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Doctor of Philosophy

Towards the New Jerusalem: Manchester Politics During the Second World War.

Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of the Second World War on the politics of one of the country's most important cities, Manchester. The thesis focuses on two broad themes. The first theme assesses the impact of the War on the nature of party politics in the city and, in particular, asks whether the experience of total war fostered a new *consensus on social and economic issues amongst the various Manchester political parties*. The second theme examines popular political attitudes in the city during the War and seeks to chart and explain the movement of public opinion that resulted in a landslide electoral victory for the Labour Party in 1945.

The thesis is written against the background of an ongoing historiographical debate surrounding the impact of the War on British politics. The first view of wartime politics, advanced primarily by Addison, argues that the War had a decisive impact on the shape of British politics, *instigating a cross-party consensus that formed the bedrock of policy making for the next thirty years*. The second view, put forward by an increasingly strong revisionist movement dominated by Jefferys and Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, suggests that the impact of the War was far less dramatic. All studies of wartime British politics have focused almost exclusively on high politics (that is, Cabinet and Parliamentary level), and this thesis aims to add to the debate by testing these various hypotheses at a local level.

The thesis concludes that the War had no significant impact on party politics in Manchester; inter-party relations remained unaffected by the War and the existence of an all-party coalition government, and a consensus signally failed to develop. It also suggests that Labour's 1945 success was attributable to a strong mood of anti-Conservatism rather than to any great enthusiasm for Labour, with support for Labour largely confined to the industrial working-class.

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Introduction.

The debate surrounding the impact of the Second World War on British high politics has been a central feature of political historiography for over twenty years. In this time, two dominant models of wartime politics have emerged. The Addison model argues that the War, combined with the existence of an all-party coalition government, instigated a lengthy period of consensus on social and economic issues between the leaderships of the major parties; simultaneously the War engendered Labour Party values in unprecedented numbers of the electorate, resulting in Labour's landslide election victory in 1945.¹ In more recent years this orthodoxy has been challenged by the Jefferys/Fielding, Tiratsoo and Thompson model, which contends that the War had little or no long-term impact on British politics and that Labour's election victory did not signify widespread enthusiasm for the Party.² This revisionist model currently dominates the historiography of wartime politics.

Cabinet disagreements, parliamentary debates, intra-party conflict and the private views of prominent contemporary politicians have been well rehearsed, and there can be little additional material still awaiting the attention of historians. In contrast, the picture away from the hothouse of Westminster and Whitehall during the Second World War has been largely neglected. The high politics perspective has resulted in an over-concentration on political elites at the expense of knowledge of the solid bedrock of politics in the communities. The dissertation partly corrects this imbalance by applying these models to the city of Manchester and asking; What was the impact of the Second World War on low (defined here as 'grass-roots'/local) politics? The thesis focuses on two broad themes. The first addresses the Manchester political community and, in particular, the political parties, and asks to what extent the existence of a national coalition Government affected inter-party relationships at a local level, and whether the beliefs and policies of the Manchester parties converged as a consequence of the wartime experience. The second theme examines the movement of popular opinion in the city and charts and explains Labour's progress from the subordinate position of 1939 to their

full role, as England's third city, in the war effort as the home of various major industrial plants; the city endured its own Blitz; it played host to a large number of American servicemen; Manchester contained the full spectrum of the electorate from solid, industrial working-class constituencies such as Gorton and Plating to middle-class suburbs such as Rusholme and Withington; furthermore Manchester had strong political traditions for although predominantly Conservative (the city represented a typical example of Lancastrian working-class Conservatism), it also possessed a strong Labour Party and had been the home of free-trade Liberalism;³ finally, the city tended to mirror national electoral trends, no more so than in 1945. Manchester can be considered representative of urban Britain.

To demonstrate how political trends developed as the War progressed, the thesis runs chronologically, and is divided into six chapters. Chapter One examines the historiographical debate surrounding British politics in the Second World War and the movement of opinion leading to the election result of 1945 via the two models referred to earlier. Chapter Two outlines the architecture of Manchester's politics by an analysis of employment structure, levels of unemployment and poverty, the condition of the housing stock and electoral trends at both Parliamentary and municipal level during the inter-war period. Chapter Three explores political developments from the outbreak of war up to the publication of the Beveridge Report in December 1942, and asks whether the early years of war fostered a spirit of unity among Mancunians. The chapter questions popular attitudes towards social and economic reconstruction and politics in general, and examines party relations and policies during the initial years of the Churchill Coalition. Late 1942 is generally recognised as a turning point, both militarily and in terms of Government planning for reconstruction, making it a logical end point for the first phase of analysis of wartime Manchester. Chapter Four examines the period from late 1942 to the end of 1943, analysing the effect of the improving military situation and the political fallout from the publication of the Beveridge Report on public attitudes towards social reform and political loyalties. With reconstruction becoming a more pressing and visible issue, the chapter also analyses the reactions of the Manchester parties to Beveridge and other reconstruction issues to ascertain whether or not a local consensus was emerging. Chapter Five deals exclusively with 1944, examining the reaction of Manchester's press, public, political parties and interest groups to the publication of a range of White Papers on Britain's post-war future. It also provides a

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The dissertation argues that the War did not instigate a consensus on Britain's social and economic future between the Manchester political parties and that, in reality, the divide between the parties at local level was greater than that which existed between the respective national leaderships. This became particularly apparent from 1943 onwards when the parties began to address the question of social and economic reconstruction. The Conservative Party, having enjoyed a highly successful decade in the 1930s, saw no reason to change a winning programme in the midst of the unique circumstances of total war and remained committed to a strong emphasis on neo-liberalism throughout the War. The Labour Party, meanwhile, was concerned about the increasing popularity of the Communist Party and later of the success of the Common Wealth Party. In consequence, Labour refused to contemplate any compromise of party policies aligning them too closely with the Conservatives, which could lead to the Party being outflanked on the left. The thesis argues the possibility of consensus was further undermined by the stability of party politics in the city. All the parties saw the Coalition Government as a strictly short-term measure, and consequently political relationships in the city remained fraught with bitter disputes occurring regularly as each party sought to gain or maintain a political advantage. With the basis of politics remaining unchallenged by the War, cross-party consensus was never likely to extend beyond a shared desire to see the successful prosecution of the War.

Addressing the second strand of the thesis, Labour benefited from massive popular interest in social and economic reconstruction, which was a major feature of the country from 1940 onwards. However, it is argued that this popular interest was tempered by class considerations, with Labour's 1945 election victory being attributable not to the support of a broad-cross section of the electorate but to a significantly increased level of support amongst the ranks of the manual working-class and younger voters of all classes. Established middle-class Conservative voters overwhelmingly remained loyal to their party throughout the War. Therefore, younger voters aside, the War further polarised the electorate along class lines; this polarisation began in the inter-war years but was intensified by class antagonisms during the War. 1943 is identified as the crucial turning point in popular political views, and by the end of 1944, the Conservatives' defeat was inevitable. The dissertation also rejects the view that Labour's victory marked the culmination of left-wing fervour. Rather, there was a strong mood of anti-Conservatism, as opposed to any real enthusiasm for Labour, which was responsible for the Party's success.

The dissertation therefore supports revisionist interpretations of wartime party politics and the success of the Labour Party in 1945.

References and Notes.

All works published in London unless otherwise stated.

¹ P. Addison, The Road to 1945 (Jonathan Cape, 1975).

² K. Jefferys, The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). N. Tiratsoo, S. Fielding & P. Thompson, England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

³ Working-class Conservatism was particularly strong in Lancashire. This was largely due to antagonism towards Irish immigrants and their Catholicism, as a strain of militant Protestantism ran through many working-class communities in 19th Century Lancashire. The Church of England was promoted by the Conservatives, along with the Monarchy, as symbols of English national pride, and patriotism, Protestantism and the Conservative Party were united in an ideology with significant populist appeal.

Chapter One.

A Decisive Watershed? The Historiography of Domestic British Politics in the Second World War.

Introduction.

To place Manchester in its wider political context, it is necessary firstly to explore the historiographical debate surrounding Second World War British politics. The chapter will address two major historiographical themes: the issues of wartime consensus and the 'swing to the left' in popular opinion. The chapter begins by analysing the 'orthodox' view of consensus, including its manifestations, origins and consequences, before turning its attention to the revisionist interpretations of wartime politics that cast doubt on the existence of any significant degree of inter-party agreement. It progresses to an analysis of the debate surrounding the movement in popular opinion that led to the Labour Party landslide election victory of 1945. It demonstrates how 1945 was orthodoxically portrayed as the consequence of wartime radicalism, before examining the views of revisionists who claim that Labour, despite their victory, held little appeal for the majority of voters.

The Historiography of Consensus.

Until the publication of Addison's The Road to 1945 (1975), British politics during the Second World War was a relatively barren area of historical research. For three decades a widespread view existed that, with the major parties agreeing an electoral truce on 23 September 1939 and then the formation of an all-party coalition government in May 1940, 'normal' politics had been suspended 'for the duration' with all energies concentrated instead on winning the War. The period consequently lacked a single, comprehensive political study, with the historiography of the Second World War focusing on the military, diplomatic and social (especially life during the Blitz) aspects of the War. Addison's study dramatically reversed this trend, spawning a plethora of further analyses and engendering a continuing debate.¹

Far from being a period of little interest to the political historian Addison concluded that the Second World War had tremendous repercussions on the course of British politics. He argued that the War initiated a period of consensus at elite level that underpinned policy decisions by successive governments for a generation. He accepts that differences between the Labour and Conservative parties, particularly at grass-roots and back-bench level remained profound, but between the front benches the pressures and experiences of the Home Front led to the emergence of a Whitehall consensus around an agreed framework of core values. Even between front benches Addison concedes that there were sharp differences, but claims these were ultimately subjugated to an agreed vision for post-war Britain. Addison has subsequently revisited and marginally revised his original thesis, but this central conclusion remains.² This consensus emerged not from a period of sharp political conflict but from the inter-war Baldwinite consensus of 'safety first' which rejected bold state action in economic and social policy, in spite of the massive problems afflicting Britain's traditional industrial regions. The new, progressive consensus that emerged from the War would have appeared almost revolutionary in 1939 but by 1945 was, Addison argues, approved by all the major parties. Labour's victory in the 1945 general election was, therefore, not decisive in shaping the post-war settlement, for Attlee's administration was simply completing and consolidating legislation agreed during the wartime Coalition. 'Mr Attlee's Consensus' centred on the provision of a comprehensive, universal, welfare state (including a free National Health Service) to provide cover from 'cradle to grave'; a commitment to full employment; an acceptance of a mixed economy of public and private enterprise and the adoption of Keynesian economic policies of demand management. Advocates of the consensus thesis claim these core policies formed the basis of both Conservative and Labour government thinking until at least the election of Heath's administration in 1970 and possibly as late as Thatcher's premiership in 1979.³

Although the first to popularise the thesis, Addison was not the first to identify a wartime consensus. In 1945, a number of contemporary writers and politicians found little apparent difference between the main political protagonists. The sociologist Mark Abrams, reviewing the 1945 election in its immediate aftermath, wrote; "From an

examination of the campaign literature officially provided by the headquarters of the parties it was difficult to discover any basic conflicts separating the left from the right.”⁴ Even Winston Churchill, in his first speech as the Leader of the Opposition, remarked; “Here and there, there may be differences of emphasis or view, but in the main no parliament has ever assembled with such a mass of agreed legislation.”⁵ Amongst historians, ten years before the appearance of The Road to 1945, Beer was discussing the beginnings of ‘policy convergence’ during the War in his Modern British Politics,⁶ while in the late 1960s Calder also identified the Second World War as the begetter of a political consensus. He argued;

From the consensus which was now developing sprang the ideology which was to govern the practice of both parties after the war. Capitalism, and with it a system of powerful private interests, must be preserved; but the state would take a positive role in promoting its efficiency, which would include measures of nationalization. In effect, this consensus included the whole of the centre of the British political life; Cripps and Eden, Herbert Morrison and R.A. Butler, the Liberal Action Group and the Tory Reformers, William Beveridge and William Temple and many influential members of the Fabian Society...Superficially, party strife was recovering from 1942 onwards, and the Beveridge debate came to symbolize in the public mind the difference between Labour and Conservatives. Yet at the same time the coalition was laying the foundations of a post-war policy which both parties accepted, but which it fell to Labour to execute.⁷

In 1974 Gamble took up the consensus ‘torch’, demonstrating how Conservative attitudes had shifted during the War and how a group of Conservatives, who had been on the margins of British politics in the 1930s, such as Harold Macmillan and R.A. Butler, became some of the major shapers of the direction of policy.⁸

In the twenty-four years since the publication of The Road to 1945 many other studies have re-affirmed Addison’s central thesis. Seldon agrees that the War replaced one consensus with another, arguing that a consensus existed in the 1930s until the early years of World War Two, with the Conservatives then having to accept a leftward move in the policy agenda in the 1940s.⁹ Kavanagh and Morris have also identified large areas of agreement between Conservatives and Labour from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s, again recognising the critical role of the War as its instigator. Indeed, they have widened

the scope of consensus to incorporate two areas of policy left untouched by The Road to 1945, foreign policy and industrial relations.¹⁰ In a recent British political textbook, Jones and Robins have argued; “What was created during the war years and immediately afterwards was a political consensus that was to characterise British political culture for three decades”, while Burch and Wood accept that out of the War emerged a consensus on an increased role for the state in economic and social policy.¹¹ Deakin has suggested that a consensus emerged in 1943, while Marquand dates the starting point of consensus as June 1944, when the Coalition published its White Paper on post-war employment policy.¹² Other advocates of the wartime consensus thesis include Searle, Ingle, and Dorey.¹³

Whilst most studies examine a broad range of policies in arriving at their conclusion, others have looked in more detail at specific policy areas, and have also found a large degree of continuity. In separate studies, Marquand and Hill have argued that the welfare state that emerged after the War was in large part a consolidation of measures already enacted or accepted in principle.¹⁴ Meanwhile Middlemas, in his magisterial study of the politics of industry has identified the War as instigator of “corporate bias”. In his view, the 1944 Employment White Paper was the key to the post-war settlement, and the basis of a new social contract between trade unions, employers and the Government. Although the terms of this contract were subject to re-negotiation, the contract itself represented a new style of economic management, accepted by all administrations between 1945-74.¹⁵

The Origins of Consensus.

All these studies recognise the decisive role played by the War in the creation of a consensus which dominated British politics. But how did such a consensus emerge? The answer, consensus advocates suggest, lays in the nature of total war. A range of inter-related factors combined to produce a new policy direction, but one must begin by looking at what may best be described as the wartime spirit.

For advocates of the consensus thesis, 1940 is one of the great turning points in the twentieth century. Calder, for example, states; “A consensual memory of 1940 was in

fact an important basis for the political consensus which was achieved after the war.”; and Clarke has argued; “National unity, in the face of the grimmest threat the country had ever faced, pushed aside ordinary party politics; yet it is hardly too much to say that 1940 brought a political revolution.”¹⁶ Put simply, the prevailing view contended; “1940 marked the end of the ‘bad times’ and the beginning of the ‘good times’”.¹⁷ The popular view of British society from this point to the end of the War is of a people united as never before in defiance of a common enemy. From the time of Dunkirk the British people were, in the famous phrase, “all in it together” and united by a spirit of self-sacrifice. This was very much, in Churchill’s phrase, the “people’s war” in which everyone was involved, regardless of sex, age, class or ethnicity, sharing the same risks and hardships. People were thrown together into the melting pot of war and developed a greater sense of community and companionship towards their fellow man. Government policies served to reinforce these tendencies. Rationing, evacuation, conscription and communal air-raid shelters were believed to have strengthened social cohesion. ‘Equality of sacrifice’ was the cry.

It is, of course, the Blitz that most catches the imagination. The enduring image of the Blitz is that of a tightly knit community standing shoulder-to-shoulder in defiance of German bombs. Bombs were the great equaliser, incapable of distinguishing between rich and poor and the folk-memory remains of communal singing in the underground shelters where people of all walks of life took their nightly refuge, of shop signs reading ‘Open as Usual’ despite bomb-damage from the night before, of the King and Queen visiting the bombed East End after their own “House” was damaged in the ultimate symbol of equality of risk, and an overall atmosphere of brave, cheery resolution that ensured Londoners (and inhabitants of other cities) would not be intimidated by Hitler. In the summer of 1940, R.H. Tawney told the American people that the War had brought to the surface those ‘elementary decencies’ which bound British society together: ‘good faith;’ tolerance; respect for opinions which we do not share; consideration for the unfortunate; equal justice for all.’¹⁸ A.J.P. Taylor believed that ‘England Arose’, a theme also propagated by Orwell’s The Lion and the Unicorn, and in 1942 the Labour

historian, G.D.H. Cole wrote of the 'deep sense of national unity which holds us together as a people'.¹⁹

This belief was not confined to contemporaries, for modern historians have repeated the claim. Brooke, in his comprehensive study of the wartime Labour Party suggests; "During the war, the question of class versus community was resolved forcefully in favour of the latter" and that "the war emphasised Britain's essential unity."²⁰ Marquand contends; "There is plenty of evidence to suggest that a class-divided, socially-fragmented people discovered reserves of solidarity which it had not known it possessed; and that part of the reason was that, in however muddled a fashion, the political nation accepted an ethic of equality of sacrifice."²¹ Ordinary people were the basis of the war effort and for Calder the fact that the ruling classes now needed the help of the everyday 'man in the street' was crucial to the post-war settlement. He argues;

Between them, the threat of invasion and the actuality of aerial bombardment had exaggerated a tendency noted in the previous world war. In a conflict on such a scale, as 1914-18 had shown, the nation's rulers, whether they liked it or not, depended on the willing co-operation of the ruled, including even scorned and underprivileged sections of society, manual workers and women. This co-operation must be paid for by concessions in the direction of a higher standard of living for the poor, greater social equality and improved welfare services. For the conscripts in the armed forces were dangerous enemies to the old social order: jolted out of their acceptance of it by communal travel, hardship and danger. The rifle aimed at the enemy might be turned on the ruling classes, as it was in Russia.²²

The social solidarity of the war years, it is claimed, led to an enhanced social conscience among middle and upper-class citizens towards their poorer countrymen, leading to a willingness to accept egalitarian and collectivist policies. These sentiments were augmented by illuminating and shocking social findings. Evacuation and the bombing of British cities highlighted the substandard condition of a significant proportion (around one-third) of the nation's housing, with wealthier sections of society made aware of the conditions in which many of their fellow citizens lived. The evacuation of schoolchildren highlighted levels of poverty. Shortly before the outbreak

of war, thousands of (mostly) working-class children were evacuated from the cities to new homes in the suburbs or the country. The condition of many of these children, the conventional argument contends, shocked and alarmed their largely middle-class hosts: stories were rife of verminous, illiterate children who did not know how to use a knife and fork, had little idea of personal hygiene and who were content to use the living room as a lavatory.²³ The then Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, was shocked by such findings.²⁴ In an argument first put forward by Titmuss in his study of wartime social policy, and later supported by Thorpe and Addison, the revelations of evacuation led to many in the wealthier classes resolving to tackle the poverty, bad housing and disease which blighted working-class life.²⁵

Simultaneously, the War changed popular perceptions of what the state was capable of by necessitating extensive state control of industry, food, materials and manpower, dubbed “war socialism” by Conservatives. Crucially, what the Government had maintained was impossible in the inter-war years, state action to eradicate unemployment, was now shown to be both practical and achievable. The new emphasis on the state represented a change in the political culture that would underpin the post-war regime, regardless of the Party in power;

The British state was, by any reckoning, remarkably successful, both by the standards of its own past, and by the standards of the other belligerents. It was successful, moreover, not only in raising armies and waging war, but in the gentler activities which Keynesians, planners and social reformers wanted it to undertake in peace. Ministers and civil servants turned out to be surprisingly good at managing the economy. No one who looked at the contrast between the fully-employed, highly mobilised command economy could deny that, in some circumstances, state intervention might be considerably more efficient than the higgles of the market.²⁶

On the same theme, Harris has claimed;

Public discussion in the mid 1940s constituted a profound break with some of the major conventions of the previous hundred years. Promises, programmes and planning had become the norm: those who questioned their validity now occupied the eccentric minority position previously occupied by programmers and planners. This change in perceptions of the mutual relationship between society and state. The older view of

politics had seen society as essentially 'given', as something which might change or evolve with the course of history or according to its own inner dynamics but which at any given moment in time was largely outside the control of its members. The new view of politics saw society as something that could be moulded and modified, made and un-made by acts of political will.²⁷

Putting it into the consensus perspective, Addison argues; "Whether ministers were Conservative or Labour, they were borne along by a belief in the state as a modernizing influence."²⁸

All these factors combined to sweep along the political parties towards a new, progressive consensus and the Coalition began to draw up plans for reconstruction from late 1942 onwards. Addison contends that, with leading Conservatives accepting there could be no return to the laissez-faire capitalism of the 1930s and with Labour maintaining its revisionist beliefs under the firm control of the Right (Attlee, Bevin and Morrison), the Coalition converged on the ideas of 'middle-opinion', a grouping first identified by Marwick in the 1960s.²⁹ 'Middle-opinion' had developed as a consequence of the economic depression that had prevailed in large parts of Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. Government appeared impotent, with orthodox Treasury doctrine failing to provide any effective solution. Consequently a number of groups, such as Political and Economic Planning (founded 1931) and The Next Five Years Group (founded 1934) and individuals such as the Conservative, Harold Macmillan and the economist, J.M. Keynes, advocated a 'middle-way' in economic and social policies that would lie between capitalism and state socialism. The 'middle-way' advocated a new and greatly increased role for the state and throughout the 1930s papers were published advocating universal social security, a National Health Service, a planned economy through the public ownership of essential industries, government direction of investment and controls over the private sector, and the use of Keynesian techniques of demand management to achieve and sustain full employment.³⁰ In the conventional view of wartime consensus these ideas became generally acceptable to the leadership of the major parties in the second half of the War.

This consensus led to the 'White Paper Chase' of 1944, which saw the publication of a range of government documents relating to the shape of post-war Britain: on employment policy, social security, education, and town and country planning. Thus, by 1945, a "massive new middle ground had arisen in politics [with] all three parties going to the polls committed to principles of social and economic reconstruction which their leaders had endorsed as members of the coalition."³¹ Addison and other advocates of his thesis admit that during the election campaign the rhetorical debate between socialism and capitalism was renewed with acrimony but claims that the difference was exactly that - rhetorical. He believes; "In practice, the Conservative and Labour leaders had by-passed most of it in favour of pragmatic reform in a mixed economy."³² Similar conclusions have been reached by Middlemas, Dutton and O'Gorman.³³

The Revisionist Interpretation of Wartime Politics.

Among proponents of the consensus thesis the content of the wartime settlement, and its origins, have aroused little controversy. There has, however, been a higher degree of disagreement surrounding the consequences of the wartime settlement. For most supporters of the Addison thesis, the wartime consensus resulted in a more benevolent and fairer society, which ensured that there would be no return to the conditions experienced by many in the 1930s. The consensus was a "good thing". Addison himself stated that the consensus was "positive and purposeful: the basis of a more enlightened and humane society."³⁴ However, whilst accepting that a consensus did exist some historians, and both sides of the political spectrum, have been critical of the wartime settlement. Calder sees the consensus as a negative construct. Although it had been a "People's War", he interprets the wartime consensus as a victory for the forces of privilege and bureaucracy over the 'participatory democracy' of 1940-42. He wrote;

The war was fought with the willing brains and hearts of the most vigorous elements in the community, the educated, the skilled, the active, the young who worked more and more consciously towards a transformed post-war world. Thanks to their energy, the forces of wealth, bureaucracy and privilege survived with little inconvenience, recovered from their shock, and began to proceed with their old business of manoeuvre, concession and studied betrayal. Indeed, this war, which had set off a

ferment of participatory democracy was strengthening meanwhile the forces of tyranny, pressing Britain forward towards 1984.³⁵

Pelling has also suggested that the War was not greatly innovatory, having emerged victorious the British concluded that their institutions had been vindicated, thereby ensuring a post-war settlement that was much less radical than might have been the case; "Somehow or other, things in their own country were arranged much better than elsewhere in the world - even if, in limited directions only, there might be some room for improvement."³⁶ By the late 1960s and 1970s, left-wing writers were strongly critical of the Attlee Governments of 1945-51. In their judgement, by implementing the policies agreed upon by the wartime Coalition, Labour were merely collaborating with capitalism and deliberately ignoring the chance to create a socialist utopia.³⁷ The New Right, in the late 1970s and the 1980s, were also critical. The most notable attack on the wartime consensus came from Barnett who attacked the Coalition for its failure to address the fundamental problems created by Britain's industrial backwardness and was critical of 'utopian' reformers such as Beveridge for imposing on the economy the burden of an expensive welfare state.³⁸ In 1985 John Hoskyns, Mrs Thatcher's policy adviser at No. 10., summarized the New Right thesis; "In 1945 Britain committed itself to full employment by demand management and simultaneously embarked upon wholesale nationalisation and the creation of the welfare state, before rebuilding its productive base. It has not yet recovered - and may never recover - from this strategic error."³⁹

There has been an increasing tendency to challenge the orthodox view of wartime solidarity, and it is no longer regarded as axiomatic that the British people came together as never before, with a breaking-down of class barriers. This revisionism was reflected in a series of essays in War and Social Change. British Society in the Second World War (1986) and more recently in Tiratsoo, Fielding and Thompson's England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain. (1997)⁴⁰ They suggest that the War was far less disruptive of social relations than was once imagined. By concentrating on the Blitz and evacuation, Tiratsoo, Fielding and Thompson demonstrate that pre-war prejudices remained intact throughout the War and that, if anything, wartime experiences served to re-affirm these prejudices. In their study of the Blitz they dispute the notion of

the sharing of shelters and common danger breaking down class barriers and increasing 'mateyness'. They point out that only a small minority (around 13 per cent) actually used the Tube or other public shelters so, for the vast majority, the Blitz was a private, familial experience.⁴¹ Citing the example of Stepney in East London, they argue that a significant body of evidence suggests that even for the minority who did use public shelters, social harmony was fragile. The small West African and West Indian community in the area complained about discrimination, particularly from Jews, and of inferior air-raid accommodation. East End anti-Semitism also appeared to increase during the Blitz.⁴² Such evidence has led the authors to conclude; "The experience rarely brought people together to the extent that some imagined. As has been shown, family or neighbourhood loyalties sometimes remained paramount at moments of great danger. The image of a people standing together in communal defiance of the German bombs seems to be, in part, a myth."⁴³ England Arise! also challenges the belief that evacuation fostered a new social consciousness among the country's middle and upper-classes. Again, evacuation is perceived to have merely re-affirmed existing prejudices as the condition and behaviour of many of the children provoked not sympathy, but disgust and resentment among their hosts; bed-wetting and headlice were evidence of "lax moral standards" or a "needlessly unwholesome life style". As a result, as the War progressed, there was an increasing reluctance to accommodate evacuees.⁴⁴ Consequently, "The common danger and anxieties of war had certainly not diminished long-standing prejudices about the urban poor...Many host families continued to believe that the condition of the evacuee children reflected incompetence and laziness rather than social and economic deprivation."⁴⁵ As early as 1974, Marwick cast doubt on the belief that evacuation magically dispelled middle-class prejudices about their being a feckless and dirty section of the working-class.⁴⁶ Macnicol suggests that evacuation did help to construct an ideological climate favourable to welfarism but that it simultaneously boosted a conservative, behaviouristic analysis of poverty that viewed the root cause of the children's condition as family failure and poor parenting, suggesting a continuity with nineteenth century attitudes. Therefore; "evacuation probably served to reinforce existing [unfavourable] analyses of working-class poverty rather than to change them."⁴⁷

Morgan has also disputed the notion that the class system underwent drastic changes during the War; “It was clear...that the belief that the British class system dissolved or was basically modified during the war is a total myth...In some ways, the war hardened rather than dissolved social distinctions”⁴⁸ This view is supported by Cronin, who demonstrates that the 1945, 1950 and 1951 elections were the most class-dominated elections of the century. This, he points out, is hardly reconcilable with a unified civilian population.⁴⁹

Calder’s Myth of the Blitz (1991) examines the period from the outbreak of war to the end of the Blitz, and portrays the ‘spirit of 1940’ as a constructed myth that has become deeply ingrained in British thought. Although he emphasises that ‘myth’ does not necessarily imply untruth, he contends that the stereotyped clichés of the Blitz (‘London can take it’) were deliberately exaggerated for propaganda purposes for domestic and, more particularly, for American consumption. Far from being a people united in their eagerness to defeat Hitler, Calder suggests that in 1940 “latent pacifism was widespread” and that Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain did not destroy the mutual antipathy of workers and management characteristic of large sections of British industry.⁵⁰ In the early stages of the War; “What [people] experienced was a perturbing sense of anti-climax, during which class divisions in British society were demonstrated and exacerbated as at no time since the 1926 General Strike.”⁵¹ The bravery and togetherness of the British people under air assault is portrayed as a myth constructed during the London Blitz, partly to impress the Americans (the phrase ‘taking it’ was actually American) and once this basic ‘story’ was scripted it was simply transposed *en bloc* to any other city that was targeted. Mass Observation reports, Calder suggests, with their tales of panic, despair and depression, presented a very different picture from the standard view and demonstrated that “morale (however defined) remained potentially volatile throughout 1940.”⁵²

Tom Harrisson, the founder of Mass Observation, has suggested that recollections about the wartime spirit are nostalgic rather than realistic. In an experiment conducted in the 1970s Harrisson asked a number of his 1940 Observers to recall their memories of 1940 and without exception they told of a united people and the Dunkirk spirit whereas

their observations made in 1940 itself were shown to flatly contradict their later memories.⁵³ They had, at the time, described a society very similar to that portrayed by revisionist historians.

