 'planners' and 'anti-planners' narrowed down to a convenient shorthand : planning was what the Labour party had promised in its 1945 manifesto and planning was what it had set about doing. It was Herbert Morrison's - and Labour's - proudest boast. Britain was to be the first major country "to attempt to combine large-scale economic planning with a full measure of individual rights and liberties"(375). The efficient direction of essential commodities implied nothing more than putting "first things first". Many of the wartime physical controls remained in place, simplifying Labour's efforts, but something less drastic than out-and-out wartime regimentation was required. Commitments had to be considered in relation to existing resources, and targets set by which to guide production. The government, the 1947 Economy Survey cautioned, could only do so much; "the tasks were for the nation as a whole, and only the combined efforts of everyone could carry them through"(376).

Arguments about *The Road to Serfdom* had not abated. After Barbara Wooton's quickfire response(377)(Hayek

374. T.Smith, *The Politics of the Corporate Economy* (1979).

375. *The Peaceful Revolution - speeches by Herbert Morrison* (1949), p.13.

376. Economic Survey for 1947 (Cmnd 7046) p.32.

377. B.Wooton, *Freedom under Planning* (1945).

had shown her the manuscript prior to publication), Herman Finer weighed in with the U.S. Edition of *Road to Reaction* (378), complaining that Hayek's slippery slope premonitions squeezed out all the moderates - a book whose release in England Hayek threatened to block unless certain references were removed. Dalton, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, could rag the Conservatives with being "slaves to Hayek", but there were few stout defences of individualism. John Jewkes (previously the head of the Economic Section of the War Cabinet) was one of the few to detail the absurdities of the new planning restrictions, believing as he did that Hayek's arguments had never been confuted (379). Still, as Schumpeter remarked, his was not an attack on the philosophical plane. Jewkes seemed to be bothered not by planning but by bureaucracy (380). Nor had he made any mention of high taxation, which left to itself would herald the march into socialism and could, as Clark had warned in 1945, if the tax ratio exceeded the "iron barrier" of one quarter of the national income, be in the long run inflationary. Richard Law - the son of Bonar Law and a Conservative front-bencher - also followed Hayek in pointing to the uncertainty of planning on the basis of poor information (381). But the very weakness of the resistance to left-wing thinking was itself taken to be symptomatic. Michael Oakeshott's contribution stood out in this regard. Unimpressed by Durbin's case for democratic socialism (382), he launched a broadside at

378. H. Finer, *Road to Reaction* (1945).

379. J. Jewkes, *Ordeal by Planning* (1948).

380. J. A. Schumpeter, 'English Economists and the State-Managed Economy', *The Journal of Political Economy*, October 1949, pp. 371-382.

381. R. Law, *Return from Utopia* (1950).

382. M. Oakeshott, *The Cambridge Review*, 19 April 1940, p. 348.

the growth of two legends, one about mass unemployment and the fear of a new slump, which the Conservative party had swallowed, the other about the beneficial effects of war upon society which it had not. In two contentious articles in *The Cambridge Journal*(383), of which he was editor, he displayed an urbane scepticism of the human addiction to "rationalism", made incarnate by the Attlee regime. Works of party doctrine, whether of the left or the right, he saw as manifestations of the same rationalist creed. Of the assault by Hayek, and others, he was equally scathing - "A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics".

Even so, events after 1945 confirmed Hayek in his belief that, in von Mises' crisp formulation, all welfare is tyranny(384), and that the end result of a social service economy, such as Labour had been introducing, would eventually turn out to be no less traumatic than had the older, fully fledged, 'hot' socialist ideals prevailed(385). It was a distinction to him without a difference. This change of tack certainly makes it harder to assess the validity of his original, elusive notion of the ever-expanding state(386). But he cited Labour's flirtation with the "conscription of labour" in 1947 as proof of the way in which socialist governments could be driven, unwillingly and yet because of the logic of their whole thinking, in the direction of increased

383. 'Scientific Politics' and 'Contemporary British Politics', *The Cambridge Journal* 1947-48, pps.347-358 and 474-490.

384. See, for example, his *Bureaucracy* (1945).

385. F.A.Hayek, Foreword to the 11th impression of *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago 1956), pp.iii-xix.

386. N.Barry, 'Is There a "Road to Serfdom"?', *Government and Opposition*, Winter 1984, pp.52-67.

coercion.

The case in point was a telling one. The Labour government had been caught unawares by the coal shortage which broke in February 1947, leaving manufacturing industry paralysed, exports plunging, and - for a few brief weeks - unemployment reaching as high as 1,900,000. The 'Keep Left' group of Labour MPs took the opportunity to demand an intensification of planning, urging the establishment of a Minister of Economic Affairs with the power to override the normal interdepartmental machinery(387). A further setback came in July, when the pound was made convertible, speculation against the currency rapidly expending the American credit loan. The cabinet was reluctant to use compulsion to steer labour into seriously under-manned industries, before finally resorting to the emergency imposition of the Control of Engagement Order in August. Evan Durbin, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works, defended the decision as mild and temporary, privately clashing with Hayek at the time. In fact, Durbin almost resigned over the issue but could not tell Hayek, who later found out and wrote to apologize(388). Machinery and materials were controlled; labour had to be persuaded. It was, Durbin considered, the single most important problem confronting the government and its entire economic strategy - "when this problem is resolved - but not before - the practicability of combining economic planning with individual liberty will have been demonstrated"(389).

With the resignation of Dalton, and his replacement

387. 'Keep Left', a New Statesman pamphlet (1947).

388. Letter to the author from Elizabeth Durbin, 25 June 1985.

389. E.F.M. Durbin, 'The Economic Problems Facing the Labour Government' in *Socialism: The British Way* (D. Munro, ed)(1948), p.29.

by Cripps, planning 'targets' were replaced by a much looser range of 'forecasts', increasing attention was paid to budgetary policy as a means of managing the level of demand, and the Treasury - after uneasily co-existing alongside the short-lived M.E.A. - established a leading role(390). This was not, to those implementing the changes, seen as an abandonment of planning. At first sight, as Worswick described the turn of events(391), there had indeed been relaxation of wartime controls over the six-year period up until 1950, the burden of which was taken up by tax and monetary policy. But the trend fluctuated, the bite of some controls (such as price controls, part of the 1948 package of wage restraint) even tightening over time. Without direct controls, he believed, employment could not have been maintained at its post-war high. More generally, Keynesian theory addressed itself to conditions of excess demand just as well as it might have to a situation of demand deficiency.

The truth of this last proposition was the most contested of all, the argument about exactly where Keynes had stood (Keynes died in 1946) being brought to a head by Roy Harrod's life of Keynes (1951)(392). The central charge, popularized by *The Economist*, was that post-war Britain was plagued by chronic inflation (stoked up by Dalton), an excess of misdirected planning and an aversion to thrift - with all of these the fault could be

390. D.N.Chester, 'Machinery of Government and Planning' in G.D.N. Worswick and P. Ady, *The British Economy 1945-1950* (1952), pp.336-364.

391. G.D.N.Worswick, in Worswick and Ady, *ibid* (1952), esp.310-312.

392. R.F.Harrod, *The Life of John Maynard Keynes* (1951).

laid at the door of Keynesian doctrine(393). Keynes may have been waking up to the dangers - Harrod printed some of his favourable comments about *The Road to Serfdom* - but his disciples were divided and his inheritance disputed. Harrod's own propensities were felt to have clouded this issue(394). Hayek it was who added the intriguing story that Keynes, shortly before he died, vowed to swing round public opinion should the use to which his ideas were being put get out of hand(395). Dalton wrote in person to the editor of *The Economist* to rebut any false impressions:

"I speak with a degree of knowledge shared by very few, when I say that in the last nine months of his life, when he was with me at the Treasury, he never wished, as you did and still do, to see money less cheap or employment less full"(396).

In cooler moments, a more balanced view could emerge. One finds it said - in the same journal only a few weeks later(397) that, compared with the wrangling of the nineteen thirties, the range of economic opinion had distinctly narrowed, blurring the theoretical line between the left and right. Some central planning was accepted, even if its extent was not. The reduction of

393. 'John Maynard Keynes', *The Economist*, 27 February 1951, pp.182-184.

394. H.D.Henderson, in *The Spectator*, 26 January 1951, pp.116-118.

395. F.A.Hayek, in *The Journal of Modern History*, June 1952, p.198.

396. Letter in *The Economist*, 2 February 1951, p.256.

397. 'The Basis of Agreement - Economic Literature Since the War', unsigned, *The Economist*, 17 March 1951, pp.609-611.

inequality was assumed, although discussion continued about how far it could be practically reduced. Public and private interests combined, without being in any way fixed. Occasional outbursts aside (from Balogh as much as from Jewkes), most economists had been chastened by "the Keynesian explosion", their sharp differences behind them - a development which was, to the anonymous commentator, all to the good.

If it was the economists who had made a head start in discussing the course of Labour and its policies, this was because the language of politics was now largely economic, turning on economic criteria. The habit of dealing with the economy in the aggregate rather than at the level of the individual or the firm followed Keynes. It made manipulation of economic trends largely a matter of technique, the economic problem an "unnecessary muddle" that the power of critical reasoning, inspired by the movement in favour of social reform, was within reach of conquering. This did not mean that ultimate values were forgotten (Robbins's classical emphasis on the separation of economic description from political prescription was widely misunderstood). Roll pointed out that Keynesian theory carried possibilities for both good and evil(398). The conscious repudiation of laissez faire alienated many traditionalists. On the other hand, the "greatness" of Keynes to a more junior economist like Crosland lay in the fact that Keynesian ideas, concerned in the main with economic stability, "[did] not bear on the fundamental issue of capitalism versus socialism"(399). When it came to specific issues of policy, economists were more than likely to divide on

398. E.Roll, *A History of Economic Thought* (4th impression 1949), pp.503-506.

399. *Tribune*, June 24 1951, p.6.

economic grounds, and economic grounds alone(400).

A clutch of American studies grappled with the difficulties of describing an economic system that was "increasingly both socialist and capitalist, both democratic and bureaucratic, both planned and unplanned"(401). R.A. Brady's *Crisis in Britain - Plans and Achievements of the Labour Government*, sent to the printers in July 1949, pointed the way. Brady, from the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of California, had known Laski in the 1930s and had written for the Left Book Club series(402). As an analyst of American business power, he was recruited to the Federal Office of the Price Administration in 1941. J.K. Galbraith, a past student, defended him before a hearing by the House of Representatives into alleged subversives on the O.P.A. staff(403). Brady's text read like an industry-by-industry statistical manual. Laski's contacts had also been of help. Brady talked with many MPs, academics and even civil servants (Robert Hall read through the manuscript), as well as Labour Ministers, including Cripps, trying to discover at first hand Labour's real intentions. The parallels he drew with the American New Deal were instructive. He emphasized the non-socialist antecedents of the 1945 programme, referring to the wartime coalition reports recommending public control,

400. See the discussion on the merits of devaluation in the late 1940s in T.W. Hutchinson, *Economists and Economic Planning in Britain 1946-66* (1968).

401. R.A. Dahl, 'Hierarchy and Democracy' in *Research Frontiers in Politics and Government* (1955), pp. 46-47.

402. R.A. Brady, *The Structure and Spirit of German Fascism* (1936).

403. J.K. Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times* (1981), p. 141.

and the strand of pragmatic thinking which this suggested. The same or similar reforms, heralded in Britain under the socialist banner, had been enacted in pre-war America as a means of salvaging, not substituting, free enterprise, and elements of a rescue operation were apparent in Britain too. Planning was restrained, while the newly nationalized industries had become the suppliers of services to business. Labour's 'middle way', though it hardly constituted a definite philosophical position, seemed to be tending in the direction of "the correction of the abuses of economic power in the interests of effecting a symbiosis between political democracy and efficient private enterprise". Worker's control, as Dahl had shown, had been expressly rejected(404). The general structure of British society was not being seriously altered. War had been the prime redistributive agency, welcoming in a form of 'humanized capital'. Adam Ulam, in his useful but scarce treatise on *The Philosophical Foundations of British Socialism* (1951) said much the same thing, only differently. The ascent of the British Labour party had come about as a response - and a characteristically pragmatic one - to the drawbacks and scarcities of an industrial system losing its dynamism; it reflected the needs and interests of its working-class base; and it had given rise, over the course of time and with increasing agreement, to government supervision of the economic life of the nation. A question of principle had been turned into a matter of balance. This was what set British Labour apart from continental social democratic parties.

The New Deal analogy also formed a central theme in the S.S.R.C.-financed research of another American scholar, Arnold Rogow, and the book he co-wrote with

404. R.A.Dahl, 'Worker's Control of Industry and the British Labour Party', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol 41 1947, pp.875-900.

Peter Shore, head of the Labour party's Research Department at Transport House(405). In many respects, Rogow did not depart from the view of Brady. He too noted the establishment of the planning machinery in wartime, and its retention, much less creation, afterwards. Its chief purpose had been to oversee the emergency co-ordination of scarce resources. There was nothing specifically 'socialist' about it. Nationalization was no different in this respect. So that policies, elsewhere associated with New Deals, Popular Fronts and suchlike, just happened in Britain to have been ushered in by Labour. This did not prevent the Conservative party, Shore wrote in a propaganda sheet, from seeking to capture the slogans and symbols for their own cause(406). Where Rogow had the advantage over Brady was in witnessing the subsequent "loosening" of planning controls over industry of Cripps's Chancellorship, and the opportunity this gave him to answer some of the forgotten questions of pre-war Laski vintage - chiefly, the extent and effectiveness of likely business opposition to an incoming Labour government. Rogow endeavoured, in effect, to put to the test the rival "working hypotheses" of Laski, Hayek and the 'New Fabians' which, although recently pushed to one side, had shaped so many preconceptions.

Rogow's assessment of Labour's "partial revolution", a task begun on but not completed, expressed many of the anxieties of the British left. But if Labour had fallen short of its stated goals, he ruled out any idea of leadership betrayal. The answer was to be found in the structural limits on how far a reforming government could go in transforming the country's industrial base. Many

405. A.A.Rogow and P.Shore, *The Labour Government and British Industry 1945-51* (1955).

406. P.Shore, *The Real Nature of Conservatism* (Labour Party Educational Series, September 1952).

Labour leaders, in his eyes, had been "increasingly persuaded that the objectives of private industry harmonized rather than conflicted with the aims of the government". The exchange of personnel between government and business, and the use of joint consultation and profit sharing, were indicative of the belief in placing co-operation ahead of compulsion. Added to which, the range of planning had been vastly exaggerated - the "unplanned" sectors (including movements of foreign exchange) far outweighed the "planned". Detailed economic forecasting and regulation had not really been tried. The machinery of physical, financial and manpower controls was largely *ad hoc*, liberal and experimental. Shore called the notion of the publicly-owned 'basic industries' a post-rationalization(407).

Yet the gradual retreat from planning, as the economy began to pick up, was also, to some degree, forced upon Ministers by the position they had put themselves in. Up until 1948-49, the essence of Labour's programme had been that of "reform without essential change", in line with what was commonly acceptable to influential elements in industry, so long as this did not reach beyond the "carefully marked frontiers" of the welfare state. Iron and steel nationalization had proved to be so contentious (and not simply symbolic) an issue because it threatened to disturb the new post-1945 social and financial equilibrium, broadly tolerable to both capital and labour. His account of the 'Mr Cube' campaign, much of it new information, chronicled the obstructive tactics adopted by the sugar producers. Faced with "disagreeable" change, powerful industrial groups would, Rogow asserted, without their having to undermine the democratic process, enter the political

407. P. Shore, 'Capitalism and Equality', *The New Statesman*, 8 October 1955, p.416.

arena:

"The steel dispute, at least, suggests that some of the effective limits of planning are determined not at the ballot box or by the planners themselves, but by the power interests of affected groups"(408)

Such was the dilemma confronting the Labour party in the 1950s. Having pushed up to the limits of redistributive 'fair shares' within an unavoidably 'mixed' economy, it could not now press leftwards without, very soon, endangering the continued existence of free enterprise. Rogow believed that, between 1945 and 1951, Labour "came in fact very near to this point". They had only been held off by the falling away of public backing. John Strachey, who saw that Keynes - for all his blind spots - had supplied a means by which to transform democracy, confessed in an introduction to the book that the pursuit of democratic reform was "of a much higher order of complexity than could have been realised in advance". "It is just because I realise something of the intricacy of the mechanism, and of the determination of the resistance", he had written to Gaitskell, "which we shall meet at this key point, that I don't believe that we can keep quiet about it or treat it as something too 'hot' to talk about in public"(409).

On the principal issue, some kind of provisional answer could now be given. The old marxist theory of outright political resistance to state regulation needed revision. Business, when its vital interests were at stake, will join the political struggle, but this need

408. A.A.Rogow and P.Shore, *ibid* (1955), p.171.

409. J.Strachey, letter to Gaitskell, 11 February 1954, Strachey papers.

not take an anti-democratic form. But neither was the assumption made beforehand by moderates, of sound and sensible government-industry links, completely valid either. As for the "anti-planners", their case was still unproven. The type of 'negative' planning adopted by Labour hardly implied any radical re-shaping of economic relations. The fiscal threat - to which attention was moving - had more substance to it, though it fell largely outside his remit. Labour's major mistake lay, he felt, in its relative neglect of restrictions (few in number and in need of toughening up) over the private sector, which clearly, he ventured, "circumscribes the effective authority of the state". Exactly where the boundaries of government should operate had still to be decided.

Rogow made a great play of readdressing the central concerns of the inter-war years, criticizing the turn towards the study of forms, structures and historical description, and of "major research into minor problems", which he attributed to the disillusion with, and collapse of, liberal and radical thought(410). To emulate the likes of Weber, Veblen and Laski, he urged, 'engaged' academics had to confront contemporary developments. But this was to recognize, if not actually to adjust to, the very changed terms of the argument. The nature of the Laski-Hayek debate had already been altered by post-war circumstances, even as Rogow was writing. Shore and Strachey had counted Labour's 'quiet victory' in converting the Conservatives to the new conditions as the most significant recent change, even though they still remained at heart a 'class' party. Others, remembering the climate of the inter-war period, saw quite the obverse - the historic, but unannounced adaptation of Labour. More to the point, the moderate success the

410. A.A.Rogow, 'Comment on Smith and Apter: or, whatever happened to the great issues?', in *The American Political Science Review*, 51 1957, pp.763-775.

wartime and postwar planning had made a greater degree of state intervention more tolerable, without providing a justification for the retention of controls once economic conditions started to improve again. A new type of mixed economy had come into being, about which there was no satisfactory theory. This did not account for all the remaining ideological differences; it did necessarily diminish them. Political economy was under-theorized. But political scientists, attempting to make sense of the constitutional and administrative consequences of the strong state, had hardly fared any better.

Constitutional Theory and Administrative Practice

The growth of modern government - in its institutions, its functions and its powers - dates from the advent of mass democracy, and the stresses and strains which they placed on existing parliamentary arrangements. State involvement extended into areas of economic and social welfare, bringing with it a huge and growing system of governmental direction in the interests of maximizing the war effort. All of these developments - by enhancing the competence of the executive at the expense of parliament - could be seen to have had important, but immeasurable consequences. To this a new factor was added after 1945 - an exceptionally heavy (and contentious) range of legislative proposals outlined in Labour's 1945 election manifesto, pushing the role of the state into new areas of responsibility. It was a paradox of the 1945 programme, however, that very little in the way of constitutional reform was envisaged. Institutions and procedures tested in wartime had fully proved their worth.

This was a far cry from the foreboding of the Labour party in the 1930s, haunted by the downfall of the MacDonald government. The passage of time and the duties of office in the War cabinet, combined with the changed climate of public opinion during the war years, encouraged Labour's leaders to make the most of their constitutionality. During the 1945 election, Churchill had tried to exploit the opening, caricaturing the party as totalitarian-minded and in thrall to extra-parliamentary influence, casting doubts on Labour's democratic credentials. But from the very outset, while making it plain that its whole programme would be passed into law, ministers were anxious to show that the main reforms were moderate and limited. That the

parliamentary system could cope with the unparalleled burden of post-war demands was, as Morrison - Leader of the House of Commons - claimed, testimony to its great flexibility. The ancient forms adjusted to changes of real substance. Labour was also helped by the lack of obstruction from the House of Lords and the recognition, "new among Labour leaders", that the Lords could take up some of the law-making load(411). There were periodic alarms - in the summer of 1947, when the Supplies and Services Bill was passed in emergency session, "the King", Attlee later disclosed, "felt that I had not explained the matter sufficiently. The King was under the impression that we were seeking dictatorial powers which might have justified the 'Police State' stunt which Sir Winston had tried to run in 1945"(412). But it was also true to say that many of the transformations were constitutional only in the widest sense. New Ministries were created. Administrative tribunals multiplied. There was a broadening of the welfare state. The cumulative effect of such steps, accordingly to one observer, was "to redefine the scope of government and to entirely transform the nature of the British state"(413).

Laski's head-to-head with Leo Amery was one confrontation. Amery, a veteran Conservative with a philosophical gift, was asked to give the Chichele lectures in 1946 and used the occasion to present an exposition of the traditional constitution, balanced by the demons of the Crown and the nation and meeting in the

411. H.R.G.Greaves, 'The British Constitution in 1949' in *Parliamentary Affairs* (Summer 1950), p.431.

412. C.R.Attlee in *The Observer*, 23 August 1959, p.12.

413. J.A.Hawgood, 'The British Constitution in 1948', in *Parliamentary Affairs* (Autumn 1949), p.338.

arena of parliament(414). It perfectly combined, he believed, the dual requirements of initiative and control, of responsible leadership and responsible criticism, that had carried Britain safely through recent troubles. In this scheme of things, the ordinary voter played no active part and did not confer a mandate on a government:

"Our system is one of democracy but of democracy by consent and not by delegation, of government of the people, for the people, with, but not by, the people"(415).

The chief danger came from the menace of the party machine, "directing Government from outside Parliament and using it merely as an instrument for carrying through policies shaped without reference to it". In the recent past, he noted, prominent Labourites had flirted with the idea of party government. Happily, after 1945, the Labour government had pushed through its legislation expeditiously - "some may think too expeditiously" - but certainly on normal constitutional lines. There had been no violent breaches in continuity, and this despite more changes in the immediate post-war period than in the whole of the preceding generation. Constitutional principles could tame even the most revolutionary intentions. None of this altered, to his mind, the threat from liberal misconceptions about popular or party sovereignty. As Wiseman remarked, the appeal was to a past golden age of parliamentary equipoise(416).

414. L.S.Amery, *Thoughts on the Constitution* (1947).

415. Amery, *ibid* (1947), p.53.

416. H.V.Wiseman, *Parliament and the Executive - an analysis with readings* (1966), p.27.

Laski, stressing efficiency in government, was more concerned to ensure that constitutional arrangements conformed to the requirements of the will of the majority(417). Two years into the government, civil servants wedded to precedent and lacking in originality presented an additional stumbling block. In his last considered thoughts on the subject, contained in *Reflections on the Constitution* (1951), Laski, although still marxist-influenced, confronted the Amery view full on, denying that the historic constitution would be broken by the power of party. Public respect for parliament was higher than at any time over the previous twenty-five years. The real threat to the supremacy of parliament came from elsewhere:

"If there is a danger ahead, it seems to me to lie in the use of great financial and industrial power to prevent the will of the electorate being made effective by the government of its choice"(418).

Admitting to some embarrassment when he came to review the book (since it set out to refute what he had said in 1947), Amery marvelled at "the remarkable transformation which could turn the revolutionary Jeremiah of 1938 into the Pangloss of 1950"(419). On the bull point of popular sovereignty, however, he had not - he felt - been contradicted. The voters did not hold the initiative, let alone the party activist. Laski indeed in 1947 - as party chairman - had urged a radical overhaul of the Labour party constitution in order to

417. H.J.Laski, 'Efficiency in Government' in D.Munro (ed), *ibid* (1948), pp.49-64.

418. H.J.Laski, *Reflections on the Constitution* (1951), p.93.

419. Review in *Parliamentary Affairs* (Winter 1951), pp.236-237.

render it more suitable to a party which now produced governments. Changing circumstances had forced changing judgements. The actual working out of the constitution had settled all arguments.

For the academic observer, less prone to look for justifications, the "actual working" of the constitution in its post-war setting was by no means apparent, so rapid were the changes. William Robson, on being made Professor of Public Administration at the LSE in 1948, mapped out a research conspectus covering the relations between parliament and the executive, central and local government, and the operation of the new public corporations - the latter by far the greatest constitutional innovation of all - that amounted to what he termed "a formidable task", made easier only by the links kept up by university staff with Whitehall(420).

Robson's revisions of *Justice and Administrative Law* (1947 and 1951) drew on his own assiduous reading of parliamentary and other public sources, showing how, with the extension of the law into health, housing and insurance, judicial powers were being exercised "not with the object of enforcing individual rights but with furthering a policy of social improvement", adding a moral dimension to the administration of justice(421). Where information was not readily to hand, however (and the Official Secrets allowed for little leakage) it had to be hunted down and collected. Ascertaining the facts took precedence over any formulae of administrative science. The older kind of prescriptive, speculative theorizing - with its personal touch - was also pushed to one side. The earliest studies were, as a result,

420. W.A. Robson, *Public Administration Today* (1948).

421. *Justice and Administrative Law* (3rd edition, 1951) p.557.

"outspokenly and almost aggressively descriptive"(422).

Surveys of the organization of central government and the main departments of state, either singly (in Beer's study of the Treasury, right down to the organizational chart(423)), by policy area (Beloff, 1960(424)) or in sum(425) began appearing. The new administrative bodies were classified, the origins of the public corporation model established, even the correct way of spelling "socialized industry" settled(426). This rush of activity helped to make Nuffield and Manchester the leaders in the field, the 'Manchester school' under Mackenzie becoming especially prominent. Chester and Mackenzie, like Robson, were both "knowledgeable insiders"(427), acquainted with the ways of the higher civil service. This was the saving grace of what was, to many, their excessively formal approach, that research was carried out with a view to improving the working of government. But there were limits. Chester for one stopped well short of worshipping the "great new god" of public administration, and rebuked

422. J.Blondel, *The Discipline of Politics* (1981), p.58.

423. S.Beer, *Treasury Control* (1956).

424. M.Beloff, *New Dimensions in Foreign Policy* (1961).

425. W.J.M.Mackenzie and J.W.Grove, *Central Administration in Britain* (1957); D.N.Chester and F.M.G. Willson, *The Organization of British Central Government 1914 to 1956* (1957).

426. D.N.Chester, 'Public Corporations and the Classification of Administrative Bodies', *Political Studies*, 1 1953, pp.34-52.

427. A.H.Birch and R.N.Spann, 'Mackenzie at Manchester' in *WJMM: Political Questions* (1974), p.16.

those who he thought did(428).

Chester's most notable contribution in this period, however, was to encourage and assist Herbert Morrison in writing *Government and Parliament*, which was published with a splash in 1954(429). Billed as the new Bagehot ("Bagehot with a quiff" - Dingle Foot(430)), and leaning on Morrison's recent experiences as a senior Minister of the Crown, it made public, in a discursive and understandable way, a great deal about the inner operation of the cabinet and of government departments, the problems of party management, and the administering of the nationalized industries, the last having raised particular difficulties to do with accountability and efficiency. But, although at times dealing with controversial matters, Morrison was always discreet, the general tenor of his remarks reinforcing - as a good House of Commons man - his reverence for the institution of parliament, "as (Amery wrote) he has himself worked it and in various details improved it to his own satisfaction"(431). A constitution which had allowed for the peaceful legislative revolution of 1945 could have very little wrong with it.

This was, as one critic wrote, "procedural conservatism" of the purest kind(432), though not without a good deal of astuteness to it. The

428. See his review of S.E. Finer's *Primer of Public Administration* in *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 June 1950, p.8.

429. H.Morrison, *Government and Parliament* (1954).

430. D.Foot, in *The Observer*, 2 May 1954, p.18.

431. L.S.Amery, 'How we are governed' in *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1954, p.9.

432. A.H.Hanson, 'The Purpose of Parliament' in *Planning and the Politicians* (1969), p.12, (originally 1964).

adaptability of British government - its workability - had been borne out by events. There had been no final crisis. The Labour government succeeded, without having had recourse to emergency legislation, making substantial amendments to procedure or meeting with "sabotage" - in giving complete effect to its domestic programme. The ordinary methods had sufficed. The experiment of socialist rule from 1945 to 1951, together with the suffocation of wartime aspirations by rising affluence, "made such views too irrelevant to seem even dangerous". The apocalyptic fears of Cripps, Laski and others died a natural death(433).

What of the other line of attack - descended from Lord Hewart - stressing the eclipse of parliament? Keeton, Hollis and Einzig all made this a central charge(434), Keeton pointing to the degree of untrammelled control exercised by a new *corps* of administrators. Kelf-Cohen, who had only just retired from the post of Permanent Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Fuel and Power (where he had overseen the nationalizing of the gas and electricity industries) identified a more deep-seated problem - that no government was able effectively control the industries, whose growth had been unchecked and whose activities were unaccountable(435). Co-ordination was non-existent, and commercial decisions politicized. Government departments were not technically competent to do the work with which they were saddled. The British constitution, he argued,

433. A.H.Hanson, 'The Labour Party and House of Commons Reform' in Hanson, *ibid* (1969), p.65 (originally 1957).

434. C.Hollis, *Can Parliament Survive?* (1949); G.W. Keeton, *The Passing of Parliament* (1952); P.Einzig, *The Control of the Purse* (1959).

435. R.Kelf-Cohen, *Nationalization - end of a dogma?* (1958).

was simply not designed to accommodate such huge extensions of the state. The immoderate tone common to these works sought to suggest that the intensity of their argument was a fair indicator of their validity. The realists saw only a good case, spoiled by tub-thumping(436); once parliament had devised satisfactory arrangements and objectives, the pattern of new public bodies would become clearer. The difficulty was that the early achievements of the publicly-owned services were hard to assess. Economic benchmarks (such as pricing policies) were hard to come by. Party political divisions on the issue created further confusion, notably with the argument promoted by the revisionist wing of the Labour party maintaining that state ownership was immaterial so long as state control applied.

These disputes notwithstanding, Robson's *Nationalized Industry and Public Ownership* (1960) was the first non-partisan progress report to look back over a decade of nationalization with the benefit of a full range of information and the latest currents of thinking. Robson had edited some pre-war essays about what did - rather than what ought or might have been expected to - happen when industries were brought into public and semi-public ownership, but even he could not have anticipated the criticisms of the nineteen-fifties(437). The 1960 study was a serious and unflagging investigation of the theory and practice of nationalization, sympathetically viewed.

436. Chester's review in *Political Studies*, October 1959, pp.314-315; Hanson's review in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Winter 1958-59, pp.128-130.

437. M.Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (1961), p.236.

For every objection raised, Robson found a measured reply. Each newly nationalized industry had its own teething troubles, but he was in no doubt that they had all done better than if they had been left in private hands. The public corporation, with a Minister and a Board, was the only way of reconciling direction with independence. Labour relations had noticeably improved. Commercial criteria were still important, but public industry, since it was expected to fulfil wider social objectives, was not really analogous with private enterprise. As to the differences of opinion within the Labour party, he did not believe that the 1945 model was exhausted, nor that there was any virtue in nationalization for the sake of nationalization. The fundamentalist case might have gone, as one essential Fabian work suggested(438). But there was a sense of faith in Robson's views which made of public ownership more than just an administrative improvisation. It was this which led one reviewer to say that the book was a blend of objective study and personal statement(439). Whether the separate stands of his argument knitted together, as he intended, was less certain. Those who questioned the whole basis of the public board (Robson believed) were starting from false - antediluvian - premises. The key point was not in confusing public enterprise with the economic state, but in failing to grasp the closeness of their connection. Nationalization amounted to something greater than a mere measure of how well each industry or service had been performing. There were political as well as practical, economic motives to consider.

Society had moved - then - beyond the old antithesis

438. M. Shanks (ed), *The Lessons of Public Enterprise* (1963).

439. E. Davies, review in *The Political Quarterly*, January-March 1961, p.84.

of individualism and collectivism known to Dicey without any new public philosophy taking their place. Elements of the Conservative 'tradition', the Liberal 'outlook' and the socialist 'idea' - the terms are taken from Ginsberg's overview of law and opinion since Dicey's time(440) - formed an uneasy blend, at once both conservative and progressive, facilitating and at the same time containing the new balance of social forces. But the purposes of the state, whether in mobilizing economic resources or in exercising administrative authority, had evolved under practical pressures rather than firm abstract principles. There was no clear conception of the proper limits of state action, other than an historical description of how the outlines of the modern state had come to be. The state could and had become socially responsible, and it had done so for pragmatic reasons. The philosophical argument remained inconclusive.

440. M.Ginsberg (ed), *Law and Opinion in England in the Twentieth Century* (1959), to which Robson contributed an article on administrative law.

Two Controversies

C.L. Mowat has shown - in his investigation of the Zinoviev letter - how the evidence about past episodes of controversy slowly accumulates by degrees, without necessarily clearing up all points of obscurity or debate (441). The nature of fragmentary information is such that it can, at least in the earliest stages, be used to lend support to a variety of assertions, the elementary state of knowledge meaning that almost any statement can be made without fear of decisive contradiction. Nowhere is this mingling of fact and legend more apparent than in the obsession with prime ministers and the prime ministership - Bonar Law allegedly playing bridge every evening throughout the Great War, Ramsay MacDonald, "a peg built to hang myths on"(442), the Baldwin "confession". The mysteries of 1945 and after were no less intriguing, two of which went to cultivate the 'Attlee enigma'.

The King's Commission |

Attlee's first task, after going to the Palace to accept the King's commission to form a government, had been to decide on his main cabinet appointments, before returning again to the conference at Potsdam. On both counts, the apparent formality of his actions concealed a great deal of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring.

That Attlee had originally intended to make Ernest Bevin Chancellor of the Exchequer and send Hugh Dalton to the Foreign Office became public knowledge soon after the

441. C.L.Mowat, *ibid* (1970), p.199.

442. F.Williams, *A Pattern of Rulers* (1965), p.68.

official announcements (with Bevin as the new Foreign Secretary) were made. The possible reasons for his change of mind were widely discussed in the English and American press. "For two hours in the morning of July 27th 1945", as Francis Williams wrote three years afterwards and speaking as a former member of the prime minister's entourage, Bevin "had the Treasury", the post which he told Attlee he most wanted(443). Dalton, instructed to pack his bags for Potsdam, was also pleased by the outcome. Summoned back after lunch, Attlee told them that he had had second thoughts and had switched their jobs. Williams made it clear that while the cause for the change was "a private secret of the prime minister's, his own guess was that Attlee already appreciated the importance of a friendly but firm negotiator who would stand up to Russian policy. At the same time, other unconfirmed rumours circulated pointing to the influence of named individuals who had taken, or been given, the credit for getting Attlee to reverse his earlier choice - Williams himself (which he took the trouble to deny), Churchill, William Whiteley (Labour's Chief Whip), Sir Edward Bridges (Permanent Secretary to the Treasury), Sir Orme Sargent (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office), Sir Alan Lascelles (the King's private secretary), all the way up to and including George VI. The story of the King's intervention was revived, however, in February 1952, following his death. Attlee, contacted by *The Daily Herald* about reports that the King had "insisted" on the selection of Bevin as Foreign Secretary, strove to kill them off, stating in no uncertain terms that it had been entirely his own decision. But the rumours continued to flourish, puzzling even Dalton. It was his piecing together of what he knew and had heard from others - tying it to another tale that had been going the rounds -

443. F.Williams, *ibid* (1948), p.65.

which formed the basis of an account in the second volume of his memoirs in 1957(444).

Dalton took the story back to early on 27th July 1945 when, travelling down to London where he was unable to see Attlee straightaway, he had called on Bevin at Transport House. There, Bevin informed Dalton of a move by Morrison the previous day - supposedly supported by Stafford Cripps and Ellen Wilkinson - to delay acceptance of the King's commission until, under the party's own leadership rules, the Parliamentary Labour Party had met to decide on its leader. Laski had also written to Attlee along the same lines. Arthur Deakin had approached Bevin, his old boss, urging him to take over, which Bevin had angrily rebuffed. After this, Bevin had telephoned Morrison warning him (in words Dalton learnt of much later) that if he carried on "mucking about" he would not be in the government at all. Attlee, however, had scuppered Morrison by going off to the Palace. It was at this meeting in the early evening on July 26th that the King was said to have expressed his preference for Bevin as the new Foreign Secretary, decisively influencing Attlee, a charge which many years later Attlee told Dalton was simply untrue: he had thought of it "all by himself". On the morning of the 27th, Morrison - undaunted - continued to press his case, now asking for the Foreign Secretaryship. He was finally persuaded by the Chief Whip to accept the post of Lord President of the Council, and in effect Attlee's deputy. When Dalton did eventually get to see Attlee, just before lunch on the same day, he gave him his backing and was told that he would "almost certainly" be going to the Foreign Office. Called back at 4pm in the afternoon, Attlee said he had reconsidered and wanted Dalton to swap places with Bevin, giving as one of his reasons the need to keep the

444. H. Dalton, *Memoirs 1931-1945: The Fateful Years* (1957), pp. 467-475.

quarrelling Bevin and Morrison apart. Dalton saw no reason to suspect any outside influence on this decision, either from the King or anyone else. Possible royal prejudice against him only caused him amusement. But he awaited the publication of the official biography of King George VI with some interest.

Until now, Morrison had said little about these events, mentioning only, in *Government and Parliament* in a passage on the constitutional role of the monarch, that there was no doubt that it was "the Leader of the Labour party" who was rightly sent for by the King in 1945. But he had been offended - after Dalton's first volume came out - by Dalton's breaking of party and private confidences. When advance extracts of volume two were carried in *The Evening Standard*, to the effect that Morrison had worked to supplant Attlee back in 1945, Morrison was outraged. This "personal attack" in a "Conservative newspaper", he reported in a prepared statement, was "very inaccurate and unreliable", to do with "discussions of an intimate and confidential character concerning the formation of the Labour Government of 1945". He did not, however, propose to answer the allegations point-by-point: "The Labour Party, which I have sought to serve loyally, selflessly and to the best of my ability for many years, would be likely to be hurt as a result of the first-class row which would be inevitable". Dalton, asked to reply, defended the diary as a serious piece of history which he hoped Mr Morrison would read in full(445).

Wheeler-Bennett's extracts from the King's own diary for 1945 reopened the whole issue in 1958(446). They

445. '1945 Disclosure Challenged', *The Times*, 12 March 1957, p.8.

446. J.Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI His Life and Reign* (1958), pp.637-639.

suggested that at his first audience Attlee had told the King he was going to make Dr Hugh Dalton his Foreign Secretary and that (as the King recorded) "I disagreed with him & said that Foreign Affairs was the most important subject at the moment & I hoped he would make Mr Bevin take it. He said he would but he could not return to Berlin till Sunday at the earliest..." The contemporaneous memorandum kept by Sir Alan Lascelles - also quoted by Wheeler-Bennett - had the King begging the prime minister to think carefully about this, suggesting Mr Bevin would be a better choice. The King evidently believed he had swung it round, all this demonstrating to Wheeler-Bennett the monarch exercising the prerogative power to advise. Attlee writing in *The Observer* shortly afterwards was unimpressed(447). Too much was being made of it. The King was "inclined" to prefer Bevin and Attlee had taken this into account, but this had not made the difference. The key consideration had been that Bevin and Morrison would not have worked well together if both held domestic jobs." Nevertheless, this confirmed all the worst fears of radicals about royal partiality.

Dalton's "personal spite" Morrison mentioned obliquely in the preface to his memoirs a couple of years later. There had been no question of his attempting to "snatch" the leadership, he asserted. He had only wished to see that the democratic safeguards of the party - worked out after MacDonald's departure by Attlee among others - were observed. Bevin had not rung up to warn him off. And the King had played no part in Attlee's hesitation about who was to fill the most important posts in the government. Morrison himself suggested that Dalton's many temperamental defects debarred him from diplomatic work. Attlee had agreed, "and so the

447. C.R. Attlee, 'The Role of the Monarchy', *ibid*, 23 August 1959.

appointments were made"(448). It is fair to add that new evidence, hidden away in V.L. Allen's *Trade Unions and Government* (1960), indicated a far more serious challenge to Attlee's authority emanating from a number of trade union leaders than had initially appeared. Attlee's last comments - to Francis Williams and then in another short talk in 1967(449) - were characteristically blunt. "If you're invited by the King to form a Government you don't say you can't reply for forty-eight hours". As for Morrison's activities, he simply noted: "We worked perfectly well together, and a great deal of this didn't come out until long afterwards. I didn't realize that the poor little man was full of seething ambition".

It only now remained for Alan Bullock, drawing on conversations with Attlee and Morgan Phillips, and cross-referencing the memoirs and recollections, to draw together an account as congruent as possible with the known facts(450). With an interest that was solely historical, Bullock demonstrated that the story was best recounted from the point of view of Bevin, the only one who had not been able to speak for himself. Bevin it was who had foiled Morrison and stood by Attlee, urging him - while Morrison was out of the room - to go immediately to the King, after which Attlee had received a standing ovation at a Victory Rally, before, a situation rich in irony, leaving Morrison to officiate. Although Bevin too had been bemused by his last-minute switch, he was ready to knuckle down to business without further fuss, the

448. H.Morrison, *ibid* (1960), pp.245-248.

449. F.Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (1961); *Clem Attlee - the granada historical records interview* (1967), p.53.

450. A.Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin: Volume Two - Minister of Labour 1940-1945* (1967), pp.391-395.

balance of power and position in the new government arranged around him. If not conclusive, this was at least consistent, providing what was thought likely to be as much as would ever be known about what Geoffrey Goodman, writing in *Tribune*, termed "this strange incident"(451).

The Bomb

When, in the Spring of 1951, the Press Association carried a report that Britain was to manufacture the atomic bomb, there was, as *The Economist* described it, "a stunned and embarrassed silence in Whitehall and Washington but, as yet, no official disclaimer". The editor found it difficult to believe, if true, that the U.K. might be running an atomic bomb programme given the huge financial strain this would place on already stretched resources. Churchill's repeated suggestion that such a project should be undertaken was "one of his least responsible acts"(452). The McMahon Act of 1946 had anyway prohibited American sharing of nuclear information with foreign countries. It was not until February 1951, after Churchill had returned to office, that he was able - to his great astonishment - to reveal to the House of Commons that the late "Socialist Government" had not only pursued the research and development of an atomic weapon but had also gone into production, at immense cost, preferring to conceal the vast operation from parliamentary scrutiny. When he had told the United States of this, he added, it had created quite a new atmosphere. The first testing of the British weapon then took place at the end of the year in Australia. When the news broke, following the American

451. G. Goodman, 'Bevin's role in wartime', *Tribune*, 21 April 1967, p.8.

452. 'Atom bombs', *The Economist*, 24 March 1951, p.673.

testing of a hydrogen bomb in 1954, that Britain was likely to follow suit, a group of Labour MPs campaigned to ensure that the decision to go ahead should not be taken without prior discussion and approval in Parliament. The Government's 1955 Defence White Paper made mention of the proposal, placing emphasis on the deterrent effect of possession of nuclear weapons, and prompted an Opposition vote of censure. But the Bevanite contingent abstained, after which they had the party whip withdrawn. Bevan was not, however, a thorough-going unilateralist, and in his speech to the 1957 Annual Conference rejected the left-wing call for British nuclear disarmament because it would deprive any future Labour Foreign Secretary of all negotiating influence. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was formed in 1958 dedicated to renouncing British ownership of nuclear weapons and attracted many Labour supporters, bringing the issue to the point at the time of the Scarborough Conference in October 1960. In discussing the party's defence policy in a newspaper article, Emmanuel Shinwell drew attention to the circumstances in which the British bomb has first been commissioned. Only one failing had blunted Attlee's quiet tenacity, he argued:

"If Attlee had any defect as Prime Minister it was his reluctance to confide in all his Cabinet colleagues. I was Minister of Defence in 1950 but knew nothing of how the decision to manufacture the atom bomb was reached. Only recently, as a result of my investigations, did I discover that the decision to undertake research and development was taken in 1947 in consultation with a few of my Government colleagues. So far as I am aware the subject was never mentioned at any of the Cabinet meetings. And apart from the Minister of Defence, A.V. Alexander, who held the post in

1947, none of the other Service Ministers was taken into confidence. In his own book Earl Attlee omits any reference to the subject and gives no details of how this momentous decision came to be made"(453).

Richard Crossman, in his introduction to a new edition of Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1963) cited the "common knowledge" of Attlee's concealment of the decision, without any prior discussion in Cabinet, as a key historical exhibit in the growing tendency towards what he called "prime ministerial government", a revelation about the new reality of power since Bagehot's own day (and quite a different criticism from the old 'Keep Left' charge that Attlee, as prime minister, had lacked 'grip'(454)). In an exchange of correspondence that was carried on in both *The New Statesman* and *Encounter*, his argument was challenged by George Strauss, the Minister of Supply from 1947 to 1951. Strauss had been a strong public defender of possession of the bomb in the 1950s, and - in an interview with a researcher from Nuffield College - mentioned that ministers like Bevan had known all about the decision. According to Strauss, Crossman's interpretation was wholly incorrect(455). Development of an atomic bomb, which it had been his responsibility to carry out, was "endorsed by the Cabinet" and, further, that this had been announced in Parliament in reply to a parliamentary question in 1948. Crossman had in the meantime discussed the matter with half-a-dozen or so other members of the

453. E. Shinwell, 'The Anatomy of Leadership - 2', *The Sunday Times*, 18 September 1960, p.25.

454. A point recalled by D.J. Heasman, 'My Station and its Duties' - The Attlee Version', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Winter 1967-68, p.79.

