

List of Illustrations

1. Terry Thomas and Peter Sellers in *I'm Alright Jack*, 1959. *Alamy*.
2. Front cover of Michael Young's *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, Pelican, 1961 edition.
3. Tony Hancock in *The Bedsitter*, 1961. *Getty Images*.
4. Harold Macmillan and President John F. Kennedy meet at Key West, Florida, March 1961. *Getty Images*.
5. General Charles de Gaulle and Macmillan at the Chateau de Rambouillet, December 1962. *TopFoto*.
6. Aldermaston marchers, Easter 1961. *PA Images*.
7. Bertrand Russell at a demonstration in Trafalgar Square, February 1961. © Roger Mayne Archive / Mary Evans Picture Library.
8. The opening session of the Constitutional Conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika, 28 March 1961. *TopFoto*.
9. Governors of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika at the commissioning of a new steamer, Lake Victoria, 1961. *East African Railway & Harbours*.
10. Cartoon by Cummings in the *Daily Express*, 4 August 1961. *Michael Cummings* © *Express Syndication Ltd*.
11. Hugh Gaitskell speaking at the Labour Party Conference, Brighton, October 1962. *TopFoto*.
12. Edward Heath with Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and Werner Schwarz in Bonn, December 1962. *Getty Images*.
13. Front cover of Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, pub. Scribner & Sons, 1962.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

14. Aircrew scramble aboard a Vulcan bomber at RAF Scampton, August 1960. *TopFoto*.
15. The Soviet freighter *Volgoles* carries Russian missiles away from Cuba monitored by an SP-2 Neptune aircraft, November 1962. *Science Photo Library*.
16. Selwyn Lloyd and David Hubback on their way to the first meeting of the National Economic Development Council, March 1962. *Mirrorpix*.
17. Reginald Maudling as Chancellor, August 1963. *Getty Images*.
18. Front page of the *Daily Mirror*, after 'The Night of the Long Knives', 13 July 1962. *Mirrorpix*.
19. Hugh Gaitskell, George Brown, Harold Wilson and Len Williams on Brighton promenade, September 1962. *TopFoto*.
20. Macmillan at Nassau, December 1962. *Getty Images*.
21. Piccadilly Circus during the 'Big Freeze', New Year's Eve 1962. *AP/Shutterstock*.
22. Cartoon by Franklin in the *Daily Mirror*, 9 January 1963. © Stanley Franklin/*Mirrorpix*.
23. De Gaulle holding a press conference, Elysee Palace, Paris, 14 January 1963. *Getty Images*.
24. The opening day of the University of Sussex, October 1962. *TopFoto*.
25. Loughborough College of Advanced Technology students working on a Hawker Hunter F4 aircraft, 1960s. *John Gay / Heritage Images / TopFoto*.
26. The M1 motorway in Hertfordshire, 1959. *Mirrorpix*.
27. Calder Hall nuclear power station, Cumberland, 1962. *Getty Images*.
28. Enoch Powell on a pogo stick with his wife, Pam, and their two daughters, January 1962. *Getty Images*.
29. Anti-smoking poster issued by the Ministry of Health, June 1962. *TopFoto*.
30. The Matron of St Thomas' Hospital, with a model of the new hospital, January 1963. *TopFoto*.
31. Residents on the Stifford Estate, Stepney, welcome the Queen, July 1963. *TopFoto*.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

32. Opening of a supermarket at Thurnscoe near Barnsley, 1963. *Getty Images*.
33. The refurbished Gresley Class A4 Pacific *Union of South Africa* leaves Doncaster Works, 1963. *Mirrorpix*.
34. Dr Richard Beeching launches his report, March 1963. *TopFoto*.
35. Gresley Class A4 Pacific *Sir Nigel Gresley*, in a siding at Ferryhill, Aberdeen, April 1966. *Roger Colbeck*.
36. Colin Cowdrey of Kent and England, comes to the wicket during the last over of the England v West Indies Test Match at Lords, 25 June 1963. *PA Images*.
37. The Ballistic Missile Early Warning System on Fylingdales Moor in North Yorkshire, 1963. *Mirrorpix*.
38. John Profumo with police outside his home in Regent's Park, London, June 1963. *TopFoto*.
39. Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies during the trial of Stephen Ward, July 1963. *Mirrorpix*.
40. Lord Denning at Whitchurch station, September 1963. *Mirrorpix*.
41. Newspapers react to the publication of the Denning report, September 1963. *TopFoto*.
42. Alan Bennett, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore in *Beyond the Fringe*, 1964. *Getty Images*.
43. Front cover of the *Radio Times*, 11 July 1964. Copyright © 2019 BBC.
44. Mods invade Eastbourne, Easter 1964. *Getty Images*.
45. Harold Wilson at the Labour Party Conference in Scarborough, October 1963. *Getty Images*.
46. Front cover of Sir Leon Bagrit, *The Age of Automation*, pub. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965 edition.
47. The Duke of Edinburgh visits the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, Chelmsford, 1962. *TopFoto*.
48. Rab Butler after his speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool, October 1963. *Getty Images*.
49. The Queen visits Macmillan in the King Edward VII's Hospital for Officers, October 1963. *TopFoto*.
50. Sir Alec Douglas-Home takes tea, November 1963. *Rex/Shutterstock*

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

51. Election posters, 1964. *Getty Images*.
52. Macmillan speaks at a by-election in Devizes, Wiltshire, May 1964. *Getty Images*.
53. Wilson arrives at Euston Station, London, 16 October 1964. *TopFoto*.
54. Wilson greets Clem Attlee on the steps of Labour Party Headquarters, 16 October 1964. *TopFoto*.

Prelude: A Tale of Two Cotswolds

The bias of my place and generation.

Eric Hobsbawm, speaking at his ninetieth birthday party, 2007, about his childhood and youth in early 1930s Germany and mid-1930s England¹

‘My place’ in the early 1960s was the Cotswolds, in Nymphsfield, 700 feet up between Stroud and Dursley where the great wedge of oolitic limestone, the building material of its exquisite villages, tips its escarpment into the Severn Valley. My family had moved there in the summer of 1959 from Finchley in north London.

It was an even greater contrast than it would be now for a twelve-year-old townie to make such a transition. Nymphsfield was and felt remote (the last bus left Stroud at 7.15 in the evening and, initially, we had no car). In winters the snow came often and sometimes lingered long. In 1962–3 it fell on Boxing Day and stayed until March. For two weeks the village was cut off by more than eight feet of snow. The local council paid the men to dig out towards Stroud and Nailsworth and an army lorry with four-wheel drive broke the icy blockade with food for the village shop. Being a swot and in my O-level year at the local grammar school, I was one of the first to trudge out over the drifts down Tinkley Lane with a Marling schoolmate the 2½ miles to Nailsworth in the valley to catch the bus to Stroud. We slithered up the hill again in the late afternoon as the light faded and the bitter east wind whipped the snow off the fields chilling the duffel-coated duo of Hennessy and Wooldridge as they plodded back to the dark, snow-entombed village.

Nympsfield looked stunning on cold, bright winter days but it was not classic picture-postcard Cotswolds. It was very much a working community of about 350 people with four farms in the village itself, a small factory producing bacon and another that made parts for the shearing equipment manufactured by Lister's in Dursley. Unusually, it had a Catholic convent, a Catholic orphanage and a small Catholic church as well as the late-fifteenth-century St Bartholomew's for the Anglicans. It was the Catholic connection which partly brought us there. We lived in a late-sixteenth-century coaching inn, Bell Court, with a fine listed ceiling and fierce draughts. It was cold even in summer. And the morning after that first blizzard in December 1962, I went to wake my father in the attic in his huge tester bed (he was a tad eccentric) to find a foot of snow gracefully curled around it on the floor. We rented the place as part of Dad's cunning plan to replace commuting on the Northern Line with the life of a gentleman horticulturalist, rhubarb and potatoes being his specialities. Both failed miserably, so we added hardly a jot to Nympsfield's gross domestic product.

The village lived within an economy of rural deliveries as well as of cereals, cattle, sheep, bacon and machine-parts. The bread came up the hill from Leonard Stanley in a prewar van; Mary Wooldridge from Court Farm brought the milk and the village news; meat and coal arrived from Nailsworth; pink paraffin flowed in in a pink van from Wotton-under-Edge. Electricity had reached the village only the year before we settled in, but, apart from that, Bell Court was almost entirely unmodernized.

On some days Nympsfield could have been prewar rural England. A sighting of Hedley Bishop in the fields, for example, was a timeless scene. Hedley laboured on the farm of our friends Michael and Tessa Watts, wore gaiters and a buff coat, got tight on market days and sang 'Don't Bring Lulu' in his cider cups. Arthur Heaven, whose farm was right in the middle of the village, was sighted, similarly attired to Hedley, driving down Crawley Hill to Uley with a pig in his passenger seat.² Their accents, naturally, were deepest Gloucestershire. This early-Sixties mid-Cotswolds world was about to change, indeed almost entirely to disappear. Modernity was creeping in, for example in the form of Bert Court, who would drive up from Dursley in his

Austin A35 van every Saturday evening to collect that week's hire-purchase instalment for Mum's prized Hotpoint washing machine, adding, like the other regular deliverers, to the weekly stock of gossip. A thousand or so miles away, Pope John XXIII was steering through the reforms that were to change what was said in the village's Catholic church and the language in which it was spoken.

Broadcasting was the most powerful transformer. The Beatles began to come through the wireless and changed the nature of the pop music charts while I lived in Nymphsfield. We acquired a second-hand television in 1962 just in time for *That Was the Week That Was*, although because the reception was rocky in the dip in which Bell Court hid, David Frost, Millicent Martin and co. performed headless as the picture moved up and down, creating a primitive split-screen effect.

Sex and satire mingled with the normal male adolescent grammar-school banter between readings from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* on the school bus from Nailsworth to Nymphsfield via Horsley shortly after it was published in 1960 and the extraordinary late spring and summer of the Profumo affair in 1963, when it was rumoured that Christine Keeler was about to take refuge in Amberley (leading one of my classmates who lived close by, so he told us, to prowl its streets in the warm July evenings in the hope of glimpsing her). She never turned up, but thanks to the lurid scuttlebutt and innuendo about the mighty and the well connected in London, we were much better informed about the ways of the world by the time the Denning Report on the scandal appeared just as we returned to Marling School for our first lower-sixth term that September.³

These were the years, too, of the assassination of Jack Kennedy and successive Cold War crises. Berlin peaked and troughed and peaked again between 1959 and late 1961. My younger sister's boyfriend in the Gloucestershire Regiment – the 'Glorious Glosters' of Korean War fame – was sent to reinforce the British Army of the Rhine. The Cuban missile crisis, which came out of the blue in October 1962, looked for a week or so as if it really might reduce Nymphsfield and everywhere else to irradiated rubble that, if mankind survived, might be the scene of a future archaeological dig to discover how the early-Sixties rural economy had worked before the bombs fell.