For a decade after The Road to 1945 Addison's thesis of a wartime consensus remained almost totally unchallenged.⁵⁴ However, since the mid-1980s doubt has been cast on the existence of consensus in key areas of policy. As Ritschel points out; "There is a growing body of revisionist opinion which contends that the belief in wartime consensus was little more than a congenial myth, born of the transitory solidarity of the Blitz and revived more recently by nostalgia for an idealised past of national unity and agreement."⁵⁵ For this school of thought the election of a Labour Government in 1945 was crucial to the shape of post-war British social and economic policy. The most noted, and persuasive, revisionist rebuttal of Addison has been Jefferys' The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945.⁵⁶ In this provocative study, Jefferys disputes the idea of the Coalition as a radical, reforming ministry and suggests that the maintenance of the agreement between Conservative and Labour leaders was contingent on agreeing to disagree. On crucial issues, where controversy threatened to erupt, such as over the future of voluntary hospitals or the future ownership of industry, party conflict was avoided only by postponing the matter under consideration; differences between the parties were not merely rhetorical but real differences of ideology and policy. The Coalition programme for reconstruction remained very much at the planning stage. For example, despite its popularity, the Beveridge Report was not implemented before 1945, and apart from the 1944 Education Act and the introduction of family allowances, no major piece of social legislation reached the statute books before the end of the War. Jefferys claims; "the reason for this was clear cut: it reflected, at base, intractable differences between the Coalition partners. The Government, to a large extent, was incapable of proceeding beyond promises of reform."⁵⁷ These 'intractable differences', he argues, were reflected in the various coalition White Papers which, far from being an agreed basis for a post-war settlement, were compromise documents that were sufficiently vague to allow very different interpretations. Furthermore neither Party planned to implement their proposals without amendments in the direction of respective

party policies. Thus; “Britain’s welfare state and mixed economy, in other words, were not cast in tablets of stone by the end of the war.”⁵⁸ He draws attention to the 1945 election and the nature of Labour’s legislation in the post-war years in support of this view. The election, he claims, far from being consensual, was “marked by profound and often bitterly expressed disagreements”, while the programme of the Labour Government was, distinctive from that of the wartime Coalition.⁵⁹ Jefferys does not challenge the view that a consensus existed in the 1950s and 1960s, but believes that its origins lay in the years after 1945 and selects 1947 as the starting point of consensus. From this time, he argues, the Labour Government began to lose its cohesion and radical sense of direction after being shaken by a series of economic crises and the Conservatives, after being shaken by their humiliating defeat, had rethought their domestic policies leading to The Industrial Charter (1947) which, he contends, broadly committed the Party to the mixed economy including an attachment to Keynesianism.

Another critic of the consensus thesis is Pimlott, who discounts the whole notion of consensus, even in its supposed heyday of the 1950s and 1960s. In a powerful polemic, ‘The myth of consensus’, he argues; “consensus is a mirage, an illusion that rapidly fades the closer one gets to it.”⁶⁰ He joins with Jefferys in claiming that 1945 was the most ferocious election campaign in post-war history, while he sees in the Attlee Governments deep battles between the parties over a wide range of policies, disputes that continued after Labour lost power in 1951; “Sandbagged in the electoral trenches, early post-war voters can be seen as the anonymous infantry of two implacably opposed armies in an era of adversarial politics, with the middle-way Liberals floundering in no man’s land.”⁶¹

Brooke, in his monograph on the wartime Labour Party, has also argued against a wartime consensus, claiming that debates about reconstruction “inevitably fell along party lines” and “in terms of policy, ideologically Labour retained a distinctive programme”⁶² Labour, he argues, were divided from the Conservatives by three key principles of social policy. In terms of social security, the Labour Party stood for subsistence level benefits, on health Labour envisaged a full-time state salaried staff working in health centres under the control of local authorities, which was in opposition

to the Conservatives' continued preference for the maintenance of private practice and voluntary hospitals; and on education Labour favoured multilateral schooling (an embryonic form of the comprehensive school) rather than the tripartite system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools. Such distinctions meant; "Differences more substantial than mere nuance or rhetoric persisted...It was obvious that Labour would take a more radical course if it took power after the war."⁶³ Morgan has identified a number of policy areas in which the Conservative and Labour parties and their supporters were significantly at odds; "On nationalisation, full employment, a National Health Service, housing, taxation, and much else in domestic policy, (not to mention India, Egypt, and other aspects of external policy) British political opinion was clearly polarized in Westminster and throughout the land."⁶⁴ Morgan also rejects the notion of 1945 being a consensual election and points out the extent of political polarization, of barely suppressed anger, was much noted by foreign observers.⁶⁵

Jefferys, Brooke and Morgan have all identified the health services as being an area of particular conflict, and indeed party conflict in the origins of the National Health Service has also been a significant theme of the health service's official historian, Charles Webster. He dismisses the view of the N.H.S. being a product of wartime consensus. He has complained that scholarship has hijacked the N.H.S. "to support the consensus as the basis for innovation in health policy"⁶⁶ and claims; "Although a skilful cosmetic exercise, the 1944 White Paper signified little progress in resolving acute disagreements over the future direction of policy."⁶⁷

A recent revisionist assault on the consensus thesis came with the publication in 1996 of a series of essays in The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History 1945-64.⁶⁸ In her study of social policy, Harriet Jones emphasises the continuing dominance of liberal ideas in the Conservative Party into the post-war years.⁶⁹ She argues that in response to the Labour Government's policies of nationalisation, universalism in the social services and the suppression of consumer demand through a continuing policy of austerity, the Conservatives soon articulated a distinctively Conservative alternative based around the values of the free market, low taxation and property ownership. Conservatives, she claims, were in no sense reconciled to the

welfare state in the years following the War. Instead there developed a strong opposition to the universalism and redistributive elements of the Labour programme, based upon the rejection of the use of the state as a tool to redistribute wealth or to maintain the egalitarian trends introduced during the war years.⁷⁰

Ellison, in his study of Labour's approach to social policy, draws a distinction between 'procedural' and 'substantive' consensus.⁷¹ He accepts that 'a notable level of procedural consensus' (a broad agreement amongst political elites about the basic direction of policy making) existed between the parties. However, at a 'substantive' level (that is ideological identification about the aims and objectives of specific policies) significant differences emerged. Consensus advocates, he claims, have focused too heavily on the procedural dimension, obscuring important substantive differences, and he examines the notion of equality in intra-party Labour debates in the 1940s and 1950s, pointing to competing visions of a socialist society within the Party, all of which were incompatible with Conservative objectives. This distinctiveness in Labour policy is also addressed by Francis who argues that the policies of the post-war Labour government owed less to wartime experience than commitment to its socialist ideology: "Far from pursuing the politics of consensus, in the areas of economic planning, public ownership, taxation, health, housing and education, the Attlee Government invested its policies with a specifically socialist character."⁷²

Kandiah examines the attitudes of the Conservative leadership and comes down firmly against consensus.⁷³ He points to the virulence of the 1945 General Election, claiming; "[The] campaign revealed the cleavages - not consensus or convergence - between Conservatives and Labour."⁷⁴ He argues that the Conservatives' 1945 platform was based on anti-socialism, the preservation of capitalism, limited reform, a belief in individual freedom, continued emphasis on the private sector, free markets and free enterprise - policies that set them well apart from Labour.⁷⁵ He rejects Jefferys' suggestion that the Conservative Party changed itself in the post-war years, claiming that the Party's platform in 1945 established broad parameters in which the Party was to operate in subsequent years. Kandiah accepts that there may have been superficial 'agreement on policy goals', but that underneath this veneer lay profound disagreements

between party leaders on policy solutions and over the details of how these solutions should be achieved; “The purpose of the ‘agreed’ goals for each of the parties was distinct; and the concept of society to be preserved or created was entirely different.”⁷⁶

The Swing to the Left and the 1945 General Election.

While the question of consensus has been the dominant theme of Second World War political historiography, a second widely examined theme has been the ‘swing to the left’ that produced Labour’s 1945 election victory. That such a swing did occur is indisputable. Labour had been heavily defeated in the general election of 1935 and by-elections held in the months prior to the War showed no evidence of a significant swing to Labour, but in 1945 Labour received 48 per cent of the vote, winning a massive majority of over 140 seats, their first Parliamentary majority and their largest until 1997.⁷⁷ The orthodox view of this ‘swing’ (Addison, Marwick, Adelman, Clarke, Brooke, and Morgan) contends that the War radicalised popular opinion, pushing the public (including, for the first time, substantial sections of the middle-class) in a leftward direction and away from the Conservative Party which had governed for virtually all of the inter-war period.

1940 is again identified as the pivotal turning point in mass opinion. The very forces which were bringing the parties together were paradoxically turning the electorate towards the Labour Party: military humiliation at Dunkirk turned the people against the pre-war (Conservative) “Guilty Men” who were responsible for the country’s military unpreparedness, while the new emphasis on equal shares, equality of sacrifice and the concept of “planning” appeared to vindicate much of what Labour had advocated in the 1930s.⁷⁸ This new mood stimulated a massive popular interest in building a ‘better Britain’ where there would be no return to the bad housing, unemployment and consequent poverty that blighted so many lives in the inter-war period. This determination was fuelled by memories of promises - ‘homes for heroes’ - that had been broken following World War One. It has been common for historians to suggest that the electorate went to the polls in 1945 with a clear vision of what the future should entail; “At the end of the war the majority had a clearer idea than ever before what it was they

expected from a modern, civilised society.”⁷⁹ Taylor agreed; “The British people had exchanged many of their imperialist values for those associated with the welfare state.”⁸⁰

For proponents of the orthodox view of the “swing to the left”, the relationship between Labour and the new popular mood was essentially unproblematic. Labour’s election victory of 1945 is portrayed as an enthusiastic endorsement of the Party’s policies and priorities which, it is claimed, were firmly in line with those of the electorate: a N.H.S., full employment and an enhanced welfare state. Addison is typical in uncritically accepting the premise that the radical mood of 1940 instigated a tide of support for Labour or, as he terms them, ‘Labour substitutes’ in by-elections, that culminated in the Party’s massive victory in 1945; “The trend was essentially towards left-wing attitudes, with the Labour Party as the natural beneficiary whenever party politics revived.”⁸¹ For Addison, the leftward swing peaked between 1940-42, suggesting that had a general election taken place in this period Labour would have received an even greater majority than in 1945.⁸² Labour built on this leftwards sentiment by enthusiastically endorsing measures of reconstruction while the Conservatives were seen as, at best, reluctant converts to the new social agenda. So, although Addison contends that both parties had accepted the ‘post-war settlement’, only Labour could be trusted to implement it.

Morgan also has little difficulty in explaining the relationship between popular sentiment and the Labour Party; “Labour’s victory, in short, can only reasonably be projected against the circumstances of the war years...Labour was uniquely identified with a sweeping change of mood during the war years and with the new social agenda that emerged. Labour alone seemed to understand and project the new mood.”⁸³ The belief that Labour was ‘uniquely identified’ with the new public mood has also been evident in the writings of Adelman and Clarke, who again trace Labour’s victory back to 1940; “The year 1940 [saw] the beginnings of the policy of ‘blood, toil, tears and sweat’ - the total mobilisation of the whole nation for the war effort, which implied a new emphasis on ‘planning’ and ‘egalitarianism’. These ideas fitted in pre-eminently with Labour’s ethos.”⁸⁴ Clarke argues; “In the last part of the war the Labour Party gave institutional form to the radical impulses of 1940-41.”⁸⁵

The Revisionist View of the Swing to the Left.

Although Labour's victory at the 1945 election was commonly believed to have represented enthusiastic support for Labour policies that dated back to the crisis year of 1940, this interpretation has come under attack. Fielding and Tiratsoo, for example, question the depth of pro-Labour sentiment during the War. In his provocative studies of popular opinion in 1942 and the 1945 General Election, Fielding argues that the radicalism of the British people, far from moving them towards one particular party, was actually moving them away from all parties, and suggests; "It is possible that it was this anti-party temper rather than any enthusiasm for any particular political organization, that was the most noteworthy characteristic of the radicalism produced by the 'people's war'"⁸⁶. Although he accepts that populism was mobilised primarily against the Conservatives, he contends that this did not automatically lead to support for Labour. Instead; "There was widespread uncertainty that any of the parties could be trusted to execute such a programme."⁸⁷ As late as the summer of 1944 a Gallup poll found that 36 per cent of its civilian sample felt politicians acted on the behalf of the country's interests, 35 per cent thought they looked out for themselves and 22 per cent suggested they were only concerned with party advantage.⁸⁸ To further support his view of the unpopularity of all political parties, Fielding points to the success of the (nominally) independent, Sir Stafford Cripps, in his attempt to enter the War Cabinet in early 1942 and the success of independent candidates in by-elections of that year. For Fielding, it was Cripps' very independence from political organisations that made him the second most popular politician (after Churchill) in the first four months of the year, while the success of independents represented more than just frustration at the country's poor military performance. During 1942 48 per cent of civilians lacked confidence in all the parties, while a poll taken six months later suggested little enthusiasm for a return to two-party politics.⁸⁹ Fielding emphasises that Labour's success in 1945 need not necessarily be evidence of the disappearance of anti-party sentiment and his study of the 1945 election portrays a largely politically apathetic population exhibiting little enthusiasm for either Conservative or Labour parties.⁹⁰ Many of those who did vote Labour, he suggests, did so despite many misgivings and largely because they did not

want a Conservative government, rather than because of any great understanding of, or support for, Labour's programme.⁹¹ Despite the impression of a massive Labour victory, he points out that the Party won only marginally more than 33 per cent of the votes of those eligible to exercise the franchise.⁹² Fielding is also careful to play down the extent to which the middle-class fell to Labour. Although admitting that the Labour vote in 1945 was more socially disparate than in pre-war years, he notes that even among the sections of the middle-classes in which Labour did best, more than twice as many still voted Conservative.⁹³ This suggests that the scale of any social consensus, as propagated by the traditional view of Labour's victory, has been exaggerated.

Fielding, Tiratsoo and Thompson's England Arise! challenges the belief that the British people knew what they wanted in 1945 and in consequence voted Labour. They point out that a Ministry of Information survey of 1942 found that between 5-20 per cent of the population had actually been thinking seriously about the country's future, with most favouring state-led solutions. However, they argue, the great majority of people did not share these interests or sentiments; "Above all else, the war had been extremely disruptive and so there was a common desire that it should be followed by a period of normalcy. The priority was to restart home and work-life on a civilian basis as quickly as possible. Wider questions seemed less pressing."⁹⁴ Although they accept that nobody wanted a return to the conditions of the 1930s, and that many did have 'vague and nebulous' ideas about the future, this tended to be the limit of popular thinking about political abstractions.⁹⁵ As with Fielding's election study, England Arise! suggests that many voted Labour for negative purposes, namely "because they actually disliked the Conservatives more than Attlee's party."⁹⁶

Sibley's study of the swing to Labour casts doubt on the orthodox view of both the timing of the swing, and the reasons for the Party's election victory. He disputes Addison's thesis that the Conservatives could not have won a general election at any point after mid-1940, claiming; "If there had been a general election in...1940 the Labour Party would not have won the landslide victory which it did win in 1945, but would probably have been quite decisively defeated."⁹⁷ Sibley argues that the swing to Labour was a longer-term movement than the orthodox view would suggest. In the early stages

of the War he suggests that the public mood was “massively favourable to the Labour Party’s programme”. However this not been translated into support for the Party itself.⁹⁸ He identifies three phases of public opinion between 1940-45 leading to Labour’s triumph: a generalised discontent in the very early stages of the War, changing to a focusing of this discontent on the Conservatives by 1942, followed by a crystallising of opinion in favour of Labour, expressed at by-elections in support for the “Labour substitute” candidates.⁹⁹ Sibley therefore identifies the real swing to Labour as occurring after 1942.

Sibley also disputes the widely held view that it was Labour’s commitment to full employment, the welfare state and the N.H.S. that led to their election victory. He demonstrates that although a majority during the War held views on specific issues which corresponded to Labour’s position, polls taken after the election suggests that attitudes towards policy were rarely given as reasons for voting Labour and points out that a current view held by psephologists about the post-war electorate is that specific policies rarely motivated voting behaviour and that negative or vague motives and habit were much more common, at least among Labour voters.¹⁰⁰ He submits; “There seems to have been a considerable negative and vague element in the motives if those who voted Labour.”¹⁰¹

Jefferys insists that the real swing to Labour did not occur until after 1942. The ‘radical spirit’ of 1940 has been overstated as an explanation of Labour’s success in 1945, the emotions of that year were inevitably superseded by other influences and experiences, according to how the War unfolded.¹⁰² In 1940-42 the Conservatives suffered in the public eye because of the shortcomings of the war effort, but contends that the Conservative malaise only became irreversible after 1943 when the Party shunned the chance of implementing far-reaching social reform.¹⁰³

Conclusion.

The last fifteen years have witnessed a fundamental shift in interpretations of wartime politics. The earlier, generally accepted truism of the War representing a watershed, instigating a bold, new, cross-party consensus on social and economic issues emerging

from an unprecedented degree of unification amongst the British people has been replaced by an increasingly widespread revisionist view that the War had, in reality, little long-term repercussions on the course of British politics. The perception of Britons 'all pulling together' are now regarded as mythical and nostalgic, while studies of party politics stress the extent of continuing differences between the main political protagonists.

In the same vein, explanations for Labour's historic victory at the 1945 General Election have been subject to significant re-interpretations. For some time the result of the election was perceived as the consequence of enthusiastic cross-class support for Labour policies, which appeared to enmesh with the public mood. Now, however, it is more commonly argued that the 1945 election polarised the electorate on class lines, and that many of those who voted Labour for the first time did so without enthusiasm, simply because Labour was less unpopular than the Conservatives. The dissertation will now address Manchester politics and will suggest that the revisionists have put forward a more defensible interpretation of wartime British politics.

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- ³⁸ C. Barnett, The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation (Macmillan, 1986).
- ³⁹ Cited in D. Ritschel, ‘The making of consensus: The Nuffield College Conferences during the Second World War’, in Twentieth Century British History, 6, 3, (1995), pp. 268-269.
- ⁴⁰ H. Smith (ed), War and Social Change. British Society in the Second World War, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). N. Tiratsoo, S. Fielding, and P. Thompson, England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

41 N. Tiratsoo et al, England Arise!, p. 25.

42 Ibid., p. 26.

43 Idem. This point has also been made by Marwick. Although accepting that there are numerous personal records of friendliness and social contact which seemed to transcend normal social barriers, he claims that this can be explained by a need, in time of danger, to communicate freely and around conditions of social isolation. A. Marwick, The Home Front. The British and the Second World War (Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 60. An account of London during the War, and during the Blitz specifically can be found in P. Ziegler, London at War 1939-1945 (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995). For the Blitz see pp. 113-178.

44 N. Tiratsoo et al, England Arise!, pp. 22-23.

45 Ibid., p. 21.

46 A. Marwick, War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century (Macmillan, 1974) pp. 156-7.

47 J. Macnicol, 'The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to state intervention' in Smith (ed), War and Social Change, p. 24.

48 K. Morgan, The People's Peace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 17.

49 Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 59.

50 Calder, The Myth of the Blitz, pp. 90-118. For a wide ranging revisionist view of 1940, also see C. Ponting, 1940. Myth and Reality (Hamish Hamilton, 1990). He ruthlessly exposes 'myths' particularly concerning Britain's military performance. Dunkirk, for example, is portrayed not as a heroic venture but as an almost shameful episode.

51 Calder, Myth of the Blitz p. 59.

52 Ibid., p. 116. This can be contrasted with Thorpe's view that a number of indicators, such as willingness to participate in voluntary war-work and popular opinion regarding those who were seen as defeatist, pacifist or disloyal to the war effort, suggest that British civilian morale, whilst fluctuating, remained at a level compatible with prosecuting the war effort throughout the period 1939-45. Thorpe, 'Britain', in Noakes

(ed), Civilian in War, pp. 14-35.

⁵³ T. Harrison, Living Through the Blitz (Collins, 1976), pp. 324-330. Harrison himself believes that the Blitz had little or no long-term effect on social habits.

⁵⁴ However, the first signs of a revisionist approach are perhaps visible in J. Lee, The Churchill Coalition 1940-1945 (Batsford Academic and Education, 1980). He draws attention to a number of areas, particularly economic and health policies, to highlight significant and continuing differences of policy.

⁵⁵ Ritschel, 'The making of consensus', in Twentieth Century British History, 6,3, (1995), pp. 267-301.

⁵⁶ K. Jefferys, The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). Also see his earlier article, 'British politics and social policy during World War Two', in Historical Journal, (1987), pp. 123-144.

⁵⁷ Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.6. Thorpe also concludes that significant differences still existed between the parties. A. Thorpe, A History of the British Labour Party (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 107-110.

⁵⁹ Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 188 & pp. 209-217. Surprisingly little work has been conducted in the general area of women and consensus. While work has been conducted on the economic impact of the War on women's lives, there is still very little known about overall attitudes towards the role of women in society. This represents a fruitful area of research, for undoubtedly more should be known about the party positions concerning women.

⁶⁰ B. Pimlott, 'The myth of consensus', in L. Smith (ed), Echoes of Greatness, (Macmillan, 1988), pp. 129-141.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 136.

⁶² Brooke, Labour's War, pp. 9-10.

⁶³ S. Brooke, 'The Labour Party and the Second World War' in A. Gorst (ed) Contemporary British History 1931-1961 (Lewis Johnman and W. Scott Lucas, 1991), p.5. Brooke, Labour's War, pp. 229-230.

⁶⁴ Morgan, People's Peace, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁶ C. Webster, The Health Service Since the War. Vol 1. Problems of Health Care. The National Health Service Before 1957. (H.M.S.O., 1988), p. 56. See also Webster's 'Conflict and consensus. Explaining the British health service', in Twentieth Century British History, 1, 2, (1990), pp. 115-151.

⁶⁷ Cited in Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 131. Similar views have been expressed by J. Lee, The Churchill Coalition and R. Klein, The Politics of the N.H.S., (Longman, 1989). Lee claims that the white paper on the proposed national health service had no serious chance of being translated into legislation by the Coalition, while Klein argues that if everyone was agreed about the end of policy in a general way, there was little by consensus about means. For a more consensual view of the origins of the N.H.S., see D.Fox, 'The National Health Service and the Second World War: The elaboration of consensus', in Smith (ed), War and Social Change, pp. 32-57. He sees a health service consensus stretching back to the end of World War One, and sees the Second World War as the 'crowning point' of consensus.

⁶⁸ Jones and Kandiah, (eds), The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History 1945-64 (Macmillan, 1996).

⁶⁹ H. Jones, 'A bloodless counter-revolution. The Conservative Party and the defence of inequality 1945-51' in Jones and Kandiah (eds), Myth of Consensus, pp. 1-16.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷¹ N. Ellison, 'Consensus here, consensus there...But not consensus everywhere: the Labour Party, equality and social policy in the 1950s' in Jones and Kandiah (eds), Myth of Consensus, pp. 17-39.

⁷² M. Francis, ' 'Not reformed capitalism but...democratic socialism': the ideology of the Labour leadership 1945-51' in Jones and Kandiah (eds), Myth of Consensus, pp. 40-57.

⁷³ M. Kandiah, 'Conservative leaders, strategy and 'consensus'? 1945-64.' in Jones and Kandiah (eds), Myth of Consensus, pp. 58-78.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

⁷⁵ A similar argument can be found in N. Tiratsoo et al, England Arise!, p. 90. They

argue that the electorate was offered a very distinct choice of returning to pre-war private enterprise or a state-run economy.

⁷⁶ Kandiah, 'Conservative leaders', in Jones and Kavanagh (eds), Myth of Consensus, p. 74.

⁷⁷ B. Evans and A. Taylor, From Salisbury to Major. Continuity and Change in Conservative Politics, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 52.

⁷⁸ For a brief analysis of the various factors put forward to explain the 'swing to the left', see R. Sibley, 'The swing to Labour during the Second World War: when and why?', in Labour History Review, 55,1,(1990), pp. 23-34.

⁷⁹ Cited in T.Mason and P. Thompson, "'Reflections on a revolution?' The political mood in war-time Britain', in N. Tiratsoo (ed), The Attlee Years (Pinter,1991), p. 55.

⁸⁰ Cited in S. Fielding, 'The Second World War and popular radicalism: the significance of the 'movement away from party'', in History, 80, (1995), p. 38.

⁸¹ Addison, Road to 1945, pp. 127-128.

⁸² Ibid., p. 162.

⁸³ K. Morgan, Labour in Power (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1985), p.44.

⁸⁴ P. Adelman, The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945 (Longman House, 1996), p.84.

⁸⁵ Clarke, Hope and Glory, p. 214.

⁸⁶ Fielding, 'Second World War and popular radicalism', in History, 80, (1995), p. 40.

⁸⁷ Idem.

⁸⁸ S. Fielding, 'What did "the people" want? : the meaning of the 1945 General Election' in Historical Journal, 35, 3, (1992), p. 629.

⁸⁹ Fielding, 'Second World War and popular radicalism', in History, pp. 51-54.

⁹⁰ Fielding, 'What did "the people" want?', in Historical Journal, 35, 3, (1992), pp. 623-639.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 639.

⁹² Idem.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 638.

⁹⁴ Tiratsoo et al, England Arise!, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Idem. Similar conclusions are reached in Mason and Thompson, 'Reflections on a

revolution?', in Tiratsoo (ed), Attlee Years, pp. 54-70. They argue that public opinion remained rather unfocused, or agnostic, about anything other than 'bread and butter' measures of amelioration. Furthermore, they argue, enthusiasm for change did not necessarily imply a belief in class-wide or collective solutions. Most voters were interested only how any changes would affect *themselves*.

⁹⁶ Mason and Thompson, 'Reflections on a revolution', in Tiratsoo (ed), Attlee Years, p. 67.

⁹⁷ Sibley, 'The swing to Labour', in Labour History Review, 55, 1, (1990), pp. 23-34.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰² Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 36.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 139. This is also the view of Ramsden. See J. Ramsden, The Age of Churchill and Eden 1940-1957 (Longman, 1995), pp. 66-67.

Chapter Two.

The Social and Political Structure of Inter-War Manchester.

Introduction.

This chapter briefly analyses Manchester's socio-economic conditions and political trends between 1918-1939, and argues that the period witnessed an increasingly strong tendency towards class polarisation. This polarisation, it will be suggested, was reflected in the city's transformation from three party politics to two party politics in both Parliamentary and municipal elections, as the Liberals faded into near-obscurity. However, the process of class polarisation was far from complete by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Socio-Economic Conditions in Inter-War Manchester.

