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The Moment of 1945 and Its Legacy

This book was completed during a period in which the institutions of the welfare state, having been undermined surreptitiously for many years, are now being overtly restructured – some would say dismantled. To understand this current moment, we must also examine the moment of formation of the welfare state. In recent years, a negative image of the public sphere, articulated in terms of government interference, state profligacy, public inefficiency and bureaucratic red tape, has become hegemonic. In the road to 1945, in contrast, concepts of the public sector, the public good, freedom from want, justice and equal opportunity were linked together in a new utopian vision for a post-war world. It was not a vision that contemplated commercial sponsorship, but one which addressed and spoke to the needs, desires and expectations of millions of citizens. It was a social programme in which taxation revenue was generally understood as essential to the support of a wide range of public services.

The extraordinary conjuncture in British politics and society, now often referred to as the moment of 1945, that produced the welfare state and shaped the post-war world, became visibly significant around the time of the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942 and continued through the reforming and innovating period of the Labour Government elected in 1945. Many elements shaped this conjuncture. There was the hostility to the ‘old guard’ who had mis-managed the 1930s after the Wall Street crash of 1929, the memory of the poverty and unemployment of the 1930s, with its fear of the expense of doctors and health treatment, a continued decline of the culture of deference and the impact of war and communal solidarity. Ideas that ‘we are all pulling together’, the ‘Dunkirk spirit’, the ‘blitz spirit’ are powerful notions in British politics, as Cameron’s claim, in 2010, that ‘we are all in this together’ (www.conservative.com) illustrates. For many women, the experience of war work produced a determination not to simply go back to domesticity. Working-class radicalism and a strong left culture from the 1930s contributed, through

the forces education movement, to a new desire for profound change in the political system.

The popular radicalism that developed during World War II, both in the United Kingdom and among the armed forces abroad, is a difficult phenomenon to examine, precisely because of its diffuse, unfocussed nature – it was not grouped primarily around any political or trade union organization, nor can it be simply reduced down to its class base. As Ralph Miliband summed it up, popular radicalism was not for the most part

a formed socialist ideology, let alone a revolutionary one. But in its mixture of bitter memories, positive hopes, antagonism to a mean past, recoil from Conservative rule, impatience with traditional class structures, in its hostility to the claims of property and privilege, in its determination not to be robbed again of the fruits of victory, in its expectations of social justice, it was a radicalism eager for major, even fundamental changes in British society after the war. (Miliband 1961, p. 274)

The impact of total war on the British population was crucial to the moment of 1945. The disruption caused by mass mobilization and the severe deprivations caused by the blitz generated a widespread collective emotional response born out of hardship – this response was given a focus in the need for unity against a common enemy. Mass mobilization and a collective response to it made the privileges of property and class appear both visible and unacceptable. Aspects of social relations and social experience were rendered more apparent – shared military experience, and evacuation, for instance, brought people from hitherto rigidly separate class backgrounds into jarring collision. Stuart Hall (1972) has argued that ‘the access to service and privilege over the shop counter, for so long the assumed rewards of status and class had suddenly been publicly de-legitimated’. There was popular resentment about perceived incompetence among the upper-class leadership in the forces, which was associated with the old gang and the 1930s. Popular patriotism had within it elements of both a unity of the people and a nascent class hostility.

Total war involved state intervention in almost every area of social life. This both served to create precedents and heightened the contrast with the handling of peace-time crisis in the inter-war years. Two major themes to emerge in popular radicalism were a concern that after the war there should be no return to the 1930s and that there should be no repeat of the aftermath to World War I, when the promise of ‘homes fit for heroes’ made to returning troops proved

hollow.¹ The economic crises of the 1930s also had their effect on sections of the ruling parties and some industrialists, who came to see the need for a degree of industrial and economic planning, and the provision of social welfare, to secure the smooth running of capitalism.

