C.R. ATTLEE: AN ASSESSMENT

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The large-scale biography of Attlee by Kenneth Harris,1 published in 1982 provides a readable but rather superficial account of the man and his times. It has 630 pages of text, notes and index but no detailed or specific references to any matter, or quotation, in the text; and this is not the way to write the history of one of the important figures in the twentieth-century history of Britain. Lists of books and of interviews used for each chapter are given at the end of the book but it is impossible to discover the date of, say, a quotation from Hansard except by searching the original source. Naturally we learn a number of things about Attlee that most people will not have known, and Harris is an experienced journalist and has clearly read widely; but a serious evaluation of the most important Labour prime minister so far in office still remains to be written.

Some personal matters first, for Attlee had more positive qualities than the historical fiction of 'the little man' often suggests. He was a unifying influence upon a potentially very divisive leadership in the years after 1945, although his influence was always on the conservative side. As a chairman and a coordinator of difficult colleagues he had an impressive record; and he was very sharp, capable of a political toughness towards his colleagues—except his most senior colleagues, and most of all Ernest Bevin—that is often surprising as it comes through the pages of Harris.

We must begin with an account of Attlee's socialism for it was of a particular kind that explains a great deal of his later political career. He was born in 1883 into a conservatively-minded middle-class family. He left his public school, Haileybury, so Harris writes 'intellectually immature and under-developed' (p. 9) and as with so many of the middle and upper classes in Britain, who never get beyond the emotional cloisters of their public schools, Attlee remained in many ways encapsulated within the language and thought of his own school days.2 Haileybury was an experience Attlee never recovered from. Sir John Colville, on his first visit to Chequers after the Labour government assumed office in 1945, remarked on the difference between the days of Churchill and the new order: 'Very much stiff collar and starched shirts. I remember Attlee introducing me to his new PPS, Geoffrey de Freitas, and saying, "Old Haileyburian, you know". There never was any Old School Tie talk in Winston's day' (p. 414).
Nor did University College, Oxford, make any difference to the young Attlee. It was 'a social interlude rather than an intellectual adventure' (p. 14) and until he went into the East End of London, Attlee's mind remained closed to any degree of social understanding or conscience. Most of the Attlee family by this time were involved in middle-class social work: Tom, his favourite brother was helping in a working-men's hostel in Hoxton; an aunt was managing a club for factory girls in Wandsworth; his mother was a district visitor in a slum area, and the eldest brother, Robert, was working two nights a week at a mission in Hornsey. Attlee was taken by another brother, Lawrence, to the Haileybury Club in Stepney, and there, within a few months, he was to stay; and this is one of the interesting differences between him and his contemporaries. After the philanthropic 'stint' young middle-class men and women were then expected to return to 'normal' middle-class life. In Attlee's case he went to the Stepney Club every week and gradually was drawn more into its activities; and it was not long before he decided to live in Stepney, and there he remained until the beginning of the First World War. The particular character of the Haileybury Club—of which he became manager—is also important to define. It was a secular, not a religious mission; it aimed to inculcate certain of the attitudes which were thought important at Haileybury, and it did this through military training. The Club was in fact ‘D’ Company of the First Cadet Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment and joining the Club was joining the junior section of the Territorial Army. The adults who ran the Club took Volunteer Commissions, and were the company officers. Discipline, team work, and a sense of belonging. Attlee, who was physically small, shy and reserved, and always in his younger days at least lacking in confidence, began to find fulfilment in his new responsibilities. But he went much further than administrative and charitable good works. He first joined the Fabians but his education and training in the labour movement began when he became active in the Stepney ILP. Of all the Labour prime ministers of the twentieth century Attlee had the most sustained experience of grass-roots politics. He spoke constantly at street corners, stood at dock-gates collecting money during the Irish Transport Workers strike of 1913, led marches of protest to the local Boards of Guardians and to the mayors, carried banners 'from the Mile End Waste across central London to Hyde Park', and above all, since this was the biggest problem of the London ILP in those days, tried to get closer to the trade unions and their members. Attlee, like so many of the middle class of his generation, was appalled at the waste and the dirt and the misery and the exploited labour that he saw around him. Ruskin and the romantic side of William Morris were his teachers; and in the conditions of the early twentieth century he came to accept the untheoretical labour-socialist rhetoric of mainstream ILP politics. In 1922, in what was to be his most radical period, he expressed
his political creed in his address for the general election:

... Like many of you I took part in the Great War in the hope of securing lasting peace and a better life for all. We were promised that wars would end, that ... the men who fought in the War would be cared for, and that unemployment, slums and poverty would be abolished. I stand for life against wealth. I claim the right of every man, woman and child in the land to have the best life that can be provided. Instead of the exploitation of the mass of the people in the interests of a small rich class, I demand the organisation of the country in the interests of all as a co-operative commonwealth in which land and capital will be owned by the nation and used for the benefit of the community.

These were ideas, sentiments, feelings consonant with the majority of the new-style Labour Party after 1918, and like so many of his time, once living standards improved and biting poverty was abolished, the socialist commonwealth dreamed of in youth became easily identified with the welfare state of the middle decades of the twentieth century. So it was to be with Attlee.³

Two days after war was declared in August 1914 Attlee enlisted. His brother Tom was a conscientious objector. Attlee was in the Gallipoli campaign and later in France. He conceived it his duty to fight apparently with no political doubts at all, and he engaged in war with the same un-emotional approach that he brought to his active political life. He ended his Army service as a Major, and as was common in the inter-war years, was often referred to as Major Attlee. When the war ended he returned to Stepney, and to Labour politics. A former member of the Haileybury Club became his batman/valet/housekeeper. Attlee was elected the first Labour Mayor of Stepney (1919-20) and stood successfully for Limehouse in 1922, a constituency he continued to represent until December 1955 when he resigned his seat and went immediately to the House of Lords. In the parliament of 1922 Macdonald made him one of his two parliamentary private secretaries, the other being Jack Lawson of the Durham miners. In the 1924 Labour administration Attlee became Under-secretary to the War Office, his minister being Stephen Walsh, a miner MP from Lancashire who, so the gossip went at the time, 'was entirely unable to conceal his reverence for generals'.⁴ In the 1929-31 Labour government Attlee was not given a post immediately—he was heavily engaged in the report of the Simon Commission on India⁵—but after Oswald Mosley's resignation Attlee became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and then, five months before the government broke apart, he was transferred to the office of the Postmaster-General. It was his first and only experience of departmental responsibility before he became prime minister in 1945.