Manchester, in common with other traditional industrial areas of Britain, knew hard times between the Wars. Fortunately Manchester did not rely, contrary to popular beliefs, on the cotton industry for employment and the city's complex industrial base protected it against the worst effects of the Depression (see Table 2.1):

Table 2.1: Occupational Structure of Manchester & Salford, 1923-37. Estimated Numbers of Insured Workers, aged 16-64, July 1923 & July 1937.¹

Industry	1923	1937	Increase\Decrease (%)
Transport & Distribution	71 240	91 510	28+
Engineering & Metals (including electrical engineering)	69 850	80 060	15+
Clothing	34 000	45 230	33+
Cotton & Textiles	41 660	36 530	12-
Building	19 080	24 090	27+
Printing & Publishing	11 150	15 960	43+
Food & Drink	10 370	14 690	42+
Chemicals	8 650	10 670	23+
Rubber	11 970	9 570	20-
Hotels etc	7 310	8 880	21+
Coal	7 610	5 650	26-
Docks	7 040	4 740	33-
Laundries	2 300	4 140	80+
All other industries & services	84 140	108 500	29+
Total, all industries and services	386 370	460 220	19+

Manchester was more reliant on heavy engineering and locomotive works, munitions, electrical plant, and structural steel, chains and wire were all manufactured on an extensive scale. Manchester engineering production far surpassed that of cotton, and employed twice as many people.² The city also had other interests, including banking and commerce, chemicals (based at Trafford Park) and foodstuffs (again based at Trafford Park and reliant on imports from the Docks). With these diverse interests, levels of unemployment were lower in Manchester than the national average and did not begin to approach the levels of the worst afflicted areas but the figures were still high (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Insured Population in Manchester Registered as Unemployed
1927-1936 (%). ³

YEAR	0%
1927	7.3
1928	7.6
1929	8.4
1930	17.8
1931	18.7
1932	16.3
1933	15.9
1934	13.9
1935	13.4
1936	11.3

There were several demonstrations in the city protesting about the level of unemployment and further bad feeling was created by the terms of unemployment relief, including the dreaded ‘means test’, which was perhaps detested more in Lancashire than in any other part of Britain. A cut in benefit rates in 1931 provoked one of the largest demonstrations in the city during this period. In early October, a week after agitation in neighbouring Salford over such cuts, 5,000 marchers assembled at Ardwick Green with the aim of marching to the Town Hall and forcing the City Council to accept a deputation. When police informed the marchers that they could not use the planned route they rushed the police cordon. Fighting broke out in which stones and hammer-heads were reported to have been thrown. Policemen were pulled from their horses and a police baton charge was made in which 6 people were hurt and 38 arrested. The following day the police put a guard on shops, banks, courts and other public buildings in the city and Special Constables were mobilised on a large scale for the first time since the General Strike.⁴

There were parts of the city where unemployment was much higher than those listed above, notably in the inner residential ring of Miles Platting, Chorlton-on Medlock, Hulme, Ancoats, Angel Meadow and Red Bank. Investigators from Manchester University in 1934 found a quarter of all households contacted in Miles Platting had no earned income from any family member and among adult males in the sample no less

than 42.5 per cent were unemployed at the time of the survey.⁵ Not surprisingly, social investigations in the city found the worst examples of poverty in these areas. In October 1932 Alf Purcell, Secretary of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council declared; "Winter is upon us. Want and hunger are rife in our midst. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in Manchester and Salford are going short of many things they need; are in desperate want; are going hungry; are suffering numerable privations."⁶ A survey of Miles Platting in 1933 found 18 per cent of the area's population were living in primary poverty and a further 26 per cent living in secondary poverty (defined as a level of income between 0-50 per cent above the poverty line).⁷ A survey conducted by the Manchester University Settlement, carried out in Ancoats in 1937-38, found an even worse situation. This survey of 254 households found that 30.7 per cent of the population was living in primary poverty and 33 per cent in secondary poverty. The survey's authors believed that a level of income 200 per cent above the poverty line was necessary to provide a "reasonable margin for holidays, luxuries and saving".⁸ The survey contained details of a representative weekly budget for a family of five, including three children under 14; their total income was 35s per week from the Unemployment Assistance Board, which left them 34 per cent below the poverty line. A total of 59 per cent of their income was spent on food, with a further 29 per cent spent on rent, which left only 14 per cent or under 5s per week to provide clothes, fuel, furnishings and all other household expenses before amusement could even be considered. This study revealed that even in 1937-38 a trip to the cinema was a luxury beyond the means of most people.⁹ The consequences of such poverty were to be graphically illustrated in the evacuation of schoolchildren from the city in 1939.

The condition of a substantial proportion of Manchester's housing left a great deal to be desired. In 1921 it was estimated that there were 150,000 people living in slum properties in the city.¹⁰ In the early 1930s official reports and private studies revealed no improvement; in 1933 Manchester's Medical Officer estimated that there were 30,000 unfit houses in the city, with the worst problem areas being Hulme, Ancoats, St Georges and parts of Cheetham. Across the city, 80,000 houses were considered little better. The

average death rate for the city was 14.5 per 1000, but in the slums it rose dramatically: in the Medlock Street area of Hulme it was 23.62 whilst off Deansgate it rose to 29 per 1000.¹¹ Three reports conducted by the Manchester and Salford Better Housing Council provided harrowing details of the condition of some of the city's housing. In 1932, a survey of 326 houses in Hulme had discovered 165 to be in "indifferent" or "bad" condition, and only 66 were regarded as "satisfactory". To give an idea of the standards set, one should note that a "satisfactory" house was regarded as one which needed no major repairs, had a drip free roof and was only "fairly free" from vermin. Almost 80 per cent had to cope without a food store in their homes.¹²

Two further studies found similar problems in other areas. A survey undertaken in Chorlton-on-Medlock, (an area now including the B.B.C. and U.M.I.S.T.) concluded that life was;

A constant fight against vermin firmly entrenched in the old and crumbling walls. In the whole district there is hardly a pantry or any similar cool, airy place in which the housekeeper could store food. The few cupboards...are invariably in a recess at the side of the kitchen fire. Of necessity the family fire must burn from about 6am to 10pm in many homes. Even if the food is not exposed to the attacks of bugs and beetles, it cannot withstand the heat of the kitchen fire. Added to this there is the weekly discomfort of the family wash which, if the weather is damp, must be hung in the only living room.¹³

The investigators pointed out that these were by no means the worst streets they could find, and nor were they unique; "There are acres and acres of similar property in the belt of slums surrounding the centre of Manchester."¹⁴ An investigation into the slums behind London Road (now Piccadilly) Station found families in housing dating back to the 1740s.¹⁵ Sir Ernest Simon, a former Liberal M.P. and a dedicated advocate of improving urban conditions investigated Angel Meadow for The Rebuilding of Manchester (1935) and found;

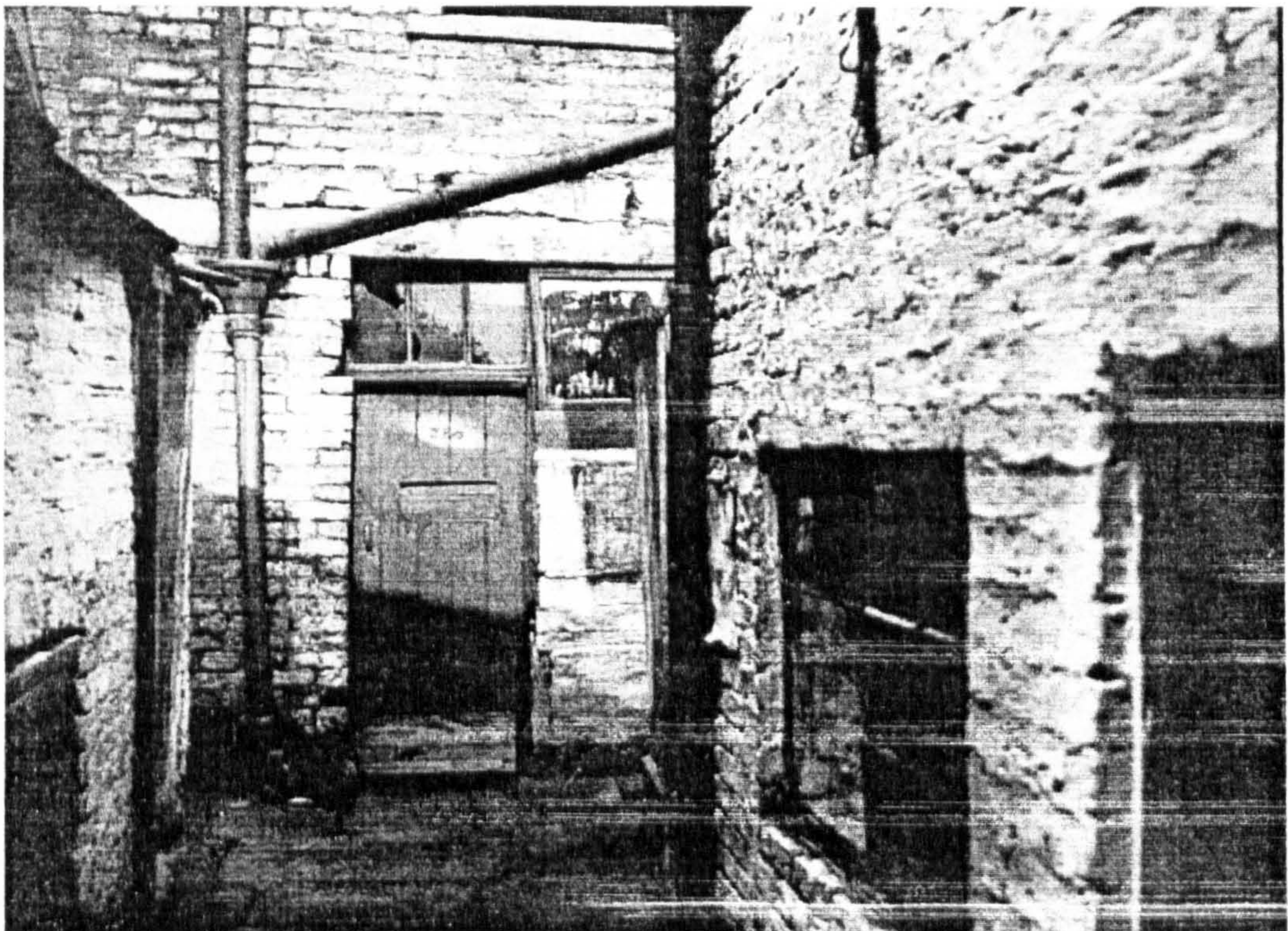
No. 4, F Street. The general appearance and condition of this house are very miserable. It is a dark house and plaster on the passage walls, in

particular, was in a bad condition. There is no sink or tap in the house: they are in a small yard, consequently in frosty weather the family is without water. In this live a man and wife and seven children, ranging from 15 to 1 and a large, if varying, number of rats.¹⁶

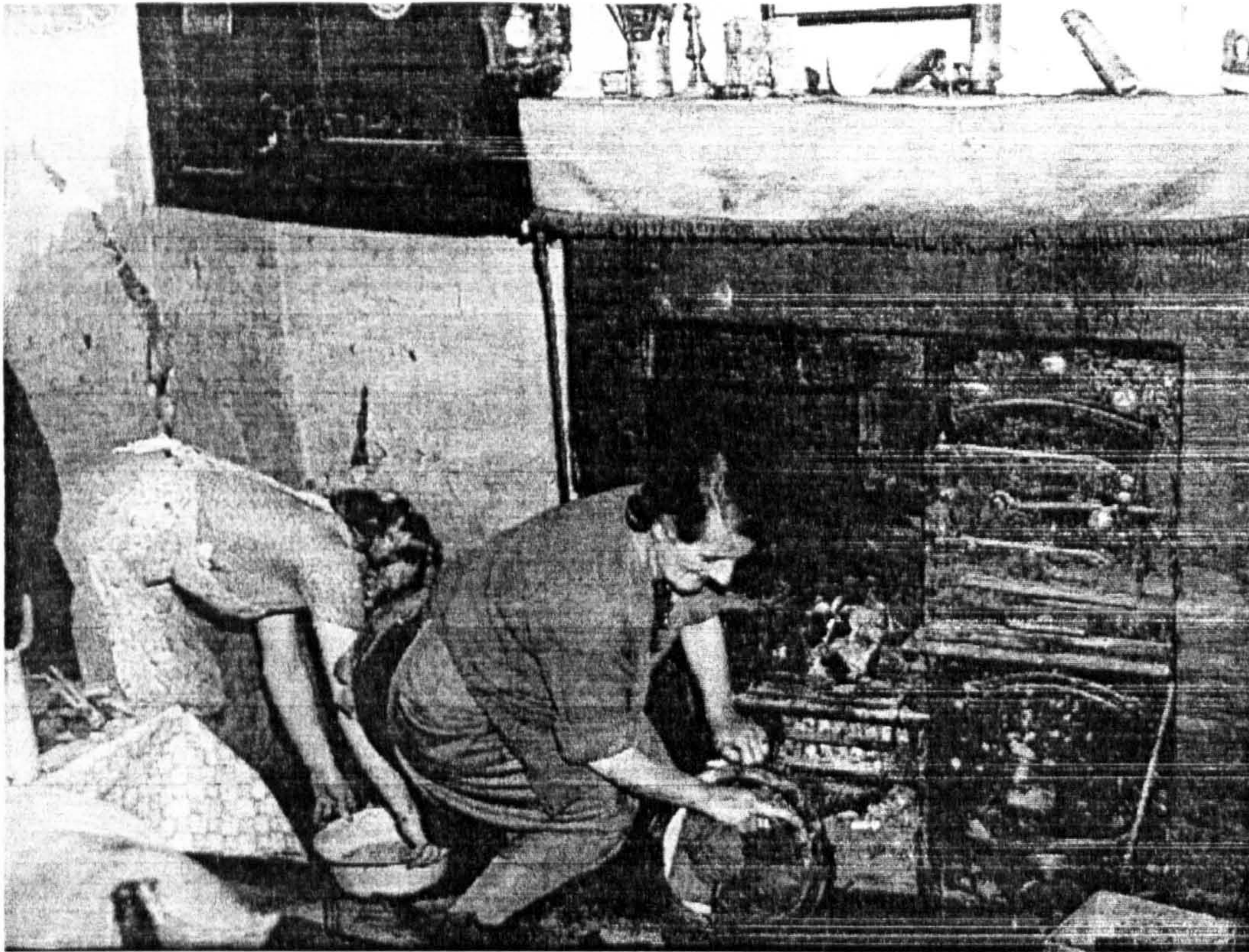
Commenting on the area as a whole, he wrote;

Throughout the areas covered by the surveys, dampness, leaking roofs, peeling plaster, and general dilapidation were so common as to be almost the rule; the same can be said regarding infestation with bugs, which is so normal a feature of slum houses and which is practically impossible to deal with in a house which has been infested for years.¹⁷

Simon believed; “In Manchester, practically all the houses in the slum belt, numbering about 80,000, will have to be demolished and replaced by modern houses or flats, before the city’s housing can be regarded as satisfactory.”¹⁸ Photographs 2.1 and 2.2 demonstrate the exterior and interior of a typical Manchester slum:



Photograph 2.1: A Manchester Slum



Photograph 2.2: The Interior of a Manchester Slum

Of course, attempts were made to improve Manchester's housing in the inter-war period. The City Council was one of the first to respond positively to the 1919 Housing Act (which gave subsidies to local authorities to build houses) and in the next 20 years the Council constructed a number of corporation estates. Between 1920 and 1938, a total of 27,447 council houses were erected, with a further 8,315 built by private contractors with financial help from the Council. This easily exceeded the 15,845 private houses built without subsidy between 1925-38, a ratio of public to private construction well above national averages.¹⁹ The most notable council effort was the creation of Wythenshawe Garden City, "perhaps the most ambitious programme of civic restructuring that any British city has ever undertaken."²⁰ Wythenshawe, instigated by Ernest and Sheena Simon (a Fabian), was planned by the Council following World War One. By 1926 farmland was purchased on a grand scale eight miles to the south of the city and by 1931 the area had been incorporated inside the municipal boundary. One of several such 'garden cities' around the country, Wythenshawe was conceived as; "A satellite garden

town...deliberately planned...to cover a large district including not only houses and parks but also a factory area [with] the population working partly in the area and partly in the mother city.”²¹ It was to have a target population of 100,000, and by 1939 some 40,000 people inhabited 8,145 homes.

Despite such innovatory schemes, few of Manchester’s slums were demolished. Under the Greenwood Act of 1930 councils received a Government grant to develop a slum clearance scheme of demolition and rehousing, but by 1939 Manchester Council had condemned only 15,000 houses out of a total of 180,000.²² Furthermore, many of the people who moved into the new estates were not slum dwellers. As Kidd has pointed out; “Of the Manchester Corporation houses built by 1924, over half had gone to clerks or others from lower middle-class employment’s and by no means all the manual workers who occupied the rest had come from the slums.”²³ Wythenshawe, in the 1930s, was a case in point. One resident recalled; “We had to prove we would be good tenants. We heard that some people were from the slums but we never met any of them.”²⁴

Political Trends in Inter-War Manchester.

Regardless of such socio-economic problems, and despite the city’s Liberal tradition, the Conservatives dominated the political scene in Manchester between 1918 and 1939, with the city’s Parliamentary election results mirroring national trends. In the 1918 and 1922 general elections, the Conservatives won 8 and 7 seats (out of 10) respectively, with the remainder going to the Labour Party. In 1923, when the first Labour Government came to power, the Labour Party added one further success, taking their representation to four. The city’s middle-class constituencies shunned the Conservatives and instead voted for the Liberal Party, who won 5 seats (the Conservatives won just one). The following year, 1924, saw yet another general election and the national mood swung against Labour with the voters instead preferring Baldwin’s Conservatives. Labour was reduced to 4 seats, while the Liberals lost all their five seats to the Conservatives, who now had 6. The 1929 General Election saw another minority Labour Government. The Conservatives lost one seat to Labour (Hulme) and two to the Liberals (the last seats won

by the Liberals in Manchester.) Labour now had five seats, the Conservatives three and the Liberals two. The 1930s proved highly successful for the Conservatives, as was the case nationally. In the 1931 election, called after the collapse of the minority Labour Government, the Conservatives enjoyed unprecedented success in the city, while Labour's disastrous results mirrored their national humiliation which saw the Party reduced to a rump of just 46 seats across Britain. The Conservatives won all ten of the city's seats that year and all by significant majorities. Even in areas previously considered relatively safe Labour territory (Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting) the Conservatives were untroubled and in almost every seat they retained, the Conservatives received almost, or over, 70 per cent of the vote. Given the scale of their massacre in 1931, Labour could hardly fail to recover seats in the election in 1935. In line with national trends Labour in Manchester rallied, winning back the four seats they had lost four years earlier. Across the city, in both Labour and Conservative areas, the Conservative vote fell but they were not seriously challenged in any of the seats they retained. Nationally, the Conservatives still had a large majority to take back to the Commons. Table 2.3 breaks down the representation of the Manchester parties in Parliament.

Table 2.3: Manchester Representation in the House of Commons 1918-1935
(No. of M.P.s) ²⁵

Year	Conservative	Labour	Liberal
1918	8	2	0
1922	7	3	0
1923	1	4	5
1924	6	4	0
1929	3	5	2
1931	10	0	0
1935	6	4	0

In total, out of 74 Parliamentary contests between 1918-37 (including by-elections), the Conservatives won 43, Labour 24 and Liberals 7.

This does not, however, portray the whole picture of inter-war Manchester politics, for election results increasingly pointed to a polarisation of the electorate along lines of social class. As the inter-war period developed, the middle-classes increasingly rallied behind the Conservative Party while Labour strengthened its hold (except in the freakish circumstances of the 1931 General Election) on the working-class vote. This can perhaps best be demonstrated by examining the fortunes of the Manchester Liberal Party. In the early 1920s the Party was still a force, and won five middle-class seats in 1923. However, the Party failed to win a seat in 1924 and the two seats gained in 1929 were the last hurrah for the Party. The 1930s was a disastrous period for the Liberals nationally, having effectively split in two in 1931 with the Liberal Nationals joining the Government. The rest of the Party spent the decade dispirited, largely inconsequential and electorally marginalised. In Manchester the Party not only failed to win a seat, but in most constituencies they even failed to put forward a candidate in either 1931 or 1935. Their only achievement of note was pushing Labour into third place in Blackley in both 1931 and 1935. In reality, the Liberals were being steadily squeezed out of middle-class constituencies by the Conservatives and working-class constituencies by Labour. This is made clear by a breakdown of voting patterns in individual constituencies (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Pattern of Voting by Constituency 1918-1935.²⁶

Division	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929	1931	1935
Ardwick	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab
Blackley	Con	Con	Lib	Con	Lib	Con	Con
Clayton	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab
Exchange	Con	Con	Lib	Con	Con	Con	Con
Gorton	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab
Hulme	Con	Con	Con	Con	Lab	Con	Con
Moss Side	Con	Con	Lib	Con	Con	Con	Con
Platting	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab
Rusholme	Con	Con	Lib	Con	Con	Con	Con
Withingto	Con	Con	Lib	Con	Lib	Con	Con

The Conservatives increasingly dominated Manchester’s middle-class constituencies - Blackley, Exchange (the central business constituency), Moss Side, Rusholme and Withington - and out of 35 general election contests in these seats between 1918-1939 the Conservatives won 28. The strength of the Labour Party, on the other hand, lay in the solid working-class constituencies of Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting. Between 1918-1939, Labour won 21 out of the 28 contests in these constituencies. Table 2.5 shows the 1935 General Election result, which highlighted the grip of the Conservative and Labour parties on their respective strongholds.

Table 2.5: The 1935 General Election by Constituency (% of vote).

Constituency	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Independent
Ardwick	47.1	52.9		
Blackley	44.3	27.1	28.6	
Clayton	46.3	53.7		
Exchange	54.1	28.2	17.7	
Gorton	44.1	55.9		
Hulme	60.3	39.7		
Moss Side	58.7	41.3		
Platting	48.1	51.9		
Rusholme	62.6	29.4		8
Withington	62.3	21.4	13.2	

A similar picture of electoral polarisation developed at municipal level. In 1919, Manchester City Council was still very much a three party body, but this had changed dramatically twenty years later. On the Council the Conservatives were the largest single party throughout the inter-war period. Although only in brief periods, 1921-23 and 1932-1933 did they have an absolute majority over all other parties, and although they endured ‘peaks and troughs’ there was usually a comfortable margin between themselves and the second largest party. For the Labour Party, the inter-war period could be split into three phases: a gradual increase in their representation on the Council up to 1929, a significant fall in the next three years, and a recovery to their previous position. Up to 1925, Labour were the third party of local government in Manchester

behind the Conservatives and Liberals. However, in the early 1920s they engaged in a brief “progressive” coalition with the Liberals that controlled the Council. Over the next few years support grew steadily and in 1929 Labour held 49 council seats out of 140 (in 1922 it was 26) with the Conservatives having only 6 more. The Labour Government’s loss of popular support, however, resulted in lost council seats and by 1932 Labour were reduced to 38, mirroring the disastrous performance in the 1931 General Election. For the remainder of the 1930s Labour gradually recovered to their 1929 position and, following the final pre-war municipal elections in 1938, held 51 out of 144 seats. For the Liberal Party, their decline at Parliamentary level was matched by a similar, if not quite as dramatic, fall in representation on the Council. In 1919 and 1920 the Liberals held 40 seats out of 140, the second largest party, and in co-operation with Labour controlled the Council. In 1921, their numbers dropped to 33, and for the next seven years their numbers stayed within the 30-36 band but in 1925 the Liberals were reduced to the third party of local government, never to recover. By 1931, their representation had slipped to 29 out of 143 and following the pattern of many municipalities, the Manchester Conservative and Liberal parties entered into an informal ‘anti-socialist pact’ (a complete ‘about-face’ for the Liberals from their earlier alliance with Labour) in which the two parties agreed to put up only one candidate in each ward to avoid splitting the anti-Labour vote. This was a sign of defeat for the Liberals. The ploy failed to destroy Labour and, if anything, it was the Liberals that suffered. From 1934 onwards, the Liberal representation declined steadily from 30 councillors in 1934 to just 19 out of 144 in 1938.

The exact political make-up of the Council was difficult to establish, even for contemporaries, given the tendency of some councillors to refuse to declare their party and the fact that others ‘crossed the floor’ without declaring it. As accurately as possible, Table 2.6 reflects the respective party strength on Manchester City Council between 1919-1938:

Table 2.6: Party Composition of Manchester City Council 1919-1938.²⁷

Year	No. of seats	Conservative	Lab/Co-Op	Liberal	Independent
1919	140	65	33	40	2
1920	140	67	31	40	2
1921	140	72	30	33	5
1922	140	76	26	33	5
1923	140	74	28	33	5
1924	140	67	32	36	5
1925	140	69	34	33	4
1926	140	63	41	32	4
1927	140	60	45	30	5
1928	140	57	46	32	5
1929	140	55	49	32	5
1930	143	63	47	29	5
1931	143	70	42	28	3
1932	143	74	38	28	3
1933	144	74	40	27	3
1934	144	63	47	30	4
1935	144	62	52	27	3
1936	144	64	52	25	3
1937	144	64	52	22	6
1938	144	67	51	19	7

The process of polarisation was, therefore, by no means complete by 1939. The Conservative Party still retained the loyalty of a considerable percentage of the working-class vote in Manchester: in the 1935 General Election they had received 47 per cent of the vote in Ardwick, 46 per cent in Clayton, 44 per cent in Gorton and 48 per cent in Platting. Furthermore, the Conservatives continued to enjoy electoral success in Hulme, one of the poorest areas of the city. Only once (in 1929) did the constituency fail to return the long-serving Conservative candidate, Sir Joseph Nall, throughout the inter-war period. Working-class Conservatism was thus still a major force in Manchester on the outbreak of war.

Given the success of the Conservative Party in Manchester between the First and Second World Wars, it is perhaps surprising that the balance of the Manchester press was hostile to the Party. The city then had four newspapers: the Manchester Guardian

(hereafter the Guardian) was the most successful provincial newspaper of its day achieving a national readership, the Manchester Evening News (hereafter the Evening News), the Manchester Evening Chronicle (hereafter the Evening Chronicle) and the weekly Manchester City News (hereafter the City News). Manchester's Liberal tradition was represented by the Guardian and its sister paper the Evening News, both of which were established supporters of progressive Liberalism. Throughout the 1930s, these papers were critical of the policies of the Conservative-dominated National Government (the Guardian particularly so). The Evening Chronicle (a stablemate of The Times), meanwhile, was a staunch supporter of the Conservative Party. The City News prided itself on having no political bias, supporting instead 'Christian policies and beliefs'.

Conclusion.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, two party politics were firmly established in Manchester. The Liberal Party had been steadily squeezed out, in both Parliamentary and municipal elections, as the classes began to polarise behind the Conservative and Labour parties. By 1939, the city's middle-class seats were very secure Conservative strongholds, whilst Labour could safely count on Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting to return four M.P.s for the Party. However, although polarisation had undoubtedly taken place between the Wars, it was by no means complete by 1939. The Conservatives continued to hold Hulme and polled well in other working-class areas, demonstrating that Conservatism was still attractive to many working-class people. This, as we shall now see, was to be changed dramatically by the Second World War.

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Chapter Three.

On the Verge of Defeat: Manchester 1939-1942.

Introduction.

Chapter Three analyses the period from the outbreak of the Second World War up to, but not including, the publication of the Beveridge Report in December 1942. The disruptive effects of the early years of the War, including the Manchester Blitz, had two critical political repercussions. First, the War, under a surface of unity, increased class antagonism; and second fostered a widespread popular interest in social and economic reconstruction. Although these two factors would, in the long-term, prove decisive in Labour's 1945 election victory, there was no leftward swing in the electorate during this period with the overwhelming public mood towards politics being one of apathy and disinterest. It therefore dismisses Addison's thesis that Labour's triumph was inevitable from mid-1940 onwards. Inter-party relations and party policies in Manchester show that the War, and the existence of a coalition government, did not lessen inter-party conflicts and tensions, and did not prompt a rethinking of policy in any party. Consequently, the degree of cross-party consensus extended no further than a shared desire for a successful prosecution of the War.

The Manchester Blitz and the "Wartime Spirit".