455. G.R. Strauss, letter in *Encounter*, June 1963, pp.91-92.

Attlee administration, none one of whom was in agreement with Strauss. The parliamentary question to which Strauss referred was only brief and peremptory, and hardly befitting such a grave. As to any discussion in Cabinet, he referred back to Shinwell who had, in drafting his *Observer* article, consulted Sir Norman Brook (the Cabinet Secretary) who had looked up the records of the time and could not find any reference to it. That, so far as Crossman was concerned, was that, unless Strauss could add anything further. Strauss, in a two-pronged reply, was not to be shifted, and only amazed at Crossman's denigration of a past Labour prime minister. If, as Crossman alleged, Attlee had been pursuing a policy of concealment, he would not have allowed the announcement in parliament. Shinwell's evidence was inadequate - he was not present in Cabinet at the time, whereas he, Strauss, was. Brook's contribution was irrelevant. The decision had been taken in the Defence Sub-Committee, over which Attlee had presided. "I have questioned five of the seven surviving members of the Cabinet and they have all told me they were fully aware of [it]", he insisted. There never was a deliberate intention to withhold the information from other colleagues. And he rounded off with the clinching point that -

"... if my evidence is insufficient, I am authorised by Lord Attlee to say that there is no truth whatever in Mr Crossman's allegation"(456).

Crossman, in Strauss's view, wanted to prove a case, and the case was a good one - only the example he had used did not sustain it.

456. G.R. Strauss, letter in *Encounter*, August 1963, pp.90-91.

In the second impression of the Bagehot book(457)(three months later) Crossman expressed his gratitude to George Strauss for his help in reconstructing publicly what had happened, and incorporated the fact that the atom bomb decision had been made by a Cabinet committee. But he was struck by how this undiscussed and unrecorded decision illustrated the modern day transformation of the idea of collective Cabinet responsibility. For the curious student, he directed readers to the letters in *The New Statesman*, showing both "how little is normally revealed of what goes on in the modern Cabinet, and how much information is available about these secret proceedings, if only someone who knows the truth can be stimulated to divulge it".

457. R.H.S. Crossman, *The English Constitution* (Fontana - September 1963), second impression.

The War and Post-War Redistribution of Income and Wealth

A keynote in Labour circles after 1945 was a sense of Fabian triumphalism. A Fabian had had a hand in the drafting of the party's election manifesto. No fewer than 224 out of the 394 MPs elected for the party were members of the Society. Membership was also at an all-time high. "The next five years will see", Douglas Cole had promised, "the practical working out of the Webb thesis"(458). His wife, much to the irritation of Laski and R.H. Tawney, took on the job of editing Beatrice Webb's diaries(459). And when the Webbs were re-interned in Westminster Abbey in 1947, the prime minister was there to deliver the address, remarking on how everything they had worked for had now come to pass. "It was altogether a goodly company", one journalist wrote in hindsight, "with no evident intimations of proletarian affiliations"(460).

'The people' had entered parliament, taking their egalitarian ideals (including the idea of reward based on merit) with them. "Socialism is about equality"(461), the economist and Fabian Arthur Lewis confidently asserted, the one thing which united all socialists and divided all opponents. The uncertainty arose in not knowing, from the income levelling trends of war and post-war, to what extent this long-term aim - translated

458. G.D.H.Cole, 'Sidney Webb', *Fabian Quarterly*, Winter 1947, p.5.

459. R.Terrill, *R.H.Tawney and His Times - socialism as fellowship* (1973), pp.77-78.

460. M.Muggeridge, *The Infernal Grove* (1973), p.301.

461. A.Lewis, *The Principles of Economic Planning* (1948), p.10.

in practical terms into the reduction of inequality - was in the process of being realised.

Several studies already existed on which to form a judgement. Clark (estimating the share of wages in the national income) and Barna examined the position prior to 1939(462). Jay reviewed the evidence again in his re-issue of *The Socialist Case* in 1947. Rowntree and Lavers, returning to York, found a sharp reduction in the number of those living in conditions of poverty, a finding which was seized on at the time of the 1951 general election(463). Seers contributed a chapter to Worswick and Ady on the real, purchasing value of post-war incomes(464). Comparing war and post-war with the immediate pre-war period, a number of observations seemed justified: a greater proportion of post-war income had gone in the form of wages, reinforced by both steeply progressive taxation and the effect of food subsidies; primary poverty had been all but eradicated; a great deal of the redistribution had happened during the war, following which the equalitarian drive was at least maintained. Though the picture was more blurred for peacetime, a modest levelling could be detected thereafter. There was, as a result, more than enough in the way of fragments of evidence from White Papers and Inland Revenue figures to justify the conclusion that Britain under Labour had become a fairer Britain. At the same time, however, there was an appreciable sense of a failure to instil new social values over the same period, with consequences that would not show up in any official

462. C.Clark, *National Income and Outlay* (1937); T. Barna, *The Redistribution of Incomes through Public Finance* (1937).

463. B.Rowntree and M.Lavers, *Poverty and the Welfare State* (1951).

464. Later expanded into *The Levelling of Incomes since 1938* (1955).

or unofficial adding and counting.

Nor should it be surprising that it was the critics of 'redistribution' who were among the first to complain about what was being lost in the equalizing process. Bertrand de Jouvenel, the French economist and man of letters who knew England well, made it one of his guiding themes. Brought up in a political *milieu* in Paris (he was the stepson of the novelist Colette(465)) De Jouvenel had, up until the outbreak of war, worked as a diplomatic correspondent. He interviewed Hitler in 1936, reported on the 'white terror' in Andalusia, and briefly joined Doriot's P.P.F., only to leave after the Munich agreement. He stayed on in occupied France, and associated with collaborationists(466), as well as accepting, in a controversial book, the unification of Europe under German hegemony(467). Subsequently he made amends. Raymond Aron, who gave evidence in his defence in a court case in 1983, pointed out the awkward choices that had faced those who had stayed behind in 1940(468).

Visiting England again after the war, he made contact once more with old friends, dining with Hayek at the Reform Club, where they bumped into Beveridge, and visiting the party conferences. He looked with admiration and envy at the English, who had been "spared the neuroses" of invasion. This insularity he considered an unqualified boon. The English *dirigiste* experiment, already underway, carried lessons - he felt - for the

465. A.Massie, *Colette* (1986).

466. M.Cotta, *La Collaboration 1940-1944* (1964), p.17.

467. B.de Jouvenel, *Napoleon et l'Economie Dirigee - le blocus continental* (1942).

468. E.Shils, 'Raymond Aron', in *The American Scholar*, Spring 1985, pp.177-178.

rest of the continent. His notebook of "reflections" (on the problems of socialist England(469)) was the outcome.

The domination of enlightened opinion was strikingly apparent to him. All roads led to socialism, even Tory ones. Government and Opposition acknowledged the same prophets, Beveridge and Keynes. "It is", he said, "the expression of the general tendency of the nation". The real difficulty was the public's inability to appreciate the seriousness of the country's predicament - forced to bring in conscription, attacked abroad as 'imperialists', and yet undeniably "a subsidized power", dependent upon American credit. Furthermore, the reigning ideas were products of a doctrine forged to meet an entirely different situation. "...Not unemployment but the shortage of manpower, not the danger of slump but of underproduction, are the characteristics of England in the after-war period". It followed that, for all the claims about fulfilling electoral pledges, the solutions being adopted were actually designed for a bygone era.

De Jouvenel recorded the slow intellectual adjustment to reality with interest. The intelligentsia he expected to exercise foresight and clear the path ahead. There was praise for Cole for his independence of thought. But de Jouvenel took from Schumpeter the remark that "Socialism is on the way, but the Socialist will not like it". No new scale of values had evolved. Instead, individual liberty had been eroded by the onset of "bigness", not just with the nationalized industries, as Jewkes maintained, but with all economic "kingdoms", large management union bodies included. The new society was thus a throwback to the old notion of public paternalism. Only the deep-seated restraints of British

life had so far held back the inherent dangers.

Three lectures at Cambridge in 1949 on the unintended consequences of collectivism, later published as *The Ethics of Redistribution* (470), pressed home the *leitmotif* of disregarded values. "Contributions to civilization", he counselled, "cannot be rightly assessed in national income calculations". Inequality was a universal fact. The egalitarian ideal of a floor-and-ceiling 'society of equals', propagated by those sitting in judgement on others, had undoubtedly led to the lopping off of the highest incomes. But the transfer of relative satisfactions from richer to poorer was not capable of comparison. All it had done was to eliminate the elites, upon whom the hope of progress depends. More than this, redistribution had been strongly centralizing, making possible the tremendous growth of taxation and public expenditure. The net effect of reapportionment was not so much horizontal as vertical:

"The more one considers the matter, the clearer it becomes that redistribution is in effect far less a redistribution of free income from the richer to the poorer, as we imagined, than a redistribution of power from the individual to the State" (471).

- a comment applauded by Oakeshott in *The Clare Market Review* (472).

In this way, the backward-looking nature of equality

470. B.de Jouvenel, *The Ethics of Redistribution* (1951).

471. B.de Jouvenel, *ibid* (1951), p.73.

472. M.Oakeshott, *The Clare Market Review*, Lent 1952, pp.4-5.

as an aim was exposed. It took the power to consume as the only true measure. It took, in other words, its cue from the acquisitive instincts of the society which socialists were seeking to reform. It was nothing but the last gasp of nineteenth-century utilitarianism.

While others might stress the destruction of Christian virtues, the plight of the English middle classes - the best part of the nation but the part which had connived at its own downfall in 1945 - was also championed(473). The new society was an equal society, all snakes and no ladders, in which the professional could not win. There was no guarantee either, for two young Conservative Research Department employees, that the return of a Conservative government would restore their position. The corrosive effects of the egalitarian creed had already gone too far, instigating the subject of Lewis's follow-up guide, *Shall I Emigrate?* (1950)(Maude later went off to edit *The Sydney Morning Herald*).

Unease on the left about what had gone wrong after 1945 was no less prevalent. The seeing through to completion of Labour's programme, and the consequent need for a fresh declaration of the Fabian case - drew attention, in Crossman's eyes, to the party's current "booklessness". Cole and Laski had considered a set of new Fabian essays in the early 1940s. Cole now revived the idea, only to go his own way when the discussions, in the course of 1950, took on an anti-Soviet tone. Crossman, an unclassifiable talent, was left to edit the final contributions, most of which, far from being self-congratulatory, displayed considerable disquiet at the alarming loss of direction of the late government. All the obvious things had been done, Crossman acknowledged.

473. R.Lewis and A.Maude, *The English Middle Classes* (1950).

The means to a good life had been established. But these things by themselves were not enough. Fair shares was not "a statistical concept"(474). Mental attitudes remained unchanged. The efforts of the 1945-50 government, in so far as they took a legislative shape, "marked the end of a century of social reform and not, as its socialist supporters had hoped, the beginning of a new epoch"(475).

In one important respect, the Fabian view of post-war was expounded with some vigour. To the 'new thinkers' ranged on the centre-right of the party who were exasperated by Crossman's "dialectical gamesmanship"(476), the lesson to be drawn was clear enough. The pre-war prognostications of Cole, Laski and Cripps had been decisively refuted, though this had yet to be conceded. A peaceful and gradual reform of the economic system had been achieved, as Labour had shown. Power was neutral, "like electricity"(477). The new arrangement had ceased to be capitalist in all its essentials. The spell of marxism was at last broken. John Strachey, one of the few outgoing ministers to participate, was -although he retained elements of a quasi-marxist outlook - a major reformist convert. Interestingly, and in comparison with Laski, his inconsistency was not taken as a sign of tortuousness. Laski's service, he suggested in 1950, lay in stating the

474. R.H.S. Crossman, *Socialist Values in a Changing Society* (1950), p.12.

475. R.H.S. Crossman, 'Towards a philosophy of socialism' in *New Fabian Essays*, R.H.S. Crossman (ed)(1952), p.6.

476. Letter by Roy Jenkins to Hugh Dalton, October 1950, amongst papers to do with the Fabian Conference at Oxford. Dalton papers, File 9/1, B.L.P.E.S.

477. A. Fremantle, *This Little Band of Prophets: The British Fabians* (1959), p.231.

dilemmas without necessarily solving them(478). As for himself, he had, he said, been convinced by "the experiences of office" that greater scope existed for "Fabian tactics" than he had realized(479). A "way out" of the capitalist/communist stalemate did exist, along the lines first envisaged in Roosevelt's 'New Deal'. A non-revolutionary transformation had been effected, he told North American readers, an 'economic 1832' well in keeping with the British pattern of seamless social adaptation(480).

It was left to the Labour party's two surviving figures of real intellectual authority to move the discussion onto a higher plane. R.H. Tawney wrote two extended papers directly commenting on the achievements of the 1945 government(481), as well as adding an epilogue to his classic on *Equality*(482), dealing with evidence for changes in the distribution of income and wealth since 1938, with all the usual scholarly apparatus employed. All of these pieces bore the stamp of his inspirational style. Tawney agreed that Labour had acted on its promises with "remarkable fidelity" and "impressive success". He classified its work under three

478. 'Laski', reprinted in J.Strachey, *The Strangled Cry - and other unparliamentary papers* (1962), pp.196-200. Astor asked Strachey to review the Martin memoir for *The Observer*, instructing him that Laski was to be condemned for his softness towards the Soviet Union (Strachey papers).

479. J.Strachey, *Labour's Task* (Fabian Tract No 290) (1951), p.2.

480. J.Strachey, 'Britain's Peaceful Changes' in *Current History*, November 1952, pp.273-279.

481. R.H.Tawney, 'Social Democracy in Britain' (1949) and 'British Socialism Today' (1952), both reprinted in *The Radical Tradition*, R. Hinden (ed) (Pelican edition, 1966).

482. R.H.Tawney, *Equality* (Fourth Edition 1952).

main heads. There had been an extension and improvement in welfare provision. Anti-unemployment measures were combined with a re-drawing of the boundary between public and private industry. And lastly, active steps had been taken to foster the deliberate regulation of state investment. This had to be judged by results, he insisted, and although the time had not yet come for a final verdict, it was clear to him that a distinctively new "social order" was in the making. Not least for Tawney was the common ground now shared by the main parties:

"Just under thirty years ago, the recommendation that the mines should be nationalized, which was advocated by the majority of the Coal Commission presided over by the late Lord Sankey, aroused a storm of opposition. When, in 1946, that proposal became at last an Act of Parliament, not a dog barked"(483).

The move, then, towards a greater equalization of income (but not capital) he considered an unambiguous good, since the reduction in liberty of the few was more than made up for by the increased freedom enjoyed by the many. Once upon a time dismissed as 'impractical', socialism was now said to be 'vicious' - it was to these latter objectors (like de Jouvenel, with his acceptance, for argument's sake, that equality was no disincentive to economic effort), and their reproach that culture and freedom were the fruits of social distinctions, that the fullest reply had to be made. Hayek's vision of an "authoritarian nightmare", appealing to the uprooted and the nostalgic, was inapplicable to a mature democracy such as Britain. The more serious concern had to do with

the age-old incompatibility of equality and liberty. The cause of liberty had been advanced most when the less privileged had exercised the freedoms they already possessed to further their interests; it was the holders of wealth who took the restrictive view of liberty to mean the right to enjoy their advantages unhindered. Political conceptions were for use. Measures diminishing inequality "have turned [equality] from an iridescent abstraction into a sober reality of everyday life".

Douglas Cole (a reluctant candidate at the 1945 election) took a more individualistic line. Ever the freethinker, Cole had embarked on a lifelong pursuit of "revolutionary reformism"(484), holding to a set of personal beliefs which he assumed applied everywhere and for all time(485). Prepared at first to go along with the favourable view that a democratic route was now open, and that the answer to marxists was "in the facts"(486), he feared even so that the government's legislative proposals were not - by themselves - going to be advanced, or sufficiently comprehensive, enough to cultivate a new social ethic of community, releasing new energies and so bringing about a genuine sense of structural change. Reforms were being pressed for on a piecemeal basis, and not as part of an overall strategy. Willing to articulate the case for consolidation(487), he did not want to see full-scale nationalization dispensed with altogether; it was a symbol of Labour's radical intent. In 1945 the Labour party had asked for a

484. A.Wright, *G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (1979).

485. See his *The Intelligent Man's Guide to the Post-War World* (1947), 'Taking Sides', pp.37-38.

486. Cited in Wright, *ibid* (1979), pp.159-160.

487. G.D.H.Cole, Labour's Second Term, Fabian Tract No.273, May 1949.

first instalment, in spirit identical with the platform of 1918; the party programmes of 1950 and 1951 called for very much less. "The fire and fervour are dying out fast", he despaired(488). His subsequent verdict, contained in the shilling pamphlet *Is this Socialism?*, made uncomfortable reading(489). In spite of the party's best efforts, Cole began, the society that had evolved out of it resembled only a "partial embodiment" of their hopes, a half-way welfare state. This ought, he granted, to be a step on the way to full socialism, which he defined as a society rid of all class distinctions; and yet it was only "socialistic - if even that". The rich, because the ownership of capital was largely untouched, were "still among us". But so too the growth of a more prosperous manual working-class had created a more subtly stratified class structure. It might now be the case, he suspected, that they had, in a new version of a very old difficulty, unwittingly set up new barriers and greater resistance to any bolder steps. The reforms of 1945 would then represent a formidable obstacle to further advance, and not a springboard. Labour had gone as far as it could along that road, so much so that many - though they were not ready to say so publicly - had begun to mistake the transitional means for the final goal; they had "given up". "Is this Socialism?" he therefore rephrased by asking "Is the Labour party socialist?" Attlee's elevation to an earldom dismayed him(490). The only hope was to press on in other directions - comprehensive education, industrial

488. G.D.H.Cole, *The Development of Socialism in the Past Fifty Years*, Webb Memorial Lecture (1952).

489. G.D.H. Cole, *Is this Socialism?*, New Statesman pamphlet (1954).

490. "How on earth could he wish to be degraded in these ways?": *World Socialism Restated*, New Statesman pamphlet (1956), cited in L.P.Carpenter, *G.D.H. Cole - an intellectual biography* (1973), p.212.

democracy. Whether this would in the short-term prove acceptable to the party leadership he could not say.

It was only near to end of his life that Cole was able to look back calmly, recognizing the period as one of historical progress, if politically disappointing(491). The chance that all could be reversed was the price paid for taking the non-revolutionary road. Despite everything, and to his relief, the achievements of 1945 had not in fact been unravelled.

Both these afterthoughts stood the test of time, and were reprinted elsewhere. Pitched at the level of ultimate ends, they transcended the "mere surface of politics"(492). For this reason they were also clear-headed where others, still dedicated to the old cause, were plainly confused by the outbreak of apathy and indifference(493). Each of them had their sticking points(494). Cole, to the last, never wavered in his view that "labour is always right"(495). Tawney had the firmest of (partly Anglican) beliefs, about which he did not care to argue. Tawney, especially, has been singled out as an 'ideal type' labour movement intellectual, influential precisely because he identified himself so closely with, and managed to give expression to, a body of practical convictions without which no political force

491. G.D.H.Cole, 'The Growth of Socialism', in M. Ginsberg (ed), *ibid* (1959), pp.79-96 and 'Phases of Labour's Development in Great Britain 1914-1958' in *Essays in Jewish Sociology, Labour and Co-operation*, H.Infield (ed)(1962), pp.99-124.

492. M.Shock, *ibid*, 3 November 1960, pp.671-672.

493. Eg. N.Mackenzie (ed), *Conviction* (1958).

494. L.P.Carpenter, *ibid* (1973), p.228.

495. Obituary in *The Times*, 15 January 1959, p.13.

can hope to succeed(496). Beales, saluting Tawney the octogenarian in the 1961, said of him that he was "no mere theorist or mere scholar"(497). Their primary attachment was to strongly-held core values which overrode party loyalty. It was the argument and not the academic trappings that really mattered, faith and not research, an emotional commitment that was imaginatively rather than systematically persuasive. Saintliness conveyed moral force.

Both, in the same way and to many of their peers, stood condemned for their emotionally derived certainties, their moralizing, and their misuse of scholarly standing for extra-curricular activities. Their judgement was saturated by personal ideology, "smudging" different forms of discourse. Cole and Tawney were useful for understanding what it was that socialists were talking about, but they exhibited all the flaws to which dogma is prey, their presumption of the ethical desirability of equality impeding a veritable estimation of post-war change. They fell outside the normal channels of disinterested inquiry, and had to be evaluated by other than scholarly standards. To these adversaries, personal 'goodness' was no excuse(498).

The full-blown 'revisionist' case, set out in C.A.R. Crosland's panoramic *The Future of Socialism* (1956),

496. J.A.Hall, 'the roles and influence of political intellectuals: Tawney versus Sidney Webb' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, September 1977, pp.351-362.

497. H.L.Beales, 'Three Octogenarians' in *The Political Quarterly*, January-March 1961, pp.62-70.

498. Thus, G.R.Elton in a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 February 1977, p.156; J.D.Rayner, 'The Uses of Ideological Language' in D.J.Manning (ed), *The Form of Ideology* (1980); J.P.Kenyon, 'Tawney and Social History' in *The History Men* (1983), pp.235-250.

sought to think anew "what socialism is now about" and to draw out the likely implications for future policy. The work had long been in preparation. Its origins lay in the animated debates of the pre-war Oxford University Labour club and in Crosland's intention, as he put it in a private letter, to become the modern Bernstein(499). Elected to Parliament in 1950, after teaching economics at Oxford, Crosland was no fan of the Webb tradition, which, "despite Margaret Cole's brave attempt at whitewashing", remained "hideously unattractive" - "we've all learnt to be practical and efficient, and too many of us have been to the L.S.E."(500). He also earned himself a heretical name by delivering an attack on the "utter impracticability" of "vast lists" of industries to be nationalized, against a backdrop of booing and heckling, at the 1953 party conference(501). By the following year, the manuscript had begun to take shape, spread in piles across his study room floor. Sixty-four pages of an early draft were lost on the train from Paddington to Bristol(502). Crosland also drew, like Durbin before him on the latest sociological findings, particularly from a trip to the United States, with its attractive blend of abundance and classlessness. Losing his seat in 1955 enabled him to put the finishing touches to his argument. His assessment of the Attlee reforms(503), which rounded off - in his view - two decades of social democratic achievement, he put at the

499. Written in 1940. See S. Crosland, *Tony Crosland* (1982), p.13.

500. Notes of a Fabian conference, October 1950, op cit, Dalton papers.

501. Labour Party Annual Conference Report 1953, p.117.

502. *The Times*, 9 August 1954, p.4.

503. The following is a summary in the main of 'The Attack on Poverty, Inequality and Instability', pp.42-55 of *The Future of Socialism*.

centre of his analysis, gently mocking those who had started to overlook exactly what had been attained.

The "revolutionary" economic and social changes of recent times, he recalled, had been absurdly underestimated by the pre-war marxist left. These changes, to do with the totally altered nature of private power, had been associated with, and in some cases accelerated by, the implementation of Labour's 1945 programme. Primary poverty had declined, as a result of a general rise in working class living standards (the Rowntree study of York was crucial in this respect); a vertical redistribution of income had come about, strengthened by a steeply progressive regime of direct taxation; the share of wages as a proportion of national income had risen dramatically, narrowing the gap between richest and poorest; and the fullest of full employment had been maintained in conditions of economic stability - on each count, as Crosland emphasized, the outcome was at least in part due to the deliberate effects of Labour rule. Full employment above all, he added, "constitutes, as a moment's recollection of pre-war debates will show, a major victory for the Left..." Certain propositions followed on from this line of thinking. Not only did these gains outstrip even the boldest of 'thirties outlines. Crosland also believed the essential fabric of reform would remain untouched even in Conservative hands, guaranteed by a new social climate. Ownership of the means of production, however, did not figure large in the balance sheet, not - that is -if equality was made the primary aim. Put another way, 'Is this still Capitalism?' The Britain of the planned, full employment welfare state ceased in all its essentials to be 'capitalist'.

Modern developments were rationally and coherently set out, and related to the traditional body of socialist

principles. Labour, he believed, had largely fulfilled the 'welfare' aspiration in its thinking, through the introduction of a wide range of universal social services. As to the future, it would not suffice just to settle for a defence of the 1951 position, "with occasional minor reforms thrown in to sweeten the temper of the local activists". Only the egalitarian ethic continued to have any relevance. They were "poised halfway". At some point the goals of equality and efficiency must collide. But this frontier had still to be reached.

The book was the making of Crosland, and quickly became a Gaitskellite reference point in party infighting. His welcoming of economic growth offended fundamentalists. Even so, he saw the need to sever the party's lingering identification with "austerity, rationing and restrictive controls" which may have been right for the time but were, in an age of opportunity, unsettlingly anachronistic. There was nothing "bogus" or "phoney" about mass living standards. Prosperity was giving rise to new issues that cut across class lines. A protege of Dalton, Crosland was an elegant exception to rule that all progressives were killjoys. There was a poignant sequel. In the early 1960s, with the printing of an amended second edition of *The Future of Socialism*, the main section on 1945-51 - which "shaped, summarized and gave order to the whole project of the Attlee government"(504) - was deleted altogether.

It is beyond doubt, nevertheless, that a large part of the revisionist case rested on the documented claim about the dramatic redistributive effects of higher taxation, full employment and the movement of prices (including subsidies) in the years from 1939 down to

504. F. Inglis, *Radical Earnestness: English Social theory 1880-1980* (1982), p.142.

1951, after which there had been something of a relapse, but all the same amounting to a permanent change in class relations. Emphases of course varied. Strachey, in a long disquisition on the history of economics and the contrary influence of Marx and Keynes, used this to show how it was only by democratic pressure that the innate tendency towards ever growing inequality was held at bay(505). Jay, reviewing the literature on social justice, hammered home the point (a very pertinent one in 1959-60) that taxation and not public ownership, which entailed compensation, had had the greater redistributive impact(506). Jenkins argued that steadily increasing affluence was the best redistributor of all(507). But it was Crosland - if only because he was read more widely - who became the main spokesman for the view that the traditional, redistributionist welfare goal should now give way to constructive policies of social reform designed to widen opportunities and expand liberties, that the Labour party should indeed adjust itself to the very changes which it had helped to initiate.

The issue turned - as Anthony Wright has put it(508) - on the coupling of welfare and equality. It was to the second of these values that Crosland and others now looked, just as it was the extension of welfare to redistribution that anti-collectivists (citing Beveridge) now contested, arguing that increased social spending, for questionable social ends, had made Britain one of the most heavily taxed countries in Europe, in hoc to a law of increasing state activity. Rising incomes

505. J.Strachey, *Contemporary Capitalism* (1956).

506. D.Jay, *Socialism in the New Society* (1962).

507. R.Jenkins, *The Labour Case* (1959).

508. A.Wright, 'Tawneyism Revisited : equality, welfare and socialism' in B.Pimlott (ed), *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought* (1984), esp. pp.90-96.

turned the national provision of benefits along comprehensive Beveridgean lines into a needless extravagance. A social service economy had developed, but it was wholly unsuited to the new economic conditions. But in both cases the notion of welfare - redolent of the 1940s - was burdened with a host of unwelcome associations. The attempt to rescue 'welfare' was taken up by Richard Titmuss, Professor of Social Administration at the L.S.E.

Titmuss's volume in the HMSO civil history series on *Problems of Social Policy* during the war years (on the strength of which he had joined the LSE) was an important text in substantiating the idea that if dangers were to be shared then resources too should be shared, and that the sharing and solidarity of the citizen's war was a valuable social good(509). Rapturously reviewed by Tawney, it joined his evident social concern and mastery of statistical technique with an intuitive insight into the process of wartime government. The coming of peace for him, while re-opening the issue of social priorities, also presaged an "approaching reaction" and, after Labour's departure from office in 1951, a sustained intellectual attack on the principles of 1945, most of all in the stereotype social ills attributed by critics to something called 'the welfare state', a polemically convenient but - to Titmuss - meaningless expression. In his 1951 lecture on 'The Social Division of Welfare', Titmuss openly rebutted the charges levelled by liberal conservatives and 'One Nation' Tories, pointing instead to new kinds of fiscal (tax allowance-based) and occupational (fringe) benefits not normally included in official welfare calculations, which had grown up alongside the social services and were threatening to overshadow them. He already saw a new, largely

509. R.M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (1950).

unaccounted division of inequality opening up, "dividing loyalties", "nourishing privilege" and "conflicting with the aims and unity of social policy", warranting deeper study. Social mobility had not become easier, as David Glass demonstrated(510). It was almost impossible to measure "subsistence". The middle, not the working classes, made the greater demands on the social services(511), while maintaining their advantages owing largely to non-economic factors(512). Armed with this realization, students of Titmuss were sent out to staff the new welfare agencies.

The limitations of the whole Beveridge outlook - geared to poverty and mass unemployment - formed the inspiration behind the Labour party's National Superannuation Plan of 1957, devised by Titmuss and two researchers, Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend, the "skiffle group" as a Tory minister dubbed them. Townsend had detailed some harrowing case histories to show what had been happening among the least advantaged since the war(513). By 1960, when he delivered a Fabian lecture on 'The Irresponsible Society', Titmuss had come to see that they had put too much faith in universality, having mistakenly linked it with egalitarianism. Injustices were less glaring but no less deeply felt. New concentrations of private power and privilege were now in place, forcing reformers to rethink what they meant by equity and fairness, and to put right the lack of hard information which was impeding their efforts.

510. D.V.Glass, *Social Mobility in Britain* (1954).

511. B.Abel-Smith, 'Whose Welfare State?', in N. Mackenzie (ed), *ibid* (1958), pp.55-73.

512. B.Wooton, *The Social Foundations of Wages Policy* (1955).

513. P.Townsend, 'A Society for People' in N. Mackenzie (ed), *ibid* (1958), pp.93-120.

The culmination of this task came with the publication of Titmuss's *Income Distribution and Social Change*, in late 1962(514). The book had its origins in a determination to critically examine the official statistics on the pre-tax pattern of income distribution over the 1938-58 period, pointing to the difficulties in defining 'income' and 'wealth', and 'income unit' and the number of such units, the measurement of family income, and the flow of income-spending over time. By itself, his painstaking dissection clarified to him the severe deficiencies of the existing data, raising questions about the widespread assumption of a strongly egalitarian trend brought about by economic and social policy over the last two decades. The framework of the official figures could not, in his exploration of the way in which they were compiled, admit of such certainty. But much more than this was what the figures left out of account - the "manipulation" and "rearrangement" of income-wealth, the provision of tax-free covenants and benefits in kind, company pension schemes and organized tax avoidance - the total effect of which was impossible to quantify. The tools of social research, as the Webbs had known them, were no longer up to the task. Together, these imperfections were increasingly presenting a false picture of the economic structure of society, concealing the emergence of new centres of corporate power behind the mesmerizing language of the 'Welfare State'.

It followed that many of the authoritative pronouncements made during the 1950s, and which had shaped the public and policy-making climate, had no firm grounding in fact. It could not be maintained that there was, as some insisted, a 'natural' equalizing tendency in post-war Britain, because the "statistical darkness" made it so hard to track "the changing equation of

514. R.M. Titmuss, *Income Distribution and Social Change* (1962).

inequality". The distribution of political power saw to that. The most that could be said - Titmuss concluded - was that "we know less about the economic and social structure of our society than we thought we did". Unconstructive as this seemed, and it was important to first understand how little they really understood.

In one way Titmuss narrowed the matter down to a technical question of factual evidence - of definition and calculation. As a number of reviewers regretfully remarked, he did not come forward with anything new. He had only subjected the available figures to a more rigorous examination, and found them wanting, so "ending the unanimity" as to the reliability of the officially-provided data(515). Everybody else up to that time, he implied, he had been arguing on the basis of wrong information(516). That Titmuss (and his collaborators) had already prejudged the issue, having long contended that post-war income levelling had been overstated, was - on this strict reading - of no consequence. Instead, the point was whether he had included all that was immediately relevant (e.g. fiddling in lower income groups) and why he had not stopped to consider the proportion of labour's share of national income(517). Even those like Barna, who shared Titmuss's outlook, stuck to technicalities(518), or else praised the usefulness of showing how fundamental notions like 'poverty' and 'welfare' had no fixed meaning, except in

515. 'Full and empty purses', *The Economist*, 13 October 1962, p.153.

516. B.Magee, 'The Fraudulent Society', *The Spectator*, 5 October 1962, p.459.

517. C.Clark, 'Soaking the New Rich', *The Listener*, 25 October 1962, p.679.

518. T.Barna, 'How equal is more equal?', *New Society*, 11 October 1962, p.35.

relation to the totality of resources(519). But Titmuss did not, and could not(520), refute the generally accepted view. He could only throw it open to reconsideration, the long and complex work involved in going over the ground again now requiring a collective effort.

That said, it would clearly not suffice to regard *Income Distribution and Social Change* as one more work in the long line of the "social book-keeping" tradition of British sociology, which had arisen in "a generation whose main preoccupation was with poverty and inequality"(521). True, the facts about post-war redistribution were in dispute, even disputed by fellow Fabians. But values could not be treated as if they were facts too, and the equality debate had been not just about one value, but many, none of which were reducible to an easily quantifiable measure. Nor could values be considered dispassionately - to breathe is to judge. No matter how complete and all-inclusive the factual understanding, it would never be enough to resolve a value-clash which surpassed the realm of facts. For Titmuss, as for Tawney and Cole, equality was an aspiration to do with how far there was still to go rather than with how far they had already come(522). Revered on the left, the right found them unbearably sanctimonious moralists - but they saw what it was that

519. R.Wollheim, in *The New Statesman*, 26 October 1962, p.584.

520. A.Peacock, in *The British Journal of Sociology*, March 1964, p.89.

521. J.Rex, 'Which path for sociology?', *New Society*, 6 October 1966, p.530.

522. H.Rose, 'Analysing the past, influencing the future', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 7 November 1975, p.25.

was at stake. By doubting the widely-held impression of an evolutionist, welfare ascent, Titmuss was also casting doubt on the configuration of value assumptions around which this impression had gained support. The argument about post-war equality and inequality, while statistical in form, was value-laden in content.

1951

A unifying theme in the 'State of England' compositions of the early nineteen-sixties was the conviction that most of the troubles said to be afflicting the country -- educational infirmity, conservatism in industry, nostalgia for Empire, amateurishness in government -- were traceable to, and indeed aggravated by, Britain's economic weakness (523). That Britain's economy was a slow-growing one, relative to its main economic competitors, was already painfully evident. "The old scourge of the trade cycle and mass unemployment have been scotched", Douglas Jay affirmed(524); governments knew how to manipulate total demand so as to correct recessionary or inflationary trends. This had not proved enough, however, to prevent alternating periods of relaxation and restriction, of stop-and-start, as rising consumption strained the balance of payments and interrupted expanding output, a policy cycle that had been the uniquely British experience over the past decade. How much of this halting expansion was attributable to mistaken policy aims, and how much to (avoidable) defects in policy-making, was very much at issue. One popular argument was that British industry suffered from chronic under-investment. A more penetrating case was put for saying that there had been too much misdirected investment in the wrong, largely protected industries. But both schools of economists could not ignore the succession of policy shocks in the outside world which had hit Britain since the war and to which the British economy was peculiarly vulnerable. Any considered

523. 'Suicide of a Nation?', *Encounter* special number (July 1963); *Rebirth of Britain* (1964); whereas Chapman, *British Government Observed* (1963) found that economic decline was "only half the story".

524. D.Jay, *ibid* (1962), p.136.

judgement had to weigh up the influence of internal and external factors on economic trends.

One such study, by Christopher Dow, carried out on behalf of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research and spanning 1945-60, took the overall effectiveness of government measures as its central topic(525). Dow, in between spells at the Treasury, and after a long and careful sifting of the evidence, found that trying to ascertain which policies had had what results was not a straightforward matter, even when reflecting on them long afterwards. The assessment of past experience was also hampered both by differing views amongst economists over fundamental questions like the causes of inflation, and by the tailoring of policy to political requirements (economics, as Sir Robert Hall, who wrote the preface to Dow, remarked, began as an attempt to clarify the issues of political dispute(526)). The lessons of the recent past were sadly not as good a guide to present policy as they should be. With this large proviso in mind, Dow was able to assert that fluctuations in economic growth, at least during the time of Conservative rule, "were due in large part to fluctuations in policy". Not that all cyclical trends could have been smoothed over. But "so far from countering such basic causes of instability, the influence of policy seems rather to have exaggerated their effects". Policy was actually destabilising. Too elementary a view was taken of how the economy functioned. It should not have been inferred from this that this made things worse than if the government had

525. J.C.R.Dow, *The Management of the British Economy 1945-60* (1964).

526. R.Hall, 'Reflections on the Practical Application of Economics', *The Economic Journal*, December 1959, p.649.

done nothing. The return towards planning in 1960-62 he saw as a disillusioned recognition of past errors and inadequacies. The disturbances of the late 1940s - on the other hand - were a very different matter. Problems like the fuel and convertibility crises had been needlessly mismanaged. Hugh Dalton's advisers "can hardly escape all blame". But by the time Cripps took over, the awkward transition from war to peace had been successfully negotiated, opening the way for a general reorientation of policy. The production and export targets which Cripps set himself had, in turn, been met, in spite of the continuing difficulty of excess demand in the economy. Only a level of still greater austerity could have quickened the pace of recovery. It was Hugh Gaitskell's misfortune, in view of his sophisticated grasp of the new wisdom, to be hit by the violent external blows following upon rearmament, of a magnitude which - Dow believed - no internal precautionary steps could have withstood. Dow's presentation of Gaitskell as the first fully formed 'Keynesian' Chancellor was one that was to persist. Taken as a whole, on the broadest questions the decisions taken in 1947-51 had been generally justified, although the finer points of forecasting and timing could be faulted. Primitive pre-Keynesian ideas about economic planning had slowly been supplanted, over the course of the five years, by piecemeal - and generally effective - government intervention. It was all too easy to overlook how novel the commitment to full employment had been, and how historically high the British growth rate actually was in the immediate post-war period. Economic policy, he urged, had "revolutionized" social conditions.

Other Keynesian interpretations of the economic record after 1945, even in the shape of dissenting histories like those of Shonfield (1958) and Brittan (1964), successively economic correspondents with The

Financial Times(527) evinced a greater degree of disquiet. Excessive welfare spending had held the economic progress of the country back, but so too had overloading military expenditure, set in train by "extraordinary cavalier" decision-making. Brittan reviewed for the publishers(528) and had then drawn on a full-length case study by Joan Mitchell of one, still disputed, past episode - the rearmament crisis of 1950-51, "the last and most severe of the crises of post-war maladjustment"(529). About the inception of the arms programme, much still needed explaining, even for Shonfield, who had been able to follow events closely(530). There was already a handful of books about the Attlee governments, Crossman told his listeners on the Third Programme(531) - "a group of laborious doctoral theses by American sociologists and economists", one or two pieces of "sensational journalism", and some not very revealing memoirs. But Mitchell's study was - he said - the first of its kind, a work of "contemporary history".

Mitchell's primary purpose was to prepare a practical analysis of government control of the economy in the unprecedented circumstances of the late 'forties. She was only secondarily interested in the spilling over of economic problems into political conflict inside the government. In essence, her approach was to scrupulously separate out what was known at the time, and the

527. A. Shonfield, *British Economic Policy Since the War*; S. Brittan, *The Treasury Under The Tories 1951-1964*.

528. Secker and Warburg Ltd archive, Box 384 (Mitchell), University of Reading.

529. J. Mitchell, *Crisis in Britain - 1951* (1963), p. 9.

530. A. Shonfield, *ibid* (1958), pp. 91-94.

531. R. H. S. Crossman, *ibid*, 18 April 1963.

information ministers (and commentators like herself(532)) had had to go on, with the evidence, such as revised and backdated balance of trade and payments figures, available only at a much later date. She then used this disjunction between the facts at the time and as they finally turned out to assess the wisdom of the background assumptions which had gone into the main decisions. As to what went on inside the main economic departments, she could only conjecture. But the reader was presented with a convinced advocacy of the essential correctness, whatever the practical difficulties, of the Keynesian approach to modern economic management.

Mitchell contended that, taking each step at a time, the case for rearming - fixing, doubling and then trebling the budget allocation for defence - as a response to the advent of war in Korea, had a certain logic to it. Decisions viewed in context appeared "not unreasonable" to those involved, although the total effect was impossibly and incredibly over-extended. The initial mistake, not repeated, had been to suggest that the burden of rearmament would not impair the country's economic strength. The government had never been committed to rearming "regardless" of the economic consequences. Given the statistics provided for him, and the existing state of economic knowledge, Gaitskell's testing time as Chancellor had much to commend it. Only much later on did it become plain that estimates of future growth had been too high, that the Treasury had been swamped by other spending claims, and that - taking rearmament as a whole - the Cabinet had been "asking too much". Even so, it was better to base judgements on a

532. See her articles in Socialist Commentary for April and May 1951 and March 1952. Mitchell worked in the Board of Trade in the 1940s before joining the Department of Economics in the University of Nottingham.

poor set of statistics than none at all. Officials had been badly caught out by the sudden rise in (especially dollar) imports, obviously affecting other nations but to which Britain was especially prone. 1950-51 could now be seen (1963) as an important lesson in coping with inflationary pressures.

She drew on the memoirs of Attlee, Morrison and Dalton to deal with the political repercussions. Who had been in the right? Bevan's resignation claims could not be checked. He had forced the issue. He did not invent it, but exploited it, magnifying any differences. The fact that the pace of rearmament did not in the end prove to be sustainable was not an argument against rearmament altogether. Gaitskell's attitude had been to make the best of a bad situation, insisting on rearmament not because he wished to call a halt to Labour's social revolution or to harm the N.H.S., but because of the need to signal allegiance to the Anglo-American alliance at a time of mounting international tension. This was a political calculation. Wilson's contribution was more interesting, not least because it was so unusual for a minister to resign in protest at U.S. policy (Wilson voted for the NHS charges). Time had been on the side of the Bevanites. By the end of 1952, with the crisis having passed, the economy was at a "standstill". Nobody emerged with very much honour. Yet both Gaitskell and Wilson, leaders in the years ahead, had for the first time been pushed into the limelight. They were paragons of the new style, economically literate politician, not a clash of left and right but a dispute about the assessment (as Crosland said) of "future production prospects". Not surprisingly, both Gaitskell, who died shortly afterwards, and Wilson, approved her book in draft.

In the end, so much had been unforeseen and

unpredictable that it was more accurate to speak of "a crisis of the Western alliance as a whole", rather than of Britain alone. But Treasury shortcomings (most of which had since been rectified as a result) added to the uncertainties. Later reprocessing of the official statistics further confused the issue, making it all but impossible - in her judgement - to make precise economic sense of the events of 1951. One could no longer be certain about what was to count as a 'known' fact in the given situation. Historiographically, the more that had come to be learnt, the less anyone could be certain of - a warning indeed that economics was not readily amenable to non-economists(533).

Unlike Dow, however, who was inclined to look back on 1951 as a one-off special case, Mitchell was still irked by and wanted to put an end to the Tory accusation - put about in the closing stages of the Attlee government - of Labour's financial irresponsibility, which had left the party with an unfair reputation for mismanagement and robbed it of the credit for having established a sound basis for economic recovery. A convinced planner, she still had memories of the way in which, after Cripps had become chancellor in 1947, the government had begun to plan its way out of trouble, fusing the planning and financial departments in order to overcome the earlier delay and division, and not a moment too soon, representing "a *prima facie* claim to some success for real policies"(534). This was of a piece with Jay's recollection of Gaitskell's saving role

533. P.Einzig, 'The Financial Crisis of 1931', in M.Gilbert (ed), *A Century of Conflict 1850-1950* (1966).

534. J.Mitchell, *Groundwork to Economic Planning* (1966), p.108.

in the 1949 devaluation of the pound(535), and Marquand's realization of how surprisingly unkeynesian Cripps since looked in comparison (536). Labour's overall record on leaving office was very much better than it had been painted. Gaitskell had simply been unlucky. Had it not been for the Korean war, it would have been Labour and not the Conservatives who would have reaped the rewards of the economic upturn, and so much else besides. Post-war politics would have taken an entirely different turning.

Her confidence in Keynesian stabilizing policy, aimed at avoiding short-term turbulence, was undiminished and, in April 1965, she was recruited as a part-time member of George Brown's National Board for Prices and Incomes, resuming her earlier contact with Whitehall, combining the lives of social science academic and public servant, a member of the same managerial elite of the N.B.P.I. that was to interest the political sociologist(537).

One final point is worth making. Mitchell, as we saw, considered the 1951 crisis to be the "last and most severe" of the emergencies that the Attlee government had to deal with. But no cataclysmic slump ensued, as some continually warned. Instead, after a short recession, the North American and West European economies embarked on the most rapid uninterrupted period economic expansion

535. D.Jay, 'Government Control of the Economy: defects in the machinery', *The Political Quarterly*, April-June 1968, pp.136-138.