In the early period of the war, up until the Battle of Britain in the second half of 1940, national unity still appeared to be the dominant theme, but when the threat of imminent invasion receded, the degree of discontent over the conduct of the war, inadequate leadership and social inequalities came to the fore. The threat posed to the frail conservative hegemony by the rise of popular radicalism was heightened by the inability of established parties to absorb or incorporate such radicalism. The Tories were identified too strongly with the past, and Labour's commitment to the wartime coalition government between 1940 and 1945 gave them little room for manoeuvre. At the same time, popular radicalism was weakened by its lack of focus – it formed in a political vacuum – a potential threat, but not yet an actual one. Popular radicalism found a voice, but it was a voice that spoke in a particular way, structuring and focusing, but also inflecting and transforming, the diffuse content of the public mood. Popular radicalism found expression in a variety of ways (WPCS 9, p. 37) in a range of institutional contexts. The work of J. B. Priestley and George Orwell provide contrasting instances: Priestley's radio broadcasts reached a huge audience, while Orwell's books had a more narrow intellectual market, but both saw the war as a moment for social change. Orwell wrote that 'we cannot win the war without introducing Socialism, nor establish Socialism without winning the war' (Orwell 1941, p. 94). Priestley, in a radio broadcast, spoke of 'a colossal battle, not only against something, but also for something positive and good'.²

In different ways, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Picture Post* spoke to some extent about popular radicalism and articulated its mood. In the analysis of press discourse in *Paper Voices*, Smith (1975) talks of a 'congruence' between the *Mirror* and the popular mood – the *Mirror* called for a radical break with the past, a 'clean sweep'. *Picture Post* 'spoke with a striking directness to the actual condition of its readers' and entered the spirit of 'planning for a new future' (Hall 1972, p. 103). A new logic of social perception established itself within the public discourse (Hall 1972, p. 88). *Paper Voices* characterized the *Mirror* style as 'ventriloquism', in that the paper was 'not speaking to its readers, but assuming what it took to be their voice and letting its readers overhear it addressing those in power' (Smith 1975, p. 65), while A. J. P. Taylor writes that 'in the *Mirror*, the English people at last found their voice'. These two phrases, the *Mirror* assuming what it took to be the people's voice, and the English people finding their voice in

it, illustrate the particular way that popular radicalism found public expression through the discursive forms of the popular press.

The limits of this public expression can clearly be seen if we locate the significant absence as being any location of fundamental social inequalities as structured into society. In the *Mirror*, problems were, typically, personalized. Cecil King describes the approach: 'Always it was necessary to attack the Establishment, to denounce blunders in high places, the selfishly complacent, the unimaginative and stupid old men who had too much power' (Smith 1975, p. 141). The effect, ultimately, of these public expressions, was to articulate popular radicalism with social reform and social democracy. In so doing, the tendency was to establish links between popular radicalism, on the one hand, and social reformist elements (sections of the Labour party, the 1941 Committee, the Fabian and Christian Socialist tradition, the trade union movement, and 'progressive' Tories) generally.

The Beveridge Report (1942) was significant not simply for its contents, but also for its reception – it sold more rapidly and in greater numbers than any other British Government document before or since. Significant numbers thought it insufficiently radical: while a Gallup Poll said nine out of ten people thought its proposals should be adopted, 66 per cent thought the transition rates (such as the gradual adoption of pensions) were too slow; and there was a widespread feeling that sickness and unemployment benefits were too low (Calder 1969, p. 611). However, the Labour Party, Liberals, TUC and Communist Party all endorsed the report; no major paper offered outright condemnation; and even moderate Tories welcomed it in principle. Public response was heightened by, on the one hand, the hostility to the plan from Churchill and the right wing of the Government, who attempted to delay publication and suppress discussion and on the other, by the pre-publication publicity carefully engineered by Beveridge.