A decade before the end of the Labour government in 1931 Attlee had married. His wife was thirteen years younger with no political experience
except that derived from a conservative family background. Violet Attlee was never a socialist and later became well-known for her tactless conservative comments on events of the day. It was a notably happy marriage. Clem Attlee had been a lonely young man; his childhood and youth had encouraged little confidence in himself, and he lacked affection and love. Violet was good looking, lively, and she adored him. The marriage provided Attlee with a peace of mind and a happiness which must have been important for his political career. At the same time Violet was undoubtedly something of a liability in his political life. She was unhappy at Downing Street when Attlee became prime minister and resented the time he was away from her. It was understood during Attlee’s tenure of No. 10 that work was to be organised, as far as possible, in ways that would allow the Prime Minister to spend as much time as possible with his wife. And she was often a nuisance to the civil servants around Attlee. What is to be said of a woman who spent her adult life with one of the leading Labour politicians of the twentieth century and who, towards the end of their lives, was able to say to her husband’s future biographer: 'Most of our friends are Conservatives. Clem was never really a socialist, were you darling?’ to which Attlee ‘made a mildly dissenting noise. "Well, not a rabid one" she said’. And she was not, of course, too far from the mark.

The fraudulent General Election of 1931 reduced Attlee’s majority to under 500, but at least he was returned. The other two Labour members of the Stepney constituency were defeated, as, of course, were all the leading Labour ministers of the 1929 government except George Lansbury. Attlee was the only other member returned who had any experience of office, and it was this 'accident' of electoral history that had profound consequences for his future career. He became deputy leader in the Commons, and with Lansbury and Stafford Cripps, formed the triumvirate who led the forty-six Labour Party MPs in opposition.

These were years of great importance for Attlee. He was exceedingly hard-working and he gained an all-round experience in parliamentary politics that was unusual. Attlee always had a somewhat sharper understanding of social questions than Gaitskell who many years later succeeded him as leader of the Labour Party, but like Gaitskell in the thirties Attlee does not seem to have been politically radicalised by the events of that decade. He went onto a Hunger Marchers’ platform in Hyde Park in 1936 and he visited Spain during the Civil War: more than Bevin or Gaitskell or Dalton ever brought themselves to do. But nothing really changed inside him during these difficult years. He became Party leader in 1935 following the resignation of George Lansbury, and was confirmed in the position after the General Election of 1935. The years until the outbreak of war in September 1939 were hardly a shining period in the history of the Labour Party; and Attlee presided over the disavowal of the Unity
campaign and then the Popular Front; the dissolution of the Socialist League; the expulsion of Stafford Cripps, Aneurin Bevan and others of the Left. If war had not come and a General Election had been held in 1940 the psephologists calculate that a Tory Government would have been returned again.

The years of war were to shape Attlee’s ideas and mould his attitudes in ways that allowed him to make the transition from deputy prime minister in a Conservative-dominated coalition to Labour prime minister in the first peace-time administration without any political or emotional stress or strain. In the 1930s he remained the typical Labour socialist: a moderate, constitutionalist, but anti-capitalist. 'British Socialists' he wrote in his 1937 book, The Labour Party in Perspective, 'have always recognised the conflict between classes but have not generally adopted the class war as a theory of society.' Like most of his colleagues at this time he could still envisage degrees of sabotage on the part of the capitalist class against a Labour government, and throughout the thirties Attlee was insisting upon the lesson of 1929–31: 'that Socialists cannot make Capitalism work'.

It was the experience of war-time government, and the working of war-time controls over the economy that convinced Attlee of the practicability of the changes he desired. Since his definition of capitalism was wholly untheoretical, the removal of social evils, or their mitigation, was evidence that capitalist society was capable of transformation. Already at the 1943 Labour Party Conference he was asking delegates to note how much had been achieved:

I doubt if we all recognise sufficiently the progress our ideas have made. The British never know when they are beaten, and British socialists never know when they have won.

The most explicit statement of what he now believed possible in the future because of what had already occurred during the war years was made in a letter to Harold Laski in 1944. Laski had been arguing for more radical action on the part of Labour ministers during the war itself, and for a more specific commitment to social change when peace came. In a long letter dated 1 May 1944, and typed by himself, Attlee wrote a carefully argued reply in defence of his own position and that of his colleagues. The central argument ran thus:

Whether the post-war Government is Conservative or Labour it will inevitably have to work a mixed economy. If it is a Labour Government it will be a mixed economy developing towards Socialism.

... Although you are a theorist and I am only a working politician, I think I give more and you give less attention to changes of conception than to legislative achievements.
For instance, I have witnessed now the acceptance by all the leading politicians in this country and all the economists of any account of the conception of the utilisation of abundance. It colours all our discussions on home economic policy. There follows from this the doctrine of full employment.

Take again the whole conception of State planning and the control of the financial machine by the Government and not by the Bank of England and the City. Here again I see the change since the days of 1931...

In my time in our movement, now getting quite long, I have seen a lot of useful legislation, but I count our progress much more by the extent to which what we cried in the wilderness five and thirty years ago has now become part of the assumptions of the ordinary man and woman. The acceptance of these assumptions has its effect both in legislation and administration, but its gradualness tends to hide our appreciation of the facts.

For Attlee, then, the implementation of Labour's programme followed naturally and inevitably from the organisation, and administration, of national resources for war. As he wrote further in the letter to Laski quoted above: 'I find intelligent Service men often of high rank and men in various walks of life who come to me and tell me that they have been converted to Socialism by what they have seen done in wartime. It is therefore in my view mistaken tactics to belittle what has been done.'

This identification of socialism with social welfare and full employment has remained a major source of confusion within the British labour movement to our own day. When the general election of the summer of 1945 produced an overwhelming victory for the Labour Party, and Attlee became prime minister, it was widely accepted that Labour's stated objectives could now be achieved; and indeed nationalisation of the basic economic services and an advanced social welfare programme was put on the Statute book within the first three years of office. It represented a considerable instalment of economic and social reform; the introduction of the National Health Service in particular was the most advanced of any of the major industrial countries and the nationalisation of basic industries offered the opportunity of modernising the economic infrastructure within which private enterprise operated. At the same time full employment continued; the demobilisation of the armed forces and the transition to a peace time economy was carried through with remarkably little friction, and between 1946 and 1950 industrial production increased by fifty per cent. There was also a minor redistribution of income, although the details are still a matter of debate. As Attlee had predicted it was a mixed economy with leanings towards a more equitable society: an advanced liberal state with economic power, measured by the ownership of capital, still in the hands of the capitalists and landlords. By the end of the 1940s there was a clear choice of two roads for the Labour government to follow: either a further extension of state ownership of certain of the commanding heights of the economy in private ownership, with a serious measure of popular control which had so
far not taken place, or a standstill on what had so far been achieved. If the latter, which was the inevitable choice accepted, then it could only be a matter of time, given the inherent tendency of capitalist society to generate inequality, for the momentum of change to be reversed.