We were naturally archaeologically minded in ‘Nympie’, as we called the village. There is an ancient burial mound in its centre known as ‘The Barrow’, and you only had to scratch the thin upland topsoil to find a relic of the Bronze Age or Roman Britain. Dr Glyn Daniel, a Fellow of my soon-to-be college in Cambridge (St John’s) who achieved great televisual fame in the Fifties as chairman of the top-rated quiz show *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?*, had excavated Hetty Pegler’s Tump on the ridge above Crawley Hill in the late 1930s.⁴ J. V. Smith’s gem of a history of Nympsfield describes how the main road from Bath to Gloucester ran through the village with two major Roman villas, at Woodchester and Frocester, ‘built within two miles either side’ of Nympsfield.⁵

While I lived in the village, increasingly anxious about the course of the Cold War, there took place, unbeknownst to any of us, the excavation of a fort of a new and particularly grim kind inside the Cotswold limestone about twenty-five miles to the south of us down the A46, the Stroud–Bath road, and a few miles east along the A4 between Bath and Corsham. It was the super-secret British War Cabinet bunker to be used in the event of a Third World War. Nympsfield was open, traditional upland Cotswolds; STOCKWELL, as it was codenamed in 1959–60* was clandestine, subterranean, doomsday Cotswolds. Not until the early twenty-first century, forty years on and with the Cold War over, could I piece together its provenance, visit its burial chambers (if the Russians had put an H-bomb on it, nobody would have escaped; ‘STUCK HERE 4 ETERNITY’ is

* In the last years of his second and final premiership, Sir Winston Churchill had authorized a study to be made, in the light of the hydrogen bomb (a thousand times more powerful than the atomic bomb on which previous planning had been based), of the location deep in the countryside ‘of a skeleton alternative administration which could carry on if the London one were blotted out and to which any official survivors from London could rally’ (TNA, PRO, PREM 11/5222, ‘Machinery of government in war: plans for the central nucleus (including SUBTERFUGE/STOCKWELL and MACADAM)’, Churchill to Brook, 10 April 1953). As work began in the second half of the Fifties, authorized by Sir Anthony Eden during his brief premiership, the bunker, in the old Bath stone quarry beneath Box Hill, was given the codename SUBTERFUGE (Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (Penguin, 2007), p. 595). In the early Sixties its codename changed from STOCKWELL to BURLINGTON to TURNSTILE (Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (Penguin, 2003), chapter 6, pp. 186–205).

scratched macabrely upon its limestone walls) or sample its artefacts.⁶ When, with my research students, I visited most of the bunker in June 2006 (I'd been permitted to see a corner of it in April 2001 before its location and former purpose had been officially disclosed), I was allowed to take home the odd souvenir. One was a dish cloth, white with a green stripe on which is emblazoned ER and the royal crown with '1960' and 'TETW' (could that be for 'The End of the World'? 'Tea Towel' more likely) flanking it, which indicates the year STOCKWELL was first provisioned.

The bunker was probably not fully ready until late 1961/early 1962. But preparations were made to get what was called the 'central nucleus' of government down there in a hurry if the Berlin crisis turned truly critical in 1959–60.⁷ The plans for manning the bunker with 4,000 officials, military, intelligence analysts, communications experts and a handful of ministers and key allied and Commonwealth ambassadors make extraordinary reading now and would have caused a sensation at the time.⁸ Harry Chapman Pincher got closest in the *Daily Express* on 28 December 1959 with a scoop which began: 'A chain of underground fortresses from which the Government could control Britain and mount a counteroffensive in the event of an H-bomb attack is being built far outside London.'⁹ Pincher's scoop caused a spasm of anxiety within the tiny, end-of-the-world planning community,¹⁰ and within a couple of weeks Whitehall had, under the voluntary system of self-censorship then operated by the bulk of the press, issued a D notice on 'Underground Operational Centres', requesting them 'in the national interest not to publish the location of these sites or information indicating their size, depth or communications'.¹¹

A briefing in the autumn of 1960 for the Chiefs of Staff gave some of the details:

The headquarters is about 90 feet underground, and includes about 800 offices, signals areas, dormitories, kitchens, a canteen, a sick bay and a laundry. It has its own emergency water, sewage and power supplies, and a Lamson tube system [for internal communication]. It is designed to provide complete protection against fall-out, but it could not withstand a nuclear explosion in the near vicinity. It will be

provisioned to operate for a month. Construction work is for practical purposes complete . . . Communications will not be finished for about another nine months or so.¹²

The plan was to move the bulk of the STOCKWELL 4,000 into the bunker in the ‘Precautionary Stage’ of a run-up to global war, with Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and about two dozen of his close advisers and key ministers staying in Whitehall to pursue preventive diplomacy until leaving for the Cotswolds at the last minute before the Soviet bombs and missiles fell.

Until Macmillan’s party arrived, a small ministerial group under Selwyn Lloyd, Chancellor of the Exchequer, would preside over the secret seat of government.¹³ If Macmillan and the others didn’t make it, it would fall to Lloyd to decide whether or not to order the RAF’s V-bombers to retaliate.¹⁴ (After Lloyd was sacked in the great Cabinet purge of 1962, Rab Butler, Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State, was designated minister-for-the-bunker).¹⁵

Manning STOCKWELL was an elaborate exercise with secrecy built in at every stage. Special trains would wait at Kensington (Olympia) Station* (renamed Olympia in 1946 after the exhibition centre it nestles beside, previously it was known as Addison Road) to carry the designated staff towards (as a decoy) ‘Taunton’. Seven trains would move off at two-hourly intervals, their drivers told only at the last minute that Warminster, on the edge of Salisbury Plain, was their actual destination. British Railways declined to provide packed lunches on the trains: the bunker staff would have to bring their own.¹⁶

That would be the least of their worries. Only hours earlier would the bunker people have been told of their Third World War duties and given just enough time to go home, tell their families they would be away for at least a month with a British Forces Post Office number (4000) to which letters could be sent as the only means of contact.

With monumental British understatement, the ‘information slip’ advised the bunkerfolk that the dress code ‘may be informal’; they

* Churchill had used Addison Road for his clandestine departures in World War II, as when he journeyed to Scapa Flow to board the battleship *Prince of Wales*, which carried him to the waters off Newfoundland to meet President Roosevelt in August 1941. From that encounter the Atlantic Charter emerged.

should take a packed lunch for the journey and that ‘Facilities for entertainment will be limited. It is therefore suggested that you take a book or so with you.’¹⁷ Although it was not divulged to them, their spiritual needs had already been taken care of: the military would provide the padres and, in classic forces language, the instruments of devotion were listed thus:¹⁸

COVERS, Altar, frontal, green/purple, reversible	I
COVERS, Altar, frontal, red/white, reversible	I
CROSSES, altar, brass, 21x W/O figure	I
CANDLESTICKS, altar, brass, 12x hexagonal pairs	I

How many of the 4,000 would have refused to head west to this troglodytic mini-Whitehall and insisted on staying with their families as the international scene darkened is unknowable.

Those who, once the mechanics of doom had been activated in a ‘precautionary period’, actually turned up at Kensington (Olympia) would have known only that the train was heading west through Reading towards Wiltshire and Somerset; no more. At Warminster they would have been taken in buses to the garrison outside the town and given a meal of stew in the camp cinema before being put in army trucks and driven up through Westbury, Trowbridge and Bradford on Avon and finally along the B3109 road until turning off a few miles short of Corsham. Once out of the lorry inside the perimeter of the ‘communications centre’ (the cover story), into the lift and down to the most secret of all government establishments, the condition of their hidey hole would have taken them aback. A senior Cabinet Office civil servant, whose duties in the early 1970s included the care and maintenance of the Central Government War Headquarters (as it was officially known), has never forgotten his first impression of the place: ‘Dust. I couldn’t believe that such a scruffy place would be the last seat of what government would be left.’¹⁹

How would Harold Macmillan and the final two dozen have got there as diplomacy failed and the missiles were about to fly? Under Operation VISITATION, RAF helicopters, based at Little Rissington in Gloucestershire, were to fly to RAF Northolt in the north-west suburbs of London, refuel and drop on Horse Guards Parade alongside

the back door of No. 10 Downing Street. The PM and his party would then be ferried west to STOCKWELL and swiftly down into the suites of rooms allocated to the central nucleus of a Third World War government.^{20*} The Queen would not have flown west to join her Prime Minister: the continuity of the state required them to be kept separate as only the sovereign can appoint a head of government. This she would plainly have been unable to do if both had perished beneath the Cotswolds after the Soviets, alerted by the signals traffic emanating from it, had detonated a thermonuclear weapon over Box Hill. Her Majesty's planned Third World War redoubt was a floating one – the Royal Yacht *Britannia*. Its avowed wartime purpose as a hospital ship was another cover. Its real purpose was to house the Royal Family in the sea lochs of north-west Scotland amid mountains that would conceal its location from prying Russian radar. At night, the vessel was to move quietly from one sea loch to another.²¹

Visiting bunker Cotswolds is an eerie experience, and sampling the secret HQ section of its 240 acres and sixty miles of tunnels burns into the template of memory. The big, early-Sixties style telephone exchange (bizarrely, a copy of the *Sexual Encyclopaedia* remains in the telephonists' area alongside all the UK phone books) has a period feel. So, too, does the canteen, with its standard caff cruets, its urns, its traditional white crockery and enamel camper-style plates plus the pile of 'TETW' tea-towels. The library has atlases, Russian dictionaries, ordnance survey maps, pilots' guides, dentists' registers, Admiralty charts. Perhaps most striking of all is a pile of royal pardons – under emergency wartime legislation, the ministers in the bunkers all had draconian powers over life and property.²²

The inner sanctum is perhaps the most eerie of all. We know which would have been Macmillan's private accommodation had the Cuban missile crisis continued and thrust the world into war (a subject of recurrent nightmares in his old age²³): it is the only set of rooms with an en-suite bathroom. It resembles a nuclear *Marie Celeste* in reverse. Its bare limestone and breezeblock walls and concrete floor make a chilly, unfurnished monastic cell awaiting Macmillan's arrival.

* My book *The Secret State* was published long before the VISITATION file was released. In it I wrongly assumed that 'VISITATION' was the code word for nuclear retaliation as it came at the end of the drill for manning the bunker.

Nearby is the Map Room, from where, had they reached Box Hill in time, the nuclear retaliation decision would have been taken – the most thought-provoking part of the vast site. It's about fifty feet long and thirty feet wide, lit with fluorescent tubes and with a large white-board at one end (perhaps the British equivalent of Dr Strangelove's 'Big Board' in the classic 1964 Stanley Kubrick/Peter Sellers film of that name²⁴). Overlooking it is a viewing area – a decision-takers' gallery that old Cabinet Office hands believe is where the Prime Minister, advised by the Chief of the Defence Staff, would have made the awesome decision whether or not to authorize nuclear release.²⁵

The nearest I came to this extraordinary place in my Cotswolds years was as the snow melted in March 1963. My friend Lewis Noble and I, fed up with being confined by blizzard and frost for so long, decided to break free at least as far as the Youth Hostel in Marlborough for a weekend's walking on the Downs. In those days, hitch-hiking was the journey-method of choice and a milk lorry hauled us slowly up the A4 as it climbed Box Hill from the Avon Valley. No prime minister ever visited it, but thousands of people passed every day fifty feet or so below the secret bunker as the Great Western Castles and the Kings pulled the express trains between Bristol Temple Meads and Paddington below those spartan rooms and dusty corridors. Many years later, the secret reached the Russians and the last phase of the Cold War saw a Soviet spy satellite make regular passes over Box Hill.²⁶ The bunker was not stood down until 1991.²⁷ What Churchill might have called the 'broad, sunlit uplands'²⁸ of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire concealed a grim and dusty secret in one of the most singular contrasts of Sixties Britain.²⁹

Overture: From Romans to Italians

Altogether it was as if vast and barbaric energies, long held in check, had suddenly burst their bounds. It was a wonderful time to be young, but rather disturbing to be anything else. A sympathetic continental observer, the French philosopher Raymond Aron, remarked that the British seemed to have changed from Romans to Italians in the space of a single generation.