536. D.Marquand, 'Sir Stafford Cripps', in M.Sissons and P.French, *ibid* (1963), pp.173-195.

537. C.Crouch, 'The Ideology of a Managerial Elite: The National Board for Prices and Incomes 1965-70', in *The British Political Sociology Yearbook*, I.Crewe (ed)(1974), pp.55-88.

in recent history, from which Britain, even though lagging behind the European average, also benefitted. Reconstruction was succeeded by an ever-widening prosperity, so that Samuel Brittan, in his sketch of the longer view from 1945 until the early 1960s, saw Korean rearmament as the start in a series of recurring post-war battles about the level of public expenditure in an economy growing by fits and starts, and a direct consequence of the tax-and-spend Keynesian package. Full employment, trade union power and universal welfare had transformed the post-war situation. But as earlier writers had already found out, the changes to do with increased scope of and administrative adjustments to 'economic government' were in the main *ad hoc* and unco-ordinated. The 1945 Labour government had certainly not - this was Shonfield's view of the matter(538) - been averse to state action as such, only that it should be of a strictly limited kind, the array of direct controls being regarded as essentially temporary instruments in conditions of scarcity, and gradually to be done away with. Labour's reluctance to use the full powers of the newly-established Development Councils made this clear. Had the government stayed longer in office, it might well have been called on to intervene more and more frequently. Labour never, in Shonfield's eyes, married economic efficiency with democratic control, or public power with private enterprise, expressing a politico-economic justification for the developmental state upon which the hopes of more sustained economic growth, on European lines, finally rested. It was fashionable, in view of this theory vacuum, to look upon Keynesian thinking in a rational and technical way, using intelligence to sort out muddles. But many neo-Keynesians, aware that classical economic theory had pretended to have nothing to say about justice or

538. A. Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism - the changing balance of public and private power* (1965).

fairness in the distribution of economic resources, were far readier to look upon high and stable employment as a good thing and much more disposed to shape policy towards desired ends. By eliminating the impersonal but imperfect mechanism of the market, priorities could be laid down as to what was socially just or economically efficient 'in the public interest'. Planning assumed the availability of superior knowledge of a supposedly objective kind. Many planners, Mitchell included, disapproved of the consumer boom that went with greater affluence, since they had a conception of how things should be otherwise. Advocates of freer markets could only see that decisions were now being made for their political acceptability or administrative convenience. Either way, 'how to' questions were thought to be inseparable from 'what to do' issues. Technical advice was indistinguishable from judgements made according to taste, temperament and value-preferences.

The McKenzie Thesis

'System' implies the interdependence of parts. A 'party system' suggests that the behaviour of any one political party affects and is in turn affected by the actions of other parties. The 'system', moreover, could be said to mould the structures within it. To the trained observer, Labour's gradual acceptance of, in Bassett's words, "the traditional form as well as the essential principles of British parliamentary democracy"(539), had greatly eased the functioning of the democratic process. Colleagues at the LSE concurred. In office, neither Labour nor the Conservatives, according to Ben Roberts (Reader in Industrial Relations), were as extreme or as dominated by sectional interests as some critics would have people believe(540). Kingsley Smellie, in his U.N.E.S.C.O. guide to *The British Way of Life*(1955), cited Bassett approvingly, referring to "the seeming paradox in a two-party system" - each party implies the annihilation of the other and yet each depends upon the other. "It has been a great debate and high argument will continue to be heard", he commented, but the two main parties were now so evenly balanced, and there was so little basic disagreement about the ends of political action, that the sting had gone out of the contest(541). All of this was quite at variance with pre-war expectations. Robert McKenzie, a Canadian research student with a background in the Canadian Labour Party who had come to England as an army captain and settled after the war, joining the staff of the L.S.E. Sociology Department in 1949, was already delving into the unexplored

539. R.Bassett, 'British Parliamentary Government Today', *The Political Quarterly*, No 4 1952, p.387.

540. B.Roberts, 'Trade Unions and Party Politics', *The Cambridge Journal*, March 1953, pp.387-402.

541. K.B.Smellie, *The British Way of Life* (1955), p.158.

area of political parties. Laski had kept an open house, and McKenzie had been one of his most frequent visitors, but the pupil soon superseded the teacher:

"One hesitated to press Laski on these issues but in conversation he readily conceded that the war had modified the course of British politics in a way he had not anticipated. He referred mainly to the unforeseen circumstances in which Labour came to power in 1945. The old fears of a flight of capital, of 'economic sabotage' by the City, proved groundless, he argued, not because of the high-mindedness of the ruling classes but because their freedom of action had been almost completely circumscribed by the straitjacket of war-time controls inherited and *retained* (his italics) by their new Labour masters.

But there is more to it, I think, than this. The fact is that the 'abyss' between the parties which Laski thought he saw in 1938 certainly did not exist in 1945 and is even less visible today"(542).

Laski, McKenzie went on, had romanticized about the crusading force that Labour might represent, when, through a combination of domestic and international factors, and a sense of bipartisan responsibility, "the social thinking of the whole community" was now very much at one. "Labour was less militant than Professor Laski hoped; the Conservatives, for whatever motive, have been nothing like as reactionary as he feared". A half-formed view was taking shape, not, as Richard Rose suggests, differing from the conception then prevailing

542. R.T. McKenzie, 'Laski and the Social Bases of the Constitution', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 3 1952, pp. 261-262.

at the L.S.E. (or among some sections)(543) so much as giving expression to a new version of it, with the main cue coming from Bassett.

McKenzie delighted in the good-natured, politically informed discussion of the L.S.E. Senior Common Room, between Smellie, D.G. Macrae (his doctoral supervisor), Ralph Miliband and others(544). The Oakeshottians, by contrast, took little part - Gellner spoke of their philosophy of "abdication" and non-commitment, robbing all academic discourse of its critical faculty(545). As a reaction to Laski, McKenzie believed(546), there was a new found reluctance by academics to become involved in matters of public policy, a reluctance which he did not share - he conducted fieldwork, broadcast on the radio, and invited practising politicians to a successful postgraduate seminar. Politics was the ultimate spectator sport; McKenzie was '*le spectateur engage*'.

The germ of an idea was evident in his 1951 essay in a Hansard Society publication on the British party system(547), examining the formal structure of the Conservative and Labour parties, the analysis already forming in his own mind. He then went in search of supporting evidence. The gap in the literature meant him having to fill in the historical background, pulling together material from

543. R. Rose, *The Problem of Party Government* (1974), p. 334.

544. D.G. Macrae, conversation with the author, 30 June 1983.

545. E. Gellner, 'Contemporary Thought and Politics' in *Philosophy*, 32 1957, pp. 336-357.

546. R.T. McKenzie, in *My LSE*, J. Abse (ed) (1977), pp. 83-103.

547. *Parliamentary Affairs*, Winter 1951. Special issue on the British Party System.

disparate sources. He also took on board sociological theories to do with the rise of political organization. He refused to take phrases like 'the labour movement' at face value. McKenzie, as he put it, was determined to "probe behind the facade" of the propaganda of the parties, taking them to pieces to see how they really worked. The length of time he took infuriated his other supervisor, W.A. Robson. Finally the thesis was submitted in 1954, uniquely in a publishers' proof copy.

British Political Parties - The Distribution of Power within the Conservative and Labour Parties (1955) was not just a thesis, more a set of interlocking theses. His primary aim was to assess the accuracy of the proposition first put forward in the early 1900s by Roberto Michels to the effect that, as a political party grows in size and complexity, the exercise of power inevitably concentrates in the hands of a few leaders, in what he formulated as an "iron law of oligarchy". A sub-theme was to explain why, as a result, the worst fears of Ostrogorski and others about the coming of 'mass' democracy had never materialized. He did not mean to provide a complete history (the Liberal party was relegated to a one-and-a-half page appendix). But each institution of each party, from the leader and the parliamentary party to the head office, conference and the local party structure, was treated historically in order to substantiate the claim that, in spite of the very different historical origins of the Conservatives and Labour, and whatever they might say about themselves or caricature their opponents for, they had grown to be fundamentally alike in the way they were organized, above all, because of the pre-eminence of the parliamentary leadership, when in office and power. The Conservative party was arranged very much as had been assumed, though even here he had some important things to say. Right from the start, however, he realised he had more to divulge about the Labour party - its most central ideas were being challenged full on.

Furthermore, he was caught up (his disclaimer to the contrary(548)) by the special character of the politics of the Labour party, since - to an extent unknown with the Conservatives - the way in which one saw the Labour party as operating had implications for what it did or might claim to represent.

The glaring contrast between Labour's professed 'inner-party democracy' and its actual working had come about through the evolution of various, largely unacknowledged devices which enabled the party's leadership to evade the institutional restraints placed upon their power and authority. Labour was hesitant, whereas the Conservatives were forthright, in admitting that, while their followers always needed cajoling and convincing, the leadership enjoyed the undisputed right to lead. The chief, though not sole, purpose of the mass organization outside Parliament was to sustain those leaders in their positions. Labour was not, therefore, subject to the kind of external control levelled against it by Churchill in the 'Laski affair' back in 1945. The emergence of the Leader, as a potential or acting Prime Minister, was the dominating fact of party life. At every level, and on a whole range of matters, there was no significant organizational difference between "the two great parties in the state". The similarities were so "striking", "strange" and "overwhelming" that McKenzie was amazed they had not been commented on before.

Labour's experience as a 'party of government' after 1945 was conclusive, he felt. The events of that period only made sense from this perspective. The stronger the P.L.P., the weaker the mass organization of the party, as a general rule. To be sure, 'Let Us Face the Future' had gone part of the way

548. "The scope of this book is indicated by its subtitle; its purpose is to examine the distribution of power within the two major British political parties. It is not concerned with party ideologies or programmes ..." (page vii).

to acceding to the wishes of the Mikardo Conference resolution in 1944 that an explicit commitment be made about the nationalizing of basic industries, but even this had been watered down in the final document. Thereafter, Conference had in the main been treated to "full-dress expositions" of Government policies by the relevant ministers, and seemed to like it that way. The stabilizing influence of the trade unions was stressed (without being expanded upon). Only the backbench revolt over military conscription stood out as an example of loss of control. Much of the credit was put down to Attlee (a notable guest at the L.S.E. seminar) and McKenzie's writing bore the imprint of his tenure. Attlee had, McKenzie argued, ruled the country over that five-year period with as much authority as any Prime Minister in any preceding Conservative or Liberal administration. Organizationally, and indeed ideologically, the big two were matching. There was an "agreement on fundamentals" which made the party dogfight somewhat contrived and unreal, with the result that

"Two great monolithic structures now face each other and conduct furious arguments about the comparatively minor issues that separate them"(549).

This did not add up to an "iron law of oligarchy", so much as a strong, historically-revealed tendency, qualified by the need on the part of all leaders to mobilize and maintain support. It was only anyway of rough application because of "the conventions of the parliamentary system" itself, wherein responsibility was owed not to the party machine but to the electorate. The party was the vote-getter. All other functions "are, and must" remain subsidiary. The voters did not initiate policy but were there to choose from among competing teams of leaders. At this point, 'is' turned into

'ought', as McKenzie moved from the assembling of evidence to a judgement of value. It was not only necessary that leaders should emerge and retain their position; it was also desirable that they should do so. 'Party' no longer acted as a potential threat to the sovereignty of parliament. The main two parties were admirably suited to the role of ventilating class animosities and integrating the enfranchised mass of the population into the political process. As a description of the realities of power during a time of social harmony, this was exceptional.

Instantly acclaimed as a masterpiece, McKenzie's book was enormously stimulating, as much for the bold way in which it was put forward as a work of the first importance(550). W.J.M. Mackenzie agreed that, in elaborating upon Michels, McKenzie was "of course" quite right (although, he added, the myths each party shared were nevertheless functional - they *were* the parties)(551). To others it was "a brilliantly evocative account" which shone with scholarship, a "memorable" and "profoundly exciting" study replete with insight and analysis, fit to rank alongside the only other landmark work on British parties by Ostrogorski and Lowell. Even though his presentation of the argument, from the centre outwards, presupposed the validity of the hierarchical party model, and even though the sub-division of chapters, jerking forwards and backwards in time, detracted from the fluency of the case, these were only seen as minor blemishes. "Nothing like it has been written in English for fifty years", Bill Pickles declared, "and we shall be lucky indeed if we get another book as good when the next half century has gone by"(552). Heartened by its reception as a piece of first-class research

550. D.W.Brogan, review in *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 26 1955, pp. 188-190.

551. W.J.M.Mackenzie, 'Mr McKenzie on the British Parties', *Political Studies*, Vol III 1955, p.158.

552. All comments taken from the backcover of the second (revised) edition, 1963.

on a major subject, it confirmed McKenzie in his conviction - according to McRae - that he would change the study of politics(553).

The doctrine of intra-party democracy

The first serious skirmish in which McKenzie was involved occurred in the pages of the journal *Political Studies* in 1957-58, going to the very heart of his Schumpeterian analysis of parliamentary leadership. Saul Rose, briefly international secretary of the Labour party at Transport House who had returned to academic life, drew on his own recent experience to pick McKenzie up on the danger of generalizing about the Labour party(554). He recalled, on the basis of Labour's actions in opposition from 1952-55, the "binding" nature of Conference decisions, the shifting and competing centres of authority inside the party, and - most of all - the style and temperament of whoever chanced to be leader. Over the short period with which he was acquainted, the leading parliamentarians, the annual Conference and the N.E.C. all from time to time moved into greater prominence, often behaving totally at variance with one another. On one occasion, indeed (German rearmament), Conference had come close to overturning a major front-bench policy, an unthinkable happening in the immediate post-war years. Power was therefore relational; it made no sense to seek after 'one focus of power' within the party. "Perhaps, after all, what the Labour party believes itself to be is a better guide to what it is".

McKenzie's rejoinder was to say that the events after 1951, as Rose had recounted them, far from making his - Rose's - case, endorsed the general tenor of his own arguments. Out

553. D.G.McRae, *ibid*, 30 June 1983.

554. S.Rose, 'Policy Decision in Opposition', *Political Studies*, Vol IV 1956, pp.128-138.

of office, the authority of the parliamentary leadership had been disrupted, along with the loss of several elder statesman, by a severe outbreak of internal party warfare, jeopardizing its ability to resemble an Opposition-in-waiting. The moment Attlee's parliamentary team lost control over the affairs of the party, it no longer became clear "where effective policy decisions were being made or indeed whether they were being made at all". Warfare between the Bevanites and their rivals raged at all levels of the party - defeated in one arena, the battle was renewed in another. But this need not be translated into a free-for-all. The only reason why the divide opened up to begin with was because the leadership of the party had lost the initiative. The real problem was the kind of attitude epitomized in Rose's view that the extra-parliamentary party and especially the Conference, a 'democracy' made up of a few hundred thousand political activists, should presume to instruct the party leaders in what party policy should be. The Labour party would continue to be at risk as long as it clung to a party constitution which was based on "an archaic doctrine of intra-party democracy which was in fact incompatible with parliamentary democracy". It was high time that everyone in the party reconciled themselves to this. His reply was a reiteration of the original argument, brought forward to account for the intervening years, and topped off with a major but inarticulate premise of that same earlier work : the absolute necessity of parliamentary elites, so as to best safeguard liberal democratic values.

But it was a reply in two halves, the back half of which was a much more forcefully presented view, switching the grounds from the positive (i.e. what the position had been in the Labour party in the early part of the decade) and a normative statement of how the party ought to see itself. It was on these terms that a sharply-worded response was drawn

from Ralph Miliband(555). Miliband, Lecturer in Government at the L.S.E., was another former student of Laski, but more clearly part of the marxist left. His thinking exhibited none of the "deep tensions"(556) so apparent in his old mentor. Laski used to reassure him, when they were on the staff together after the war, that Attlee and Morrison, whom he knew well, were to be trusted, and for a while Miliband had also been optimistic about Labour's accomplishments, joining in with the Bevanite 'Second XI' of activists and parliamentary hopefuls in the early fifties(557). But as time passed he came to regard party politics as "a decreasingly meaningful activity, void of substance, heedless of principle, and rich in election auctioneering". Rose and McKenzie's discussion of the precise role of annual Conference was of interest to him, and as an active member of the left he shared many of McKenzie's suspicions that Labour's leaders had been deradicalised; what interested him even more was McKenzie's open display of aversion to the doctrine of intra-party democracy. McKenzie had objected to it on two counts - an active but unrepresentative minority had no right to tie the hands of elected representatives; and such a state of affairs would be "incompatible" with the tenets of parliamentary government. This implied, in Miliband's view, "a narrowly restricted conception of politics", symptomatic of a growing professionalization, which was doing away with what little the politically interested could contribute to the vitality of democratic life. Intra-party democracy at least ensured that there was dialogue between leaders and followers, preventing the complete degradation of mass politics. Direct, extra-parliamentary action also had its place. Politics - and

555. R.Miliband, 'Party Democracy and Parliamentary Government', *Political Studies*, VI 1958, pp.170-174.

556. R.Miliband, 'Voices of Socialism - Harold Laski', *Tribune*, 12 June 1964, p.12.

557. R.Miliband, conversation with the author, 25 February 1983.

especially Labour politics - was about real issues of vital importance. It could not be reduced to a popular spectacle. Amicable as their relations were, there was no common ground linking the partisans of parliamentary and party democracy.

Group theory

The establishment of 'party' as a central category of political analysis was followed in short order by the application of pressure group theory - very much an American-led innovation - to British politics. British authors had been slow to incorporate the idea of a constellation of interests pressing on and influencing government policies into the framework of the parliamentary-central approach. Potter, Stewart and Finer sought to make up for lost time, the latter wading through the dusty files of the Federation of British Industry, examining the political power of private capital, and the denationalization of the road haulage association, before calling for "more light" on the lobby(558). Even some American observers - like Epstein (1954) - had explicitly ruled out an emphasis on economic interest groups, already familiar back home, as being inappropriate to British surroundings, while Rogow, although aware of powerful sectional interests, was still thinking in Laskian terms of capitalist obstruction. Returning to Britain in the early 1950s(559), Samuel Beer, Professor of the Science of Government at Harvard University, was able to compare British with American practice, and became one of the first to talk of "a kind of pressure politics"(560), beyond considerations of

558 A.M.Potter, *Organised Groups in British National Politics* (1961); J.D.Stewart, *British Pressure Groups* (1958); S.E.Finer, *Private Industry and Political Power* (1958) and *Anonymous Empire* (1958).

559. Beer was at Balliol College in the early 1930s. He first crossed paths with Laski in 1934.

560. S.Beer, 'The Future of British Politics - An American View', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 26 No 4 1955, p.33043.

class or social philosophy, that - in his view - had been waiting to be discovered, and that had contributed greatly to the (wholly unexpected) absence of conflict. He saw only "satisfied" powers, nurtured by the welfare state and the quasi-corporate relations of government and the economy, buttressing an enviable social stability. "No visitor who remembers the Britain of the thirties can fail to mark today's contentment, the relaxation of tension, the return of consensus. Something of importance", he added, "has happened in social standards and ideals". In as much as this happy state of affairs had its roots "deep in the past", based around the powerful remnants of traditional, ancient, hierarchical, pre-Victorian society, an historical explanation was called for. Beer's answer to this problem was to sketch out "the cultural context of politics", centring on various deeply-entrenched philosophical clusters - Old Whig, Liberal, Radical, Collectivist, and predating them all, Old Tory(561) - which had, by restraining the rule of money and moulding mercantile habits, led up to "the anglicized socialism of Mr Attlee". This application of a culturally-based group theory of politics was a clear advance on earlier attempts. It also allowed him to break free from the kind of "watered down Marxism" of earlier vintage(562). Many organized interest groups now held what amounted to a virtual veto over public policy, Beer indicated, not just through 'capital flight' but equally by the larger trades unions, without this ever leading to - borrowing the Weimar analogy - a position of "pluralistic stagnation"(563).

561. S.Beer, 'The Representation of Interests in British Government: Historical Background', *The American Political Science Review*, September 1957, pp.613-650.

562. Letter to the author from Samuel Beer, 7 November 1983.

563. S.Beer, 'Pressure Groups and Parties in Britain', *The American Political Science Review*, March 1956, p.123.

Beer's appreciation of the significance of traditional authority infused his 1956 study of the emergence of the British Treasury as the lead agency in economic planning and co-ordination, a work overshadowed by his contemporaneous journal articles and criticized by some for excessive deference(564). He approved of the institutional bias towards agreement and compromise, and commented on the remarkably subtle way in which Treasury 'control' was actually enforced. The convertibility episode of 1947 was the only instance where unequivocal blame could be attached to officials. In return for being allowed to speak with Treasury administrators, however, Beer had to show them his draft prior to publication. "These pages are too much like undressing in public", Sir Edward Bridges, the Permanent Secretary, wrote of one passage(565). Beer had over-emphasized the responsibilities of officials as against ministers, and given the impression that the Treasury was somehow open to public inspection, both of these errors stemming from "the clear difference between British and American custom"(566). He made too much of recent and still touchy budget discussions and did not understand "the position of public servants in this country". "Draw down again the veil", Burke Trend minuted - an early lesson in the impenetrable nature of British decision-making which was only breached a decade-and-a-half later.

Interests, as opposed to parties, had not found a place in *British Political Parties*, except in so far as the history of the Labour party dealt with the emergence of a pressure group aspiring to political power. In introducing a special issue of *Political Quarterly* devoted to the important part

564. S.Beer, *Treasury Control - the co-ordination of financial and economic policy in Great Britain* (1956); T Balogh in H.Thomas (ed), *ibid* (1959), p.97.

565. 'Publication of a book by Professor S.H. Beer - *Treasury control*' (1954-57), T199/516, Public Records Office.

566. P.R.O., *ibid* (unnamed official), 27 April 1955.

which pressure groups were now recognized as playing, McKenzie took the opportunity to make full amends, greeting the "belated" recognition of the pressure group approach, and claiming it as perfectly consistent with his central thesis about modern party government - if it was true that the parties only performed a minor and supporting role, imperfectly refracting the popular will through the machinery of the electoral system, then organized groups could act as important channels of communication with the electorate, "filling in the gaps", so to speak(567). Standard textbook accounts had, on the whole, done little to disseminate this view, allowing far too much hostile comment and holding back a realistic evaluation of their legitimate purpose. Despite obvious reservations, these fears were wide of the mark. The pressure group system was "an inevitable and indispensable concomitant of the party system", facilitating popular involvement in decision-making and elevating new elites into power. In this way, McKenzie brought pluralist thinking into line with the oligarchic tendencies of modern politics. But he made no attempt to integrate these elements into a fully rounded explanation. He saw the rise of 'big' government and the expansion of pressure group activity, as well as the new and powerful factor of trade unionism; the declaration that all politics had become pressure politics he pointedly rejected.

Beer, to begin with, was inclined to agree with him. "At the present time", he wrote, 'convergence' in British party politics was matched by an unmistakable 'consensus' in social and political values, attributable to the "pluralized" dispersal of power among a new range of interest groups(568). Parties and pressure groups were complementary features of the post-war balance of social forces. The job of

567. R.T.McKenzie, 'Parties, Pressure Groups and the British Political Process', *The Political Quarterly*, January-March 1958, pp.5-16.

568. S.Beer, *ibid*, March 1956.

the political scientist was not - in the case of Britain - that of understanding transformation and upheaval, the path to modernity of most other nations. Instead one had to account for the long-run persistence of institutions that had adapted and survived. British government did not, as Beer knew, yield up its secrets easily. A start could be made with a formal-legal institutional description, which the British had long excelled at. This was a precondition for any subsequent classification of those institutions according to type and function, out of which explanatory generalizations might then be formulated. The "variables" of power, interest and policy were to be the building blocks, over and above an understanding of the cultural foundation of a society. The fruits of this enterprising attempt to arrive at reliable explanatory hypotheses about political behaviour were contained in the major, cross-European study, *Patterns of Government*, first published in 1958(569).

The British system of government was said, by Harry Eckstein, to whom the chapter on Britain was assigned, to be made up of a compound of the "pre-modern" and the "modern", the "cultural" and the "structural", the result of careful "grafting of new upon old and ancient principles". Parties and pressure groups were of the same standing in the pattern of interest aggregation and articulation, but were instruments for the channelling of influence as much as articulators of a definable party or political doctrine. The operation of the welfare state after 1945 illustrated his point. The expansion in the scope of government, circumstantial as much as anything, into the fields of welfare and planning, had both weakened the extent of ministerial control over policy and strengthened the effectiveness of outside interests, thoroughly transforming the basics of political life. Objective factors, chief amongst which was the impact of the Second World War, had pushed Britain into adopting a new

569. S.Beer and A.Ulam, *Patterns of Government - The Major Political Systems of Europe* (1958;1962).

social programme largely acceptable to all shades of opinion. The blocking off of out-and-out *laissez-faire* doctrines smoothed the way. The current of ideas, "powerfully reinforced by 'circumstances'", made for party differences of degree but not of kind. As such, social changes were not explicable solely by reference to some kind of ideological impulse. Labour and Conservative offered a clear-cut choice to the voter, but, were not fundamentally opposed. Both, in the terminology, were 'systemic'.

Eckstein's parallel studies of the evolution of the English Health Service (1958, but finished four years before(570)) and of the British Medical Association (1960)(571) illuminated the practical effect of these developments in one area of post-war government policy - the form, extent and effectiveness of pressure group activity in the realm of medical politics. Out of the apparent diversity of Labour's 1945 reforms - planning, nationalization and social welfare - he found a single unifying thread: the recurring motif of "rationalization", by which he meant the re-ordering and re-organizing of existing government activities, not to supplant them but to make them function more efficiently. Although he said little about the first two of this tripod, he was insistent that it was wrong to see Labour's Health Service reform as a "social welfare" measure at all. Instead it had been a means of improving, as far as possible, an inefficient and inadequate set of current services. The agitation for reform had played its part. Then again, much pressure had also come from within the medical profession. Wartime had revealed the inadequacies. By the date of its inception, there was almost complete acceptance on all sides. In view of the pre-history, the socialist contribution had come last and been the most half-hearted:

570. H.Eckstein, *The English Health Service - its origins, structure and achievements.*

571. H.Eckstein, *Pressure Group Politics - the case of the British Medical Association.*

"Once this is understood much that is puzzling about the history and objectives of the Health Service becomes comprehensible. In a very real sense the institution of the Service marks a triumph of nonsocialist over socialist ideas, however much we have become used to calling systems like the National Health Service 'socialized' medicine"(572).

Enough time, therefore, had elapsed to judge the operation of the new service, by way of a calm exposition of its origins and aims (a balance sheet, drawn up by Lindsey, similarly dismissed stateside reports of extravagant socialized medicine(573)). As to the large perfectionist claims being made for group theory, he was doubtful - it was merely "a useful tool". A pressure group theory would always leave the larger number of circumstantial factors out of account. That was why any comprehensive explanation had to include the determinants of political agreement which allowed that pressure groups would be at their most effective. McKenzie had been right to say that party competition was now joined to the aggregation and articulation of pressure group interests. But the argument could be taken a stage further by locking them together in an overarching description of continuity and change in modern Britain, the two main parties at the heart of a complex universe of pressurised politics, "a pluralization" of power that had reshaped the working of cabinet government without altering its essential form. Herein lay the appropriateness of the assumption that every system, but especially the British, had a self-maintaining tendency. As Beer summarized it:

"In Dr. Eckstein's analysis the main patterns

572. H.Eckstein, *ibid* (1958), p.x.

573. A.Lindsey, *Socialized Medicine in England and Wales - the National Health Service, 1948-61* (1962).

of the system do indeed seem to interact with one another in such a way as to maintain each in its existing form. In Britain during the past decade or more, for instance, there has been a great decline of ideological conflict and little innovation of major issues in the field of domestic policy. This consensus in the interests and purposes pursued in the political arena has undoubtedly been promoted by the highly bureaucratic structure of power, not only in government, but also in parties and interest groups. Similarly, the policies carried out by government have tended to support first this consensus and second this bureaucratization of power - for example i) by easing the economic insecurities from which ideological conflict might arise and ii) by a policy of economic management that requires the co-operation of sectional economic interests. In this way three sectors of the system - the patterns of interest, power and policy - tend to be mutually supporting. Disturbances in any one pattern may occur, such as the attempt to radicalize certain political issues, but the weight of the system as a whole tends to iron out these disturbances and restore the previous equilibrium"(574).

It was in these terms that the operating method of hyperstable British government - bringing 'party' and 'group' into close relation - was unfurled.

Putting to the test

The Clause IV and unilateralist controversies which threatened to split the Labour party wide open in the wake of its third election defeat in-a-row - in October 1959 - turned the 'McKenzie thesis' from what was a thought-provoking but

academic curiosity confined to the specialist journals into an matter of great topical importance. It was made so by McKenzie himself, who regularly gave prominence to his views in *The Observer* and on BBC current affairs programmes; but it was also brought up and discussed by other scholars working in the field (not all of them political scientists) who - in appreciating that McKenzie had advanced the understanding of party politics - took a very different view of the inter-relationship of structure and ideology in the Labour party. It was an unusual illustration of academic opinion feeding into the party argument, and, in view of the way the thesis had come to be so closely identified with its author, a rigorous trial of the reliability of McKenzie's propositions about the party's internal distribution of power. The well-known drawback to covering laws and generalizations in the social sciences was that they were held to be experimentally untestable. The events of 1959-61 provided as good an opportunity to check the validity of a working hypothesis as the rival camps were likely to get.

McKenzie fired the opening shots(575) on the weekend immediately after polling day. The public image of the Labour party, surveys showed, was that it was of and for the working man, that it believed in nationalization, and that it was, in comparison with the Conservatives, less 'fit to rule'. Traditional deference could explain part of this last impression. A larger cause of this presumed incompetence, however, was the outcome of "the fantastically archaic and cumbersome policy-making procedures required by the party's constitution", and most of all the dogma of intra-party democracy, "which is grossly inappropriate to a system of Cabinet and parliamentary government". In a parliamentary democracy, effective power must be focused "and be seen to be focused" in the team of parliamentary leaders whose task it is to offer an attractive electoral alternative. But Labour, its

575. R. McKenzie, 'Labour's need for surgery', *The Observer*, 25 October 1959, p.10.

endless quarrelling squandering the inheritance of 1945, risked becoming the party of perpetual opposition. Hugh Gaitskell had now to force the party to realize that it was sick to the point of death, and could only recover by setting up a Commission to decapitate its hydra-headed constitutional monster, starting with the deletion of Clause IV. McKenzie's plain speaking expressed his sympathy with the revisionist claim that Labour's organizational deficiencies were wholly out of keeping with the notion of a modern, power-seeking political party.

A necessary element in the autonomy of the party leadership, as McKenzie also asserted, was having to show to the electorate that the union leaders did not have the final say over the policies of the parliamentary party, a need heightened by the accession to office of a new cohort of General Secretaries who were far less minded to support and sustain agreed party policy, further weakening Labour's electoral appeal. The publication, slap bang in the middle of 1960, by Martin Harrison (a young research student at Nuffield) on the *Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945*, furnished the results of an examination of the party-union link which, in disposing of common myths, cut the ground from under McKenzie's feet⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾. Harrison had analysed the financial support of the party that came from the unions, an area which even party officers knew little about. He calculated the rise in union political funds at the national, regional and constituency level. Without question they were "the financial mainstay of the party". In terms of actual policy-influencing, however, the position was not so clear-cut. The major unions were usually divided in their attitudes to policies sponsored by the parliamentary leaders, and could not be treated as a monolithic voting *bloc*. It was wrong to posit a clash between largely right-wing trade unionists and militant local parties. The conflicts were multi-dimensional,

576. M.Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party* (1960).

in all wings of the party. For this reason, Harrison suggested that McKenzie's view was "heretical" but far too "sweeping"; "the party had to live with its constitution". As the anonymous special correspondent of *The New Statesman* (probably Crossman) reported, the first and inestimable merit of the Harrison book was that it "exploded" McKenzie's "pet theory" (577).

McKenzie, seeing only confirmation in the breakdown of cohesive leadership, was unimpressed (578). Harrison was stimulating and praiseworthy, "one of the most important contributions since the war", and in preparing a second edition of *British Political Parties* he intended to take it fully into account. At the same time it was, as he put it, "strangely complacent". In office, to repeat, the power structure of the main parties was very nearly identical. This was not the same thing as saying the party machinery by which the ascendancy of the parliamentary leaders was secured was equally similar. In opposition, he granted, Labour leaders were in a far more exposed position, unless and until they were able to retain the co-operation of a parliamentary team and rely on the working alliance with a group of leading trade unionists. This was the main contrast between the Labour party and the Conservatives. The collapse over the past few months had created all the problems, robbing the party of its electoral potential. Harrison appeared to regard the party constitution as if it was sacrosanct. If, at that late stage, the party could not face up to realities, then they were all witnessing its demise. The approaching party conference of October - at which Conference and the PLP seemed likely to be at odds on the issue of defence - underlined to him how vitally important it was for the leadership to assert its independence from extra-parliamentary dictation.

577. 'Labour and the Unions', *The New Statesman*, 11 June 1960, p.850.

578. Letter in *The New Statesman*, 18 June 1960, pp.893-894.

Crossman returned to the attack in his review of Henry Pelling's short history of the Labour party, which came out after the very public platform defeat in October 1960(579). Although disappointed by its slightness, Crossman said that the book did at least recognize the distinctive role of the trade unions in the deliberations of the Labour party and the eternal struggle of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces which had made the party what it was and which better explained what had happened the previous October. The substitution of centralized authority for party democracy, the gist of McKenzie's account, might have seemed to fit for the six years when Labour was in government after 1945. But ever since McKenzie's book had appeared, history had conspired to make nonsense of it, McKenzie preferring to rebuke the party for failing to fall in with his theories. Its' "wrongheadedness" was now plain for all to see. Tiring of Crossman, McKenzie's reply letter brought the issue to a head(580). The Scarborough decision had been "an almost perfect test case" for his central argument that the final determination of party policy (whatever the constitution might say) must rest with the parliamentary party and its leaders, and that Conference could not direct those leaders to adopt policies to which it was opposed. Had he not - he asked - proved his point?

At this, both Crossman and Pelling weighed in(581). Crossman did so by remarking on the easy acceptance of McKenzie's views as "gospel truth" in most Departments of Politics, proposing instead the counter-thesis of a loose, ill-defined but divided sovereignty in the party, theoretically unworkable but in practice made to do so by the skill of all sides in never pressing the argument to the point

579. 'Socialist Cerberus', *The New Statesman*, 23 June 1961, pp.1009-1010.

580. Letter in *The New Statesman*, 30 June 1961, p.1044.

581. Letters in *The New Statesman*, 7 July 1961, 14-15.

at which deadlock ensued. That was his interpretation of Scarborough. McKenzie's assertion in the press that this uneasy division of powers should be ended by resting absolute control of the party with the PLP leaders was, Crossman was convinced, the surest way of destroying it. Fortunately no one at Westminster had taken any notice. Pelling, cheered by the news that a second edition was on its way, tried to point McKenzie in the right direction, first praising and then finding fault with "the absence of effective treatment of the role of the trade unions, and especially the trade union leadership", a serious defect which "tends to vitiate the general conclusions about the power structure of the party". McKenzie had, according to Pelling, seriously overlooked the power of the extra-parliamentary check upon the leadership's room for manoeuvre, of a kind wholly absent with the conservatives. The works by Bassett, Bullock, Allen and, he tentatively suggested, his own writings, would, if McKenzie cared to, rectify matters. But by the time McKenzie had done all of this, Pelling was unsure how much would be left of his original thesis. McKenzie, as many observers must have felt all along, "had never got the Labour party quite right".

Back came McKenzie, criticizing Crossman's equivocal role in the defence debates and his black-is-white insistence that a tiny group of party activists should have final authority over a parliamentary party representing millions of voters(582). He agreed with Pelling about the trade union factor - it was just a matter of emphasis. And he again asked the bull question: what would happen if Conference, asked to think again, still readopted unilateralism? Would the party leaders be won round or would they step down? What would Crossman say then? To this "knock-out" question, Crossman repeated his earlier view that, since all the other possible outcomes were so much worse, a compromise just had to be

582. Letter in *The New Statesman*, 14 July 1961, pp.49-50.

worked out. The fact that the leadership had not felt able to openly disregard a Conference resolution conclusively demonstrated a party operating on two axes of power, Westminster and Conference, the one counter-balancing the other. Pelling, noting McKenzie's concession, asked a question of his own - was McKenzie now alleging (amongst other things) that the leadership could survive conference defeats indefinitely? If he genuinely meant this, then *British Political Parties* was more "lopsided" than ever(583).

This flurry of correspondence was closed with a final letter from McKenzie(584). In it, and in ignoring Pelling, he agreed that power was divided, as it was in varying proportions in all political parties, requiring the leaders to carry their followers with them. But he stuck defiantly to his exposure of Labour's "myth" of extra-parliamentary authority which got it into constant trouble. This did not make him an "opponent" of the Labour party, as Crossman had charged. And he was happy to quote in his support an editorial in *The Guardian* newspaper pronouncing that "the aftermath of Scarborough has shown that Mr McKenzie was right ... the real significance of Mr Gaitskell's victory is that it has enormously increased the power of the parliamentary leadership and made the party conference less important than it has ever been". The emphatic reversal of the 1960 decision at the Blackpool conference in 1961, after a year-long campaign, proved beyond any doubt to him the one essential truth - the undisputed right of the party leadership to lead.

A movement

McKenzie's differences with his critics boiled down

583. Letters in *The New Statesman*, 21 July 1961, pp.82-83.

584. Letter in *The New Statesman*, 28 July 1961, p.118.

to different understandings of the Labour party as a part of a wider 'movement' - a combination of associations and loyalties, of industrial and political wings, of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary elements, founded in an earlier age but still providing the interests of labour with actual and symbolic force. McKenzie made short work of much of the mythologizing cant of 'this great movement of ours'. His onslaught on the doctrine of intra-party democracy fitted in with this. Words like solidarity and brotherhood he regarded as verbal traps. The point was not to be taken in by the signs and symbols of the 'movement', but to examine how the party in fact worked - and what it had to do to make itself electable. It could not be helped if, in the process, Labour had come to embody a vote-gathering, leadership-sustaining vehicle, a party-as-machine, domesticated by the electoral contest for power.

British observers, it must be said, had a far keener sense of the new factor which Labour brought into the body politic. This was understood by partisans of Labour ("Socialism is an idea", Cole said, but it is also, of course, a movement(585)) as much as by saddened Liberals ("McCallum, asked ... why he had never joined the Labour party, replied that he could never join a 'movement', which it was, and is, but only a party"(586)). Pelling, in a milder way, and Harrison, used the word 'movement' quite deliberately. The Labour party was many-centred and multi-purpose; it was not simply a political party like all other political parties. It was driven by informal, inexplicable motives which could not be weighed and counted. What the party believed mattered as much as anything else. It followed

585. G.D.H.Cole, 'The Growth of Socialism' in M. Ginsberg (ed), *ibid* (1959), p.79.

586. J.Critchley, *Heseltine - the unauthorised biography* (1987), p.14.

that McKenzie, on this view, would have done better to begin with the dissimilarities of the Conservatives and Labour. As was liable to happen in all social science, wayward conclusions could be traced back to faulty assumptions.

It was also the case that, rare and unequalled as the goings-on of 1960-61 were in offering a 'reality check' with which to test differing interpretations, the substance of the McKenzie thesis could not be conclusively proven either way. That, for one, was the opinion of Leon Epstein, looking at the defence conflict in the light of democratic principle and practice(587). The doctrine of parliamentary party freedom from external control, propounded by McKenzie, Epstein considered much more supple than his critics were allowing. Gaitskell's refusal, on the face of it, to bow to the will of Conference did seem to be in accord with the strong version of leadership. On the other hand, Scarborough had not established PLP supremacy. The lengths to which the leaders went in getting unilateralist decision overturned implied at the very least respect for the authority of Conference. "Uncertainty on this point cannot be fully resolved on the basis of the 1960-61 experience". "Unfortunately for political science", a second Conference defeat for Gaitskell had not materialized. All that they had to go on - and despite the best efforts of McKenzie, Crossman, Pelling, Harrison *et al* - was what had happened after one such defeat, and to this extent the evidence could be read both ways. But Epstein did agree that, in the final analysis, the "unworkability" of external party policy-making was shown up. This was not just because of the especial requirements of British constitutional practices

587. L.D.Epstein, 'Who Makes Party Policy: British Labor, 1960-61', in *The Midwest Journal of Political Science*, May 1962, pp.165-182.

that forced changes on the parties. It derived, as in every other advanced society, from the nature of the appeal to the voting public by any responsible party "wanting to gain and hold power". Hence the British Labour case had a broader application, its "excellent illustrative material" eventually finding its way into Epstein's wider generalizing about *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (1967).

The whole debate revealed the shaky basis of general covering laws in political and social science. McKenzie was roundly praised for having broken new ground. A mass of new material was imaginatively arranged and deployed, so as to emulate the clinical objectivity of natural science. But his theories were still subject to the inescapable constraints of approach and method. Too many of his basic terms (leadership control) were too imprecisely formulated. His working methods had been crudely inductive, seeking out only confirming instances, so that awkward evidence was excluded. He did not take sufficient note of human inventiveness, which can breathe life into the most overused slogans. And, given that outright refutation of any theory is anyway very unusual, it was left unclear what kind of proof would count in clinching or falsifying his case. The question of the distribution of internal party power seemed to be ultimately indecidable. There were no mutually recognised parameters for choosing between alternative explanations, without which there could be no measurable disciplinary progress. If political scientists were unable to resolve an issue in such favourable circumstances, they were unlikely to be able to do so at all. Incapable of being proved or disproved, all that one was left with was McKenzie's forthright elucidation, from a very personal point of view, of his one big idea.

William Pickles

That later developments did not fully bear out the substance of McKenzie's claims did not deter him from extending his argument into an analysis of permanent significance. He recognised that, in seeking to stress the originality of his book he had overstated his case, and went some of the way to meeting objections in a new edition in 1963, which included an epilogue bringing the story up to time of Alec Douglas Home and Harold Wilson. He did so by clarifying some of what he had taken for granted. He had not meant to mislead by saying that party ideology would be left out - he was "deeply concerned with the ideological issues and policy disputes which have racked the parties". He was ready to grant that the mass organization made a far larger impact in the Labour than the Conservative party. Both parties were anyway multi-faceted. All of this was understood. But he refused to admit that the degree of trade union influence had been inadequately dealt with - the relevant section on block voting was retitled but otherwise left unchanged. The basic argument was unaltered, indeed in some respects was stiffened by Labour's policy-making arrangements and the almost unlimited opportunities they provided for the perpetuation of internal disputes, fatally damaging - as Gaitskell had found - Labour's election prospects. Epstein, but not the self-deceiving Crossman, agreed with him. Re-working the text was, even so, kept to a minimum. McKenzie had welcomed in *The Observer* Dalton's vain, "off putting" but immensely informative *High Tide and After*, adding it to his updated bibliography(588). But its contents were not slotted into the narrative. The task had become too great.

The T.L.S. reviewer surely went too far in contending that the second edition would extinguish McKenzie's "dwindling" band of critics altogether. Not

588. R.T. McKenzie, 'Witness at the sick-bed of socialism', *The Observer*, 4 February 1962, p.29.

only had he generalized too hastily from the immediate post-war years, playing down (though he had had every excuse for doing so) the influence of leading trade unionists in throwing their support behind the party leaders up until the mid-fifties. He also tried to prolong the point into the late 50s and early 60s, when circumstances had so radically changed. William Pickles, McKenzie's L.S.E. colleague, a man "born into the Labour party", was the severest judge in this matter. Though he wrote little, Pickles had a close knowledge of the ways of the party and the back channels through which power and influence were exercised. Pickles believed that McKenzie was unaware of the part played by dominant union personalities like Lawther, Deakin and Williamson, taking their authority as in the nature of things. But the hereditary succession in the Transport and General Workers Union had gone wrong with the election of Cousins in 1957, and from that point on the McKenzie thesis was in trouble. The classic relationship by which the biggest unions constituted the "steadying ballast" of the party was turned upside down, and he had no doubt that this had been caused by a decline in the quality of new union leaders(589). So long, Pickles argued, as the majority of Labour MPs continued to take the view that they owed a primary duty to those who had voted for them, then the exercise of outside influence could not be said to be "unconstitutional". 1960-61 had explicitly demonstrated this. While this stood, the problem of party and parliament was reconciled. But no amount of stretching could hide the point that McKenzie's argument were wearing thin. The organic party-union alliance was a contingent one, and no longer quite the same as in the past. There was no two-party 'system' as such - this was to make things more complicated than they needed to be.

589. W.Pickles, 'Trade Unions in the Political Climate', in B.C.Roberts (ed), *Industrial Relations -contemporary problems and perspectives* (1962), pp.28-61.

What there was was a two-party fact, brought into being by the electors themselves, in ways that were still mysterious(590). Those trying to make the study of politics into a science raised hopes they could never fulfil. The less scientific it strove to be, the more worthwhile it would become.