What complicated, indeed greatly confused the situation was the wholly wrong assessment made by labour intellectuals as to what had taken place since 1945. In *New Fabian Essays*, published in 1952 with a preface by Attlee, there was provided a summing up of the achievements of the Attlee administrations in terms that were both extravagant and wildly beside the mark. Not all the contributors were as naive as C.A.R. Crosland who believed that 'by 1951 Britain had, in all essentials, ceased to be a capitalist society'; but the sense of something fundamental having happened ran through most of the contributions to this volume. John Strachey, for instance, was of the opinion that 'the Labour Government between 1945 and 1951 did in fact appreciably modify the nature of British capitalism' (p. 182); and Roy Jenkins, who continued to exercise considerable political influence within the labour movement for the next quarter of a century, insisted on the political changes that had occurred:

A straightforward struggle between the capitalists and the proletariat for power over the productive machinery of the nation, there will not be. The capitalists have already surrendered too much power, partly to the State, partly to their own managers, and partly to the trade unions, for a determined stand to be practicable. A classical Marxist clash is not possible in a situation in which, before it takes place, the President of the National Union of Mineworkers is already more powerful than any six capitalists.

Multiplication of such politically naive statements would be tedious. They were made, it should be remarked, at a time when Labour had recently lost a general election; when tensions inside the labour movement concerning future polities were developing rapidly; and at the beginning of what was to be thirteen years of Conservative government. By 1964, when the Labour Party came back to power with a tiny majority of three, no one was repeating the Fabian nonsense of the early fifties.

Britain was not, however, an island to itself and even in the *New Fabian Essays* there was one article out of eight entirely devoted to foreign politics. It was a superficial account by Denis Healey that at least recognised the decline of Britain as a world power of the first rank. What the New Fabian essayists in general missed was the central importance of foreign policies and politics to domestic affairs in Britain during the years of war and in its aftermath. The Harris biography gives a fair weighting to foreign affairs, but the discussion and analysis are separated from consideration of domestic issues, and the close intertwining of the two is for the most part missed. And yet it was above all in foreign affairs that
consensus was achieved during the Churchill coalition, and carried over unchanged into the era of the Labour administration.

This agreement on foreign politics with the Tories was a new departure—or largely new departure—for the Parliamentary Labour Party as well as for the broader labour movement. The radical tradition in Britain has mostly been critical of the Conservative party and the Establishment generally in foreign policies. In the twentieth century the Boer war, the growth of armaments before 1914, the alliance with Tsarist Russia, the secret diplomacy of the pre-war and war years, the lukewarm attitude to the League of Nations, the failure to oppose Japanese aggression from 1930, the German-Italian intervention in Spain: in all of these matters the greater part of the Labour movement had found itself in sharp opposition. Naturally, the movement has always divided into right and left groupings, but it was only during the Second World War and the years that followed that basic agreement with the Tories was accepted by the Labour leadership, backed by the majority votes of the right-wing trade unions at Party conferences. Whatever the equivocations of the pre-1939 decades—and they were many—there was nothing comparable with the accord on fundamentals that emerged after 1940. As Gaitskell was able to say in the run-up to the general election of 1955:

I doubt if foreign policy will play a big part in the next election—not because it is not important, but because Mr Eden has, in fact, mostly carried on our policy as developed by Ernest Bevin, in some cases against the views of rank and file Tories.

The inter-relationship between foreign and domestic politics was at least formally understood by Attlee, at least in his pre-war days. In his 1937 book he had written: 'The foreign policy of a Government is the reflection of its internal policy' (p. 226). The present story must begin—although that is not its starting point—with the Anglo-American antagonisms of the war years, themselves a further development of trends that had been growing in earlier years. The crucial fact was the increasing economic weight of the USA in the capitalist world, and the declining position of Britain in relation to the emerging super-powers of Russia and the United States. The British decline was masked, from most of the British public at least, by the political role that Churchill played during the war years, and by the fact that Britain remained the unconquered aircraft carrier off the mainland of Europe. In the chancelleries of the world, however, realities were given their proper place and it was only the sharp division of opinion and approach within the American administration, as well as the immediate problems of the military war, that permitted a somewhat greater power of manoeuvre for Britain than would otherwise have been the case. Very early in the developing Anglo-American relationships—
before America actually entered the war—the conflicts over the phrasing of certain parts of the Atlantic Charter statement emphasised the differences in economic policies that were to become increasingly acute in the years that followed.

Long before the war Cordell Hull, a Wilsonian internationalist who was appointed Secretary of State in 1933, had been campaigning against trade barriers and restrictions as major factors in the development of economic and military tensions between nation states. This was always a central part of Hull's general thinking, and although he made little impact in this context before 1939—his own country's record was hardly a tribute to his crusading zeal—Hull remained single-minded and vehement on the issue. In 1940 he described the Ottawa agreements introduced by Britain from 1932 as 'the greatest injury, in a commercial way, that has been inflicted on this country since I have been in public life'. In the spring of 1941 Keynes made a strong statement in Washington that post-war Britain would be troubled by many serious economic problems, and would therefore be forced to resort to bilateral agreements and other forms of discrimination. State Department officials were shocked, and when the Atlantic Charter was on the table for discussion later in the same year, there was fierce discussion and debate, within the American administration and between America and Britain, over the formulation of future economic policies. Sumner Welles, who represented the State Department at the meeting in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, fought very hard to gain a commitment to end all British discrimination against American goods as a recognition of the aid being given through Lease-lend. Roosevelt had been the original mover for a joint statement on Anglo-American war aims, and he was not especially interested in matters of economic principle. And Roosevelt, prompted by Harry Hopkins, was willing to accept some important British amendments and the fourth and fifth paragraphs, as finally agreed, allowed Britain to avoid any specific commitment inconsistent with imperial preference. At least that was how the British saw it, but inevitably the phrasing was later to be interpreted differently on opposite sides of the Atlantic. In the House of Commons (9 September 1941) Churchill emphasised that the Charter was 'a simple, rough and ready war-time statement of the goals towards which the British Commonwealth and the United States mean to make their way'; but in America the phrases 'equal access' and 'self-determination' were heralded as an important anti-imperialist statement. On commercial policy Sumner Welles said:

The Atlantic declaration means that every nation has a right to expect that its legitimate trade will not be directed and throttled by towering tariffs, preferences, discriminations, or narrowly bilateral practices.