*Professor Sir Michael Howard, 2007*¹

Raymond Aron was speaking to Michael Howard at a conference in Venice in the early 1970s when he delivered his assessment of the British experience in the 1960s.² The very term ‘the Sixties’ is redolent of an era and an attitude, and anyone returning to gaze upon the alleged Italianization of a once imperial people from the 2010s would instantly pick up on the significance of Aron’s quip.

This book covers the early 1960s, the anteroom to what might be called the high Sixties – the transition years from the late Fifties which stand out now, as they did then, as especially nuclear-tinged. This was reflected in another side of Raymond Aron’s polymathic range – Aron the nuclear strategist and author of *On War: Atomic Weapons and Global Diplomacy*.³ In fact, writing in 1960, the theoretical physicist Otto Frisch, Jacksonian Professor of Natural Philosophy at Cambridge, declared: ‘Power from atomic nuclei is about to transform our world – and threatens to destroy it.’⁴

Few could have spoken then with an authority to match Frisch’s. With his aunt, Lise Meitner, he discovered atomic fission in 1939 – that uranium atoms when bombarded with neutrons split into atoms

of lighter elements.⁵ With his fellow refugee from Nazi-occupied Europe, Rudolf Peierls, at Birmingham University in early 1940, Frisch's calculations showed that far less enriched uranium was needed to make an atomic bomb than had hitherto been thought. In late 1942 the first atomic pile went critical and produced a chain reaction in Chicago, and in the summer of 1945 a bomb based on these processes was tested in the New Mexico desert.⁶

Frisch's 1960 article captured in the same flight of thought the possibility that the coming decade would mark the beginning of an era of abundance based on cheap, limitless energy and that the world could experience nuclear catastrophe and irretrievable destruction in a Third World War. The Frisch paradox, as one might call it, itself partly explains the explosion of hedonism and individual energies that both fascinated and alarmed Michael Howard. It is easy looking back to understand why life lived in the shadow of the thermonuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union had a touch of Paris, Vienna or London in the years before the First World War about it – especially after we all peered over the rim of the abyss during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962.

The Frisch paradox felt real enough even though the atom produced neither economic transformation nor nuclear immolation by the end of the decade – or (so far) in any of the decades that have followed. It could be argued that another farsighted scientist with a powerful pen, the biologist Rachel Carson, was the more accurate prophet when she published *Silent Spring* in 1962,⁷ which has been described as '[a]rguably the most important book published this century . . .'⁸ It was undoubtedly one of the 'touchstone books' of its generation.⁹ It began with an unacknowledged whiff of Marx and Engels' opening to their 1848 *Communist Manifesto* ('a spectre is haunting Europe') as Carson warned that '[a] grim spectre has crept upon us almost unnoticed' of a physical landscape polluted by pesticides and the fallout from nuclear weapons tests. In words that instantly impressed President Jack Kennedy in the White House in September 1962, she declared:

The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the

chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world – the very nature of its life. Strontium 90, released through nuclear explosions in the air, comes to earth in rain or drifts down as fallout, lodges in soil, enters into the grass or corn or wheat grown there, and in time takes up its abode in the bones of a human being, there to remain until his death.¹⁰

As what turned out to be a great new global movement fuelled by concern for habitat and the careful stewardship of natural resources flickered into life, kindled by Carson's book, another, also initially resource-driven and world-shaping, entered its terminal ward. For the day of the nineteenth-century territorial empire was over – with the cruel and immensely significant exception of the repressive system operated in eastern and central Europe by the Soviets, which had another thirty years to run and whose peaceful demise was wholly unforeseeable in 1960. As the economist J. K. Galbraith put it, there was by 1960 a 'less recognized and, quite possibly, more decisive factor' at work than an indigenous nationalism whose 'insistent pressure . . . had become too strong, too costly, to be resisted' by the old imperial powers (of which the UK was by far the largest). The colonies, said Galbraith,

no longer rendered any justifying economic advantage. Once they had. They were a rich source of raw materials and varied consumer products. In return, they were a significant market for elementary manufactured goods. Those who so traded were economically and politically powerful . . . And, with all else, there was the ancient commitment to landed territory as essential to the possession of wealth and power.

This, argued Galbraith,

was the case no more. The engine of economic well-being was now within and between the advanced industrial countries. Domestic economic growth – as now measured and much discussed – came to be seen as far more important than the erstwhile colonial trade. The colonial world having thus been marginalized, it was to the advantage of all to let it go.¹¹

As a political or trading partner, Europe would never – could never – provide a sentimental surrogate for the British Empire for the early postwar generation. The UK has exhibited a deep emotional deficit towards the notion of Britain in Europe since Jean Monnet first turned up in London out of the blue from Paris in the spring of 1950 with the plan for a European Coal and Steel Community in his pocket.¹² This was profoundly true in 1960 but hard-headed, practical considerations caused the Macmillan government and the Whitehall machine that served it to realize that the road to future prosperity led towards Bonn, Paris and Rome rather than the old empire of palm, savannah and pine.

In terms of Britain's place in the world – and the satisfaction of its persistent wish to cut a dash globally out of all proportion to its population size or natural resources – the Sixties were a perpetual anxiety. This was especially true of the first years of the decade when the Cold War reached its most perilous phase as a rolling Berlin crisis morphed into a swift, chilling and potentially terminal Cuban missile crisis, the impulse to shed imperial commitments reached near manic proportions and the desire swelled to strap the faltering British economy to its booming western European neighbours. At the same time, the Macmillan administration clung desperately to the United States as the sustainer of Britain as a nuclear weapons power.

Churchill's old 'geometrical conceit'¹³ about Britain's power flowing from its locus at the centre of three interlocking circles (North Atlantic, Empire/Commonwealth and Europe¹⁴) just about fitted the early Fifties but, a decade later, it looked delusory and was mercilessly exposed as the Sixties deepened. As Douglas Hurd (the future Foreign Secretary and then a young diplomat) put it: 'The trouble lay in mistaking a snapshot for a long-term analysis. The three circles were changing shape and size quite rapidly.'¹⁵

There was one illusion-stripper in particular throughout the Sixties that made the process of post-great power adjustment all the harder – the poor performance of the UK economy compared with its pacemaking competitors (P. G. Wodehouse called it 'a certain anaemia of the Exchequer').¹⁶ Both main political parties made the halting and then the reversal of Britain's relative economic decline their prime selling point. Each promised economic modernization and the institutional reform that improved economic growth required, albeit via

differing policies. Bob Morris, a seasoned Whitehall veteran, has developed the concept of the British ‘vampiric’ issue – a question the country keeps trying to settle by driving a stake through its heart, to find it only a matter of time before it rises up to bite once more.¹⁷ The economy is *the* ‘vampiric’ issue of the years since 1945 and the ‘stake’ each political party sharpened to skewer it in the early Sixties was labelled ‘planning’.

There were few who spoke up for the purer versions of the free market. Ralph Harris and Arthur Seldon did so from their perch at the Institute of Economic Affairs.¹⁸ Some younger Conservatives, such as the future Chancellor of the Exchequer Geoffrey Howe, added their voices under the banner of the Bow Group.¹⁹ Inside the Cabinet Room, the Minister of Health, Enoch Powell, was probably the only 22-carat free-market/small-state man, and he held Cabinet rank only from July 1962 to October 1963.²⁰

From the perspective of the 2010s, it is temptingly easy to overgild the consensual years as an age of stability and harmony, as *The Economist*’s anonymous reviewer of Tony Judt’s *Ill Fares the Land* did in the spring of 2010, when he or she described the thirty years after 1945 as witnessing ‘a balance between market and state’ which ‘oversaw a fruitful truce between business and labour that produced a golden period for capitalism all round’.²¹ The Sixties were far from a ‘golden period’ for either British capitalism or its nationalized industries compared with the UK’s competitors, including the nearest neighbours across the Channel. And a decade that began with the trade union militancy of Frank Cousins and ended with the rise of Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon and their triumphant seeing off of a Labour government on the question of trade union power can hardly be depicted as ‘a fruitful truce’. The UK’s postwar settlement, which had promised so much, was in all kinds of trouble (strongly reflected in the previous volumes of this series, *Never Again* and *Having It So Good*) in the early 1960s, and economic innovation and growth comprised the key battleground of the 1964 general election with which this book finishes.

One of the understudied elements of the Sixties is the interplay of perceived decline/failure/malaise and the itch for a range of social changes that a stuffy, stagnant, old, backward-looking, economically

shuddering, fast-fading imperial country was thought to need by the young beneficiaries of the health, education and welfare the Attleean settlement had pumped into them. Tony Judt, like me a prime beneficiary of all that, reckoned it gave 'our age' an 'overwhelming confidence: we knew just how to fix the world. It was this note of unmerited arrogance that partly accounts for the reactionary backlash that followed it',²² especially in the 1960s.

Modernization, dashes for growth and catching up with the competitors was the meat-and-potatoes of the early-Sixties generation, and of early-Sixties politics. And, as it became increasingly obvious that both the Conservative and Labour elixirs were failing to work their would-be transformative magics, still greater levels of anxiety ensued about balance-of-payments deficits and comparative-growth statistics. In the middle of the decade, Enoch Powell, in the ringing tones of a classically educated, maverick loner fascinated by the vicissitudes of his country's history, chose an Irish audience before whom to unveil his analysis of Britain's Sixties psychodrama. 'Of course,' he cried in that air-raid siren of a West Midlands accent of his to a no-doubt slightly startled university audience in Dublin in the election autumn of 1964,

nothing halted, because nothing could halt, the continued decline in the relative size of Britain in the industrial and commercial world; but the longer it continued, the more firmly the British embraced the myth of the world's workshop as a lost Golden Age, and the more they flagellated themselves for the supposed latter-day sins which had earned them expulsion from that economic Garden of Eden. The Americans did not do this; the Dutch and the Belgians did not do this; the Germans did not do this; but the British did. It was our own private hell, as the myth of empire was our own private heaven, and under both hallucinations together two generations have laboured.²³

If you treat twenty-five years as a generation, two more generations have done so since Powell acted as shrink-in-chief to his nation in 1964.

With those characteristically Enochian strictures ringing in his ears, this is exactly the terrain on which the author of a treatment of early-Sixties Britain must first alight, to try to explain the neuralgia that accompanied perceived decline and contributed so powerfully to the making of the political weather in the first years of the 1960s.

I

The Chipped White Cups of Dover

Everywhere in Europe you can have hot food and cold drinks in the open air or indoors, in the evening or the day-time, on Sundays or week-days and usually in a clean café. Whereas everywhere in Britain . . . well, you only have to observe the expressions on the faces of incoming tourists: the Frenchman looking down at his plate of meat and two veg; the German as he alights from his train in the main station of any British city; the Italian woman as she sits shivering by the warming pans hanging *on the walls*; the American as he comes out of the 'rest room' of a Midlands garage.