The foundations of the political transformation from the position of 1939 to the Labour landslide of 1945 are commonly held to have been laid in the early years of the War. The most enduring images of these early years are those of a hard-pressed community working together in a spirit of self-sacrifice, but it is argued that this period of the War transformed popular expectations and demands, producing an unstoppable tide leading to a Labour victory. The British people endured a great deal in these years, and the War had a massive impact on all aspects of civilian life: conscription and re-direction of the labour force, long working hours (55-60 hour weeks were the norm), and, of course, rationing.¹ Most importantly, civilians now experienced war at first hand through bombing. Throughout the inter-war period, through the theories of the Italian General,

Guilo Douhet, and numerous apocolyptical novels and films such as H.G. Wells' The Shape of Things to Come (1936), the devastating potential of aerial bombardment was well documented. Stanley Baldwin believed that 'the bomber will always get through' and the Spanish Civil War, particularly the bombing of Guernica, appeared to justify such prophecies. The Government predicted hundreds of thousands of deaths, with the survivors reduced to nervous wrecks. They were consequently extremely reluctant to provide deep shelters, or open the tube stations, fearing that once people had found safe refuge, they would become a race of troglodytes. In Manchester, preparations for the inevitable attack had begun before war was declared and, within a week, the Council had blacked out every building, lamp and vehicle, converted 140 buses into ambulances, transferred 700 patients from city centre hospitals and evacuated thousands of children.

Naturally, attention is most often focused on the London Blitz but Manchester and other provincial cities endured their own Blitz. Eleven months into the War, on 8 August 1940, Manchester suffered its first air-raid. Several high explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped, along with a bundle of leaflets titled 'Hitler's last appeal to reason' and for the next three months there were regular, but relatively light attacks. In total there were 23 air raids between 28 August and 16 December. As one of the country's most important industrial cities, Manchester could not expect to escape a major assault much longer, and the worst was feared after Liverpool was heavily bombed on 20 and 21 December 1940. Manchester was now the last major industrial centre awaiting a Blitz, and for the next two nights the Luftwaffe targeted the city with heavy, concentrated attacks.² On the first night, 22 December, a minimum of 270 German bombers dropped at least 233 high explosive bombs, 32 huge parachute mines and thousands of incendiaries. On the second night thousands of incendiaries were dropped, together with a minimum of 55 high explosive bombs. Two eye-witnesses recorded their experiences on those two terrible nights. On 22 December a serviceman on leave, Les Sutton, headed by train towards Manchester;

Our chatter was of Manchester pubs and other places of interest. After a very slow journey the train stopped outside Warrington. We stumbled through the dark to the station platform and were told that no more trains would be going to Manchester as there was a raid on, so we hitched. A

lorry picked us up, and perched atop the load we hung on to the lashings, the icy wind whipping our faces, each of us thinking Manchester might be no more by the time we got there. As we neared the burning city the frightening glow reached high into the heavens and lit up the countryside. We could hear the dull impact of bombs and the barrage sent up by the big guns. Passing through Irlam we could plainly see the fires of Salford and in the open fields on both sides of the road scores of incendiaries were burning away. Reaching Victoria bridge, at Wooley's the lorry had to turn back because of the mass of fire hoses covering the road like giant spaghetti. The fire-fighters, though busy and intent on their job, had a curious air of detachment and unconcern, and from them we learned of the city's ordeal.

We dispersed anxious and apprehensive. I took the shortest route to Ardwick, pausing only to look down Oldham Street at the conflagration that was Piccadilly. Our street was deserted and a Warden directed me to St Silas church shelter where I found Mum and Dad with neighbours, all looking rather the worse for wear.³

Patricia Sample was returning home from evacuation;

The sirens went about 7:30. We didn't take too much notice at first and then the bombing became really heavy. We all went down to the underground canal that runs beneath Deansgate. It was full of beds as far as I could see. The men, including my father, were asked to volunteer, putting out fires from incendiary bombs. My mother and I thought we would never see him again. The noise and the thuds were terrifying - women were fainting. The Red Cross were working non-stop and we were told that the whole of Deansgate above us was on fire and Victoria Station had gone. Most of the exits were blocked and people were trying not to panic, but many were suffering from claustrophobia and were rushing from exit to exit only to find them blocked by falling buildings.⁴

The effect of the bombing was severe. In two nights, 200 business houses, 165 warehouses, almost 150 offices and 5 banks were totally destroyed or severely damaged; a further 500 business houses, 20 banks, 300 warehouses, and 220 offices suffered lesser damage. Effectively, within a mile radius of Albert Square, 31.3 acres had been laid in ruins. Scores of famous buildings, including the Cathedral, had either been totally destroyed or were little more than shells; 159 schools were damaged, some so severely that repair was impossible; 86 churches were damaged; several cinemas along with over 180 public houses and breweries were destroyed or damaged and most of Manchester's

hospitals sustained damage and many were unable to admit further patients. The city's industrial areas were a target, but they escaped heavy damage.

Many buildings had been gutted by fire rather than demolished by high explosives. Over a two day period there were six officially designated "conflagrations", 20 major fires, and 600 (acknowledged by authorities to be a modest estimate) serious, medium and small fires. On the night of 23 December a massive fire around Piccadilly engulfed nine and a half acres, described shortly afterwards as the biggest fire in Britain since 1666. It was not until the afternoon of Christmas Day that the fire situation throughout the area was under control. By 2 January 1941 the number of dead in Manchester numbered 363, with 455 seriously injured hospital cases and 728 less serious wounds.⁵ Over 30,000 homes had been destroyed or damaged and several scores of thousands of people had been rendered homeless. In eight days, 72,000 meals were served at rest centres and in just one day the city's mobile canteens fed 10,000 people. In some respects, Manchester's preparations were woefully inadequate. Mass Observation reported;

One of the most important factors of all in Manchester is the bad organisation for dealing with the results of a raid, especially with the homeless...The Rest Centres in Manchester were almost as unsatisfactory and unprepared, in some cases, as those in the East End three and a half months before. They would have been much worse had it not been for a determined attack by the Local Council on the constitution of the Emergency Committee of three, which led to the Chairman resigning, to the Committee being extended to six, and consequently to an Air Raid Welfare Officer and a whole new department to take over responsibility for Rest Centres etc. This occurred only a few weeks before the blitz, and the new department, while it had done much, had obviously not been able to do everything.⁶

Mass Observation noted that a typical rest centre still had only one blanket per bed. Camp beds in three others were due to be returned to the manufacturers because they were falling to pieces.⁷ No centre had an adequate first aid chest. The founder of Mass Observation, Tom Harrisson, wondered; "But what, one amazedly asked, of the lessons of London, of Coventry and all the rest? Why had this great city not learned before?"⁸ A final significant attack came on 9 January 1941. The three large scale attacks on the

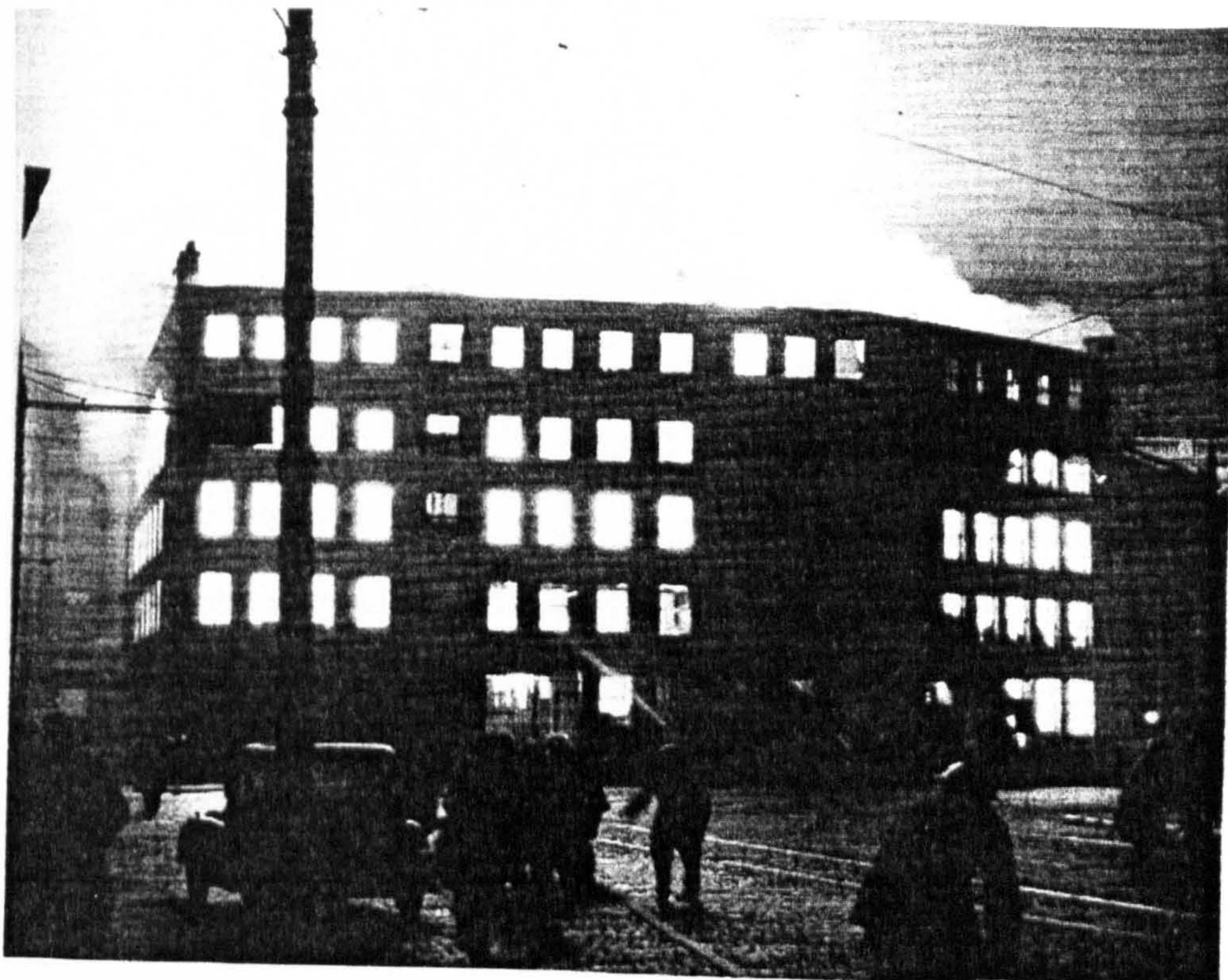
city put Manchester eleventh on a rough 'Blitz league table'.⁹ Photographs 3.1 to 3.8 provide graphic images of the Manchester Blitz:



Photograph 3.1: Piccadilly Before the Blitz



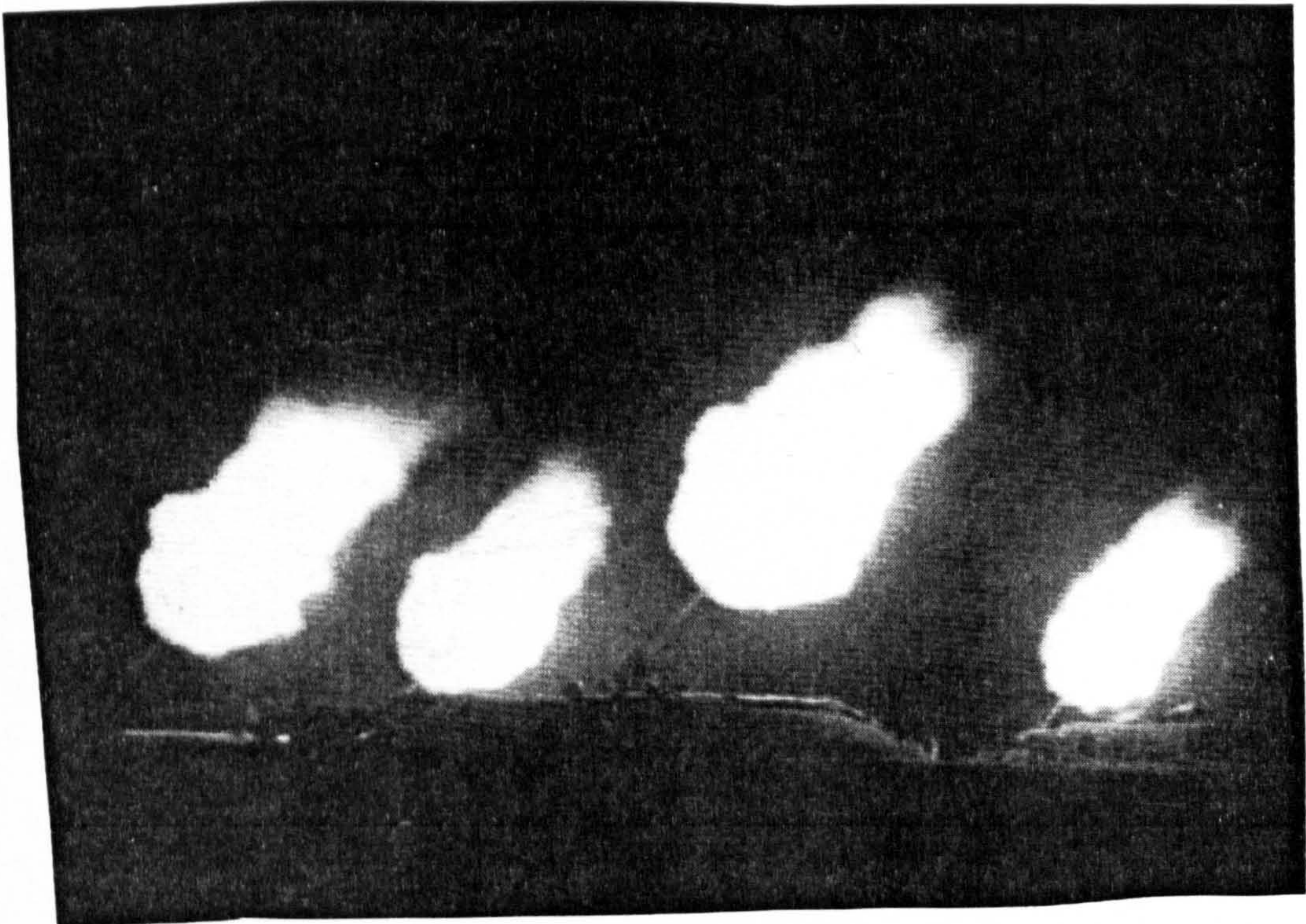
Photograph 3.2: Piccadilly After the Blitz.



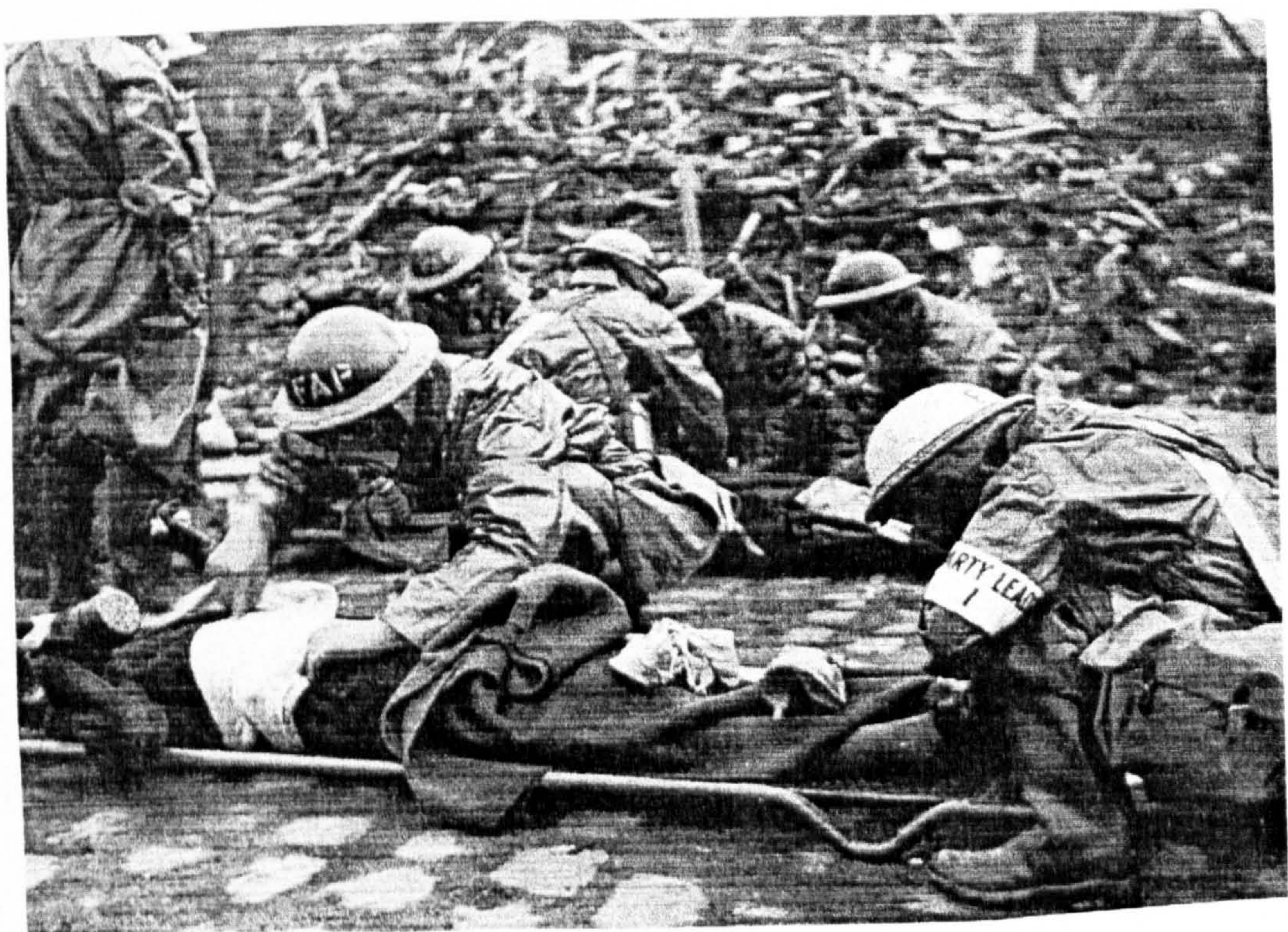
Photograph 3.3: Back Piccadilly Ablaze



Photograph 3.4: Damage to the Canon Street Area



Photograph 3.5: Hitting Back: Manchester's Air-Defences in Action



Photograph 3.6: A Rescue Team Treats a Casualty



Photograph 3.7: Churchill Visits Blitzed Manchester, April 1941



Photograph 3.8: The King and Queen Tour Manchester, February 1941

It has become fashionable to denigrate the existence of the 'wartime spirit' that is said to have flourished under such hardship. It is portrayed as mythical and nostalgic rather than realistic. The Manchester evidence suggests a highly complex reality, with a mass of contradictory evidence. There were the inevitable complaints concerning rationing and the shortage of many goods, ranging from the lack of oranges and eggs to the unavailability of shovels and hair rollers, but this can be ascribed to the natural human reaction of expressing dissatisfaction rather than any great expression of selfish sentiment.¹⁰ For the majority of the local population, the early years of the War did promote a spirit of self sacrifice and a willingness on the behalf of individuals to "do their bit". For example, public opinion was prepared to accept an extension of rationing, if it was considered necessary. In 1942 the Manchester Information Committee (M.I.C.), a branch of the Ministry of Information, noted that "there was strong support for some system of rationing of fuel" and in reaction to the Parliamentary debate on coal rationing there had been "very little support for the attitude of critical M.P.s."¹¹ Even restrictions on personal recreations provoked little disquiet. In April 1942 the "budget was quite well received, with most men interpreting it as a 'request' to give up smoking. Many men seemed to be making a really serious effort to curtail smoking, [and even] beer tax does not seem to cause much concern."¹²

There were reports of a renewed feeling of community or neighbourliness, whilst there was also evidence of a determined public resolve, which was never more evident than in periods in which the war news was particularly bleak. In February 1942 the M.I.C. reported; "It is remarkable that in a period of bad news, which included the loss of Singapore and the escape of the German battleships, so few negative reports were received."¹³ A few months later, the Committee's Secretary noted; "I have the impression that Libya has considerably shaken public confidence yet the odd thing is that there is so much difference between what people say and their general demeanour...[even when] they think we are doing badly they aren't bothering overmuch and seem remarkably carefree".¹⁴ Although some local trade union leaders, mostly Communists following the Moscow line, opposed the War until mid 1941 and condemned the conflict as "purely an Imperial War [which] does not concern the working class"¹⁵, most

ordinary workers threw themselves into war work as a patriotic duty. As part of a Ministry of Information survey, a number of factory owners were asked; "How are the new women recruits working?" and "Are you suffering from absenteeism?" The answers were the same; "The new recruits are working excellently and absenteeism is practically non-existent, certainly under 0.5%. Even in the case of the dockers of Manchester voluntary absenteeism is a very small element."¹⁶ There were numerous examples of extreme hard work and total commitment on the part of workers. An excellent example came at the Metropolitan Vickers (MetroVicks) factory at Trafford Park. Following the fall of France in 1940, with an invasion expected at any moment, all the workmen and supervisors involved in radar production at the factory worked for 48 hours without a break to dispatch eight special transmitters to the South Coast. The historian of MetroVick's war effort wrote; "Men and women sacrificed hours, leisure, health, everything to radar. At the time of Dunkirk men whose sons were known to be involved in that dark episode, worked for four days and nights without ever going home, so that urgently needed sets could be sent out."¹⁷

Other evidence, however, suggests that this 'rosy' view of wartime life is too simplistic. Mass Observation found; "Manchester was such an uncoordinated, overlapping, jumbled up place, that even at the best of times 'Manchester feeling' and a positive Manchester outlook were liable to be lacking."¹⁸ This was the case following the bombing of the city in late 1940. Mass Observation found little evidence of the cheery, but resolute determination that is supposed to have characterised the British people at such times. Tom Harrisson, observed; "Mancunians got very upset, at a time when Liverpoolians were still pretty confident."¹⁹ In early January 1941, Mass Observation reported; "Going from Liverpool to Manchester was like going from an atmosphere of reasonable cheerfulness into an atmosphere of barely restrained depression."²⁰ There was "obsessive bomb-damage talk", while one worker visited three of Manchester's rest centres and found "the misery and despair" of the people therein to be "past description."²¹

Not all factories or workers were as dedicated as those at MetroVicks. Wright Robinson, a prominent member of the local Labour Party (and shortly to be Lord Mayor) wrote in his diary;

I was shocked when [an employer] said that wholesale slacking was taking place, but did not blame the higher trade union officials for that. He told of one craft union which was one of the closest corporations in engineering, which had a stringent policy against a high production rate. I was not shocked that men tried to spin employment out and protect their livelihood by any device they could. What did shock me was that there should be any workers, any employer, who did not realise that we are fighting for our lives and for the life of democracy. Doing less than our best to make up for the lowering of output is treason to mankind as I see it.²²

Indeed, at times the M.I.C. found that the public did not see themselves as part of the overall war effort, noting as late as June 1942; "Common people have little idea still of the nature of this war, and are far from identifying themselves with it."²³

Trades Unions came in for heavy criticism, even amongst their political allies. After a proposed strike in November 1940, which caused much ill-feeling among the general public, amongst the Manchester tram and 'bus drivers (who refused to work after 7:30pm if there was an air-raid alert) even Wright Robinson commented that their action was "difficult to understand in these times".²⁴ Anti-union sentiment was a regular feature of public opinion reports throughout this period and there was a lack of support amongst the people of Manchester for the actions of certain trade unions, particularly the miners.²⁵ A number of reports suggested a growing feeling that strikes should be banned.²⁶

Public Attitudes 1940-1942.

The cumulative effect of the War's disruption of everyday life in this period had two critical political consequences, which would ultimately shape the outcome of the 1945 General Election. Firstly, under the veneer of social unity, the early years of the War intensified class antagonisms, leading eventually to the class polarisation evident in 1945. Secondly, it prompted a widespread interest in the social and economic reconstruction of

Britain which, in the long-term, benefited Labour. However, in the short-term, popular interest in reconstruction had no effect on political attitudes in Manchester in the period 1940-42.

Although much was made, in print and in films, of the essential unity of the British people, the War undoubtedly heightened social and, more particularly, class tensions. With the press keen to maintain the pretence of unity, evidence portraying a different reality is scanty, but a few examples can be taken as indicative of a more general trend. Amongst the working-classes existed a popular perception that the burdens of war, and the greatest sacrifices, were falling disproportionately on their shoulders, whilst higher up the social scale people continued to live much as they had in peacetime. This was reflected in public opinion questionnaires completed in August 1942, which asked whether there were “any local matters attracting much public notice?” The responses to this question led the M.I.C. to conclude that there was;

A popular feeling that such matters only ever seem to be intended for the lower...classes - that folk in better positions are not setting an example in this direction. Again, it seems to be a general opinion that Government and municipal workers are enjoying two and three weeks holiday while essential workers in factories are only allowed one week. In this and other matters there are still grave doubts as to whether anything like equality of sacrifice has yet or ever will be recorded.²⁷

There had been similar complaints earlier that year following news that interest was being paid to share-holders of the Skoda works. The M.I.C. noted that there had been “considerable feeling shown on this subject” with many people commenting that “we thought this sort of thing wasn’t going to happen in this war”.²⁸ Such perceived inequality was clearly causing resentment amongst the working-classes.

In Manchester’s wealthier middle-class suburbs, on the other hand, perceptions of their poorer fellow citizens were being shaped by the startling revelations following the evacuation of schoolchildren from the city in 1939. Evacuation provided shocking evidence of poverty in Manchester (and in all other major cities). Many of the children came from the poorer areas of the city and the condition of a large minority of them surprised and horrified their largely middle-class hosts in the reception areas (rural

Lancashire and Derbyshire). In November 1939 the Manchester Education Department published an Interim Report on the evacuation, which stated;

Much has been written about the dirty condition of the children, and it is a fact that the physical condition of a minority was not what it should have been, and there were children with vermin, impetigo and eczema. Clothing in some instances was dirty and it is not surprising that in such cases householders resented the introduction of such children who, owing to lack of home training or some physical cause, were obviously undesirable guests. There were also many difficulties created by parents who visited householders and altogether failed to appreciate their points of view. Often there was dissatisfaction on both sides, resulting in acrimonious arguments, in appeals to the tribunals and in withdrawals.²⁹

Other reports confirmed the poor condition of many Manchester evacuees. A Women's Institute report noted; "Some children [from Manchester] had never slept in beds...few children would eat food that demanded the use of teeth - [they] could only eat with a teaspoon"³⁰ In Derbyshire, local residents were driven to revolt by their newcomers from Manchester. A regional welfare officer reported;

They were really difficult and rough. I don't mean that they were unpleasant, they were enchanting, but their habits were appalling. The people of Derbyshire experienced children just doing their jobbies on the floor of sitting rooms. The women approached the Dowager Duchess of Derbyshire who told the Ministry of Health, on behalf of the people, that they refused to have the children in their homes.³¹

For the first time, Manchester's middle-classes had been exposed to the poverty in their midst, in areas of the city they probably never visited, and some were undoubtedly roused to support measures to eradicate it. Following such revelations, the Guardian stated;

More than anything else evacuation must have brought home to people how far from perfect our democracy is. 'The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the richest he', but those who have seen some of the poorer children arrive from the cities will realise more than they did before how different the two lives are. If this memory can stay in the country's mind it may be that in an expedient of war will have been found the seeds of a great peace-time reform.³²

Similarly, Rostrom Duckworth, the Conservative M.P. for Moss Side discussed the evacuees with the Evening Chronicle, which reported;

It was borne on his mind most appallingly, he said, that our system of education had not brought about the result which its great expense ought to have achieved. It was heartbreaking to see a number of children who looked as though they had never had a bath since they were born. And some of the women had not brought a rag of clothing for the children, he added. He thought we should have to teach these children self-pride and overhaul many of the hygiene services of the country.³³

Such sympathy and determination was, however, rare. The work of Marwick and Tiratsoo, Fielding and Thompson suggests that a keenness to improve working-class conditions was not widespread amongst the suburban classes. Instead, such revelations merely confirmed, and strengthened, their existing pre-war prejudices about the “undeserving poor”. So Manchester’s evacuation served only to drive a further wedge between the classes, rather than acting as a uniting force. The political ramifications of such class antagonisms would not be felt until full-scale electoral politics resumed. The political polarisation of the classes, evident in the inter-war period, was intensified by the unique circumstances of the early years of the War, and was already reflected, as we shall see, in the social make-up of the membership of the Manchester Labour Party.