*New York Times, 8 October 1941*
The rapid growth of the American economy during the war years was greatly to encourage those within the American administration who preached the virtues of a liberalised world economy, and there was increasing recognition among many sections of the business community that only a very high and sustained level of exports would maintain the American economy at anything approaching full stretch. Export surpluses might or would help to avoid the contraction of those sections that were 'over-committed' to the war economy; and the domestic sectors would correspondingly benefit. The vision of an open world market became clearer and more attractive as the end of hostilities approached. Fred Block summed up the American position in relation to the rest of the world:

The privileged access of imperial countries to their colonies would be eliminated, as would the bilateral payments and trading systems created in the 1930s by Germany, Japan and, to a lesser degree, Great Britain. A multilateral world economy would be one in which trade and capital flowed across national boundaries in response to the law of supply and demand without political interference favouring one nation or another. . . . A world economy organised on these lines would create the markets and investment opportunities needed to assure both a large export surplus and the continued growth of the largest American banks and industrial firms.16

Anglo-American antagonisms permeated the close relations between the two countries. The tight restrictions around the Lend Lease arrangements are well-known17 but what is not so often appreciated was the way in which, during the whole period of Lend-Lease, there was continuous pressure by the Americans to keep British reserves of gold and dollars to a figure of not more than about one billion dollars: reckoned to be around the minimum required.18 There were two reasons for this policy, apart from a general opposition on principle to Britain and the Empire. The first was what was known as the principle of 'scraping the barrel', a condition for the continuation of Lend-Lease to soothe its critics in Congress. The second was the need to develop as much leverage and bargaining power as possible over the British in order to move towards a greater rather than a lesser dependence upon the USA in the post-war world. This is part of an argument developed by Gabriel Kolko, that there was, inside the American administration in general and within the State Department in particular, an understanding to keep Britain neither too weak nor too strong.19 Block summarises the situation as it was in the closing years of the war and its immediate aftermath:

In general, Britain was seen as a kind of bridge between the United States and the rest of the world. If the United States could count on British economic, political and military resource in the pursuit of U.S. global aims, it was thought that it would then be infinitely easier to gain the acquiescence of other countries.
It was precisely U.S. dependence on British co-operation in a variety of areas that made U.S. policy toward Britain so complicated. On the one hand, if Britain were too strong, if she had substantial currency reserves, it would be difficult to force her to act according to American wishes. On the other hand, if Britain were too weak, if her payments position were desperate, she would be of little help in financing European trade, in working to eliminate trade and exchange controls, and in a whole variety of other tasks. The trick, then, was to keep Britain weak and dependent, but not too weak, and debates that took place within the United States government over the proper size of British reserves reflected the subtlety of such an undertaking.

It was, as Block indicates, by no means a straightforward matter for Washington; and the issues involved became more complicated as the end of the war approached. The Treasury, under Morgenthau and Harry Dexter White, was in sharp conflict with the State Department on many aspects of policy. One crucial item of difference that generated bitter conflict was their divergence over Germany and the Soviet Union. The State Department had fought continuously against Morgenthau's plans for a punitive treatment of post-war Germany. The attitude of the State Department favoured German reconstruction—for a mixture of reasons—and the rapid deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union after the end of the war and following the death of Roosevelt, greatly strengthened their position.

Roosevelt's death in April 1945 was critical. It may well have been the case that had he lived, the State Department would have had their way, since the dynamic interests of American imperialism were undoubtedly best served by their approach to world problems. But the timing could well have been different. As it was, the succession of Truman dramatically altered the balance of power within the American administration. Morgenthau, a close personal friend of Roosevelt, very soon left the Treasury, and Dexter White's influence was sharply reduced. Seven days after the end of the war with Japan, Lend-Lease was abruptly discontinued, and the Attlee government was presented with very large problems. Harris (p. 271) argues the common theme—common at the time and since—that 'Truman's precipitate action aroused European fears of an American return to isolationism'. But this was seriously to misjudge the situation, although, as already noted, it was widely accepted at the time. 1945 was not 1919, and the Americans were highly conscious of their role as the most powerful country in the capitalist world, and it was not conceivable that the United States would have relinquished the leadership of the capitalist world order when confronted with the emergence of the Soviet Union as the second major power in the world. Moreover, there were powerful economic interests pushing America into the world economy. It is arguable—and I would wish to argue—that had America retreated into an isolationist position the world in the decades that followed would have
been a more peaceful and probably a much happier place; but this is not a matter that can be pursued here. It is necessary to re-iterate, however, that this was not, regrettably, on the historical agenda.

The ending of Lend-Lease confronted the Attlee government with bitter choices; and less than a month later, in early September 1945, Maynard Keynes was sent to Washington to negotiate large-scale assistance from the Americans. By this time Keynes had shifted away from his earlier arguments for bilateralism and discrimination, and all his exceptional negotiating powers were predicated on the assumption that there was no alternative for Britain but massive aid from America. He was aware of the opposition from the Labour Left in Britain to an open economy and he apparently told the Americans that he would prefer the loan negotiations to take place in Washington, rather than London, since there he would be less constrained by direct ministerial supervision. In all this Keynes seriously misjudged the new temper in Washington which had followed the death of Roosevelt. Keynes began by being highly optimistic concerning the terms on which a loan could be secured, and he was to be disillusioned by the very hard bargain he had to accept. But he had already made his choice. In a memorandum he had presented to the British Cabinet in April 1945 he rejected bilateralism and controls as imposing intolerable burdens upon British society. Independence from the United States would involve, he wrote:

(a) the continuance of war rationing and war control more stringent than at present for (say) three to five years after the war;
(b) the national planning and direction of foreign trade both imports and exports, somewhat on the Russian model; and
(c) an indefinite postponement of Colonial Development and Far Eastern rehabilitation and a virtual abandonment of all overseas activities, whether military or diplomatic or by way of developing our trade, wealth and influence, which involved very considerable expenditure.21

In this same memorandum Keynes continued to assume that the Americans would make a 'fair offer, not so much generous as just' but he went on to add that if the terms were too onerous the UK should at least consider the disagreeable, indeed the disastrous alternative, without, however, disguising from ourselves its true character. In the event, Keynes was to discover that a 'just' settlement was never possible, given the way the negotiations were conducted; but the alternative, while still appreciated, was not seriously considered. Dalton summed up the course of the negotiations in his 1945 volume:

So, as the talks went on, we retreated, slowly and with a bad grace and with increasing irritation, from a free gift to an interest-free loan, and from this again to a loan bearing interest; from a larger to a smaller total of aid; and from the
The primary concern of the American negotiators was not in fact the size of the loan, or the financial terms on which it was given, but the commitment upon Britain to begin dismantling controls, open up the Sterling Area and accept convertibility. The loan, which was ratified during 1946, offered $3.75 billion dollars at two per cent payable over fifty years starting in 1951. Convertibility, which would come into effect one year after final ratification, would also be accompanied by the ending of discrimination against dollar imports. Harris, who has missed most of the real significance of the Anglo-American conflict of these times, could nevertheless appreciate what was the meaning of the loan: 'For better or worse, she [Britain] had tied her economic future to that of the Americans' (p. 275).

