



Per ABCA ad Attlee?
The origins and early reception of Paul Addison's *The Road to 1945*¹

RICHARD TOYE
University of Exeter

As for the popular radicalism which gave Labour its majority, it's possible that some historians will argue that strike statistics and Ministry of Information reports reinforce the impression, but I am beginning to wonder whether the 1945 victory, like the referendum on the Common Market, was not another example of the successful management of popular opinion by an elite, albeit in wartime the elite was a left-wing intelligentsia headed by Michael Foot.
 Paul Addison, c.1976.²

Introduction

The politician and historian Roy Jenkins once suggested that a suitable title for Paul Addison's *The Road to 1945* would have been *Per ABCA ad Attlee* – an adaptation of the RAF motto, *Per Ardua ad Astra*. The formulation was erudite, elegant, and rather unfair. The idea that the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) had radicalised servicemen and thus paved the way for Labour's landslide was in Addison's view an exaggeration [Addison, 'Suggested blurb for *The Road to 1945*'].³ But Jenkins was certainly right that he had sought to account for 'the influences which moved British politics to the left in World War II'.⁴ Although many scholars have disputed the conclusions of Addison's book, his first, its seminal status is not in doubt. One of his obituarists, the historian Ian S. Wood, recalled being short of money at the time that it was published. He sold a suit to raise the cash to buy it: 'It was worth every penny and has never been out of print since, setting a new standard for the analysis

¹ I would like to thank Piers Brendon, John Campbell, Antoine Capet, Peter Clarke, Helena Clarkson, David M. Craig, Jeremy Crang, Warren Dockter, Boyd Hilton, and Edward Skidelsky for valuable information, comments and suggestions, and other forms of help. Rosemary Addison kindly shared her memories and looked through her late husband's papers in search of relevant material. Penguin Random House granted access to relevant files in the Jonathan Cape archive. The staff of the Churchill Archives Centre and of Reading University Library provided timely assistance. I would also like to thank Michael Bentley, David Howell, Lord Morgan, Lord Skidelsky, and P.J. Waller. They were amongst the original reviewers of *The Road to 1945* and generously shared their knowledge and offered their reflections on what they had written. Any omissions or errors are of course my own responsibility.

² Paul Addison, 'The Politics and Historiography of the Second World War', unpublished and undated paper, Paul Addison Papers (courtesy of Rosemary Addison). Internal evidence dates this to soon after the 1976 Labour leadership contest.

³ On the role of ABCA, see S.P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale: Current Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army 1914-1950*, and J.A. Crang, 'Politics on Parade: Army Education and the 1945 General Election'.

⁴ JENKINS, Roy. 'Under new management', *The Observer*, 29 Sept. 1985 (reviewing Paul Addison, *Now the War Is Over: A Social History of Britain 1945-51*). *Per Ardua ad Astra* means 'Through struggle (or adversity) to the stars'.

of the social, cultural and political forces behind Labour's great 1945 election victory' [Obituary of Paul Addison, *The Scotsman*, 12 February 2020].

The book needs to be understood in three historiographical contexts. First, the development of the discipline of contemporary history from the 1940s, in parallel with new social science approaches to politics [HAYTON : 290-292]. Second, the growth of interest in social history in the 1960s and 1970s [HARVEY, 'History and the social sciences']. Third, contemporaneous with the start of Addison's career, the rise of the study of 'high politics' in a fashion at first glance far removed from the popular or 'low' political concerns of *The Road to 1945*. *The Road* has been described as 'a classic text' [HICKSON : 142] and as 'a key point of reference' [READMAN : 229] in the field; one could enumerate many more tributes of this type. Reviewing Addison's book *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-war Britain* (2010), Rodney Lowe wrote that *The Road* had provided

the construction of political consensus as both a 'positive and purposeful' structure for historians studying domestic politics during the Second World War and a goad for those 'conviction' politicians who, since its publication in 1975, have condemned such a consensus as the principal cause of Britain's relative decline [LOWE : 502].

Crucial to *The Road's* long-lasting appeal, then, was the apparent potential it offered to extract lessons from the past to illuminate political problems in the present. As Addison acknowledged in a 1992 interview, 'If you think a good historian is one who is interested in the past for its own sake, I would never have been one, I am always thinking about origins' [ZWEINIGER BARGIEŁOWSKA : 190]. It has, of course, been common for historians to approach the issue of 1945 with some degree of political commitment [BURGESS : 155-170].

This helps explain why a classic book also stimulated a classic *debate* – not something that all excellent works succeed in doing. Another classic on a similar topic, Angus Calder's *The People's War* (1969), failed to achieve to achieve *The Road's* degree of historiographical purchase, for reasons to which we will return. Equally, Addison's own two books on Churchill, which are authoritative and superbly written, are widely read and cited and yet have not provoked heavyweight counterattacks in the same way that *The Road* did. Addison's claim that the wartime coalition laid the groundwork for a 'post-war consensus' on the Attlee government's terms was at the heart of the controversy. Harriet Jones, co-editor of the 1996 volume *The Myth of Consensus*, recalled:

As young postgraduates, we spent a lot more time than we ought to have done in the canteen at the PRO derisively unpicking Addison's arguments with the smug cynicism that is the irritating trait of young postgraduates everywhere. [...] Debunking the postwar consensus has led to a tiresome series of heated seminars and conferences over the years, and defenders of the idea often cling to it with an orthodox fundamentalism calling to mind some of the wackier Christian sects I grew up with in the Bible Belt [JONES, 'Speaking Volumes'].

Jones noted that Addison comported himself through these debates with grace; certainly he was not one of the fanatics on his own behalf [*Ibid.*]. In his afterword to the 1994 edition, he acknowledged that some of the criticisms he had received had been well founded, and clarified that the consensus he was talking about was a 'Whitehall consensus' rather than one with a wider embrace.

But some of my critics are wide of the mark in attributing to me the idea that wartime politics were characterized by consensus alone – a seamless web of public spirit that embraced everyone from [Sir Stafford] Cripps and the Archbishop of Canterbury to Jeeves and Bertie Wooster'. [*The Road to 1945* (1994 Reissue) : 280]

The purpose of this article is not to re-adjudicate the debate but rather to cast light on its origins.¹ It is sometimes suggested that *The Road* established a new orthodoxy which then came under attack. 'Addison's interpretation established a dominant new narrative of the period', suggests Daniel Ritschel.

Yet, no sooner had this narrative established itself, than a new revisionist school emerged in the late 1980s, highly critical of the 'consensus paradigm' and firmly convinced that its supporters had greatly exaggerated both the depth of ideological agreement on reconstruction during the war and the extent of the policy parallels between the Labour and Conservative governments afterward [RITSCHEL : 176].

Writing in 2009, Paul Readman presented a similar picture, although he was less specific about the time-frame: 'while Addison's views have been influential, the idea of consensus both during and after the war has been subjected to damaging criticism, with many scholars now questioning its purchase, and even suggesting it to be a myth' [READMAN : 229].