Given the seriousness of the military situation throughout this period, Mancunians were, unsurprisingly, obsessed with war news. Following the Phoney War, interest in the War surged with the German invasion of the Low Countries and France in the summer of 1940, and with the evacuation from Dunkirk the possibility of invasion was clearly uppermost in people’s minds.³⁴ The dominance of war news in everyday life remained unchallenged until the close of 1942 and war news, even bad news, was eagerly discussed and analysed. People had a realistic appreciation of the War situation and the M.I.C. received numerous reports from observers who noted that there was much criticism of the Government and the B.B.C. for presenting an overly optimistic view of events, particularly the tendency to exaggerate the casualties inflicted upon the enemy forces while playing down the extent of British losses. Indeed, any kind of official news was greeted with considerable cynicism. In July 1942 the M.I.C. noted; “Disbelief of the

truth of published photographs of damage done to enemy factories i.e. Renault works. Opinion expressed that 'these are probably our own factories.'"³⁵

However, whilst public interest was predominantly focused on the War, the early years of the conflict also provoked considerable interest amongst Mancunians on the question of social and economic reconstruction and the shape of post-war Britain. Throughout Britain, the desperation of the early years combined with the hardships endured by the civil population "gave rise to heightened expectations about the securing of a better world when arms were finally laid down."³⁶ This was despite the fact that throughout 1940-42 Britain looked more likely to lose the War than emerge as victor. Pressure towards the idea of "equality of sacrifice" became intense and there was widespread reaction against the "old gang".³⁷ Popular discussion on the subject of social reconstruction was, in turn, both stimulated and fed by the progressive intelligensia. From 1940 onwards, J.B. Priestley's popular series of 'Postscripts' on the B.B.C., in which he urged his listeners to turn their minds to the creation of a better, new world, was only the most controversial of several examples. Priestley's talks were extremely popular in Manchester, with the City News describing him as "a man who, next to the Prime Minister, has done more than any speaker or writer to sustain and inspire the mass of the people...The solid heart of Britain is behind him...He is saying things we shall remember."³⁸ A series of Penguin Specials examining the prospects and possibilities of post-war Britain were published and were widely available, and many of the national daily newspapers became more receptive to progressive ideas. The Times became an advocate of social reconstruction and one of the most popular and successful of the wartime newspapers was The Daily Mirror, whose populist style was based on attacks against Colonel Blimp and the Old School Tie network.

From 1940 onwards came demands for there to be a 'better Britain' after the War. By the end of 1940, Mass Observation had found evidence of a radical new spirit and a "questioning of the status quo."³⁹ Manchester was no exception. In November 1940 the Guardian commented; "All serious thinkers are agreed that if democracy is to justify itself we must make a different sort of Britain after the war and put an end to a number of

injustices that disfigure our life today.”⁴⁰ In his ‘Weekly Column’ in the non-political City News, Sidney Wicks believed;

This new vision of a land precious enough to be died for must surely give a new meaning to social and political life when peace allows us to turn to the trowel and the plough. Will this new emotion be transmitted into constructive social effort, the dream expressed in practical rebuilding of the whole structure of the national life? I think it will. Wherever men meet, in orderly room, in observation post, sitting after tactical exercises on the hillside, they talk of reproaches, of evils, of reforms greatly to be desired. They talk like men who are acquiring the right to rebuild Britain.
41

Later in the War Labour’s Northern Voice newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Manchester and Salford Labour parties, retrospectively commented that in 1940;

One man’s war became everyman’s war and in their camps and their shelters, on fire watch and on guard, men began to ask themselves: What on earth have we been doing all these years? Why these recurring wars, these economic collapses, these hideous towns, this overwhelming moral and spiritual bankruptcy? Why, why, why? Disgust, shame, anger - all these played a part and it became clear that there had arisen a grim determination to accept democratic responsibility and rise above the moral and social standards of the past?⁴²

Throughout 1941 popular interest in reconstruction continued unabated and it was a major feature of the local press. In January the Guardian observed;

There have been great movements of population; town and country have been thrown into close and unexpected relations; death, danger and destruction have thrown their shadows everywhere; thousands spend their nights often or always in shelters, where a new kind of communal life has sprung up. From these conditions two consequences may be expected. There will be a warmer sympathy bred by common hardship, and there will be a revolutionary spirit bred by the more vivid realisation and the sharper resentment of the gross inequalities that still disfigure our social life.⁴³

Later in the same month the same paper claimed;

The war will leave behind it not only a great deal of dangerous confusion but a great deal of dangerous impatience. If the Parliamentary system

cannot adapt itself to these conditions, if politicians resist reform for the sake of resistance, they will find the nation is not in a temper to watch these dilatory proceedings with indulgence...We all know what are the four or five great spheres of action in which large advance is essential: education, nutrition, agriculture, regional and town planning and all those questions of economic re-organisation that are involved in the effective treatment of unemployment.⁴⁴

The Evening News believed; "There is throughout the country a popular feeling, perhaps more intense than ever in history that this time things should be better ordered."⁴⁵ In August the Evening News ran a series of articles concerning post-war Britain, with contributions from such notables as H.G. Wells, Julian Huxley and the Dean of St.Paul's, dealing with the issues of social equality, education, economic planning, industrial democracy and political devolution.

By early 1942 popular discussion in Manchester on the question of reconstruction was such that the M.I.C. asked for specific reports on public feeling concerning the issue. Over the following months the M.I.C. received reports and public opinion questionnaires highlighting the depth of public interest; "there is much enthusiasm over post-war reconstruction"; "post-war being widely talked about"; "a considerable amount of discussion of the kind of peace we shall make after victory" and "much talk of post-war education and town planning".⁴⁶ Perhaps the most illuminating evidence of public interest in post-war matters came not through the M.I.C. but via a question and answer session between the Lord Mayor, Wright Robinson, and a group of one hundred children of school leaving age in mid-October 1942. This was the bleakest phase of the War since Dunkirk. Rommel had pushed the Allies back in North Africa; British and Empire troops had just completed a further withdrawal in the Far East, while the Germans had progressed deeper into the Soviet Union and were encircling Stalingrad. Despite the seriousness of the situation, at least one third of the questions were directed at post-war matters, with the remainder enquiring about the Mayor's official duties. Some of the questions warrant reproducing, for they provide a guide to the conversations children were hearing around them, and the priorities being ascribed to particular aspects of reconstruction: "What is Manchester planning for the improvement of the slums now

and after the war?"; "Are there going to be more or less hospitals after the war?"; "After this war, will the ordinary man's son have as much chance of going to college as the rich man's son?"; "Do you know whether there will be any unemployment after the war?"; "In post-war housing, will there be much communal housing as there is in Russia?"; "Should flats be built after the war?"; "Will there be a big slump after this war as there was after the last?"; "Has Manchester City Council taken any steps to prevent unemployment after the war?"; "Has, or are there, any plans being made for equality of opportunity as far as education is concerned?"⁴⁷

In mid-1942 the M.I.C., hitherto a centralised body, was divided into five divisions with each responsible for a separate area in order to make their information gathering more effective.⁴⁸ This change revealed that interest in reconstruction was not confined to specific social groupings but to society as a whole. Reports from the Northern Division, which consisted of traditionally strong Labour areas (notably Ardwick and Clayton) and those of the Southern Division, which represented staunch Conservative areas (Moss Side, Rusholme and Withington) revealed little or no difference in popular views. Reconstruction was being widely discussed across the whole spectrum of the electorate.⁴⁹ Similarly, the priority being given to particular aspects of reconstruction was the same throughout the city. In line with the children's questions listed above, the work of the M.I.C. suggested that housing, employment and education were considered the most important priorities, with more modest numbers referring to pensions and family allowances.⁵⁰ Housing became an even greater priority in the public mind following a survey of the city's housing stock in 1942, in which Manchester's Medical Officer of Health confirmed that there had been very little, if any, improvement on the findings of the 1930s. The survey revealed that Manchester still had 69,000 unfit properties and that over one-third of all houses remained below "reasonable" standards of sanitation.⁵¹ Wright Robinson noted that the Officer had found, in his district, that of the 1,848 houses inspected, over 1,800 had perished brickwork, 1,512 had bulged brickwork, 1,500 were verminous and 1,315 were bug infested.⁵² The Officer stated that throughout Manchester; "The unsatisfactory nature of such a large proportion of the dwelling houses must be causing incalculable, but

nevertheless great, damage to the health of the occupants and the bad effect on the welfare of children, in particular, can scarcely be exaggerated.”⁵³ At this time, there was much interest in building flats after the War, but the Medical Officer made clear his preference for houses;

Flats are not suitable for families with small children and for young married people. Though the amenities of blocks of flats, now universally proposed, mitigate to some extent the inherent disadvantages of flats, such amenities fall far short of replacing the advantages of maximum light, ventilation, privacy, safety, ease of access and garden space of cottage dwellings, all of which are so essential to the health and welfare of children.⁵⁴

The report surprised many in the city although the Labour leader on the Council, Bill Johnston, had earlier admitted; “Every time distinguished visitors come to Manchester I feel ashamed of the narrow streets and poor and sometimes verminous houses, revealing a low standard of living.”⁵⁵ The findings strengthened the determination to improve the situation. The City News said;

To be told that we have in Manchester no less than 68,837 houses which are unfit for people to live in them cannot indeed do any other than depress us. Yet to give the fullest publicity to these figures at this time when rebuilding is a subject much in the public mind, is itself a hopeful sign. For it is only if we grasp the magnitude of the task ahead that there is real promise of wiping out this blot on our civic record. We have not merely to make Manchester a better looking city. We must undertake the more fundamental and urgent task of seeing that all its citizens are decently housed.⁵⁶

At the heart of the popular interest in reconstruction was a general belief that the state would play a more significant role in the nation’s social and economic affairs in the post-war years. Although the state’s activities had increased gradually in the inter-war years, in 1939 Britain’s economic life was still overwhelmingly in the hands of private enterprise. War mobilisation increased the state’s power massively and soon it controlled virtually every aspect of the war effort and civilian life. The belief that such involvement would continue after the War, at the expense of private enterprise, which

was increasingly seen as being responsible for the unemployment and squalid living conditions of much of Britain between the Wars, was evident as early as 1940 and, following the Blitz, was particularly focused on the issues of housing and town planning. The Guardian observed;

One effect of the daily destruction from the air has been to turn men's minds to the possibility of planning towns and buildings on more pleasing and intelligent lines...the rebuilding must be rational and in accordance with social need...it is essential to have firm direction from the top to overcome anarchic interests.⁵⁷

Two months later the same paper returned to the subject;

We remember the housing problem at the end of the last war and how private enterprise was allowed to run out from our towns unsightly streaks of little houses both tasteless and badly built. Suburbs were wasted with ugliness and in the cities great blocks of flats rose up chokingly where never flats should be. The Nazi bombs will leave a building problem at the end of the war. Will the State leave those unfettered private hands already disgraced to solve it? ⁵⁸

Such criticism of the failings of private enterprise was adopted by the Evening News. A mid-1941 editorial hoped that post-war Britain would see no return to the "opportunity which a laissez-faire age gave to the shrewd and unscrupulous to make money out of their neighbours..."⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards the same paper came out firmly in support of the nationalisation of Britain's transport facilities;

The only way of getting the best value out of our transport facilities is for the Government to take them over - rail, road and canal. Industry and the general public would benefit not only during the war but after it as well if all our transport services were run for public service rather than private profit.⁶⁰

Demands for nationalisation or an increased role for the state were not new. The Labour Party had advocated such policies since 1918 (although they had done little about them in their brief periods in Government), while pressure groups such as The Next Five Years and Political And Economic Planning, together with individuals such as Harold

Macmillan, the Conservative M.P., had advocated planned capitalism throughout the 1930s. What was significant in the early years of the War was that such ideas gained a more general acceptance. 'Plain Citizen', writing in his regular column in the City News, observed; "The demand of the common people that, having once more gone through the anguish of war, they shall this time get a better world will be heard everywhere...There is a general assumption that the changes to come will be in the direction of more state regulation."⁶¹

It was not only Manchester's civil population that showed great interest in reconstruction for her servicemen, drawn almost entirely from the younger generation, showed perhaps even greater enthusiasm. From 1942 the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (A.B.C.A.) and the Army Education Corps led weekly classes and discussion groups where the problems of contemporary Britain found expression. An informed account of A.B.C.A. published in The Times in September 1942 revealed;

Of the dozens of topics so far promoted for discussion in the Army, a few stand out in popularity. Reconstruction themes are well up. Although they develop plenty of debate about such bread and butter matters as post-war security, they also reach broader issues like 'What's wrong with democracy?', 'Do we deserve our Empire?', 'Town Planning' and 'How should our schools be run?'"⁶²

Although the effects of A.B.C.A.'s work has been called into question, the evidence in Manchester suggests that it raised awareness.⁶³ In August 1942 the M.I.C. noted; "great interest, especially amongst the lads home on leave from the Forces, about a new social order."⁶⁴ A short time later it was again reported that there were "many servicemen calling in the Bureau complaining that their dependants are not receiving a fair deal from the Government and mutter dark threats about a 'New Social Order' after the war".⁶⁵

The civilian and service interest in reconstruction was accompanied by a considerable cynicism. Many recalled that the First World War had witnessed similar hopes and aspirations, fed by the promise of 'Homes fit for Heroes'. Such promises had led to little in the way of progressive change and there were many who believed that the aftermath of this war would be little different. Early in 1941, the City News observed;

“Many people when they hear the promises and aspirations that come so freely from all quarters today remember painfully the social aspirations of the last war and shortly after, and the sad contrast of the realities.”⁶⁶ Deep cynicism was still evident in the summer of 1942. The M.I.C. received reports noting a mood of “dissatisfaction with the rosy picture painted by leaders about life at the end of the war - `experience of the last war should produce caution.’”⁶⁷ Many dismissed high-level talk of reform as a carrot with which the Government sought to encourage people to work harder and sacrifice more, talk which would be forgotten after the War. In August 1942 public opinion questionnaires revealed that people were asking whether “something [is] really going to happen, or is it just bluff?”⁶⁸

A Swing to the Left?

The widespread interest in post-war reconstruction has been held, by historians such as Addison, to indicate a major swing to the Left in public opinion in the period 1940-42. Indeed, Addison suggests; “Opinion may have been further to the Left in 1942 than it was to be in 1945.”⁶⁹ Labour’s 1945 triumph was, he contends, inevitable from the summer of 1940 onwards. Superficially, the evidence appears to support Addison’s argument. The reaction against the “Guilty Men”, the slogan of “equality of sacrifice” on the home front; the prestige enjoyed by figures such as J.B. Priestley and the widespread interest in social reconstruction can all be put forward as evidence of a distinct leftward trend in popular attitudes.⁷⁰ Perhaps most revealing was the massive popular interest in the Soviet Union from the moment the U.S.S.R. entered the War in June 1941. The depth of interest in the Soviet’s military performance and her way of life was a major feature of this period of the War, a point that has not gone unnoticed by those attempting to discover popular political sympathies. Throughout 1942, public opinion reports revealed that war news from the Eastern Front was almost as widely discussed as news of British forces.⁷¹ Furthermore, with the continuing German advance into Russia came widespread calls for the Allies to open a Second Front in Europe to relieve the Soviet burden. In Manchester, as elsewhere, the major force behind this push was the Communist Party and in September 1942 the Lord Mayor received a deputation of

seventy men, all Communists representing a number of workshops, to press this demand.⁷² Two large public meetings in support of a Second Front, again initiated by local Communists, were held at Belle Vue and in Piccadilly, drawing large turnouts.⁷³ The Soviet Union was clearly hugely popular in Manchester. One local Communist recalls;

When a Russian trade union leader visited Metro Vickers the support he got was enthusiastic beyond imagination. He was even invited to come downstairs to the directors dining-room but he wanted to go to the workers canteen instead and he was very warmly cheered. No doubt about that.⁷⁴

The M.I.C. noted that "you frequently hear the jest that we had better borrow some Russian generals."⁷⁵ The local press also extolled the virtues of Britain's Soviet allies, with the Evening News typical in asserting; "We were told that Communism was a ghastly failure. Now we learn that the release of science for the aid of industry and agriculture has worked miracles and is one of the secrets of Russia's amazing resistance."⁷⁶

This tremendous pro-Soviet feeling can be contrasted with the indifferent, and occasionally hostile, attitude taken to the entry of the United States into the War. In the early years of the War, American non-involvement had undoubtedly been resented. One Mancunian, now residing across the Atlantic, wrote to the City News in 1940 and asked; "What do you expect of this motley crowd of blacks, yellows and throw-outs?"; Another remarked; "[American] boys are cowardly...Many of the boys now coming of age were 'weather strips', conceived to keep their fathers out of the draft [in 1917]. Therefore, they inherit cowardice."⁷⁷ America's declaration of war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (December 1941) provoked no great relief and the M.I.C. received a number of reports suggesting a popular feeling that "the Americans have come in late again and will take all the credit like they did last time."⁷⁸ Throughout 1942, the American war effort came in for heavy criticism. After the capitulation of the "fortress" of Singapore in February 1942, the M.I.C. recorded; "[The] tendency now is to say 'well, we can't hold on to everywhere'. I'd like to know what the Yanks have done so far."⁷⁹

Similarly, in April it was noted; "People want to know what the U.S. Navy is doing and whether America is doing anything at all except talking big figures. People are beginning to feel very bitter about the failure of the U.S. to help in the Far East."⁸⁰ The political significance of the widespread interest in Russia is impossible to quantify, but the evidence suggests that it had no political ramifications. A pertinent analogy would, perhaps, be to compare the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War with that of Belgium in the First, that of a gallant ally fiercely resisting a strong enemy.

The evidence from Manchester suggests that there was no leftward swing in popular opinion between 1939-1942. The period was, instead, characterised by a general disinterest in party politics in any form. Furthermore, as we shall now see, popular interest in reconstruction was subordinated to a general willingness to win the War first. Consequently, although not the case in later years, reconstruction did not yet have a political edge, and no political party was linked with reconstruction in the public mind.

Given the cynicism about the prospects of reform, one might have expected there to have been considerable local pressure on the Government to initiate some tangible measure of reconstruction to prove that their talk of change was genuine. Indeed, both the Guardian and Evening News regularly pressed for such evidence. In October 1940 the Guardian claimed; "Among the things required now is an assurance that some Cabinet Committee is working unremittingly on a design for twentieth-century living in the sphere of...reconstruction at home."⁸¹ However, such statements were unrepresentative of the public mood, for one of the most notable features of these early years, even as late as the summer of 1942, was the complete lack of such pressure from the general public in Manchester. This is an important point which has been either widely dismissed or ignored by many historians who have seemingly confused widespread interest in reform for a demand for work to begin immediately. In fairness many contemporaries, including Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee, also believed that the public mood required the Government to give the people something positive to fight for (i.e. the promise of change) rather than the essentially negative aim of defending (and therefore maintaining) the *status quo*. Most political studies of the War have argued that such attitudes demonstrated that the Labour Party were in touch with the

mood of the people. Conversely, Winston Churchill is portrayed as reactionary, a man out of touch with public feeling on the issue and an obstacle standing in the way of change. It is true, of course, that for more than two years after he came to power in May 1940 Churchill's energies were directed almost totally to matters of military strategy and, on the occasions he turned his attention to the Home Front, production. In these years Churchill, who, in Hugh Dalton's words, was "allergic to post-war policy", avoided reconstruction matters realising that they would threaten coalition unity and therefore his own position.⁸² For Churchill, reconstruction would have to wait until the War was won. The evidence of Manchester suggests that as late as August and September 1942 Churchill's attitude, far from being diametrically opposed to that of his people, was merely echoing their own private thoughts. Questionnaires taken in the city during August revealed that high-level talk of reform was unpopular with many Mancunians, who felt politicians should concentrate exclusively on the war effort: "I am continually hearing complaints of public speakers talking of what is going to be done after the war, when we have not yet won it."; "Too much talk on post-war problems whilst still fighting for our existence."; "There is too much talk of post-war."; "General attitude is 'get the war over'."; "General opinion is 'first catch your hare.'"; "General feeling is to get the war won and then to talk of reconstruction. If we don't win we needn't bother talking about reconstruction - Hitler will see to that for us."⁸³ Not one questionnaire (out of over sixty) revealed dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in social reform being made. So throughout the early part of the War, Labour were not riding on the crest of public opinion but were actually in advance of it. While the Labour Party and much of the local press was pushing for change, most people supported Churchill's approach.

The lack of public pressure for immediate reforms was reflective of a general disinterest in politics. M.I.C. reports during these years reveal that political apathy was a characteristic of the city. On the occasions that public interest in politics was recorded by an observer, it took the form of a common desire for all politicians to present a united front. This was also admitted by the Clayton Labour Party which, in December 1940 found that "there is no demand for a general election."⁸⁴ Again, in a M.I.C. Public Opinion survey of August 1942 it was noted; "A General Election was not wanted."⁸⁵

This was a national trend, with Mcallum and Readman pointing out; “It is certain that nothing was further from the minds of the general mass of the electorate in 1942 than the idea of holding a general election.”⁸⁶ The one contested by-election in Manchester in this period highlighted a general disinterest in political conflict. The turn-out for the by-election in the Labour-held seat of Clayton (October 1942) was only slightly over 20 per cent, as against the 1935 general election turnout of 77 per cent.⁸⁷ Although the by-election figure was measured against an electoral register that was now three years out of date, it should be noted that a by-election in Rusholme two years later attracted a turn-out of nearly 35 per cent against an even older register. Amongst those who did vote, the majority evidently did so only to show their support for the Government, rather than through any great interest in policies. One voter said: “I would [like] to give my vote for the Government...I think everyone who can should go to show our confidence in those who are running the country today.”⁸⁸ It was generally agreed that the campaign of the Independent, Hammond Foot, had attracted very little interest, despite the election coming after months of military setbacks. The Guardian remarked;

The mood of the electors has been pretty clear for some time. Alderman Harry Thorneycroft, the Labour candidate is sure of election, what remains in doubt is whether Major Hammond Foot, the Independent, will save his deposit. Major Foot’s candidature has lighted no fire in the division. The electors have, on the whole, treated him with indifference and have largely ignored his meetings.⁸⁹

This was in part due to the nature of Foot’s candidature, with Foot himself dismissed by the Labour Lord Mayor, Wright Robinson, as an “elderly, tall and bemused Major.”⁹⁰ He was a consulting engineer and was described as an authority on tank attacks and was actively engaged in an advisory capacity to the Government.⁹¹ His policies included opposition to the “centralisation of commodities which are destroying individual enterprise and the small shopkeeper”, opposition to women fire watchers (women were deemed “too precious to be unnecessarily imperilled”) and, obscurely, a “courageous balancing of a terribly menacing unbalanced town and rural planning by the building up of a new yeoman community and ideal modern homesteads.”⁹² Such policies were not

likely to attract much support and Foot was heavily defeated, receiving little more than 600 votes, as against almost 9,000 for his Labour opponent.

Throughout this period, political conflict or a party seeking to use war-time issues for its own ends caused considerable public resentment. Interestingly, local criticism was directed solely at the Labour Party. In late May 1942, following the Labour Party Conference, which endorsed the continuation of the electoral truce by a majority of only 1,275,000 to 1,209,000, the M.I.C. recorded that there was “much disgust at the strength of the vote against the electoral truce”⁹³ Two months later, public opinion questionnaires revealed the existence of “strong criticism of the Minister of Labour’s [Ernest Bevin] tendency to indulge in party propaganda on every possible occasion.”⁹⁴ The perceived Labour bias of the B.B.C. caused much disquiet with one observer reporting “violent criticism of the left tendency of B.B.C. speakers and the broadcasting of the Socialist Party Conference as blatant party propaganda.”⁹⁵ As the Conservatives were largely dormant, no similar criticism could be made of the Conservative Party.

There is no evidence to suggest that widespread interest in reconstruction boosted support for Labour. There was, again, considerable feeling against parties using reconstruction to advance their own cause. In the summer of 1942, public opinion reports revealed that on the issue of social reform there was disquiet at the way “politicians give the impression they are playing for position.”⁹⁶ Others reported that; “There seems to be some disquiet re talk of post-war. Whilst all feel that changes are necessary, there seems in many quarters a real fear lest they are being used by sentimentalists to foster their own social or political fads.”⁹⁷ Once more, public criticism was reserved for the Labour Party. In reaction to the 1942 Party Conference, where there had been talk of using the Party’s influence to introduce reconstruction measures as soon as possible, the M.I.C. noted that they had “heard much disgust expressed with the blah-blah talked at the Conference.”⁹⁸ Rather than helping to present a united front, non-Labour supporters felt that Labour was undermining the war effort by failing to cease their party political activity and attempts to make political capital out of war-time issues were, therefore, the antithesis of the popular mood. For this reason, widespread public interest in reconstruction had no positive effect on Labour’s

popularity. Labour's push for reconstruction was seen as blatant party political propaganda at a time when the majority of the local population believed the war effort should be receiving sole attention. Jefferys argues that throughout the early years it "remained to be seen whether [Labour] would benefit from new public concern about social progress."⁹⁹ The evidence of Manchester supports his argument.

There was no swing to Labour in Manchester in the period 1940-1942 and there was nothing to suggest that Labour was gaining support from middle-class Conservative voters. Indeed, the opposite appeared to be true, a point reflected in the Manchester Labour Party membership figures. Membership of the city's constituency Labour parties fell from 8,069 in 1940 to 4,719 in 1942.¹⁰⁰ This in itself is not significant: throughout the country factors such as service call-ups led to a considerable decrease in party membership. It was, however, significant that the fall was much greater in the city's Conservative held constituencies than in Labour strongholds. In 1940, the four Labour-held constituencies (Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting) provided 4,098 members; by 1942 this had decreased by 1,200 to 2,829 - a fall of 29 per cent. In the Conservative areas membership had dropped from 3,971 to 1,890, a decrease of over 2,000 or a massive 52 per cent.¹⁰¹ Proportionately, in 1940 the four Labour constituencies provided 50.78 per cent of the Party's membership, while the six Conservative constituencies provided 49.21 per cent, virtual parity. By 1942, the proportions had changed to 60 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Evidently, while some of those leaving the Party in Labour strongholds were being replaced by new members, the same was not happening in Conservative-voting constituencies. The intensification of class antagonisms was perhaps leading many of Manchester's middle-class citizens to identify even more closely with the Conservative Party, their natural political defenders. In consequence, Labour was making no inroads into the Conservatives core middle-class support. Indeed, in early 1942 some Conservative Ward parties reported an increase in their membership, particularly among women.¹⁰²

The period 1939-42 nevertheless saw the beginnings of wartime class polarisation but the overwhelming mood of the Manchester electorate was one of disinterest in

politics. In 1941, Home Intelligence had found that there was “an absence of thought along traditional party lines and as yet few settled opinions about the expected complexion of Britain’s first post-war Government.”¹⁰³ The evidence of Manchester would justify the same conclusion being reached in the autumn of 1942.

Coalition versus Party Loyalties.

If the early years of the conflict had significant, if long-term, effects on public attitudes, they had no impact on party politics. Despite the exigencies of total war and the existence from May 1940 onwards of an all-party government, continuity, rather than change, characterised Manchester (and Westminster) politics between 1939-42. Political relationships remained fraught as the main parties continued to play the party political game, while none of the parties felt the need to amend their core policy beliefs.