As a postscript, it may be noted that the Labour Government 'chose to mislead the country about what had happened'. These are the words of Harris (p. 274). Dalton, who communicated so much misgiving to his private diary, made a major speech in the Commons advocating acceptance, and Keynes delivered a brilliant defence in the House of Lords. The Left of the Parliamentary Party, and the Left outside Westminster, were, as so often, vindicated in their opposition; and much good it did them.

Fifteen years later Harris asked Attlee if he still thought the decision to accept the loan had been justified. Attlee replied that Britain was in no position to bargain; her needs were desperate, and they had nothing to offer in return. He was always aware, he continued, that the Americans might follow their own example after World War One and pull out of Europe. 'So far as possible' Harris reports him as saying 'nothing should be done to make them feel we were not grateful to them. They had to be humoured' (p. 275). Extraordinary words for a leading politician, of any party, and a further piece of evidence of the loss of nerve of Attlee and the majority of his government. Although Attlee never really understood international finance he was not entirely ignorant of the consequences of the loan. Certainly Dalton was in no doubt but was overwhelmed with the problems of the alternative of rejection. But it is not true that rejection of the American loan, on the terms finally agreed, would have meant stark, unremitting privation. It is agreed that there would have been a continuation, and almost certainly an intensification of austerity in the short run. But a determined national policy, either with the Sterling Area or with Western Europe, or a combination, might well have brought economic improvement and relative prosperity in a few years. The financial interests of the City of London would naturally have been powerfully
opposed. They had lost out during the war years and were very anxious to re-establish themselves. But many business interests have always had aims and objectives very different from the banks and finance houses, and the Labour government had large reserves of political support in the country. Moreover, as already indicated above, a tougher bargaining stance from London could have meant that the Americans would have given way, at least temporarily. Britain was important to the global perspectives of American imperialism, and a genuinely radical government could have found itself some room for manoeuvre without capitulating to the reactionary foreign policies of the United States.

To argue thus is, however, to miss certain crucial components of the historical record, and in particular the political dimension of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism which affected Attlee and Bevin, his Foreign Secretary, from the earliest days of their administration; by contrast this was not wholly true of the Americans. The Roosevelt tradition lingered on in Washington after Truman took over, although it was certainly declining rapidly by the end of 1945, and Dexter White's vision of a massive loan to the USSR as part of the necessary US-Soviet relationship faded even more quickly. But Bevin and Attlee steadfastly continued the foreign policy directed by Churchill and Eden during the war. Listening to the exchanges between Churchill and Stalin at the first Potsdam meeting in May 1945 Harris records that Attlee 'had soon concluded that there was no possibility of real Anglo-Soviet co-operation' (p. 267). There is a highly revealing letter from Attlee to Fenner Brockway, written in September 1945, a month or so after the abrupt ending of Lend-Lease and just at the beginning of Keynes' negotiations for the American loan; and it is abundantly clear that Attlee could never possibly deviate from the closest possible agreement with the Americans. No man who wrote the words which follow could have rejected the American loan. No doubt Attlee did believe that there was no alternative; but his prior acceptance of the politics of American power was a crucial determinant in the formation of his general views on the American connection. The letter which is given below represents a central text for the whole post-war policy of the Labour government:

There is a tendency on the part of some people in the Labour Party to oversimplify foreign affairs. It's partly due to a certain woolly idealism; seeing everything black and white when in fact there are sorts of shades of grey. They mean well but they don't like looking at unpleasant facts. Some of them thought we ought to concentrate all our efforts on building up a Third Force in Europe. Very nice, no doubt. But there wasn't either a material or a spiritual basis for it at that time. What remained of Europe wasn't strong enough to stand up to Russia by itself. You had to have a world force because you were up against a world force... Without the stopping power of the Americans, the Russians might easily have tried sweeping right forward. I don't know whether they would, but it wasn't a possibility you could just ignore. It's no good thinking that moral
sentiments have any sway with the Russians, there's a good deal of old-fashioned imperialism in their make-up, you know. Their foreign policy has been carried on in much the same way from the days of Queen Catherine the Great. Some of our friends wouldn't see that. p. 295

It is not wholly clear from Harris' biography when anti-Sovietism became an inflexible postulate of Attlee's thinking, but it must have been sometime during the war years since he emerged as an unyielding opponent of Soviet Russia from the beginning of his own administration. Bevin had long been an anti-communist and he always found it difficult to distinguish his anti-communism, derived largely from his experience of the British Communist Party, from his opposition to the Soviet Union. But what must be insisted on is the continuity with the Churchill coalition. As Eden said in the debate when Bevin made his first speech in the Commons as Foreign Secretary (20 August 1945)—referring to his years in the War Cabinet with Bevin:

Eden. During that period there were many discussions on foreign affairs I cannot recall one single occasion when there was a difference between us. I hope I do not embarrass the Foreign Secretary when I say that.

Bevin. No.

Eden. There were no differences on any important issues of foreign policy.

Nor were there to be throughout the whole period of the Labour administrations. When Churchill made his notorious speech at Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946—an important landmark in the development of the Cold War—Attlee, so Harris reveals 'could not express approval of the speech in public; in private he was delighted with it, and with the impact it had made on the Americans, whom he still considered to be naive in their attitude to Stalin' (p. 298).