This is a chronology which makes a good deal of sense if the evidence is confined to books and full-dress articles; contributions from Kevin Jefferys in 1987 ['British Politics and Social Policy during the Second World War'] and Ben Pimlott in 1989 ['Is the "Postwar Consensus" a Myth?'] suggest a turning point at this time. However, examining the original reviews of *The Road* shows that some scholars offered, along with a lot of enthusiastic commendation, important reservations and criticisms which foreshadowed later, lengthier responses. Jones was surely right to suggest that by the early eighties 'consensus had become a central concept in our understanding of post-war Britain', but, as the canteen arguments she described make clear, that did not mean that it had achieved unquestioned acceptance ['Speaking Volumes']. But it would be wrong to dwell only on the scepticism. It is worth paying attention, too, to the praise that Addison received. What did he say that was perceived to be new? Which orthodoxies was he thought to be overturning? And what longstanding suspicions did his impressive research appear to confirm? Above all, what were the frames of reference through which reviewers regarded the book? The most important frame of all, it is worth emphasising, was not always explicitly stated. 'To write of post-war Britain is to enter a long-running debate over the state of the nation which began about 1960 and has continued ever since', Addison wrote in 1991. 'Many conflicting views have been expressed, but strange to say there is one assumption on which almost all participants agree. They all conceive of British history since 1945 as a record of decline' ['The Road to 1989'].

Origins

Addison was born in Staffordshire in 1943 and was raised by his mother Pauline; he never knew his father, Stanley, who was in the US Army and who returned to America when Paul was an infant. In middle age, Addison identified as 'a secularised Anglican of Lib-Lab outlook' ['Destiny, History and Providence' : 236] but as a child, he imbibed the views of his grandfather, 'a strong Tory who detested the Labour government and all its works. Only Mr. Attlee commanded his respect as a decent Englishman who had somehow strayed into the wrong party' [*The Road* : 281]. Addison attended the King Edward VI Grammar School in Lichfield, where he had two inspirational History teachers. One was 'one of nature's Tories', and the other, a former conscientious objector, 'taught us that history was all about the class struggle'. Addison's belief in 'progress' underlay much of his work as an historian, though the rise of 'the permissive society' and then of the new Right left him slightly baffled. He recalled in *No Turning Back* [1-2], 'At some barely conscious level of my imagination the England of which I was a part in the late 1950s is forever the norm, and almost everything that has

¹ For a recent contribution which contains a helpful summary of the debate, see BLACKBURN, 'Reassessing Britain's "Post-war consensus": The politics of reason 1945-1979'.

happened since a puzzling deviation'. When he wrote *The Road* he assumed that 'the brave new world of Attlee, Beveridge and Keynes' was an 'enduring structure', or at the very least was worth preserving 'as a memorial to a more civilized era' [*The Road* : 280]. Addison admired Labour's 1945 leaders as 'moderate social patriots' [276]. This is a label that could well be applied to him too. Addison graduated with a First from Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1964. He then started as a research student at Nuffield College. He recalled:

When I began my research, Harold Wilson, who had of course acted as secretary to the Beveridge report, was campaigning for office on a platform which, had I realised it at the time, was a re-run of wartime social reconstruction, demanding efficiency on the one hand and better social services on the other. ['The Politics and Historiography of the Second World War']

While working towards his thesis, Addison helped Randolph Churchill assemble the documentary companion volumes to the official biography of Winston Churchill, alongside Martin Gilbert and Cameron Hazlehurst ['Achievement on a Colossal Scale' : 21]. In 1967, well before he completed his D. Phil. – on 'Political Change in Britain, September 1939 to December 1940' (1971) – he secured a lectureship at Edinburgh University, where he remained for the rest of his career [Obituary of Paul Addison, *The Times*, 23 March 2020]. The influence of his supervisor, A.J.P. Taylor, was critical. Addison, who felt 'a bit of a misfit' in Oxford ['Achievement on a Colossal Scale' : 21], credited Taylor with keeping him 'emotionally alive' by giving him 'constant encouragement to go on with tasks that seemed to be very very difficult at times' [ZWEINIGER BARGIEŁOWSKA : 188]. Taylor was Director of the Beaverbrook Library, the short-but-brilliant life of which (1967-75) was an important influence on Addison's early historical work.¹ One imagines that his links with Randolph Churchill and Taylor opened a few doors; the Nuffield psephologist David Butler lent a hand [David Butler to Quintin Hogg, 28 May 1966]; and Addison was able to secure an impressive roster of interviewees for *The Road*. These included Attlee, Lord Boothby, Lord Reith, and Sir Horace Wilson [*The Road* : 10].

Addison recalled that, when he started researching the politics of World War II, the topic was 'barely distinguishable in many ways from current affairs. [...] Probably in a rather crude way, I wanted to know what the origins of the present were' [ZWEINIGER BARGIEŁOWSKA : 189]. He found a friend and ally in Angus Calder, who was studying for a Ph.D. at Sussex University on the radical wartime party Common Wealth, and also working on the book that would become *The People's War* ['Angus Calder (1942–2008)'].² Angus was the son of the radical journalist Ritchie Calder, who had reported vividly on the Blitz, and who became one of Addison's interviewees. Though it is standard to cite *The Road* as the starting point for the consensus debate, *The People's War* used the term six years earlier; indeed it appeared on the book's dustjacket. 'The consensus, while serving in the long run to preserve private capitalism, had shifted the debate on to ground which Labour had made its own', Calder argued [CALDER : 575]. Although Calder's contribution deserves to be better recognised, this is not to say that he should be credited, over Addison, with having coined the concept of 'consensus'. On the one hand, as we will see, the roots of that idea were to be found earlier. On the other hand, the two men had worked so closely together that their 'convergent work' had sometimes amounted 'almost to collaboration' [16].

Although Addison and Calder exchanged ideas freely, their respective works had different emphases. As Addison recalled,

We both regarded it as axiomatic that the drawing up of post-war plans was an elitist exercise in the creation of 'blueprints from above. But whereas Dr Calder regarded the consensus as a victory

¹ On the library, see BURK, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor* : 317-320.

² See also Addison's 2012 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Calder, and Sue CAMERON's obituary of him, *Financial Times*, 21/22 June 2008, which includes quotations from Addison.

for the forces of privilege and bureaucracy over the 'participatory democracy' of 1940-42, I regarded it as 'positive and purposeful': the basis of a more enlightened and humane society. [*The Road* : 288-289]

The basic difference between them was over the question of whether or not it was possible to obtain meaningful social democratic reform within capitalism. Addison's book has been described as the restatement of an 'earlier orthodoxy' of wartime national solidarity that Calder had disrupted [ELEY : 816 n.15]. True, Addison regarded the Labour Party as 'speaking for England' in 1945 [*The Road* : 269]. Yet, given that both scholars saw consensus as a form of elite imposition, benign or otherwise, it is clear that Addison was not merely peddling nostalgia. In the later debate, Calder inclined towards Addison's side, as his review of Jefferys' 1991 book shows [*Albion* : 369-370]. Calder also revised his own views, having deduced that many readers of *The People's War* had regarded it as a confirmation of wartime myth rather than as a challenge to it, and having concluded that he himself had accepted aspects of the myth without sufficient questioning [*The Myth of the Blitz* : xiii].

In the Sixties, archive-based research on the politics of World War II was a novelty – in fact, Addison and Calder's respective Ph.D.s were classified not as History but as Social Studies. Addison located (and drew Calder's attention to), the papers of the sociological research organisation Mass Observation (MO). By this time, MO had mutated into a market research body, with offices in London's Cromwell Road. 'In the basement, all higgledy-piggledy under layers of dust, were the archives.' At this time, naturally, the notetaking had to be done by hand ['Angus Calder' : 300]. The MO material was only one part of the incredibly rich range of sources upon which Addison drew. He benefitted from the Wilson government's Public Records Act (1967) which meant that official documents were in general to be made available after thirty years instead of fifty. As a bonus, the records for the whole of World War II were released by 1972. The Cabinet Papers were obviously crucial, but so too were the Ministry of Information's Home Intelligence Reports.