The Beveridge Report became a symbol which was taken up by the 'ventriloquists' of popular radicalism (as, for example, the *Daily Mirror*'s 'Hands off the Beveridge Report Campaign' in 1942) (Smith 1975, p. 112). It occupied the centre of the emerging social reform discourse, linking popular radical and social democratic thinking. During the war, Labour's continued involvement in coalition and the reluctance of the majority of Tories to act on Beveridge meant that popular radicalism could not at this stage be fully re-absorbed. The appearance of Beveridge at a crucial moment in the development of popular radicalism and its enthusiastic adoption by the popular media made the Report a central symbol which aided the unification of popular radical and social democratic ideological elements in a single unified discourse.

The moment of 1945, despite intense internal discussions, marked a rare moment of strong cohesion within and outside the Labour Party. The popular mood, fed by war radicalism, the insistence on no return to the 1930s, underpinned a wide range of Labour initiatives – nationalization of industries, the establishment of universal secondary education and the welfare state. The moment of 1945 ushered in a period in which both major parties broadly accepted that the future of Britain should be as a mixed economy with an expanded role for the state, which would ensure the welfare of the people within a safety net protecting people, from the cradle to the grave, against the worst impact of illness, unemployment and homelessness. The transformation of the state established a political environment in which public spending on the arts, culture and sport was felt to be a good thing, while health and education, it was assumed, should be paid for by taxation. The broad agreement between Conservative and Labour gave rise to a phrase, ‘Butskellism’, denoting the supposed similarity of perspective of two significant figures, Labour’s Hugh Gaitskell and the Conservative R. A. Butler.

Labour in the 1950s: Reform, revision, doubt and decay?

The Labour Government of 1945 established a welfare state and a substantial nationalization programme involving coal mining, iron and steel, ship-building and transport. It laid the foundations for post-war recovery and institutionalized a new mode of governance in which public ownership of significant elements of the economy played a central role. Despite the successes of post-war reconstruction, however, Britain’s industrial and economic base had structural problems that were not adequately addressed in the 1950s. The traditional British industries, iron and steel, ship-building and coal were already in long-term decline. Lacking the huge support given to Germany in the form of Marshall Aid, the British economy could not direct sufficient investment in sunrise industries. One example is that the powerful position the United Kingdom had in the electronics industry was squandered, as other countries, most notably Japan, were quicker to develop the new transistor and subsequently integrated circuit technologies. The British economy was beset with swings between growth and recession (boom and bust), which neither party in power could manage for long. The prolongation of rationing beyond the 1940s and into the 1950s was unpopular and contributed to a Conservative election victory in 1951.

Britain's uncomfortable entry into its post-imperial era, its adjustment to no longer being a major power, restructured the political map, bringing to the fore on the right-wing of British politics a nostalgic sentimentality, a pessimism about the future and a Little-England defensiveness. In 1956, the fiasco of Suez exposed the relative impotence of the United Kingdom in international politics and underscored its dependence on the United States. The Russian invasion of Hungary in the same year was a shock to the Left, causing large numbers of defections from the Communist Party. Internal battles within the Labour Party were already fracturing the 1945 consensus. These events opened up the space in which the British New Left emerged. In the 1960s, with the political confidence of the moment of 1945 ebbing away, there were extensive debates about the way forward for the British Labour Party.

The Labour party had spent much of the 1950s engaged in intense internal struggles between the reformers and the Bevanite left, and despite Wilson's largely successful attempts to hold the party together between 1964 and 1976, it was in these debates about socialism in a capitalist society that some of the roots of the advances and failures of the Labour Left in the 1980s, the subsequent fightback of the right-wing of the party, culminating in the marginalization of the Left in the 1990s, and the emergence of New Labour, can be traced.