Samuel Beer: bringing the ideology back in

Starkly expressed books excite strong opinions, and the McKenzie thesis was not without its many detractors. Others, at first persuaded by McKenzie's description of how alike the Labour and Conservative parties had become, had cause to reconsider. Samuel Beer, a Roosevelt and Kennedy liberal(591), was initially of like mind, surprised - on returning to England in 1953-54 - at the degree of party agreement and convergence, all so different from what had been expected on the basis of pre-war experience. Beer arranged for McKenzie to take over his office and teaching duties at Harvard while he was back in England again in 1958. Beer had already developed a typology of value clusters, viewed over time, which had found later expression in the group politics of post-war. These he allied to changing theories of representation, and the distinctive political formations to which they gave rise. McKenzie had been fascinated. But on further reflection, Beer pulled back, distinguishing between the similarities in promises and policies of the big two parties and "the underlying and continuing conflicts in their basic values and interests"(592) - the survival, in other words, of

590. W.Pickles, 'Democracy as Dialogue', *The Twentieth Century*, October 1957, pp.316-324.

591. A.Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days - John F. Kennedy in the White House* (1965), p.59.

592. Letter to the author from Samuel Beer, 11 January 1984.

ideological politics into the modern era. Labour's internal turmoil in the 1950s convinced him that there was more to the party than McKenzie had made out. Going through many policy documents from the party's early days brought home to him that Labour was not only moderate and reformist but also class-based and ideological. These observations he wove together in his dazzling, part-historical, part-sociological 'Modern British Politics' - a study of parties and pressure groups (U.S. title - *British Politics in the Collectivist Age*), a *tour de force* linking the evolution of the modern party and group system to the ideas and beliefs of the time in which they were created, an effort which had defeated others before him. From a point close to McKenzie, Beer ended up finding himself in direct opposition.

Beer announced his intentions at the first opportunity, conceding that politics was at least a struggle for power, but a struggle which embodied "radically different moral perspectives". Britain was an old country, constructed around tradition, custom and usage. The 'Tory' and 'Whig' forms of representation of the eighteenth century, though analytically separate, he found to have had a common root in their attachment to "estates", "ranks" and "orders", social groupings of which the nation was composed. These were superseded by newer, more diverse 'Liberal' and 'Radical' ideas of the following century, stressing individualism and popular sovereignty, the older notions of paternalism and community only reasserting themselves in the collectivist age, clearing the way for a massive growth of state power. Combined with older Tory notions of hierarchy and order, the new collectivist outlook made for strongly delineated class-based representation. The concentration in two main parties of democratic power and political programme ushered in the era of 'party government'. Social class, then, although unifying, also divided.

Having set the scene, Beer then turned (in parts two and three) to applying these ideas to Labour and Conservative politics.

Labour's early history belonged to the closing phase of liberal-radicalism, being a largely interest-centred coalition of pressures, of which the trade union element was dominant, but entirely consonant with the principles of advanced liberalism. It was only in 1918 with the adoption of avowedly socialist aims that the Labour party "became something more", registering an ideological shift but also leading to the creation of an entirely new political formation. Labour's bid for political supremacy tied in with a new ideological outlook. Socialist thinking fitted, even though it was "incidental to", the strategy of fully-fledged independence as a way of "asserting a claim to power". He took seriously Labour's rhetorical claim of solidarity of purpose, built around consciousness of class. It was not just another party in the state; it envisaged introducing a new social order. Socialist ideology was therefore the ideological counterpart to a party structured on democratic lines. Given this arrangement, he speculated, the ideological element of Labour politics might be expected to go into decline, once real power by the party was attained.

Two central chapters on the structure and ideology of the party covering the years from 1918-1948 examined the accuracy of this proposition. Power and purpose featured in equal part, but the latter placed identifiable limits on the former, modifying the behaviour of the party leaders. The nationalization of the mines and of iron and steel illustrated how this worked out in practice, leading up to the Mikardo resolution at the 1944 Conference which showed how (thanks to Dalton's memoirs) both rank-and-file pressure and elite manipulation helped to frame the content of the

1945 manifesto - a document he believed of remarkable resemblance to the position staked out in 1918.

A key assertion now followed. How far did his model of programmatic party account for the experience of the Attlee governments? Without Beer wanting to go too much into details, the answer was immediately forthcoming: "To an unprecedented extent in British political history the legislation of [that] Government was dictated by a party programme". Promise and performance exactly tallied. But more than this, the government did not, in an important rider, go beyond its pledges. It went so far, and no further. Furthermore, this solidarity of purpose was reinforced, once in power, by a highly disciplined party regime. Party cohesion, according to his analysis of parliamentary voting, was virtually unflawed. Agreement on the basic measures of party policy ensured that the party could act "effectively, harmoniously and coherently". The Attlee governments, then, were a winning combination, the historical culmination of democratic power and socialist purpose. They had shown that the Labour party could be made to 'work'.

Even as this was happening, however, the exercise of power and purpose had been influenced - in unintended ways - by the new group politics and the existence of peak producer organizations of the managed economy and the welfare state. The critical turning-point came in the 1947-50 period, when circumstances had compelled Labour to turn away from direct physical planning towards a much looser form of economic management, not as a result of a conscious "choice" or "decision" - that would be to over-rationalize - so much as a recognition of the impact of new forces with which the old party orthodoxy was unable to cope. The principal though not exclusive cause of this was the resistance which the government encountered from the trade unions to governmental control

over manpower and wage-fixing. The unions, as Roberts had previously pointed out in his book on *National Wages Policy in War and Peace* (1958) wanted controls on everything except wages. The government, moreover, preached fairness, while individual trade unions believed in preserving differentials. When voluntary wage restraint was finally agreed upon in 1948, it proved temporarily successful, but only at the price of reducing manpower planning to a dead letter. Both the material conditions of trade unionists, and the power position of the unions nationally, had dramatically improved over the preceding decade. A new social contract, underwritten in wartime, a shift in the economic balance of power which preceded the electoral swing, had been the decisive moment, of which 1945 and after, and indeed the competitive bidding of the 1950s, was a later phase. This new configuration of political power undercut the more doctrinaire style of politics and - the real importance of McKenzie's omission now becoming clear - acted as the impediment which the Labour government had run up against, robbing it of its forward impetus.

The obvious answer was for the party to adjust to the new realities, and revisionist sections in the party wished to do just that. But there were also fundamentalist elements hostile to any dilution of traditional socialist objectives. Opposing conceptions of socialism fought it out, ensuring that the party could not, after 1951, do what the Conservatives had managed after 1945, re-inventing itself while out of power. An elitist model, imagining a clash between leaders and followers, did not explain what had transpired. There was no question of the leadership imposing its views on the mass of the party. Conflict appeared at every level. The revisionists were no less doctrinal than the fundamentalists. It was the "compulsive ideologism" which lent to the quarrel its peculiar character. Labour had

chosen to be both ideological and democratic, fortunately combined in the years up to 1945. The ending of this relationship revealed the conflicting tendencies on which the party was built.

The Tory conception of governing, on the other hand, while it had altered to accommodate "bidding" for the support of consumer interests and "bargaining" with organized producer groups, remained distinctive and contrary, as the record of the later 1950s demonstrated. Re-defining the party's purpose in the 'Industrial Charter' had been almost entirely an elite initiative, expressive of its "will to power" and a self-sufficient explanation. And although some outside interests did exert some influence, it was wrong to see party policy merely as a reflex of business pressure. The leadership was not bereft of all guidance from the mass membership, but the crisis policies of 1955-58 exhibited "an essential Toryism" of stability and order where were regarded as valuable ends in themselves. Whatever the case, this was a quite different reaction from the way a Labour government would have handled the problem.

His closing verdict was unequivocal:

"The major test case in the period with which we are concerned is presented by the legislative program of the Labour Government of 1945-51. When one seriously asks where this program came from and how it achieved its authoritative place as a party commitment, one cannot avoid examining a long historical development that goes back to the party's very inception. Whatever may have been the actual role of that ultimate integer, the member of the rank and file, the vigorous group action of the party's components in this development

demonstrates a degree of pluralistic democracy that is worlds apart from the elitism of the Conservatives. For good or ill, moreover, throughout its disordered 1950s, Labour continued to display its lack of a true elite and its obsessive commitment to intraparty democracy. I conclude that in practice as in theory, in the actual distribution of power as in their reigning conceptions of authority, the two parties were deeply opposed"(593).

Labour and the Conservatives, he concluded in an upbeat *finale*, were the "institutionalised" agents of the reigning collectivist ideas. The operation of interests pulled them together, forcing them to occupy the middle ground in a classically executed two-party manoeuvre; but rival ideological outlooks kept pulling them apart, preventing any real identity of viewpoint. There was consensus, but also division. Happy the country in which such tranquillity obtained. Beer was to praise J.K. Galbraith for "clearing up the ambiguities" of the 'New Deal'(594). In explaining the origins of the historic 1945 programme, its eventual implementation, and what had brought it up, short, he had done the same for Labour's social revolution, effectively integrating belief and action.

.McKenzie was being good-humouredly but no less expressly challenged, as most reviewers were quick to appreciate. What there was less agreement about was whether the challenge was effectively carried off, and where this left the differences of view.

593. S.Beer, *ibid* (1965), p.388.

594 S.Beer, 'Two Models of Public Opinion', in *Royal Historical Society Transactions*, 24 1974, p.96.

Although Beer was "too polite" to do so openly, according to Noel Annan, his whole book was a refreshing and convincing controverting of McKenzie's well-known analysis(595). Beer's brilliant account had "set right", in Max Beloff's view, McKenzie's basic error by showing how the Labour party, in structure and spirit, was far more different than similar to the conservatives(596). The insistence on treating Labour as the party of a 'movement' was greeted (even if reluctantly) by Denis Brogan as remedying "one of the weaknesses of McKenzie's admirable *British Political Parties*"(597). McKenzie's bible, David Marquand wrote, might have been plausible for the 'ins' and 'outs' of the 1950s, but it had been knocked sideways by the long controversies of 1960-61, so that Beer, in re-emphasizing the force of ideas, was "the most powerful single counterblast"(598). At times exaggerating the differences for effect, Beer had nevertheless "made good" his criticism of the McKenzie thesis, Crick decided(599). His was not, however, just a necessary and overdue corrective. It was a "masterly" evocation of recent history which deserved acclaim on its own account.

Some thought the book's blemishes made its overall worth unsatisfactory. The two halves were not effectively joined. Beer had little to say about the processes of government, giving the impression that

595. N. Annan, 'This Unhappy Breed', *The New York Review of Books*, 11 November 1965, pp.25-28.

596. M. Beloff, in *Public Administration*, Spring 1966, pp.107-109.

597. D.W. Brogan, 'To Rule Britannia', *The New York Times Book Review*, 18 July 1965, pp.10-12.

598. D. Marquand, 'Myths about ideology', *Encounter* (February 1966), pp.68-75.

599. B. Crick, 'On Method and Matter', *Government and Opposition*, April 1966, pp.414-421.

policy was made by ministers. The parties were taken too much at their own valuation, especially the Labour party, for which he had consistently over-accentuated the importance of doctrine (and an American obsession with nationalization). The real character and atmosphere of political debate passed him by. He was "trapped" in the 'thirties and 'forties, when, the Labour party's agonies to the contrary, the real substance of politics was otherwise(600).

But it was Bob McKenzie's own review of Beer, carried in *The Observer* (601), that demonstrated how many were genuinely in two minds, his comments veering between approval and disappointment. Beer's depiction of the past was stimulating but tendentious, his view of the distribution of party power simply "wrong-headed". More than this, it was "retrograde", by which he meant that Beer accepted all too readily the propaganda of the literary left. Miliband's "much neglected" work, McKenzie said, would disabuse him of this. "I am sorry to find myself so completely in disagreement with those aspects of Professor Beer's model of the British party system because I have read this book with greater pleasure and profit than anything written on British politics for many a year".

Beer and McKenzie subsequently took part in an enlightening staged confrontation on BBC radio(602). Again, it was the historical evolution of Labour and not the Conservatives that proved the most puzzling. And again, 1945 was regarded as the decisive event in that

600. J.D.B. Miller, in *The Political Quarterly* (Summer 1966), pp.107-109.

601. R.T. McKenzie, 'Parties in Perspective', *The Observer*, 5 September 1965, p.26.

602. Reproduced in the 'Book Section' of *Parliamentary Affairs*, Summer 1966, pp.373-384.

evolution. Beer, in outlining his original purpose, explained that the more he had looked at the inter-war period and wartime, the more he had been persuaded that the parties differed both in their structure of power and in their social purpose. A major clash of ideas and social forces had taken place. Out of this conflict, and it could not be made sense of in any other way, the 1945 programme had emanated. To McKenzie's reply that the 1918 commitment came from above, with little party discussion, Beer reminded him of the trades union presence, a built-in feature of Labour that had no parallel in the Conservative party, and he called in Pelling as his expert witness. Both seemed to agree that Labour was the more programmatic party; it was just that, for McKenzie, policy originated in both from on high. In the case of 1945 this was all too obvious - had Labour been in power for the same length of time as the Conservatives, it would be plain for all to see. Beer paraphrased his chapter on the post-war collision of socialist orthodoxy and external reality. Labour's great problem had been "how to cope with the trade unions in a period of inflationary pressure", a problem which he had spent a good deal of time in his book sorting out. The failure of Labour to re-adapt thereafter, in the same way as the Tories had done, suggested something else. The party had a heritage of ideas, a deeply embedded fundamentalism, holding it back. The two North American protagonists exchanged parting pleasantries. McKenzie saw a gulf in British party politics no greater than the one in the United States. Beer was convinced that the British did not see the importance of ideas in their own political life. There they left it, with *British Political Parties* and *Modern British Politics* the two great bookends of the political science literature, their authors arguing about how far, and for what reasons, the fierce ideological passions of pre-war Britain, which came to a head in 1945, had gently subsided.

Beer's stand-off with McKenzie perfectly described the mixed fruits to be garnered from "growth points" in political science(603). His point had been that a science of politics would only be found by trying it out. And yet neither the evidence nor the methods would admit of a final conclusion. Beer had forced the need to modify the McKenzie view, without completely demolishing it. A flat contradiction was not the same as a blanket refutation. It was not that either was demonstrably wrong. There was simply no way of telling, no means of proving or disproving plausible hypotheses that might (as every political scientist hoped) satisfy scientific criteria(604). Both approaches were, in their own terms, justifiable. That was why it made no sense to pick out a winner, as many commentators had done(605).

603. B.Crick, 'The Tendency of Political Studies', *New Society*, 3 November 1966, pp.681-683.

604. P.Pulzer, in *The American Political Science Review*, June 1966, pp.400-402.

605. J.P.Nettl, *Political Mobilization* (1967), p.336.

The Concept of Labourism

Hardly in use before the 1950s, Labourism caught on in radical circles as an all-purpose label for describing the characteristically ambiguous politics of the Labour party, revealed in the party's trials and tribulations after 1945. It was the construction which the New Left put upon what Labour governments did. Imprecision was perceived to be of the essence. Marking a clear advance upon ideas that were no more than progressive and liberal, but geared expressly to the interests of organised labour, the party's kind of socialism fell some way short of a major assault on power and privilege. Positing a slow transformation of economy and society by mildly and marginally collectivist reforms, the leaders of the party hoped, by pursuing a policy of class collaboration, to head off business antagonism. Untheoretical and self-limiting, it was the doctrine of Labourism which held socialists and social reformers together in the same party, blurring the issue of the party's central objectives. Paradoxically, it was the very same achievements of the Attlee governments, by taking the principles of the Labourist project as far as they could be taken, which brought the issue of the party's fundamental purposes to the point. The internal party debate was framed in Gaitskellite and Bevanite terms. Those further to the left employed the concept of Labourism as a way of escaping all Labourite categories of thought.

Ralph Miliband's "new era" opened when Labour had first entered the wartime coalition in May 1940 - 1945 could not be appreciated except in relation to the war years of popular radicalism and state intervention, of

which Labour was the electoral beneficiary(606). Nevertheless the first Attlee government "could well boast to have done more than any government had done before". This was not just a grudging recognition from Miliband of the changes that were introduced - they were, he conceded, "real, and of permanent importance". In many instances, change had taken a form which business had strongly disliked, and which no Conservative government would have ever contemplated. For the representatives of traditional England, the early post-war years were a moment of great danger.

That this did not, in fact, turn out to be the case could be explained, in large part, by the way in which Labour's leaders conceived of their task. Hesitant and inhibited, Attlee and his colleagues swept into power on a surge of working-class confidence; but they also made it their job to curb and restrain those expectations. Moderation and loyalty were urged on their followers. Reforms were justified on a piecemeal basis, rather than as part of a larger remaking of society. This was nowhere more clear than in the government's handling of nationalisation, "a good deal less extensive than the Labour activists had wished, or than those who had voted for Labour in July 1945 would in all probability have been ready to support". The government's overall impact, Miliband said, had to be viewed in the light of post-war reconstruction and the need to reorganise the industrial base of the country in order to preserve and strengthen it. The whole point was not to nationalise British industry, but to control it and to bend it to the government's wishes. Miliband returned to the Mikardo resolution from the 1944 party conference which had forced a pledge about large-scale common ownership upon a half-hearted leadership. It was this head of steam built

up by the rank-and-file which was subsequently so rapidly expended.

Just as the age of reform preceded Labour's accession, so it also came to a close midway through its term of office. Although he had not been aware of it at the time, the moment of truth had occurred in 1947-48, when the bulk of Labour's programme had already been enacted. At this critical point, the nationalisation of the iron and steel industry was embarked upon, a symbolic and practical measure of Labour's radical intent, the only step which entailed a serious threat to the private sector. And it was at this stage that the weight of industrial pressure was brought to bear. Divisions within Labour's own party and government weakened its authority. The moral for Miliband was immediately apparent. Labour had tried to back away in the face of an unequal struggle with powerful vested interests. If Attlee and Morrison were so ready to discard party policy to reach agreement with the steel masters, it must mean that they did not really 'believe' in socialism. They took the reforming legislation of 1945 to be the social revolution. With a government that had no intention of replacing the ethic of private ownership with one of collective organisation for a common end, iron and steel nationalisation could only be an awkward leftover. Still, at least the value of nationalising had a place in the scheme of things for old-style Labourites like Morrison, however defensive and apologetic; the revisionists of the later 1950s were prepared to abandon it altogether. For Miliband, increased state control of industry was the essential condition for socialist advance.

The case study by George Ross (1965) of the genesis of the Iron and Steel Act, written under Miliband's tutorship, elaborated on how far the party's leaders

brought their difficulties upon themselves(607). The legislation, Ross affirmed, amounted - unlike all the other earlier bills - to "a direct attack on the productive core of British capitalism". It was the one measure which promised to make real inroads into the profitable sector of industry. Steel was power. But the enterprise came to grief because the party had not worked out its preparations thoroughly enough in advance, because the Cabinet had, by all accounts, allowed the matter to drag on in indecision and delay over three lost years, and because of the lack of firm leadership from the inscrutable Attlee, this last a major drawback for "a serious reforming party". The forces ranged against the bill, both inside and more especially outside Parliament, were ready to stop at nothing in order to thwart the government's plans. The protracted wrangle over iron and steel - according to Ross - carried lessons for the re-nationalisation of iron and steel to which Labour was pledged in its 1964 election manifesto.

In Tom Nairn's hands, this kind of thickly descriptive account was replaced by an adept, all-encompassing analysis of the Labour party in which the abstract idea of Labourism was invested with a tangible form(608). Everything was explicable in relation to it. It was the beginning and the end of any discussion about Labour and the left, out of which all other considerations flowed.

In a fundamental sense, the Labour party's strengths were also its weaknesses. It looked to a visionary future, but was tied to a mindless past. Dominated by trade union concerns and expressing the unity of the

607 G.Ross, *The Nationalisation of Steel - one step forward, two steps back?* (1965).

608 T.Nairn, 'The nature of the Labour Party', in P.Anderson and R.Blackburn (eds), *Towards Socialism*(1965), pp.159-217.

working classes, it also harboured within itself a peculiarly weak left. Founded as a challenge to bourgeois society, it could not escape from its subordinating values. Transforming itself into a nominally socialist party in 1918, it remained in effect the extremely conservative agency it had always been, joined by unradical theorists creamed off from the liberal intelligentsia. The left were locked as a result into an organisational design, the 'labour alliance', which instead of liberating, was imprisoning.

1945 was, for Nairn, the pivotal time for Labourism, when "the vague image of a new world ... half dream, half reality in the peculiar context of the war, hung over society". Most of the groundwork had been laid in the war years. A revolutionary opportunity to move in a socialist direction could be glimpsed. Indeed the earliest changes it introduced could still be regarded as opening instalments of reform which would, by their cumulative force, add up to the makings of Fabian socialism. But in the act of bringing these culminating changes about, a complex of dynamic forces transformed the meaning of the revolution, neutralising its radical import. The details, as he remarked, did not concern him (the nationalisation of iron and steel was passed over in a cursory couple of sentences). What mattered was that a government which in certain respects was successful, in other respects was clearly not - necessary and popular as many of the changes were, they had been integrated into a still predominantly capitalist order which lent them their real, functional significance. The Labour party was not equipped either by organisation or ideology to remodel society at all levels or break the established universe of rule and power. This was the actual extent of the failure of Labourism:

"The chance was given it in 1945. The third

Labour government of 1945-50 is the decisive happening in the history of Labourism, after 1918. In retrospect, the Labour party seems always to have been tensed for this moment. A great electoral triumph, massive popular support, an overwhelming majority in parliament - Labourism's moment of self-realisation had arrived at last, it entered upon its inheritance. But, as we have seen, the contradictions and confusions it was made of were such that its period of affirmation was bound also to be a period of crisis and disintegration; being a bundle of disparate forces united in a delusion, Labourism could not rise to express its true character without at once threatening this unity, without disentangling dream from reality in a way fatal to its own continued existence. Its political victory necessarily presaged its own division and defeat. This fact is the key to most of what has happened to the Labour party, between 1945 and the present day"(609).

This was to handle (mishandle in Thompson's view) history with a vengeance, pulling and stretching and cutting it to fit a prior model. There were few or no facts with which to gain a purchase. Nairn's conceptualised high theory was not straight history at all, but an omniscient, superhistorical mind in flight.

By the middle sixties, as it happened, a great many other accounts of the passage of the iron and steel legislation had come into being, almost all of them focussing on the exceptional, atypical example which it represented. It had had important constitutional implications, owing to the anticipated and actual

opposition of the House of Lords. A.H.Hanson, recoiling from all active left-wing involvement, examined it as an unusual exercise in parliamentary procedure(610).

There were the noteworthy origins of Labour's iron and steel pledge for Beer to consider. Hodgson highlighted the steel debates from the point of view of the recovery of the Conservative party(611). Iron and steel had also marked an important stage in the development of pressure group influence. It cropped up in the accomplished industry-study by Burn(612). The diversity of approaches reflected the usefulness of the issue in providing material for absorbing illustration. But none of these authors began from the initial assumption that there were underlying economic and social forces which largely determined the way in which events turned out. To do so was - Dalton said in so many words to Miliband(613) - to have an unreal appreciation of the serious constraints with which party leaders had to contend, and, by the same token, to absurdly underestimate the economic potentialities of democracy. Ross, going most of the way Miliband had gone, had helpfully shown how *not* to go about writing up the history of an item of parliamentary legislation. Iron and steel was critical, but for various reasons connected with factors that were the normal content of liberal democratic politics.

To New Lefters, all of this was unacceptable. Crisis put existing institutions to the test, revealing their true character. Iron and steel repaid close study not for lots of little reasons, but for one big one - as

610 A.H.Hanson and H.V.Wiseman, *Parliament at Work: a casebook of parliamentary procedure* (1962), pp.121-180.

611 G.Hodgson, 'The Steel Debates', in M.Sissons and P.French (eds), *ibid* (1963), pp.306-329.

612 D.L.Burn, *The Steel Industry 1939-1959* (1961).

613 H.Dalton, review of Miliband in *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 33 1962, pp.86-88.

an eyeopening instance of the configuration of political and economic power, which the Labour government was neither prepared or able to combat. All of the Labourist apologias made sense, but only if they were viewed in their correct capitalist context.

There is little doubt that the New Left explanations brought about a significant widening of the terms of the argument about 1945. Many of the established Fabian certainties were upset, which even hostile commentators could appreciate(614). A means was devised to expose Labour politics and the deficiencies of the Labour left in an uncorrupted idiom. 'End of ideologists' who had taken this to mean the presumed demise of marxism had had their expectations confounded. But with the widening also went a distinct polarising of liberal and marxist opinion. Liberals suspected that theorising induced the socialist left to treat abstractions as real, and that to try and explain everything - at such a high level of generality - was to explain nothing. Concepts were far too politically charged. Commitment in the sense that marxists used the term was, to the open-minded, just another word for bias. New Lefters, even when disagreeing among themselves (the Miliband-Thompson notion of Labourism was much more elastic than the structural variant of Anderson and Nairn), dismissed these rebukes out of hand. Factual evidence informed concepts, but equally a body of facts needed organising. Relating general concepts to particular facts was an intractable problem, and one moreover which always left room for friction and argument. There was no way of evading the choice between frameworks. The non-ideological were ideological like everyone else, could they but gain an insight into their own predicament. It was the distinction, ultimately, between differences of

614 G.L.Arnold, in L.Labedz (ed), *ibid* (1962), p.312.

approach - all legitimate ideas and interests of which, in liberal theory, harmonise - and approaches which are fundamentally irreconcilable.

1945 in the 1960s

While denying that students of the recent past suffered from any "special disability" - all that was required was the refinement of techniques to cope with the sheer bulk of documentation - the growing band of contemporary historians were still hampered, in any comprehensive presentation of long-term trends in modern British history, by their ignorance of what was to happen next. "This fact alone", David Thomson explained, "would seem to rule out reliance on any theory which implies one eventual direction or destination, as does the theory of historical progress"(615). With that qualification in mind, however, it was possible, he felt, in commending his Pelican history of *England in the Twentieth Century* (1964), to separate out a few of the most striking changes which future developments could hardly obliterate altogether - the march to full democracy, the transmutation of Empire into Commonwealth, and the defeat (in 1945) of fascist tyranny. This last date marked, he thought, a decisive punctuation point in British, and world, history. The American scholar, Alfred Havighurst, who had completed a "frankly political" survey of *Twentieth Century Britain* two years beforehand, had come up against the same difficulty - the inability to see those episodes closest to the present day in due proportion, since everything appeared to be of equal significance - by pressing the leading idea of a long drawn-out struggle to achieve social democracy, delayed after World War One by economy and inertia but brought to the common man after 1945, effectively tying post-1945 to

615 D. Thomson, 'The Writing of Contemporary History' in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, January 1967, p.32.

pre-1914 British society(616). But even this larger theme was not coherently or consistently pursued. In A.J.P. Taylor's Oxford *English History 1914-1945* any such doubts were stilled. History got "thicker" as time passed, Taylor acknowledged. More interested in individuals (and particularly the doings of politicians) than institutions, he saw only "the rise of the people", who had turned against the men at the top in May 1940, paving the way for the reforms which - in Taylor's rhetorical flourish - were to come with war's close. He made no apologies for declaring that he had been drawn to hurrying the story along in the way he intended it to run. *Post-Victorian Britain*, L.C.B. Seaman's 1966 history, finished before and "in no way" derived from Taylor, took the slightly longer vista from 1902 until 1951 in one go, its author convinced that the period had been too often divided up into chunks to the detriment of the later forties. He found a unifying thread in the contrasting trends of "absolute growth" and "relative decline", taking it up to the early post-war days, after which, as he remarked, the world changed out of all recognition and was no part of his account. Norton Medlicott, in setting out the major concerns of his own general history of *Contemporary Britain 1914-1964* (1967) was seemingly undaunted by the size of the task, finding - in reply to sceptics - that the contemporary historian had, on balance, many advantages, and doubting whether "the voice of impartial prosperity would speak with any more unanimity than our own"(617). To him the main impression was self-evident - "it must be the impact of an almost continuous series of external crises on the domestic outlook, economy and national policy" which the country had nevertheless come through. His aptitude for

616 A.F.Havighurst, *Twentieth Century Britain* (1962).

617 W.N.Medlicott, *Contemporary England 1914-1964* (1967), p.1.

aptitude for international and diplomatic history gave this added substance. T.O. Lloyd (1970)(618), in a shorter Oxford history designed to take account of the flood of work registering a change away from traditional political narrative to society and the social structure, set imperial retreat alongside internal contentment, couched in a viewy and readable form. But he was disturbed to find that, the nearer one got in time, and the more rapidly that 'instant' histories were overtaken, the harder it was to tell exactly what had been going on. This was, as Lloyd's general editor, John Roberts, remarked, only the reflection of a basic truism about history: "that it is theoretically boundless, a continuing debate, and that historians in each generation re-map and re-divide its subject-matter in accordance with their interests and the demands of society". Definitiveness, in general histories above all, was not to be had.

In covering such a difficult and event-filled period, however, any general historian needed an angle of approach or gift for putting a pattern on the past, without which no history can be conceived of. This need was, despite Thomson's reservations, met by a toned-down version of enlightenment and improvement, of all-party, welfare state Whiggery, still tinged with national pride but more suited to a Britain with fewer resources and fewer illusions. That said, prospective problems and challenges of the kind outlined by Barraclough made even the most tentative of pronouncements more impermanent than usual(619).

It was noteworthy, considering these points, to see how reviewers - to a man - thought that, of all the

618 T.O.Lloyd, *Empire to Welfare State, English History 1906-1967* (1970).

619 G.Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (1964).

periods under discussion, the general treatment of the later 1940s was handled to best effect, all "the right sources" being made use of (Poirier on Havighurst(620)), the varying emphases on internal and external factors "given their proper place" (in Medlicott, according to Mowat(621)), the balance of success and failure "carefully assessed" (Pelling's verdict on Thomson(622)). They had attained a level of historical perspective, spelling out the established direction that historical inquiry had taken and the still very considerable areas left unanswered and disputable, that could not really be said for earlier decades. The state of historical play was summarised, through several pairs of eyes, leading to a remarkable, if unsynchronised, congruence of opinion.

All were agreed that post-war politics only made sense precisely because of the war, and that in the effort to overcome foreign dangers a type of democratic totalitarianism had been created in Britain, the probable effect of which was to give an accelerated push to state-led national mobilisation. Even so, the "special legacy" of the war years was uncertain. A Conservative government in power after 1945 might not have made all that much difference; as it was, the opportunity went to the Labour party, though this should not (and not just in hindsight) have come as such a surprise. The severely weakened state of the British economy made post-war finance, foreign trade and international policy interdependent, even though most ordinary voters were oblivious to the extent of Britain's reliance on the goodwill of its allies and quickly became absorbed in

620 P.Poirier, in *The Journal of Modern History*, June 1963, pp.202-203.

621 C.L.Mowat, in *History*, June 1968, pp.266-267.

622 H.Pelling, in *History*, June 1965, p.249.

domestic concerns. The transition to peace was accompanied by an extensive programme of nationalisation, social reform and state control (including important reforms relating to education, housing and town planning) but these, significantly, were not advanced in any fierce ideological spirit. Their total effect was neither as favourable nor as disastrous as supporters or critics at the time alleged. 'Social revolution' was too grandiose a term - rather Labour prevented a return to the class bitterness and economic insecurity of the inter-war years, so that its objectives were distinctly backward-looking. Government intervention had aided recovery, and yet other European countries had recovered too, and more speedily. Whether reform, especially in welfare, had wrongly channelled spending away from industrial investment was something that historians would eventually have to settle. But planning had never been more than improvised, and prosperity - as the buffeting of devaluation and the Korean war showed - was somewhat tenuous. The international dimension to domestic reform was unmistakable. One did not need to wait until the opening of the archives to see that. The relinquishing of overseas responsibilities was, particularly in the case of India, a shining achievement; it was doubtful whether this made up for the tragic division of East and West (which Bevin had admittedly done his utmost to avoid), or British hostility towards the early moves in favour of greater European integration. What was clear was how rapidly the solidarity and common purpose of wartime had run down, to Labour's great disadvantage. By the end of its time in office, the government had lost the initiative, was bereft of ideas, and had a prime minister who, though he had displayed the "highest qualities", did not have the means to turn the situation around. The revival of the Conservatives was largely down to Labour's own deficiencies. Britain was caught between the old (and, to many voters, increasingly frustrating) society

of fair shares, and a new society of rising living standards, to which Labour was ill-attuned.

These common observations about the years of Labour rule, outweighing any lesser differences of authorial style or emphasis, did much to convince others of the success each historian had had in reaching a remarkably dispassionate verdict. They earned all the epithets - sensible, reflective, reasonable, unemotional - which the disinterested scholar most prized. Their agreedness was enough for Mowat, surveying the latest developments, to be able to say that the Attlee governments had "passed into history"(623).

The outstanding exception to this relaxed level-headedness, at least in terms of imaginative force and narrative control, was Alan Taylor's *English History*, a chronologically structured but deliberately iconoclastic work which swept aside what Bullock called the history with which "most of us have grown up"(624). Throwing in his lot with "the common people" who had "deserved better leaders than on the whole they got"(625), Taylor followed up his controversial reading of the origins of the Second World War with (amongst much else) a brilliantly pointed demolition of wartime mythology, distributing praise and blame in unexpected ways and ending, perversely, with a stirring passage celebrating the inspirational effects that the war had and, for him, still symbolised. Marred by factual slip-ups (a number of them spotted by

623 C.L.Mowat, *ibid* (1971), p.16.

624 Quoted in J.C.F.Littlewood, 'The Rise of the People', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Autumn 1966, p.311.

625 A.J.P.Taylor, 'Accident Prone, or What Happened Next', in *Encounter*, October 1977, p.61.

Pelling(626)), eyebrow-raising exaggerations and uncheckable anecdotes, many fellow professionals were prepared, all the same, to exonerate Taylor. Indeed, in denouncing so much of what needed to be denounced, Taylor had, Elton thought, indicated how much prejudices can assist(627). The uneven, lop-sided shape of the text did not pass unnoticed. The lack of coverage of the growth and organisation of the labour movement or of the main currents of intellectual and ideological life was a significant neglect of elements otherwise so central to the history of the left(628). Taylor's own philosophy of history, he argued disarmingly, was that he had no philosophy, other than that things happened in the order in which they had happened, and that the historian's role was to seek to recount the course of events as best he could. His unconventionality, in other words, was kept within the conventional bounds that commanded scholarly attention.

Welcomed as an improvement upon the bland, ultra-respectable, 'uninvolved' studies of Havighurst, Thomson *et al* (the political debates of the 1950s had for Taylor "the flavour of warmed-up tea"), he had still not, in his crossbench radical way, allowed his anarchic dislikes to develop into a truer and deeper assessment of modern Britain, or so the more robust historians claimed(629). For this the enforcement of a false standard of decorous, matter-of-fact impartiality was the main fault. Writers and reviewers alike had aspired to be objective, and yet

626 H.Pelling, in *Past and Present*, April 1966, pp.149-158.

627 G.R.Elton, *Modern Historians on British History 1485-1945 - a critical bibliography* (1970), p.145.

628 M.Shock, in *The English Historical Review*, October 1967, pp.807-812.

629 J.C.F.Littlewood, *ibid* (1966).

it was an objectivity narrowly construed to mean that they should stay impersonal and (most Englishly and trivially of all) *non-party political*. Taylor's traditionalist offence was that he had personalised his history, conveying 'Taylor's' own times and 'Taylor's' England. At least he had tried to break down the suffocating agreement of middle opinion. It was not the denial or suppression of values that counted, but their constructive usage. Those deficient in an attitude of engagement were the ones who, by skirting round relevant but unsettling arguments (the recent questioning of post-war redistribution, or the record of economic management) were holding the historical debate back. Provisional history was also noticeably trite and unduly complacent. Impartiality - in this light - turned out to be a bias, a bias against a more profound understanding.

The Home Front

War holds a natural attraction (Marx, Spengler, Toynbee) for theory-builders. Wars have occasioned many of the most decisive turning points in history. Their destructive impact has been unmistakeable. Historians have drawn from this the conclusion that outbreaks of armed conflict represent a breakdown in civilised relations; economists have thought so too. The liberal interpretation was that all wars - in human and material terms - were costly. The increasing scale of 'great' wars in the twentieth century emphasised their increasing destructiveness. But along with this went a corresponding appreciation of greater mass involvement - conscription, war economics, the bombing of civilian targets, evacuation - in total war. From here it was but a short step to the consideration of the social dimension of war, and its effects on the social system of the belligerents. Titmuss, in his uplifting official history(630), led the way in arguing that Britain's war effort had necessitated securing the involvement of the mass of the population by holding out the prospect of material reward. Hancock and Gowing, in one of the introductory volumes in the same series, spoke of an implied wartime contract between government and people(631). Andrzejewski (1954)(632) developed the idea of the military-participation ratio to show how those social groups drawn into participating in a conflict would be in the best position to press their

630 R. Titmuss, *ibid* (1950).

631 W. Hancock and M. Gowing, *The British War Economy* (1949), p. 541.

632 S. Andrzejewski, *Military Organisation and Society* (1954).

claims on the state. Although Abrams raised several doubts about this view(633), it was already the case that the matter was argued over without recourse to the actual (and therefore contestable) merits of the changes which the war introduced. Because the Second World War was followed in most Western countries by the long economic boom of the nineteen fifties, it was no difficult task to imply that prosperity and security had come about as a consequence of it, even though other countries which stayed out of the fighting benefitted too. Welfare advance might - in what was coming to be an accepted sociological dictum - be a concomitant feature of all developing capitalist societies; but it was military factors which many regarded as the driving force behind the vast social changes since 1900. Warfare, directly or indirectly, begat welfare.

Significantly, however, it was not chiefly military historians who were the quickest to take this up. Initially presented in a much looser form, Arthur Marwick's innovative analytical frame for the "modes" of social change in war, published in *Britain in the Century of Total War* in 1968 when he was only in his early thirties(634), exhibited an unusual readiness to theorise on the basis of ideas and concepts far removed from the traditional soldierly interest in the conduct of military campaigns. Combining detailed knowledge of special areas (his articles on 'middle opinion' in the 1930s and on the Labour party's neglected contribution to the development of the welfare state were models of their

633 P.Abrams, 'The Failure of Social Reform, 1918-1920', in *Past and Present*, No 24 1963.

634 A.Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War - war, peace and social change 1900-1967* (1968).

kind(635) with an overall interpretative scheme, Marwick advanced a general explanation bringing together the transforming influences of war, peace and social change. Of the two World Wars, the psychological shock of the First had been by far the greater, he acknowledged. But otherwise, the overall effects were strikingly similar, and could be seen in the working out of a number of operating mechanisms - by way of the disruptive action of war, and the need to reconstruct; by means of the dissolution and transformation of ideas and institutions; through the emergence of new groups and classes reaching out for a share of involvement; and as a result of the heightened emotional expectations of those living through the experience of war. All of these modes were mutually reinforcing. They could be further classified by distinguishing "guided" from "unguided" consequences - that is, the conscious acts of politicians and others working towards certain ends, such as in state-led economic reorganisation, as compared with the unco-ordinated, but no less effective, force of independent variables like technological change or changes in social values. His examination of the halting progress of social reform from 1940 to 1945 illustrated the usefulness of this perception. Bombing, evacuation and the urgent call on the hospital services revealed shortcomings in existing provision which new initiatives were designed to rectify. An increase in state power began as a means of turning the economy over to military purposes. A new importance was attached to the labour unions. There was a stirring of common decency and national purpose. At the same time, the pressure for reform in social security, employment policy and national

635 A. Marwick, 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political Agreement', in *The English Historical Review*, 79 1964, pp.285-298; 'The Labour Party and the Welfare State in Britain, 1900-1948', in *The American Historical Review*, December 1967, pp.380-403.

health was counteracted by interested (and very senior) opposition. The one legislative measure which did get passed - the Education Act - was also the least sweeping, and for that reason. The upheaval of war aggravated the problems and suggested solutions; it was left to political priorities to establish the exact lines that reform would take. But all this took place within the context of irreversible changes in society at large, especially in better standards and a new social morality, which the state was powerless to affect. This strong sense of a society in motion, and of society-led change, was Marwick's trademark.

It followed that the development of British society in the immediate aftermath of the war was largely shaped by the legacy of the war years, and the competing influences and cross-pressures it had provoked - coupled, of course, with the election of a state-minded Labour party armed with much bolder proposals than its pre-war ones had been. Such confidence was not, even so, enough to disguise the improvised nature of many of its subsequent policies, which lacked coherence or well-defined shape. Planning was more apparent than real. A fully integrated welfare state was no more than a pious aspiration. Educational reform - which lay at the heart of the class divide - had no effect whatsoever. The sole achievement of a specifically socialist character was the government's insistence on the principle of universality in state welfare, "one of the few aspects of Labour policy that [did] show a genuine revolutionary intention". But there was to be no "mighty blow" at class distinctions. The Second World War, unlike the First, was not, then, succeeded by disillusionment. There was something more akin to a relative, if spartan, contentment, since the very worst features of inter-war life had been done away with. This was, all the same, a grave disappointment to the liberals and leftists writing

in the 1950s who had been hoping for so much more. The working class had lost its potency as an agency of radicalism. No concerted pressure for fundamental change was now remaining. 'Butskellism' - in economic and social matters - ruled. Talk of a social revolution (an expression which Marwick confessed he used to use) was extravagant. Labour was brought up short by its own failings, as well as by the perennial obstacles of compromise, traditionalism, financial stringency, Tory adaptability and an unyielding and in many respects pre-democratic political structure which had not been exposed to the full blast of war. Critics of left and right could agree in seeing immediate post-war as a response to the temporary difficulties of capitalist production in a time of shortages and dislocation, and nothing more. The aim of classlessness was noble and worthy; the eventuality fell dismally short. The social revolution, both historically and historiographically, was "shrinking".

"Total war", he observed from the other end of the sixties, "amid all the confusing legacy of destruction and loss, has had the effect of bringing about social change on a major scale". Its negative effects were joined by many positive and in the long-term beneficial ones. The difficulty was not wartime *per se* but the peacetime playing out of the social contest, when the forces of entrenched authority were able to reassert themselves. This was a specifically British conundrum. Where - he wondered - was the next pressure for change to put things right, short of another war, going to come from?

That the war produced paradoxical effects, as Marwick defined them (he made no large claim for the resolution of this paradox), was not an outcome likely to endear him to his elders. Sir Colin Coote, writing in

The Daily Telegraph, was astounded by Marwick's willingness to overlook the horrors of war in the belief that they speeded progress towards socialism. The objectivity of youth also brought insensitivity. If, as Donald Read commented(636), this was an unfair charge, it did at least indicate that Marwick's acceptance of war would surprise those over 40, still more those over 70, for whom the trial of the Great War had been a personally felt catastrophe (Coote, who was born 1893, was wounded and gassed on the Western Front). It was a generation gap that was bound to grow, since in the years to come the history of twentieth century Britain "will be increasingly written by scholars for whom not merely the Kaiser but also Hitler is just one more figure in history". As for himself, he found that the book could have come to the analytical part more promptly, notwithstanding the fact that Marwick wrote "from an avowedly left-wing viewpoint". Even discounting the more controversial elements of his argument, it still stood as a valuable and stimulating synthesis of the present state of scholarship.

In Alan Milward's stern view(637), it failed even on that score. Charting the course of the debate on the economic effects of war, and the swing away from the older liberal perspective, Milward admitted that Marwick's Titmuss-like account was based on more reading than, for example, Abrams; "neither, however, rests on research". The superiority of research over opinion deserved to be encouraged. Well or ill-informed social comment would not suffice. The debate had so far also suffered from an "unfortunate" parochiality, leaving out

636 D.Read, in *History*, 54 1969, pp.322-323, from which the reference to Coote's *Daily Telegraph* review is taken.

637 A.Milward, *The Economic Effects of the World Wars on Britain* (1970), p.24.

the wider and altered international financial situation in wartime. It was time for historians to move on from the examination of short-term changes during the war itself - which were not really at issue, in his view - to the longer-term evolution of Britain, and the way they had started to think of British society over recent years.

Like Marwick, Angus Calder was "the child of a distinguished intellectual family (Ritchie Calder was a journalist with *The Daily Herald*, and was active in the 1941 Committee and the C.N.D.) with a political bent"(638). After Cambridge, he went on to do postgraduate work at the University of Sussex, completing a mammoth two-volume doctorate on the Commonwealth party which had flourished in 1942-45. Apart from interviewing and looking through the private papers of old party members, Calder was also one of the first to consult the wartime reports of Mass Observation, an organisation which had pioneered the use of impressionistic social surveying in the late thirties, and it was the insights gleaned from this source, allied to the detail contained in the 30-odd volumes of the official civil histories of the war, which he used to compile *The People's War* (1969), a lively, witty and ironic celebration of the Second World War as it was lived through and endured by ordinary people, "protagonists in their own history in a fashion never known before". But this was no social history of a conventional kind, only dealing with more extreme conditions. There was no distancing of the author from his subject. Calder meant to recover and recreate the everyday experience of the civilian war, recounting what it had really been like behind the screen of official propaganda, and to make this accessible to a larger audience. The object was to empathise, not to

638 E. Bowen, 'All people great and small', *The Spectator*, 20 September 1969, p.367.

launch (as one reviewer erroneously saw it) upon "an essay in unadulterated nostalgia"(639). His sympathy with the popular hardships of wartime was total. War entailed harnessing the willing co-operation of the masses to work towards a new democracy after the conflict was over; in response to this call, as Calder described it, the people "surged forward".