In addition to the Public Record Office (now known as the National Archives), Addison exploited holdings elsewhere. These included those of the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the LSE (notably the Hugh Dalton diary) and at Churchill College. He also tracked down a number of collections that were still in private hands. The papers of Churchill himself were not at this stage generally available to researchers, and although Addison was permitted to consult the papers of Neville Chamberlain for background, he was allowed to make use of only one short quotation from them [*The Road* : 329]. Of course the opening later on of further archives, such as those of the Conservative Party, contributed to the revision by others of some of Addison's claims [JONES, 'A Bloodless Counter Revolution' : 2]. But his diligent detective work meant that his interpretation of the war drew on thickets of new information – and this in itself made his book a critical point of reference for subsequent historians.

Addison might well have written a very different book; or rather, he might have turned sooner to the second major theme of his career. In 1969, he wrote to Taylor to ask his advice with an issue that was worrying him. The publishers Jonathan Cape had offered him an advance of £10,000 to write 'a one volume and scholarly biography of Churchill to be done by 1975/6'. In 2019 prices this was over £165,000. It was an extraordinary sum to offer to a scholar in his twenties who, as yet, had no publications to his name, but the fact that they published Calder shows their openness to youthful talent. Addison seems to have contemplated either giving up his lectureship or at least taking a lengthy leave of absence, as he noted that Cape 'would keep me while I spent the time writing it'. He wanted to know whether Taylor thought a) that it was a professionally honourable assignment, and b) whether he Addison, was up to the job [11 Jan. 1969, BBL/11].

In reply, Taylor offered sage advice, but did not commit himself as to whether Addison's 'great historical judgement' would equip him to be a satisfactory biographer: 'I know from experience that

these gifts are different from those required from a historian'. He also pointed out a practical problem. After Randolph Churchill's death, Martin Gilbert had replaced him as Churchill's official biographer. If Gilbert did not allow Addison access to the Churchill Papers, he would have to wait until the official Life was finished; or if he did, Addison would in effect have to duplicate all of Gilbert's work [14 Jan. 1969, BBL/11]. Addison judged: 'Martin has the popular market, and more of that kind of thing would be one chimp too many at the tea-party'. When it came to Churchill, what was needed was 'a Schlesinger-style analysis of Churchillian politics' [Addison to Taylor, 20 May 1969, BBL/11]. The reference was to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the Harvard historian who, prior to his service in the Kennedy administration, had published *The Age of Jackson* (1945) and *The Age of Roosevelt* (1957-60). Addison did in fact contract with Cape to write both a one-volume biography of Churchill and – jointly with Owen Dudley Edwards – a work called *The Politics of Winston Churchill*, but neither book was delivered.¹ The comment about Schlesinger gives a clue as to what Addison wanted to achieve with *The Road to 1945*. By this point Addison had a draft of his Ph.D. 'all in rough though typed' but the eventual book would be considerably more ambitious than the thesis [Addison to Taylor, 20 May 1969, BBL/11].

Addison later recalled that '*The Road to 1945* was written during the latter half of the Heath government of 1972-4, and the first year or so of the Labour governments of 1974-9. That problems were mounting was obvious: the "post-war consensus" was under pressure' [*The Road* : 280]. Contemporaneously, he described the book as 'a tough political property which could be very timely from the point of view of current debates' [Addison to Machin, 10 June 1975, JC217]. Unbeknownst to Addison at the time – but highlighted later in *No Turning Back* – a few months before publication of *The Road* Margaret Thatcher's Shadow Cabinet debated the term vigorously [ADDISON, *No Turning Back* : 276-277]. Ideologically divided, they differed amongst themselves over the nature, extent and desirability of the post-war consensus, but none of them seemed to doubt it existed [JOSEPH; HAILSHAM; OFFICIAL MINUTES]. In fact, uses of the term can be traced back to the 1940s, thus showing that, contrary to what has been argued by some of Addison's critics, the idea of consensus was not a retrospective nostalgic invention. However, such statements need to be read as interventions in political debate and not as incontrovertible proof that consensus actually existed [TOYE, 'From "Consensus" to "Common Ground": *passim*']. For our purposes, the point is that the language of consensus was available to Addison in the primary sources (as it was also to Calder). Although, somewhat surprisingly, he did not quote any examples of historical actors using the term itself, he did note that it had held many different meanings from the time of Disraeli onwards. He also quoted Churchill and Labour's Arthur Greenwood to the effect that the war stimulated cooperation and comradeship between the Coalition's members [*The Road* : 165]. Although Addison did not coin the concept of consensus, he gave it new substance and definition and was responsible for giving it prominence within the academic literature.

But as he freely acknowledged, he was not painting on a blank canvas. Writing (with Harriet Jones) in a book published in 2005, he observed:

The first drafts of history are seldom the work of historians. The conceptual framework of contemporary British history was initially the work of politicians, media commentators, economists, social scientists and social policy experts. It is to them that we owe such concepts as the 'relative economic decline' of Britain, the 'missed opportunity' of British participation in 'Europe', the 'post-war consensus', 'Thatcherism', 'consumer society', 'globalization', 'racism', 'gender', the 'decline of the welfare state', the 'permissive society', the 'classless society', the 'North-South

¹ David Machin, Director's Memorandum, 21 Dec. 1973 and Bruce Hunter to Machin, 2 Dec. 1974, Jonathan Cape Papers, JC217. Cape later published Addison's *Churchill on the Home Front, 1900-1955* (1992). In addition to Addison's extensive published writings on Churchill, note also the existence of a lengthy interview transcript for a 1993 TV documentary, preserved in the Piers Brendon Papers, BREN 1/14, CAC.

divide'. The first challenge for anyone seeking to historicize contemporary Britain is therefore to test the validity of these concepts. [ADDISON & JONES, 'Introduction'. *A Companion to Contemporary Britain* : 2].

Since the early 1950s, as Simon Burgess has shown, political scientists had been debating the degree to which the Labour and Conservative parties had become ideologically closer ['1945 observed' : 161-167]. An article in *The Economist*, published in 1954, had created the figure of 'Mr. Butskell' a composite of Conservative Chancellor R.A. Butler and his Labour predecessor Hugh Gaitskell ['Mr Butskell's Dilemma', 13 Feb. 1954]. *The Road* made only two mentions of 'Butskellism' (or 'Butskellites') – one of them, though, in the book's last sentence - but it was a term that would have been familiar to the readers of the day [278].

It was not only social scientists and journalists who influenced Addison. Amongst historians, Arthur Marwick (along with Calder and Taylor) stands out. Seven years Addison's senior, he was the author of several books, including *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (1974). Addison cited this work, but perhaps more critical was Marwick's seminal article tracing the growth of 'middle opinion' in the 1930s.¹ In his acknowledgements, Addison thanked Marwick 'for many wise observations which cleared my mind and broadened my understanding'. Both Marwick and Calder read the book's first draft and offered criticisms and suggestions [*The Road* : 10]. But, just as he disagreed with 'Calder's vision of a betrayed people', so too was he a little sceptical of scholars 'like Richard Titmuss and Arthur Marwick, who sympathise with Labour, and argue that wartime government was under pressure from below to change its pre-war ways.' In Addison's view, in fact, there had been 'an intense bureaucratic drive to power' ['Politics and Historiography'].