Shortly after the outbreak of war the three major parties, at national level, agreed “not to nominate candidates for Parliamentary vacancies that now exist, or may occur, against the candidate nominated by the Party holding the seat at the time of the vacancy occurring.”¹⁰⁴ This electoral truce was extended into formal coalition in May 1940 following the collapse of the Chamberlain Government, with Labour and the Liberals serving with the Conservatives under the premiership of Winston Churchill. Even in the first few perilous months, coalition relations were tense and strained and the Coalition can best be described as an uneasy alliance rather than a solid team. Several issues provoked party political feelings in Westminster, most notably the production crisis (which engendered much debate throughout 1940 and 1941) and the fuel rationing scheme (spring-early summer 1942). Throughout the ‘Phoney-War’ the economy remained only partially mobilised; munitions production and the mobilisation of manpower proceeded at a leisurely pace and little was done to interrupt the production of many non-essential items. Over one million people remained unemployed. Even in mid-1941 ministers were admitting that “output is not what it should be, and nothing to boast about.”¹⁰⁵ Production deficiencies throughout 1941 revived party tension at Westminster with Conservative and Labour M.P.s, anxious not to yield any advantage,

soon lining up behind the respective interests of capital and labour. John Colville, Churchill's Private Secretary, noted in June of that year;

[The] first signs of a new class feeling between the two sides of the House. The Tories, conscious of the great sacrifice they are making financially and of the exceedingly high wages being paid to war workers, are cantankerous about the many reports of slackness, absenteeism etc. in the factories. The Labour Party resent this criticism and blame the managers and employers for any shortcomings.¹⁰⁶

On 3 December 1941, over thirty left-wing Labour M.P.s pressed an amendment calling for the immediate public ownership and control of all industries vital to the war effort. Despite Attlee's threatened resignation, over 40 M.P.s voted for the unofficial amendment.¹⁰⁷ This was by far the most serious anti-government vote since May 1940, and many Conservatives saw the issue as an attempt to exploit the War for socialist purposes.

The coal rationing issue of spring 1942 saw a similar political confrontation, provoking a Conservative rebellion. Hugh Dalton (Labour) as President of the Board of Trade argued that rationing provided the only feasible solution to the shortage of coal, and made a provisional announcement to this effect in March 1942. Before the Government could finalise its plans, a powerful body of resistance had built up among both coal-owners and Conservative M.P.s. The Vice-Chairman of the 1922 Committee put forward an alternative policy to increase coal production and warned Dalton that at least fifty Conservative M.P.s would enter the opposition lobby if the Government pressed ahead with its plan unamended.¹⁰⁸ There could be no doubting the political feeling behind the storm which engendered by these proposals or of the part the Conservative 1922 Committee played in defeating them. As one Conservative told Dalton; "They acted as they did because they felt that the Labour Party in the Government was getting too much of its own way."¹⁰⁹ Rationing, when advocated by a Labour Minister, was seen as the first step to nationalisation of the mines and Dalton was forced to shelve rationing to concentrate instead on the idea of government control aimed at increasing production, with the state assuming responsibility for mining operations

while owners retained control of all financial matters. This compromise, whilst acceptable to Conservatives, was poorly received by miners' officials and Labour opinion in general.¹¹⁰ As with the production issue; "Behind the arguments about the merits or defects of the scheme, the debate turned into an unacknowledged trial of strength between the parties."¹¹¹ Party political feeling was constantly simmering beneath the veneer of coalition unity, rearing its head whenever any ideological controversy arose.

It is frequently argued that the Conservative and Labour parties held divergent views of the nature of party politics during the War. Ramsden, referring to the electoral truce, states the common argument that "Tories interpreted it as an electoral and political truce, Labour only as an electoral truce", whilst Addison argues that "the Right was politically quiescent while the Left kept up a barrage of activity and propaganda."¹¹² This view of the Conservative Party, concentrating their energies on the war effort while Labour was busily laying the foundations for its victory in the next General Election, is a prominent feature of the historiography of wartime politics. Much is often made of the suspension of the Conservative Party's annual conference in the early years of the War. Last held in 1937, the Party did not arrange another conference until 1943 and party organisation was similarly affected, with a number of key staff at Central Office leaving to take up work of national importance. The majority of full-time agents and Area Officers were conscripted, while the Party's youth organisation (The Junior Imperial League) was disbanded following the outbreak of war and was only reformed in late 1944. At a local level many Conservative Associations simply closed down until further notice while several of the Party's regional and district associations never met at all between 1940-1945.¹¹³ In comparison, attention is drawn to the fact that Labour continued to hold its annual conference (normally in London and lasting for less than the normal week) and although local Labour associations were also affected by the War, especially in areas where organisation had been relatively weak (such as Scotland), in many inner-cities (London, Birmingham and Bristol are all good examples) Labour's reliance on trade unionists working in reserved occupations permitted a much higher level of activity.¹¹⁴ Conservatives complained that compared with their own restraint,

Labour activists missed no opportunity to proclaim their party's socialist message, and would later present this as a major factor in their 1945 defeat.

In Manchester, a similar pattern was repeated. All but one Conservative agent left their posts and the Party ceased to hold regular meetings. E.A. Radford M.P. (Rusholme) was typical when telling the City News in late 1940; "I am not having any political meetings nor taking part in any form of political party activity."¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Labour Party continued to hold regular meetings and lost only one of their party agents. However, the evidence of Manchester suggests the view of a one-sided truce is misleading, for local Conservatives engaged in party politics to a level at least equal to, if not greater than their Labour rivals, but Conservative activity took a different form.

Superficially, inter-party unity was solid with all three parties respecting the terms of the electoral truce. Up to the end of 1942, there were three by-elections in the city: in September 1940 the Conservative candidate, Harry Hewlett was elected unopposed in the Exchange constituency following the death of Peter Eckersley M.P.; in March 1942 Labour's Bill Oldfield was elected unopposed for Gorton when the incumbent M.P. William Wedgwood-Benn was elevated to the peerage.¹¹⁶ Only one seat was challenged, resulting in the by-election in Clayton in October 1942. The ensuing contest was seemingly a model of wartime political co-operation. The Manchester Conservatives asked all voters, including supporters of their own party, to vote for Harry Thorneycroft (Labour), the Government candidate, and Harry Hewlett M.P. (Conservative, Exchange) supported Thorneycroft at several election meetings.

The electoral truce presented a calm surface in Manchester politics, but underneath this veneer existed a very different reality. Party rivalry continued to such a degree that a local Labour leader lamented after a stormy City Council meeting of November 1940 that "there might have been no war on [at all]."¹¹⁷ Throughout the early years of the War, the Conservative Party's actions on Manchester City Council displayed a remarkable degree of partisanship, producing considerable resentment from their Labour counterparts. In late October 1940 a major party conflict developed over the issue of expanding the council's Emergency Committee. This Committee initially

constituted three members, including the leader of the Conservative group on the Council, Sir Norton Barclay, as Chairman. However, the Committee's work was widely considered unsatisfactory and was criticised by Mass-Observation. Similarly the City News observed;

Whatever may have been its success in details of organisation, Manchester's Emergency Committee cannot be said to have shown any conspicuous grasp of any issues that have been a matter of public discussion. It has 'dithered' continually from one policy to another. It has shown itself unaware of public needs and feelings and haughty and aloof towards endeavours to educate it.¹¹⁸

The Council expanded the Committee from three to six members, a decision opposed by the Conservatives. Barclay called for a meeting of the Council's Conservative-dominated General and Parliamentary Committee, which decided to ask the Council to reverse its previous decision. This led to "heated discussions between Labour and Conservative Groups".¹¹⁹ One Labour leader, Wright Robinson, bemoaned; "I strongly object to the Tory Party trying to over-ride a decision of the Council."¹²⁰

The following month, despite the fact that invasion remained a possibility, the Conservatives attempted to gain a party advantage in the running of the city. In mid-November 1940, the City Council met to select the Chairmen and Deputy-Chairmen for its various committees. Throughout the meeting, the Conservatives continuously used their superior numbers to ensure that they were greatly over represented in these positions. There were twenty statutory committees up for election, and following this Council session fifteen Chairmanships and eleven Deputy-Chairs were held by the Conservatives. Three Chairs and two Deputies were held by the Liberals and only two Chairs and three Deputies by Labour. Taking both Chairs and Deputies together, the Conservatives held 43, Labour 16 and the Liberals 9. As Labour had 51 councillors out of a total of 144 (the Conservatives had only 16 more), they were significantly under-represented. An exceptionally stormy council meeting ensued with Labour councillors enraged by the Conservatives' actions, and the City News observer reported; "[There were] severe attacks on Alderman S. Woolam, Secretary of the Conservative

group [and known as the Grand Old Man of the Tories], alleging that his colleagues were using their great majority to secure the 'plum' positions on committees."¹²¹ Wright Robinson told the meeting that he wished to protest against the unfairness of the 'other' party;

There is supposed to be a united front to win the war. What has happened is that under the guidance of those of the other side we are receiving less and less a proportion of responsible positions. Take Education, Electricity, Highways, Markets, Public Assistance, Rivers, Town Hall, Town Planning, Airport, Local Pensions and Wythenshawe. On all these there are Conservative chairmen and deputy chairmen, although we on our side have men who have served longer. Their members of three years service are getting offices against seasoned veterans. The other side have quite definitely taken advantage of this truce and there is therefore no unity between us. We want proportional representation. Here is no truce to win the war. It is sharp shooting for they have obtained a stranglehold on this corporation.¹²²

Another Labour member, Alderman Hart, told Woollam;

The Conservatives have done everything to get hold of all the important committees leaving the rest for the pickings...You are Public Enemy number one...You would lose the British Empire before you would give in on a political issue... We are asked to sit down quietly and take what the other party is going to give us. They take all the best positions and then say we will now talk things over to show you how fair we are.¹²³

One such example came on the General and Parliamentary Committee. Woollam defied the Labour Party over an allegation that he had broken an agreement by replacing two deceased Conservatives with other Conservatives. Wright Robinson alleged that the agreement was for proportional representation on major committees, and that Labour were entitled to both seats. Robinson said; "We have found Alderman Woollam unbending. There is no fairer man on ordinary topics, but when he gets his party spectacles on his sense of fairness disappears." Woollam replied; "As party secretary I am here to defend the interests of my party and to see that it gets fair play."¹²⁴ Following the meeting, a furious Robinson wrote;

I was very annoyed to find how the Tories had done it on us over Chairmanships and Deputy Chairmanships. We are living in a time of party truce, an altogether partnership to win the war [but] when we come to the election of Chairmen and Deputies the Tories throw their party weight around.¹²⁵

Robinson noted that one Labour stalwart with thirty years of Council service, George Titt, was nominated by the Party for the Deputy-Chairmanship of the Highways Committee but was rejected by the Council in favour of a “negative Tory” with just three years membership of the Council.¹²⁶ Tom Regan, a leading Labour figure and a staunch left winger with the longest membership of anybody on the Committee, “was rejected in favour of the same negative Tory”, because it was “[Regan’s] socialism that the Tories objected to.”¹²⁷ Robinson noted that he was “very annoyed at this patent political packing by the Tory Party” and claimed; “there will be no unity on these terms.”¹²⁸

Twelve months later, the same situation occurred. Robinson noted; “We had the old row about Regan [this time] as Deputy Chairman for electricity.”¹²⁹ Once again the Conservatives refused to appoint him, but so as not to alienate Labour completely they elected another Labour member, whom they believed to be more moderate, in his place. This infuriated Labour with Robinson remarking; “Now was the fat in the fire. What right had the Tories to select our nominees for us and turn down the official one?”¹³⁰ The ‘moderate’ appointee was ordered to resign by his Labour colleagues and promptly did so.

It was not only the Labour Party with whom the Conservative tactics caused friction. The Manchester Liberal Federation was infuriated following an incident in December 1940. An Aldermanic vacancy had arisen in the Rusholme Ward and both the Liberals and Labour had agreed that in such circumstances the senior Councillor would be elevated to the Alderman’s bench without an election. However, the Conservatives refused to agree to this position and nominated a candidate for the seat, who was defeated.¹³¹ This demonstrated the extent to which the Conservative Party sought to secure the utmost advantage for themselves, regardless of the military situation. The Secretary of the Liberal group on the Council, Hugh Lee, believed that the War had actually exacerbated party tensions;

For some time in the council chamber there has been a marked tendency to move in the direction of party politics rather than in a direction which makes for wise and efficient local Government administration. The opposition to the elevation of Alderman Edwards is the most recent example of these tactics.¹³²

This was also the view of neutral observers, with the City News bemoaning; "The lack of leadership which many think they have discerned during the war, and the petty squabbles over mean points which mar our council's dignity and influence."¹³³

The Conservatives revealed little spirit of co-operation even when non-party, war-related, issues were discussed. On many local Councils, party stalwarts worked together in order to frustrate the common enemy. In Birmingham, where the Conservative majority had bitterly resented the way in which Labour had supported a Communist-led rent strike in 1939, an agreement was reached giving Labour representation on the Council's Emergency Committee. Thereafter, inter-party agreement on matters of civil defence was complete.¹³⁴ This was patently not the case in Manchester, where the Conservatives had strongly opposed any extension of the city's Emergency Committee and this position was taken further in October 1942 when the Party decided to oppose an important report on War Damage and Condition of Rebuilding. Only the revolt of several Conservatives ensured that "instead of blocking the very first step in reconstruction, the Report was carried."¹³⁵

Although the Manchester Conservatives ceased holding regular party meetings they did hold a special conference in the city in late 1941. The main topics of discussion were support for the Government, wartime 'slacking', youth education, the plight of small shopkeepers, family allowances, and post-war industry.¹³⁶ It was the overall mood of the conference that was of most significance; the City News stated; "The conference did not smack of propaganda; rather a rallying of determination that when the war ends Conservatives, far from lulled into security by successes in war-time by-elections, will be not unprepared to face the inevitable conflict of political ideals."¹³⁷ The Conservatives clearly believed that the Coalition was only a short-term measure and the next general election was very much on their minds.

It was not only Conservatives who failed to put party interest aside; the same was true of Labour and the Liberals. Most of the subsidiary branches of the Manchester Labour Party ceased to function shortly after the outbreak of war and did not resume activity until later in the conflict. For example, the Women's Section of the Gorton Constituency Labour Party closed down in the summer of 1939 and did not hold its next meeting until May 1943, but the main Labour organisations, the Manchester City Labour Party, and the Manchester Labour Women's Advisory Council continued to meet regularly. Labour was determined to maintain its separate presence as a political force in the city. One day after the outbreak of war, the President of the Women's Advisory Council "spoke of the need to maintain contact and preserve the organisation during the war period."¹³⁸ A short time later the Council heard that "a lead should be given by the Advisory Council as to what could be done to keep the sections together."¹³⁹ Admittedly, this was partly due to a keenness to play their part in the war effort and in September 1939 the Council launched a group to look for profiteering, take evacuee's reports and to form a working committee to make bandages and other such supplies.¹⁴⁰ However, this desire to 'do their bit' came second to their sense of party loyalty. Just as the Manchester Conservatives continued to play party politics, so did the Labour women. The thought of co-operating with Conservatives, even in wartime, proved impossible for many to swallow and an indication of this came early in the War. For almost a year from December 1939, the Labour Women's Council minutes recorded numerous debates and resolutions concerning the recently created Maternal Mortality and Welfare Committee. In December 1939 the Women's Council withdrew its support from this committee due to the fact that it contained Conservative women and other non-Labour members. In April 1940, the Council unanimously passed a resolution "re-affirm[ing] our previous decision to disaffiliate and [we] ask all Labour councillors and Women's Sections to withdraw the support."¹⁴¹ The Women's Council had the full support of the City Labour Party whose Secretary "expressed his opinion that he thought the decision [to withdraw] was a wise one and that maternal and welfare questions were the normal work of our Party and should be done by us as a Party, and not in conjunction with an ad hoc committee."¹⁴² The issue rumbled on throughout the summer of 1940 and an example

of the pettiness it aroused was revealed with the Women's Council noting with glee; "Mrs Holmshaw of Maternal Mortality stated that if they had to choose between the support of the Labour women and that of the Tories they would drop the Conservatives as they did not give active support, nor were they prepared to go all the way with the Maternal Mortality Committee."¹⁴³ For Labour women, any civic/community work should only be undertaken if they alone were responsible for carrying it out. This was further emphasised in October 1940. The Women's Council received a letter from the National Group for the Defence of Women and Children asking the Council to affiliate and appealing for donations. Again the Advisory Council refused, resolving that "the work being done by it is work that should be undertaken by the Labour Party."¹⁴⁴ Even sharing a public platform with a Conservative provoked howls of protest from Labour women. In late 1942, the Council was informed that Dr Edith Summerskill (a prominent Labour M.P.) would address a meeting whose Chairman would be Alderman Miss Kingsmill-Jones, a veteran Manchester Conservative. In response, the Advisory Council resolved; "We strongly protest against Labour women M.P.s associating with and taking part in public meetings with organisations not affiliated with the Labour Party."¹⁴⁵

Surprisingly, given the Conservative Party's actions, the Labour group on the City Council did attempt to show a spirit of party co-operation. However, this led only to intra-party conflict with councillors enduring heavy criticism from other sections of the Party. In early 1940 the City Council Labour group, nominated Conservative women councillors for positions on various committees and was instantaneously condemned by the Women's Advisory Council. Bill Oldfield, the leader of the Labour group, addressed the Advisory Council and put forward their explanation, but the Labour women "Expressed their opinion [that] whilst accepting Councillor Oldfield's explanation, they protested against the practice of Labour men Councillors giving preference to Tory women when Labour women are available."¹⁴⁶ This suggests that Labour men were perhaps more willing to co-operate than were their female colleagues. Two years later, in January 1942, the Labour group supported an increase in salary for the Chief Engineer and Manager of the Manchester Transport Department. Again the councillors were fiercely criticised with the Labour women resolving; "This Council deplores the attitude

of the Labour Group.”¹⁴⁷ Evidently, as was the case with the Conservatives, much of the local Labour Party found it extremely difficult to put party politics to one side.

As with the Conservative Party, the Manchester Labour Party regarded the wartime Coalition as a strictly limited measure. Normal local party machinery and activity continued to as great an extent as possible, and the war effort and the existence of a coalition did not prevent Labour from continuing its propaganda. In December 1939, the Women’s Council agreed to purchase copies of ‘Labour Women’ for the rest of the War, which it intended to put on open sale to attract new members. Similarly, in March 1941 the Party produced a pamphlet entitled ‘The Threat To Wages’, again intended to be widely available. Labour was keen to see prominent Labour members of the Government visiting the city to both boost their own electoral prospects and to spread the Labour message. Concerning the visit of Herbert Morrison to the city in May 1942, Wright Robinson wrote; “It was suggested that he was thinking of the textile vote and if he was it was a very sound political thing to do. It is not only house sense but a duty on the part of a politician to cultivate his electorate.”¹⁴⁸ Robinson here is very revealing, suggesting that Morrison’s trip was seen as essentially a party rather than a government visit. Even at this perilous stage of the War, the Manchester Labour Party was looking ahead to the next general election and was keen to ensure they made political capital out of their party’s participation in government. The wartime Coalition was precisely that, a wartime measure that would ultimately end, allowing a return to “normal” electoral politics and Manchester Labour Party meant to be ready.

The third coalition party, the Liberals, largely steered clear of political disputes in the city during this period. Apart from the Aldermanic dispute with the Conservatives, no other incidents were recorded. However, from the outbreak of war the Liberals were active in the city, following the Labour approach that foundations should be laid for the next general election. Again, the Coalition was regarded as only a short-term necessity. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Manchester Liberal Federation received correspondence from Party Headquarters, informing the local Party that “ordinary political activity will naturally cease and that all grants to associations will be discontinued.”¹⁴⁹ Despite this news the Federation continued much as before, with

meetings at Federation, Executive and constituency level held on a regular basis. The Federation's view of the need to retain a coherent, working organisation was made clear a few weeks after the outbreak of war;

This Committee is of the view that it is vitally necessary to keep the organisation of the Party in being as this means not only can the Federation play its part more effectively in the national effort but when the time for contesting the election which is likely to come shortly after the war, the Liberal organisation in Manchester must exert its efforts as never before to lay the foundations for a just and lasting peace.¹⁵⁰

The need for organisational strength was a recurrent issue. In February 1940 the Executive Committee received "reports from the various districts which showed that a determined effort was being made to keep organisations alive despite the difficulty of holding regular political meetings."¹⁵¹ In November Mr Robert Davies of the Liberal Party Organisation "urged that meetings be held wherever possible even if of an informal nature in someone's private house."¹⁵² The Liberal strategy was taken a stage further in late 1942, when the Executive Committee advised; "Divisional and Central Associations should carry out a programme of activities with the definite object of strengthening their position."¹⁵³ For the Liberals, in common with the other two parties, party politics was not to be put on hold even in a time of national emergency.

The study of Manchester highlights the fact that disputes, particularly those between the Labour and Conservative parties, in Parliament were mirrored even more strenuously at a local level. Any issue, whether controversial or relatively trivial, was likely to lead to the parties entrenching themselves in their party positions. Despite the graveness of the war situation and the existence of a coalition, all three parties had one eye on the next general election. Old habits refused to die.

An Emerging Consensus?

Continuing party politics in Manchester were accompanied by the lack of any emerging consensus between the two major parties on Britain's social and economic future. At Westminster, the gravity of the military situation ensured that reconstruction planning did

not proceed far before the end of 1942. Indeed the appointment, in January 1941, of the Labour veteran Arthur Greenwood to the post of Minister without Portfolio charged with responsibility for reconstruction questions was a reflection of the low priority accorded to post-war matters in these years. All three major parties created their own reconstruction policy groups, but policy discussions in all parties had limited bearing on Government planning.¹⁵⁴ However, as Jefferys has argued; “the importance of such discussions lay rather in highlighting the very different perceptions of the future that lay concealed beneath the mask of coalition unity.”¹⁵⁵ While the lack of major policy initiatives in the early years of the Coalition can be attributed to the war situation, it also reflected the mood of the Conservative majority in Parliament. Many Conservative back-benchers resented what they saw as the socialistic trend of wartime controls over the economy and were determined to limit, whenever possible, the influence of Labour ministers and Dalton had discovered how uncompromising Conservatives could be when he produced plans to re-organise coal. In contrast, from mid-1942 onwards in particular, the Labour Party were determined to urge its ministers in government to secure tangible gains in social policy. Hence, in July 1942, more than fifty Labour M.P.s voted to condemn the latest changes in the pensions system, the largest anti-government vote since the outbreak of war.¹⁵⁶

The differing views of the parties in Westminster on the shape of future policy were also evident in Manchester. The early years of the War did appear to lead to a greater interest in the welfare of the working-classes for some local Conservatives. Evacuation findings surprised local Conservatives, as it did others. This was made clear in a letter from Harry Hewlett M.P. (Conservative, Exchange) to a Labour colleague in November 1941. Hewlett wrote;

I have been distressed to find, when our children from Manchester were evacuated, to ascertain the large numbers of children who were what I might describe as being dirty. This came as a great shock to me...I want to live to see the day when there is a total abolition of slums...I would love to talk to you at length, and listen to you at length, on these post-war problems, particularly those problems that effect what we might call the working classes.¹⁵⁷

Superficially, this may suggest the beginnings of a shift in the traditional Conservative position towards the adoption of a degree of collectivism, and certainly it would appear to support the views of historians (such as Addison) who have argued that the early years of the War witnessed the origins of a cross-party consensus on social and economic affairs. In reality, the increased awareness of working-class life and conditions had little or no effect on the attitudes of local Conservatives who remained wedded to their pre-war values of self-help and the minimalist state, values which continued to dominate their policy agenda. The views of the Manchester Conservatives were firmly on the neo-liberal Right of the Party. This was demonstrated by Hewlett who, in the same letter, wrote;

I am a great believer in the fact that if the state cannot find a man work, then the state is responsible for the help of that man, his wife and his children, but here I feel there is an anomaly, and that is during past years on occasions I have ascertained that an unskilled labouring man with reasonably sized family could draw more from the dole than he will be paid if he was working a full working week. I am sure that you will agree with me that this is wrong in principle and that amendments to our laws will have to be brought into operation to rectify this anomaly.¹⁵⁸

Here is the traditional Conservative position on welfare provision, and demonstrates that any attempt to improve the welfare of the poor would only be undertaken within strict boundaries and without changing the fundamental Conservative philosophy of minimalist state intervention.

Local Conservatives continued to consider sacrosanct their preference for private over public enterprise, with one Labour councillor being asked by a Conservative colleague; "Did I not agree that corporation employees were slackers and less efficient than private employees?"¹⁵⁹ For Conservatives, state control over industry was a necessary short term measure, which would give way once the War was won, allowing a return to the dominance of private enterprise. Any significant extension of the peace-time role of the state in welfare, industry, or the economy in general, such as that undertaken by Labour after 1945, was unthinkable and there was no recognition from Labour members that the Conservatives were beginning to transform themselves. After

one City Council meeting in 1941 Wright Robinson lamented how two Conservative councillors;

Talked about the poor unemployed and how they doled out relief at the Guardians, bringing to my mind all the insolent arrogance of the rich philanthropist who used to be 'kind to the poor'...Humiliated I sat, feeling that the unemployed were being insulted and cheapened and their humanity exploited.¹⁶⁰

This prompted Robinson and other Labour councillors to accuse local Conservatives of being "selfish, self-satisfied, with no real conscience, charmingly unaware of any social obligation, doing what public work they do in order to satisfy their desire for public approbation."¹⁶¹ Even allowing for the natural Labour suspicion of the Conservatives, these examples demonstrate that they did not believe the Conservatives were changing their ways. It would, however, have been very surprising had the Conservatives started to amend their core beliefs. The 1930s had been a highly successful decade for the Party, and the unique circumstances of 1939-42 were unlikely to persuade the Party to change a 'winning formula'.

Manchester Labour also remained staunchly supportive of core party beliefs. In reality the Party had very little room to manoeuvre, even had it wished to do so, for Labour's decision to participate in the Coalition sparked unrest among some sections of the Labour movement. This placed the Party in the difficult position of managing a balancing act between co-operation with the other parties in the Coalition and maintaining a degree of independence in order to placate its own members. Once in the Coalition, the Parliamentary Labour Party came under pressure from local organisations who held unrealistic expectations of what Labour in government could achieve. Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Manchester District Council Branch of the N.U.R. recorded;

We hold that the declaration of policy made by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary with reference to assistance to the U.S.S.R can only be implemented by a Government from which members who approved of Munich and laissez-faire capitalism have been exorcised and we call upon the N.E.C. of the Labour Party to insist upon the passing from

Government of those friends of Fascism who have helped materially to bring the nation into peril.¹⁶²

Although such demands were totally unrealistic they, combined with the strong feelings expressed by groups such as the Women's Advisory Council, emphasise the fact that the P.L.P. had to appear distinctive from the Conservatives to mollify its rank-and-file. This was a crucial necessity. The Labour Party leadership were aware that their participation in the Coalition, and the attendant co-operation with the Conservatives, risked alienating some traditional supporters and driving them into the grateful hands of the resurgent Communist Party. Popular interest in the Soviet Union had led to a substantial growth of the British Communist Party, which achieved a peak of membership of around 65,000 in September 1942 compared to the highest pre-war figure of 18,000 achieved in the first half of 1938. Although with hindsight it is easy to dismiss the growth of the Communist Party as a strictly short-term phenomenon, this was not obvious at the time, and Labour were concerned that they may be outflanked on the Left. This concern manifested itself at both national and local levels. National Labour leaders were highly critical of the Communists, and refused to accept their affiliation to the Labour Party, while locally, in diaries and minute-books there are concerned references to the relative success of the Communist Party and its propaganda. Throughout the country, the Communist Party sought to exploit popular fears on the subject of air-raid shelters and in September 1941, Wright Robinson (then Lord Mayor) wrote; "Alderman Hall, Councillors Ben Ainley and John Owen had called a public meeting, ostensibly to rouse people to their danger, really to carry on the good work of Communist propaganda."¹⁶³ Labour were greatly concerned about Communist infiltration into the local trades union movement. Throughout 1940 a struggle waged on the Manchester and Salford Trades Council between moderates and Communists, who were officially banned from trades councils, and who, it was claimed, were engaging in disruptive activities. The Trades Council refused to affiliate to the Labour Party and was "restrained by the knowledge that some of its Union members would withdraw if it did."¹⁶⁴ The Guardian noted; "the extremists [are] apparently getting the better of it", and consequently the Trades Council received word that the T.U.C. had struck it off the list of recognised trades councils until it had

been satisfactorily reorganised.¹⁶⁵ Such concern did not simply die away, and over a year later, Robinson noted anxiously; "Communists are out to capture the Works Committee at Metro Vics."¹⁶⁶ So concerned were the Party about the threat of losing support to the Communists that party members were banned from taking part in any activity organised by the Communist Party. One Labour councillor, Dr Emrys Davies, who disobeyed this instruction by presiding at a meeting commemorating the Communist Tom Mann, was excluded from the Labour Party and subsequently said that it was regrettable that the Labour Party "should have sunk so low as to act in so dictatorial a manner."¹⁶⁷ Labour also resented the Communists subversive efforts on the various Anglo-Russian associations. Wright Robinson, referring to the Anglo-Russian Friendship Committee, claimed; "[It] should have been one of the greatest joys of my life but was thwarted by the continuous attempts of the Communist Party to go beyond the terms of reference and to use one and the Committee for political as against educational appeal on Russia."¹⁶⁸ Such was Robinson's feeling against the Communists that he described them as "the least pleasant feature of my year of office [as Lord Mayor]."¹⁶⁹

However, not all Labour members opposed the Communists and the attitude of the Labour leadership did provoke some internal arguments with the Labour Left, particularly at constituency level. Manchester provided one such example. At the 1942 Labour Party Conference the Rusholme Labour Party, who were regarded as being the most left-wing of the Manchester Labour Constituency parties, moved a resolution in support of Communist affiliation;

This Annual Conference of the Labour Party and Affiliated Organisations, believing that working-class unity is essential to secure the full prosecution of the war and vitally necessary in the post-war world, instructs the N.E.C. to remove the ban on members of the Labour Party co-operating with members of the Communist Party on specific issues. With undivided forces the working-class can go forward to victory in the war and victory in the peace. We are of the opinion that the Labour Movement should unite all sections of the working-class so that the fight would find the working-class in full strength. My party are convinced that the pressure of events will undoubtedly bring this about and say any such unity will not hinder the full prosecution of the war.¹⁷⁰

This resolution was overwhelmingly defeated and the views of the Rusholme Labour Party were unrepresentative of the Manchester Labour Party as a whole, the great majority of which remained steadfastly hostile to the Communists.

