

# Commentary

THE BUFFIN FOUNDATION

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

## Profiles in Leadership

During a recent radio interview in England, David Buffin, Chairman of Buffin Leadership International Ltd (an international management consultancy) was asked by the interviewer to define the attributes of great leadership and to provide examples of great leaders as role models. The interviewer was evidently seeking to identify the characteristics that would be desirable in today's political environment. David responded with two examples of exceptional leadership, namely, Nelson Mandela and Margaret Thatcher. His careful choices were based on the ability of these two leaders to manage successful transitions in national economic and social policies. Mandela negotiated an end to apartheid in South Africa and he established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; he left a legacy the world will always respect for his humanity and courage as a great leader. Thatcher became the longest-serving and only woman UK Prime Minister in the 20th century; her pro-business advocacy and record of achievements in international affairs brought praise for her courage, determination and resilience. This thought-provoking interview provided an incentive for the editor of *Commentary* to contemplate other examples of great leadership in times of successful economic and social transitions. A suitable case study for research, with an emphasis on the profiles of the national leaders, is the postwar recovery of Great Britain during the years 1945-51. This period was described in great detail in the book *Years of Recovery: British Economic Policy 1945-51* by Sir Alexander Cairncross, former Chief Economic Advisor to the UK government.

The most significant event in Britain in the months following the cessation of wartime hostilities in 1945 was the General Election that produced a victory for the Labour Party, under the leadership of Clement Attlee, over the Conservative

Party under the leadership of Winston Churchill. The six years of Labour government 1945-51 put into effect the proposals on which the Labour party had campaigned, including the introduction of the National Health Service and what came to be known as the Welfare State. The government also introduced major reforms to education and housing as well as bringing several major industries into public ownership. The government's achievements were accompanied by an economic recovery, including full employment at a level never before experienced in peacetime; industrial production increased by one-third and gross domestic product grew at a record rate during 1947-51. Economic recovery was coupled with far-reaching changes in the management of the economy. Cairncross wrote "*By 1951, the techniques were much further advanced and the degree of success far surpassed what had been contemplated earlier*". Attlee deserves great credit for his leadership during 1945-51, together with his Cabinet colleagues and other contemporary leaders who exerted influence over the economic recovery. This period in recent British history is notable for a number of exceptional leaders in addition to Attlee, including: John Maynard Keynes; Stafford Cripps; William Beveridge; Aneurin Bevan; Ernest Bevin; Herbert Morrison; and Hugh Dalton. These eight individuals will be the subjects for future editions of *Commentary* under the title of *Profiles in Leadership*.

Attlee was a great visionary who saw the need for significant social and economic changes in Britain and for a transition from Empire, including independence for India and the many colonies around the world. His defeat of Churchill in 1945 demonstrated his skill in listening to, understanding and responding to the needs of the British people for a peaceful existence with adequate provision of health, housing, employment, and education. Keynes

had many accomplishments as a brilliant economist, including his work in establishing the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund at Bretton Woods. Cripps, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was skillful in directing an essential era of austerity for the British people, including food rationing and high taxation, in the course of boosting productivity and managing stringent national debt obligations. Beveridge will be well known to most readers of *Commentary* as the father of the Welfare State and originator of ideas leading to the formation of the British National Health Service. Bevan implemented the Beveridge proposals despite opposition from the Conservative Party and the British Medical Profession; his oratorical skill and ability to win support for the National Health Service were remarkable accomplishments, particularly when the nation was essentially bankrupt. Bevin was a great labour leader who was able to rally support among the working class; he also became a successful Foreign Secretary late in his career. Morrison was an expert at planning and organization; his ideas formed the basis for much of the reorganization of the British economy during 1945-51. Dalton served as Chancellor of the Exchequer prior to Cripps; his tenure was notable for his skill in managing the national financial situation in a time of crisis. The accomplishments of these eight British leaders and their effect on economic and social policy in the period 1945-51 are remarkable, even from the perspective of today's generation of economists, seventy years later.

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