Calder went to great lengths to differentiate, in a way Asa Briggs (his PhD supervisor) said Taylor had not(640), between peoples. There had been different experiences at different levels, even, ranging across the whole of the British Isles, different wars - "it was not a homogenous nation of heroes and Stakhanovites". Often there was nothing to unite the conscript, or female factory worker, or rural evacuee, save for a shared sense of disaster and danger. The sheer diversity of wartime living militated against any rash assumptions about its radicalising effect. Indeed many forms of anti-social behaviour - looting, waste, rumour-mongering - were rife. There was also a healthy resistance to many government appeals. And yet it was very far from being the anonymous war that the 'Old Gang' wanted to make of it. A new populist elite was borne to prominence, exemplifying a clean break with the past - J.B.Priestley; the up-and-coming Cripps; Monty, the People's General; above all, Sir William Beveridge and his reports on manpower and social insurance (Keynes made an unlikely economist of the people). They in turn expressed the common hopes in a struggle which, contrary to widespread myth, involved everyone. In the opening two years of fighting, as Calder reminded his readers, the "many" had won the Battle of Britain (in a neat reversal of

639 See Calder's preface to the second (Panther paperback) edition of 1971.

640 A.Briggs, 'Taylor's Own Times', in *Encounter*, February 1966, pp.65-68.

Churchill), not the few; wider still, Britain had not "stood alone" in 1940, since in truth she had "stood on the shoulders of several hundred million Asians".

It was in the early phase of the war, Calder was convinced, that the growth of a critical mood and marked leftward shift in public feeling occurred. The evidence from Mass Observation, as well as from other records of public opinion, indicated not only that common sacrifices (eg. the general introduction of rationing) were accepted, but that in many instances people were prepared to go further, wherever it was felt that others were "getting away with it". There was already a clear narrowing of incomes, which a fully employed economy did most to bring about. But popular aspirations outran the parties. With the electoral truce in force, this galvanised opinion found its way to independent and non-aligned political groups (like the Commonwealth party), rather than for Labour itself. Most of the new thinking was in non-party circles. Labour and the Conservatives did not stand all that far apart, but it was Labour, almost in spite of itself but still strongly associated with the less well off, that capitalised in 1945, after a quiet but serious election campaign. Coming as this victory did in the wake of so many manifestations of popular discontent, the result really should not have been a surprise to anyone, least of all - Calder insisted - to the Labour leadership.

In fact, Calder believed, the fleeting chance of moving in the direction of a new, classless Britain was thwarted thanks to the energetic activity of wealth, bureaucracy and privilege which survived with little inconvenience, soon resuming their old business of manipulation, concession and "studied betrayal". We are not told in clear terms how this transpired, except through small signs - he cited the reappearance of iron

railings - indicating the return of privacy. The last war, he wrote in his rejection of the 'Backing Britain' campaign in 1969, still provided the hope of another way(641). Angrier than Marwick, Calder's was meant as an historical indictment, popularising what ordinary folk would have said had they but realised.

A narrative structure carries with it certain confining limitations, and Calder later regretted that he had not integrated his political beliefs more fully into the narrative. The book later inspired many offshoot novels and plays. That he had not pressed his views others did not regard as a defect - quite the opposite. Not only were the vague references to postwar less interesting than the arresting minutiae of wartime existence(642); they were not even essential to the tale. "It is of course one of the virtues of so excellent a book as this", Marwick said(643), "that one can absorb the fascinating material so well presented, accept most of the brilliant individual judgements, and yet reject the main theses", in particular that the war - in Calder's view - merely represented "an exaggeration of peacetime trends". It made sense to discount the wider talk of a social revolution in the 1940s; Marwick had already done so. But it was less wise "to link the war directly to the preoccupations of 1969 without any attempt to summarise the complicated developments of the intervening years". This was not to say that the moral lesson was out of place (it was after all still central) - only that Calder's case was unsubstantiated. *The People's War* would retain its value for other, more

641 A. Calder, 'A Refusal to Back Britain', *Question*, January 1969, pp.23-33.

642 V.S.Pritchett, 'On the Home Front', *The New Statesman*, 5 September 1969, p.310.

643 A. Marwick, 'Degrees of Muddle', *The Listener*, 4 September 1969, p.318.

scholarly reasons, as an engrossing social document.

Of all the reviews made of Calder's work, however, the strongest reservations were entered by Henry Pelling, already at work on a Fontana student study of the Second World War. He too agreed that Calder's work lacked argument, since, having stated his general thesis about popular betrayal in a dogmatic introduction and conclusion, between times he promptly forgot about it(644). To establish his case would have meant examining "with more care" the years after the war, "which Dr Calder does not do". Pelling found it first-rate descriptive writing about social change in wartime, without finding the reforming sentiments of Mass Observation wholly convincing. On the larger question of how far the war's effects were temporary or permanent, he noted, the issue remained open. His own thoughts in *Britain and the Second World War* appeared later in the same year(645). Without any fanfare, Pelling quietly and persuasively dismantled the Home Front eulogies.

Domestically, he asked, what in all probability would have happened to British society anyway, war or no war? Cause and effect were not so easily established. The once-and-for-all hike in wartime government expenditure masked a fairly uniform growth in social services spending going back to the turn of the century, and had more to do (as in other countries) with the level of economic development than the pressures of war. Full employment had become an accepted fact of life, but, as R.C.O. Matthews had recently shown, it was to be doubted whether this could be directly attributed to the spread of Keynesian ideas. The general improvement in ordinary

644 H.Pelling, review in *History*, Vol 55 1970, pp.313-314.

645 H.Pelling, *Britain and the Second World War* (1970).

family life had come about as a result of a widespread economic improvement, to which specific acts of social policy were secondary. True, wartime attitudes had moved leftwards (he preferred to rely on the evidence of Gallup polls instead of Mass Observation reports) but this might well have occurred in the normal course of events. Though it remained hard to measure, the redistribution of wealth in the war years was "moderate", and was consistent with a longer-term evening-out already underway before 1939. All told, the British war effort had been well-ordered, serving to reinforce a view many British people already held "that somehow or other, things in their own country were arranged much better than elsewhere in the world ...". Aside from moments of crisis, the sense of community was bound to slacken and war weariness set in. In many ways, popular expectations had run ahead of official thinking, but dangerously so. British relations were much more cordial with the United States, and much more guarded with the Soviet Union, than the public appreciated, with all the consequences that this was to have after the war had ended.

It was apparent from all of this that Pelling would take some persuading. The 'participation' thesis, in short, just would not carry the load it was devised to bear. Taylor and others (this in a bibliographical aside) had gone too far in re-interpretation. Those wanting to bring the people back in had fallen victim, said Pelling, to "the commonest of historical pitfalls, the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*". The evidence for political and social change in war was fragmentary, and one had to make do with what there was, but he could see little confirmation of the argument that the springs of action came from either the fifty or sixty politicians who really mattered (a la Cowling(646)) or the

646 H.Pelling, 'The Impact of Labour', in *The Cambridge Review*, 7 May 1971, pp.180-181.

explanation which put most emphasis on the organised exertions of the labour movement(647). Middle class reformers were equally ineffectual. The editor of the Fontana series had asked for a consideration of war and social advance, and Pelling, unspectacularly - so unspectacularly that it was easy to miss - answered by suggesting that working class involvement in the war did not make all the difference to its enhanced power or status, "the coolest debunking of all"(648). Marwick and Taylor could continue to maintain that Pelling had not fully grasped what was meant by the participationist view(649), and that his dismissal of it was "not much more than a personal opinion, appropriate to Pelling's general scepticism"(650). But Pelling's objections, in point of fact, amounted to a great deal more than this. Pelling was demonstrating the ability of the historian, by close attention to the available empirical evidence, to check or negate the constructs of social science in a way that social science cannot match. In any disciplinary divide, the social scientist and sociologist, not the historian, had to give way.

Tracking back to the Britain of the war years began with Taylor, Marwick and Calder, all three of them approaching the relations of state and society 'from the ground up'. Pelling wove together the political and the military aspects of the conflict, holding that the standing of the Coalition government had depended ultimately upon the progress of the war. Paul Addison,

647 H.Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (1968).

648 A.Marwick, in A.Sked and C.Cook, *ibid* (1970), p.149.

649 A.Marwick, in *History*, Vol 56 1971, pp.148-149.

650 A.J.P.Taylor, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol 14 1971, p.464.

in a landmark monograph on British politics in wartime(651), completed the tilt, captivatingly synthesising the small world of high-level politicians' politics with the subterranean movements of popular opinion so as to elucidate the intellectual and social dynamics of the war period. In an autobiographical journey intended to trace the making of the modern Britain he could see all around him, he ascribed its formation to the creation of a bipartisan "consensus" (consensus being more fundamental though less impressive than strife) among members of the War Cabinet and the government, on the backbenches in parliament, and reaching down into the ranks of the progressive intelligentsia, which crucially tied prosecution of the war with a programme of domestic reconstruction, and so erected the trail of signposts leading up to the 1945 general election - a turnaround in political fortunes that, in some minds, had hitherto been all but unanalysable. Addison told, in as compelling a way as could be conceived of, how it was that the age of Baldwin and Chamberlain gave way, under the urgencies of war, to Clement Attlee's new post-war ruling dispensation, "a new consensus at the top which dominated Britain long after the last bomb had fallen".

Everything stemmed from Addison drawing the important distinction between the *electoral* truce in wartime - which all the main parties strictly observed - and the immense political changes which nevertheless came to pass. These changes took place in the upper levels of government as well as in the fluctuating swings in public sentiment, which it was the business of the politicians to intuit and steer. In the first instance, the process had been one of reorganisation from above, not revolution from below. The displacement of Chamberlain in May 1940,

651 P. Addison, *The Road to 1945 - British politics and the Second World War* (1975).

and Labour breaking in on terms of equality (a 1931-in-reverse) was the defining moment when patronage and initiative passed out of the hands of the old rulers. In the Labour view, contributing to the war effort carried with it the complementary aim of furthering social and economic reform, to which the trade unions felt they were entitled. "If it was [the duty of the Labour leaders] to share in the organisation for war, it was also their chance to build up the left". War turned the Labour party into a coherent force with definite goals. Securing a number of government posts involved in home front tasks made this more certain, none more so than Bevin's tenancy of the Ministry of Labour. Preparing for the peace also chimed with the interests of the radical writers and publicists who began actively to press for a statement of war aims, this in turn influencing government and administration. The advocates of "middle-of-the-road reform", excluded from power throughout the 1930s, now found themselves on the inside, calling for changes which Conservatives (with Churchill a rock past which these currents flowed) were increasingly obliged to accede to.

Along with this shift in elite thinking - however - went a pronounced move to the left in public opinion, particularly after the retreat from Dunkirk, and which Addison worked hard to dissect. In part, it could be explained by the imposition of egalitarian controls which demanded equity on all rungs of the social scale, promoting, where the First World War had encouraged patriotism, a sense of selfless sacrifice, captured in the powerful and popular ideal of 'fair shares', a slogan originally coined in a Board of trade publicity campaign in 1941. Added to this were a range of other influences - memories of 1918 and after, loathing of the 'guilty men', admiration for the Soviet Union - which one after another counted against the Conservatives, and were

bound to favour even the lagging Labour party once partisan politics returned. This was where Addison's use of the Mass Observation findings and the reports on morale prepared by Home Intelligence for the Ministry of Information (opened in 1972) were the most revealing.

The growing consensus was not - then - in defiance of the popular leftward swing. Both were symptomatic of the Conservatives in eclipse, leaderless, bewildered and losing control of events, their difficulties compounded by the chance publication of the Beveridge report, which expressed and intensified the public clamour for more preogressive steps, jolting the main parties into acceptance of its recommendations as the foundation of post-war policy. Determined to prevent all-out socialsit measures, the Conservative party was unable to stand in the way of Beveridges's attack on poverty and unemployment, an "irresistible" plan which the Tories were bounced into, reluctant converts to an idea which the public did not trust them with. Cripps, who briefly threatened Churchill's position, would have done better to latch on to this. But, as Addison made plain, these were not fundamental disagreements of a sort which could endanger the "fusion of purpose" of the coalition. On balance, the new politics of agreement represented a dilution of Conservative policies, to which Labour was giving up the most. The influence of the left especially diminished. Attlee's slapping down of the wilder elements was one sign, just as the free enterprisers were frozen out in the Conservatives. The Hayeks and the Laskis (for all their publicised antipathy in the 1945 election) were marginalised, their place taken by more moderate opinion-formers. Indeed it could be said that the Labour party was more concerned with a recasting of the governing ethos while the war was still on than with looking ahead to political power in the post-war period. Many wanted the coalition to continue. It was the

grassroots membership in each party which brought it to an end and so allowed party politics to revive. The 1945 election campaign itself was hard fought, but the party differences were much narrower than the main spokesmen were inclined to make out. On all sides there were representatives of the new thinking. Labour, tested in government and blessed with a reputation for social patriotism, was only seeking to consolidate and extend the already established wartime consensus on a managed economy and welfare state; the prize just fell into Attlee's lap. Hence the peculiarly mixed and blended nature of the 1945-51 reforms. The history could be recounted in terms of the high policy of personal and party calculation. But this was in turn only the resolution of a more deep-seated process of social and economic change, with which Labour corresponded more closely.

Any overall assessment of the war could only, Addison granted, be a subjective one, hinging on the view one took - and Marwick, Calder and Pelling had taken - of its outcome in bringing about a reformed, more humane but still efficient capitalism. This was, by his own reckoning, entirely for the best and no mean achievement, even 'radical' by British standards. It represented a patriotic compromise between Socialism and Conservatism, which satisfied the pragmatic, moderate demands of the left without in any way going to the roots of the economic problems of inequality - itself indicative of how little class hostility or feeling mattered. But the political change was not simply a question of style or rhetoric. It translated into more jobs and greater security, making a real difference to people's lives. The war years, in this sense, could be understood as a passing phase of "genuine change", breaking away from what had gone before, and installing a new natural order in British politics presided over by the benign figure of

Mr Attlee, an order which had only recently begun to fall apart.

It only remains to underline how great a historiographical feat *The Road to 1945* was, conceptualising the entire sweep of war and post-war British politics. A useful test of the value of a new work is its success in superceding older ones - which are no longer required reading - in so far as the new analysis it contains explains anomalous or puzzling events that others had been unable to account for. The mystery of 1945 now had a plausible explanation which Addison provided. It triumphed over the psephological approach (set on its way by McCallum and Readman) by drawing attention to the significance of the non-electoral realignment of 1940, rather than the campaign of 1945, and in demonstrating the degree to which the latter was the result of a rapid, but disregarded, political transition in wartime, best imparted in the language of leverage and manoeuvrability than in a transfer of votes. There had been an intellectual and social landslide for which 1945 was only the final act. But existing 'consensus' accounts, to be found in the works of political scientists like McKenzie and Beer, were also overtaken. Consensus as they termed it had been a kind of blurred merging or forced policy convergence, imposed on the parties by constitutional dictates, electoral necessities and interest group pressures. In Addison's hands, the notion of consensus was given a much clearer focus, almost an ideology-in-itself, a programmatic agreement formed in a time of abnormal party politics. The question was not, therefore, where the unique and special ideological outlook of the Labour party in 1945 had emanated from, but where the common front moving forward from 1945 was going to. To say that Addison filled a gap would be an understatement; he characterised and articulated an

historical stage. The transition from one equilibrium to another, from Baldwinian to Attleean England, was convincingly engineered, and it was a political historian who had been best placed to do it.

Maurice Cowling, arriving at 1940 from the other direction(652), offered many points of resemblance, although his high political approach presumed a greater autonomy from popular pressures from below. On the fall of Chamberlain, Labour had suddenly got its "foot in the door". A new liberal-left mandarin had formed up, propagandising its own values. Few at the time saw this as the grounding of a new governing consensus, though many had indeed been looking for it. What had appeared at first to be nothing more than an arrangement of convenience turned out in fact to mark "the beginning of a regime", preparing the way for a massive and unnecessary capitulation by conservative forces. 1945 and all that it stood for Cowling regarded as an "intellectual discussion-stopper", the flat, unreflective, "agreeable" politics of subsequent decades an inviting target for short-tempered reactionaries.

Thirty years on, Addison and Cowling, between the two of them, encapsulated a theory of 'postwar'; Colville, reproducing the original hand corrected typescript of Churchill's "Gestapo" election broadcast, retrieved from the wastepaper basket and proving beyond any doubt that the speech was all Churchill's own work, gave it a visible form(653).

Paul Addison's central contention - that all the major changes in outlook and policy were effected during

652 M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler - British politics and British policy* (1975).

653 J. Colville, *Footprints in Time* (1976), p.208.

the war and not after it - provoked surprisingly little opposition, bearing in mind its novelty. Addison, according to K.O. Morgan, had "defined the essence of historical change between 1939 and 1945", fully justifying his claim that the Coalition administration was the greatest reforming government since 1905(654). He had shown how, facing possible extinction, the system of the middle way took shape, moving British politics permanently leftwards(655). The progression from warfare to welfare (the 1945 election hardly came into it) was, A.J.P. Taylor thought, "magnificently" etched(656). Wartime and postwar were fused into a continuous whole, with the accent on the war. In places, Addison had obviously given the account a helping hand - Pelling sensed, as he had with Calder, that the swing in popular thinking in wartime, though profound enough, was "rather exaggerated"(657); Vincent pointed out the double standard by which those responsible politicians who chanced to doubt the wisdom of Beveridge's proposals, and were therefore cast as non-consensus actors, were treated unfairly(658). But - be it noted - Pelling's complaint about Addison's emphases also threw open the validity of his general interpretation; with Vincent it did not. Most were ready to endorse the new conceptual picture with acclamation. When Addison gave the lead paper on 'Labour and Politics in the People's War' at a special meeting of the Society for the Study of Labour

654 K.O.Morgan, 'Westminster at War', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 October 1975, pp.1222-1223.

655 M.Radcliffe, in *The Times*, 30 October 1975, p.8.

656 A.J.P.Taylor, in *The Observer*, 19 October 1975, p.27.

657 H.Pelling, in *History*, February 1977, pp.150-151.

658 J.Vincent, 'Brave New World', in *New Society*, 30 October 1975, p.280.

History, reiterating his view that promises of welfare were significant not for boosting popular morale but in radicalising public opinion, other participants were more concerned to examine how this promising insight could be pushed further(659). Calder, tiring of the bye-election evidence, wanted to know more about working class reactions, especially in the armed forces and the trade unions. And Harris, whose biography (soon to appear(660)) of Beveridge outlined the considerable resistance to the Beveridge report (even from Bevin, inventing trade union opposition where there was none), speculated about why the bureaucratic form of welfare was the one that came to be preferred, and why the Labour party had no communitarian alternative to it. Only Pelling met Addison's argument head on, adamant that total war need not necessarily result in a strengthening of the forces favouring radical change, and that the sole generalisation one could derive from the First and the Second World War was that in both cases the immediate post-war election always saw a punishing reaction against the (culpable) party which had been in power when the war broke out. Continuity there may be after a war, Pelling accepted, but continuity of a complacent sort, typified for example by British self-regard for the working of its institutions, and aided by the sharp turn to the right by the Labour party leadership. That said, and this is evident from a reading of the BSSLH report, any such substantive differences, while extensive, had to be argued out not with a *priori* or *ad hominem* point-scoring but by reference to factual and methodological issues in the accepted fashion. That Calder, to take one instance, wrote as a committed socialist, was beside the point so

659 Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No 34 Spring 1977, pp.8-14.

660 J.Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography* (1977).

far as his well-founded version of history was concerned(661). Objectivity was guaranteed by the process of arguing. There was a development to the debate, not just variety or fruitless conflict. The accepted guidelines of historical inquiry and the enforcement of controlling standards of evidence and approach were coming into play, rules which were not dependent solely on the good faith of particular historians.

Marwick, returning to the topic in an L.S.E.-edited tribute to A.J.P. Taylor and in a Home Front scrapbook took note that the literature had now turned towards the view that the momentum for reform had *not* been maintained after 1945. He welcomed the successive corrections to mythology, which had given him the excuse to reconsider and refine his position, but felt that the trend had gone too far the other way. He still stood by the notion of a 'people's war' which had led on to a 'people's peace'. It was just that reform had to be thought of in a more limited sense than before, given the forces ranged against it:

"There were, then [he decided], no great revolutionary changes after 1945 - some of the older writers are quite wrong here. But if it is unhelpful to speak of a 'social revolution' it is positively misleading to speak of "a restoration of traditional values" [Howard] or of society sweeping along "the old grooves" [Calder]. Change resulted more from the mechanisms touched off by total war ... than from the deliberate actions of politicians. But it must always be remembered that throughout the war and well into peacetime

661 A. Marwick, *The Home Front - the British and the Second World War* (1976), p.6.

there were plenty of powerful people ready to emulate their predecessors in 1918 in attempting to resume the long golden age of Means Test and insecurity. The clock could have been put back in 1945; it may not be the most glorious of achievements, but the Attlee Government did not put it back"(662).

Not radical change as such but - adopting Pimlott's pithy formula - radical continuity(663), solidifying the wartime reform programme which Addison had so imaginatively set out. This, at least, was Marwick's minimum defence. There were some, Marwick noted, who were dismayed by the bogus modernisation of the decade of reform in the forties, once the full impact of economic decline had struck home, but they were lacking in a historical sense. Britain had gone forward by not going back, as it could so easily have done. That in itself was reason to be grateful.

The source of the worry to which Marwick alluded should not be passed over. Opinion was changing, for reasons that had little to do with the Attlee era and everything to do with the altering political climate and state of affairs of mid-seventies Britain, which may not have influenced the writing of the Home Front histories but undoubtedly affected the way they were being received. The economic underachievement of the Macmillan and Wilson governments had been tolerated. Comparisons were not always made, and when they were Britain could still claim to set a moral example to other nations. A further deterioration after 1973 - along with rising inflation and unemployment, and trade union confrontation

662 A.Marwick, in A.Sked and C.Cook, *ibid* (1976), p.162.

663 B.Pimlott, 'Attlee in fashion', *New Society*, 25 April 1985, p.124.

- raised the prospect of political disorder, suggesting that the social democratic age of efficiency and welfare might be drawing to a close. Judgemental evaluations of wartime and postwar, with one eye on the present, found much less that was praiseworthy or even warranted(664). The accepted commonplace of imperial withdrawal counterbalanced by economic and social advance - a staple of the general histories of the 1960s - no longer carried conviction. Critics on the left were joined by vocal social marketeers and neo-liberals.

Two reviews of Addison - by the political historians Morgan and Skidelsky(665) - gave a revealing glimpse of just how much could be read into, as opposed to read out of, a book like *The Road to 1945*. Morgan argued that while Addison had dealt very well with the collapse of the wartime Conservative party, his coverage of the new ascendancy of Labour was far less assured - in the main because Labour's leaders were so slow to grasp the significance of wartime reform. 1945 had been the end result of a "vast democratic upsurge, unique in British history", a rare opportunity to remould a society in flux which the Labour party, committed instead to gradualist change within a liberal-progressive framework - entirely failed to exploit. In the longer run, by being content to preserve the wartime gains, the Attlee governments had done nothing to dent the blinkered conservatism which continued to plague the economic performance and social cohesion of the country right up to the time of writing - a sad commentary on the consequences of the Attlee consensus for the later condition of Britain. Hope was deferred, "perhaps for ever".

664 J.Ramsden, introduction to *Trends in British Politics Since 1945*, C.Cook and J.Ramsden (eds)(1978), p.x.

665 K.O.Morgan, *ibid* (1975); R.Skidelsky, in *The Spectator*, 25 October 1975, p.536.

"From today's perspective", Skidelsky thundered, the Second World War, because it had required so much sacrifice without providing for an alternative means of subsistence, had really been lost. The Churchill coalition, egged on by left-wing intellectuals, had made over-expansive social commitments before a sound basis for economic recovery was established. It was "an interlude of illusions" which shunted the Attlee consensus leftward without creating a continuing economic vitality. Addison, in swallowing whole the wartime legend, was too much a child of his time, sounding as if it was still the 1950s and 60s. "What remains today", he inquired, "of the war's promise of national renaissance?"

Periodic reassessments are to be expected, all the more so in a time of fundamental political unrest. It is held against the study of contemporary history that it always lacks the requisite distance to ascertain the full effects and final consequences of events only just past. The "economic holocaust" (Morgan's words) of the oil crisis and afterwards dramatically altered the retrospective angle of vision, modifying impressions of the reforms of the later forties and giving them a less exalted meaning. It forced a coming to terms with former habits and attitudes which had been accomplished on the continent after the war but which the British had managed to avoid.

By the same token, this historical revision reintroduced an overt political element into the discussion, making the analysis of the recent past a political instrument. Subjective interpretations, which had been slowly crowded out by the co-operative conflict of practicing historians, began to work their way back in again, disturbing and enlivening the debate. There already were a great many grounds for dispute which fell

within historical confines - generational differences, the younger tending to prefer a good war; disciplinary priorities, evident in the clash between pure history and applied social science; as well contrasting methods and approaches (the 'top-down' versus the 'from the ground up' models). But it was of the essence that these divergences were contained within and resolvable through the normal working of the process of historical inquiry. Bias, in the traditional view, is acceptable, and can even be productive, providing that an allegiance to the proper scholarly skills involved in doing history is still observed. With the newer, more condemnatory verdicts on 1945, this was no longer so obviously the case. Reassessments of the recent past plainly reflected current, not primarily historical, concerns, and - to the extent that these reassessments attacked the hidden values of all the existing historical accounts - signified a growing politicisation of the debate. In this way the changing political context gave rise to a revitalised controversy about the aims and achievements of the war and post-war governments which counteracted and controverted the assumed logic of historical argumentation. History itself was becoming political.

H. M. S. O.

Norman Chester was the obvious choice to write a history of the post-war nationalisations(666). His career spanned academia and public service, in what had come to be the 'Nuffield' manner, even though his own background was a modest one. He wrote (in 1932) an industrial survey of his native Lancashire for the Board of Trade, toured North America to see the running of publicly-owned transport on commercial lines, and was drafted into Whitehall as a temporary 'irregular' in 1940, first in the Economic Section of the War Cabinet, later becoming Secretary to the Beveridge Committee on social insurance and a noted critic of the Treasury mind. Chester was - in all respects - an outstanding archetype of the wartime recruits who made up Paul Addison's rising class of enlightened progressives (Lionel Robbins, a colleague of those times, dubbed him 'the Friend of Man'(667)). Joining Nuffield College in 1946, he set about establishing the teaching of public administration and social studies, helping in particular to clarify the operation of the new public utilities which his patron, Herbert Morrison, had taken the lead in steering through parliament. The founding statutes were individually analysed, and the fundamental principles behind this new form of governmental involvement in industry were laid down(668). As an expert with first-hand knowledge of the institutional growth of the state, Chester applied the same uncluttered method that he brought to bear in

666 D.N.Chester, *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945-1951* (1975).

667 Tribute to Chester by David Butler in the Nuffield College Report (1981-1986), p.85.

668 D.N.Chester, *British Public Utility Services* (1948).

his independent inquiry into English football in 1960 first assembling the raw material of facts and figures, and then drawing out of them the logical conclusions to which they pointed(669). To this was added a firm set of personal beliefs (he was said to have stopped buying *The Guardian* newspaper when 'Manchester' was dropped from its title). Along with Professors Robson and Hanson, who were all called before the Commons' Select Committee on the Nationalised Industries, Chester was both a leading authority and a stout defender of the Morrisonian public corporation.

Strangely, Chester decided against interviewing widely - he felt the documents were more than full enough. He listed only three civil service informants, one of whom (Kelf-Cohen) had written an intemperate attack on the large, unaccountable and unchecked expansion of state power soon after retiring from the Ministry of Fuel and Power, a book which Chester disliked. Furthermore, he was conventionally discreet. Only a handful of officials were named in over a thousand pages (the wartime histories had not mentioned individual officials at all), even though, as was clearly apparent, the administrative workload that fell on their shoulders was a very heavy one. Chester went most of the way to redressing the balance between the work of ministers and their most senior advisers, necessary in any reappraisal. But the official fiction of ministerial responsibility was preserved.

Chester's main difficulty was in organising his material and finding a convenient cut-off point (taking it all the way up to 1960, as originally intended, would have been too onerous a task). He eventually decided to group his material around the headings of administrative

669 S.Pile, 'Norman sets out for a delayed conquest', *The Sunday Times*, 24 October 1982, p.8.

problem-solving - structure, finance, compensation, and the relations of the new board with parliament - emphasising how the framing of legislation and the passing into law of the seven nationalising acts had meant devising and developing a wholly new and experimental form of public body - the public corporation - for which the pre-war versions provided no assistance. In translating the Labour party's long-standing electoral aims into legislative action, a procedure about which there had, even by the 1970s, been very little detailed academic coverage, he was able to show to what extent it was an exercise in administrative improvisation, adjusted to the particular needs of each industry and the political imperatives of ministers. The difference between the earlier and later Acts was evidence of this. With the coal industry, a relatively non-controversial piece of legislation, the starting functions were worked out first; only then was a structure designed to achieve them. For iron and steel, the last and most contentious of all the Acts, it was a national board vested with full control over the industries that was essential, around which the future operating guidelines had then to be fitted. In the latter instance, the ideological thrust clearly took priority. The lengths to which the government went to secure the acceptability of its legislation in parliament (in spite of its commanding majority in the Commons) did not, moreover, substantiate the common assertion that the legislature played only a subordinate role. Where the government suffered most, however, was in its deficiency of thinking. A mixture of - often contradictory - motives inspired the demand for public ownership, just as the purposes to which they were meant to be put were never clearly established. On the key question of political direction and economic efficiency, for which the public corporation model supposedly provided the best of both worlds, the exact relationship was full of ambiguity. The problem, it

could be argued, was one that could only be resolved in practice, and for which there was no ready-made solution. But Chester, in his concluding remarks, had no qualms about suggesting that, in launching upon such a huge legislative programme of ill-conceived measures at a time of economic uncertainty, was too much to ask. The pace could not last. Ultimately, the confusion surrounding the objectives of the nationalised industries was only a part of the wider issues of inflation, employment, the balance of payments, and of the management of the post-war economy as a whole. If these matters are still unresolved in our own time, he wrote, it should not come as a surprise to find that their answer was not apparent in 1945-51 either, even though it had then been "a much simpler world with much lower expectations"(670).

The wealth of information - everything that was in the files and nothing that was not (and there were very few references to the secondary literature) - made it, as Chester conceived it to be, a work of reference, an anatomical manual of legislative change from which others could then draw. Its main use was prospective, encouraging new interpretations but not by itself generating them. The end result, judging by the historiographical yardstick, was a definitive but heavygoing read. Partly this was because of the author's unobtrusive style and exaggerated restraint, concealing his own staunch, even crusty Labour sympathies. One might never have guessed that Chester, in his discussion of bigness and centralisation - a dominating concern of the seventies - had in his own time in the wartime civil service taken a strong decentralist line; nor that he had become worried, over the last few years, by the accretion of bureaucratic power, upsetting the traditional balance

670 D.N.Chester, 'The austere crusader', *The Times*, 1 December 1982, p.12.

between Whitehall and Westminster(671).

The drawbacks were also, however, in the nature of official history and its narrow terms of reference. The uncertain basis on which the nationalised industries had been set up, most evidently in the failure to devise a criterion for their operation in the public interest, was obviously germane to the contemporary debate, especially after a second wave of nationalisations beginning in 1971-72. The other related issue was the economic performance of the nationalised undertakings since the war, about which economic opinion (divided at the best of times) was already shifting. Pryke, aware that the public judged the publicly-owned industries and services by their financial behaviour much more than their administrative shortcomings, had provided evidence to show that, in the ten years up to 1968, the public sector had done as well as private industry, taking into account labour productivity and the allocation of resources(672). In the decade thereafter, however, publicly-owned industry had done significantly worse, and for reasons he believed that were intrinsic to state-owned enterprise: an abrupt about-turn(673). This climate of unease made it all but impossible to treat nationalisation as if it was only a matter of technicalities, as Chester, Robson and others had for long been hoping to make it, or that the ownership of industry was really an irrelevance. The 'Whitehall' vantage point, too easily devoted to the rigmarole of

671 P.Hennessy, 'A lone voice preaching against bigness', *The Times*, 8 August 1978, p.3.

672 R.Pryke, *Public Enterprise in Practice* (1971).

673 R.Pryke, *The Nationalised Industries* (1983).

public administration with the politics left out(674), could leave the impression that the machinery of state existed for its own sake(675). One could not tell from the text that the book dealt with one of the major clashes of political principle of the century(676). It was not so much neutral, as neutered.

674 A.Sutcliffe, review of the HMSO volume on post-war environmental planning, in *History*, February 1978, p.152.

675 B.Alford, in *History*, February 1977, pp.150-151.

676 S.Pollard, 'Through the proper channels', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 27 February 1976, p.214.

The Battle of the Biographers

To an extent more than was usual, the collective reputation of the 1945 government already rested on an appreciation of the contribution of its 'Big Five' leading members in giving effect to an historic programme of legislative reforms against overwhelming odds. This was so in spite of the mutual antagonisms of senior Cabinet ministers, by now well known because of Hugh Dalton's memoirs and the pathbreaking biography of Herbert Morrison. By working through colleagues and leaving the initiative to others, Attlee's own part in British reconstruction after the war seemed to be inseparable from that of his party and administration(677). But it was not Labour's term in office so much as the events immediately preceding its fall, when all of the government's older figures were worn out, temporarily indisposed, or dying, that differences of personality inside the government, between some of its more junior members, proved most publicly damaging. The dispute about the rearmament budget of 1951, notwithstanding the best efforts of an economic historian like Joan Mitchell, continued to reverberate down the years. That the clash of personalities was also endowed with ideological significance meant that the authorised biographies of the principal contenders, when they appeared in the nineteen seventies, were bound to revive old feuds.

Michael Foot's double volume life of Aneurin Bevan, a work of devotion based, in the absence of family papers, on Foot's own recollections of the years they had shared, was a hagiography of the highest order. In a

677 Lord Longford, in *1000 Makers of the Twentieth Century* (1969).

career otherwise apparently directionless, and for the most part inexplicable to contemporaries, Foot hailed Bevan - his Bevan - as the torchbearer of a political creed, articulate, spacious and liberating, which it was the biographer's primary task to rekindle. In this endeavour, the story of the fate of the 1945 Labour government was pivotal.

Foot conceived the idea of a full-length biography shortly after Bevan died in 1960. "Meanwhile on Tuesday I had Michael and Jill Foot to dinner", Crossman records:

"I had thought it possible that I could write a quick portrait of Nye, not a full-scale biography but the kind of thing Francis Williams did of Bevin. Michael explained to me that Jennie [Lee] said she wanted to do it but she had also agreed that, if she didn't, Michael should. I said we should get a young man from Nuffield College to do the spadework and Michael said he could do it all by himself and wanted to spend two years on it. This finished any idea I had of butting in. If Michael really will do it, he can produce his one and only masterpiece, none the worse for its being the product of someone who adored and worshipped Nye"(678).

Bevan and Foot had effected a reconciliation in the last few weeks of Bevan's life, after rowing in 1957. But their differences were as nothing to the treatment meted out in the past to Bevan by the popular press, and which made Foot and Bevan's widow understandably defensive. The real truth could prevail in biography,

678 J.Morgan (ed), *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (1981), entry dated 4 August 1960, p.862.

Foot believed, even if it had not done so when Bevan was alive. Foot himself was not put off by colourful partisanship - *Guilty Men* was a pamphleteer's dream, and he thought it normal for historians to attack each other "like bye-election candidates"(679). He also had a persistent record of party rebellion (according to Philip Norton, nobody else in any party during the 1945-74 period rebelled against the party line more often than Foot(680)). The Bevan of the first volume, published in 1962 by McGibbon and Kee (owned by Howard Samuel, the backer of 'Tribune') and coming out appropriately enough when Foot was without the Labour whip, had travelled a "rough, precipitous road to power"(681). Caged in by the ingrained timidity of the party's leaders, Bevan alone had risen to the occasion during the Second World War, cut Churchill down to size, galvanised the faithful, and lifted Labour into office. It remained to be seen how Foot would handle the more difficult, dilemma-fraught, post-war phase.

Gaitskell's death in 1963, and his replacement by Harold Wilson, brought from Foot an enthusiastic pre-election booklet on the new leader(682). That Wilson was "a politician to his fingertips" was excusable. He had, Attlee-like, healed Labour's self-inflicted wounds, and had - in addition - a Bevanite past of sorts. There was nothing about Labour's poor showing after 1966 that could not be put right by a better team of leaders, he

679 M.Foot, introduction to *Armistice 1918-1939* (1940).

680 P.Norton, *Dissension in the House of Commons 1945-1974* (1975).

681 M.Foot, *Aneurin Bevan, 1897-1945* (1962).

682 *Harold Wilson - a pictorial biography*, J.Parker and E.Prager (eds)(1964).

told his 'New Left' inquisitors(683). But by 1969 he was said to wish the Wilson book could be "suppressed"(684). He resumed work on Bevan in 1971-72, with less of a change of tone from the first volume than might, after such a protracted gap, be expected. But as before, the outlook of the biographer and his subject were indistinguishable. It was not that Foot wrote himself into the storyline. Whole passages consisted of an imaginative rendering of Bevan's innermost thoughts and feelings. The motive force and literary invention of the book stemmed precisely from a retrospective attempt to make of Bevan the Bevanite that Foot had wished him to be(685).

The "great nothings" of pre-war were not, however, as much in evidence. "In such a climate [of war and electoral victory in 1945]", Foot explained, "lilliputians might grow to Brobdingnian stature". Attlee, previously a cipher, became an inscrutable man of the golden mean. Cripps, no less impressive, though now mystifying to Foot, had shifted to the right. Bevin was a formidable individual. Their raised prestige matched the times. Circumstances were not favourable for a root-and-branch transformation of society. The whole atmosphere was one of "suffocating necessity". Labour was "blown off course" - shades of 1966 - by "a catalogue of disasters", financial and other. But its actions were politically defensible, even more so with the realism of hindsight. The government gave way where it had to, where its very survival was at stake, in order to do what it did want to do - no other course was open to it.

683 M.Foot, 'Credo of the Labour Left', *The New Left Review*, May-June 1968, pp.19-34.

684 P.Jenkins, *The Battle of Downing Street* (1970), p.114.

685 M.Foot, *Aneurin Bevan 1945-1960* (1973).

Bevan's own contribution was of central importance. The middle sections of the book were those chapters dealing with the lengthy negotiations over, and actual establishment of a nationalised hospital scheme (not a manifesto commitment), a tale strikingly told and with much new information. It was not quite the trial of strength that the newspapers had had it. Here one saw the private Bevan who, on entering a meeting intent on charming his audience, never left his principles outside. Here too was the patient process of building up a coalition of allies, Bevan having to keep in mind "outflanking the BMA, enlisting public support, averting left-wing attack, [and] winning over the Cabinet". He shrewdly assessed the balance of forces, using the Commons - as it should be used - as the cockpit of partisan debate. Bevan had held his nerve, finally breaking the deadlock with a series of judiciously-timed concessions. It was the peak of his achievements - "Nothing less than to persuade the most conservative and respected profession in the country to accept and operate the Labour government's most intrinsically Socialist proposition". There is little doubt that Foot, in recounting these events and still incensed by the way Bevan's role had been overlooked, knew exactly what he wanted to say beforehand: when he went to interview Sir John Hawton, the former Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Health, it was Foot who had done most of the talking(686). This gave his account an epic quality. Democratic socialism was in the making. To the later charge that Bevan gave too much away, Foot was convinced that his was the only national health service that could, at that time, have been got.

But Bevan was still a man apart, even to those like Foot on the left of the party who craved his leadership.

686 J.E.Pater, conversation with the author, 10 January 1983.

He was not motivated only by personal advancement. Foot charted the long build-up to the 1951 confrontation with Gaitskell, and Bevan's anxiety that the revolution of 1945 was about to be cut short - a principled matter which divided the two of them, not "a last minute fabrication":

"He [Bevan] noted not the will and courage but the other aspects of Gaitskellism: the parched political imagination, the pedantic insistence on lesser truths in the presence of great ones"(687).

In the end Bevan did not resign; he was "driven out" by others, notably Gaitskell and Morrison, plotting against him. The Bevanites, by implication, were obliged to band together in self-defence. This was remarkable coming from the author who had done his utmost to persuade Bevan in 1951 that it was time to go. There was no sense in which Bevan had brought about his own undoing. Foot and Jennie Lee exceeded Bevan in their adherence to a more aggressive parliamentarianism, and were only occasionally able to persuade him of this. In Crossman's diary, which Foot saw, Bevan was a reluctant and the least assiduous of conspirators. He was fully capable of talking 'left' and acting 'right'.

This then was the Bevanite case rationalised and Bevan, his old battles successfully refought, vindicated. Partly, it had been a matter of style - Foot was not unaware of this. But personalities always embodied underlying ideals, and it was ideals which gave to history its meaning. There was a poetic entitlement, since the Bevanite side of the argument had been

neglected for so long, to exaggerate, even to mythologise, in pursuit of a truer account. "Virtue lies on the left", as Foot once expressed it(688). What Bevan had really thought remained "locked in his own heart", and the closing chapters of the book, when Foot and Bevan went their different ways, were clearly the hardest to compose. A life should not be judged, he said of Bevan's final few despairing months, by its last flickerings. Even so, the impression lingered of a magnificent but unexplained failure.

Aneurin Bevan was highly acclaimed, "a book (one fellow bibliophile wrote) any man might be proud to have written, one of those books which justify a lifetime of authorship"(689). Enoch Powell warmed immediately to the portrait of one who strove to "make his own ideas the ideas of his party"(690). Others saw it as a summarising statement of 'Tribune' socialism, which Bevan more than anyone else gave expression to(691); he had not sat confiding his frustrations to his diary. The 'other' Bevan whom Foot had rarely seen was missing - a difficult, volcanic person, his differences nothing to do with policy. The belittling of colleagues, especially the caricature of Gaitskell, was deprecated. But only Marquand (close to finishing his life of Ramsay MacDonald) saw fit to question the general hang of the book altogether(692). The biographer must enable the

688 T.Coleman, 'Master of Consent', *The Guardian*, 26 March 1976, p.13.

689 W.Rees-Mogg, 'A heroic tragedy', *The Times*, 8 October 1973, p.14.

690 E.Powell, 'Bevan Agonistes', *The Listener*, 11 October 1973, p.490.

691 B.Crick, introduction to Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn* (Penguin 1982), p.7.

692 D.Marquand, 'Was he really a Bevanite?', *The Guardian*, 11 October 1973, p.11.

reader to see the world through his subjects' eyes, which Foot had - he agreed - triumphantly achieved; but he must also drain himself of all predispositions, dealing fairly with the views of those whom he disapproves of. "My one quarrel with Foot is that he doesn't believe it necessary to try". For this reason Foot's Bevan only occasionally emerged in his pages from beneath the conventional hero of left-wing legend. Foot had completely misunderstood the demands of biography. Marquand aside, however, most reviewers were prepared to accept the premise of Foot's passionately argued account. The book was to be judged as the work of a rhetorician. The total effect mattered, rather than the small details.

The official biography of Hugh Gaitskell, written by "an old sympathiser with Gaitskell's views" and dedicated to one of his ideological successors, Anthony Crosland, appeared in 1979(693). Its' author, a Fellow of Nuffield College and a lifelong member of the Labour party, had taken on the task in 1968, after Roy Jenkins had had to drop out. Apart from a diary kept intermittently by Gaitskell from 1945-56, Williams also conducted many interviews (only Eden and Hailsham refused to see him). Along the way, he was converted to the value of oral history, as long as it was in conjunction - wherever possible - with other sources(694). He wrote asking for an early sight of the relevant Cabinet papers, but his request was refused. Williams had known Gaitskell only slightly. But his loyalties were with the social democratic wing of the party - an old scourge of Mr Bevan

693 P.M.Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell - a political biography* (1979).

694 P.M.Williams, 'Interviewing politicians: the life of Hugh Gaitskell', in *The Political Quarterly*, July-September 1980, pp.303-316.

and his followers(695), he had also been a founder of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism in 1960. When it came to his scholarship, he saw no merit in professing detachment and practising partiality. He wanted to be fair to Gaitskell's critics. But he was surprised "at how often, on thorough examination, [Gaitskell's] case proved stronger than he had anticipated". Williams made a special point of wanting to put the record straight on a number of controversial episodes which he felt were "inadequately or misleadingly recounted elsewhere". In this attempt, he singled out one major culprit.

Monumental in form, respectful in tone, and with little to say about private life or psychology, Williams was concerned above all with the disfigurement of Gaitskell by his detractors, past and present. In large part, this had occurred during his time as party leader after 1955, but many of his later difficulties had their origin in the events of the Attlee governments. Gaitskell had served as Dalton's *chef de cabinet* during the war, and was one of the 'young victors' elected on the tidal wave in 1945. He spent less than a year on the backbenches, before being offered a vacancy as Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Fuel and Power. Gaitskell it was who ensured that electricity supplies were maintained for essential services in the fuel crisis of 1947. Eventually he was promoted to the post of full Minister. Shinwell, who had never trusted his junior, suspected foul play, though Williams could find no evidence of this. Gaitskell's officials, interviewed in retirement, were almost unanimous in their compliments about their new political master. Attlee later asked Gaitskell to handle economic affairs in the absence of Cripps, and together with Douglas Jay he oversaw the devaluation of the pound, convincing the

695 See his letter to *The Times*, 1 November 1951, p.7.

doubters and fending off an eleventh hour deflationary package cooked up by the Treasury. The detailing of this episode was meticulous, the technique the same as Williams had employed to analyse the plots, crises and scandals of the French Fourth Republic, and Jay for one said he learnt much from it that he had not known about(696). The consequential measures following devaluation led to health charges first being mooted, a portent for 1951 but an issue that arose well before Gaitskell's Chancellorship. Everything could not, he indicated, be put down to Gaitskell's famous obstinacy.