*Michael Young, 1960*¹

What sort of island do we want to be? This is the question we always come back to in the end. A lotus island of easy tolerant ways, bathed in the golden glow of an imperial sunset, shielded from discontent by a threadbare welfare state and an acceptance of genteel poverty? Or the tough dynamic race we have been in the past, striving always to better ourselves, seeking new worlds to conquer in place of those we have lost, ready to accept the growing pains as the price of growth.

*Michael Shanks, 1961*²

The Victorians were pushed forward by a profound belief in progress and the imperial mission. In 1940 the applied forces of war brought together the scattered professions and tribes, and the common danger produced not only a burning radicalism but, paradoxically and wonderfully, an intense interest

in the future . . . [T]he post-war years have had a tragic sense of bathos. Radicalism seems less concerned with changing institutions than with a sense of doom from the H-bomb; the social ferment has subsided, the public schools have prospered as never before, and Oxford and Cambridge have refashioned their gilded cages. The professions have become more separate and self-absorbed.

*Anthony Sampson, 1962*³

A free society is necessarily an untidy, uncomfortable and apparently inefficient affair; and I suspect that one of the troubles with the ‘State of England’ writers is that they cannot bear the whole anxious process . . . [I]t is the lack of sense of proportion in ‘State of England’ writing that most depresses me . . . I sometimes have the impression that all their criticism comes from a bad digestion. The thing most likely to set them off is a tasteless *bisque d’homard* in a luxury hotel, or the inability to obtain a meal when they reach Ballachulish after 10 p.m. It is all very affecting. But I do not really think you can begin a reformation by nailing the *Good Food Guide* to the door of a provincial hotel.

*Henry Fairlie, 1963*⁴

I quite liked living in a ramshackle social democracy.

*Paul Addison on the early 1960s in 2005*⁵

Michael Young was a sociologist with a genius for sensing the significant in the prosaic. Many years later, he reconstituted for me the ‘mental map’⁶ in his head in October 1960 when he published his exquisitely titled pamphlet *The Chipped White Cups of Dover*. He had been struck that summer, returning home on a cross-Channel ferry from bustling, modernizing France, how drab Dover was. It hit him forcibly when he and the family parked their car and went for a cup of tea before bashing up the crowded A2 to London. It was served in the ubiquitous chipped white cups associated with British cafédom and works canteens.⁷ (There were plenty of these in the Corsham

bunker, too, as I discovered when I first entered part of it in 2001.⁸ In the pamphlet he put it like this:

[T]he old joke about the Continent being cut off [by fog in the English Channel] is too painful to be any longer funny, and any traveller not an Empire Loyalist is almost bound to return to the chipped white cups of Dover with more of a sense of shame than of relief.⁹

By 1960, Young, draughtsman of the 1945 Labour manifesto *Let Us Face the Future* ('Beveridge plus Keynes plus socialism' as he would later distil it),¹⁰ had become disillusioned with the existing political parties as bringers (real or potential) of an amenity society at home and a truly post-imperial foreign policy abroad.

His pamphlet was one of the more distinguished contributions to a critical genre whose shared philosophy was neatly caught in the title of Penguin's 'What's Wrong With Britain' titles, which ran as part of a series of Penguin specials between 1955 and 1965, picking up pace and bite after the Suez crisis of 1956.¹¹ They were written by men and women born in the 1920s and 1930s.

The cumulative effect of the 'What's Wrong ...' literature and associated journalism was to add to the pangs of Britain's relative economic decline and to help create the intellectual and analytical climate that contributed to the political change of the decade which brought Labour's narrow return to power in October 1964 and its big majority in March 1966. The 'What's Wrongs' were also among the more profoundly disillusioned centre-left progressives after successive economic crises had taken the bloom off Harold Wilson's 'purposive' progressive politics later in the decade.

In its way, the 'What's Wrong' phenomenon was the retort of those who felt shamed and enraged by Suez and baffled and irritated by the credulous smugness of a British electorate that had fallen for Harold Macmillan's having-it-so-good politics instead of Hugh Gaitskell's austere progressivism in the polling booths on 8 October 1959. Arnold Toynbee talked of 'the stimulus of blows' in human and political affairs.¹² Writers of a left-of-centre inclination, reacting to both Suez and Macmillan's victory, reached for their pens. The 'What's Wrong' literature was their catharsis and their revenge. The best remembered of them is Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain*,

published in 1962, which became a huge best-seller.¹³ Their choicest monument – not least because its first essay by the spirited right-winger and sceptic Henry Fairlie took them and their collective *mentalité* apart – was the special ‘Suicide of a Nation?’ edition of *Encounter* that appeared under Arthur Koestler’s guest editorship at the height of the mania induced by the Profumo affair in July 1963.

Most of the contributors were bored by the British New Deal shaped by Keynes’s economics and Beveridge’s social policy.^{14*} They were completely out of sympathy with Macmillan despite his efforts to lever Britain into the European Economic Community (the prosperity and modernity of whose original six members† shone like a beacon for most of the ‘What’s Wrongers’). They were by 1963 all too ready to succumb to the shiny promise of Harold Wilson’s blend of science and socialism. Fairlie’s mockery of their politics, their taste buds and their fondness for a shared linguistic litany of “vigour”, or “dynamism”, or “efficiency”, or “greatness”¹⁵ now seems apt, if prematurely cruel. But although they could be characterized in this way they had a point – and they made much of the political and economic running during the first half of the decade and, as we shall see in chapter 3, contributed to the politics surrounding Macmillan’s own attempt at the pursuit of modernity.

What were the fuel rods at the core of the ‘What’s Wrong?’ chain reaction? The cluster included rods historical, sociological, class-conscious, industrial, economic and cultural; they combined disquisitions on national character, the country’s imperial past and its uncertain future with the hard numbers appearing annually from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris, which provided comparative statistics of national growth in gross domestic product per head that the press converted into league tables read like runes by the political class and the commentariat.

Arthur Koestler as guest editor of *Encounter* declared: ‘We cannot

* Though nobody at the time called it ‘the British New Deal’, I argued in *Having It So Good*, the predecessor volume to this one, that the remaking of the economic and social relationships between the state and the citizen in the years after 1945 amounted to just that, with the creation of a comprehensive welfare state, substantial educational reform and the pursuit of a full-employment policy to which the political parties subscribed.

† France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

evade the economist's drab curves, because they are mirrored in our living standards, the prospects before our children, and the rate at which we develop stomach ulcers.¹⁶ We have, in varying degrees, lived as a country in the shadow of those 'drab curves' ever since. As the chart shows, the UK was locked in a vortex of relative under-performance in the age of postwar economic miracles the ended only with the oil-price explosion of 1973.

GNP, Annual Rates of Growth 1951-73

Japan	9.5
Germany	5.7
Italy	5.1
France	5.0
Netherlands	5.0
Canada	4.6
Denmark	4.2
Norway	4.2
USA	3.7
UK	2.7

Sources: John Cornwall, *Modern Capitalism* (1977), p. 11; OECD, *Economic Survey* (November 1979). Also Angus Maddison, 'Long Run Dynamics of Productivity Growth', *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro Quarterly Review*, no. 128 (1979), p. 4.

The 'What's Wrongers' attempted to penetrate the compost – cultural and social as well as industrial – which underlay those bleakly depressing growth figures. Michael Shanks, whose 1961 Penguin added the 'stagnant society' to the lexicon of decline, allowed his anxious frenzy to run away with him in Koestler's 1963 *Encounter* special by digging deep into African anthropology to find a parallel that would shock. In his essay on 'The Comforts of Stagnation' he drew on Mary Douglas's newly published study of the Lele tribe of the Congo¹⁷ to help his readers better understand Macmillan's Britain. In a passage born of frustration, Shanks made his point with irony:

The Lele are an amusing, cultivated, intelligent Congolese tribe who have conspicuously failed in recent years to advance their economy as have their neighbouring tribes. Mrs Douglas traces the reason for their

stagnation back to their distinctive tribal customs, which are based on avoiding what is felt to be the humiliation of old men losing power and becoming dependent on their juniors. To prevent this, the Lele have built up an immensely complex system of checks and balances, in which the old men are given a virtual monopoly of wives and the right to cultivate the fields. The younger men are kept in a state of what amounts to prolonged idleness and avoidance of responsibility, so that they will not infringe on the prerogatives of the elders. In this way a delicate equilibrium has been achieved, but at an enormous price in efficiency . . .

Shanks argued that the ‘British, I am afraid, are in danger of becoming the Lele of Western Europe’.¹⁸

In a way, the ‘What’s Wrongers’ were a tribe in themselves, with their own shared mantras of decline and overlapping explanations. They were to a man (and occasional woman – Elizabeth Young contributed an essay to the *Encounter* collection on education¹⁹) patriotic, genuinely concerned that their country should flourish and much exercised by the contrast of late Fifties/early-Sixties Britain with the superb burst of collective energy and purpose under the shared duress of the Second World War when they had been young.

Arthur Koestler, their unofficial ringmaster in 1963, was an exception. He was older than most of them, born in 1905 of Hungarian and Austrian parentage and a late arrival in the UK, having escaped from prison in France to reach Britain in 1940 only to be interned by the Home Office (his recently shed communism made him suspect everywhere).²⁰ By the early Sixties Koestler was an internationally celebrated author and journalist and it was an article by him on patriotism in the *Observer* which had triggered the formidable decline-spasm in *Encounter*.²¹ Both the article and the *Encounter* essay began with the bizarre combination of stoical heroism and immovable stubbornness he encountered working alongside the bizarre Brits (as he saw them) in 1940 in the Army’s Pioneer Corps, and the decencies of European tradition – hence his essay’s title ‘The Lion and the Ostrich’ and his observation that ‘[t]hus Pentonville was my prep school, the Alien’s Pioneer Corps my Eton’.²²

My company was employed on a vital defence job, and we were of course ‘too keen’ as foreigners notoriously are. So we asked our British CO to do away with the ritual tea-breaks – which, what with downing

tools, marching fifteen minutes to the cook-hut and back, mornings and afternoons, cost nearly two hours of our working time. The CO appreciated our laudable zeal and explained that we had to have our tea-breaks whether we liked it or not because the British Pioneer Companies, plus the local trade unions, would raise hell if we did not. That was about six months after Dunkirk.²³

Koestler liked his mates – ‘[t]he majority were a decent lot, with untapped human potentialities buried under the tribal observances’ – ‘[t]he same bloke who unhesitatingly risked his life at Alamein to “keep Britain free” would not lift a finger at [Fords of] Dagenham to save Britain from bankruptcy’.²⁴

If one were to distil the essence of the early-Sixties ‘What’s Wrong’ critique, its ingredients would be a blend of the following:

- The continuing blight of class in schoolroom, university seminar, on the factory floor and in the works canteen and in the ideologies of the two main political parties.
- An ‘establishment’ dominated by Oxbridge males steeped in the classics and the humanities (rather than practical subjects) and what the Cabinet Office civil servant Clive Priestley would later call the amateurish ‘good chap’ theory of government,²⁵ in sharp contrast to the engineers and the financially numerate, *grandes écoles*-trained technocrats in Paris, who were widely thought to be the motive power behind a French growth rate double that of Britain’s.
- Imperial and great-power illusions that led to an excess of defence spending and expensive overseas commitments and which also militated against a full-hearted attempt to join the booming European Economic Community and to compete in tough markets as opposed to soft, Commonwealth trade; the related desire to sustain the ‘frighteningly insecure’²⁶ sterling area, which financed half of the world trade, based on the UK’s gold and dollar reserves that could meet but a third of its liabilities.
- A trade-union movement obsessed with avoiding a return to the mass unemployment of the 1930s, clinging to rulebooks and inter-union demarcations that put a highly effective brake on technical innovation and economic growth.