Addison's model of politics

Addison, in his 1994 afterword, admitted: It is clear to me in retrospect that I applied to the later stages of the war a model of British politics that I never explained in the text, and probably thought of as quite unproblematical.' Addison's description of this model – which he counter-posed to Margaret Thatcher's model of 'government as an instrument of party, and party as an instrument of ideology' – is worth quoting at length:

My own model of politics allowed [...] for a large measure of administrative and political autonomy at the top. To simplify, it assumed that whichever party was in office, the Whigs were in power. Party conflicts were compromised, and ideology relegated to the margins of government, by countervailing factors which impelled all administrations towards the middle ground. Among these factors were the influence of the civil service, the electoral imperatives of a party system in which the two parties were evenly balanced, the pragmatism of party leaders, and the practical value of maintaining a large measure of continuity between one administration and the next.

This model owed something to Marxist ideas of the nature of the state, something to the political history of Maurice Cowling, and something to the notion of 'the Establishment' [*The Road* : 282-283].

Taylor used the term 'the Establishment' in a 1953 book review; whether or not he actually coined it is unclear, but it was subsequently popularised by the journalist Henry Fairlie [TAYLOR, 'Books in General'; [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#)]. The mention of Cowling is striking. Addison was clearly a little surprised, in the early 1990s, to be asked to contribute to a *Festschrift* for Cowling, whom he had met only once, twenty years earlier: 'If I were to be set down in the middle of

¹ MARWICK, 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political "Agreement"' (1964). See also Calder's review of Jefferys, *The Churchill Coalition*.

Cambridge [...] I would not know the way to Peterhouse' ['Destiny, History and Providence: The Religion of Winston Churchill': 236]. As the book's editor explains, he invited Addison because he wanted to include critics, knowing that Cowling would approve.¹ Yet Addison's comment about his 'model' suggests, he should not be seen simply as a Cowling antagonist. There were also areas of overlap between *The Road* and Cowling's ostensibly very different 'high politics' approach.

A few months before *The Road* came out, Cowling had published *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy, 1933-40*. Addison had spent his days in a dusty basement trawling through the forgotten files of Mass Observation, whereas Cowling contended that there were only fifty or sixty people in politics who mattered [*The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924*: 3]. Cowling called into the question whether it had been necessary for the British to fight Hitler; Addison harboured no such heretical doubts. Yet as David M. Craig has argued, Cowling has been misrepresented. He concentrated on elite manoeuvre but did not think that this was the only factor in politics that counted; the fifty or sixty people who mattered did so in terms of *national decisions*, but this did not mean that backbench and public opinion held no significance [CRAIG, "'High Politics" and the "New Political History"', *passim*]. Addison – whose single meeting with Cowling had perhaps made more impression than he realised – was thanked in the acknowledgements to the Hitler book as one of three scholars who 'made helpful remarks or read helpful papers at Mr A.J.P. Taylor's seminar' [*The Impact of Hitler*: x].

Addison and Cowling's books had some specific points of agreement [*The Impact of Hitler*: 387-388]. As Burgess has remarked, both saw the formation of the Coalition as more significant than the 1945 election ['1945 observed': 165]. Robert Blake noted in his review of *The Impact* that

To Mr. Cowling its creation made a permanent imprint on British history [...] as the medium through which the Labour Party became the dominant intellectual and political force after 1945 (Mr. Cowling evidently regards post-war Conservative governments as little different from Lib-Lab).

Blake's article, it so happened, was headlined 'The road to coalition' [*Times Literary Supplement*, 25 July 1975].

In one of his last pieces of writing Addison described Cowling as 'the cantankerous historian whose reactionary imagination enlivened a trilogy of works on the history of British democracy' [[Review of *The End is Nigh*](#)]. Paradoxically, Cowling actually formed a link of sorts to Addison's interest in Marxist ideas. Cowling was well versed in Marx's writings; indeed, he sometimes described himself as a 'Tory Marxist' [WILLIAMSON, 'Maurice Cowling and modern British political history': 113-114]. Both Addison and Cowling, moreover, were archival pioneers, skilled at digging out previously unavailable sources. *The Impact of Hitler* appeared too late to influence *The Road*. Though *The Road* cited none of Cowling's work Addison had by this point likely read *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution* (1967) and, even more probably, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924* (1971).² Addison once told an interviewer that he had been 'at the start a very old-fashioned political historian' [Zweiniger Bargielowska, 'The road from 1945': 189]. Clearly, by the time of *The Road*, his interests had broadened, but he still had a considerable interest in elite manoeuvre in addition to popular politics. As one reviewer noted, two chapters were devoted 'to explaining the political miscalculations of Chamberlain in the months after September 1939' [MORGAN, 'Westminster at War', 1975]. Another, with Peterhouse connections, thought that the 'outstanding chapter' was that on Stafford Cripps's 'bid to oust Churchill in 1942' [VINCENT, 'Brave New World', 1975]. This all helps explain why

¹ Michael Bentley, email to the author, 4 May 2020.

² He certainly read both of these books at some stage but it is unclear when. His review of *The Impact of Hitler* suggests a broad familiarity with Cowling's previous work. See Paul Addison's review of Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill and Cowling, The Impact of Hitler*, in *History* (1977). Also his 'Destiny, History and Providence': 236.

Addison – well aware of the then-current wave of appeasement revisionism – received *The Impact of Hitler* quite warmly. Cowling had succeeded in making the Churchill of the 1930s appear ‘as one professional politician among many, and not perhaps a very good politician’ [‘Politics and Historiography’]. The book offered ‘an exciting and thoroughgoing revision, from a radical conservative viewpoint’, although Addison could not of course accept its most controversial judgements. ‘Whether or not other historians agree with Cowling’s conclusions, they are bound to be influenced by his approach’ [Review of Pelling and Cowling in *History* (1977) : 537].

In a strongly negative review of a later and more eccentric book, Addison noted of Cowling’s previous work:

Though his views were regarded by most historians as distinctly rum, they were wholly intelligible from a professional point of view as a methodical interpretation of the archives. For this very reason many of Cowling’s findings have been tactfully assimilated by historians of quite different political outlook. [‘Getting on’. *London Review of Books* (1986)]

This makes it harder to dismiss Addison’s comments, in the Cowling *Festschrift*, about ‘bracing revisionism’ and ‘a very much needed scepticism’, as merely polite [‘Destiny, History and Providence’ : 236]. We need not argue here about the true extent of Cowling’s influence on left-leaning historians more broadly.¹ It is enough to note the areas of convergence between Addison’s thinking and his, even though Addison had reached his specific conclusions about Labour in World War II completely independently of Cowling.

Cowling’s position was that democratic politics are never quite what they seem. This is because politicians have to ‘make decisions in the light of the wishes and ambitions of other politicians’, and also justify themselves to a public which might disapprove of their own motivations. This was not corruption, but simply the way that the system had to operate.² Addison’s ‘model’ was also based on the idea that politicians’ statements of ideological belief masked the real reasons for their actions. He had sympathy for ‘the very common human predicament’ of those like Attlee who were ‘compelled to believe in certain aims’ and then ‘compelled to behave’ as though they did not [*The Road* : 271]. Unlike Cowling, he believed that this dynamic had, during World War II, delivered positive outcomes for society. As we will see, the points of contact between *The Impact* and *The Road* were visible to contemporary reviewers.

The road to publication

A typescript of the book was complete by the end of 1973. At this stage it was called *The Impact of War : Conservatism and Change in British Politics, 1939-45*. Jonathan Cape, who had had great success with Calder’s *People’s War*, was a logical choice of publisher; Addison was by this point serving as their modern history adviser. However, the initial report, by an internal reader was unenthusiastic. Its author, identified only by the initials ‘A.C.’, was probably Anthony Colwell, one of the firm’s directors. Had it not been for Addison’s advisory role, the reader would have confidently turned the book down after reading a third of the text and skimming the remainder. Even a full and careful reading did not convince. Using rather scathing language, the report postulated that Addison was hostile to ideological interpretations of history. High political manoeuvre was more important to him than ideas – yet the book nonetheless admitted quite often that ideas were significant. The reader felt that there was a lot of waffle about trends of opinion and changes in public mood, and that everything ended up being explained by vague references to immediate conditions. Colwell – if it was

¹ WILLIAMSON casts doubt upon the depth of this influence: ‘Maurice Cowling’ : 115-116.