In *The Future of Socialism* (1956), Anthony Crosland suggested that, in the 1930s, socialists believed that a Labour government should have three objectives: abolition of poverty and creation of a welfare state, greater equalization of wealth and economic planning for full employment and stability. Crosland argued that this vision was out-dated and that the Marxist critique of capitalism was no longer relevant (Crosland 1964, p. 1). The battle to remove Clause IV (the commitment to common ownership of the means of production distribution and exchange and to obtain for workers the full fruits of their labour) from the Labour Party constitution began in this period, but was only accomplished by Tony Blair in 1995. In the 1959 Labour Party conference debate instigated by Gaitskell's attempt to remove Clause IV, union leader Frank Cousins stated 'we have all accepted in the past that, whilst we can have nationalization without socialism, we cannot have socialism without nationalization' (quoted in Foote 1997, p. 276). In *Parliamentary Socialism* (1960), Ralph Miliband argued that Labour's commitment to parliamentary democracy meant that it could never become a transformative socialist party, but was apparently unable to persuade his two sons, David and Ed, both stalwart parliamentarians.

The discourse of party modernization, continued by Kinnock in the 1980s, before crystallizing in the form of 'New Labour' in the 1990s, also has its

roots in the 1960s. Labour MP Richard Crossman, a critic of revisionism, characterized the revisionist argument as: 'labour will decline into a minority party, representing an ever shrinking working class, unless it scraps its old-fashioned critique of capitalism and modernizes its policies, its images and its constitution' (Crossman 1960, p. 1). This period of debate undermined some of the confidence that had produced the welfare state and the project of nationalization. These are some of the roots of attempts to establish a socialist strategy at the heart of the Labour Party – one that both climaxed and expired in the road to the 1983 manifesto. The dilemma for Labour, as a constitutionalist and reformist party, was stark – in opposition, it could strive to represent the interests and aspirations of the exploited working class, but in government, it was forced by economic pressure to discipline those aspirations in the interests of capitalism. Foote (1997) identified labourism as at the core of the party with the trade union movement playing the dominant role. Consequently, the Labour Party was structured around both the aspirations of the trade union movement (improving pay, shortening working week, improving conditions) and its limitations (hostility to capitalists, but not a revolutionary programme to supplant capitalism). Marxism was always marginal in the Labour Party.

This is not to say that, within limitations, valuable and important reforms were not being achieved. Indeed, in the area of social policy, much was accomplished under the Labour Governments of 1964–70, albeit often stimulated by individual members of the Liberal Party and by back benchers. Reforms included the abolition of theatre censorship (1968), abortion law reform (1967), divorce law reform (1969), abolition of flogging in prisons (1967) and the legalization of homosexuality for consenting adults over 21 (1967) (Jenkins 1991, p. 180).

The 1964 Labour manifesto pledged to give more generous support to the Arts Council, (without, as in 1959, putting a specific figure on this increase), to the theatre, orchestras, concert halls, museums and art galleries (Dale 2000, p. 119). The 1966 manifesto promised the establishment of the Open University (then referred to as the University of the Air), but the section on the arts, while promising an increase of £2.5 million, mostly used its space to outline achievements in the previous 2 years – the establishment of a Minister for Arts and Leisure and increased financial support. The response to the growth of sponsorship in the arts from the Labour Party and from socialists had been largely muted. The *May Day Manifesto*, produced by left-of-labour socialists in 1968, despite its 50 chapters, was all but silent on arts policy (Williams 1968). The pamphlet *Labour's Programme*, 1982, some 279 pages long, contained just over a page on the arts, making a commitment to arts funding but with no

reference to commercial sponsorship. In 1985, Labour proposed to double the Arts Council's grant when they returned to power, but the Labour manifestos for 1992 and 1997 contained no proposals for the curbing or monitoring of commercial sponsorship.

If sponsorship did not attract critical comment, the same could not be said of advertising and consumerism more broadly. World War II left the United States as the dominant power of the world, challenged only by the establishment of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. Post-war reconstruction, growing affluence and the rapid spread of new domestic and family-centred consumer goods (fridges, televisions, music systems and cars) produced in turn a discourse of cultural commentary critical of the consumerist society. Both in England and in America, a hostility to the concept and reality of advertising and sponsorship was by no means the province of the left alone. Cultural critics of both left and right evoked advertising as a symbol and symptom of the ills of contemporary society.