Gaitskell's meteoric rise to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, exceptional in terms of his age and experience, only heightened tensions within the government. The intricately-sourced retailing of Gaitskell's one and only budget brought out Williams's handiwork at its best. He could find no hard proof, earlier than the middle of March 1951, for Bevan's opposition to the arms programme, and judged - as Attlee had done - that Bevan broadened the issue of teeth and spectacles to rearmament as a whole only after he had resigned in April. All surviving Cabinet members seemed to agree on this. Gaitskell, on the other hand, behaved faultlessly throughout, offering to go quietly if asked, but adamant about the need to stand up to Bevan. Williams guessed rightly that Attlee, convalescing in hospital, waited until the last possible moment before siding, as any Prime Minister must side, with his Chancellor. In a decisive use of interviewing, he traced back to Morrison the false rumour that Gaitskell deliberately split the party so as to further his own chances. Rearmament had been a gamble, but a necessary gamble. Bevan resented being passed over - "big men have big faults". Attlee, then and later, was irresolute.

696 D.Jay, conversation with the author, 24 July 1980.

Tribune newspaper, and *Tribune* alone - backed by the sinister Beaverbrook - "ended several years of reasonable harmony in the Labour party and resumed the fractricidal civil war which has lasted on and off ever since". Gaitskell, for his part, devised no moves to drive out the threat, and refused to give the struggle within his own party priority over that against the Tories. Labour had to do the right thing, and for the right reasons; it had to demonstrate that it knew how to act and govern responsibly. Opposition in the 1950s saw the long playing out of this conflict. Williams was apparently content to hide in a footnote the vital information that Attlee hoped (this was by 1954) Gaitskell would succeed him and that he would time his retirement accordingly.

The centre of gravity of the Gaitskell biography was placed much more on Gaitskell's tenure as party leader after 1955, and the "years of strife" over the party constitution, defence policy and latterly the Common Market which followed on from electoral defeat in 1959. These ructions overshadowed his earlier conciliatory phase as leader, but they revealed again the same qualities which had stood him in good stead back in 1951: an emotional but unflinching audacity, a readiness to risk his career to fight for his principles and the party's public standing. Williams did not exonerate Gaitskell entirely. But about the larger significance of these crises he was emphatic - they were about "more than a struggle over a doctrinal point like Clause Four, or over a policy issue like unilateral nuclear disarmament, or over a personality clash concerning Gaitskell's leadership, or even over the location of power within the party". "It was", he said, "a conflict about its character: whether the party was to be a protest movement or a prospective government of the country". Gaitskell, emerging from the traumas of the early 1960s, was

destined to change the course of British politics but, at the age of 56 and in sight of election victory he died of a rare and then incurable disease, for Williams "the last irony".

Of bulky proportions, with two hundred pages of references alone, the size of the biography appeared excessive for a politician who never became prime minister(697). It was more political and less personal than many would have liked. In the attention it paid to long forgotten politicking it struck some as almost obsessive(698). His *ex post facto* justification of Gaitskell's actions in 1951 seemed strained; the objectivity he had fought to attain with Gaitskell was squandered in his comments against Bevan(699). But of the biography's "demythologising" qualities there was no question. Gaitskell was a good man in a party full of rogues scrambling for preferment, and the Namierite representation of the party which Williams provided was entirely appropriate. The nod at contemporary developments in the Labour party of Wilson and Callaghan had an undeniable appeal - the resort to a form of words to conceal fundamental differences could not go on indefinitely, and Gaitskell, alone among Labour leaders, had grasped this(700).

But the direction of his biographical attack was plain for all to see. Williams had fired an early polemical broadside at the distortions contained in

697 S.Koss, 'Labour in travail', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23 November 1979, p.12.

698 A.Watkins, 'Hugh the holy', *The Spectator*, 27 October 1979, p.17.

699 P.Stead, in *The Welsh History Review*, Vol 10 1980-81, pp.263-266.

700 P.Johnson, 'Gaitskell the Gambler', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 21 October 1979, p.15.

Michael Foot's eulogy of Bevan six months before his own book went on sale. In an article in *Political Studies* he accused Foot of lack of documentation, a string of slipshod inaccuracies (consistently in Bevan's favour) and a severe biographical "squint", all of which had led him to appreciate Bevan the temperamental rebel rather than Bevan the power-conscious realist(701). The Gaitskellites were made to appear as the real enemies of socialism, first in their continued efforts to compromise Bevan or expel him from the party, and then as the group that gathered around the 'Hampstead set'. Williams described the Bevanites in his book as "elitist sectarians who posed as the sole guardians of socialist principle, while seeking personal publicity and factional support at the expense of the party". In his account of the 1959 party conference, he had Foot coming into view from "the blackest and most invisible quarter" of the hall to speak in the Clause Four debate, and noted with satisfaction that Foot "had just lost again at Devonport, suffering the third worst swing in the country".

In his review-reply, Foot spoke of the Williams biography as the quintessential "Nuffield" biography - the worship of facts, facts and more facts, none of which could be equal or speak objectively for themselves(702). Never before had so much reconstituted reminiscence and gossip been assembled. And what must be the fate, he asked, of those politicians, like Bevan, who keep no diary? The charge against Gaitskell was not that he lacked honesty or courage or fine intellect, as Williams had supposed, but that "he was seeking to guide the Labour party into alien channels", and Foot challenged

701 P.M.Williams, 'Foot-faults in the Gaitskell-Bevan Match', in *Political Studies*, March 1979, pp.129-140.

702 M.Foot, 'Gaitskell's infirmity', *The Listener*, 18 October 1979, pp.530-531.

the tacit assumption that the party was and is somehow inherently centrist and reformist. Stung by the huge number of errors Williams had unearthed, Foot signed off with the promise of more to come.

On the face of it, the Foot-Williams collision was an illustration of the extension of party warfare by other, literary means, the left confronting the right in an explicitly ideological disagreement over "two rival conceptions of the party's future". Both accepted the oratorical conventions by which internal disputes were conducted, so that the parameters of scholarly debate were pre-set. This greatly simplified the biographer's task. But it typecast the principal contenders and twisted those issues which cut across the left-right divide. The contrast with Martin Gilbert who, after years of indefatigable study, still felt unable to guess beforehand what attitude Churchill would take to particular matters which arose, is instructive. Marquand indeed was driven to conclude that, if Bevan was not strictly a Bevanite, Gaitskell was hardly ever a Gaitskellite - followers were more ardent than figureheads; and he now wondered whether Gaitskell would have gone on, had he lived, to create the broad-based party of the centre-left that his old supporters once hoped and believed (Marquand willingly, Williams reluctantly, signed up for the SDP in 1981). Style of leadership and temperamental differences were just as important a consideration in politics as ideas and beliefs, sometimes more so. Ideological accounts were the characteristic deformation of writing about the politics of the Labour party. The advance that the biographies of Bevan and Gaitskell bestowed was also very much a reiteration.

At another level, the dispute between Foot and Williams was less to do with ideological opposites than

the meeting of an old-fashioned practitioner of amateur political biography and the professional historian who has seen and read everything. Foot, the devotee of Carlyle, full of romanticised attachment to the values that Bevan espoused ("Don't confuse me with the facts", a Shadow Cabinet colleague recalls him saying), and an approach unlikely to come well out of the exacting textual scrutiny of Williams who, although no less intensely involved, was concerned to see that scholarly standards were observed. A stern view of the kind propounded by Marquand would brand the Footite method as an illegitimate use of the biographical mode, that Foot and his work - by dealing in unscrupulous myth-making - was no history and not history. A more tolerant view is to recognise that Foot and Williams were trying to do different things, within the scope which biographical conventions permit.

The second of these interpretations was in fact shown to be nearer the mark when the complete run of Cabinet papers for the 1945-51 governments had been made available at the Public Records Office by 1982, enabling - in a comparatively rare instance where rival accounts were reducible to a single point of discord - the charges and counter-charges over the 1951 budget to be independently assessed. The first to do this was the Oxford historian K.O. Morgan, for his *Labour in Power: 1945-51*, in which he relayed the Cabinet budget discussions in full, courtesy of the much fuller notes taken for the occasion by Sir Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary(703). Bevan, it now transpired, had had reservations about the proposed scale of rearmament from the word go - "episodic" warnings, it was true, but no less keenly felt. Much could be said for Gaitskell's

703 For the background to this additional notetaking, see the PREM 8/1480 file in the Public Records Office, Kew.

side of the case, and the jealousies of Bevan. Bevan had been angered by the provocative imposition of health charges; furthermore, in his short time at the Ministry of Labour, he had come up against the intractable matter of trade union wage restraint. Both of these factors were important in influencing his reactions. Nevertheless, on "the main issue", Bevan and Wilson had undoubtedly got the better of the argument, a verdict which carried conviction even when one sensed who Morgan's heart was with. All of those, including many colleagues, who could not recall any early objections from Bevan, were shown to have erred. Michael Foot, in *The Observer*, greeted the news with relish, delighted that the "official" story of Bevan's trumped-up resignation - "his ego off the leash" - had been exposed as a shameful falsehood which had concealed the way the sedate Attlee Cabinet was "stampeded" into accepting the rearmament budget, truly "a political and economic disaster"(704). Williams did eventually agree, "though distinctly grudgingly", that Bevan's doubts about rearmament were of longer standing than he had conceded, but he was, Morgan felt, inclined to be a shade partisan on the point: "I expect the poor man thought the same of me!"(705) After his death in 1984, a Nuffield colleague wrote in an appreciation that Williams "tried to justify Gaitskell's position on the 1951 defence budget and the cuts in the NHS which led to the traumatic conflict with Aneurin Bevan - although it must be said that Williams wrote prior to the release of the relevant public records and that the Cabinet minutes of 1950-1 do

704 M. Foot, 'Attlee and Co.', *The Observer*, 4 March 1984, p. 22.

705 K.O. Morgan, letter to the author, 25 January 1986.

not altogether sustain his account"(706). Thereafter, the new discoveries were quickly accepted, and when Woodrow Wyatt still harped on about Bevan's vanity and opportunism, he was slapped down now that "after 30 years the subject is just beginning to be susceptible to more balanced judgement"(707). John Campbell, the full-time historical biographer who had delivered the rebuke, had his own revaluing life of Bevan which was published in 1987, incorporating much of the new material(708). The outrage which it excited among old Bevanites might have seemed a sure indication of his fair-mindedness(709), and in truth it was one of the great strengths for which he was praised that Campbell managed to "disinter the bones of Nye"(710), using the Foot biography - brilliant in its way but written in the way it was so as to deter others - and building upon it, coolly reassessing a political career that had long been in need of it. The figure of Bevan that took shape was in several respects much more complex than Foot had allowed for, or could have known. Bevan Campbell regarded as having been activated by a strain (however unsystematic) of marxian fundamentalism, minimised by Foot, which made him believe that History, and Britain, were moving inexorably along a socialist path, founded on the numerical force of the working class majority, and for which 1945 was a clear demonstration. Equally, and

706 D.Johnson, 'Philip Maynard Williams, 1920-1984' in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1986 (1987), p.550.

707 J.Campbell, letter in *The Times*, 16 March 1984, p.15.

708 J.Campbell, *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism*.

709 C.Brown, 'Historian angers Kinnock corner', *The Independent*, 26 March 1987, p.1.

710 B.Pimlott, 'The Legacy of Nye', *The Observer*, 29 March 1987, p.36.

equally passed over by Foot, he was a serious-minded politician, politically astute, "a curious blend of anger and intellect" who could fight his corner in Cabinet and was, from 1947 onwards, very much a member of Attlee's inner circle of ministers. Departmental papers also showed him to have been more doctrinaire about state housebuilding than health policy, the later rejection of public provision of housing no less a defeat for his outlook than the government's initial underestimation of the costs of state medicine. Campbell found some signs that Bevan, by the late 1940s, sensed that the socialism he had visualised was not going to come about, and sought in vain to revitalise the movement, treating "issues as symbols" with which to reignite the crusading spark. The clash with Gaitskell (when, joining Morgan, Campbell had Gaitskell wanting to impose charges from his very first day in office) was the moment when the vision began to fade, his resignation - made up of equal proportions of principle, provocation and pique - the pent-up expression of frustration. But Campbell, unburdened by adversarial loyalties, thought that there was no point in endlessly going over the rights and wrongs; it was tragic for all concerned, the party just as much as the protagonists. Doubtless Bevan's was the greater tragedy, his fundamentalism by the end of his life an historical anachronism, the mistaken prophet of a rising working class distracted by consumerism. The trouble was that successive Labour leaders had been dishonestly cashing in on the posthumous canonisation of Bevan ever since, invoking his name to legitimise the abandonment of practically everything that he had worked for, and preventing a realistic reappraisal of his legacy. The 'New Fabian' economists of the 1930s had had a much better understanding of historical trends. Hence Campbell's urging of a return to the pre-1914 alliance of the progressive centre, with the mildly interventionist adaptation of society that had grown out of it - an

SDPish slant which was not lost on his readers(711). Despite straying off into polemics(712)(his introduction and conclusion were noticeably spiced up), and overdoing the "flimsy" theme of Bevan's failed marxism(713), most reviewers found more than enough to give Campbell's well-researched biography a warm welcome. As for Campbell, he was taken aback that the book was seen by so many as a political tract dictated by his own preferences. He had meant it as an "historically objective account" transcending partisan allegiances, and should be taken as such.

In the war of words between the biographers of Bevan and Gaitskell, the immediate issues were also bound up with contrasting approaches to the nature of biographical inquiry. A strong prejudicial bias instinctively guided Foot's account; for Williams, truth was only to be found in precision. It was the difference in acquiring knowledge by feeling as well as by (documentarily) knowing. As things turned out, on the all-important question of Bevan's resignation, the Bevan of 'faith' and the Bevan of 'history' proved to be closer than many had thought, and it was Williams who was obliged to give ground. The Bevanite myth was confirmed, so forming the basis for a new, factually more accurate but also more impersonalised evaluation, the externally certifiable facts superseding all previous arguments. But this in no way lessened - indeed it sanctioned - the ongoing influence of those imaginative insights which had sprung

711 J.Campbell, 'Lessons for anti-Conservative forces in the pre-war alignment', *The Independent*, 4 February 1988, p.20.

712 K.O.Morgan, 'Nye comes in from the cold', *The Guardian*, 27 March 1987, p.22; M.Rutherford, 'End was Nye', *The Financial Times*, 4 April 1987, p.14.

713 D.Marquand, 'Maximum embarrassment', *The London Review of Books*, 7 May 1987, pp.3-5.

from the mind of the biographer.

Keynes and the Keynesians

Throughout the years of high and stable employment, lasting loosely from 1948 until 1973, British economic history was largely relayed in terms of 'Keynesian' history(714). Governments had been equipped by Keynes with the tools to control the level of demand in the economy by fiscal and monetary means, allowing them to maintain resources at or near to a fully employed position. Keynesian tenets had demonstrated their superiority by the test of instrumental policy application. Though economic relationships could not be categorically established, the disappearance of large-scale unemployment was taken as a striking corroboration of the essentials of Keynesianism. This historical version was never monocausal. Other factors, such as the impact of the war economy, the increased bargaining power of the trade unions, and the pick up in world trade after 1945, were given a place. Nor did it assume policy-making infallibility, given politically-induced mood swings and policy mistimings. But - as Dow had pointed out - however much policy may have been destabilising, there was no way of knowing what would have occurred if the government had acted neutrally or done nothing whatsoever. Forecasting of macroeconomic aggregates, which Keynes had made possible, was better than no forecasting at all. As one historian of the interaction of economic thinking and official policy wrote disarmingly, he could quite see how the (false) impression was created that he regarded Keynesian economics as the higher wisdom, "the summit of all

714 A.Budd, in F.Cairncross (ed), *Changing Perceptions in Economic Policy* (1981), p.53.

progress"(715).

The questions raised by R.C.O. Matthews, in a landmark paper (1968), were of a more probing nature, puncturing the "simple-minded" view that there had been full employment since the war owing to the announcement of "a full employment policy"(716). If true, he observed, "it would be a most striking vindication of Keynes's celebrated dictum about the ultimate primacy of abstract thought in the world of affairs". But the pledge made by the Coalition government in 1944 was of no relevance, Matthews argued. The important point was to explain the historically and "unprecedentedly" high level of demand in the post-war economy - this was what was really new. To what extent, then, could this be ascribed to government action? A fiscal explanation was unlikely, in view of the consistently large budget surpluses. Compared with 1937, exports had recovered from a depressed level, outweighing the fall in overseas income and the rise in the propensity to import, but this was not the whole story. By a process of elimination, he arrived at the view that the climb in investment, and particularly *private* investment, during and after the war, was at the heart of the matter, and that although the field was still unresearched, this could be accounted for either by a one-off wartime boost, or as a result of a greater willingness to invest on the part of entrepreneurs, because of confidence in the government. Going further back (to before 1914), there had also been a continuing scarcity of labour relative to capital, a decidedly non-Keynesian factor. This was not to say that the record might not have been any different - avoidance

715 D.Winch, *Economics and Policy - a historical survey* (Fontana 1972), p.10.

716 R.C.O.Matthews, 'Why has Britain had full employment since the war?', *The Economic Journal*, September 1968, pp.555-569.

of excessive deflationary measures at least meant that governments had not done anything to check "the tendency for demand to be high", and for this they could take some credit. Within the framework of Keynesian thinking - therefore - government action was never wholly certain or predictable in its effects; governments could only, in the later formula, create the conditions within which a fully employed economy could flourish. Depressions of the damaging character of the past were now inconceivable, the modern role of governments being to provide the assurance necessary to steady business expectations, the mere statement of this intention bringing about full employment "as if by magic"(717). As unemployment rose above the half-a-million mark in mid-1968, Matthews, and others involved with the London and Cambridge Economic Service, were well placed to comment(718).

This line of argument had two disturbing aspects, as Stewart (1971 and 1977(719)) - a former economic adviser to the Wilson governments - noted. It was impossible to disprove, relying as it did on an implied counterfactual assertion that private investment after the war would have been much the same come what may; it could not be downed. And it threw off demand management as an "unnecessary charade", giving credence to the reviving belief in the classical conception of an automatically adjusting economy that Keynes had so effectively disposed of. The first point was well made, indicating that, though not cast in a testable form, the Matthews argument

717 R.C.O. Matthews, *The Trade Cycle* (1959), p.263.

718 R.C.O. Matthews, 'An upswing of a sort', *The Times*, 13 October 1969, p.23, and 'Realism in setting Britain's targets', *The Times*, 14 October 1969, p.25.

719 M. Stewart, *Keynes and After* (2nd ed 1971); *The Jekyll and Hyde Years - politics and economic policy since 1964* (1977).

was at least lacking in plausibility.

The second thrust was more dubious. The one feature Matthews made no reference to was that of inflation and the price level which, from the point of view of the monetarist counter-theory then gaining ground again, Keynesianism was not well designed to cope with. Keynes, it was conceded, had been alive to the dangers of inflationary pressure; his self-appointed followers were not. Johnson (1971), one of a select band of market economists, saw that their hopes of persuading other economists did not depend on establishing the scientific status of monetarism, useful as the methodology of positive economics might be in throwing up predictive hypotheses. The only way to prove its worth and escape the charge of reversion to dogma was to show that their analysis of monetary phenomena had a pay-off in terms of problem-solving in the realm of actual policy.

Leijonhufvud's achievement in *On Keynesian Economics and the Economics of Keynes* (1968) in driving a wedge between Keynes and the Keynesians Johnson praised for its clearing of the air of "a stultifying ideological controversy, paving the way for a further advance in economic understanding"(720). Monetarists looking at the post-war experience were convinced that the British economy had only been kept going by short-term expedients, deceiving policy-makers into thinking that their coarsened prescriptions were having the desired effect, all the while storing up inflationary trouble for the future, a reading of the economic past tailored to the call for a full-scale reversal of state intervention. The course of post-1945 policy may have been radical, in so far as it ensured the continuation of interventionist government and further weakened industrial competitiveness; it was not, in all probability (Hayek

720 H.G.Johnson, 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Economics', in *Encounter*, April 1971, pp.23-33.

was one of the few to differ on this) in accordance with the views of Keynes himself.

Emphasis on the delaying power of Keynesian-inspired policies, on their postponing of an economic crisis that had now arrived, was a belief that monetarists shared with the leftist-going-on-marxist critique of Keynesianism. Keynes - in this regard - had reconciled capital with labour by doing away with the old division between planning and the market; he had saved democracy from more drastic remedies, the moderation of the Keynesian approach (ensuring full employment and welfare as the normal state of affairs) providing the intellectual support to persuade the Attlee governments of the benefits of the managed, mixed economy. Keynesianism mitigated the harsher features of economic life; what it could not do was to totally eradicate the persisting inequalities of wealth and power which were the fundamental dynamic of the still largely capitalist economic system. The recent reappearance of economic instability manifested itself in a crisis of production and profits which Keynesian commentators had no answer to. The more the government intervened to correct the malfunctioning of the market, the more it was generating tensions in reaction against it. There had not, as most economists had claimed, been a "final victory" for the new, Keynesian economic science(721). Keynes, as a liberal social theorist, had merely furnished a conceptual adaptation of classical economic theory, extending the life span of capitalism while leaving the basic structure of society unaffected(722). Keynesians had taken up the promise of painless gadgets and policy weapons, the acceptance of the ideas of Keynes greatly

721 T.Balogh, 'Keynes and the IMF', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10 October 1975, pp.1211-1214.

722 V.L.Allen, *ibid* (1975), pp.26-28.

eased by their "deeply conservative" character. Unfortunately the Keynesian era was proving to be only an *intermezzo*, brought up short by the incapacity of economists to account for the latest disquieting developments. The left gave full credit to the tenaciousness of Keynes in eventually influencing policy; what he had been driving at was anything but revolutionary.

A neo-Keynesian case was framed to meet this double-pronged attack (among those who felt it deserved to be taken seriously) in assorted essays and assessments of the legacy of Keynes in the light of the disturbances of the mid-1970s, in combination with the gradual publication of a complete edition of Keynes's *Collected Works* by Donald Moggridge, also the author of a short life of Keynes(723). It consisted in demonstrating that both sets of critics had a warped sense of history, caused by reasoning that preceded rather than grew out of the evidence they had before them.

In line with Keynes' belief (contested by both the New Left and the New Right), post-war Keynesians gave greater weight to ideas over interests in explaining how barriers to change were overcome. Several forces were already moving in the direction of increased state regulation - Keynes helped to speed that tendency (Meade), although the achievement of full employment was no more than an inheritance (Opie) from the war. His main success lay in breaking the hold of established doctrines. Skidelsky (in M.Keynes, 1975), merging economic and political analysis, took the argument to its furthest extent: wartime was the real engine of reform,

723 D.E.Moggridge(ed), *Keynes: Aspects of the Man and his Work* (1972); M.Keynes (ed), *Essays on John Maynard Keynes* (1975); D.E.Moggridge, *Keynes* (1976); R.Skidelsky (ed), *The End of the Keynesian Era* (1977).

diminishing the influence of older habits of thought, and Keynesianism was the "ideal ideology" to underwrite the new technique of economic management and the new social consensus that lasted on into peacetime. This sharper ideological focus to the ideas and impact of Keynes was a sign of the times, alien to the older generation of liberals and social democrats, but of a piece with Addison's account, arrived at independently and with the same sense that the Keynesian era was passing away. It was not a re-defining of what Keynesianism was about so much as the recognition, under the pressure of competing ideological alternatives, of its true nature.

Coming to the post-war period itself, realistic Keynesians (Stewart's phrase) were ready to admit to mistakes of judgement and timing, without seeing the need to accept that the whole approach was misguided. One had to take Keynes along with the Keynesians. Stung by Congdon's attack on "counterfeit Keynesians" who had taken too many liberties in propagating a spurious 'Keynesian' tradition, Moggridge warned against lifting quotations out of context, cited Keynes's recommendation (in 1942) that controls would probably have to be retained for some time after the war, and explained - going on the basis of what he had so far seen among Keynes's papers - that on the key question of full employment in the post-war transition, Keynes for one "had not come to any firm policy conclusions"(724). It would not do to prematurely attribute views to him. Whether Keynesian measures had been stabilising or destabilising was, according to Moggridge, now beside the point - "the argument has shifted to the consideration of relatively small swings around generally high levels of employment and output from the much larger swings of the inter-war and pre-1914 periods". How much of this was

724 Letter in reply to Congdon's 'Are we all Keynesians now?', in *Encounter*, September 1975, p.89.

due to an investment boom, technical innovation, arms spending or some other factor was an empirical matter that also had to do with the personal leaning of each economist. The understanding of economic processes was simply not advanced enough. But however slight or indirect the effect of Keynesian ideas might be said to be, the record of post-war prosperity was still "remarkable". The capitalist economies had been reformed and civilised, solving the economic problem of accumulation, and some at the very least of this had undoubtedly been of Keynes's doing(725).

We can summarise the argument by saying that the modern exponents of Keynesianism continued to stress how great a leap forward, even after the rising inflation and unemployment of recent times, the Keynesian revolution in theory and policy still represented. This might have been an effective counter to those who had never accepted Keynesian ideas from the off and had been surprised by the unexpected duration of post-war economic expansion. Hutchison, well versed in the transformation of economic doctrines over time, granted that Keynesian prescriptions were the only coherent ones available in the severe economic circumstances in which they were originally formulated. What interested him still more, in a Hobart paper he wrote for the free market Institute of Economic Affairs (1977)(726), was their subsequent hardening and over-simplification into a dogma by so-called 'Keynesian' publicists and popularisers who had added on "distorting accretions" that put such a different complexion on them as to amount to an entirely new, and far less Keynes-like, theory. No one could be certain what Keynes would be saying in today's climate. But in his last relevant peacetime pronouncements, in 1937, the fear of inflation

725 D.E.Moggridge, *ibid* (1976), pp.161-162.

726 T.W.Hutchison, *Keynes versus the 'Keynesians'*.

loomed largest, carrying with it the corollary that it was wrong to try and bring unemployment down below something akin to a 'natural rate', a concept dear to monetarists. As for claiming his support for modern measures - ever higher targets for employment, 'growthmanship', incomes policies, and indifference to rising prices - it was impossible to find statements about these in his writings. In Keynes's own thinking, the kind of purposive demand management of monetary and fiscal policy had no place. There was plenty of evidence to show that Keynesian theory had been thrown into crisis by internal weaknesses, as much as by historical and institutional changes which were hastening its obsolescence - but that was best left to the critical comment of others. The real issue was the classic instance Keynesianism provided of a ruling paradigm coarsened and corrupted by economists who had entertained an excessively confident idea about the state of economic knowledge. Hutchison was not one to argue that there was no equivalence between the social and the natural sciences. It was only that, in order to guard against the ubiquitousness of values, it was vital to maintain the "utmost purism" in the handling of concepts(727). On this score the much-vaunted suppleness of modern Keynesianism fell down. It was the 'Keynesians' who had stretched knowledge and ignorance in economics beyond its limits, operating on the assumption that economic opinion was becoming progressively integrated. Hutchison was anxious to disillusion them. Advances were made, on the contrary, by *dis*integration. Keynesianism had been turned into a complacent orthodoxy which it was incumbent upon other who thought like him to topple.

Publication of the official memoranda and correspondence of Keynes when he was working in the

Treasury from 1940 onwards did, to some extent, substantiate the point that Keynes had always hedged his recommendations about with cautious qualifications which others had later forsaken. Wilson, a member of the Prime Minister's Statistical Section throughout the war, reviewed some of the papers in *The Guardian*, remarking that in coming down in favour of a post-war unemployment target of around 5%, Keynes did not believe that Beveridge's working assumption would be feasible, though he saw no harm in trying. "...It would not be unfair", Wilson conjectured, "to say that he [Keynes] attached much the same importance to a 1 per cent variation as was subsequently attached in the Fifties and Sixties to a 0.1 per cent variation". Furthermore, the national accounts should be divided up into an ordinary (taxation) budget and a capital budget covering public investment - but only the latter should be made to vary anticyclically, a significant additional proviso to the practice of deficit financing. With one exception (social security contributions) he was staunchly opposed to anti-cyclical changes in taxation. Not wanting to end on a negative note, however, Wilson recalled Keynes's desire to preserve a free society and a liberal economy, something overlooked by ultra-monetarists, and the hazards that full employment presented to these. Discretionary action by government was, nevertheless, an overriding requirement. "During the first three post-war decades these conclusions would have seemed obvious and uncontroversial; but it is a different matter today"(728).

Taking Keynes's revealed views on employment policy together with the evidence of the Public Record Office files, it was apparent to Booth (1983) that the old, "delightfully simple" account of the triumph of

728 T.Wilson, 'Don't blame Keynes for Keynesian failures', *The Guardian*, 19 March 1981, p.19.

Keynesianism over Treasury opposition in the 1944 White Paper on Employment must yield to a more complicated detailing of the emphases and interpretations in official opinion, which Hutchison's stimulating but emotive use of the term 'Keynesian' had done little to aid(729). Knowing that the Treasury had in fact shown greater flexibility towards counter-cyclical public works in the later 1930s (following the researches of Howson and Winch) than previously thought still did not indicate a complete identity of outlook in wartime between Keynes and the Treasury, or that the 1944 White Paper could be regarded as a kind of joint statement that was about as far as officials (Keynes among them) were prepared to go. In specific policy areas - employment, but also war budgeting and social policy about which Keynes also kept very much in touch - Booth found that their respective positions moved noticeably apart, his own views much more likely to coincide with the Keynesians in the Economic Section. Keynes did not query a future policy of wage restraint, and displayed an unmistakable "expansionist bias", even to the point (which Hutchison did not know about) of tolerating deficits in the ordinary budget if all else should fail to cure unemployment in the longer term. This being so, it followed that the White Paper ought still to be viewed as the compromise document that it had been seen as all long, Keynes and the Keynesians being obliged to take a conciliatory line in order to win round the Treasury, making it not the culmination but only a "milestone" on the road to the full conversion of the Treasury to Keynesian methods. For the first two years after 1945, even this momentum was lost, as Labour's leaders - having little understanding of Keynesian ideas - either pressed ahead with the planning of economic recovery (Morrison, Cripps) or else (Dalton)

729 A. Booth, 'The "Keynesian Revolution" in economic policy-making', in *The Economic History Review*, 36 1983, pp.103-23.

stuck to a quite orthodox financial attitude. Continuing official scepticism and the ministerial preference for the planned use of economic resources, tied in with the retention of controls, thwarted the advance of Keynesianism, making a nonsense of Paul Addison's facile presentation of war as the accelerator of ideological change. It was only with the inflation and balance of payments difficulties of Spring-Autumn 1947 that the Treasury belatedly applied Keynesian remedies significantly to choke off excess demand as inflation threatened - and against Dalton's better judgement - that the last obstacles were finally removed.

Two conclusions suggested themselves to Booth. The official adoption of Keynesianism was "scarcely revolutionary", an uneven and protracted process spread out over more than ten years, and still not complete even then. As to the evolution of Keynes's own thinking, his pre-war prognostications had not been his last pertinent thoughts, nor was he closed to new initiatives - both claims made by Hutchison. Lining Keynes up against the Keynesians fell down, leaving economic historians in need of a better framework of explanation. That said, the wartime experience of economists in government was wholly beneficial - freshness and originality came from outsiders who did not think like civil servants; economists in return gained a sense of professional unity and of the demands of policy that was to serve them well after 1945(730).

Aimed at Hutchison, Booth's paper also had in its sights Tomlinson's dismissal of the 'revolution' that

never was(731). Tomlinson had confined his interpretation of Keynesianism to its central concern with the inter-war problem of unemployment, picking up where Matthews had left off in 1968 by referring to the budget surpluses that were run up immediately after the war, and going on to make the broader point that, for at least the next decade, budgetary policy had never been subordinated to the goal of securing high employment. The buoyancy of the international economy enabled governments to advocate and indeed seem to attain full employment without actually having the means to do so. The essential "cutting edge" of Keynesianism - deficit financing to counter unemployment - was at no time put into effect. Governments did learn to manage budgets, but this was to contest elections, not to maintain employment levels. The Treasury captured Keynesian doctrines by turning them over to the pursuit of the more traditional aims of controlling rising prices and public expenditure. When governments did eventually reflate, in the 1970s, they were blocked by the unwillingness of the markets to finance government borrowing. This was not to deny that a revolution on the theoretical side took place, which influenced the language of political debate. But other historical developments that had nothing to do with economic theory, such as the growth of the public sector, were of far greater importance. The changes had to be conceived of in terms of the institutional environment of policy-making - in modern parlance, the essentials of public policy - emphasising the bureaucratic and interest group entanglements, a dimension which Tomlinson said Booth had made only scant reference to. The Keynesian fallacy - that ideas alone determine events - was exposed.

731 J. Tomlinson, 'Why was there never a "Keynesian Revolution" in economic policy?', *Economy and Society*, 10 1981, pp. 73-87.

Booth, in a rejoinder(732), argued that Tomlinson's doggedly-maintained thesis was entirely without foundation. Confining the notion of Keynesianism to the blunt "deficit test" ignored its wider reach extending to control of aggregate demand across the whole economy. Matthews, anyway, had assigned a role to the influence of government in acting upon business expectations after 1945, even if it was a more modest one than others had presumed. Bringing in related historical developments tending in the direction of bigger government might be rewarding, but there was no end to it. To contend - in short - that there was no 'Keynesian revolution' at all was to fly in the face of the huge volume of received scholarly opinion, both 'pro' and 'anti'. Most observers had, to be sure, tended to take Keynesianism in a wider, macroeconomic sense, the largeness of its impact in turn prompting an argument about where to pin the responsibility for contemporary economic distress. On the other hand, Tomlinson's apprehensions about the driving force of economic theory or the capacity of governments to have any substantial effect on economic activity was in tune with the lowered popular expectations in government - and of the low public and self-esteem of economists - in the 1980s. The historian who feels that all others are engaging in elaborate mythologising is not to be lightly swayed. The respective starting-points of Booth and Tomlinson were at such variance that, even with the onrush of their follow-up works and later literature(733), the parameters of the debate were so constructed as to make the achievement of

732 A.Booth, 'Defining a "Keynesian Revolution"', *The Economic History Review*, 38 1984, pp.263-267.

733 J.Tomlinson, *Employment Policy: the crucial years 1939-1955* (1987); A.Booth, *British Economic Policy 1931-1949: was there a Keynesian revolution?* (1990).

an understanding impossible(734). The impression of "near agreement", conveyed to at least one reviewer(735), was deceiving. Only by widening the discussion to include a wider range of documentary (non-Treasury) evidence and other disciplinary approaches could progress be made.

The more eye-catching argument of Tomlinson did take some of the sparkle off Booth's otherwise bold rewriting of the Keynesian past, especially with his reminder of the economic planning of the Attlee governments at the outset of its first term of office. Ben Pimlott's prize-winning biography of Hugh Dalton went even further in rescuing the brief 1945-47 period of Dalton's tenure as Chancellor, now coming under heavy fire again(736). Pimlott had begun work in 1977, and was then invited to edit his unpublished diaries. The latter, which Dalton used in Pimlott's view as an outlet for emotional release(737), enabled him to go beyond the conventional biographical account, filling the political history of the public Dalton with psychological insight. Many of the best Daltonian passages had already been drawn on elsewhere, and there was no point, as Pimlott saw things, in reproducing those sections of the diaries which Dalton had liberally quoted in his own memoirs. Nevertheless, the controversy over the Keynesian revolution gave what Pimlott had to say an added interest.

734 S.Newton, 'The Keynesian revolution debate: time for a new approach?', in A.Gorst, L.Johnman and W.S.Lucas, *Contemporary British History 1931-61* (1991).

735 T.Hart, 'A century of managed economies', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 11 May 1990, p.32.

736 B.Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (1985).

737 B.Pimlott, 'Hugh Dalton's diaries', *The Listener*, 17 July 1980, pp.72-73.

It was Dalton, more than anyone else, who after the debacle of 1931 stimulated the Labour party's intellectual rebirth, aligned its policies with Whitehall, and saw them through to enactment once in government. The war had, Pimlott wrote on the 40th anniversary of the 1945 victory, reshaped much of the party's pre-war thinking. Mutual dislike between Keynes and Dalton delayed the taking up of Keynes's ideas. The 1945 manifesto, furthermore, had only been drafted in the vaguest of terms, and with little expectation of outright victory. The fleeting opening two years were those when the government was under the severest external pressure, but they were also, coinciding with Dalton's time in high office, the years of maximum impact, more so perhaps than even Dalton realised. He it was who also found the money and constructed the necessary financial policies to support welfare reform and the location of industry, and was indeed willing to "pay almost any price", in spite of the institutional forces ranged against him. Of course, this had called for a degree of blind faith, for which he was much criticised. But Dalton's aims were quite at odds with the apparently "objective", technical complaints of academic economists, or - a little while afterwards - of Gardner. "In the immediate aftermath of the war", Pimlott explained:

"the instincts of Webbian socialists and non-socialist Keynesians were often sharply in conflict, despite agreement on the need for government action to maintain full employment. Where socialists preferred a state-controlled economy to the market as a matter of principle, Keynesians longed for a return to the market and the abandonment of controls; where Dalton saw physical controls as a tool for reducing inequality, many Keynesians regarded the pursuit of greater equality for its own sake

as a distraction from the main purpose of pursuing prosperity"(738).

For a period, then, the economy was relatively tightly controlled. As Worswick has confirmed, little thought had been given to their dismantling in the Economic Section(739); Jay (one of the few in a position to know) indicated that there was even a stepping up of controls(740). Similarly with Keynes's optimistic hopes for the creation of a new world economic order, hopes which Dalton did not share. Dalton was ready to accept Bretton Woods "for the sake of domestic reform". Agreement was given to the risky terms of the American loan as a way of buying time for a radical programme "that could not have been achieved without it". The choices may not have been quite as stark as Keynes presented them. But the immediate advantages overrode the long-term drawbacks. By concentrating primarily on domestic priorities, the Atlantic orientation of British policy was made almost without thinking, and was certainly not a caving in to American demands. It would have made no sense to jeopardise everything in a stand-up confrontation.

This was not a picture of the onward march of consensus. The very fact that Dalton was so vilified was an indication, to Pimlott, that no Keynesian middle way was then taking shape. Labour at that time had been at the forefront of a tide of progressive opinion, a party of ideas and not just of class, when "Labourish" beliefs were the common sense of the epoch. Beveridge, Dalton

738 B.Pimlott, *ibid* (1985), p.473.

739 G.D.N.Worswick, 'Advised by experts', *The London Review of Books*, 21 December 1989, p.15.

740 D.Jay, 'Dalton: the prophet of recovery', *The Sunday Times*, 17 March 1985, p.44.

had told supporters, was not "one of us". Name me a more "socialist Chancellor", Pimlott demanded at the end of it. He added one final twist in suggesting, after exhaustively examining the proof, that come the budget leak in 1947, tiring of Dalton's continual scheming, had wanted to be rid of him.

The Fabian-Keynesian dispute was given a final airing in Elizabeth Durbin's *New Jerusalem*(741), a work of filial devotion and an "intellectual homecoming", a group portrait of her father (who had died in a bathing accident in 1948) and the other 'New Fabians' of pre-war who had "filled out an effective programme for socialist action", pointing the way forward to 1945. Retracing their steps in Oxford, Cambridge and London, and detailing the work of party and other research committees on which they were active, she provided by far the fullest account of the groundwork that, hidden from public view, lay behind the legislative success after the war. The keynote was calculus, not ideology, a balancing of the market and the state, overlapping at times with the evolutionary proposals of Keynes, but ultimately as distinct from liberal Keynesianism as it was from the alarmist thinking of Hayek. A Keynesian approach by itself would not be enough - this was what made them, in Meade's distancing terms, "real socialists", intent on replacing, and not just modifying the economic system. By bringing out the superficial similarities and the more fundamental differences(742), the economic rationale for post-war revisionism, a task Evan Durbin had begun but never finished, was clearly asserted. In the author's formula, "socialism was about justice, the economy was

741 E.Durbin, *New Jerusalem - the Labour party and the economics of democratic socialism* (1985).

742 J.Harris, 'A halfway house?', *New Society*, 18 April 1985, p.90.

about efficiency, and planning was the way to get both"(743). Comparison of the 1930s with the eighties was chastening to her. The group effort that the New Fabians invested was largely selfless and unseen, "a last great flowering" of intellectual concern and social commitment. Over the intervening period, however, their faith in the power of rational scientific progress and enlightened government had been lost, the emotional basis of the Fabian outlook mercilessly attacked, the whole Fabian enterprise condemned (by one former New Fabian who had long since turned towards economic liberalism) for its naive, vacuous duplicity(744).

Apprised of the fact that the Keynesian framework of post-war political economy - with its assurance of a confidence-building command of economic science - had broken down, the 1980s saw the completion of a number of ambitious, long-range pull-togethers, juggling at considerable length (as against the summary diatribes from some of the New Left and New Right) with the relative contribution made by individuals, ideas and institutions to the making and unmaking of modern Britain. Middlemas's first volume in a projected trilogy (1986) was only one such work, but it was the one which made most of the economic component of the political contract which helped to comprise "the post-war settlement"(745). Uniting politics with economics, Middlemas advanced a moderate but avowedly "systematic explanation" that could stand comparison with the schools of neo-liberalism and marxism.

743 E.Durbin, 'Fabian Socialism and Economic Science', in B.Pimlott (ed), *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought* (1984), p.46.

744 C.Clark, 'The IEA and the Fabians: Comparison and Contrast' in A.Seldon (ed), *ibid* (1981), pp.189-204.

745 K.Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State - Vol 1: Britain in Search of Balance 1940-61*.

Profiting from the comments made about his *Politics in Industrial Society*, Middlemas was also struck by the far more heated nature of the contemporary political argument. It might not be the best time to attempt such an essay - but with the rush to judgement in other disciplines, he believed an historical account to be at least as justified. To carry conviction he had first to demonstrate that the settlement had been an historical reality, an observable feature "arising out of the [historical] material itself". One way to authenticate it was to tap the historic memory of the politicians and administrators who had devised it and "invested their intellectual and moral capital in making it work". It was by relying on this testimony that Middlemas was able to discard the liberal narrative of evolutionary improvement with which post-war history had been typically written up, but which the participants at the time had had no inkling of. The settlement, he came to see, had been formed out of a set of conflicting departmental and sectional interests thrown together by the extension of the machinery of state regulation in wartime, born of the war emergency rather than through any notion of "moral progress". These competing interests, primarily industry, the unions and finance, by being drawn into the discussion about the post-war future, thereby carried their differences into the very heart of government. Balance was achieved by an unwritten understanding of the rewards and the reciprocal duties which went with this incorporation - the centrepiece of this package of ideas being the guarantee to maintain a high and stable level of employment. By this means it was hoped to prolong the agreement after war's end, furthering the attainment of political stability, economic reconstruction and social improvement. Informal rather than statist, the terms of the accord not only marked a clean break with the past

but also entrenched industry and the unions as "organic" parts of government. The crucial point about the quasi-corporatist alliance, however, was that forging an arrangement of interdependent collaboration meant evading any contentious issues (monopoly, wage restraint) which would have made agreement impossible. All of the various sectional interests had made a sacrifice in wartime, and were not to be denied. The 1944 Employment White Paper was an agreed political document struck in an atmosphere of genuine enthusiasm and as an expression of the higher national interest; but it did nothing to resolve conflicts of ethos, outlook and even ideology. Thus it was that the post-war shape of the economy was "tailored to the existing mentalities and practices of industry and labour", imparting to the Attlee administration "a dangerous ambiguity".

Labour's success after 1945 stemmed from its being able to bridge the gap between pre-war strategy and the country's post-war dilemmas, giving to the new administrative pattern the Labourite character of public ownership and indicative planning, while staying within the spirit of the wartime understanding. Part of the way the electoral mandate was interpreted was that the party's leaders would not tolerate any form of command economy. Government could try to persuade and induce, but it could not coerce. Middlemas was certain that the settlement embodied a hegemonistic idea, kept in being by far more than rising living standards. Even in the early 1950s, with the return of the Conservatives, there were no outbreaks of outright opposition to the relationship of mutual competition which had grown up. In time, however, many of the safeguards of 1944 were impaired and, when economic difficulties ensued, capital and labour were pulled apart, leaving the government with no way of re-imposing co-operation. Economic management became intertwined with electoral calculation, to civil

service dismay. The main producer groups, slow to change their ways but still invested with a negative power, reached bargains that were often unenforceable, even renegotiable. By the end of the decade, the wartime tripartite mechanism was wearing out, the wartime mandarins who had had a hand in designing it were passing on, and political debate was increasingly coloured by new forms of ideological dissent. Central to this "substratum of hostility" (though still only a minority view on the left and right which had never quite been killed off) was the belief that the corporatist system itself was at fault, and that it had only worked to start with through the elimination of organised self-interest brought on by the wartime external threat. To this extent, the political settlement had outlived its political context, and the physical presence of its authors, so that the buried questions of the past - concerning the role and degree of state activity - resurfaced with the re-appearance of fundamental antagonisms.