² Institute of Historical Research Interview of Maurice Cowling by Michael Bentley, c. 1998, transcript courtesy of David M. Craig.

indeed he – felt that he had learned a lot of facts about wartime politics but had gained no clarity about what they all signified [‘Report by AC’, 15 Jan. 1974, JC 217].

In the absence of the original typescript, it is impossible to say whether the above criticisms were at all fair; but they may suggest that Addison was still struggling to reconcile his interest in high politics with his understanding of social change and intellectual currents. He now made revisions. A new report by another reader was written in October 1974. This time the verdict was very positive. Though there were still a few stylistic infelicities to be ironed out, the book was well organised and remarkably readable. By this point, though, the book had a new title: *The Triumph of Mr. Attlee: The Impact of World War II on British Politics, 1939-1945*. The reader found this problematic. According to him or her, Attlee’s success was simply the accident that he happened to be leader of the Labour party at the vital moment [‘Report by MJP’, 4 Oct. 1974, JC 217]. Addison had some difficulty settling on an alternative. ‘I played a small part in helping Paul decide the title’, recalls John Campbell, a former Addison student. ‘It was on a long train journey from Edinburgh to London on which, as I remember it, we had to stand most of the way, when he was agonising about the title. He was afraid *The Road to 1945* sounded like a Bob Hope / Bing Crosby film. I don’t know if I helped persuade him to go with it, but it is odd to think that he ever had doubts.’¹

With the book accepted, Addison worried about the jacket copy. By his own confession, he, like many ‘pregnant authors’, was ‘hyper-maternal’, but he was likely right to imagine that the book’s reception was likely to be influenced by para-textual material such as the blurb. He was anxious that the publisher’s draft actually reinforced various myths that the book was intended to challenge. The first of these was that it was not generally realised until 1945 that radical change had taken place: ‘if this were true, half the text would be redundant. I go on at great length about people pushing for change and resenting the changes which took place in wartime’. The second was that war exposed the nation’s ills: ‘I argue that it did not, and that most wartime reforms had been thought out before the war, although they were encouraged by wartime circumstances.’ Third, the book did not claim that the *extent* of left-wing propaganda had been overstated; rather, it suggested that its *influence* had been exaggerated. Fourth, Addison was not claiming that the war had strengthened working-class morale; in fact the book described evidence showing that the working classes were very pessimistic about the future. Fifth, there had not been ‘a growing conviction that Britain could be superbly rebuilt, though one or two idealists thought so’. Finally, the book revolved around two themes, ‘all-party consensus at the top, and a swing to the left in popular opinion, and the two ought to be distinguished’ [Addison to Machin, 30 June 1975, JC217]. Addison’s comments were taken on board, although the final jacket copy seemed to emphasise ABCA’s role more than he perhaps wished.²

The reviews

The Road was published in September 1975. The ever-modest Addison awaited the reaction anxiously, but, to the publishers’ delight, the first run of press notices was extremely positive.³ It has been possible to locate seventeen reviews, which are listed in Table 1. Several of the surviving authors were contacted; they kindly offered their reflections. Several things stand out. Unsurprisingly for the era, all of the reviewers (with the possible exception of *The Economist*’s anonymous contributor) were men.

¹ John Campbell, email to the author, 22 August 2020. Addison held Campbell in high esteem. Addison to Machin, 4 Nov. 1972, JC 263.

² The published blurb stated: ‘He [Addison] maintains that the influence of left-wing propaganda, spread through such channels as the press and the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, has been exaggerated. But, together with the egalitarian emphasis of “the people’s war”, it helps to explain Labour’s decisive victory at the polls in 1945’. A variant of the first of these sentences was present in Addison’s ‘Suggested blurb’ [JC217] but the second was not.

³ Lord Morgan, email to the author, 2 May 2020; Machin to Jim Silbermann, 18 Nov. 1975, Jonathan Cape Papers, JC 217.

Almost all of the interest was from within the UK. Addison scored a brief, praising review in the US journal *Foreign Affairs*, but not in the *American Historical Review* or even in *Albion*, then the leading North American British Studies journal. Lothar Kettenacker, the sole reviewer for a non-English-language journal, was based at the German Historical Institute in London. Lord Boothby was the only reviewer who had been directly involved in the political events that the book described. He thought that Addison had 'got it all right – at last'. But he spent so many words dealing with his own role as a Conservative MP in the machinations of 1940 that he had 'no space to deal adequately with the remainder of this admirable book' [BOOTHBY, 'Politics and War', 1975].

Amongst the rest of the major reviewers, Henry Pelling and John Grigg had served in the war, but others had experienced it only as children or (like Michael Bentley) had been born afterwards. The war years and post-war reconstruction were now moving from current affairs to history and the commentators were changing accordingly. Addison thus avoided the fate of the 1960s essayists ticked off by Attlee for having the cheek to write about his government in spite of being too young to have first-hand knowledge [ATTLEE, 'When Labour Had the Whip Hand' (1963); BURGESS : 160-161]. The reviewers included journalists, political scientists, and historians. Many were academic heavyweights. One of them was Taylor, who, gratifyingly, praised his former pupil's 'wit, scholarship and imagination' but did not offer any striking contribution to the debate. [TAYLOR, 'Warfare to Welfare' (1975)]. Another was Kenneth O. Morgan, a personal friend of Addison (from Oxford days) [MORGAN, *My Histories* : 88]. In other cases the acquaintance was slight or was only established later.¹ At least one of the reviewers never met Addison in spite of working in a closely related field.² Morgan notes today the broader context of the book's appearance: 'the industrial struggles of the 1970s though before the "winter of discontent"'.³

In terms of political views the reviewers ranged from Morgan, a biographer of Keir Hardie, on the moderate left, to John Vincent, a Nineteenth Century scholar and former Fellow of Peterhouse, on the Conservative right. In terms of specialism the outlier was Kettenacker, an expert on Nazism rather than British politics. Anthony Howard was the editor of *The New Statesman* and had previously written on the Attlee government. Grigg, a successful journalist and biographer of Lloyd George, was a former Conservative candidate of advanced views who was to join the SDP in the 1980s [[Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#)]. Robert Skidelsky was known for *Politicians and the Slump* (1967), which was a study of the second Labour government, and for his recent biography of Oswald Mosley. Some considered the latter book too sympathetic to its subject, though the pre-fascist Mosley's enthusiasm for Keynesian style policies is crucial context here. Skidelsky too later joined the SDP, then became a Conservative peer, and now sits on the cross-benches. Michael Ratcliffe was a regular reviewer for *The Times*. E.L. Ellis was based in Aberystwyth and, much later, wrote a biography of the interwar civil servant Thomas Jones. G.K. Fry had briefly been a civil servant before becoming an academic expert on Whitehall. P.J. Waller was tutor in Modern History at Merton College, Oxford. His first book, a political and social history of Liverpool, would be published in 1981. David Howell, of the Department of Government at the University of Manchester, was soon to publish his first book, *British Social Democracy : A Study in Development and Decay* (1976). The underrated Pelling, 'probably the least fashionable of Labour historians', was no radical but enjoyed provoking Maurice Cowling at Cambridge seminars [MACINTYRE, 'Henry Pelling': 190; REID, 'Class and politics in the work of Henry Pelling', *passim*; [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#)]. Bentley, who was soon to publish *The Liberal Mind, 1914-1929* (1977), had been Cowling's student. Bentley now reflects that he and Addison 'were poles apart on the political history front. But I liked what he did and I think he was the first to give a clear POLITICAL shape to British experience of the Second World War'.⁴

¹ Lord Skidelsky, email to the author, 11 May 2020; David Howell, email to the author, 6 May 2020.