Labour was not alone in fearing the rise of the Communists. The British Establishment were greatly disturbed about the possible political ramifications of the tremendous pro-Soviet feeling in the country. In an attempt to prevent the Communist Party from benefiting from this overwhelming popular sentiment, the regional information officers of the Ministry of Information were quietly encouraged to take over local campaigns begun by the Communists. Manchester provided a classic example. The local Communists organised an Anglo-Soviet Committee to raise funds for Russia but, prompted by the North-West region office, the Lord Mayor gave the Committee his blessing but persuaded it to disband so that he could form one of his own with Ministry representation.¹⁷¹

With the Labour Party needing to maintain its independence, it was inevitable that the language and policy preferences of the local Labour Party during these years were very different from those of the Conservatives. The existing economic system was continually attacked and, it was argued, could only be replaced by a system which involved a greatly increased role for the state. As early as August 1940, Wright Robinson referred to a decision taken by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now B.P.) which was reported to have sold one million barrels of oil to Japan. Robinson bemoaned; "This is disturbing and is part of the whole mad policy of capitalism. To win this war we must have unity [but] there will be hell let loose afterwards."¹⁷² For Labour, profits and self-satisfaction should be put aside in favour of the common good, with Robinson saying in a speech of late 1941;

I do not suggest that either here or in America equality has ever been accepted in practice. The nearest approach to equality is not to be found in the larger but in the smaller democracies - Denmark, Sweden and Norway where the gap between the highest and lowest incomes was much narrower than in Great Britain or America, [and we must] praise Denmark for setting up a co-operative dairy system to overcome major economic difficulties.¹⁷³

In total contrast to the Conservatives, the local Labour Party foresaw the future in terms of state “control of industry and equality of economic opportunity.”¹⁷⁴ Labour were adamant that there must be no return to the mass unemployment of the 1930s, which was described as “the best recruiting sergeant for Hitler [and] the greatest soul destroying thing in our civilisation.”¹⁷⁵ The Manchester Labour Party thus urged the need for national planning, involving the creation of a Regional Industrial Committee, to begin work as soon as possible to prevent mass post-war unemployment.¹⁷⁶

Further evidence of the major differences between the two major parties was provided by Labour’s support for the nationalisation of land. In early 1941 Sir Ernest Simon (at this time an Independent but with links to Labour, becoming a Labour Peer after the war) spoke for many fully-fledged Labour members when advocating national, regional and local planning to determine the general location of properties and industry. In a paper entitled ‘Urban Land Ownership and Management after the War’ Simon stated how impressed he had been at the contrast between the planning of Moscow and Manchester. Simon argued;

Individual ownership of the land must be abolished. Under unified ownership central open spaces can be provided with no cost to anybody. Only when there is common ownership of the land will it be possible to plan and rebuild our cities with a single eye to the advantage of the people as a whole. The authorities must have a free hand to plan for convenience and amenity without certainty of obstruction through damage to the value of property or individuals.¹⁷⁷

He concluded; “Firstly, separate ownership of urban land must at all costs be abolished [and that] secondly, all land should be nationalised at the earliest possible moment.”¹⁷⁸ Simon presciently acknowledged that there was “a very strong prejudice against nationalisation from the political Right, and there would be a terrific fight to settle the basis of compensation.”¹⁷⁹

While the Conservatives remained wedded to their pre-war views of the social services, the local Labour Party continued with their campaign to further their provisions. In July 1941 the Labour Women’s Advisory Council resolved that it should “take steps to forward to the N.E.C. a resolution that sick benefit should be paid to pregnant women

two months before and after the birth. If necessary supplementary benefit should be provided.”¹⁸⁰ Also in July 1941, in response to the Government’s recently introduced scheme of Day Nurseries, the Advisory Council proposed that the P.L.P. should push for the following policies to augment the proposals;

- (1) Residential Day and Night Nurseries for children up to 2 years old.
- (2) Nursery schools from ages 2 - 5 with meals provided.
- (3) Equipment of nursery classes on nursery school lines.
- (4) Provision to be made for children after school hours from age of 5 to school leaving age.¹⁸¹

Amongst the Women’s Council, any sign of vested interest or private profits coming before what they perceived as the public good was roundly condemned. In January 1942 the Council resolved; “[We] strongly protest against the statements made by Lord Woolton and the Catering Trades [which were the subject of fierce disagreement between the parties in early 1943] that (a) the British Restaurants would not be continued after the war and (b) that the Catering Trade would be considered before a British restaurant is opened in any area.”¹⁸² Similarly, the following month it was resolved that “This Council is of the opinion that the recent legislation granting an allowance for travelling expenses to a section of the community [such as the upper reaches of the local Council] is unjust and demands that the allowance should be available to all workers.”¹⁸³

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of policy formulation amongst local parties concerned the Liberals. There is clear evidence to suggest that there were marked differences between the Parliamentary Liberal Party and the Manchester Liberal Federation over the Party’s future direction. During this period, the Liberals at Westminster were moving closer to the Labour Party position on many issues, accepting that the state would continue to play a major role in society after the War. Indeed, the Party was in favour of adopting a peacetime planned economy. However, while the Liberals in Parliament were moving in a progressive direction, this was evidently causing considerable friction in the provinces and Manchester Liberals, on many issues, were closer to the Conservatives in their views. For them, increased state action and

regulation was purely a war-time phenomenon to be dismantled as quickly as possible after the War, a view shared by Liberal associations in other parts of the country. In late 1942, the Manchester Liberal Federation received a letter from the East Grinstead Liberal Association asking for the Federation's support in their protest against the Liberal Party's Organisation's suggested adoption of the planned economy.¹⁸⁴ In response, the Federation decided to await a report from the Party Headquarters, but hinted that it had considerable sympathy with the East Grinstead Association's views.

The Manchester Liberals views on the shape of post-war Britain were clearly expressed in an address made by their President, Philip Oliver, in April 1942. This makes interesting reading for much of it could quite easily have come from a Conservative:

After the victory there will be an appalling amount of work to be done and an appalling number of beaurocrats [sic] who will be perfectly willing to do it. The beaurocrat [sic] will be ready to give us security at the expense of freedom. It is for Liberals to see that in the giving of security, freedom is preserved, not at the expense of security but as its complement...We demand the widest possible extension of free trade...In the domestic sphere our task will be to re-establish the freedom which we have voluntarily surrendered for the purposes of war. The new 'Declaration of Rights' recently published in the U.S. speaks of the "right to live in a system of free enterprise, free from compulsory labour, irresponsible private power, arbitrary public authorities and unregulated monopolies." Not for ever can we be obedient and regimented children of the state, the pertinent victims of monopoly. The interim period will no doubt be full of difficulties. In restoring freedom we must not destroy security. The restoration of some [economic] controls will be necessary while we change from a war economy to a peace economy. But there must be no uncertainty as to the direction in which we tread. The goal must be freedom - the restoration of the old freedom which is security from the arbitrary authority of the state.¹⁸⁵

The emphasis here on free trade, the relaxing of economic controls and curbing the powers of the state demonstrate that the Liberals in Parliament were at odds with the views of their colleagues in the country. The evidence of the Manchester Liberals, together with the correspondence from the East Grinstead Association suggests that provincial Liberal opinion remained essentially conservative.

Conclusion.

The evidence of Manchester suggests that the disruptive effects of the period from the outbreak of the War up to the publication of the Beveridge Report in late 1942 impacted on the electorate in two significant ways. Firstly, although one can easily find examples of bravery and a willingness to make sacrifices which conform to the 'myth of the Blitz', one must conclude that to speak of a homogenous, united civilian population is highly misleading. Attitudes towards the War itself were at times nebulous, whilst the Blitz shook civilian morale far more than was, and is, recognised. Crucially, class antagonism intensified. There existed a widely held working-class perception that they were shouldering a disproportionate amount of the burdens and sacrifices inherent in total war, while the experience, and horrifying stories, of evacuation served only to strengthen existing middle-class prejudices about their poorer neighbours. Secondly, the very desperation and hardships of the early war years generated a massive popular interest in social reform, and public enthusiasm, perhaps strongest among the young, for the notion of a 'better Britain' was a notable characteristic of these years. In this period, however, such thinking tended to take the rather vague form of 'something must be done', although reports suggested that certain policy areas (notably housing and education) were seen as priorities and there was increasing support for the state to play a greater role in post-war Britain. Between 1940-1942 the population ^{were} is awaiting a lead, some great initiative behind which they could throw their support.

However, although in the longer-term the combination of these two factors shaped the outcome of the 1945 General Election, their short-term political effects were negligible. There was, throughout this period, an absence of thought along party political lines. Newspaper comments, M.I.C. reports and the evidence of the Clayton by-election all suggest that, even by late 1942, party politics held very little interest for Mancunians, who met any attempt to score party political points with resentment and criticism. Importantly, reconstruction did not yet have a political edge; although there was considerable cynicism about the prospects of much-vaunted social reforms ever being introduced, public opinion reports demonstrate a general acceptance of Churchill's approach of 'winning the War first'. Such evidence clearly suggests that Addison is

wrong in his assertion that Labour's 1945 victory was determined as early as mid-1940. On the contrary, the evidence of Manchester supports the Jefferys/Sibley thesis that, even by late 1942, the likely outcome of the next general election was impossible to predict with any degree of confidence.

Throughout the period covered by this chapter Britain remained in a perilous military position but despite this, and the creation of an all-party coalition Government in 1940, the early years of the War had no effect on the nature of party politics or on policy thinking. Underneath the veneer of unity presented by the electoral truce, all three major Manchester parties saw the Coalition as a strictly war-time phenomenon which would give way to a return to 'normal' politics. Consequently, the parties remained determined to protect their separate identities and party interests. Party rivalries and conflicts therefore remained fraught, as could be seen in on a number of occasions. With the very nature of party politics unaffected by the War, it is little surprise that there was no evidence of a cross-party consensus emerging between the parties. For their own reasons, both the Conservatives and Labour held rigidly to their pre-war beliefs. The 1930s had been a highly successful decade for the Manchester Conservatives, who were therefore unlikely to feel the necessity for a major re-thinking of the Party's social and economic policies in the uncertain and perilous early years of the War. Consequently, although the revelations surrounding evacuation appear to have shaken some Conservatives, the Party remained wedded to their neo-liberal tenets of minimalist state intervention in social policies and the superiority of private over public enterprise.

With the Conservatives remaining loyal to their pre-war dogma, a consensus could only emerge if Labour moved to the Right. However, for internal party political reasons, Labour had very little room for manoeuvre. Labour had to continue to appear distinctive from the Conservatives to both mollify their own rank-and-file and to check the possibility of being outflanked on the Left by the resurgent Communist Party. This, judging by the nervous reaction of the Labour Party, was a real fear in 1941-42 and Labour was therefore strongly resistant to any notion of compromise of party policies.

There was therefore no consensus, or emerging consensus, between the two major parties by the end of this period. For one to develop in the later years of the War was by

no means impossible, but it would require a significant change in attitudes from one of the two main parties.

References and Notes..

- ¹ The average weekly hours for men and women manual workers in the metal/engineering/shipbuilding industries had been 48.0 in 1938, but rose considerably to 54.1 by July 1943. After 1941 it was increasingly realised that full efficiency required some relaxation and by June 1945, hours had in general fallen to 49.2. P.Dewey, War and Progress. Britain 1914-1945 (Longman, 1997), p. 303. There are many studies of wartime civilian life. For a brief informative study see Dewey, War and Progress, pp. 299-322. For a more detailed examination see A. Marwick, The Home Front. The British and the Second World War (Thames and Hudson, 1976).
- ² All Blitz statistics taken from Our Blitz. Red Skies Over Manchester (Kemsley Newspapers, 1945).
- ³ J. Walter and M. Vaughan-Rees, Blitz - The Civilian War 1940-45 (Macdonald and Co., 1990), p. 133.
- ⁴ B. Wicks, Waiting for the All-Clear (Bloomsbury, 1990), pp. 133-134.
- ⁵ To put this into perspective, one should compare this figure to the 40-50,000 German civilians killed in one night's Blitz in Dresden.
- ⁶ T. Harrison, Living Through the Blitz (Collins, 1976), p. 248.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 249.
- ⁸ Idem.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 358. Behind, in descending order, London, Merseyside, Birmingham, Clydeside, Plymouth/Devonport, Bristol/Avonmouth, Coventry, Portsmouth, Southampton and Hull.
- ¹⁰ Manchester Information Committee (M.I.C.) Public Opinion Reports, 25 February, 1942.
- ¹¹ M.I.C. Public Opinion Reports, 25 April, 1942. The M.I.C. constituted local councillors, religious groups and representatives of other organisations - the W.V.S., youth organisations, journalists and the University of Manchester.
- ¹² Ibid., 18 April, 1942.
- ¹³ Ibid., 25 February, 1942.

- ¹⁴ Ibid., 27 June, 1942.
- ¹⁵ N.U.R. (Manchester District Council Branch) minutes, 9 November, 1939.
- ¹⁶ M.I.C. Public Opinion Reports, 24 March, 1942. In general absenteeism was considerably higher amongst women than amongst men. Penny Summerfield attributes this to the high percentage of married women workers, who in addition to their jobs were also expected to stand in long food queues and do housework. By 1943 married women workers constituted some 43 per cent of all working women. See P. Summerfield, Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 125-130. A similar point is made by M. Pearce and G. Stewart, British Political History 1867-1995. Democracy and Decline (Routledge, 1996), p. 434.
- ¹⁷ A. Calder, The People's War (Johnathan Cape, 1969) pp. 117-118.
- ¹⁸ Harrison, Living Through the Blitz, p. 246.
- ¹⁹ Idem.
- ²⁰ Idem. Also see B. Beaven and D. Thoms, 'The Blitz and civilian morale in three northern cities' in Northern History. A Review of the History of the North of England and the Borders, XXXII, (1996), pp. 195-204 for a comparison of the effects of the Blitz on Manchester, Liverpool and Hull. They suggest that damage to a city's infrastructure, including city centre and notable buildings had a direct effect on morale. In Liverpool, they point out, such damage was not so severe as in Manchester, hence a more optimistic populace.
- ²¹ Harrison, Living Through the Blitz, pp. 247-249. Although accepting that such M.O. reports were full of grumbles, Thorpe contends that "they contained little that suggested defeatism or the despair upon which it thrives." A. Thorpe, 'Britain', in J. Noakes (ed), The Civilian in War. The Home Front in Europe, Japan and the U.S.A. in World War II (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992), pp. 14-35. This can be contrasted with Calder's view of the effects of the Blitz on civilians: A. Calder, The Myth of the Blitz, (Johnathan Cape, 1991).
- ²² Wright Robinson Diary, 3 November, 1940.
- ²³ M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 16 June, 1942.

- ²⁴ Robinson Diary, 11 November, 1940.
- ²⁵ M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 29 May, 1942. This was not surprising. Across the whole of the War, the mining industry accounted for 43 per cent of all days lost in strikes. Dorey, War and Progress, p. 307. For a brief examination of class conflict in the coal industry during the Second World War see L. Harris, 'State and economy in the Second World War' in G. McLennan et al (eds), State and Society in Contemporary Britain (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 60-70.
- ²⁶ M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August, 1942.
- ²⁷ Idem. Harris suggests that the private ownership of capital (private ownership still ruled most of the economy, even in war industries and essential supplies such as coal) meant that the economic basis of the old class structure was unchanged. In consequence, although patriotism and hostility to fascism were powerful unifying ideologies, in wartime Britain significant social divisions were class divisions. Harris, 'State and economy in the Second World War', in McLennan et al (eds), State and Society, p.75.
- ²⁸ M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 19 May, 1942. Addison draws an interesting distinction between the two World Wars. He suggests that in the First World War the dominant ethos was that of traditional patriotism, with the focus of social disapproval turned on the 'conchie' or drunken munitions worker. In contrast, the prevailing assumption of the Second World War was that the War was being fought for the benefit of the common people, and that it was the duty of the wealthy to throw in their lot with those less well-off. Whenever there was a military setback, resentment would break out towards 'vested interests'. P. Addison, The Road to 1945 Revised Edition, (Pimlico, 1994), p. 131.
- ²⁹ Guardian, 27 November, 1939.
- ³⁰ P. Lewis, A People's War (Methuen, 1986), pp. 12-13.
- ³¹ B. Holman, The Evacuation. A Very British Revolution (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1995), p. 75.
- ³² Guardian, 16 September, 1939.
- ³³ Evening Chronicle, 2 November, 1940.
- ³⁴ Robinson Diary, May-August 1940.

- 35 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 21 July, 1942.
- 36 D. Dutton, British Politics Since 1945. The Rise and Fall of Consensus (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 10.
- 37 K. Jefferys, The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 53.
- 38 City News, 15 March, 1941. Audience research reported that an average of one in three adults tuned in to Priestley's broadcasts. However, Addison suggests that the impact of such talks should not be exaggerated. He contends that the British people did not need the intelligensia, army education officers and politicians such as Harold Laski and Richard Acland to tell them that present society was in many ways unfair, and that it was probably the character of the War itself that served as the best propaganda. Addison, Road to 1945, p. 129.
- 39 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 53.
- 40 Guardian, 16 November, 1940.
- 41 City News, 14 September, 1940.
- 42 Northern Voice, October, 1944.
- 43 Guardian, 17 January, 1941.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 29 January, 1941.
- 45 Evening News, 29 July, 1941.
- 46 M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August, 1942.
- 47 Wright Robinson, files relating to official duties as Lord Mayor, 14 October 1942. See also Robinson Diary, October 1942 for a brief summary of the meeting. N. Tiratsoo, S. Fielding and P. Thompson, England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 38 point to a Ministry of Information survey which suggested that only around 5-20 per cent of Britain's population were thinking seriously about the nation's future in 1942. They then conclude that the disruptive effect of the War prompted a common desire that the conflict should be followed by a period of normalcy. The evidence of Manchester suggests that both the Ministry and England Arise! considerably underestimate the depth of interest in post-war thinking amongst the people.

⁴⁸ The five divisions were based on established Police divisions and were constituted as follows: **Central Division:** Exchange, St Anns, St Clements, St Johns, Oxford, St Georges, part of Medlock Street. **Northern Division:** St Michaels, Collegiate Church, Collyhurst, Newton Heath, Cheetham, Harpurhey, Moston, Crumpsall, Blackley, part of Miles Platting. **Eastern Division:** Part of Miles Platting, New Cross, Beswick, Bradford, Ardwick, Openshaw, St Lukes, St Marks, Gorton North & South, Longsight, Levenshulme. **Southern Division:** Part of Medlock Street, All Saints, Moss Side East & West, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Rusholme, Withington, Didsbury. **Wythenshawe:** Wythenshawe solely.

⁴⁹ M.I.C. Northern & Southern Division Public Opinion Reports, May-August, 1942.

⁵⁰ M.I.C. Public Opinion Reports, various references, February-August, 1942.

⁵¹ Kidd, Manchester, p. 217.

⁵² City News, 24 October, 1941.

⁵³ Ibid., 7 May, 1943.

⁵⁴ Idem.

⁵⁵ Evening News, 29 July, 1942.

⁵⁶ City News, 7 May, 1943.

⁵⁷ Guardian, 18 October, 1940.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 5 December, 1940.

⁵⁹ Evening News, 22 July, 1941.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 31 July, 1941.

⁶¹ City News, 9 November, 1940.

⁶² Addison, Road to 1945, p. 150.

⁶³ See N. Tiratsoo et al, England Arise! pp. 27-30. They suggest that the influence of A.B.C.A. should not be exaggerated. They accept an active, relatively well educated minority certainly enjoyed army education and no doubt benefited from it. But, on the other hand, most saw the sessions as an irrelevance: being lectured at increased rather than alleviated boredom. There were no real signs of an idealised citizen-soldier.

⁶⁴ M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August, 1942.

⁶⁵ Idem.

- 66 City News, 11 January, 1941.
- 67 M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August, 1942.
- 68 Idem.
- 69 Addison, Road to 1945, p. 150.
- 70 S. Fielding, 'The Second World War and popular radicalism: the significance of the movement away from party', in History, 80, (1995), p. 48.
- 71 M.I.C Public Opinion Reports, January-October 1942. Also see M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August 1942.
- 72 Robinson Diary, September 1942.
- 73 M. Crowley, 'Communist engineers and the Second World War in Manchester', in North-West Labour History, 22, (1997/98), p.64.
- 74 Ibid., p.65.
- 75 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 27 June 1942.
- 76 Evening News, 15 November, 1941. . Such gushing pro-Soviet sentiment was repeated throughout Britain. For such opinions in London see P. Ziegler, London at War 1939-1945 (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), pp. 223-226.
- 77 City News, 6 January, 1940.
- 78 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, April 1942.
- 79 Ibid., 27 February, 1942.
- 80 Ibid., 10 April, 1942.
- 81 Guardian, 10 October, 1940.
- 82 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 112.
- 83 M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August, 1942.
- 84 City News, 7 December, 1940.
- 85 M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August 1942.
- 86 R. Mcallum, & A. Readman, The British General Election of 1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 2.
- 87 The seat had become vacant following the death of the highly respected and much liked John Jagger (or J.J. as he was known). Jagger had been a staunch left-wing M.P. (he had counted Lenin as a personal friend) who was serving as P.P.S. to Herbert

Morrison when he was killed in an accident on his motorcycle in July 1942 during the blackout. He had refused to use official cars because he would not waste petrol. B. Vernon, Ellen Wilkinson (Croom Helm, 1982), p. 125.

88 Evening Chronicle, 17 October, 1942.

89 Guardian, 17 October, 1942.

90 Robinson Diary, October, 1942.

91 Gorton Reporter, 9 October, 1942.

92 Idem. Foot's candidacy was typical of the Independents standing throughout the country in these early years. The electoral truce between the major parties largely held firm with the vast majority of by-election contests being provoked by Independents and 'freak' candidates whose most common theme was the need to wage war more effectively. Only in a small minority of cases, notably Pollock (1940) and Dunbartonshire (1941), was there a strong element of inter - party competition in the by-elections of the early years of the War.

93 Secretary's Report to M.I.C., 21 May, 1942.

94 M.I.C. Public Opinion Questionnaires, August, 1942.

95 Idem.

96 Idem.

97 Idem.

98 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 29 May, 1942.

99 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p.55.

100 Labour Party Annual Reports, 1941-1943.

101 Idem.

102 City News, 16 January, 1942.

103 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 139.

104 J. Ramsden, The Age of Churchill and Eden (Longman, 1995), p. 55.

105 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 62.

106 J. Colville, The Fringes of Power. 10 Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955 (Hodder and Staughton, 1985), p. 401.

107 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 75.

- 108 Ibid., p. 196.
- 109 A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin 1940-1945 (Heinemann, 1967), p. 167.
- 110 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 96.
- 111 Bullock, Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, p. 167.
- 112 Ramsden, Age of Churchill and Eden, p. 55. Addison, Road to 1945, p. 128.
- 113 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 141. Nationwide, by the start of 1941, 184 Conservative agents and organisers were in the armed forces and another 159 were employed on other war-work outside the Party. Ramsden, Age of Churchill and Eden, p. 49.
- 114 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 141.
- 115 City News, 21 December, 1940.
- 116 Eckersley was killed in action while serving as a pilot in the air division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Before becoming an M.P, he had been captain of Lancashire County Cricket Club. Wedgewood-Benn is the father of Tony Benn and had been Secretary of State for India in 1929-31. The holding of this office was due, according to Hugh Dalton, "entirely to his bum-sucking of Macdonald". B. Pimlott, (ed), The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-1945 (Johnathan Cape, 1986) p. 158.
- 117 Robinson Diary, 3 December, 1940.
- 118 City News, 2 November, 1940.
- 119 Idem.
- 120 Robinson Diary, 3 December, 1940.
- 121 City News, 7 December, 1940.
- 122 Idem.
- 123 Idem. Also see Robinson Diary, 3 December, 1940.
- 124 City News, 10 December, 1940.
- 125 Robinson Diary, 14 November, 1940.
- 126 Ibid., 7 December, 1940.
- 127 Idem.
- 128 Idem.

- 129 Ibid., 7 November, 1941.
- 130 Ibid., 14 November, 1941.
- 131 Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee (M.L.F.E.C.) minutes, 18 December, 1940.
- 132 Guardian, 21 December, 1940.
- 133 City News, 26 October, 1940.
- 134 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 142.
- 135 Robinson Diary, October, 1942.
- 136 City News, 28 November, 1941.
- 137 Idem.
- 138 Manchester Labour Women's Advisory Council minutes (M.L.W.A.C.), 4 September, 1939.
- 139 Ibid., 24 September, 1939.
- 140 Idem.
- 141 Ibid., 7 April, 1940.
- 142 Idem.
- 143 Ibid., 1st September, 1940.
- 144 Ibid., 7 October, 1940.
- 145 Ibid., 20 December, 1940.
- 146 Ibid., 7 April, 1940.
- 147 Ibid., 18 January, 1942.
- 148 Robinson Diary, May 1942.
- 149 M.L.F.E.C. minutes, 12 September, 1939.
- 150 Idem. My emphasis.
- 151 Ibid., 28 February, 1940.
- 152 Ibid., 27 November, 1940.
- 153 Ibid., 30 October, 1942.
- 154 The Liberals were first to set up a reconstruction committee in the autumn of 1940, and eventually had sixteen committees on different aspects of post-war planning. The Conservatives followed in the summer of 1941, establishing the Post-War Problems

Central Committee under the chairmanship of Rab Butler. At this stage this was the only source of a more progressive Conservative Party approach, with Butler convinced that the War had necessitated the creation of a distinctive, new Conservative social policy. It had only mixed success in influencing the reconstruction process, largely because the majority of Conservative M.P.s disagreed with Butler's views on the need for enhancing the role of the state, and by late 1942 elements of the divided Conservative ranks were throwing their weight behind fledgling right-wing groups such as the National Society of Freedom. In the summer of 1941, the Labour Party established a variety of policy groups to discuss post-war matters. These were beset by personality conflicts and uncertainty about the future, although they did benefit from the fact that the experience of war had increased the popularity of some of its pre-war ideas, such as the need for a National Health Service. A number of pamphlets were published focusing entirely on post-war domestic issues.

¹⁵⁵ Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 116.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Harry Hewlett M.P. to Wright Robinson, 24 November, 1941. Shortly afterwards, Hewlett became the acting head of the Manchester Conservative & Unionist Association.

¹⁵⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁵⁹ Robinson Diary, 3 November, 1940.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 November, 1941.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, December 1941.

¹⁶² N.U.R. (Manchester District Council Branch) minutes, 8 January, 1942.