During the 1950s, dissenting voices spoke out against advertising and the materialist society. Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) portrayed the advertising industry as calculating and manipulative. J. K. Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958) warned of the growing gap between rich and poor, the declining power of the public sector to remedy the situation and the emergence of a contrast between private affluence and public squalor.³ Cultural commentators as diverse as J. B. Priestley, Denys Thompson, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams spoke out against the commercialization of society. In England, Leavisite critics such as Denys Thompson, in *The Voice of Civilization* (1943), hit out at the decline of moral values in the face of commercialism and advertising. Raymond Williams wrote in *The Long Revolution*, first published in 1961, 'We are spending £400 million annually on an advertising system, which . . . lives in a world of suggestion and magic' (Williams 1961, p. 347).⁴ Hall and Whannel (1964, p. 336) comment that 'the artistic skill involved only makes the process of manipulation more effective and by the same token, socially more damaging'. In the English context, of course, a disdain for commerce was often articulated in terms of anti-American-ness, most notably in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958), with its reference to 'shiny barbarism'.

The sociologist Michael Young (who became Lord Young of Dartington in 1978) responded to the consumer society by founding the Consumers Association and its magazine *Which?*, designed to provide consumers with impartial advice based on independent testing of products. Young, who had helped draft the Labour manifesto for 1945, and was also involved in the establishment of the Open University and the National Extension College,

wrote *The Rise of the Meritocracy* in 1958, as a critique of the term, and was subsequently angered by New Labour's misunderstanding of his argument.⁵

Despite the critical commentary on advertising and consumerism, the emergence and growth of sponsorship attracted little specific critical attention. One of the first and still one of the few public figures to offer critical reflection on the dangers of commercial sponsorship was Professor Roy Shaw (director of the Arts Council between 1975 and 1983), whose 1993 book *The Spread of Sponsorship* has been a significant influence on our own research in this area.

During the 1960s and 1970s, advertising became a significant driving force associated with media innovation such as colour supplements in newspapers, and the introduction to the United Kingdom of commercial radio. The period from 1960 to 1990 can be seen as one in which advertising became triumphant. It was the source of finance behind the expansion of television, behind the growth of supplements in newspapers and behind the growth of free newspapers. More and more areas of public life were colonized by advertising – whole sides of buses, taxis and trains, giant billboards, some, as in the case of Berlin, visible more than a mile away. During the 1980s and 1990s, image, icon and brand became central to the production and consumption of commodities, a process traced in Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999) and Allisa Quart's *Branded* (2003). The communally aware citizen of the welfare state was reconstructed as a new possessive consumer and competitive individual of the consumer society. During the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, commercial sponsorship would develop into a vital means of establishing and reinforcing a trade name and of associating it with public activities that bestowed upon it a positive and benevolent image.⁶

Notes

- 1 It was David Lloyd George who, when Prime Minister (1916–22), first used the phrase 'a land fit for heroes' in the 1918 General Election at the conclusion of World War I. This phrase was taken up by MPs and campaigners who demanded 'homes fit for heroes'.
- 2 *Postscripts*, London 1941: 18.
- 3 Note the work of American cultural critics such as Dwight McDonald, Edmund Wilson, C. Wright Mills, William H. Whyte (*The Organization Man*), Fred J. Cook (*The Warfare State*), and also more recently the success of the book *The Spirit Level*.
- 4 See also Williams in NLR 4, 'The Magic System' described by Hall and Whannel in *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchinson, 1964) as the most authoritative critique of modern advertising.

- 5 Michael Young's son Toby, would became a fervent advocate of 'free' schools and set up the West London Free School in 2011.
- 6 The rapid growth of sponsorship from the start of the 1980s is echoed by the growth of discussion of and guides to sponsorship from 1980s: Bagehot and Nuttall 1990, Gillies 1991, MAPS 1995, McCallum 1992, Norton 1981, Turner1987a and 1987b, Walden 1989, and Wragg 1994).