It was reasonable to ask how little and how much of the Keynesian-inspired history Middlemas left standing. Disliking loose talk of 'Keynesian social democracy', whose meaning he found hard to discern, Middlemas thought of the post-war settlement less in terms of ideas and assumptions and more by way of an organisational principle or administrative logic which took on a life of its own. In place of widening prosperity and security, he described instead a tale of mounting predicaments. Although unsympathetic to their message, he nevertheless offered a structural analysis as to why it was that the older ideologies of class and interest came to enjoy a new lease of life. The once-dominant Keynesian historiography had gone and Middlemas, Marquand reported,

had done more than any other scholar to demolish it(746). All that remained was a "cacophony" - vigorous, enlivening, indiscriminating in its plundering of the past for ahistorical ends, but as yet unresolved.

But the Middlemas method of blending narrative and model did raise eyebrows. Many thought his approach frankly unbelievable, a shaky theory spoiled further by the realisation that the 400 pages of closely argued text were not error-free(747). Was post-war Britain actually "quasi-corporatist", or was the corporatist concept simply a useful but only partial analytical device? Middlemas said that he went out and had found it to be so, something which others, had they been so inclined, would have uncovered too(748). It cannot be held that his account derived exclusively or even mainly from the official archives, which he drew on far less than expected. His special source was elite interviewing of the administrative and political class of the forties, the prevalent attitudes of the Keynesian-Beveridgean mandarinatè dependably reproduced. For all his allusiveness, this also smacked of the old consensual history by another name. Many retired officials had become disillusioned later in life by the way things turned out(749), but this did not absolve them from all

746 D.Marquand, 'Exit Left in Loud Disarray', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 15 June 1990, p.18.

747 J.Turner, 'Acronymous relations', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1990, p.3.

748 See the interview with Middlemas in *Contemporary Record*, Winter 1991, pp.519-541 and his review of Greenleaf in *History*, June 1990, pp.359-361.

749 P.Hennessy and D.Hague, *How Adolf Hitler Reformed Whitehall* (1985), p.48; see also E.Plowden, *An Industrialist in the Treasury* (1989), A.Cairncross and N.Watts, *The Economic Section: a study in economic advising* (1989) and A.Cairncross (ed), *The Robert Hall Diaries*, Vol 1 1947-1953 (1989).

blame. To New Rightists, scornful of the bureaucratic urge to control, they ought by now to have known better. The New Left had no time for the Fabian ideal of a expert, patrician but basically undemocratic clerisy(750). On balance, as one patrician expositor (who knew everybody) could conclude, it was right to say that the representatives of *Our Age* owed their contemporaries an apology(751). It was not just because of Middlemas's touching rendition of wartime and post-war values, which had since gone out of fashion. That kind of outlook was now held - with the full force of hindsight - to be morally and intellectually indefensible.

Theory choice

The exchange of arguments about the impact and legacy of John Maynard Keynes and of Keynesian ideas marked an important stage in the development of economic science, conceived from the point of view of historical economics.

On a number of counts, understanding was heightened. New archival sources made it easier to pin down the individual attitudes of Keynes and other economists and advisers at particular points in time, even if fluctuations in opinion made it harder to make sense of what was going on. The meaning that could be attributed to the 'Keynesian revolution', with its associated assumption of the power of ideas to influence policy, was carefully explored, the lack of agreed definitional terms requiring scholars to go to great lengths to clarify their interpretation of the concept and even causing some

750 B.Schwartz, 'Conservatives and Corporatism', *The New Left Review*, November-December 1987, pp.107-128.

751 N.Annan, *Our Age - portrait of a generation* (1990).

to argue that it should be abandoned altogether. And the events of the 1970s forced a revision of existing attitudes about the ability and willingness of governments to effect changes in the economy, which inevitably reflected back on to the war and post-war years, altering the perspective but compounding the uncertainty. The total effect of these advances was to encourage the replacement of a simplistic with a more involved and complicated historical account which, by expanding the particulars, compelled a greater regard for what could and could not be firmly established.

But this is to seek out slender agreement in a world of fundamental difference. New sources did come to light, only to be evaluated according to preconceived positions. The concept of a Keynesian revolution was taken apart and reconstructed, but mainly in order to highlight and extend the grounds for disagreement. New views of the economic past, claiming to free the discussion from a dominant ideological orthodoxy, reintroduced new, all-knowing strains of dogma. 'Keynesian' history was challenged, but it was as if all of the main schools - Keynesian, free market liberal and marxist - were seated at separate tables, debating the same or a similar range of issues within their own frameworks(752).

In part, this academic discord can be said to have had a sociological basis in the professional organisation of academic economics in the post-war period. The participation of many economists in wartime government, the apparently successful management of the economy immediately after the war, and the expansion of economics teaching in the universities, all fostered a belief in

752 The analogy comes from G.Almond, 'Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science', *PS*, Spring 1988, pp.21-35.

the confident, problem-solving ability of economic understanding applied to matters of practical policy. More recent economic troubles cast doubt on this earlier faith, which, critics argued, was built upon a dangerous over-estimation of intellectual capacity. 'Primitivist' pre-war ideas and outlooks which had been driven out now began to flourish once more, bringing the discussion full circle. The extent of disciplinary agreement and disagreement had to do, in other words, with the special circumstances of economists and economics in the period after 1945.

An economic positivist will maintain that the proliferation of schools need be no bar to the elucidation of factual assertions about economics, the study of which is essentially about organising knowledge. Different accounts and explanations can therefore be made consistent in so far as they are subject to the arbitration of the available evidence. But if, instead, one thinks of the main schools as alternative, internalised and exclusive 'ways of seeing' the economic aspects of reality, testing by reference to an objective realm of facts is ruled out. An approach is not, in this case, assessed against an empirical backdrop; rather there is a contest between one approach and several others, which economists do not have the tie-breaking, **purely economic** criteria to decide between(753). Subjective influences can be minimised, but the effects of fashion, value-preference and unexamined prejudice can never be eliminated entirely. In so saying, economics is bereft of the methodological means which alone can be said to confer scientific authority.

753 M.Blaug, in the introduction to *Economic Theories: True or False? Essays in the History and Methodology of Economics* (1990).

Mr Attlee's Britain

In the comparatively short space of two-and-a-half years, taking us up to the middle of 1985, devotees of contemporary history were supplied with a quintet of indispensable - and complementary - accounts and analyses of the Attlee governments which they had been so conspicuously lacking. Major Attlee made a remarkable comeback, the 'age of austerity' was bathed in a revivalist glow, and the immediate, eventful post-1945 period at last got the histories it deserved. In a burst of sustained critical appreciation and cross-reviewing, the new works were evaluated for their comprehensiveness, accuracy and fairness in a way that only a fully-formed historical judgement - though historians were still troubled by demands for scientific rigour and social relevance - could bring. Political history had "returned" (754).

Primarily, the newly opened government archives, taken together with a careful combing of other private manuscripts and the interviewing of eminent survivors, yielded more than enough of the right sort of recorded material to allow for all-in-one, richly sourced accounts displaying chronological and factual solidity. In the first full year of the Public Record Office papers (1977-78), the rate of documentary requests (though not of readers) jumped sharply (755), and, notwithstanding the shortcomings of the public records, those who had opted to wait upon their release were confirmed in their decision. The play of personality and the evolution of

754 D.Kavanagh, 'Why Political Science Needs History', *Political Studies*, Vol 39 1991, p. 487.

755 PRO Readers Bulletin, No 1 1988, p.1.

policy turned out on inspection to always be much more convoluted. Actions seen from the inside made more sense than that had outwardly appeared. Known consequences had to be measured against official -- and unofficial -- intentions. Most of all, the turbulent shake-up of Britain's domestic economy and social structure had been tied by all kinds of inter-relationships to the much wider remaking of the post-war European and international order. The breadth and depth of the new findings were such that it ceased to be reasonable, or advisable, to talk about Attlee's Britain in the comparatively uninformed, pre-archival terms. There was still room for argument. But disputes could now be settled by appeal to a documented record of demonstrable information that held good for every type of persuasion.

Side-by-side with this went a keen sense of disciplinary efficacy. History was often charged with being little more than the privileged opinion of historians, whose values and beliefs needed deconstructing; for this purpose, one groundless version of the past was as good as any other. Alternatively it was regarded as an accessible body of material for generating and testing hypotheses and generalisations, in the continuing quest for law-like certainty. Modern political historians, in attempting to show the current worth of history as a systematic object of study with an identifiable subject-matter and recognisable methods, had to guard against both the 'new' historians who renounce the possibility of any real knowledge of the past and the theorists who presume to know more than they really do know. This called for an emphasis on the particular and the contingent, and on the openness of all historical situations. History was a discipline -- not an ideology or a science.

Both these elements contributed to what was the most

audacious claim attaching to the new range of studies of the Attlee years - that they represented a powerful and mutually reinforcing thrust in the direction of a more disinterested view of an only just recent past, an exploit which even many mainstream historians were highly sceptical about. The matter of 1945 had been the subject of heightened contention since the early 1970s, undermining the customary accounts of liberal-left advance. The authors of the latest works were never unjudging. But they had the advantage of being able to approach early postwar in its own time and on its own terms - in its full historical context - which allowed them to stop the clock before it ran on into the, for many, apocalyptic succeeding period.

Good old Clem

The authorised and overdue tribute to Clement Attlee, which went on sale on the eve of the centenary year of his birth, was the first book-length work to utilise the plentiful official files, including from the PREM class, which - by 1982 - covered the whole of his premiership(756). Although lacking in footnotes (which were only added for the paperback edition) and heavily edited, without drawing on Transport House, Harris, as befitted *The Observer's* star interviewer, put to good use a number of private conversations he had had with Attlee in the years from 1958 to 1967. Further to this, Attlee's regular and less guarded letters to his brother provided important insights. The biography both marked, and helped towards, the upward valuation of Attlee's standing.

Attlee was lauded for having made "the best of an impossible situation" - that had been the essence of his

leadership in government. Only he could have held the colliding egos of ambitious colleagues together. Knowing when to temporise, he could also act with unflinching firmness. The country fatally weakened by war, he nevertheless was able to ensure that his administration had an impact on Britain and the world that no other twentieth-century administration could match. His primary concerns, Harris saw Attlee as having seen it, were international ahead of domestic ones - the "momentous" decision to quit India, when Attlee really came into his own, offset by the failure over Palestine. Without a Foreign Affairs or Commonwealth committee of the Cabinet, Attlee and Bevin kept in the closest of touch, neither moving without first securing the support of the other. Attlee, much earlier and more resolutely anti-Soviet than his Foreign Secretary, had been - in one chapter heading - the real "Cold Warrior". But Harris was happy to repeat the well-worn story of Attlee's flight to see Truman in 1950, long since questioned. His statesmanly handling of the sea of troubles with which they were engulfed was evidence to Harris that Attlee grew with high office. Consistently more popular than the government or party he led, his hold only began to slip in 1949, when Bevan first began pushing his claims. The Bevanite arguments cast a shadow over these later years. Attlee's reputation, as such, had been wrongly tarnished by incidents which had occurred after leaving office and were no part of the main story. In the context of his time and of the course of events, Attlee proved himself to be of the highest calibre.

The assessment, and not just the content, was the most notable feature of Harris's summing up, in a book which otherwise contained few novelties: Attlee, 'accidental' prime minister that he was, fitted to perfection. His modest ordinariness, picked out by

Burridge in a second run around the course(757), was his chief asset. The country, retired civil servants informed Harris, had never been so well governed. No-one else could have effected such immense changes with so little alarm. Harris ran out of superlatives. In an already congested biographical field, Attlee - just as he had at the time - outshone them all.

Harris did not solve the enigma of Attlee(758), attributing his commanding presence(759) to the delivery of a series of well-chosen formulae (many of them included in an appendix). Hennessy and Arends, taking the Harris biography as their starting-point, and dipping into the large official archive, grasped the importance of his harnessing of the Cabinet committee structure(760). Aside from foreign affairs, where Attlee and Bevin "did the job themselves", Attlee had touched on many other key areas of government activity - economic policy (especially from 1947 on), the atomic programme, and the managing of labour disputes. The 1949 Defence Review also for the first time saw the light of day. The colossal range and workload of the committee network gave an indication not just of what the Attlee

757 T. Burridge, *Clement Attlee: A Political Biography* (1985), in which the author argued that the mystery about the commonplace Attlee was that there was no mystery.

758 R. Jenkins, 'The unknowable Prime Minister', *The Observer*, 26 September 1982, p.28.

759 "The recent publication - under the thirty-year rule for disclosure of Cabinet documents - of the Cabinet Conclusions for 1946, has led commentators to express surprise at Attlee's domination of the proceedings. The writer did not enter the Cabinet until 1947, but if 1946 was like 1947 and the succeeding years it is not at all surprising": H. Wilson, *A Prime Minister on Prime Ministers* (1977), p.291.

760 P. Hennessy and A. Arends, *Mr Attlee's Engine Rooms: Cabinet committee structure and the Labour government 1945-51* (Strathclyde paper, 1983).

governments did, but of how - in administrative terms - it was all done. Their view was that, in line with the upward revaluation of the undemonstrative Attlee, and with the mass of supporting detail now being made available, "Attlee looks better with every passing year". The booklet bordered on the reverential, and this despite the "old Buffer" being no fan of open government.

The rehabilitation of Clem was thus ensured. Harris concurred in Attlee's own high opinion of himself. Whatever view one took of its overall achievements (and the serious questions, Campbell felt, still had to be addressed(761)), it was - Harris explained in a radio symposium(762) - undeniable that the period had been one of huge significance. So much was carried out in the most arduous of conditions, and was only just coming to be fully appreciated. And in that reappraisal, Attlee's role, whether in co-ordinating or delegating, had been crucial - the 'little' man in a 'big' government, radical change brought about by a cautious, even conservative leader (Jenkins recalled a similar contradiction with Asquith), the legacy inseparable from the man. "In 1000 years time when we are all dust", M.R.D. Foot commented, Attlee's name rather than Churchill's is the English one that may yet shine out of the muck of the mid-twentieth century"(763).

Harris's point was made for him by others also ready to subscribe to Attlee's upgrading, their memories of postwar overlain with a modern gloss. Attlee's abilities and achievements had - rightly - to be regarded as epoch-

761 J. Campbell, 'Subscription Manager for Socialism', *History Today*, January 1983, p.53.

762 'Everybody's Politician', led by Edmund Ions, 2 January 1983.

763 M.R.D. Foot, review in *Books and Bookmen*, January 1983, p.3.

making. But this was because the politics and language of "the 1945 Socialists" (the phrase is from Macmillan's biographer) were all too easy to forget. "The Labour party's legislation of 1945-51 was drastic and far-reaching", Lord Blake considered:

"One does not need to read Kenneth Harris's excellent biography of Attlee to be reminded of how strongly socialistic it was. Yet for nearly a quarter of a century that vast extension of *etatisme* was regarded as semi-sacrosanct, even by the Conservatives who were in office for most of the time. This is not true today" (764).

Jo Grimond, invited to review Harris for *The Sunday Telegraph*, was the most outspoken of all. Though Attlee's reputation as the very model of an 'English' Prime Minister was secure, and his record in dealing with the main issues of the transition from war to peace was creditable, he had left behind him one damnable inheritance - the extension of state socialism through the nationalised industries and the welfare state, which had made the economy unmanageable and killed off the possibility of economic expansion. Those policies were, Grimond conceded, hugely popular at the time, and Attlee and his colleagues had neither the imagination nor the interest to think up new forms of economic and social organisation. To this extent, they and the party leaders that followed remained prisoners of the past, a decline inherent in all parties of the left. As with so many other parallel historical situations, great though Attlee's accomplishments were in their day, they had led on to ultimate failure, even disaster. The aftermath was

everything(765).

The Mighty Bevin

Only Bevin - the centenary of his birth also recently celebrated - stood higher. Some even complained of a personality cult(766). Alan Bullock's third and final volume, sixteen years after the second, did little to dispel such a notion(767). Bullock had chosen to delay publication so as to consult and incorporate the voluminous State papers, British as well as American. In Bevin, he believed, life and times were as one - the 1940s he labelled "the decade of decisions"(768) in foreign policy, which the country had been living off ever since; Bevin he took to be the principal architect.

Aged thirty when Bevin became Foreign Secretary, Bullock had also had ample opportunity to watch the historical perspective "slowly change and display new facets", especially in more recent years, a development which he had found both instructive and engrossing. Revisionist historians in the United States had breathed new life into the left-wing case against Bevin, which British-based scholars like Avi Schlaim and Bill Jones - showing how far Attlee and Bevin had grown apart from Russophile colleagues while the war was on(769) - had

765 J.Grimond, 'Attlee: what did he really achieve?', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2 January 1983, p.11.

766 M.L.Dockrill, review in *The Royal United Services Institute Journal*, March 1985, pp.80-81.

767 A.Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-1951* (1983).

768 A comment made in Peter Hennessy's 'The Great and the Good' radio broadcast, 21 September 1985.

769 A.Schlaim, 'Ernest Bevin', in *British Foreign Secretaries Since 1945*, A.Schlaim et al (eds)(1977), pp.27-69; B.Jones, *The Russia Complex* (1977).

done something to obstruct. Paradoxically, as Rothwell put it, "the literature on Bevin's left-wing critics within his party has been in inverse ratio to the effect which those critics had on his conduct of foreign policy" (770). A subsidiary line of attack exploited the highly charged issue of the Labour government's policy in Palestine. But there were also questions being asked about the cool reaction to the Schuman plan and the early moves in favour of European integration, which had not worn well. Last of all were developing criticisms, emerging from neo-conservative circles, blasting Attlee and Bevin for entering into a whole range of ill-advised domestic and external commitments which were, looking back, politically and economically unsustainable. A 'select' bibliography of books, monographs and articles on immediate post-war international relations ran to more than 150 items, in a field that was large and still growing.

Bullock cut a path through the documentary tangle by pointing up the chaos of muddle, accident and unpredictability that govern all human affairs. Contemporary history to him was a matter of being trained in the right habits, avoiding conjecture and concentrating on those political or diplomatic events where individual choices and decisions had made a discernible difference. This was not to skim over the surface of events, as the 'quantifiers' of history were inclined to assert. With Bevin, he had to take on the most demanding of assignments: conveying complexity with clarity. Some sense of order might then emerge out of "the unstructured world of experience". It was this humanistic approach which Bullock hoped would disarm Bevin's foes. "The Labour party still cannot take

Ernie", he confessed(771).

Bevin had never expected to hold the post of Foreign Secretary. But he was not without expertise. Along with Attlee, he had dealt with many international problems in the wartime coalition. Bevin was very far from being the one-man band people were accustomed to think of. Once in office, however, he was given a remarkably free hand by Attlee. Only the Indian sub-continent fell outside his responsibilities. Allied to this was his involvement ranging over the whole field of government policy - manpower, wages, planning. Bevin did not, Bullock was keen to stress, enter the Foreign Office with any preconceived ideas about future conduct. He believed, as did all his colleagues, that Britain's international and economic difficulties were only temporary and that she was still a "great power", and he acted upon this basis. The immensity of his task only gradually dawned on him. His greatest fear to begin with was that the United States and the Soviet Union might forge a separate peace over his head. There was no thought at this time of a close Atlantic alliance, for which neither side was prepared. It was also apparent how late on Bevin was willing to entertain hopes of an understanding with the Russians, despite the mutual distrust.

On this point the fiercest opposition arose from sections of his own party. Bullock pointed out that it was Attlee - by proposing in the Spring of 1946 a British disengagement from the entire Mediterranean and Middle East, against the wishes of Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff - who presented the stiffest challenge to Bevin's initial position. Within a few months of this, UK and US views were already beginning to move closer, though there was nothing certain about such a *rapprochement*. Having held

the line until American opinion swung round; Britain was only then able to relinquish some of its overseas responsibilities.

This opening phase, when Bevin was often at a loss as to what to do next, overwhelmed by Palestine(772), frustrated in his Middle Eastern designs(773), and when, had he stopped there, he would have been considered a failure, was all too easily merged with the later phase, from 1947-48 onwards, and the hardening of East-West conflict. Hence the two Bevins. Bullock even dated the turning-point with some accuracy to the moment, in July 1947, when Molotov rejected French overtures to take up the American offer of economic assistance to Europe. "This", Bevin whispered to his Principal Private Secretary Pierson Dixon (we know this because Dixon wrote it down in his diary) "really is the birth of the Western bloc".

The dilemma from Bevin's point of view was one of retaining some independence of thought and action, while at the same time recognising the basic and necessary dependence upon American goodwill, which in turn led him to an appreciation of Britain's domestic economic recovery. He understood that economics and diplomacy were overlapping spheres. The Anglo-American relationship was not entirely without friction. Bevin agitated for a special place for Britain in the Marshall aid scheme, wishing to receive the full benefits while staying apart - much to the annoyance of the Americans -

772 R.Ovendale, 'The Palestine Policy of the British Labour Government, 1945-1946', in *International Affairs*, July 1979, pp.409-431; '1947: The Decision to Withdraw', *International Affairs*, January 1980, pp.73-93.

773 W.R.Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: arab nationalism, the United States, and postwar imperialism* (1984), a book which carried Bullock's imprimatur.

from the rest of continental Europe. In mid-1947, with Labour in disarray, the Truman administration regarded the Attlee governments as no more stable than the French or Italian coalitions. But Bullock stressed how close Western Europe was to collapse. It might be easy, long afterwards, to see those fears as exaggerated; they did not seem exaggerated then. In this Bullock reinforced the traditional argument that, though Marshall aid had led to the hardening of divisions between America and the Soviet Union, there had been no feasible alternative to helping the Western Europeans to help themselves. Greece, Palestine and Berlin may, then, have taken up the lion's share of Bevin's time, but they were peripheral to the main object in mind - securing the economic revival of Britain and Europe, now to be served in addition by the association of the US with the embryonic North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, guaranteeing that America's fate was tied to that of the Europeans. The fact that Labour's left-wing was sympathetic to the new turn was of no more consequence to Bevin than its former hostility. The forging of co-operation with the United States, seized upon by Bevin, together with the country's Commonwealth links, precluded - in the Labour Cabinet's view - any closer economic and political integration with the rest of Europe, of the kind envisaged in the Schuman plan. No-one else thought differently at the time, not even, in his heart of hearts, Churchill. As America's symbolic "principal ally", and with the early ending of Marshall aid, just as Bevin's powers were starting to fade, Britain was now invigorated and "on course".

Although Bevin's record was marred by the outbreak of war in Korea, and the question of whether he should have been moved earlier by Attlee, the basic framework of policy was in place. In Bullock's final reckoning, this was how Bevin should be measured - as the first Foreign Secretary to have to face up to the full extent of

Britain's weakness, but one nevertheless able to play a decisive part in shaping the post-war settlement which, so far from representing 'continuity', committed Britain to a wholly new balance of power that was to last for another generation. Bevin could be classed as America's truest and most dependable friend, but this was never carried to the point of subservience. Nor could he justifiably be accused of failing to recognise the permanence of Britain's declining position. He gave a strong lead, to the best of his ability and the country's resources. Later on, it could be said, Britain slipped badly, both in terms of economic strength and international status, "but it would be hard to put the blame for that" on Bevin's foreign policy. The years from 1945-50 (and it was, Bullock was at pains to remind people, those first five years that he was concerned with) were vastly different from the later 1950s and 1960s.

Time had vindicated Bevin, just as he had - on his deathbed - prophesied to Francis Williams(774), even if he had never been able fully to speak his mind about his real intentions. Sir Frank Roberts, Bevin's Private Secretary between 1947 and 1949 (during Bevin's most constructive phase) fully endorsed the view that his achievement was on a par with any of his distinguished predecessors(775). In his own way, Bevin was even quite 'European'(776). Bullock was not, even so, expecting that all controversy would now die away. Some aspects, such as British intelligence operations in the

774 F.Williams, *ibid* (1952), p.5.

775 Sir F.Roberts, 'Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary', in *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-1951*, R.Ovendale (ed)(1984), pp.21-42.

776 J.W.Young, *Britain, France and the Unity of Europe 1945-1951* (1984).

Middle East, were still a closed book(777). Others tended to play down the myth of Bevin as the driving force, as compared with the respective foreign policy elites(778). On Europe it seemed that the attitudes of some later writers were immovable. But on the central issue of policy - the real scope for an independent foreign policy after 1945 - Bullock was unstinting in his admiration. Pinning the blame on him for the deterioration in East-West relations, as the 'Keep Left' faction had done, was no longer credible. The later charge that he had sought unrealistically to prop up Britain's ailing position was equally unfounded, relying as it did on an "unhistorical" knowledge of subsequent events. As for the latest, vogue idea that Britain had actually lost the war in the longer-run, he had no time for it. However misguided it may appear, the British regarded themselves as winners, and could not contract out of a role in the peace settlement. Bevin, his feat comparable to that of any of his predecessors, was instrumental in establishing a strong and secure place for Britain in the unstable world after the war, bequeathing to his successors a full range of opportunities; "whether they made the best use of them is another matter".

The book's reception was a useful barometer of feeling, and an indicator of the slow build-up of a detached viewpoint. The half-a-million word memorial was generously praised, and Bevin's stature alongside the 27 other Foreign Secretaries of the century favourably

777 K. Roosevelt's *Countercoup - the struggle for the control of Iran* (1979) was withdrawn after pressure from B.P. (formerly the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company). See also 'The First Oil Crisis', radio broadcast, 8 July 1980, and 'Britain's role in Mossadegh's downfall', *The Guardian*, 28 July 1980, p.1.

778 D.C. Watt, *Succeeding John Bull - America in Britain's Place* (1984), Chapter 5.

assessed(779). Wyatt, a long way from his 'Keep Lefting' days, pleaded forgiveness(780). Crick, praising Bullock's coolness of judgement, said that it was time for Bevin to be honoured by Labour and not any more reviled(781); the intellectuals - and Bullock was careful not to crow - had been in the wrong, and this should be recognised. In Marquand's eyes the whole trilogy was masterly history, "imbued with a robust horse sense reminiscent of Bevin's own"(782). This did not deter other respected reviewers from suggesting that Bevin's whole approach had been based on a contradiction - independence at the price of dependency -- which had helped to lock Britain into a system of constricting alliances, bringing in its wake the kind of choices which were not always, as later became clear, to the good(783). To their way of thinking, those glorifying Bevin were over-inclined to lose their critical faculties. But the whole shape and tenor of Bullock's work was a standing example to others, making of it "a brilliant historical recreation" of the mood of the times - rather than a polemical account of how things should have been different - the clutter and confusion swamping any facile verdict. For all the adjustments in outlook since Bullock first began in the 1950s, it was still the Bevin of old, answering to his contemporaries

779 R.Jenkins, 'On a grand scale', *The Observer*, 6 November 1983, p25.

780 W.Wyatt, 'Colossus of the Cold War', *The Times*, 10 November 1983, p.11.

781 B.Crick, 'The way it was', *The New Statesman*, 30 December 1983, pp.18-19.

782 D.Marquand, 'Life-size portraits of two giants', *Encounter*, April 1984, pp.43-44.

783 E.Powell, 'Losing the peace', *The Sunday Times*, 6 November 1983, p.43; C.Thorne, 'The aftermath of war', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 18 November 1983, p.18.

in the surroundings and circumstances that he was compelled to wrestle with, on which Bullock was determined to rest his case. More was known now than had been known then. But on almost all the vital issues, and being better informed now, it was Bevin who had seen clearest and furthest.

High and Low Politics

Biographies predominated. But there was already by now enough in the way of new source material to complete a study of the 1945-51 Labour governments seen in the round, an administration from start-to-finish bordered by electoral victory and defeat. The Attlee years were ripe for compression. Eatwell's undergraduate primer led the way, expressing a clear view of its own, though limited by the publishers to 70,000 words (784). In 1984, and within months of each other, Kenneth Morgan, and his predecessor at Queen's College, Oxford, Henry Pelling finished the long march through to post-war Britain at the head of a movement of historiographical ferment. Historians of renown, familiar with the very full public and less plentiful private papers (and using oral evidence only sparingly), they also differed on important matters of emphasis and interpretation. What they shared was a determination to pierce through the mythical, legendary and partisan readings which enveloped the Attlee governments and to penetrate to their historical core.

Of the two, Morgan was the more all-encompassing and, although, as he argued, "wholly scholarly", the more politically indulgent (785). His criticisms of Labour

784 R. Eatwell, *The 1945-1951 Labour Governments* (1979).

785 K.O. Morgan, *Labour in Power 1945-1951* (1984).

and the left were always, as he wrote in introducing a later set of essays, "criticisms from within"(786). Author of highly regarded works on Welsh politics and in particular on David Lloyd George, Morgan drew much from the favourable comparison between the 1918 of his earlier research and 1945.- His study of Viscount Addison (1980)(787) neatly fused - as Addison had fused - the Cabinets of Asquith and Attlee. But even when a biographical account was well executed, as he thought Harris's was, Morgan saw the tight scope which it afforded. Political history, he maintained, "transcends sheer biography"; politicians are not simply scoundrels on the make. The historian should never donnishly overlook the jumble of politics(788). "They (the post-war Labour governments) were not concerned with proclaiming universally valid truths, but with reconciling, managing and muddling through, relating their principles to the real, ravaged, terrifying world as they faced it in 1945". Of course, analysis of the framing of high policy was essential. But the operations of power had to be joined to the enormous changes in national psychology, economic restructuring and demographic upheaval after the war. This was part of the "political history" of the times too(789).

Morgan's resident reviews in *The Times Literary Supplement* in the late 1970s can be seen as rough notes

786 K.O.Morgan, *Labour People - leaders and lieutenants: Hardie to Kinnock* (1987), p.v.

787 K.O. and J.Morgan, *Portrait of a Progressive - the political career of Christopher, Viscount Addison* (1980).

788 Professor Morgan was one of the 275 Oxford University signatories of the petition against awarding an honorary doctorate to Mrs Thatcher in 1985.

789 K.O.Morgan, 'Political History', *History Today*, January 1985, pp.16-17.

for a book in preparation. He gave an enthusiastic welcome to the dynamics of wartime change contained in Paul Addison's *The Road to 1945*, agreeing about the central importance of the war, arguing that the extent of wartime transformation was "debatable", and singling out Bevan as one of the few figures who grasped its full potentiality(790). The promise of 1945 was clearly at this point in Morgan's thinking unfulfilled. Enjoying the republication of Bevan's *In Face of Fear*, he also saw how it was rooted in its period, but stayed loyal to the achievements of the previous administration in a way that the Bennites were not. From what he had so far come across in the records, there was no "prolonged dissatisfaction" on Bevan's part with the pace and direction of change after 1945, as his wife was implying(791). On the other hand, 'Bevanism' (ably described in Mark Jenkins's account) went further and deeper than a quarrel over the 1951 budget(792). Other notables on the left (Laski, Wilkinson) also came in for fresh treatment, bearing out Morgan's impression of the creative tension between the various elements that made up the Labour coalition - a movement, he agreed, and not just a machine to be manipulated. All of these insights were worked into his final draft, and in the process - in seeking to "propel" the age of Attlee out of the mists of pre-history - Morgan came instead to appreciate the unconsidered progress of the period, judged with the historical perspective it ought to be judged, led by the real "unknown Prime Minister" (not

790 K.O.Morgan, *ibid* (1975).

791 K.O.Morgan 'Adding freedom to freedom', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 November 1980, p.

792 K.O.Morgan, 'Dimensions of dissent', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 September 1981, p.1090.

Bonar Law but Attlee(793)). In the meantime the picture of a "missed opportunity", favoured by the left but a misunderstanding of events, faded out of sight.

One way in which Morgan managed to impress this on the reader - in one of his most innovative arguments - was to suggest, much more forcibly than beforehand, that 1945-51 had been more than a straightforward reaffirmation of wartime changes. The war had been crucial, but the varied effect of social forces, sometimes conflicting and contradictory, was not easily reconciled. There were four respects in which Labour became identified with greater reform - its leaders had held sway over the home front during hostilities; as a junior partner, the party had been allowed to govern and oppose simultaneously; the trade unions, incorporated into the governing fabric, enjoyed new authority; and, lastly, organisationally and as regards policy, the party was much better prepared.

Superimposing this onto 1945 should not, however, hide the unexpected nature of the "seismic" victory that resulted. Nor could pre- and post-1945 be seen as seamlessly joined. For one thing, the degree of consensus and continuity then prevalent had been grossly exaggerated in later accounts, concealing important shifts and divergences. This was true not only for the nationalisation proposals in 1945-49, the key element in the programme, clearly finite in scale and yet quite different in form to the wartime blueprints, but also with the more "socialistic" aspects added on to Beveridge's welfare base, pride of place going to Bevan's NHS scheme, which he called "Labour's - perhaps Britain's - finest hour". In other respects, such as planning, there had been little more than the retention of

793 K.O.Morgan, 'The reticent prime minister', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 24 September 1982, p.1026.

controls. Shinwell's advocacy of statutory wage regulation was firmly rebuffed by the trade unionists in the Cabinet. In the main, it was the latter, welfare objective which, for the historian, marked out the prime case for Labour as the unique custodian of the progressive idea.

For another, the late forties were a time of strong political feelings, which - in his least effective chapter, on the social and cultural mood - Morgan tried to assess:

"The idea [he wrote] of a broad consensus after 1945 in which the NHS, nationalisation and the retreat from empire commanded universal, bipartisan support, is perhaps a later construct which requires qualification. It does not conform to much of the record of events, to the personal recollections of those active at the time, or to the voters' contemporary conception of themselves"(794).

It had been an "intensely political time", as he could well remember(795).

In a similar way, and just as seriously, later commentators had transposed back on to the immediate post-war years the decline in Britain's international influence. In the conditions of 1945, Britain was still one of the three larger powers, a view from which few then dissented. Rejection of the Schuman plan, for a number of "excellent" reasons, could not be said to have

794 K.O.Morgan, *ibid* (1984), p.329.

795 K.O.Morgan, conversation with the author, 8 March 1983.

closed the door to closer European co-operation, as Bullock had already outlined. Besides which the plan fitted badly with other national priorities, especially in the fields of colonial development and the creation of a multi-racial Commonwealth, where altruism and self-interest combined to produce some of Labour's "brightest" acts.

But Morgan was clear about the extent to which foreign and defence considerations dictated domestic advances. Britain's great power prestige (Lord Franks had talked in such terms to him) made possible the democratic socialist experiment at home, and military leadership abroad, even if any "moral capital" was sacrificed. This was brought home graphically in the last few months of the second Attlee government - robbed of its overwhelming parliamentary majority and, following the outbreak of the Korean conflict, under pressure from the Americans to boost defence spending. Several months beforehand, Bevan had sensed the undermining of the achievements of 1945, and it was "quite wrong" of Attlee to say that Bevan only later widened his objections - a disclosure of great interest in the war between the biographers and yet one, as Clarke noticed, that the uninitiated could easily miss. As to the upshot, there was no disputing that Labour, harassed on all sides and its momentum spent, was (despite going hopefully into the 1951 election) a government on its last legs.

In spite of this falling away, Labour's accomplishments remained considerable. Morgan had some lingering sympathy with the "retreat from Jerusalem" lament, and of other left critiques, but they were too full of one-sided dogma and passion to withstand

searching appraisal(796). The debunkers of 1945-51 - left and right - had gone too far. There were evident shortcomings, such as in the lack of institutional reform. Attlee was not all that he was cracked up to be. But by its own realistic estimation, in the very different position pertaining in 1945, there had been a substantial slab of economic and social change. Great strides were made in balancing economic improvement and social liberty. The Labour party, throughout, was to an unusual extent united in its actions and certain of its purpose. These years were not to be seen as a form of "advanced liberalism", a mild precursor to the SDPite 1980s, given substance by David Marquand, amongst others. Opportunities were taken, and not just missed. Labour often took the radical way out of a tight corner. If continuity was to be found anywhere, it was after 1951 and the Tory confirmation of what Labour had done. Comparing post-1945 with post-1918, about which he was an acknowledged expert, sealed his case. What was true for Wales was true for Britain as a whole. 1945 represented a respectable heritage, symbolising "the British version of socialism in one country"(797); 1918 was well forgotten(798).

Academic colleagues engaged on similar work were ready to grant that, in what was after all the first full-scale overview of the period, Morgan had confirmed his place as one of the leading political historians. In striking the balance between successes and failures, he

796 See his review of John Saville's 'The Labour Movement in Britain', *The New Statesman and Society*, 10 June 1988, pp.41-42.

797 K.O.Morgan, 'How good was the Attlee government?', *New Society*, 23 February 1984, p.286.

798 K.O.Morgan, 'Post-war reconstruction in Wales, 1918 and 1945', in *The Working Class in Modern British History - essays in honour of Henry Pelling*, J.M.Winter (ed)(1982), pp.82-98.

had - Addison thought - applied 'just enough bias to illuminate, but never too much to distort(799). Though Morgan's instinct was to give Labour the benefit of any doubt, it was a book, Burk said, on which one could depend(800). For Clarke, the grip of controversy was not easy to escape, even thirty years on, and even guided by as scrupulous a historian as Morgan; but the "hard slog" through the thickets of policy had been well worth it(801). Conscious of the furore which still surrounded many aspects of the age of Attlee, it was the elements tending towards fair-minded disinterestedness which were the most valued.

Instead of a continuous narrative, Henry Pelling's concise reassessment of the 1945-51 Labour governments consisted of a set of highlight essays, chronologically arranged, drawing on the public records and the extensive secondary literature, and employing *The Times* as his watchpiece(802). Its circumspect, sourced brevity was entirely characteristic. His own one-volume life of Churchill(803) had been a commercial success, and Pelling was known to believe that other recent books on the 1940s were over-long(804). Severe illness held up his academic work, but an early copy of his opening chapter, a reconsideration of the 1945 general election (McCallum's study having been the first of its kind, but

799 P. Addison, *ibid*, 5-18 April 1984, pp.3-5.

800 K. Burk, review in *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 1984, pp.450-452.

801 P. Clarke, 'High tide for the left', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 March 1984, pp.263-264.

802 H.M. Pelling, *The Labour Governments, 1945-51* (1984).

803 H.M. Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (1974).

804 H.M. Pelling, conversation with the author, 22 October 1982.

also, by now, "the crudest and least adequate") appeared in *The Historical Journal* in 1980(805). Later sections went on to cover the main areas of reconstruction and welfare on the domestic front, external policy, the 1947 hiatus, a novel sketching in of the Marshall aid programme and the OEEC (expanded into a book(806)), before reaching the winding-down in 1950-51. His judgements were often astute. Not venturing further than a listing of the likely causes for the turnaround in 1945, he drew attention to Churchill's inadvertent building up of the personality of Attlee. Sceptical of manifestoitis, he showed how the nationalisation of the hospital service had been a civil servant's idea. 'Keynesianism' he found to be too vague a term to have any real meaning in the immediate post-war years. There was gentle irony, also, in many of the otherwise very moral pen portraits of Attlee, Morrison and Cripps. Flat and uncontentious as his tone generally was, the lasting nature of Labour's achievement, however, was never put in any doubt: externally imposed limits, which the government had been very much "at the mercy of", were the decisive factor; but within those limits, a meritable "social betterment" had come about, in which continuity - the Conservative continuity that followed - remained the keynote.

It was a disappointing result, even for his friends and admirers. J.M. Winter, editor of a Pelling *festschrift* in 1982, had made much of Pelling's standing as a historian of record, providing the yardstick against which all other scholarship could be measured, and arguing that "anyone working in labour history today is

805 H.M.Pelling, 'The 1945 General Election Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, 23 1980, pp.399-414.

806 H.M.Pelling, *Britain and the Marshall Plan* (1989).

informally one of his students"(807). He drew heart from Pelling's well-honed skill at taking "the sound and fury" out of historical discussion. But in this case it had been overdone. Where Morgan was alive to the functional mythology of the labour movement, acting as a guardian of struggles past (the earliest supporters indeed using history as a substitute for theory), Pelling "deprive[d] much of that history of the passion and conviction which give it its special character"(808). Morgan's account was seen to be partial, but acceptably, even inspiringly so, whereas - with Pelling - the sober, pedestrian task he set himself of purging legends did not always satisfy. Any history of the Labour party, and above all any account of its high tide in the late 40s, had also to treat with what the party had made of its history. A detachable viewpoint, while valuable, could only be taken so far.

Pelling had, moreover, in Addison's view, missed in a way that Morgan had not the rise during the war of an alliance between the radical intelligentsia and the leaders of the unionised working classes, the joint impact of which - in his own persuasive thesis - was the "efficient secret" that ultimately lay behind the more immediate causes of the victory in 1945. The war had shaken up Britain in a dramatic way, adding force to Labour's collectivist drive, and enabling it to dictate the main lines of social development "right down to the 1970s". Though he did still wonder whether the government had done all it might have done, one had all the same to grasp and convey the changes wrought upon the underlying economy and society. Sticking to the legislative changes in an undramatic style muffled and

807 J.M.Winter (ed), *ibid* (1982), p.xii.

808 J.M.Winter, 'Say not the struggle', *The London Review of Books*, 1-14 November 1984, p.16.

muted the "social dynamics"(809).

Their contrasting methods were brought out in the short chapters which Morgan and Pelling had contributed to a collection of essays on the theme of 'high' and 'low' politics the year before(810). Pelling gave a brisk run through of his essential findings, sweeping aside the fallacy that the party's 1945 programme had only to be announced for it to be capable of implementation. Recalling McKenzie's neglect of the trade union factor in the Labour party, which had badly skewed his account of 1931, Pelling explained how the guiding hand of the unions after 1945 added to the institutional and other pressures which had affected the timing and realising of the main election pledges, the least influential of these being the greatly enlarged Parliamentary Labour Party. Administrative practicalities and electoral considerations meant that the mandate which Labour sought in 1950 and 1951 was less far-reaching that was the case in 1945. But there was no suggestion that the history of 1945-51 deserved to be written about in any way differently from the history of any previous government, Labour or otherwise. Pelling's conventional bent, accentuated by his reliance on the official archives, contributed to making the high political approach not just a good but the best means of tackling what the Attlee governments were able to achieve.

Morgan also referred to McKenzie's erroneous analysis, compounded by his mistaking of Labour's

809 P. Addison, 'Attlee's new order', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 August 1984, p.960.

810 H.M. Pelling, 'The Labour governments of 1945-51: the determinants of policy' and K.O. Morgan, 'The High and Low Politics of Labour: Keir Hardie to Michael Foot' in M. Bentley and J. Stevenson (eds), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain* (1983), pp.255-284 and 285-312.

"constitutional normality" after the war as somehow standard, when in fact the 1945-51 period, he remarked, was - because ideological tensions were momentarily stilled - *un*typical in Labour history. For a variety of reasons the party was marked by a powerful, disciplined and harmonious unity, its leaders already tested in office and its policies laid down with exceptional clarity, out of all recognition so far as other Labour governments went. The stirring of constituency activism in the later 1930s, kept in being throughout the war years, had added to the forward thrust after 1945, just as rank-and-file discontent, and trade union revolt, fed into the Bevanite unrest after 1951. Pressure from below (not to be dismissed simply as disruption by the left) was really a history-long constant, past disputes between populists and elitists in the party having more to do with "democracy" than "socialism", a thread of discord that could not be glossed over by inventing iron laws or historical proofs. Having seen off the political scientists, Morgan also rebuked his fellow historians. Although the high politics of Labour had gone through its "classic" phase between 1945 and 1951, a longer view demonstrated how imperfectly the party conformed to the high political mould. He was far less convinced that the traditional kind of institutional political history, of parties administering the state rather than striving to radically change it, was strictly appropriate to Labour's past. Labour was - and remained - different.

Though the editors of the *High and Low* volume admitted that the argument which had flared up in the early seventies about the methodological merits of the high political approach had since died down, the main issues had not been settled. It was apparent how much more emphasis Morgan placed on the popular, societal dimension of Labourism after 1945 than Pelling had. But to others arrayed across the political spectrum who were

less enamoured by the collectivist, egalitarian ideal, even this did not suffice. They felt his disavowal of partisanship to be unconvincing, and the attempt to 'objectify' the Attlee years a misleading undertaking. Coverage of the then Labour governments was of vital contemporary importance, since so much of what they stood for was being actively repudiated by Conservative governments of the early 1980s, but in adopting the Westminster and Whitehall perspective on Labour Britain, Bullock, Morgan and Pelling had uncritically imparted the official assumptions of great power pretension and beneficent statism. To recapture the true temper of the times, one had to take the measure of the Attlee government's full sociological impact.

One variant of this angle of interest homed in on why the government - in such a strong position in 1945 - had not been able to go far enough to make its reforms stick. E.P. Thompson, writing "not as a professional historian but simply as a politically-conscious citizen who lived through those years" questioned the value of excessively government-oriented accounts, conjuring up instead the earnest, hopeful mood in the country at large, far to the left of official Labour, and the activities of maverick individuals like Konny Zilliacus(811). There were issues at stake in that government, according to Barnett, that could not be wished away in a cloud of "consensus-prose"(812). Saville, in an extended review of Bullock, was worried that the same illusions about Labour's government of

811 E.P.Thompson, 'Mr Attlee and the Gadarene Swine', *The Guardian*, 3 March 1984, p.9.

812 A.Barnett, review in *Marxism Today*, July 1984, p.41.

weary titans lived on(813). Was the country really more socialist in 1951 than in 1945, Anthony Wright (the biographer of G.D.H. Cole) inquired?(814) And why, if this was so, did the Labour government slip downhill so quickly? The attempt to replace class divisiveness with communal co-operation, binding Britain into a single, coherent society, had been left unfinished, and Stedman-Jones gave his own reasons(815). But the "structure of determination" of the leading accounts debarred them from even beginning to understand the incomplete nature of the 1945 reform-revolution.