² P.J. Waller, email to the author, 1 May 2020.

³ Lord Morgan, email to the author, 8 May 2020.

⁴ Bentley, email to the author, 4 May 2020.

Overall there was warm recognition of the depth of Addison's research, the aptness of his quotations, and his ability to conjure a telling phrase. He was seen to be ploughing relatively untilled soil. Morgan, one of many who recognised the high quality and scholarly importance of the book, suggested that only Pelling's *Britain and the Second World War* (1970) covered similar ground. (He might also have mentioned Calder) [MORGAN, 'Westminster at War' (1975)]. *The Economist's* reviewer appreciated that Addison had moved 'beyond conventional history sources into a much wider range of ephemera', thus adding 'colour to the newly published Cabinet memoranda' ['A party transformed' (1975)]. Vincent, to whom the book was only brilliant 'in parts', found it 'mouth-watering in the naughty, Cecil King sense.' (King was a former press supremo who had published revealing diaries.) 'Alec Home wonders whether Winston should be sacked. Harold Macmillan wants a Centre Party under [Herbert] Morrison. Eden doubts whether Churchill could ever be PM' [VINCENT, 'Brave New World' (1975)]. The fact that Home, Macmillan and Eden were all still alive made these revelations particularly spicy.

Grigg thought that Addison was 'fair in his judgements and impartially destructive of myth' [GRIGG, 'Enter the Butskellites' (1975)]. But which myths were being destroyed? Grigg did not specify, but others were more explicit. Howard quoted from a speech given by the Labour MP John Freeman on 16 August 1945, when Parliament re-opened after the election: 'Today, we go into action. Today may rightly be regarded as "D-Day" in the Battle of the New Britain'. According to Howard, this represented 'the orthodox "Whig" interpretation of Britain's post-war political history'. In this analysis, 1945 not only marked a landmark in terms of the end of the war; it was then too that a 'social revolution' was launched that led to the birth of the welfare state. 'The importance of Dr. Addison's admirably argued first book is that it challenges this orthodoxy head-on and demolishes it' [HOWARD, 'Before the Flood' (1975)].

As an example of a specific claim that Addison debunked, Ellis highlighted the notion 'that Labour's electoral machine was kept oiled and ready during the war while the Conservative organisation rusted away in patriotic neglect' [ELLIS, *Welsh History Review* (1978)]. Ratcliffe did likewise: 'I suppose the truth has always been known but I have never seen it put so clearly as in this book: after the fall of Chamberlain the whole country shifted irreversibly to the Left, and Labour [...] was the best political machine of the day to express that shift on the Statute Book' [RATCLIFFE, 'The People's Peace' (1975)]. Morgan agreed, and argued further that Addison had deflated the myth that Churchill's mistakes during the 1945 campaign, such as his notorious *Gestapo* broadcast, had been responsible for his defeat. Morgan also suggested that the social changes wrought by the war had previously been explained via a series of clichés, such as the impact of evacuation and rationing and 'indoctrination by the army's current affairs bureau'. Addison had dispelled such legends [MORGAN, 'Westminster at War' (1975)]. Pelling thought the book showed that

Labour's victory in the 1945 general election was due to no sudden popular whim, such as might have been occasioned by Churchill's mistakes in the election campaign itself; nor was it the result of 'left-wing propaganda' through such bodies as the Army Bureau of Current Affairs'. [PELLING, *History* (1977) : 150]

So (although *The Economist's* review placed some emphasis on the Bureau's influence) Addison was not generally understood to be peddling a straightforward *Per ABCA ad Attlee* narrative.

Not all reviewers actually used the word 'consensus'. For *The Economist*, the book's 'main thesis' was 'the transformation of Labour in the war years'. Thus, 'by 1945, Labour was well placed to be the natural party of government, ready to build the welfare state on the changes brought about by the war ['A party transformed']'. For Kettenacker, the book meant that the victory of the colourless Attlee over the militarily triumphant Churchill was no longer an unsolvable riddle; Germans would no

longer have to fall back on the vague explanations of which they were fond, such as the British national character or the political cleverness of the English. According to his summary, ‘The close cooperation of both large parties and the elimination of their previous differences for the duration of the war had created a new political consciousness that one could almost call “national-socialist”’.¹

Other writers engaged directly with Addison’s terminology and several of them gave it a broad endorsement. Morgan, for example, agreed that the war’s outcome ‘was a progressive shift in political and social attitudes, which led to Baldwin’s consensus giving way to that of Attlee – and of the Butskellites that came after’. He added, though, that the degree and the radicalism of the transformation wrought by the war remained debateable, and felt that Addison had neglected the position of the Bevanites [‘Westminster at War’]. (Addison wrote to Morgan that he agreed with the latter criticism.)² Vincent noted the importance of the early years of the war to Addison’s account: ‘By the end of 1942, Attlee’s consensus had been created’. Vincent accepted Addison’s picture, but accused him of treating the wartime opponents of consensus as Aunt Sallies. ‘The responsible politics for which they stood seem to Addison as dead as the dodo. Alas, how right he is, and how wrong to make it his historical mission to celebrate the fact’ [‘Brave New World’].

Skidelsky, for his part, felt that Addison’s ‘very fine, elegantly written book’ revealed that the author was trapped in a Butskellite perspective. So though the research was cutting-edge, the outlook was dated, and failed to take account of Britain’s relative decline:

He looks back on the war as one might have done in the late ‘fifties or early ‘sixties when it still looked all eminently worthwhile. Yet this was the immediate prelude to a collapse in Britain’s position and morale sufficiently spectacular to compel a reappraisal of the war experience.

Skidelsky did not doubt the existence of Attlee’s consensus, but felt that it ‘provided no basis for tackling the “British disease”’ [Skidelsky, *Spectator* (1975)]. Skidelsky now reflects: ‘I was glad I said so many nice things about Paul’s book; sorry that my assessment of the result of the war was so negative. I had just finished my biography of Oswald Mosley & I was unduly swayed by his view that the war had been a disaster’.³

Howard found only one fault with Addison’s ‘first-class’ volume. Why, given Labour’s strength in 1945 (as diagnosed by Addison) was the Attlee government ‘able to do so little to change Britain’s economic and social contours in the following six years? [...] Alas, Dr. Addison never even bothers with the question’ [‘Before the Flood’]. Others, though, were more challenging of the notion of consensus as an historical reality. Pelling praised Addison’s scholarship and commended ‘his valuable exposition of the story of domestic political change’. However:

Dr. Addison rather exaggerates the changes that occurred in popular feeling in 1940-45. It is not true that the Labour Party gained more than 50 per cent of the vote in the 1945 election. Nor was Conservative opposition to the nationalization programme of the Attlee government a ‘token’ affair: there was a fierce tussle over the railways as well as over iron and steel. [PELLING, *History* : 150].