This last comment must be taken further. It was Bevin and Attlee who were the front runners in the opposition to the Soviet Union during the second half of 1945. At Potsdam the American Secretary of State, James Byrnes, commented on the aggressive manner that Bevin adopted towards the Russians and 'both the President [Truman] and I wondered how we would get along with this new Foreign Minister' (quoted p. 266). The Americans were not slow to learn and to have an undeviating support from Britain for their Cold War policies was of inestimable value in their world strategy. As Churchill reported in the House of Commons in a foreign affairs debate on 23 January 1948:

On the whole the Government have maintained a continuity in foreign policy with that pursued under the National Coalition Government... We have therefore tried to give them all possible help and thus keep the foreign policy of Britain outside the arena of party controversy...

[After congratulating the Labour Government on its counter-revolutionary
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I cannot help also feeling content to see that not only the British, but the American Government, have adopted to a very large extent the views which I expressed at Fulton nearly two years ago, and have, indeed, gone in many ways beyond them. . . I was much criticised on both sides of the Atlantic for the Fulton speech, but in almost every detail, and certainly in the spirit and in its moderation, what I there urged has now become the accepted policy of the English-speaking world. The language used by the Prime Minister [Mr Attlee] and the Lord President of the Council [Mr Herbert Morrison] about Soviet Russia and about the dangers of a new war far exceed in gravity and menace anything which I said at that time or indeed have ever said on this subject since the war. The joint use of bases, the maintenance of the common Staff arrangements between Great Britain and the United States, and the close integration of our foreign policies are being pursued throughout the English-speaking world.

Acceptance of the American loan in 1946, and Marshall aid two years later, considerably eased Britain's immediate post-war problems, allowed internal consumption levels to rise, and permitted the enactment of the social welfare legislation for which the Attlee government has become known. In the longer run there was a steady increase in living standards, against the background of a world economy that was rapidly expanding; but the longer run has also made plain the economic and political costs of the attempt in the immediate post-war years to maintain a great power status within a context of subservience to the United States. Convertibility was a disastrous episode that had to be abandoned after seven weeks in the summer of 1947, and little progress had been made towards multilateralism by 1950. But the gates towards an open world economy had already been unlatched, and with the return of a Tory government in 1951 the principles the Attlee government had accepted were now increasingly practised. By the end of the decade the shortage of dollars had gone, all the major currencies were convertible, and the physical controls of war and post war had been swept away. The acceptance of a rearmament programme in the closing stages of the Labour administrations of 1950–1 was the end product of the processes of subordination to the global strategy of the United States which Attlee and Bevin had established as the keystone of British policy. Defence expenditure rose to 14 per cent of GNP in 1951, a figure which even the new Tory government found beyond the country's economic and financial capacity; but the burden of armaments has remained as a major factor responsible for the low level of performance of the British economy in the third quarter of the century.

It has been an incredibly dismal story: a radical movement after 1945 guided by its leaders into a political subservience to the United States with its economic consequences the long-term decline of Britain. But there was one other legacy of the Attlee years for which he himself had almost sole responsibility; and that was the decision, secretly taken, to manufacture an atomic bomb.
The reasons which encouraged the making of an independent British bomb were the product of political misjudgments, muddled and confused estimates of the contemporary world and especially of its future shape, mixed with strong emotional spasms following a more than usually unpleasant example of American bad faith in the matter of atomic information. There was no immediate military threat nor did anyone pretend there was, but because of the secrecy which surrounded the whole matter, there not many who could have argued the case one way or the other. The background of events and personalities out of which the decision appeared was inevitably crowded and complicated, but there are three factors which may be singled out for a brief, and inevitably, simplified discussion.

There was first the delusion that Britain was still capable of maintaining a great power status in the post-war world. Hugh Dalton always argued, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, although without serious result, that Britain after 1945 was being seriously over-stretched. On 20 January 1947 Dalton sent Attlee a long memorandum in which he argued powerfully for a serious reduction in the numbers in the Armed Forces and for a general reduction in defence expenditure. January was the same month that the decision was taken about the British bomb; but Dalton was neither consulted nor informed. His memorandum followed a Cabinet meeting which he said was 'a bad failure to face unpleasant facts', and paragraph 8 read:

What shall it profit Britain to have even 1,500,000 men and women in the Forces and Supply, and to be spending nearly £1000 millions a year on them, if we come an economic and financial cropper two years hence?

And I am told in Cabinet that to have only 1,400,000 Service and Supply personnel and to spend only £750 millions on them is 'unilateral disarmament'.

But among the top elites of the administration and government: politicians, civil servants and not least the Chiefs of Staff, there was a determination to keep the first class power status in more than name. The pressures on Attlee from the many conservative and traditional groups that surrounded him were unremitting. When Attlee, early in 1947 and not for the first time, proposed a military withdrawal from the Middle East, all three Chiefs of Staff said they would resign if it were pressed. So the proposal was dropped. The great power theme was constantly reiterated. Lord Cherwell, a powerful political figure in these years, wrote in 1949 that without its own Bomb Britain would 'rank with other European countries who have to make do with conventional weapons. And, in a nice touch of white imperialist rhetoric, he argued that having to rely on the United States 'for this vital weapon, we shall sink to the rank of a second-class nation, only permitted to supply auxiliary troops, like the native levies who were allowed small arms but
not artillery'. Cherwell, who was Churchill's scientific adviser, has not had the critical appraisal he warrants. He was, for example, a strong advocate of mass bombing by the RAF, now widely accepted to have been a serious diversion of economic and military resources; and his acceptance of the great power approach came naturally out of his Conservative politics.

During the years of war, the relations between the British and the Americans on atomic matters generated great mistrust, bitterness and friction. The British had asked, and answered the theoretical questions relating to the making of an atomic bomb; but only the Americans could provide the necessary technology. The Bomb was therefore made in the United States. There were a succession of secret agreements concerning the interchange of information, although their status was not always clear: the Quebec agreement of 1943; the Hyde Park memorandum of 1944; and the Truman–Attlee–King concordat of November 1945. The continued efforts of the British to obtain a more complete channel of atomic information were suddenly brought to a complete halt by the passing of the MacMahon Act of 1946 which prohibited the disclosure of classified atomic information to any foreign country. The reaction on the British side was anger and frustration; and the majority sentiment of those involved on the British side was to press forward to an independent Bomb. This was the 'emotional spasm' noted above. It was an interesting reaction, since the British, like all governments, have been skilled at double-dealing their opponents, yet in these years they seemed so often surprised by American deceit, lack of scruple and general perfidy. Moreover, at this time, the British came back for more, largely of course because they desperately needed American dollars. When, for example General Marshall became Secretary of State in 1947, the British really thought they would be able to reverse in a significant way the trend away from co-operation between the two Atlantic countries. In the first year of Marshall's tenure of office talks on atomic energy produced an agreement which gave the Americans a great deal (including large amounts of uranium) and the British hardly anything.