A similar but contrasting line was also on offer, in this case decrying the entrenched, immovable character of Attlee's bureaucratic socialism. The wholly exceptional, dragooned solidarity of the war(816) had been allowed to persist into the peace, creating a manufactured consensus which had taken in even Pelling. The nation had been saddled with monolithic state monopolies in services and health, while providing for large vested interests gathered close to the heart of the economy, carving out a huge welfarist, unionised, public sector political constituency. Labour Britain was a socialised Britain, which had inhibited economic revival and established an ideological control from which the country had been unable to extricate itself(817). Was it not

813 J.Saville, 'Ernest Bevin and the Cold War, 1945-1950', in *The Socialist Register 1984*, pp. 68-100. R.Miliband, J.Saville and M.Liebman (eds)(1984), pp.68-100.

814 A.Wright, 'The one big lesson of 1945', *New Socialist*, November 1984, pp.45-47.

815 G.Stedman-Jones, 'March into history?', *New Socialist*, January-February 1982, pp.10-15.

816 K.Joseph and J.Sumption, *Equality* (1984), p.61.

817 S.Walkland, 'The failure of Labour', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 3 August 1984, p.14.

possible, then, that the success story of 1945 was the biggest myth of them all?(818)

These protests amounted to a refusal to allow the discussion about the collectivist forties to be ground down by a process of documentary, dry-as-dust attrition. Not only was there no immaculate, impartial road to the past; the period in question was not yet detachable history, being so much a part of present politics. The whole attempt at historicising the immediate post-war years was meritorious but fundamentally misconceived.

Economic reconstruction

After a pause of more than twenty years, with nothing since J.C.R. Dow's standard work, a substantial and well-researched economic history of 1945-51 followed in 1985, written by Sir Alec Cairncross, the former head of the Government Economic Service (1964-69) and an economic adviser to the Board of Trade between 1946 and 1949(819). A wily, undoctrinaire Keynesian, conscious of the limits of economic theorising and the interaction of policy and politics, Cairncross was a leading critic of Thatcherite economics in the early 1980s and was one of the famous 364 objectors. Having edited for publication the wartime papers on Anglo-American economic collaboration of 'Otto' Clarke, Cairncross turned to a lengthier consideration of the early post-war practice of "economic management", mainly seen from a Treasury viewpoint, endeavouring to work out what had been in the minds of policy-makers, and the alternative lines of action that had seemed to be open, on the basis of the figures that they had had in front of them. Cairncross

818 P. Johnson, 'Why Bevan resigned', *The Spectator*, 24 March 1984, pp.20-21.

819 A. Cairncross, *Years of Recovery - British economic policy 1945-51*.

drew much less on his time in Whitehall than he had expected; his main advantage lay in knowing where to find what he was looking for in the departmental archives. The wealth of official statistics for the post-war period (unlike for earlier periods) unquestionably made the interpreting of events far easier(820). But the "shifting sands of statistical revision" - by which earlier figures were revised according to later recalculations of seasonal trends and the flow of invisibles - introduced an element of arbitrariness, one construction put upon any change being (arguably) as good as another. In some respects, as Clarke reported, new calculations "turned the story upside down"(821). The passage immediately after 1945 was of the greatest interest to Cairncross because of the huge economic adjustments that were completed over such a short time span, with their attendant difficulties. They were years of recovery - as he termed them - but years interrupted by regular emergencies, and with Ministers (including some from the front-line economic departments) all too often coming to the issues ill-prepared and uncomprehending.

This lack of understanding was most obvious in the poor grasp of the relationship between the home economy and external economic policy, which Attlee had "vigorously" denied, compounded by the separation of overseas from domestic sectors in the machinery of economic co-ordination. The dollar shortage, though in the end less prolonged than originally believed, governed policy. For the first two years in the life of the

820 A.Cairncross, 'The post-war years 1945-77', in *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700* (Vol 2: 1860 to the 1970s), R.Floud and D.McCloskey (eds)(1981), pp.370-416.

821 P.Clarke, 'Guessing at the future', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 June 1985, pp.683-684.

government, however, ministerial expectations were wildly unrealistic. Partly, this had come about as a result of bad advice, as was the case with the American loan in 1945 (Keynes was let off lightly by Cairncross). But it also stemmed from a failure to appreciate the extreme precariousness of the post-war position, and the urgency this gave to the earning of dollars to offset a balance of payments deficit. Whereas UK exports increased four-fold (as a consequence of growing world markets, not increased competitiveness), so that an export-led recovery could get underway, the terms of trade moved consistently in the wrong direction, requiring successive import cuts to bring the economy into line, each retrenchment provoking Cabinet-level rifts. The low point arrived in 1947, with the acceleration in the dollar drain, helped, but not actually created, by convertibility. A worst-case 'doomsday' programme was even drawn up - a story first broken by Hennessy. There was also a huge capital outflow, in spite of exchange controls, of a far greater magnitude (this was from the 1981 revision) than officials were then aware, meaning that the balance of payments deficit for 1947 was in fact much closer to the one originally projected in that year's Economic Survey. It was here, Cairncross wrote, that rationing and controls did have an effect, not so much in restraining inflation as in curbing the value of dollar imports - the one area in which the government's planning boast was fully justified.

In other respects, they fell short. The fuel crisis, an early demonstration of Britain's energy vulnerability, was badly mishandled. The margin of failure was only a narrow one - an industrial shutdown, with a severe loss of production, and all for a minute saving of coal - a clear cut case where ministerial action made things worse. There was a similar untidiness to the 1949 devaluation, delayed beyond the point of

advantage (Cairncross had been urging it at the end of 1948) and eventually forced upon ministers so that it looked like a climbdown to market opinion. Cripps, of the 'Big Five', the author indeed of the 1947 Economic Survey, was the only one to have a sense of what organising the nation's resources actually entailed, but it had only been by chance that he had assumed the sole responsibility. After his elevation, economic and financial policy were united in the hands of a strong minister with a clear line of policy. The shift from physical to financial control, however, only gradually came about, this judgement of Cairncross's being "in keeping with the findings of other historians who have been pushing back the date at which the Keynesian era in economic management can be said to commence"(822). Here, the author's Board of Trade instincts were at their starkest. He had some trouble with Gaitskell's "odd doctrine", before and when Chancellor, that some physical controls should remain as an integral part of a properly planned economy. But a mooted Full Employment Bill, intended to entrench the range of manpower controls Gaitskell thought desirable, was dropped in 1951. Such restrictions were only residual, according to Cairncross, and secondary to the fiscal measures being applied to influence the level of demand. The 'fiscality' of Keynes's ideas - as Keynes's own papers showed - was not as thoroughgoing as commonly believed. Cairncross was to conclude that "we cannot say with assurance how much intervention and what kinds of intervention Keynes would have accepted as the price of full employment", a remark close to the agnosticism of Moggridge.

If, as Dow had suggested, government actions could at times be destabilising (though he had come to see this point as "trivial", compared with the sheer over-

ambitiousness of demand management that now struck him(823)), so too - Cairncross decided - it was right to attribute economic fluctuations to forces largely outside government control. Thus, as far as could be ascertained (and *contra* Dow), the dislocation following on from rearmament in 1951 could be blamed on rising import prices.

How the extensive programme of nationalisation fitted into all of this was unclear to Cairncross. It had nothing to do with the country's most pressing economic problems. The government attached more importance to it than it warranted. Ministers never learned that the commanding heights of the economy were dominated by the balance of payments, not iron and steel.

All in all, the period had been one of painful and difficult structural change, quite unlike the picture of steady legislative enactment and retrospective coherence. Nevertheless there were considerable successes to record. Post-war deflation was avoided. Recovery was achieved, despite recurring difficulties, and in spite of acute exposure to world conditions. Though the government did not always know where it was heading, it knew where it wanted to go. The economy was put on a path that it was to follow over the next two decades. Cairncross found little to support the argument that still more could have been done. "Few governments have proclaimed more insistently the need for higher production", even if the level was raised by less than was once thought. Some controls were inevitable, even if the burden of hardship was distributed unequally - it did not follow that reform was pushed too far. These were years of "learning by experience" the techniques of economic steering. Whether looking forward from 1945, and examining the economy

823 See his comments in F.Cairncross (ed), *ibid* (1981), pp.56-57.

sector-by-sector, or looking back from the present, the economy was "set fair", as fair (Cairncross added wryly) as the British economy ever is set fair.

That this upbeat conclusion sat ill with the chronicling of hesitation and ignorance in earlier chapters took nothing away from the judicious thoroughness which several reviewers noted(824). His "prosaic" delivery, disclaiming originality, was reassuring(825). To this extent, he put the economic analysis of 1945 on a more "secure footing" than the statistical information might have allowed(826). Austen Robinson, who had worked in wartime in the Ministry of Production, in a semi-autobiographical note(827), did not regard the later revised figures as being any more 'right' than the earlier 'wrong'. Personal judgements still counted for much. He too considered 1945-47 as largely wasted, before the getting of wisdom. But he wondered whether Cairncross had not, through natural tact, played down the anxieties of the era (Robinson had been a member of the 'doomsday' committee) and the tenuous form that the recovery to begin with took. "We were in the nick of time rescued by Marshall aid", he wrote. Without American help, reconstruction would have been slower and even more painful. Britain without America would have been in a far more fragile state - that was the opinion of the whole government, and the reader who knows the happier ending needed, he added, to be told of this.

824 K. Burk, review in *The Political Quarterly*, April-June 1986, pp.

825 B. Pimlott, *ibid*, 25 April 1985, pp.124-125.

826 P. Clarke, *ibid* (1985).

827 A. Robinson, 'The economic problem of the transition from war to peace: 1945-49', in *The Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 10-1986, pp.165-185.

On this last point, however, historical views were undergoing further changes. In the United States, the orthodox-revisionist confrontation had run its course, the revisionist reaction against the idea that Marshall aid had 'saved' Western Europe from Soviet subjugation having begun to be supplanted by a less ideological, "post-revisionist" synthesis - led by Charles Maier of Harvard - favouring multi- rather than monocausal explanations for the outbreak of cold war antagonism, and giving greater emphasis to the Europe-wide institution-building policies of modernisation and productivity along Keynesian lines, which the programme reputedly ushered in(828). American ties with Europe were placed against a longer backdrop. Post-World War One American aid initiatives, because they had been privately funded, had invariably dried up. But after 1945, use could be made of the inter-allied machinery that had been set up while the war was still on. Hogan, making the comparison with earlier foreign aid efforts, argued that what distinguished the Marshall plan programme was the comprehensive attempt at integrating the European economies(829). Mobilising moderate, non-communist trade unionists behind the plan became an essential element in the strategy. Marshall aid had, as such, a "politico-economic" importance, bringing with it the US government reassurance missing from private sector loans. This technocratic account, by overtaking the academic divisions between left and right and Europeans and Americans, marked a significant shift, with the result, Maier commented, that "even before the Cold war ended, the history of the Marshall plan became far less its

828 C.S.Maier, 'Revisionism and the interpretation of cold war origins', reprinted in *The Origins of the Cold War and Contemporary Europe*, C.S.Maier(ed)(1978), pp.3-34.

829 M.Hogan, 'European integration and the Marshall plan', in *The Marshall Plan - a retrospective*, S.Hoffman and C.S.Maier(eds)(1984), pp.1-6.

hostage".

Alan Milward, in an impassioned and arresting tome(830), volunteered another possibility. The evidence he had come across for an economic slowdown in Europe in 1947 was "unconvincing", based upon a wide variety of separate economic causes, peculiar to each country, which were anyway symptoms of rapid growth and expansion, and hardly of imminent breakdown. The many crises of that period, said to reveal the severity of the UK's fundamental weakness, were a reflection rather of the political arguments deployed at the time, not least the need for the Truman administration to win Congressional approval. The long postwar boom - to his own great surprise - had begun in 1945. What the provision of Marshall aid dollars did, therefore, was to give a further upward boost to the already strong economic and social changes in an increasingly interdependent Europe, in the interests of economic, political and military safety. It followed that Marshall aid was not the "exceptional economic phenomenon" it was singled out as (and for such a strangely long time, to his mind) in the years afterwards, something which both orthodox and revisionist writers had taken for granted. Earlier treatments of reconstruction came in for "complete reassessment"(831).

There was a more pronounced sense in Milward than in Cairncross that economic factors - being fundamental and irresistible - were all-important. Unsurprisingly, the notion that Europe had not after all been helpless was a controversial one, especially across the Atlantic but also among Whitehall veterans in Britain. Milward, in

830 A.S.Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-51* (1984).

831 R.Bullen, review in *The Journal of Common Market Studies*, June 1986, p.348.

his angry discontent, had stretched a point, it was said(832). Altruistic motives on the part of American policy-makers, since these were harder to gauge than the patterns of multilateral trade payments, were too easily and wrongly dismissed(833). The point anyway - as Kindleberger, a junior officer in the State Department at the time, noted - was what practical steps to take to deal with the problems, on the balance of risks to European stability, if America was not just to stand by(834). Gardner, in a *reprise* of his earlier study, was adamant that the plan and its forerunners were a "miracle" of statesmanship(835). The differences were basically due to differences of disciplinary approach. The economic evidence was open to debate, in Ellwood's summary; "the political and social facts point in almost all cases in quite the opposite direction"(836).

A 'great power' delusion?

On the whole, though, in Britain, where the revisionist flare-up had been largely disregarded, the 'post-revisionist' tendency did not so readily apply. Nevertheless the long-standing British preoccupation with the centrality of Britain's role did help to dismantle the outdated bipolar framework of US histories. The UK's increasingly close links with the European Community also 'Europeanised' much historical discussion, the UK's

832 See the comments made in J.Major's 'A Spark to Fire the Engine', radio broadcast (1 of 3), 5 June 1987.

833 K.Burk, 'Britain and the Marshall plan', in *Warfare, Diplomacy and politics - essays in honour of AJP Taylor*, C.Wrigley(ed)(1986), pp.210-230.

834 C.P.Kindleberger, *Marshall Plan Days* (1987).

835 R.N.Gardner, 'Sterling-dollar diplomacy in current perspective', in W.R.Louis and H.Bull(eds); *The Special Relationship* (1986), p.190.

836 D.Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe* (1992), p.260.

continuing European dilemmas having their source in the early cold war division of Germany and Europe, American aid, and early steps to create a Common Market. New documentation suggested promising new lines of research(837), and serving officials from the 1940s were cross-examined about the evolution of policy, having their thirty-year old memoranda quoted back at them(838). Younger historians, unhampered by a lifetime of cold war associations, found ways of taking a fresh, archivally accredited look at familiar questions(839).

To take one example, attacks on the 'great power' delusion of the 1940s, disparaged by critics on the left and right, was harder to credit when it transpired from the official papers that Britain had been anything but a minor player in the important 1945-47 phase, Bevin — as Bullock had already forcefully underlined — emerging more and more as a key figure. Dependence on the archives could be overdone, the assumption being that, whatever may have been said in public, the private record was pristine and credible(840). But privately, and then by the Summer of 1946 openly, as Anne Deighton demonstrated(841), Bevin spearheaded the move to bring to an end the Grand Alliance, thereby obliging the United States to take sides. This did not come as any surprise

837 A. and J. Tusa, *The Berlin Blockade* (1988).

838 M. Charlton, *ibid* (1983).

839 R. Crockatt and S. Smith, *The Cold War — past and present* (1987).

840 V. Rothwell's review of E. Barker's *Britain Between the Superpowers*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 March 1984, p.264.

841 A. Deighton, 'The "frozen front": the Labour government, the division of Germany and the origins of the cold war', in *International Affairs*, Summer 1987, pp.449-465.

to old hands like John Saville who, having waded through "many hundreds" of files relating to Bevin's stewardship of the Foreign Office, was as convinced as ever of Bevin's "undeviating hostility" to the Soviet Union (842). But Deighton's point was the very different one that one could now make a study of the period "without the risk of being called a neo-marxist or a CIA agent"(843). Greater recognition of the multilateral nature of Britain's other strategic, economic and military relationships afforded a clearer understanding of actions and attitudes which were not explicable only on the basis of politicians and civil servants clinging to outdated beliefs. Newton (1984) showed that Britain's reluctance to join fully in the plans for European union was governed by well-founded considerations of economic necessity rather than by a so-called anachronistic attachment to an imperial role. Sterling Area responsibilities were real and could not be summarily ducked(844). When it came to the issue of the development and production of a British atomic bomb, discussed with advisers and scientists while leaving to one side the wisdom or morality of it(845), Bevin's insistence on a weapon "with a bloody Union Jack on top" emphasised in no uncertain terms how it had been an "of course" decision about which there could be no serious objection, possession being a natural military and diplomatic appurtenance. Later historians had let their

842 J.Saville, in *The Guardian*, 7 August 1990, p.35.

843 Quoted by P.Hennessy in 'Britain hangs on to Potsdam's poisoned chalice', *The Independent*, 5 November 1990, p.5.

844 See the summary of his comments in *The Bulletin of the Centre for Economic Policy Research*, April 1984, p.2.

845 P.Hennessy, 'A Bloody Union Jack on top of it', radio discussion, 16 May 1988.

knowledge of Britain's medium-ranking status colour their perceptions of an earlier period, instead of reading forward from 1945, which was the only way the post-war years could make any historical sense. Events had to be viewed just as those directly involved had viewed them, not doing as they pleased but acting as they must.

Golden years

What was it - to return to our opening claim of contemporary historians - that made this fresh crop of academically endorsed studies mature, authoritative and required reading?

The essence of the claim rested on the declared ability to establish an increasingly detached account of the early post-war years, in a way that reflected well on the growing prestige and professionalism of contemporary history. The new abundance of primary (archival and oral) source material was blended with new directions in the growth of scholarship, the two parts held together by an 'invisible college' of historical review, exchange and comment. The very fullness of the complicating detail that was brought into the open exposed the partiality of dubious (ministerial), unsound (social science modelling) or misleading (partisan) constructions imposed on the past, enabling the actors to be restored to the historical circumstances and attitudes of their own time. "The past ten years have been a great education for us all", Paul Addison wrote in his sequel to *The Road to 1945*; both the marxist left and the radical right had succeeded in illuminating "a disturbing corner of reality neglected by conventional opinion", pointing to truths that remained so in spite of "the fallacious ideological baggage with which they were mixed up". But, he continued, they were neither plausible history nor workable politics, and were yielding to a more considered

- and appreciative - evaluation(846).

The mass of complicating detail, contrary to expectations, contributed to an enhanced understanding of the heroic scale and immense achievements of a government confronted throughout by the most forbidding of domestic and international problems. This interconnectedness, the international context of domestic reform, was generally regarded by all authors as the dominating fact about the years after 1945: economic recovery, as well as the precondition for recovery - security. The whole of the government's efforts were turned towards fulfillment of these aims. A bold domestic and a strong foreign policy were fused, Morgan argued, by the general Labourite conviction that Britain, for all its short-term difficulties, remained one of the great powers. Relative economic decline and reduced international standing, if one was searching for origins, *post-dated* 1950; as did the thwarting of post-war expectations. There had been too much backward, and censorious, extrapolation. A line dividing off the past from the present was firmly drawn, sealing the forties off from ensuing hostility. This was the most valuable of scholarly attainments.

Scholarship is never enough by itself, however, to modify historical opinion, and the Attlee era was still not quite purged of all emotional connotations. Most writers were as detached as possible, but as committed as was thought permissible. There was, even in the most reserved of analyses, something of an undimmed affection for the standards and values of Labour Britain - spartan, worthy, exhibiting great social strength, civic pride and reforming purpose, the country in the hands of (in

Addison's expression) "social patriots"(847). By any measure of greatness - though the measures were almost always classically orthodox ones - the Attlee age scored highly(848).

847 P.Hennessy's later, magical and very personalised *Never Again - Britain 1945-1951* (1992) was not to everyone's taste.

848 G.W.Jones, 'The Attlee governments', *Government and Opposition*, Winter 1985, p.126.

Guilty Men

Confounding the trend towards a more dispassionate accounting of post-war Britain, the sharpest-worded and most hotly received work (the argumentativeness of its author for once being matched by the reviewers) was also one of the latest - Correlli Barnett's *The Audit of War - the illusion and reality of Britain as a great nation* (1986), an analysis of and a prescription for the nation's plight which met full on the contrived mythology of Britain's finest hour. Adept at creating a stir, Barnett had distinguished himself as a tough-minded young realist in the 'What Went Wrong' debate of the early 1960s, lashing out at the fatal decency and smug dogooding of nineteenth-century liberal humanists whose teachings, appropriate to an age of empire, were a debilitating luxury when it came to the country's fight for economic survival in the modern world. The theme was expanded upon in *The Collapse of British Power* (1972), in which Barnett described the impact of the "British national character" on the totality of its political, military, social, economic and technological development in the inter-war period. 'The English disease', Barnett believed, was a consequence of the retention of habits of thought which had initially been formed in the era of the country's wealth, success and security, but which had psychologically cushioned the nation against the reality of industrial decay, the necessity to adapt and change being inhibited by the same "informed opinion" which disseminated outmoded values(849). Barnett's spirited and irreverent tone, it should be added, was reminiscent of the line-up in many earlier historical controversies -

849 C. Barnett, 'Obsolescence and Dr Arnold', reprinted in P. Hutber (ed), *What's Wrong With Britain?* (1978), pp.29-34.

the plain-speaking 'pretender', accepting the authority of historical understanding in general but (a school all of his own) appealing against its authority in one important particular, in the hope of modifying the prevailing view, but risking at the same time the claim to the label of a true historian.

Although it was the case that Barnett's views were already well-advertised and long-contested, 'The Audit of War' (a chapter heading in his 1972 book) was buttressed by a culling of archival evidence, in an ESRC-funded project, drawing on the reports, surveys and forecasts from the wartime ministries to catalogue the fundamental "strategic" error that was made in applying the apparatus of the war economy to post-1945 conditions. This made it one of the most extensively researched and validated of the new critiques. Barnett was not, he wished to emphasize, locating the root causes of decline in the post-war era, as so many other rightists had done; nor giving substance to the fashionable verdict of 'the victor vanquished'. Decline went back at least to the 1870s, if not before. But the war had presented an all too rare chance for the country, its fate in its own hands, to break out of the pattern of ruinous disintegration. This was the opportunity that was foolishly squandered.

The Audit of War began - as it ended - with a frontal offensive on the politics of the 'New Jerusalem': the slogans and aspirations, the social goals of a better world belonging to the left-wing prophets, churchmen, publicists and the enlightened Establishment, which were formulated and pressed upon the departments in Whitehall in complete ignorance of the state of the actual resources of the nation, and at the expense of what was really required - a root-and-branch rebuilding, on the state-directed Prussian model (he was no ordinary free

marketeer) of the UK's industrial base. Barnett did not acknowledge that triumph in war could be, and was, taken by many as having vindicated the British way of ordering things, but insisted that the apparently - artificially - stimulated war economy, kept alive by American assistance, had masked the inferiority of the UK's industrial and technological performance. Shortcomings in key sectors of the economy, in coal, steel, shipbuilding and the aircraft industry, well-known to government officials, were shrouded by the euphoria of victory. The overall picture was one of low morale, poor labour relations and insanitary working conditions, a scarcity of good management, lacklustre output, absenteeism, stoppages and go-slows. But these economic and industrial symptoms were expressions, more than all, of the cultural debilitation of national life, and of the wasting of its human resources. Neglect of technical education, an elitist bias towards the liberal arts and the time-wasting irrelevance of religious education had left a workforce ill-equipped to compete.

The shock of war might have jolted the expectation of broad social advance. Some Ministers and officials, though very much outnumbered, questioned the affordability of large-scale social programmes, and argued the case for a corporate dash-for-growth strategy, as was to happen in Western Germany and Japan. Instead, each party sought to outbid the others, especially in promises about the provision of new housing, with Whitehall running to catch up. The false, uncostered prospectuses of 1945 opened up "the illusion of limitless possibility", in which it was implied that only the goodwill was lacking. A 'social' miracle was preferred to an 'economic' one. A unique breathing space was frittered away. The British brought it upon themselves. The reforms that were really needed were put off for 20 years and more, concealed by withdrawal from empire and

domestic progress, the post-war dream in the meantime turning "to the dank reality of a segregated, subliterate, unskilled, unhealthy and institutionalised proletariat hanging on the nipple of state maternalism".

Much of importance was left unelaborated by Barnett, or glossed over. He did not sufficiently explain why it should have been at the close of the Second World War that a decisive break for freedom could have occurred. The momentum behind wartime social reform was inadequately dealt with - at times he called it a "popular yearning", at others it was scaled down to the urging of one man's ego. He never quite made it clear whether the shining economic lift-off, which he did so much to evoke, ever was a realistic alternative, within the realm of the politically possible; as Vaizey had argued, only a handful of people then thought in terms of a free market strategy(850). The eventual and disastrous "failure" of the 'New Jerusalem' ideal, with a footnote setting out the plentiful critical literature on education, housing, poverty and health and the class divide, did not, evidently, need demonstrating. The assumption throughout was that close acquaintance with the evidence could admit of no other inference.

Barnett's 'good bad'(851) book was widely discussed, its claims not so unreasonable that they could be peremptorily brushed aside. Points of substance were a main preoccupation. His talk of 'decline' was generally condemned for its rhetorical looseness, since it mattered exactly what at every stage he intended to

850 J.Vaizey, *ibid* (1983), p.134.

851 George Orwell, borrowing the phrase from G.K. Chesterton, referred to "the fact that one can be amused or excited or even moved by a book that one's intellect simply refuses to take seriously" - *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Vol 4 In Front of Your Nose 1945-50* (Penguin 1970), p.39.

mean by it. His latching on to the war years unfairly saddled the Churchill and Attlee administrations with a heavy burden of responsibility. His 'fresh' evidence from the Whitehall files was in fact long familiar to those who knew the field. And what kind of an audit was it, scholars asked, which was all debit and no credit?(852)

His interpretative framework did not escape attention either. Paul Addison, in his review and in a later survey of 'The Road from 1945'(853), welcomed the first serious work since Calder and Cowling to challenge wartime attitudes. But he felt that Barnett had misunderstood the demands that lay behind social reconstruction - working-class participation in the war effort had meant holding out the reward of greater provision of welfare. It was the shift in the politics of class, and not the sentimental idealism of intellectuals, that needed attending to. Barnett might alter the historical perception; he was unlikely to convince. Economists were similarly sceptical. Sir Alec Cairncross was amazed by what, for a military historian, was Barnett's silence on the post-war deadweight of military expenditure. It would have been difficult, he added, in view of the efforts by the Labour government, to have accorded a still higher priority to exports and investment. The praise in some quarters for the book only made sense to him because it went with the grain (in 'Industry Year') of many Tory prejudices(854). Barker thought that it was wrong to judge peacetime by the

852 M.Gowing, contribution in *Contemporary Record*, Summer 1987, p.18.

853 P.Addison, 'Warfare and Welfare', *The London Review of Books*, 24 July 1986, pp.6-7; 'The Road from 1945', in P.Hennessy and A.Seldon (eds)(1987), pp.5-27.

854 Sir A.Cairncross, letter to the author, 7 April 1990.

exceptional circumstances of the war(855), while Worswick doubted whether Barnett's findings from the official papers formed a representative sample(856). The general belief was that Britain's post-war economic difficulties were not so easily explained. "The economic historians", Lord Annan drily concluded, "have not on the whole been sympathetic to Barnett's interpretation ..." (857)

But this litany of complaints was nothing compared to the presumed breach of collegiate etiquette, for the real force of Barnett's style depended, as Calder observed, not on revelations but polemic(858). Gowing, especially, was irked by Barnett's histrionics, delivered, as others said, "at the top of his voice"(859), a vestigial reflex having no place in scholastic discussion. Barnett always wanted someone to blame, and now it was the intellectuals.

Given leave in the ESRC's newsletter to "review his own critics"(860), Barnett did not stick to material issues. "To challenge cherished national legends", he wrote, "question the value systems of governing elites and expose the self-serving conduct of vested interests rarely ensures universal popularity in an author - least

855 *Contemporary Record*, *ibid*, Summer 1987.

856 G.D.N.Worswick, review in *The Economic Journal*, June 1987, pp.502-503.

857 N.Annan, 'Gentlemen vs. Players', *The New York Review of Books*, 29 September 1988, p.65.

858 A.Calder, 'How we didn't build Jerusalem', *The Guardian*, 25 March 1986, p.10.

859 S.Maclure, 'An audit of the nation', *The Times Education Supplement*, 11 April 1986, p.4.

860 C.Barnett, *ESRC Newsletter*, September 1986, pp.35-36.

of all when he is reviewed by the very kind of people he is criticising" (even Lord Blake was not spared). His academic research had not been carried out, he said, in a frivolous liberal vein "for its own sake" or from the standpoint of "social conscience" and "values". The polemical was still historical - he insisted - and no less valid for that. Only the conceited could believe that it was a sign of cultivated intelligence to hold opinions lightly. The intelligentsia was a self-interested party to the argument, which was precisely why his views were "emotionally and intellectually so distasteful" to them.

Robert Skidelsky's lengthy and acrimonious exchange of correspondence with Barnett crystallised the differences, switching from matters of strict historical fact and conjecture to the subject of authorial motivation and ending up with the two of them barely on speaking terms. Paying his respects to Barnett's perseverance(861), Skidelsky had taken considerable time to draw out and then contest the main elements of his thesis, pointing out the uncertainty involved in Barnett's talk of 'decline', questioning whether the "illusions" of wartime were really illusions when a great victory so obviously validated a nation's culture and institutions, and indicating that there is no straightforward connection between military strength and social welfare. It was a stimulating and incisive reinterpretation, Skidelsky decided (and certainly not one that he was predisposed to argue against), but its leaning was perverse and its intent uncertain. Barnett was driven to protest at the way Skidelsky managed to "garble" his argument, restating that, as the wartime documents made plain, the illusions of the war had encouraged the misplaced hopes that were carried over

861 R. Skidelsky, 'Failures of the will to power', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 March 1986, pp.295-296.

into the peace, which was what made the nineteen forties of such immense importance. Weaknesses apparent then cast light on the history of failure leading right up to the present day, and the current inability to conquer world markets, confirming his tough-minded analysis(862). Skidelsky stood by his point about Bassett's confusing use of 'decline', maintaining that long-held moralising Establishment values which were endorsed by success in the war could not also be dismissed as illusions, and adding that the Attlee government did everything in its power to promote exports and investment - "Barnett's mistake is to look at this period through Thatcherite spectacles"(863). The change of tack in Barnett's second reply showed his impatience with the hair-splitting tactics adopted by Skidelsky which he felt were more suited to an academic seminar, instead of as a contribution to "a boardroom discussion about the problems of an industrial conglomerate losing market share", reminding everyone that his "operational study" had been based on a thorough trawling of the relevant archives(864). To Skidelsky's short riposte(865) that he had thought they were academics discussing historical matters, Bassett was adamant: he wrote "in a spirit of active engagement", just as legitimate an approach as the high-minded and "remotely academic", and perhaps - in the circumstances - even more constructive(866).

862 Letter in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 April 1986.

863 Letter in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 April 1986.

864 Letter in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 9 May 1986.

865 Letter in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 May 1986.

866 Letter in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 6 June 1986.

It would have been too much to expect that Skidelsky and Barnett would come to terms, given that there is no obvious way of reconciling Skidelsky's view of what the war and post-war governments *actually did* with what Barnett, citing chapter-and-verse, believed that they *ought to have done*. But there is a deeper issue to address, which is the problem the 'lone-ranger', contemptuous of academic ways and unwilling to be rated by them, presents to the established rules of scholarly engagement. Barnett refused to partake of a co-operative enterprise, damning all earlier historians and their histories for perpetrating supposedly objective but in fact appeasing accounts of recent events. Although dogmatic, his "inverted Whiggism"(867) was, in his view, entirely justified. Others were part of the problem, their continued adherence to the social democratic ideals of 1945 an affliction(868). He offered a solution.

Some respondents were content to judge Barnett's dissenting analysis solely on its merits, consistent with the approach that personal preferences could have no final bearing on the quality of his argument; others were quite ready to reply in kind by attacking the author too. Of these alternatives, the former is the harder to sustain - if it is right that bias is inevitable and that the only thing to do is to state one's own point of view as honestly as possible, this does leave a great deal up to the discerning powers of the reader. Conversely, to resort to personal vindictiveness endangers the claim to impartial scholarly evaluation, without fear or favour.

867 D. Edgerton, 'Dogfight in defence of Britain', *The Higher*, 8 November 1991, p.15.

868 See also W. Rees-Mogg's 'A wrong theory with the wrong results' in *The Independent*, 19 February 1990, and the subsequent correspondence with P. Clarke, P. Reynolds and J. Burrow.

But there is a respectable argument with which to fall back on, in so far as it can be said that Barnett (even though he asked to be judged by extra-academic standards) did alter and affect the course of the historical argument, though largely in the form of more or less strenuous attempts to rebut or refute him. The only commitment that mattered was not his energetic resolve to assist national recovery but his commitment - shared in common with critics and sympathisers - to a genuine evidence-based historical account for which he was publicly accountable. In this sense, the logical unfolding of historical inquiry still applies, even on the most rousing of topics, and even when it is denied.

Conclusion: The Commitment-Detachment Thesis Reconsidered

A recapitulation of the argument

Recent historical publications claim to have cast the aims and achievements of the Labour governments of 1945-51 in a proper historical perspective, overcoming the technical and methodological obstacles that stand in the way of a critical appreciation of the contemporary past, and - in spite of the particular difficulties associated with the writing of and about the Labour party and left-wing politics generally - managing to attain a recognisably objective view of the period, the personalities and its preoccupations. The purpose of the present work has been to examine this assumption of historiographical progress by considering the form and content of successive additions to the literature relating to the early post-war era, and the contribution which these have made to our understanding of (in the title of one of the most recent of all the books) "the Attlee years" (869).

In Chapter 2, the evolution of the main strands of political, historical and other opinion were set out, paying due attention to the advances in the state of documentation, perspectival outlook and disciplinary development, but with especial emphasis on the presuppositional assumptions of the respective schools of thought, with their distinctive ways of approach and discourse, and the extent to which these characteristics have allowed and encouraged, hampered or indeed ruled out altogether the fruitful exchange of viewpoints. The journalistic, impressionistic accounts of earliest

origin, where judgements were shaped by what participants had seen with their own eyes, refracted by party or personal interest, were shown as having been succeeded by the analytical rigour and sociological theorising of the new political and social sciences, in which impartial investigation of the social world was married to the needs of policy and reform. Latterly, and partly reacting to the 'scientific' nature of earlier writings, the first accredited histories emerged, helped by the freeing up of source material denied to predecessors. The representation of 1945 and after as an impersonal period piece dates from this time. Presented in this chronological way, however, conceals more than it reveals. Contributions to the discussion did not always address the same issues or speak in the same language. They varied in the account they took of the surrounding, and changing, climate of political opinion. The background, generation and values of the various authors often clashed. Proponents of an accepted or orthodox history that was thought to be growing up were confronted by others out of sympathy with the characterisation of a one-way loosening of historical partisanship from which all deviations could be classed as partial or loaded. The exploding of the assumptions of social science in the 1970s coincided with the onset of contemporary history writing, compounding the problems. From this it might be said that all of the various schools and approaches - English empiricism, the Fabians and the anti-collectivists, American political science, Keynesian and neo-Keynesian political economy, the historians of labour, the new left and the anglo-marxists, and traditional and modernist historians - were comprised of elements both of historical insight and historical distortion.

Chapter 3 consisted of a detailed, case-by-case reconstruction of a selection of the most prominent

themes and leading controversies that formed up, designed to show how different outlooks - starting out from differences in their approach to evidence, perspective and interpretation - came together, at what point pre-conceived attitudes were squeezed out by collective debate, and where signs of the persisting influence of competing value systems were still apparent. This was not to vulgarly suggest that the animated arguments constituted the whole of intellectual activity; simply that the relative importance of notions of commitment and detachment would only be disclosed by detailed demonstration. It remains, bearing in mind the caution against generalising from a single set of examples, to draw from the material some pertinent conclusions, relating them to a wider consideration of the nature of historiographical change and historical understanding.

Progress towards a more dispassionate view

Evidence for the advancing state of historical understanding is compelling, tenable on the combined grounds of product and process.

Judged by results, development is apparent on all fronts, the moving picture of 1945 having broadened and deepened with the passing of time.

Discoveries-of-fact have enormously enlarged the range of information, falsifying many earlier beliefs which are now plainly unsustainable. It can no longer be claimed - for instance - that it was the Services' vote which made all the difference in the 1945 election. Or that the statistical information about the economy which the Attlee governments had to hand was accurate or reliable enough to permit sound management, let alone any kind of planning. Or that the trade union factor in the Labour party could be taken for granted. Or that the

assumption of an extensive war and post-war redistribution of incomes was clear and unambiguous. Or that Attlee was merely a 'good chairman'. Or that what was completed between 1945 and 1951 was a 'social revolution' - neither more nor less. Popular misunderstandings and misconceptions have been exposed by the new findings which, though less sweeping and spectacular, are, because they are more complex, nearer to the truth.

The growth of factual knowledge has also made for greater technical exactitude, forcing a revision and refinement of earlier, more loosely formulated ideas and concepts. The relative importance of party ideology and group interests in the framing of policy has been clarified, as well as the impact of war on short and longer-term social change. An effort was made to improve on conceptual tools which were hitherto underpowered (eg. Labourism) or, like the notion of a 'Keynesian revolution', overloaded. Even those concerned to demonstrate that the changes after 1945 had come in place of something else that would have been more necessary or radical have contributed to an understanding of the politics of reformism. Internal 'consensus', considerably sharpened by academic argument, is now set alongside external impressions of British 'greatness', and connections drawn with the comparative national decline of postwar. Tentative theories of the 'stateless' state have resulted. In so doing a whole range of ideas and concepts have been subjected to examination with the aim of improving their descriptive, empirical and explanatory usefulness. A remarkably unvarying vocabulary of expressions and recurring themes have nevertheless been expanded and reconceptualised in such a way as to be virtually unrecognisable from earlier versions.

Increasing specialisation has, it must be granted, encouraged the development of different research programmes, so that, in some instances, disciplines have been walled off from each other. Political, economic and social historians, by nature highly sceptical of large-sounding general theories, have maintained that the more closely certain favoured abstractions are inspected the less there is to be found. They have been far happier converting notions like consensus into the more familiar terms of continuity and discontinuity. But recent years have also seen the completion of a number of over-arching historical accounts, based on innovations-in-theory, designed to encompass the abundance of detail and variations of approach in expressions of greater scope and generality, which - it is hoped - can carry conviction with the specialists. Even where these attempts have not been persuasive, the value of what has come out of them has been universally recognised. It cannot be maintained that current historical thinking on 1945 is marked by an increasing capacity of historians to say the same thing; there is no single view, even in the student guidebooks(870). It is unquestionably the case, however, that the enlargement of objective and accessible knowledge, without dictating any absolute answers, has acted to limit the range of plausible accounts. Apparent fragmentation disguises the makings of a higher synthesis.

The case for a progressively greater historical comprehension of early post-war Britain can be made stronger still when we turn from the results of historical inquiry to the *methods* involved in ascertaining and analysing evidence that go to make up

870 D.Dutton, *British Politics Since 1945 - the rise and fall of consensus* (1991); T.Gourvish and C.O'Day, *Problems in Focus - Britain Since 1945* (1991); K.Jefferys, *The Attlee Governments 1945-1951* (1992).

the activity of a historian. It is on this larger basis that the claim of history as a systematic, organised, objective field of study commonly rests. The whole nature of the academic discipline of history (and this must include contemporary history) revolves around the idea of a progressive, empirically founded and identifiable mode of research with its own character and development, which is capable of freeing itself from the influence of personal values and which is sufficiently adaptable to retain its form throughout any wider changes in intellectual and political thinking. It posits a 'past' that is amenable to investigation, and which is not just of the historian's own making. The popularity of approaches and attitudes may alter over time, but the past itself does not change - all that changes is the viewpoint(871). The constancy of the historical method is what distinguishes it from an aimless recitation of equally valid versions, or the distorting exercise of opinion and rhetoric, and without which the study of history would have no rationality or integrity. Although the modern trend has been to relax the call for or assertion of historical objectivity, historians are still inclined to reproach those who confuse the difficulty of detachment and impartiality with their supposed impossibility. The gratifying wonder of history to historians is that advances as much as it does(872).

The persistence of remaining disagreements

The logic of historical inquiry - and its regulating disciplines - does not require that all argument must ultimately come to an end. Evidence can be inconclusive,

871 D.C.Watt, 'Battle of the history men', *The Evening Standard*, 22 March 1990, p.7.

872 J.A.Passmore, 'The objectivity of history', *Philosophy*, 33 1958, pp.97-111.

theories provisional, temperaments contrary. Historical problems are often only partly answerable, still less explicable. The larger an issue, the more likely that the taking of sides will ensue. The historical past is acknowledged to be more complicated than historians can hope to convey. There are limits to which it can be grasped imaginatively, as opposed to documentarily. Sometimes to understand more is to know less. Much of the best kind of historical writing, instead of claiming to account for everything that happened, leaves open or suggests issues for future investigation. The historian, then, knowingly initiates a discussion or debate which he or she must expect, sooner or later, will make their own work obsolete. The intractable nature of the subject, while it leads naturally to different and even conflicting approaches, need be no bar to historical progress, providing that the primary commitment to the common, publicised, problem-solving methodology of history is not compromised. Distinct 'schools' are replaced by sequential 'problems'.

The cardinal point to grasp is that the anti-positivist case (which has a great deal of philosophical support) against an advancing historical view exploits the same inherent ambivalence and uncertainty in the study of history to argue for the *inescapability* of value judgements in any historical interpretation. It makes a virtue out of variety by insisting that, since the available facts to hand never suffice by themselves to entirely justify the preference for one account or explanation over another, then this will always leave open the door to capricious, nonrational, unhistorical influences. Facts have first to be selected and rejected. All concepts have a descriptive and an evaluative content. Although historians develop a sense of judgement and proportion, there may be no way of discriminating between contradictory, though factually

consistent, points of view. Disputes about the nature of the Labour party, or the radicalising effects of the Second World War, or the influence of Keynesian thinking, or the merits and demerits of Mr Attlee's post-war Britain, cannot be formally and finally settled, however rich the source material, however distancing the perspective, and however inventive the interpretation. And where rival frameworks exist, dialogue is constrained. The understanding of the facts can converge, but the meaning ascribed to them may be completely and ununderstandably at variance; truth is opposed by other truths, even by an alternative rationality. Not only will the choice of a framework necessarily exclude all others. That initial choice is not defensible exclusively on empirical grounds. Personal preferences always play a part. There can - it is concluded - be no new knowledge without the exercise of reason; but neither can there be creative endeavour without an emotional commitment. Attitudes are determined (strong) or conditioned (weaker) by pre-existing presuppositions whose impact, though modifiable by experience, is not thereby diminished. The logic of historical inquiry may indeed operate to good effect, but only in so far as historical knowledge is seen as the product of a specialised community sub-divided into smaller groupings with their own special methods and dominating values. It follows that there is no identifiable and ordered historical method, or clear-cut distinction between history and non-history. Engagement, once dismissed as a freakish aberration from the normal pattern of English life and letters(873), is something that has to be accepted. It is the very idea of the impartial scholar which is out of date, now held to be

873 E. Shils, 'The Intellectuals - I: Great Britain', in *Encounter*, April 1955, p.7.

applicable only to the cloistered academies of old(874), and the vain pursuit of objectivity the real obstacle to fuller comprehension. Values do not "intrude" into the historical discussion; the indeterminate, unresolvable and unknowable nature of historical knowledge *invites* and *requires* them.

Knowledge and ignorance in historical understanding

In the abstract, these competing outlooks are irreconcilable, since each logically proscribes the other, and - academic priorities being what they are - great efforts have gone into staking out the differences and divergences. The one is denounced (by seemingly evading all criticism) for destroying all means of rational intercourse. The other rejects outright any notion of an established, canonical way by which history should be studied. In practice, however, the differences are overdrawn. 'Either-or' propositions rarely hold good. All historians have to be able to work on the basis of being able to say something without knowing everything. Equally it is accepted that there are specific minimal and independent criteria of authority which help to sort out good from bad history. Each of these conceptions involves the other, in a "two-way link" between explanatory approach and political or personal standpoint(875), and there is no useful sense in which it can be claimed that one of them is the more important or valued. Their very entanglement is what makes history what it is. A field of study can flourish and develop even though it is built on shaky foundations. Regarded in this light, the objective and the subjective are really two elements in one single undertaking: the

874 P. Novick, *That Noble Dream: the 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession* (1989).

875 D. Miller and L. Siedentop (eds), introduction to *The Nature of Political Theory* (1983), pp. 11-12.

historical study of the distant or recent past, with all its large possibilities and intrinsic limitations.

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