The benefits of the British New Deal in terms of a better-fed, healthier and more formally educated full-employment society were assumed – rather than praised – by the ‘What’s Wrongers’. The contrast between the prewar Britain of 1939 and the mass-consumption society of twenty years on were somewhat discounted. Nor did their critique carry all before it in party-political terms.²⁷ The Conservatives, under a hereditary Scottish aristocrat in the person of Sir Alec Douglas-Home, very nearly fought the Labour Party, under the gritty more-meritocratic-than-thou Harold Wilson, to a draw in the general election of October 1964 – partly, it could be argued, because Macmillan and Douglas-Home had picked up the modernization theme and run with it themselves.

Those who were squeezed out in the early 1960s were the free-market critics on the right who had severe reservations about the increasingly interventionist economic stances of both the major parties. When the Institute for Economic Affairs was founded in 1957, its self-styled ‘full frontal market economists’,²⁸ Ralph Harris and Arthur Seldon, felt immense frustration with what Harris called ‘a Tory government with a large chunk of socialism built into a consensus’.²⁹ The IEA, propelled by the ideas of Friedrich von Hayek and sustained by the broiler-chicken fortune of their patron, Anthony Fisher, found little purchase in the Whitehall of the Keynes-reading Harold Macmillan. Their hour would not come for another quarter of a century.

Journalists sympathetic to them, such as Norman Macrae on *The Economist* (inventor of ‘Mr Butskell’ in Butler–Gaitskell days, and soon to coin the concept of ‘stagflation’³⁰), fared no better. In his *Sunshades in October*, Macrae railed against an economic profession and a Treasury high command who were, in Keynes’s metaphor, slaves to the thinking of a generation past and ‘too much ruled by ideas that were rightly conceived for circumstances ten years back’.³¹ Macrae had a nose for what Fernand Braudel called the ‘thin wisps’ of tomorrow that were barely discernible today³² – in the Sixties, for example, he was prophetic in foreseeing just how great a manufacturing and trading force Japan was to become. In 1963, he suggested that Whitehall and the economics profession had ‘to be pulled round into a stance where they can fight against today’s dangers, not against yesterday’s

ones'.³³ The next stage of mass production, Macrae prophetically suggested, might 'lie in such fields as automated house-building, transport, food production and office employment – with all the attendant problems of driving existing workers in those industries out of a job and existing small-scale firms . . . out of business'.³⁴

Where the left and right critiques converged was the point at which the British New Deal bore down most firmly and malignly in the early 1960s – the structures, practices and powers of the trade unions – which, in Koestler's words, had become 'an immensely powerful non-competitive enclave in our competitive society'.³⁵ Some, like him, Harris and Seldon, saw trade unions as excessively influential in British economic life; others, Shanks in particular, saw them as lacking the kind of influence Swedish or West German trade unions rightly enjoyed as well-organized and staffed social partners in a co-operative national enterprise devoted to the maintenance of high-productivity/high-wage economies.³⁶ The question of trade-union power and the sustenance of the British New Deal was a fundamental Sixties preoccupation which absorbed a great deal of government time and produced successive policy and institutional fixes that, after brief bursts of promise, failed to take.

It was in film form that the trade-union question reached those parts of a wider national consciousness that neither the 'What's Wrongers' nor the 'full-frontal' free marketers could touch. Its impact in 1959–60 was instantaneous, and it added a phrase to the permanent storehouse of the English language. It was called *I'm All Right Jack*.³⁷ John and Ray Boulting's hilariously biting satire exposed the appalling state of both unions and management in some parts of British industry, brilliantly pitting Peter Sellers, as the communist shop steward Fred Kite, against Terry-Thomas as the hapless personnel manager Major Hitchcock, with Ian Carmichael as Stanley Windrush, the well-born innocent, keen to work harder to boost exports who brings the arms manufacturer, Missiles Limited, and, in the end, much of British industry to a standstill.

David Puttnam, a connoisseur of British film as well as one of its most distinguished directors, believes *I'm All Right Jack* 'genuinely defined an era',³⁸ not least because it tackled a subject that was taboo in film terms – taboo partly because of the appalling labour relations

within the UK cinema trade itself. Roy Boulting later revealed that Fred Kite was based on a shop steward at Charter Films' Denham studios.³⁹ Peter Sellers was very reluctant to take the part not because of any lurking trade union sympathies but because, as he said to Roy Boulting, 'Where are the jokes? Where are the laughs?' He wasn't fully persuaded until the first day of filming when, surrounded by members of the works committee, he swung round a corner with Kite's angular, assertive walk en route to bollocking the management and the film came to an immediate halt. In the language of the acting business, the film crew 'corpsed', overcome by laughter to the point where they couldn't carry on. They had recognized the type immediately.

Kite caught the breed to perfection in dress, attitude and speech. Alan Hackney's script was based on a torrent of stilted Trade Unionese, as spoken in scores of strike news bulletins delivered in a kind of staccato – half aggressive; half insecure with a touch of linguistic grandiosity – as when an interviewer asks Fred how many strikes he had led that year. 'I do not regard that question as being relevant to the immediate issues.'

Bill Morris, the much respected leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union in the 1990s, acknowledged that 'for generations . . . the portrait of Kite was seen to be . . . the reality'.

But the Boultings and Alan Hackney were not bent on producing a monochromatic political rant against excessive trade-union power and utterly absurd restrictive practices. A sleazy and manipulative management (the silky Dennis Price using his nephew Carmichael/Windrush as his stooge), doing corrupt arms deals with Middle East potentates, were pilloried mercilessly and Dickie Attenborough played the spivvy Sydney de Vere Cox to perfection. There are several glancing blows against the nature and consequences of the British New Deal, many of them from the mouth of the extravagantly toff-accented Terry-Thomas:

The Welfare State – I call it the Farewell State . . . They're an absolute shower [pronounced 'sharr']. We've got chaps here [he tells a wonderfully twitching, neurotic time- and-motion expert played by John Le Mesurier] who come out into a muck sweat merely by standing still.

The Macmillan government gets a thumping too with 'Coxy' saying: 'And don't forget all that bunk about "Export or Die!"' As Alan

Hackney said, at least Fred Kite was an ‘idealist’ reading the works of Lenin and idolizing the Soviet Union (‘All them cornfields – and ballet [pronounced ‘ball-ette’] in the evening’).

For Simon Heffer, a devotee of the Ealing Comedy tradition,⁴⁰ *I’m All Right Jack* ‘always struck me as one of the great monuments to British cynicism . . . The Boulting brothers saying “We’re washing our hands of the whole lot of you . . .” The message that comes out of it is one of complete hopelessness.’⁴¹ Absolutely true.

As David Puttnam noted, British films were at a low ebb (war movies apart) in the late 1950s.⁴² But, as Dominic Sandbrook has described, *I’m All Right Jack* swept all before it in British picture houses during the summer and autumn of 1959:

In seventeen weeks one British comedy attracted more than two million people to cinemas across the country while in New York it ran at the art-house Guild Theatre for four months and broke the house box-office record. In early September, when Harold Macmillan went up to Balmoral to ask the Queen for a dissolution of Parliament and a general election, she arranged that they should spend the evening watching a special projection of the chart-topping film.⁴³

By 1960, when the film toured the provinces (I saw it in Stroud) the phrase ‘I’m All Right Jack’ had become a staple cliché of Conservative Party meetings and acquired legs that carried it into the permanent political lexicon.

There was another mighty popular conveyor of early-Sixties ‘What’s Wrongery’ on a more individual level of anomie-tinged dissatisfaction – the comedian Tony Hancock, whose solo career peaked on BBC Television when his extraordinarily expressive face met the genius of Ray Galton and Alan Simpson’s scripts for *Hancock’s Half Hour*. The series is best remembered for the episode ‘The Blood Donor’ (1961), especially for the opening sequence with the nurse (played by June Whitfield) in the waiting room. Hancock, with his characteristic mix of bravado, self-irony and absurdity tells her he had decided it was time to do something for the country. So it was a matter of

become a blood donor or join the Young Conservatives. As I’m not looking for a wife and I can’t play table tennis, here I am. A body full

of good British blood and raring to go . . . British undiluted for twelve generations. You want to watch who you're giving it to. It's like motor oil. It doesn't mix.

Whitfield points out that blood is the same the world over:

HANCOCK: I did not come here for a lecture on communism.

WHITFIELD: In fact I'm a Conservative.

HANCOCK: Then kindly behave like one, madam!

WHITFIELD: Have you given blood before?

HANCOCK: Given, no. Spilt, yes. There's a good few drops lying around the battlefields of Europe.

And he goes on to spin a wildly improbable yarn about getting separated from his battalion in the Battle of the Ardennes and setting off for Berlin.⁴⁴

For me, the episode that took the palm was another 1961 Hancock gem, 'The Bedsitter'. It was chipped-white-cups country with a vengeance – thirty minutes' worth of solo genius; a bored Hancock on a Sunday afternoon in his run-down room in the heart of Earls Court bed-sitterland in west London, with its dreadful floral wallpaper, frilly lampshades and seedy clutter. It opens with Hancock lying on his bed in one of those shapeless knitted jumpers that were such a feature of the postwar years trying to blow the perfect smoke ring from his cigarette. Suddenly, he bursts into an ironic Noel Coward impression:

A Room with a View, and you – and nothing to worry us.

Tut. Tut. Ta.

He relapses into tedium with a sigh. (No comedian breathed a sigh to such effect.) Trying to draw the last inch from his roll-your-own cigarette, Hancock burns his lips, leaps up and searches for balm in the medicine cabinet but to no avail:

Gotta put something on my lip. Might get lock-jaw. I know – butter.

A touch of the old New Zealand.

He protrudes his lip, applies the butter and erupts into more impressions as he stares into the mirror, lip still extended. First Maurice

Chevalier with heavy French accent ('Every little breeze seems to whisper "Louise"') and then of Archie Andrews and Peter Brough (the radio ventriloquist on the BBC Light Programme's *Educating Archie*).

He returns to his bed of boredom and scans the heavy literature (Karl Marx; Bertrand Russell) on his bedside table – to no avail:

Too much on me mind. Nuclear warfare. Future of mankind. China. Spurs.* It's hard graft for we intellectuals these days.