Waller was significantly more critical. He noted that the book contained ‘both new material and refreshing commentary on old’ but found its thesis unconvincing as a whole. Waller found that some of the book’s language seemed ‘stale, redolent of the academic journalist comment of the 1960s. The

¹ ‘Die enge Zusammenarbeit der beiden großen Parteien und die Eliminierung der bisherigen Gegensätze für die Dauer des Krieges hatten ein neues politisches Bewußtsein geschaffen, das man beinahe “national-sozialistisch” nennen könnte.’ KETTENACKER, *Historische Zeitschrift* (1977).

² Morgan, email to the author, 2 May 2020, citing Addison to Morgan, 3 November 1975.

³ Skidelsky, email to the author, 11 May 2020.

wallpaper is very Nuffield' [Waller, *English Historical Review* (1977)]. This was an allusion to an ad campaign for Sanderson wallpaper ('very Sanderson') that was designed to appeal to the upwardly mobile. Thus it was a dig at the aspirations and self-satisfaction of Nuffield scholars. 'That every politician must at some point appear at a Nuffield seminar in the 1960s and early 70s and consult the sages was practically mandatory', Waller recalls.

Understandably, this gave the place a swagger [...] There was no gainsaying it, Nuffield was influential; but too many people fell for the illusion that the only politicians who mattered were all feeding from the same trough. I suspect that's what I was getting at in my review, that a Nuffield groupthink was being projected back in a self-congratulatory way into the 1940s / 1950s, brushing aside real differences.¹

Waller's critique noted Marwick's 'middle opinion' article had pre-figured the arguments of *The Road*. Marwick had been writing during the 'thirteen years of Tory misrule' that ended in 1964:

Dr Addison set to work later, when Labour was in office and claiming to be a 'national' party and future 'natural' party of government. Accordingly he moves his sights from the incipient 'agreement' of the 1930s to the formed 'consensus' of the 1940s, which established Labour's first majority government.

Both the Marwick and Addison theses were attractive at the surface level, Waller argued, but there were problems of definition if the term 'consensus' was to be of much use.

Does it mean a real absence of controversy about fundamental principles of government in the present and foreseeable future; or is it simply a shorthand for an adjustment to majority opinion or inescapable circumstances prevailing at any one time?

This was a question which anticipated the debates of the eighties and nineties. Waller's answer was: 'The "consensus" that Dr Addison seeks to prove requires something more: that the parties not only responded in similar fashion but actually had beliefs and intentions in common'. [Waller, *English Historical Review* (1977)].

Howell was more critical still, doling out only a soupcon of lukewarm praise. He recalls today that although the review was published in 1977 'it was written between the implementation of the Wilson Government's incomes policy in the summer of 1975 and Wilson's resignation the following March'.² He also flags up the context of the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1973-4, the Sunningdale agreement that established power-sharing in Northern Ireland and its subsequent collapse, and of course the election of Thatcher as Tory leader in 1975.³ Howell was influenced by wider historical debates which included Skidelsky's *Politicians and the Slump* and Peter Clarke's *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (1971). Clarke had challenged the idea that Edwardian Liberalism 'was played out and that only with its displacement by the Labour party would class find its proper expression in politics'[vii]. 'Paul's book belongs in this company as does David Marquand's biography of [Ramsay] MacDonald published just after the review appeared', Howell explains. 'These were and remain powerful challenges to a simplistic Labour historiography. Sometimes I have felt that the challenges involve a limited understanding of the labour movement. Hence the criticisms in the review'.⁴

The review was long; the criticisms searching. The crucial point was this:

¹ P.J. Waller, email to the author, 1 May 2020.

² D. Howell, email to the author, 30 Apr. 2020.

³ D. Howell, email to the author, 6 May 2020.

⁴ D. Howell, email to the author, 30 Apr. 2020.

The whole analysis constitutes an attempt to rewrite history around a particular interpretation of the British Left. Addison wishes to emphasise the centrality of moderation and pragmatism, and to deny the other face of Labour in either its ideal or its industrial aspect. While it is true that most of Labour's political leaders have accepted existing political and economic structures and have always shown a strong predisposition to do so, that is no reason for ignoring or devaluing other strands in the Labour tradition.

Howell believed that Addison, on the one hand, had neglected the fact that, both during the war and after, the fundamental economic interests of certain bodies of workers had provoked them into industrial action, in spite of the appeals of Labour leaders. These forces had led miners to strike in 1944 and to the eventual breakdown of the Attlee government's efforts at wage restraint. On the other hand, he had failed to take seriously the radical socialism of the party's rank and file, a face of Labour that was much on display during the 1945 election. Now, when some trades unionists had shown themselves unwilling to bow to 'Mr. Wilson's consensus', loyalists sought to deny the legitimacy of their attitude. 'The persuasiveness of such denials is obviously increased by the rewriting of the party's past history', Howell concluded. 'It is intellectually and practically important therefore, that the "new myths" of revisionist historians should be subject to critical examination' [HOWELL (1977) : 114].

Three of Addison's reviewers identified similarities between *The Road* and *The Impact of Hitler*. Skidelsky wrote:

He [Addison] agrees with Maurice Cowling that as late as April 1940, Neville Chamberlain was still hoping to avoid fighting the war he had been forced to declare, relying on a stalemate on the western front. His strategy in peace and phony war alike was destroyed by the interaction between Hitler's brutal thrusts and a domestic opposition which wanted Chamberlain out for many reasons of which foreign policy was only one, or perhaps even only the instrument.¹

According to Pelling:

His [Addison's] thesis, not so very different from, if somewhat more optimistic than, Mr. Cowling's in his *Impact of Hitler*, is that the crisis of 1940 led to a permanent left-wing swing in British politics, replacing the MacDonald-Baldwin consensus with a new social democratic consensus under Attlee later called 'Butskellism'. [PELLING (1977) : 150]

Ratcliffe observed that

'Consensus' can be a smothering sort of conspiracy and there is a feeling again now in current books as unlike as Maurice Cowling's *Impact of Hitler*, *The Cecil King Diary*, and Terry Arthur's *95 per cent is Crap*, that Westminster and Whitehall are mutually competitive industries which close ranks the minute they are threatened from outside.

(Arthur's book, subtitled, *A Plain Man's Guide to British Politics*, delivered a libertarian, free market case in a humorous way.) Ratcliffe continued: 'the sharpest of several definitions he [Addison] gives the phrase "consensus politics" is the agreement by which the parties agree to cooperate in order to prevent the political initiative passing out of parliamentary hands' ['The People's Peace'].

In 1975 the post-war settlement seemed under threat from the extremes of Left and Right, as the economic and industrial crisis appeared unresponsive to earlier solutions such as those offered by Keynes and Beveridge. As we have seen, various commentators ascribed political motivations to Addison's writings and revealed preferences of their own. Ratcliffe thought that Addison believed

¹ SKIDELSKY, 'Wasted opportunities'. For Skidelsky's review of *The Impact of Hitler*, see 'Robert Skidelsky on Hitler and "high politics"', *The Spectator*, 26 July 1975.

that the system which had informed the government of Britain for the quarter-century after 1945 was 'now irretrievably defunct through overstrain and exhaustion' [*Ibid.*] But to what extent did the reviewers themselves detect or anticipate the death of the old order?

