

BACK TO THE FUTURE

I needed (I still need) to find my party political bearings. For a while Jeremy Corbyn lent me his compass but it was knocked out of my hand and before I could pick it up some Queer Customer (QC) crushed it under foot. I fainted and fell into a deep political dream in which I kept meeting heroes from history. Such heroes. First one? I shall give you a clue. "He never uses one syllable when none will do".

You got it! Attlee. During the war when Churchill was using lots of syllables to make sure that history would remember him Attlee and fellow Labour members of the government were reduced to the second rank: to the rank of those that actually got the job done.

Next along was **Ernie Bevin**. He left school at eleven and became a founder and General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. You cannot do a job like that without a vast hinterland of experience, knowledge, skill and understanding. Because of people like him the U.K. out produced Germany for most of the war."Today?" he asked, "Do we come close"?

A postwar hero also popped into my dream. It was **Nye Bevan**. He left school at thirteen and became chair of his union lodge at nineteen. NHS anybody? Do you think it was a matter of a moment to make that happen?

But who also resigned from government when prescription charges were introduced to pay for the Korean War? It was the research assistant behind the Beveridge Report. Who was that? **Harold Wilson**. Hello there Harold. Imagine, if you will, what it took to be the researcher behind the Beveridge Report. Put that in your CV and smoke it.

With Harold was **Barbara Castle**. She showed me a paper she had written for a Post Blair Labour Party. It's title? **IN PLACE OF BULLSHIT**. She wanted to know if Starmer would like it.

And then there was **Denis Healey** who, when asked by Harold at a cabinet meeting if we should join LBJ in Vietnam, thundered one word: NO! Afghanistan anyone? Iraq? But then Denis had had a few bullets fired at him in his time. He could not be counted among those that sent others into fire on the basis of a dodgy dossier."Off you go with your gun while I keep an eye on things. Just listen to my speeches. You know you have my full support."

Gerald Kaufman turned up from time to time. I remembered a film he had made in which he pointed at an old Ottoman building on Hayarkon Street in Tel Aviv. He said it was his favourite. I was able to tell him that it is mine also. He reminded me that what the Nazis did to his grandmother was directly comparable with what Israel does in Gaza. "No use", he said, "telling that to Starmer. I would be chucked out." I had to admit that he was right.

There were others in my dream. **Anthony Crosland** came to ask what became of Circular 10/65. "Surely", he asked, "all secondary schools are now comprehensive?" I found it very difficult to explain to him that Blair preferred so-called Faith Schools.

Into that dream came many others. **Harold Macmillan** and **Rab Butler** asked me if they would get into Starmer's Labour Party. "Not a chance", I told them, "you are far too left wing". A sequence of old Liberal Leaders led by **Joe Grimond** turned up with the same question. "Sorry", I had to say, " you have all been classified as a bunch of revolutionary lefties

Waking up I heard myself exhorting socialists with the words,

All together now, "The people's flag is brightest pink. Its not as red as you might think."

See you at the barricades? In your dreams.

But the dreams did not stop. The next night I had another one.

GOVERNMENT WITHOUT PAPER CLIPS.

Pacifist has often been an insult. Lloyd George suffered from it during the Boer Wars and at the outbreak of WWI was, we might say, suspected of being sufficiently anti German. Less than one year into the war it was realised that our troops did not have enough shells to put into their guns. Possibly those that chose to go to war still thought of sabres and cavalry charges. Who became Minister of Munitions? Lloyd George. That was 1915. As the eldest and a girl my mother had to leave school at twelve to look after the family while her mother got a job in a munitions factory. My mother felt the loss but we won the war.

Near the end of 1916 Lloyd George became prime minister. In the same month the Cabinet Office was established to co-ordinate the work of the different departments and Maurice Hankey became its first Secretary. Government was 'cooking with gas'. How else do you survive a war, an economic depression and another war? How else do you, a skint country, establish a Welfare State? You make government work properly.

The Cabinet Office still exists but that way of working is hardly the Thatcherite style. Blair preferred his sofa. Gordon Brown had more Cabinet Office about him but not Cameron and certainly not our current Great Leader. Do you think, for one second, that Cummings wished to subordinate himself to Sir Humphrey? Who, today, orders the paper clips without which government cannot function?

In my recent dream I came across Herbert Morrison. Fans of Attlee may not take to Herbert and when you think that he is the grandfather of Peter Mandelson eyebrows might rise. But in 1954 he wrote a book, GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT, that was required reading for my degree. He drew upon not only his experience as a minister, including being Home Secretary during WWII, but also his huge knowledge of local government, having been the leader of London County Council. It required the toughest sellotape to keep the cover on my copy.

"Shall I re-read it?", I asked when we met. "Move it to the history section", was his reply.

Cliff Jones, 11th. December 2020

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