Just as Tony Hancock was peaking in appeal (his show reached 30 per cent of the adult population in May 1961⁴⁵), a less gentle form of humour – satire with a dash of acid rather than self-irony – began to trickle into the national consciousness, bringing 'back into English life a strain of public insult and personal vilification which . . . it had not known for many years', as Christopher Booker, one of the founders of *Private Eye* in 1961 and someone who has provided a continuous recitative of satire and the lampooner's art from that day to this, put it as the Sixties drew to a close.⁴⁶ The time and place of this re-creation of a national phenomenon is easy to establish. The place was Edinburgh; the time, August 1960; the revue, *Beyond the Fringe*, starring Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett and Dudley Moore. It opened on the 22nd in the Lyceum Theatre to a house two-thirds empty.⁴⁷ That swiftly changed and the ripple-effect was potent. As the historian of the satire boom, Humphrey Carpenter, wrote of August 1960:

four young men stepped on to a stage in Edinburgh and changed the face of comedy . . . its arrival in London the following year created a fashion for the satirical, or would-be satirical, that was one of the manifestations of what would soon be called 'The Swinging Sixties'.⁴⁸

The show began at 10.45 p.m. once the stage had been cleared after Chekov's *The Seagull* and the more orthodox festival goers had departed for their hotels. It ran for only a week,⁴⁹ but it added a new and distinctive sound to the national cacophony. As Morgan Daniels

* The programme was first broadcast on 26 April 1961. If Tottenham Hotspur won the FA Cup the following month on 6 May they would become the first team to win the League and Cup 'double' in the twentieth century. They beat Leicester 2–0 and did.

put it in his study of its impact on successive 1960s government, '[t]he satire movement was the most savage, and often the most eloquent voice of Sixties Britain'.⁵⁰

Young Oxbridge (Cook and Miller from Cambridge; Bennett and Moore from Oxford) sliced into the Establishment writ large – but, above all, Harold Macmillan's Britain. Michael Billington, later a famous *Guardian* critic, was sent to review the show for the National Union of Students' newspaper and asked them:

'What are you really attacking, what's your gripe?' And they said, 'Complacency.' It was the complacency of Macmillan's England that they really wanted to get at. And I think it's no accident that *Beyond the Fringe* happened when it did. Because the 1950s (which I was brought up in) had been so complacent, parochial, smug, Little England-ish.⁵¹

It was Peter Cook's cruelly superb parody of Macmillan (he had the slow, measured, world-weary voice to perfection) that had the most savage bite of any of the show's sketches. It was, in fact, a brilliant send-up of Macmillan's highly praised, globe-twirling party-political broadcast in the run-up to the 1959 general election.⁵² Cook added extra bite the following year once Kennedy was in the White House and the show was enjoying its London run:

'Good evening. I have recently been travelling round the world on your behalf and at your expense.'

'I went first to Germany, and there I spoke with the German Foreign Minister, Herr . . . Herr and there, and we exchanged many frank words in our respective languages. So precious little came of that.'

It was the next section playing upon the contrast between the ageing Edwardian in London and the young, energetic, new-world man in Washington, that stayed longest in the memory:

'I then went to America, and there I had talks with the young, vigorous President of that great country . . . We talked of many things, including Great Britain's position in the world as some kind of honest broker. I agreed with him when he said that no nation could be more honest. And he agreed with me when I chaffed him and said that no nation could be broker.'⁵³

Cook's arresting malice at the Prime Minister's expense was matched only by Malcolm Muggeridge in his contribution to *Encounter's* 'Suicide of a Nation?' special, in his essay 'England, Whose England?' when he wrote:

Each time I return to England from abroad, the country seems a little more run down than when I went away; its streets a little shabbier, its railway carriages and restaurants a little dingier; the editorial pretensions of its newspapers a little emptier, and the vainglorious rhetoric of its politicians a little more fatuous.

On one such occasion I happened to turn on the television, and there on the screen was Harold Macmillan blowing through his moustache to the effect that 'Britain has been great, is great, and will continue to be great'. A more ludicrous performance could scarcely be imagined. Macmillan seemed in his very person to embody the national decay he supposed himself to be confronting.

He exuded a flavour of moth balls. His decomposing visage and somehow seedy attire conveyed the impression of an ageing and eccentric clergyman who had been induced to play the part of a Prime Minister in a dramatised version of a [C. P.] Snow novel put on by a village amateur dramatic society.⁵⁴

Muggeridge was a professional sceptic, a social dyspeptic who himself looked and sounded as if he was daily distilled in vats of his own bile. Yet those most affected by *Beyond the Fringe* and its followers were not the ageing and cynical but the young and idealistic, such as my friends Kathleen and Tam Dalyell (Tam would hammer the Conservative vote in the West Lothian by-election in 1962, adding to Macmillan's woes). Kathleen Wheatley, as she then was (daughter of Lord Wheatley, Scotland's Lord Advocate during the Attlee governments), has never forgotten the brio and bite of *Beyond the Fringe* that August in Edinburgh:

We didn't know it was going to be so good. It had a huge impact on us because it was so critical of the Establishment. I had demonstrated against Suez. But this was different. I'd come from a convent [to Edinburgh University]. Humour was not the strong point of the nuns at all.

Beyond the Fringe was very funny and very good. It was the excitement of being able to use your intellect to look at institutions with a

critical eye. You didn't think you were being nihilistic. You thought you were going to get a better world by exposing all this hypocrisy.

It was a class thing, too. – Harold Macmillan, the grouse-moor, privilege and all that . . . We were the Butler Act generation coming through. There was a real classlessness about the history group I was in at Edinburgh. I'd just graduated a month before. It was the beginning of all this questioning of the Establishment and it had a great deal to do with the Butler Act.⁵⁵

That Was the Week That Was, presented by David Frost and produced by Ned Sherrin, in its short life on BBC Television (starting in November 1962) reached millions (where *Beyond the Fringe* was seen by thousands) and exercised both the Macmillan and Douglas-Home governments. It had a real capacity to shock. Never before had the BBC come anywhere near the bite of TW3's satire, which sometimes went beyond parody to the edge of character assassination. And *Private Eye* carries on the tradition to this day (infuriating every prime minister on the way). But *Beyond the Fringe* retains the freshness and specialness of the pioneer attack breaking through the crust of conformity for the first time.

The mood among many, though not all, of the university-trained young (a mere 216,000 students attended British universities in 1962 – 148,000 men and 68,000 women⁵⁶) was exactly as Kathleen Dalyell remembers, especially those nurtured by the grammar schools. Macmillan came face to face with this in Oxford in February 1962, as recorded by two diarists. First, Paul Addison, then a first-year undergraduate, later top-flight modern historian and, with *The Road to 1945*, prime begetter of the 'great debate' about postwar consensus:⁵⁷

Pembroke

Feb 2 62

towards ten

Missed dinner this evening so as to get to the Union in time to hear the Prime Minister. When I arrived at around half past seven the floor was almost full . . . The gallery filled up. The floor was already packed. Someone shouted 'Ban the bomb England.' . . .

A great hullabaloo outside, and flashes of white light caught on the stained glass indicated Mac's arrival. He walked in at a dignified pace,

carrying a portly front before him as royally as possible. An undergraduate next to the platform balanced a paper dart on the dispatch box. Mac sat down, picked it up, examined it and handed it to an anonymous blue-suited aide . . . As Mac uttered his first words the howling outside of the late-comers shut out took on tribal proportions.

Mac, untidily shaped under a dark blue suit which hung loosely over him, sombre scarlet tie, hair in an ample sweep of silver lined with grey, eyebrows falling sleepily like a bloodhound's, a slight droop about the moustache, a fatigued, drawling, lugubrious voice apparently proceeding from a cavernous throat, a thickness about his sibilants, a whistle about his 't's', gave us, of course, nothing new. He had a rough ride. It's no use any PM trying to fob off an audience of undergraduates with a few well-chosen bromides.⁵⁸

The head man of the British Lele had plainly lost his rapport with the cleverer younger members of the tribe. And yet, as Paul Addison sensed, there was more in Macmillan that night than a trumpeting of the gold of the postwar years (compared to 1918–45) – there was recognition of a need to quicken the pace of reform and improvement, that his having-it-so-good had mutated into having-it-so-edgy. 'Mac,' Addison continued,

put forward the Conservative Party, amidst a great deal of jeering, as the party of change, the party which adapts itself to a new situation. He dismissed 'orthodox Marxist socialism' and 'orthodox laissez-faire Liberalism' in one breath. 'I am not going to review the record of the past ten years,' he said, provoking cries of 'Suez' which grew to a crescendo.

He ignored them. Then he went on to deal with six major issues. He started off with The Bomb, but the Banners weren't around. Then he made his gaffe of the evening: 'Twice in my lifetime,' he said with gravity – in the Napoleonic Wars and the Marlborough wars – and then the place almost fell apart. They roared. Then, just as he had affirmed that Britain would stand by the deterrent, he went on to 'the League of Nations', and although he corrected himself there was another burst of derisive applause and laughter. Mac took no notice.

It's possible the Napoleonic/Marlborough wars reference was deliberate old man's play with the young – Macmillan was not averse to sending himself up. He bashed on regardless:

After supporting UNO [the United Nations Organization] he backed the Common Market. He stressed the need for European unity against a Communist menace, and there was a weak cry of 'Portugal'.

Portugal, a member of NATO (unlike Spain), was then ruled by a fascist dictator, António Salazar. Could the old man get through to the '[r]ows of sports jackets [which] made a motley colour scheme, all packed together along the benches'? Not while he stuck to economic affairs:

'The cause of last year's economic troubles [the 1961 'Pay Pause'] . . .' said the Prime Minister. A smart young man yelled: 'Selwyn Lloyd' [Macmillan's Chancellor of the Exchequer] and got an appreciative round of laughter and applause. Mac indulged in some table-thumping about economic policy. 'I have lived through those times,' he said, 'and that is why I am determined (thump) that such suffering and misery shall not happen again.' Heroics go down badly even with Conservative undergrads . . . Britain was prosperous, said Mac, to a cry of 'old age pensioners'. 'No longer does the insurance man come to take away the furniture . . .' A smart young man chipped in: 'It's the HP [Hire Purchase] man,' and got another big laugh.

But a change of gear and mood drawing on Macmillan's High Anglican side left Paul Addison 'surprised . . . a little. He turned to "the deeper spiritual needs"':

Wealth was a wonderful thing, but it was not enough. Old standards were being questioned (a shout of 'A good job too'). 'The false gods of cynicism, materialism and atheism (derisive moan) are strong,' he said in a memorable phrase. Conservatives must have faith, though he never said what in.

'I wish you the best of good fortune. And may God bless you in your work.'

This produced a mixed reception. The cynical murmured a moan. The sceptical, including myself, didn't know quite what reaction we felt . . .

Back in his room at Pembroke, Paul Addison mused about the moments Macmillan had quelled the rumbustiousness of the meeting in the university of which he was the proud Chancellor:

It's always worth noting what impresses and touches an audience. Twice in his speech he indulged in a little corn – or rather it was just that he put it cornily – but there was a stillness and silence while he spoke. The first was when he said that Britain had twice (and this came after his great gaffe) in this century fought for the freedom of the world, 'and I hope no one here is ashamed of it'. The second was when he said that in 1945 the electorate dismissed [Churchill] 'the greatest Englishman of this or any other age'.