As we have seen, Vincent believed and regretted that 'responsible politics' had become extinct – which suggests he thought that the current order had established itself permanently. Skidelsky, by contrast, regarded Butskellism as old hat. Morgan ended his review on a dark note: 'When consideration is given to the results of Attlee's consensus for the condition of England (not to mention Wales and Scotland) in 1975, the politics of thirty years ago resemble less the politics of hope, than of hope deferred, perhaps for ever' ['Westminster at War']. 'Over 30 years after the war the tide has only now started to turn back', wrote Fry. 'We may be on the brink of or actually experiencing another sea change in British politics' [Fry (1977) : 123]. One obvious sign of such a change was Thatcher's recent seizure of the leadership of the Conservative Party, but no reviewer referred to her explicitly. Grigg, however, did make mention of the man who acted as her political mentor, albeit in a way that appeared to underrate the challenge posed by the New Right:

Now that the particular consensus whose origins he [Addison] describes is, in some respects, breaking down, it is salutary to be reminded that another will have to be found if our Parliamentary democracy is to survive. It is, therefore, encouraging that Sir Keith Joseph has repudiated the middle way only to proclaim the virtues of the common ground.¹

Conclusion

Joseph, in the middle of the next decade, developed an enthusiasm for Correlli Barnett's *The Audit of War* (1986), a book which laid much of the blame for poor British industrial performance on the 'New Jerusalemism' of the advocates of the welfare state. [EDGERTON, 'The Prophet Militant and Industrial' : 363].² Nigel Lawson, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, cited it as an influence too. [HARRIS, 'Enterprise and Welfare States' : 177]. Although *The Road* received mention in comment articles in *The Guardian* in 1977 and 1979,³ it never attracted political attention in the same way. However, the academic debate triggered by Barnett was effectively shut down by devastating critiques from David Edgerton and others.⁴ Another important scholarly wrangle of the era, about the role of the so-called 'franchise factor' in the rise of the Labour Party, had begun in the 1970s but was amicably resolved through the discoveries of Duncan Tanner, a Ph.D. student of Peter Clarke, who was one of the protagonists. [CLARKE, 'In Memoriam : Duncan Tanner' : 137-140]. Calder's early work, by contrast, never triggered the debate it arguably deserved – though it was an influence on the playwright David Hare and the director Richard Eyre. Addison judged:

Such is the profusion of detail in *The People's War* that its importance as a work of interpretation is often overlooked. This is partly because Angus himself was never the kind of didactic or polemical historian (compare Arthur Marwick or Correlli Barnett on wartime Britain) to lay a thesis on with a trowel. Although he provided readers with signposts, he believed that his analysis of events was implicit in the way the story was told. This probably flattered his readers and certainly took no account of the need of students and tutors for concise, user-friendly texts with neatly summarized formulae and conclusions. *The People's War* was not only too long, but cast too much as a large-scale narrative, to sit easily with the demands of the essay list and the lecture theatre. It was,

¹ GRIGG, 'Enter the Butskellites'. For the significance of Joseph's remark, see TOYE, 'From "Consensus" to "Common Ground"'.

² For Addison's critique, see 'The Road from 1945' (1987) : 5-27.

³ 'The shrouded spirit of '45', *The Guardian*, 14 December 1977; Malcolm Dean, 'Who's afraid of Mrs T?', *The Guardian*, 19 September 1979.

⁴ In addition to the works by Edgerton and Harris cited above, see Jim Tomlinson, 'Correlli Barnett's History : the Case of Marshall Aid', *Twentieth Century British History* 8 (1997) : 222-238.

nevertheless, a major landmark in the historiography of twentieth-century Britain. [‘Angus Calder’ : 301-302]

That Addison succeeded in sparking argument where Calder failed suggests that he *did* appreciate the needs of his most likely readers. At the same time, one of the reasons that *The Road* triggered controversy – notwithstanding the lengthy hiatus after the original reviews – was because of certain weaknesses in its construction. As Addison acknowledged in his later reflections, the material in Chapter 10 was

inconsistent with the emphasis placed in the Introduction on the commitment of both sides before the general election to an economic ‘middle way’. Critics, therefore have seized on the Introduction and taken me to task for ignoring quite simple points that are in fact made later on. No matter: I did imply in the Introduction, and also perhaps elsewhere in the book, that social and economic policy followed a common timetable of convergence. This was a mistaken emphasis. [*The Road*: 288-289].

But a more fundamental reason was that Addison, whether or not he had provided the right answer, had set a profound question. Clearly, *circa* 1975-1979, a sea-change did occur in British politics.¹ Everyone could agree that the previous settlement had broken down, even if they could not agree that that settlement had amounted to a consensus. The question of the degree to which, during the first three post-war decades, politicians had in fact agreed with each other had to be answered somehow. Addison was therefore bound to remain an essential point of reference. Yet, in another respect, he was even more successful, so much so that his achievement has been taken for granted. In 1975, to assert the primacy of 1940 over 1945 was a novelty (though here Cowling got into print first). After *The Road*, though scholars might doubt the extent of the wartime ‘swing to the left’, nobody questioned that the roots of Labour’s victory were to be found, in some way, in the experience of Coalition.

Morgan’s review rightly recognised *The Road* as ‘a landmark in the writing of contemporary Britain’ [‘Westminster at War’]. Addison’s determined source work is worth remembering, lest we start to take our access to the relevant archives and the advantages of digital technology too much for granted. Equally, Addison gained seminality to no small extent due to his literary talent. The label ‘*Per ABCA ad Attlee*’ reduced a subtle and complex book to caricature. Peter Stansky notes that ‘From Calder on, perhaps even before, scholarship on the period can be ironic and interestingly full of contradictions’ [STANSKY, review of Sonya O. Rose, *Which People’s War?* : 600]. For Addison that irony and those contradictions were linked to his love of country and his mildly bewildered efforts to get to grips with its changes whilst maintaining hope for the future. As he put it in the 1990s, ‘it’s that mixture in Orwell of radical critique of Britain plus an immense feeling of attachment to Britain that I think was the emotional charge for me to write about Britain in the Second World War’ [Zweigner Bargielowska, ‘The road from 1945’ : 189]. *The Road to 1945*, then, deserves to be studied as a foundational text for the understanding of British politics, but not only as that. It should also be read as the authentic expression of the puzzled, progressive patriotism of a brilliant and now fading generation.

¹ In a deleted sentence from his paper delivered c.1976 Addison noted that ‘the Centre is weakening in its intellectual appeal, and the Right and the Left have revived’. Addison, ‘Politics and Historiography’.

Table 1. The reviewers of the first edition of *The Road to 1945*.

Date	Reviewer	Publication	Affiliation, if any
16 Oct. 1975	Lord Boothby	<i>Guardian</i>	
17 Oct. 1975	Kenneth O. Morgan	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>	The Queen's College, Oxford
19. Oct. 1975	A.J.P. Taylor	<i>Observer</i>	Magdalen College, Oxford
25 Oct. 1975	Robert Skidelsky	<i>Spectator</i>	Johns Hopkins University
30 Oct. 1975	Michael Ratcliffe	<i>Times</i>	
30 Oct. 1975	Michael Bentley	<i>Listener</i>	University of Sheffield
30 Oct. 1975	John Vincent	<i>New Society</i>	University of Bristol
31 Oct. 1975	Anthony Howard	<i>New Statesman</i>	
2 Nov. 1975	John Grigg	<i>Sunday Telegraph</i>	
22 Nov. 1975	Anon.	<i>The Economist</i>	
1976	Fritz Stern	<i>Foreign Affairs</i>	Columbia University
1977	G.K. Fry	<i>Political Quarterly</i>	University of Leeds
1977	David Howell	<i>Government and Opposition</i>	University of Manchester
1977	Lothar Kettenacker	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>	German Historical Institute
1977	Henry Pelling	<i>History</i>	St. John's College, Cambridge
1977	P.J. Waller	<i>English Historical Review</i>	Merton College, Oxford
1978	E.L. Ellis	<i>Welsh History Review</i>	University College Wales, Aberystwyth