The decision on the British bomb was not therefore based upon a serious analysis of the British economic situation or upon a sober appreciation of the coming decade or an evaluation of the new world in which there were two, and only two, super-powers. When the Russians exploded their first nuclear bomb in 1949 the British were genuinely surprised; and their own explosion in October 1952 at Monte Bello no longer made any difference to anyone. As an American politician said when there was a poll of Congressmen in Washington, soon after the British bomb had been exploded, on the issue of information exchanges with Britain: 'We would be trading a horse for a rabbit.' Imperialist nostalgia was no substitute for the harsh realities of the contemporary world; and the British
after 1945 were singularly lacking in simple realism, with Churchill among the Conservatives leading the vanguard of those who still thought in great power terms.

There ought, of course, to have been a continuing debate on these momentous questions, inside Parliament and in the country; but during the whole period of the Labour government of 1945 to 1950 there was not one single debate on atomic energy. Within the top levels of the administration there were a few who were in possession of the facts, but of those only P.M.S. Blackett seems to have opposed the idea of an independent bomb. Blackett had initially been in favour of the bomb as deterrent, but he soon changed his mind, and by the end of 1945 he wrote to Attlee that an independent British Bomb would not increase our security, but that it would operate the other way. And a year later, after a visit to the United States where talk of a preventive war had shocked him, he produced an internal memorandum which argued for atomic neutrality. Margaret Gowing noted that whatever the merits of the argument, Blackett had produced a closely argued and reasoned thesis, but that it was received either with silence or with contempt. 'He should stick to science' minuted Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary. Sir Henry Tizard, himself an eminent scientist, who was chairman of the Defence Research Committee, knew nothing about the decision to manufacture a Bomb until six months later, but would have opposed it at the time.

Attlee took the decision largely on the advice of two or three close colleagues, the Chiefs of Staff and the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Atomic Power. The full Cabinet was never consulted. During the war years, under Churchill, atomic matters for Cabinet decision had always been muffled and muddled so that only a few members were aware of what was going on; but with the Labour government, secrecy went further. In the Attlee government it was agreed, or understood, that as far as possible atomic matters should be left to the personal decision of the prime minister, guided by the Advisory Committee which Attlee himself had established. The chairman of the Advisory Committee was a prominent Conservative, Sir John Anderson and indeed, the only politician in the Commons, outside a very small group around Attlee, who was capable of making an informed comment on government policy. Harris, who does not fudge this issue in his biography, writes that Attlee

in his readiness to shroud in secrecy what Britain was doing about her bomb, connived at arrangements which were constitutionally dubious. Nearly all his Cabinet ministers were systemetically kept ignorant about a most expensive, and possibly hazardous, national commitment. The Defence Committee never discussed it, and the main committee responsible for atomic energy had only limited facilities for discovering, let alone determining, what was being done.

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And to help matters along his way, Attlee manipulated the financial estimates to conceal the £100 million expenditure on the Bomb; and this secrecy, and the muddled inefficiency it generated, lasted for the remainder of his administration.

At the general election of February 1950 the Labour Party increased its vote over 1945 by a million and a quarter and won a majority of all votes cast. The national swing to the Tories was 3.3 per cent, and Labour had 315 seats against the Tories and their allies with 298; overall, Labour had a majority of only 5. It was a tired and sick government; Bevin and Cripps died; Attlee had a recurrence of his duodenal ulcer and went into hospital. The most important political issue was the Korean war which broke out at the end of June 1950. Attlee gave immediate support to the American-dominated United Nations and imposed a rearmament programme upon the economy that was far beyond its capabilities. Within a year the government was beginning to fall apart. Bevan resigned in April 1951 followed by Harold Wilson and John Freeman; and Herbert Morrison's mishandling of foreign affairs, especially the Iranian question, all helped to determine Attlee's decision to go to the country again. In the October 1951 general election Labour won slightly more of the total poll than the Tories but with fewer seats; and overall the latter had a majority of 17. Attlee remained leader of the opposition for the next four years: long enough to ensure that Morrison would not follow him as leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party and that Hugh Gaitskell would. His years in opposition did nothing to enhance Attlee's reputation.

Attlee was a highly competent administrator; he worked methodically and efficiently; and he learned much, during his many years as a leading politician, in the way of political management. But he lacked the charisma necessary for a great party leader; he found it difficult to talk even to close colleagues—Ernest Bevin being one of the few exceptions; and there were serious attempts on a number of occasions to displace him as party leader. During the war and after 1945 it was Bevin's support above all which made these attempts fail. Since Attlee's death in 1967, and not least because of the performance of the Labour administrations from 1964 on, his reputation as a party leader and manager has grown. The years after 1945 are looked upon as something of a golden period when the welfare state was established and when a programme of nationalisation of certain key sectors was successfully carried through. There is a haze of nostalgia about the Attlee years; through it Attlee himself has grown in stature and reputation. The myths have begun to gather round him.

In his summing up of Attlee's career, Harris emphasises, as do most historians and politicians, Attlee's 'epoch-making achievement' of Indian independence. 'If any one man can be said to have given India her independence it was Attlee' (p. 568). There is no doubt, of course, that if
Churchill had won the 1945 election India would not have become a sovereign state; and there would have developed, in that sub-continent of hundreds of million of people, a Northern Ireland situation of growing warfare with the foreign occupation. Attlee did not give India her independence: there was no alternative, except a long period of attrition at the end of which Britain would have had to withdraw, bloody and bowed. Attlee believed in Indian independence; it was a central issue for the Labour Party by the time the Second World War ended; and despite opposition even in the Labour Cabinet, he got his way. It was a sensible, rational and thoroughly sane decision; and since politicians only seldom act in this way, Attlee must be given full credit for a wholly proper insistence that there was no other path forward. On the other hand, there are very serious questions to be answered, among them the ways in which power was handed over, and its timing and the imposition of Partition; and half a million dead Hindus and Moslems in the Punjab alone, with probably nearly two million dead in all, point to the need for a comprehensive evaluation of British policy, from which Attlee certainly cannot be excluded.