The more unruly young members of the tribe plainly realized that the bequest and memory of war was beyond mockery. (It's interesting that the send-up of the Battle of Britain and 'the Few' in 'The Aftermyth of War' sketch of *Beyond the Fringe* caused the cast anxiety; Peter Cook considered dropping it before the London run.)⁵⁹

What did Macmillan himself make of his brush with sports-jacketed Oxford at the Union? His account is rather different from Addison's:

An amusing meeting at Oxford. It was organised by the University Conservative Association and took place in the Union. The hall was packed, with a good sprinkling of Liberals and Socialists. Outside there were 500 or 600 more – who had come to listen. There were loudspeakers. Mixed with them was a band of 'Anti-Bomb' demonstrators. I had some difficulty getting into the hall, but once in it was a splendid meeting. I abandoned most of my prepared speech and I had a very good and attractive audience, with plenty of heckling and interruption. Of course the press today completely misrepresent what happened.⁶⁰

Macmillan seems to have seen the meeting as an example of youthful high spirits, as to be expected from undergraduates. To be fair to him, he always rather relished hecklers and a touch of the rough-house that characterized old-fashioned political meetings.

Much more worrying for him was the degree of griping within his own party and from the press in early 1962 when he motored

to Oxford that winter Friday evening. His Press Secretary, Harold Evans, mused on it in his diary the following Sunday:

The Sunday commentators inevitably take their cue from the Legge-Bourke speech [the somewhat ‘crazy’, as Macmillan called him, Tory MP for Ely had ‘made a speech full of praise of me, but saying I should retire, exhausted, in favour of a younger man’⁶¹] and spread themselves in analysing where the PM stands with the Party. Peregrine Worsthorne [in *The Sunday Telegraph*] says that the PM’s performance at the University Conservative Association’s meeting at Oxford was lamentable . . .⁶²

Worsthorne’s and Addison’s assessments ring truer than those of Macmillan himself. Yet even though the opinion polls were moving against him and the Conservatives and the gilt had gone off the surface of ‘having-it-so-good’, there was life in the old performer yet.

A sense of both fragility and pleasure jostled uneasily in early-Sixties Britain, and yet, as Paul Addison would say over forty years later, there was pleasure in living in a ‘ramshackle social democracy’.⁶³ Macmillan was governing in a strange political climate in which gusts of contentment vied with a drizzle of complaint to become the dominant weather pattern.

What the sports-jacketed youth of Oxford and the platoon of literary ‘What’s Wrongers’ – without access to his diaries or the minutes he was penning for his ministers – did not know was that Macmillan himself was suffering a degree of divine discontent similar to theirs, and had been for some time. Between 1960 and 1962 he dreamt up and developed a series of interlocking plans – parts of a ‘Grand Design’ – to reposition the country geopolitically and economically. As the glow of his 1959 election triumph faded with many a backward glance towards the ramshackle Edwardian Whiggery for which he pined,⁶⁴ Macmillan-the-modernizer realized that Churchill’s geometric comfort blanket, quilted with a mix of US, Commonwealth and European patches, could no longer provide either economic or political warmth. And a re-stitch here and there would no longer be enough. The tired old Balliol-trained brain would have to be tuned up once more in the service of country and party and, as Macmillan himself conceived it, for the benefit of the free world.

2

Grand Design

As he grew older, and into the part, [Macmillan's] gestures became more eccentric: the shake of the head, the dropping of the mouth, the baring of the teeth, the pulling-in of the cheeks, the wobbling of the hand, the comedian's sense of timing – the whole bag of tricks seemed in danger of taking over, so that his intellectual originality was constantly surprising. He had a series of set pieces of tragic roles which he would constantly repeat to his colleagues, often with tears in his eyes – the veteran of Passchendaele,* the champion of Stockton's unemployed, the trustee of future generations of children and grandchildren.

Anthony Sampson, 1967¹

With the Labour Party . . . stricken, and his own Party girding itself to meet the country's long-term problems on a radical and dramatic scale, it might have seemed in that autumn of 1960 that, despite his setbacks earlier in the year, Harold Macmillan was still riding high. It was nevertheless at this moment the first portent appeared that the increasingly aggressive hunger of a certain type of young politician and journalist for 'change', 'action' and political excitement was turning into something that could not be met just by measures alone, however radical. It was becoming a need which went much deeper – for something that no 'Edwardian' father-time figure in his sixties could provide, however imaginative or shrewd.

Christopher Booker, 1969²

* In fact, he was a veteran of the Somme and it was the battle of September 1916, in which he was seriously wounded, that particularly haunted him.

December 30 [1960]

Motored to Chequers – where I shall stay for a few days alone. I want to try to think out some of these terrible problems wh face us.

January 4 [1961]

. . . worked all the afternoon on my memorandum . . . It must of course be kept *absolutely* secret within a small circle, for much in it is dynamite.

January 6 [1961]

. . . it is a grand design to deal with the economic, political and defence problems of the Free World!

*Harold Macmillan's diary*³

Harold Macmillan was a month short of his sixty-seventh birthday when he wrote those words. A broody man at the best of times, he was feeling his age and staggered towards the Christmas and New Year break ‘quite exhausted’⁴ by his ‘wind-of-change in Africa’ year following his speech to the South African parliament in February 1960, the collapse of the East–West summit in Paris after the Russians had shot down a CIA U-2 spy plane and, before that, a long, sloggy (if mightily successful) election campaign for the Conservative Party. His mood was not lightened by the ‘strict diet’ on which his doctor had put him.⁵ Just as he had thought (wrongly, as it turned out) that the summer of 1960 might ape the summer of 1914 and tip the world unexpectedly and accidentally into a global war, he reckoned ‘1961 is going to be a dramatic year, for good or ill’⁶ and that the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, ‘means to press the German question’ with still more pressure on Berlin.⁷

The rise-and-fall-of-civilizations side of Macmillan* began to take over as his tummy emptied and his brain picked up thanks to Dr Richardson’s diet over that solitary Chequers New Year. Out of his

* He was a keen student of Arnold Toynbee and re-read him in the summer of 1961 as the Berlin crisis worsened, finding it ‘soothing, in a curious way, to learn about so many civilizations wh have “risen and fallen”’ (Macmillan diaries (unpublished), entry for 8 July 1961; Toynbee is best consulted in the abridged version).

physical and intellectual rumblings came his thirty-two-page ‘Grand Design’ or ‘Memorandum by the Prime Minister’ as the draft circulated to an intimate Whitehall few was rather prosaically entitled.⁸ Much of it written in bed, the paper was an attempt to combat drift at home and abroad, to concentrate on the weaknesses of a precarious domestic economy, a bloated set of commitments overseas and to give his government a sense of direction now that, as he had confided in his diary at the end of November 1960, ‘[t]he popular press (tired of Gaitskell and Labour Party disputes) has started to attack me violently and “below the belt”’.⁹

Perhaps, above all, it was his first proper attempt to find a way of ‘influencing’ the new, about-to-be-inaugurated President John Kennedy in Washington, and working

out a method of influencing him and working with him. With Eisenhower there was the link of memories and a long friendship. I will have to base myself now on trying to win him by *ideas*.¹⁰

Macmillan had taken a stab at doing this in a letter to the President-elect in mid-December 1960. It mixed flattery (‘as I have just read the collection of your speeches called *The Strategy of Peace* I am looking forward with special pleasure to discussion of some of these things’) with Toynbeean grand-sweep (‘what is going to happen to us unless we can show that our modern free society – the new form of capitalism – can make the fullest use of our resources and results in a steady expansion of our economic strength’). He rounded it off with a touch of faux deference – ‘I am so sorry to inflict this on you when you have so much to think about . . . I await our first meeting with great eagerness’.¹¹

Macmillan’s first letter to Kennedy was the seed from which the ‘Grand Design’ grew, nurtured by what he called ‘that fatal itch for composition which is the outcome of a classical education’.¹² It turned out to form the blueprint for the middle phase of his premiership, from the election victory of 1959 until de Gaulle’s veto of the first UK application for EEC membership wrecked it in January 1963.

Macmillan took immense pains over the document and steered it carefully through small groups of ministers and officials before taking it to the full Cabinet in April 1961. His official biographer, Alistair Horne, reckoned the ‘Grand Design showed Macmillan at

the peak of his powers on the wider canvas'.¹³ This might be going a tad far, given his exhaustion at the turn of 1960–61. Certainly, it showed his intellectual fires were not banked – and it is hard to think of any subsequent premier who could have ranged so widely and thoughtfully with his or her own mind and pen.

His 'Introduction' opened in Toynbee mode:

The Free World cannot, on a realistic assessment, enter on 1961 with any great degree of satisfaction.

In the struggle against Communism, there have been few successes and some losses over the past decade.

In the military sphere, the overwhelming nuclear superiority of the West has been replaced by a balance of destructive power.

In the economic field, the strength and growth of Communist production and technology has been formidable. (Indeed, it ought to be, for that after all is what Communism is for.)¹⁴

To early twenty-first century eyes, after the discrediting and collapse of the Soviet Union, this passage reads oddly. But to early-Sixties eyes, Soviet industrial advance over the previous thirty years (not just since 1950) *had* been spectacular and other analysts had yet to appreciate the degree to which a superpower could sustain a first-world military capacity with a second-world economy and, in some areas, a third-world agricultural one.

His access to secret sources left Macmillan in no doubt, too, of the vigorous political intelligence combat that pockmarked the Cold War:

In the political and propaganda field, Russian (and to a lesser extent Chinese) subversion, blackmail, seduction and threats, as well as the glamour of what seems a growing and dynamic system, have impressed hesitant and neutral countries, and are proving especially dangerous among the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia. Against this background the long predominance of European culture, civilisation, wealth and power may be drawing to its end.¹⁵

Yet, all was not lost. Since 1945 the United States had not returned to 'isolationism' and western Europe had 'made a remarkable recovery from the calamitous destruction of the Second World War'. But 'great weaknesses remained' and there was insufficient Western

solidarity in the face of East–West, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern problems.

His specifically British section shows Macmillan had fully absorbed the conclusions of the highly secret ‘Future Policy Study’ that officials had presented to him ten months earlier on where Britain would most likely be in 1970 if current policies and relative economic performance remained:¹⁶

Britain – with all her experience – has neither the economic nor the military power to take the leading role. We are harassed with countless problems – the narrow knife-edge on which our own economy is balanced; the difficult task of changing an Empire into a Commonwealth (with the special problem of colonies inhabited by European as well as native populations); the uncertainty about our relations to the new economic, and perhaps political, state which is being created by the Six countries of continental Western Europe; and the uncertainty of American policies towards us – treated now as just another country, now as an ally in a special and unique category.¹⁷

Macmillan, despite the weaknesses of the UK’s position, craved boldness:

These problems are all intermingled. It is difficult to deal with them separately. Yet it is a tremendous task to attack them as a whole. So we are in danger of drift. Yet, if we are to influence events, we must not shrink from strong, and sometimes dramatic, action.¹⁸

Interestingly, given the overwhelming place the politico-military threat posed by the Soviet Union had in his mind over that Christmas and New Year, Macmillan thought that Western economic collaboration offered the best prospect of progress in the West’s struggle against what he saw as a monolithic communist bloc. ‘I am,’ he reminded himself, ‘an unrepentant believer in “interdependence”’. The Communist danger – in its various forms – is so great, and so powerfully directed that it cannot be met without the maximum achievable unity of purpose and direction.¹⁹ Macmillan, like the British intelligence community that contributed to his picture of the world, was slow to pick up the width and magnitude of the developing Sino-Soviet split until Khrushchev denounced the Albanians, ‘the recognized surrogates

for the Chinese',²⁰ at the Twenty-Second Soviet Party Congress in October 1961.