There are other matters which qualify his record; and these are central to the judgment of historians. What the Attlee administration achieved was the elaboration of a wide-ranging social welfare system; a transition from war to peace that was remarkably smooth and efficient, and by 1950 the economy was in much better shape than could have been anticipated in 1945. Full employment was less the result of government management in the late 1940s than of the beginnings of dynamic growth within the world economy; and that was to remain true for the next twenty years. The Tories could have done none of these things in the same effective way, and certainly the collaboration of the trade unions, so crucial to the return to a peace-time economy, would not have been at the disposal of a Churchill government. The social welfare achievement of the Attlee administration was important, although whether the principle of comprehensiveness, which everyone has assumed since 1946 to be accepted by the great majority of people, will withstand the harsh winds of a rampant Toryism in the 1980s, is now seriously in question. But the establishment of the national welfare schemes after 1946 rested in considerable part upon the acquisition of American dollars, and the terms on which these dollars were obtained effectively removed the possibilities of the continuation of any kind of controlled economy which had been so successful between 1945 and 1950; and the way was thereby opened to the free-enterprise developments of the 1950s when controls were dismantled and unfettered enterprise encouraged. The beneficiaries of the travails and crises of the Attlee government were the profit takers of the 1950s. It was to prove the greatest capitalist bonanza of the century.

In another sector, the programme of nationalisation rebuilt the ill-
planned and under-invested national services: coal, gas and electricity, railways. The compensation paid was much too generous, the structures of control established were highly bureaucratic, and workers' control or a minimum of worker-participation was never seriously discussed, let alone implemented. And finally, there is Attlee's personal responsibility for the existence of a British atomic Bomb, and the implications for foreign policy which are central to our concerns today. Moreover, the acceptance by his government of the great power argument encouraged the Tories, when they returned in 1951, to continue the colonial crises foreshadowed by Iran and Egypt in Herbert Morrison's disastrous days at the Foreign Office, and which gave us the crises of Kenya, British Guyana, Aden, Cyprus, and Suez in the 1950s.

The longer term consequences of the Attlee administration were the theory and practice of Butskellism: consensus on all major questions including the acceptance of the gross burden of armaments, and a foreign policy subordinated to that of the United States. Since all effective controls on foreign trade and capital flows had been eliminated by the end of the fifties—the continuation and conclusion of the policies initiated by the Attlee government—deficits on the balance of payments could only be met by what became known as stop-go policies, and these immediately affected domestic investment and welfare services. With the beginning of the world crisis in the early nineteen-seventies the 'cushioning' effect which a world boom had provided very quickly disappeared. Hence the much harsher decisions which the Callaghan–Healey government initiated and which in principle and practice marked a shift towards the monetarism that the Thatcher government accepted as their major articulate premiss after the Conservative election victory of 1979. For the leadership of the British labour movement it was intellectual and political bankruptcy.

NOTES

1. K. Harris, *Attlee* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982). Except where a specific book is quoted, all page references in the text are to Harris.

2. Attlee commonly talked in cricketing language: a typical upper-class way of expression which inhibits the development of serious dialogue and discussion. See, for an example, the letter from Tony Harman in the *Guardian*, 4 October 1982. Harman was Labour candidate for the Aylesbury constituency in which the Attlees lived and voted. It was the general election of 1951 and Harman asked Attlee why he had cut his period of government short and gone to the country. 'Because I thought it was time to declare' said Attlee. Harman, who clearly had never thought of politics in this way, commented: 'I don't think they play by the same rules.' 'Oh,' replied Attlee, 'we shall get another innings in some day if we don't win this time.' Hayter, the British ambassador in Moscow, told Richard Crossman of a friend of his who had arrived in Britain sometime during the summer of 1953 and was asked by Attlee who was staying there: 'Have you got the cricket scores? Nobody out here seems to know a think about them.' *The BackBench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (ed. Janet

See below, p. 149.


Attlee was invited to become a member of the Simon Commission by Ramsay MacDonald who had his own devious reasons for the choice (Harris, p. 77). Vernon Hartshorn, the South Wales miners’ leader, became the other Labour representative. Harris writes: ‘By becoming a member of the Commission, Attlee became a suspect in the eyes of many Labour Party backbenchers’ (ibid.).

Harris, p. 56.

Attlee, p. 115.

Ibid., p. 130.


The Fabian tradition was notably deficient in any serious concern for foreign politics. Hence ‘even’.

There are, of course, many exceptions, large and small, to the statement in the text: the mass jingoism of the First World War is an obvious example.

The Ottawa conference was held 21 July to 20 August 1932. It brought together the UK, and the Dominions of the British Empire, and established a system of Imperial Preference, following the earlier imposition of a tariff by the UK after the General Election of 1931. Imperial Preference was extended to the Crown Colonies in 1933.


Ibid., pp. 41-2.

Fred L. Block, The Origins of International Economic Disorder (University of California, 1977), p. 36. See also for a similar emphasis upon multilateralism as one of the central factors in the development of American foreign policy: W.A. Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy (New York, 1962) and Lloyd C. Gardner, Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy (Boston, 1971).


Block, op. cit., p. 55 ff.


Block, op. cit., p. 59.


Dalton reported Bevin as saying that Molotov was just like a communist in a local Labour Party, making the most of grievances if treated badly and putting up his price if treated reasonably. The most extraordinary example of Bevin’s megalomania in general, and of his illiterate anti-Sovietism in particular, was his speech to the Bournemouth conference of the Labour Party in 1946. After retailing his exploits as the man who did more than anyone else to defend the Russian Revolution in Britain—these were his words—he continued:

The thanks that I got was an attempt by the Communists to break up the Union that I had built. I said to Maisky [the Soviet Ambassador] on one occasion: ‘You have built the Soviet Union and you have a right to defend it. I have built the Transport Union and if you seek to break it I will fight you’,
That was a proper position to take up. Both were the results of long years of labour. After that there was a slightly greater respect for my view. I think that is fair.

23. Margaret Gowing, 'Britain, America and the Bomb' in Retreat from Power. Vol. 2 After 1939 (ed. D. Dilks, 1981), p. 129: 'The initial decision in 1947 to make a bomb simply emerged from a body of general assumptions. It was not a response to an immediate military threat but arose rather from a fundamental and instinctive feeling that Britain must possess so climacteric a weapon. It seemed, however, a manifestation of the scientific and technological on which Britain's strength—so deficient in terms of manpower—must depend.' The article from which this quotation is taken is a distillation of the author's official history of atomic energy in the UK. The relevant volume is Independence and Deterrence. Britain and Atomic Energy 1945-1952. Vol. 1. Policy Making (1974), chs. 6 and 7.

24. See the reference in the article by Margaret Gowing, cited above; and those in Edward Spiers, 'The British Nuclear Deterrent: Problems and Possibilities' in Dilks, op. cit.


27. Harris, p. 289.