'It is,' Macmillan judged, 'no longer a question of Europe or the Commonwealth or America – we need a united Free World. Of course, we can't get it – in the sense of a politically federal or unitary state. We cannot altogether get it in the sense of a military alliance which can really work as a single team. We could perhaps get nearer to it in a monetary and economic policy.'²¹ This argument would feature strongly in Macmillan's dealings with the Americans, the French and the Germans in the coming months.

Before turning to the ways in which such enhanced economic co-operation might be constructed, Macmillan told his select readership that as they had 'read and written so much about our own economy' he did not propose to elaborate in this paper. A touch hubristically, he told them:

We all know, more or less, what we have to do. We have to *expand*, without inflation. We have to meet increasing Government and local expenditure on things necessary to our economic future – roads, schools, technical colleges, health services – without (if possible) increases of taxation, and even (if we can) with some reduction or at least rearrangement in order to stimulate effort.

We must control – if possible reduce – military expenditure.

We must deal with our balance of payments problems by reducing overseas expenditure (military and other) to the minimum, and above all, by *expanding exports*.²²

This, to use Macmillan's own heading, was 'The Economic Problem', give or take minor fluctuations, that had faced every set of British ministers since 1945 – the 'New Deal' plus the residual empire plus the Cold War and how to pay for it all with a sluggish economy, a relatively immobile labour market and a set of competitor nations (especially, after 1958, the EEC 'Six').

Macmillan feared his hope for 'real export drive' would be blocked if 'other countries pursue policies which are restrictive or entirely self-protective', in which case 'we shall be driven inevitably to measures of defence' leading to 'economic war between nations of the Free World from which the only beneficiaries will be the Communists'. If

Macmillan could not entice his fellow Western leaders into a kind of global Keynesianism – ‘namely, expanding world trade’ – Britain ‘must be ready for the worst. We must not be caught unawares.’ If Kennedy, de Gaulle and the German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer proved difficult and ‘chose the path of restriction’, the UK would have to retaliate with ‘import controls, reduction of oversea [sic] expenditure, (including our troops in Europe), increased control over movement of capital, and external monetary measures’.²³ Such rudiments of a siege economy – which would cut against the grain of the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and, via the British Army of the Rhine, NATO, too – were presumably what Macmillan had in mind when he wrote of ‘The Grand Design’ in his diary that ‘much in it is dynamite’.

Kennedy would be the key. Would he go protectionist, or would he be prepared ‘to broaden the base of credit’ and lean on the West Germans to revalue the mark to ease pressure on sterling and the dollar? ‘He may prove to have the courage and political finesse of F.D.R. [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], the genius of Keynes, and the determination of Churchill. Let us hope so.’²⁴ If Kennedy proved resistant, Macmillan had the slightly extraordinary idea that Britain could reverse roles within the ‘special relationship’ and put pressure on *him*:

I have thought of the possibility of issuing an open challenge to the world on this issue. I might propose an Economic Conference of leading nations of the Free World, to face this problem and to solve it. I could make it clear that this lies at the basis of all co-operation in every other field – defence included. I might be able to force the new President’s hand – especially if he would rather like it to be forced.

This was Britain as ‘awkward squad’ among the Western bloc; Macmillan as a British de Gaulle. Reason began to reassert itself:

Alternatively, I might try to get him to call such a conference, and put up this policy and get the credit for himself (and his country).

Such ‘economic summits’, in fact, became a feature of regular Western diplomacy in the mid-1970s and eventually mutated into the G7, and, later, G8 meetings. However, over Christmas/New Year 1960–61, Macmillan was convinced he had to do something. ‘In any

event, we must not (as we so often do) leave the Americans in any doubt as to the drastic steps we (with our precarious economy) may have to take to defend ourselves, and the consequential tragic results on the whole struggle against Communism.²⁵

Khrushchev and Kennedy and the great East–West struggle were one thing; the constant and growing threat to the UK from the EEC ‘Six’ was really the driving force of Macmillan’s ‘Grand Design’. If the EFTA* countries could not reach an accommodation with the Common Market nations, ‘[t]he economic consequences to Britain may be grave. However bold a face it may suit us to put on the situation, exclusion from the strongest economic group in the civilised world *must* injure us.’

He reckoned the Germans and the Italians would be amenable to reducing, maybe ending, ‘the economic split in Europe . . . The French will not. The French means de Gaulle.’²⁶

The General would dominate all the Sixties’ British premierships to a remarkable degree. He became a constant – and, very often, a malign – presence in the UK’s Cabinet Room, a one-man roadblock to Europe. In British eyes he may have been negativism-made-flesh radiating from the Élysée Palace; but what a glorious negativism – such pomp, such circumstance, such style. Macmillan, no slouch himself when it came to this trio of attributes, spent a great deal of his last three years in No. 10 plotting how to handle the General as British entry to the EEC became the great prize of his remaining premiership.

Macmillan did not wish an early retirement to his country home at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises upon his great rival. Quite the reverse, as

by a strange paradox, if de Gaulle were to disappear, an accommodation might be still more difficult. Whatever happened in France, there would be great confusion, perhaps even disintegration. French Federalist opinion would be strengthened (Monnet and all that)† and timid Frenchmen would seek a refuge in a European Federal State. Difficult

* The seven EFTA countries from its creation in January 1959 were the UK, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland.

† Jean Monnet, French public servant and original begetter of the idea of a European Coal and Steel Community from which the idea of a wider Common Market developed. Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (Collins, 1978).

as de Gaulle is, his view of the proper *political* structure (Confederation not Federation) is really nearer to ours. If he wished us to join the political institutions it would be easier for us to do so if they took the form which he favours.

Macmillan was convinced that, should the 'extreme Federalists' 'triumph' in Europe, sooner or later it would mean 'the triumph of the [nuclear] unilateralists and neutralists [as between NATO and the Warsaw Pact] here'.²⁷ This was an anxious old man whipping himself up into a degree of flappability to which Macmillan *was* prone despite the public mask of world-weary near insouciance. But in terms of de Gaulle as the crux to any 'deal' in Europe, and that such a question 'is now not primarily an economic but a political problem', Macmillan was absolutely right.

So how on earth to deal with the General? Before turning to the answer, Macmillan indulged himself in one of the private anti-German outbursts that punctuated his premiership. He really could not stand the Germans. It was as if that piece of Krupp steel in his pelvis – his daily reminder of the Great War – fed straight into his pen:

German policy is short-sighted and selfish, and in the long run will prove as disastrous to Germany as to the rest of the world. The Germans secretly enjoy their power, and the feeling that 15 years after defeat they are threatening both the dollar and the pound. They will not organise a proper capital market. They will not lend abroad. They will not reduce their interest rates to a nominal figure. They will not up-value the mark.

They would probably agree to an accommodation on Sixes [EEC] and Sevens [EFTA] but they will not bring effective pressure on the French . . .

Germans, in particular, never yield to the force of argument, but only to the argument of force.²⁸

He had clearly not seen the degree to which Germany had changed, was changing, so fundamentally. It riled Macmillan deeply that the EEC was constructed around a Franco-German axis. Why, he wondered, had France and Germany become 'so indispensable to each other'? 'They cannot live apart: they do not find it easy to live together.'²⁹

This question brought on another attack of the Toynbees at Chequers. It was, no doubt, a good thing Macmillan was lying down in bed in his old brown cardigan as his pen moved into *Völkerwanderung* mode (he called it a ‘Digression on the State of Western Europe’):

Since the Second World War, the movement for a permanent reconciliation between Gaul and Teuton has been based partly on genuine and respectable sentiment and partly on fear of the Slav. It has passed through different phases. The political phase – the European Movement, the Council of Europe – was quickly followed by the first economic moves – Schuman plan [for a European Coal and Steel Community], etc. This grew into the Treaty of Rome and the EEC.³⁰

Macmillan knew he had at the very least to weaken the Franco-German spine of the EEC if he was to ease Britain into the Common Market. Why had Adenauer, the German Chancellor, been so accommodating to French needs (including France’s imperial possessions) in the making of the Treaty of Rome? Macmillan had two explanations of Adenauer’s ‘motives’ (a man to whom he never warmed, unlike de Gaulle, whom he admired³¹):

First, fear of France’s weakness and eventual neutralism or semi-Communism. Secondly, fear of the kind of Germany that may follow him and a desire to tie his country firmly with its Western neighbours.³²

In fact, Adenauer had told him as much in a private chat after dinner in the British Embassy in Bonn during Macmillan’s first visit to the West German capital after becoming Prime Minister. He noted in his diary for 8 May 1957 (the twelfth anniversary of VE Day) Adenauer’s view

that no one who had lived through the years of Hitler could fail to believe in the Devil. [Adenauer was a devout Roman Catholic whom, as Mayor of Cologne, the Nazis had imprisoned.] He said, ‘I tell you, what I could not say to any German, no one realises the harm that Nazism has done to the German soul. It is by no means cured yet. We have got rich again too quickly. I don’t want us to get strong again too quickly. I hate uniforms, the curse of Germany. You will see that our Generals in conference are like yours, in civil clothes. I see great

dangers ahead. That is why I yearn so for European unity and (in view of France's weakness [this was France pre-de Gaulle]) for British participation.³³

De Gaulle's assumption of power in Paris on 1 June 1958 pleased Adenauer, who soon lost his fear of what he had heard of the General's Germanophobia.³⁴ Looking back from his Chequers bed three and a half years later, Macmillan noted that

Adenauer certainly welcomed de Gaulle's return to power – Catholic, anti-Communist, patriot. Recently, however, Adenauer's feelings towards de Gaulle and France have not been so friendly. He may have heard reports of de Gaulle's contemptuous references to 'Les petits gens de Bonn' . . . He may be genuinely alarmed at the effect on Britain of France's rigid attitude on EEC and fear that Britain may not be so anxious to join in defence of the 'Empire of Charlemagne' and its outpost, Berlin. All the same I would judge that, unless very extreme pressures are put on him, Adenauer will do nothing effective to carry out his promises to us or be prepared to risk a quarrel with France.³⁵

So the crux of the 'Grand Design' was to move France towards an accommodation with any UK application for EEC membership, which meant, in effect, shifting de Gaulle. If this could not be engineered, the rest (including the wider world economic aspirations embedded in the Christmas/New Year memorandum) would not fall into place and the master plan of Macmillan's second premiership would fail. How profoundly irritating it must have been, for all Macmillan's championing of de Gaulle during the war (when he was Minister Resident in the Mediterranean³⁶) that the terms of mendicancy had swivelled right round. But swivelled they had, and Britain rather than France was now the supplicant. How profoundly gratifying that must have been for de Gaulle, for all the courtesy he sustained in his relationship with the UK premier.

Might events – or anticipated events – soften de Gaulle up? Maybe the Germanophobia Adenauer sensed in him could help? Recently, Macmillan thought,

there has been a change in the French attitude towards Germany. It is no longer so patronising. There is a note of alarm.