¹⁶³ Robinson Diary, September, 1941. My emphasis. Ainley was to stand as a Communist candidate in the city in the 1950 General Election. Owen was on the editorial board of the Communist Daily Worker and had previously been a Labour Councillor before being expelled for his Communist Party activities.

¹⁶⁴ City News, 16 January, 1942.

¹⁶⁵ Guardian, 21 December, 1940.

¹⁶⁶ Robinson Diary, October 1942.

- 167 Guardian 2 May, 1941.
- 168 Robinson Diary, November, 1942.
- 169 Ibid., March 1943.
- 170 Labour Party Annual Report, 1942.
- 171 Addison, Road to 1945, pp. 135-136.
- 172 Robinson Diary, 15 August, 1940.
- 173 Ibid., 10 November, 1941.
- 174 Ibid., 4 November, 1941.
- 175 Talk by Wright Robinson on B.B.C. Overseas Programme, 16 March, 1942.
- 176 Lord Mayoral speech by Wright Robinson, 10 November, 1941.
- 177 Sir Ernest Simon War Dairy, 4 March, 1940.
- 178 Ibid., 4 March, 1941.
- 179 Idem. The Conservative reaction to the Town & Country Planning Act in 1944 totally justified Simon's contention.
- 180 M.L.W.A.C. minutes, 6 July, 1941.
- 181 Idem.
- 182 Ibid., 18 January, 1942.
- 183 Ibid., February, 1942.
- 184 M.L.F.E.C. minutes, November, 1942.
- 185 Address by Phillip Oliver (President) to the Manchester Liberal Federation, 23 April, 1942.

Chapter Four.

The Tide Turns...Hooray for Beveridge!

Introduction.

The year from the end of 1942 to the end of 1943 represented the decisive turning point in public attitudes towards reconstruction and popular perceptions of the political parties. The publication of the Beveridge Report, coinciding with the turning of the military tide, transformed the public mood into one of widespread dissatisfaction with the Government's approach to reconstruction. In consequence, reconstruction acquired a sharp political edge, previously lacking, which began to benefit the Labour Party. However, Labour's increasing support was confined to specific social groupings and owed more to the unpopularity of the Conservatives than to any great enthusiasm for their own party. By focusing on the crucial policy areas of Beveridge, land-ownership and the retention of economic controls, this chapter demonstrates that in Manchester there was no evidence of an emerging cross-party consensus. Indeed, the divide between the Manchester Conservative and Labour parties was greater than that which existed between the respective national leaderships; the Conservatives strongly opposed any notion of change whilst the Labour Party, through a continuing fear of being outflanked by the Communist Party, resisted any compromising of established party policy. With Britain no longer facing imminent defeat, party conflicts intensified, further reducing the likelihood of establishing a common ground and the improving military situation served to intensify and extend social divisions in the city.

The Intensification of Social Divisions.

Late 1942 saw the military tide turn in the Allies' favour; in North Africa, Russia and the Pacific, the Allies enjoyed decisive successes. On 4 November a B.B.C. announcer interrupted normal programming to advise listeners that the best news for years would be given at midnight. General Alexander's communiqué from Cairo revealed that British forces had won a complete victory at El Alamein and the church bells rang out, not to announce invasion, but to mark 'Monty's' victory.¹ Shortly afterwards British and

American forces landed in French North Africa (Operation Torch) whilst in Russia, the German Sixth Army was trapped at Stalingrad, surrendering in late January. In the Pacific the Japanese position on Guadalcanal had become hopeless. The war news gave a massive boost to public spirits which had endured reports of defeats and retreats since the War began. The M.I.C. recorded the mood in Manchester;

The news from Egypt, Libya and later French North Africa has been so heartening during the last few weeks that there is a universal feeling that we are now on the right road: that we have found the right men in General Alexander and General Montgomery. The feeling of caution felt by everybody - a kind of 'too good to be true - or to last' is being replaced by confidence in victory in Africa. The landings in Morocco and Algeria, and particularly the passage of the huge convoy to Gibraltar received the highest praise. The news from the Solomons and New Guinea is regarded as very encouraging.²

The good news tended to promote over-confidence throughout the country, leading Churchill to warn; "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning."³ The M.I.C. noted that Churchill's broadcast had been appreciated as "a welcome and necessary antidote to the excessive optimism which recent successes have encouraged."⁴ However, the M.I.C. still felt it necessary to warn; "There are still people who do not appreciate that we shall sustain very heavy casualties when we storm Europe and that very hard fighting lies in front of us in the vital job of driving the Axis out of the Occupied Countries."⁵ Nevertheless, it was difficult to dispute that there was certainly "light visible at the end of the tunnel."⁶ The Evening News espoused this belief in late December; "Now 1943 dawns, its horizons gleaming with more hope than since the long distant days of peace."⁷

The improving military position eliminated the external threat (1943 was the quietest year of the War for air-raids), provoking a general sense of war-weariness and complacency amongst the population. Early in the year a member of the M.I.C.'s Central Division, Mr Nathan (also a Liberal councillor), "expressed grave concern at the general slackness and lack of drive shown...at the moment."⁸ The Committee were clearly in agreement with this assessment; "After a debate, the Honorary Secretary was asked if he would send a letter to the Public Opinion Officer at the Ministry of

Information expressing the concern of the Committee on this matter.”⁹ Complacency and war weariness were not short-lived responses to the first major Allied victories, but trends that continued throughout the year. The public mood was now one of confidence with fear of invasion and defeat a distant memory; “our sense of personal danger has faded and we have settled down to a humdrum routine of civilians at war, or in wartime.”¹⁰ By September the M.I.C. was again expressing its concerns, whilst in October, the City News stated;

Here in Manchester we are able to see what is taking place day by day. There is a slowly accumulating tiredness which is mental as well as physical. Tempers are frayed, minor ailments are growing in importance, the critical fever is rising. The Government is in danger of becoming a focus of discontent.¹¹

Manchester was not alone in reporting a high degree of complacency. Other Regional Committees reported the same observations and in October the Home Intelligence Department launched a national investigation into “the question of the feeling of slackness thought to be prevalent in the country at the moment.”¹² Three months later, on Christmas Day, Wright Robinson still believed; “As far as the major issue for us all [is concerned], we are in more danger from complacency and tiredness than from enemy action.”¹³

Attitudes towards the War itself underwent a significant change. In mid-February 1943 there was evidence to suggest that war news, hitherto eagerly devoured and discussed, was now of diminished importance to Mancunians. The M.I.C.’s Eastern Division noted with concern; “[The] Committee is almost unanimous in the belief that the public attitude to the military situation is an apathetic one of waiting for fresh developments.”¹⁴ Public feeling against enemy powers was diminishing; despite the fact that British forces were enjoying little success against the Japanese and that stories of Japanese atrocities against Allied prisoners were reported in the press, it was still considered necessary to launch an investigation into public attitudes towards the Japanese. In February the M.I.C. received a letter from the Ministry of Information which stated;

It is of importance that people in Britain should realise that, though Germany is near to us, Japan is a menace not only to the people of Canada and Australia, to our Allies...but to us in Britain. The Prime Minister has stated that in the event of the war in Europe being ended before the struggle in the Pacific, British forces will be diverted to that theatre until Japan is beaten. It would be disastrous...if we failed to back up our servicemen.¹⁵

The M.I.C. acknowledged the problem and urged the M.O.I. to emphasise; "Before the war Japanese competition, particularly in textiles [of major importance in Lancashire of course] was severe and it was intensified by unfair and dishonest trading methods, such as the imitation of British trade markets." and that "During the war their war crimes have been catalogued often."¹⁶ People's willingness to "do their bit" was reduced by Allied successes. In late July Dr. Stratton reported to the M.I.C. that the number of blood donors in the area (obviously of great importance in war-time) had fallen to less than 7,000; "making it difficult to obtain the requisite number of donors for civilian purposes [let] alone...military requirements."¹⁷ For the first time in the War the M.I.C. was forced to organise a 'Blood Donor Week' to enable blood to be collected for the services.

In 1943 the M.I.C. introduced a 'Question and Answer' service in which official replies were given to written questions submitted by the general public. A survey of these questions emphasises the extent to which complacency and expectation of the War's end dominated the public mood. Some of the questions would have been unthinkable a year earlier; for example, in late August, one correspondent asked; "What are the reasons for maintaining the blockade of the continent?"; in November another asked; "Couldn't the Home Guard and fire-watching services be relaxed now?"¹⁸ Concern for servicemen focused entirely on their prospects at the end of the War. By July the M.I.C. was receiving numerous questions such as; "Will members of the forces who have served overseas for a long time be allowed priority in returning to this country?" and "What is being done to solve the many problems concerned with demobilisation after the war?"¹⁹ Enquiries also revealed a degree of general war weariness. Despite the shortage of fuel, one questioner wondered; "What is being done

to restore the damage done to the countryside by open-cast mining?" Even troop exercises, a novelty in the early years of the War, now became the subject of complaints because of the damage they incurred.²⁰

The general mood of weariness served to further fracture Manchester society. Crime rose dramatically in the city with the total number of indictable offences rising from 5,990 in 1942 to 7,217 in 1943, an increase of 21 per cent. Compared to the lowest war-time figure, that of 1940 (5,067 indictable offences), crime had increased by 42 per cent.²¹ Manchester society became introspective and particular social groupings attracted widespread criticism. Most notably, despite the fact that Nazi atrocities against Jews were well documented in the press, anti-Semitic feeling in the city increased, particularly in the first six months of the year. Anti-Semitism had long been a feature of Manchester, but it increased markedly with the improving fortunes of the War. In January Leonard Behrens, the Head of the M.I.C.; "expressed grave concern at the growth of anti-Semitism...and felt that it was helping the enemy to allow this to continue unchecked."²² Anti-Semitism featured heavily in M.I.C. minutes for several months, and the Northern Division's Annual Report for 1943 stated that the growth of anti-Semitism had been a major feature of that Division, while Councillor Barrat (a Conservative) wondered; "If the Jewish members of the meeting really were aware of the growth of anti-Semitism because if not he could assure them that it was there."²³ The M.I.C. was concerned with the increasing hostility towards the Jews and the attention of the Committee was drawn to a letter published in a local newspaper from a 'known Fascist' (the Committee's description, although it was later withdrawn from further M.I.C. correspondence) which conducted 'a violent attack against the Jews'. Instead of dismissing this example as a 'one-off', the Committee was acutely worried about the effect of such a letter;

While agreeing that the freedom of the press should in no way be curtailed, the Committee was of the opinion that the publication of such a letter was regrettable in so far as it was aimed at creating disunity within the nation, and while too crude in its statements to convince any informed member of the community its sentiments might influence certain sections of the people.²⁴

At this time a confidential meeting between the M.I.C. and Jewish representatives took place to discuss measures that could be taken to improve matters.

1943 also saw the questioning of juvenile morality, particularly the perceived loosening of moral standards among girls of little more than school age. On 2 July a local Juvenile Morality Conference was held, attended by 150 delegates including a U.S. Army chaplain, clergymen of several denominations, a female Police Sergeant, representatives of the political parties and a British Army Officer. Leonard Behrens, the Chairman of the M.I.C., stated; "No one at the meeting...had the slightest doubt that the problem existed in an alarming degree."²⁵ The problem, the Conference heard, was, "ignorance of the serious dangers of moral conduct and widespread indifference to moral standards among adolescents and even parents."²⁶ This "had been accentuated by the presence of large numbers of men in uniform [particularly Americans]."²⁷ One female probation officer, emphasising the scale of the problem, commented; "Before the war [I] had to deal with something like 30 boys under 14 and perhaps 2 girls, now it is 35 girls and 1 boy."²⁸ Members of the Conference formulated a number of recommendations over the next few weeks.²⁹ The concern about juvenile behaviour was not confined to Manchester and the 'Manchester Report' (as it became known) struck a chord throughout the nation with enquiries "pouring in about its widespread immorality from the authorities in London and many other parts of the country."³⁰ The Report was not the end of the matter and in December, Manchester City Council created a Special Committee to consider the requirements of young people and youth welfare.³¹ At a meeting of this Committee a further 42 representatives of social organisations attended, emphasising the continuing concern surrounding the issue. It was not only the behaviour of young girls that caused concern, as servicemen's wives also came in for criticism. In August a letter to the M.I.C. stated; "I am a young married woman of 25 and my husband is in the Merchant Navy and I am appalled at the actions of married women whilst their husbands are in the Navy."³² In the same vein, Wright Robinson noted; "complete chastity and fidelity is no longer believed in as a sacred obligation. Young women after

short honeymoons are finding themselves unable or unwilling to endure indefinite celibacy and are taking chances in the husbands absence.”³³

With the war situation improving, it may well be that 1943 saw the release of anger and tensions that had been building up, during the early years of war. With the pressure easing, such emotions were no longer ‘bottled up’ and a form of ‘scapegoating’ could now take place. The social classes were hardening in their views of each other, a point reflected, as we shall see later, in the continuing polarisation of the Labour Party membership.

The Impact of Beveridge.

1943 saw not only an intensification of class and social divisions, but also a further crucial political development. The widespread support for Churchill’s cautious approach to reconstruction, so evident in public opinion surveys taken in the city as late as August 1942, dissipated and was replaced by widespread demands for the Government to provide tangible evidence of its sincerity. This, in turn, gave reconstruction a political cutting edge with Labour as the beneficiaries.

The pivot for this change was in late 1942 with the publication of The Report on Social and Allied Services, or the Beveridge Report as it was more popularly described, on 1 December 1942. Coinciding with the victory at El Alamein, which had so greatly boosted public confidence and morale, the Beveridge Report had an enormous impact on both opinion formers and the general public. The Report had initially been commissioned by Arthur Greenwood when he was in the War Cabinet, and its purpose had been to recommend measures to consolidate existing welfare provisions. Sir William Beveridge, the Committee’s Chairman, was disliked by many of his colleagues, who regarded him as vain, humourless and tactless, and was given his new brief because Ernest Bevin, for whom Beveridge worked at the Ministry of Labour, detested him and wanted to be rid of him. In his new job Beveridge went considerably beyond his brief and the character of the final report owed a great deal to Beveridge’s determination to make a crusade out of it for the sake of the achievement of social reform and, according to his critics, for the sake of his ego. After sixteen months of consultation with 127

individuals, pressure groups, and political organisations (but not the Conservative Party, which declined to assist) the Beveridge Committee published its recommendations. Beveridge's plans for social insurance envisaged a single flat-rate contribution which would provide a comprehensive system of social insurance, including unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, disability benefit, workmen's compensation, old age, widows' and orphans' pensions, funeral grants and maternity benefits. A system of National Assistance, paid for by the Government, would be provided for those who fell outside other benefits. The level of contribution would be fixed at a level within the reach of every employed person, with benefits paid at a "national minimum subsistence income", with the whole system being co-ordinated by a new Ministry of Social Security. To these proposals, Beveridge added three "assumptions" which were necessary to ensure the plan's success: the provision of family allowances, national health and rehabilitation services, and the maintenance of full employment (i.e. an unemployment rate of not more than 3 per cent according to Beveridge, although others claimed that 8 per cent would still constitute full employment). In summation of his report, Beveridge stated;

The Plan for Social Security is put forward as part of a general programme of social policy. It is one part only of an attack upon five great evils: upon the physical Want with which it is directly concerned; upon Disease which often causes Want and brings many other troubles in its train; upon Ignorance which no democracy can afford among its citizens; upon the Squalor which arises mainly through haphazard distribution of industry and population; upon Idleness which destroys wealth and corrupts men, whether they are well fed or not.³⁴

The plan involved a large increase in social insurance contributions from individuals, but it was calculated that the average household was already paying out so much towards private, voluntary schemes and private medical services which the plan would make redundant, that no great increase would be involved for those content with the national minimum.

Despite Beveridge's earlier claims that his scheme would take Britain "half-way to Moscow", the scheme was evolutionary rather than revolutionary. His proposals were based on the time honoured principle of contributions from employer, employee and the

state, the preservation of insurance was a throwback to the days of Lloyd-George, while the flat rate contributory element applied to all income levels, which was a retrogressive arrangement. Beveridge had “finally rejected the socialist doctrine of a social security provided by society.”³⁵ Nevertheless, Beveridge encapsulated the hopes and aspirations of the British people for a better future; in one 300 page document the population were seemingly assured that poverty, financial insecurity and poor health had no place in post-war Britain.

The earlier, vague desire for a ‘better world’ crystallised into massive public acclaim for the Beveridge Plan.³⁶ Outside His Majesty’s Stationery Office, massive queues lined up to buy copies of the Report, with at least 635,000 copies eventually sold. Within two weeks of publication, Gallup revealed that 19 out of 20 people had heard of the Report and 9 out of 10 believed that the proposals should be adopted.³⁷ The Spectator observed; “It is rather more than a fortnight since the Beveridge Report was published. In that interval the report has almost eclipsed the war itself as a subject of discussion in the country.”³⁸ The press were similarly enthusiastic, with even right-leaning newspapers (except The Daily Telegraph) supporting the plan; The Times pronounced the Report to be a “momentous document which should and must exercise a profound and immediate influence on the direction of social change in Britain.”³⁹; The Yorkshire Post praised Sir William’s “pioneering vision” and said that a prompt decision to implement its main features “would be a most heartening affirmation of faith in the future of Britain.”⁴⁰; The Spectator was more circumspect but still argued that “to recognise that everything in the Beveridge Plan is open to discussion and revision does not mean that the plan could simply be shelved.”⁴¹

The impact of Beveridge was such that his proposals were widely reported abroad. Returning from the United States the Manchester politician, Sir Ernest Simon, informed Beveridge;

For two or three weeks the headlines of the papers, wherever we went, was dominated by ‘Beveridge’. The publicity there was quite astonishing. One small illustration of the popularity of the report will amuse you. The Controller of the City of New York gave a copy to his

wife for a Christmas present; she also had the same idea and gave him a copy.⁴²

The reaction in Manchester reflected the national mood, with the Report being greeted with enthusiasm by all the local papers. The Guardian described it as “a big and fine thing.”⁴³ The Evening News commented; “Its publication has lighted a beacon in the minds of a people grown weary of the narrow and muddling content of their affairs before the war and it is as certain as anything can be that the nation will never be content until that beacon has been reached.”⁴⁴ The Evening Chronicle was also supportive;

The conclusion Sir William has drawn is that it is within our power to abolish want and to offer a measure of social security to all. That has been talked about for years, but this is the first time a comprehensive plan for achieving it has been drafted. In this respect it should prove one of the most powerful propaganda weapons at the disposal of the United Nations...The great thing is that it gives them [politicians] a fine basis on which to work for the abolition of want in a world which can be made better when this war is over.⁴⁵

On 7 December the M.I.C. reported that the Beveridge proposals were “generally welcomed as the basis for consideration and discussion, and as a token of Britain’s desire to translate promises into deeds.”⁴⁶ This was tame and greatly understates the massive public interest in the scheme within the city. The local press more accurately assessed the public mood; “Wherever one went today, in the workshops, on the buses, in the offices, and in commercial circles, everybody seemed to have digested the many newspaper columns devoted to the Beveridge Plan.”⁴⁷ On 5 December the Guardian noted;

There has been a remarkable demand in Manchester for copies of [Beveridge’s] report on the social services. The first supplies were sold out in a few hours and inquiries have been continuous ever since. The local officials of the stationery office are taking special steps to distribute the fresh supplies that reach them and ask that the public should be a little patient. It has not yet been possible to meet the full daily demand.⁴⁸

Beveridge visited Manchester on 11 December as part of a promotional tour, addressing the Manchester Luncheon Club on “Reconstruction Problems”. This provided further

evidence of Beveridge's popularity, with his visit "arous[ing] unusual interest. The number of people who have indicated their anxiety to hear him is already so large that the officers of the club announce that they may be compelled to limit the issue of tickets."⁴⁹ Beveridge had caught the imagination of Mancunians.

Support for the Beveridge Plan transcended traditional socio-economic boundaries. There was no doubting its popularity amongst the working-class; in his regular Evening News feature, 'Voice of the Workshop', William Pickles (an engineering worker) stated;

There is no doubt the Beveridge Plan has gained the approval of the man in the workshop. Particularly this is true of the part which makes provision for old age...The enthusiasm of the man in the workshop for the Beveridge Plan seems likely to continue. Should any Government endeavour to prevent the plan being put into operation it will pay a heavy penalty for its failure.⁵⁰

The middle-class was also strongly in favour of its implementation. One local civil servant said of Beveridge; "It is a big step towards security and it will be welcomed by the middle-class particularly.; similarly the M.I.C. concluded;

What might be called the 'middle' or 'professional' classes are particularly interested because of the promise it suggests of some form of state aid for them...At present the man earning between £500 and £1000 a year with children to educate is finding current taxation a heavy burden...Now he is looking forward to the time when he can reap a small dividend from the money paid in taxation, which looks like continuing at a high level. This class of citizen will expect some consideration when plans for post-war security are considered by the Government.⁵¹

The popularity of the Beveridge Report also cut across traditional political allegiances, a point demonstrated by Divisional Committee reports to the M.I.C. In February, shortly before Parliament debated the proposals the Eastern Division, a largely Labour area, commented; "[The] Committee is almost unanimous in the belief that...there is a keener interest in Home Front events [than the War]"; in the same month the Southern Division (strongly Conservative) observed that there was "a sustained interest in the Beveridge proposals."⁵² The Evening News reiterated the overall strength of support for the

Report in Manchester; "Its reception and propaganda has been such that it will be very difficult for the Government to avoid adopting the major parts of it."⁵³

Despite the massive acclaim for the Beveridge Report, the Government's response was hesitant. At Westminster the reactions of the Labour and Conservative parties revealed a significant gulf of opinion; the Beveridge Report had clearly "brought to the surface and pinpointed the tension of coalition politics."⁵⁴ Critically, in the public mind, Labour were seen to be strongly in favour of the Report, whilst the Conservatives were seen as hostile to its intentions. The vast majority of Labour M.P.s supported its immediate implementation for the Report was advocating policies Labour had championed since the mid-1930's. Only a few on the left of the Party disagreed. Realising that the Plan was hardly revolutionary, one veteran party agent described its ecstatic reception as a "deluge of slush."⁵⁵ Nevertheless the National Council of Labour, representing both the Labour Party and the T.U.C., endorsed the Report, the Liberal Party also declared their support for immediate implementation but among Conservatives, however, there was widespread scepticism with the right-wing of the Party, in particular, remaining unimpressed. The National Review observed gloomily; "The dole is to be increased so greatly that thousands of people will greatly prefer to do nothing."⁵⁶ The line of more moderate Conservatives, as Harold Nicolson perceptively observed it, was to "welcome the Report in principle, and then to whittle away by detailed criticism. They will say that it is all very splendid and Utopian, but we can only begin to know whether we can afford it once we have some idea what our foreign trade will be like after the war."⁵⁷ Churchill himself regarded the Report as a distraction from the serious business of winning the War, and only a small group of younger Conservatives (later to be known as the Tory Reform Group, led by men such as Lord Hinchinbrooke and Quintin Hogg, later Lord Hailsham), consisting of no more than 50 M.P.s, championed the Report with Hogg remarking that it was "above all an opportunity to re-establish a social conscience in the Tory Party."⁵⁸

The split between the two major parties was reflected in the Cabinet. Labour ministers pressed for the implementation of Beveridge while Conservatives such as Kingsley Wood pointed to the financial difficulties of the Plan. Despite the

overwhelming popularity of the Beveridge Report, the widely divergent views of the parties meant it could not be implemented without a controversy that would jeopardise the Coalition. The inevitable consequence was prevarication. The Cabinet agreed to welcome the Report in principle but also to undertake its own detailed investigation. In the meantime there could be no legislation: given the uncertainty of the post-war situation it was “impossible at this stage to establish any order of priority or to enter into definite commitments.”⁵⁹

The Government went to extraordinary lengths to stifle all official publicity for the Report. A summary, by Sir William himself, was issued as an A.B.C.A.. pamphlet on 19 December but was withdrawn by the War Office just two days later. The War Minister, Sir James Grigg, explained to indignant M.P.s that he could not permit A.B.C.A.. discussion groups to discuss such a controversial subject. The Evening News, along with much of the rest of the country, was strongly critical of the decision, commenting;

Among the most ridiculous attempts to turn back the clock has been the decision of the War Office to withdraw the A.B.C.A.. bulletin on the Beveridge Report. Soldiers are apparently encouraged to discuss ‘current affairs’ but not those things which will intimately affect their future, or not until the Government has decided whether the report will be good for them or not.⁶⁰

The Government’s response to Beveridge provoked massive discontent in Manchester. The broken promises of the First World War were recalled and the Guardian commented;

Parliament must never forget the enormous psychological effect the Beveridge Plan has produced in the country. There was no parallel to it in the last war, even with ‘homes for heroes’ and if the peoples hopes should be dissolved in cynicism the consequences will be revolutionary in a very different sense from that of Sir William Beveridge’s mild ‘British Revolution’.⁶¹

In the midst of this increasing suspicion and frustration, a Parliamentary debate on the Beveridge Report took place between 16-18 February. The local press were in no doubt as to the importance of the debate. The Evening News commented;

The wishy-washy safety-first, all-party motion on the Beveridge Report satisfies none of its supporters. If that is as far as the Government is preparing to go in the coming debate the cynics and pessimists will feel themselves confirmed in their suspicion that the Government does not mean business in the matter - that in fact the report is no more than a carrot dangled before the nation's nose. Discouragement will be intense. It is of the utmost importance for the prosecution of the war that the Cabinet spokesmen in the debate should make clear not only that full action on the report is intended but also how soon action will be taken. ⁶²

The Guardian again warned; "As the weeks have gone on it has become more and more clear that unless we get the Beveridge Plan, or something at least as comprehensive and bold we shall not escape ...without far reaching political reaction at home."⁶³

The split in the Cabinet and between the parties ensured that the Government's statements during the debate were fudged. It was agreed that the Government should announce that the Cabinet was ready to commit itself to a start on preparing legislation, but at Churchill's insistence any decision as to whether this legislation should be implemented was to be left to a new Government elected after the War.⁶⁴ The Government arguably had a reasonable case but their main speakers, Sir John Anderson (Home Secretary) and Sir Kingsley Wood (Chancellor of the Exchequer) presented it so badly that, in Dalton's words, they "succeeded in creating the impression that they were both shifty and hostile."⁶⁵ Anderson put the Government's position "in a manner which made clear that he lacked not only any enthusiasm for the plan, but also any understanding of the depth of interest taken in it by the people" whilst Wood "lingered with apparent satisfaction over the financial perils of the plan."⁶⁶ As Barnett dryly observes; "The Government got much the same response as a parent telling a child that Father Christmas would have to consider very carefully in the light of this and that, when and whether and in what circumstances eventually to bring him his heavily expected bicycle."⁶⁷ After the first day of debate, the Evening News scathingly commented;

The Government's explanation of its attitude to the Beveridge Report was so provisional, conditional and indecisive that if they do not think again, we may soon be in the throes of a political crisis. The very fact that this is so shows to what extent public opinion on the question of social security has advanced since the war began. The public, growing increasingly cynical wanted evidence that plans are to be implemented rather than pigeon-holed. The evidence they asked for was an immediate start by the setting up of a Ministry of Social Security and a clear indication of when other legislation will be introduced. The Government not only refused to do that but went out of their way to emphasise that their statements of policy commits them to nothing.⁶⁸

The Guardian was initially prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt; "One's first impression is that the Government has met the Beveridge Report in something like the spirit it was written."⁶⁹ While Labour ministers were constrained by loyalty to the Government to support its policy, backbench Labour M.P.s strongly criticised the Government's stance. Without exception, Labour speakers called for the Beveridge proposals to be implemented immediately. On the Conservative backbenches attitudes were very different. Most reluctantly accepted the Government's policy of welcoming the Report in principle, as they were anxious not to be seen blocking a proposal that had widespread public support. The only open criticism came from Sir Herbert Williams. However, several others could hardly conceal their animosity towards the Report and the manner in which it had been produced, and a group of Conservative industrialists put down an amendment calling for the postponement of legislation though this was not pressed after the Government's spokesmen hinted that any such eventuality was unlikely before the end of the War.⁷⁰

The Government's weak endorsement of Beveridge produced the largest backbench revolt of the War. Although all Labour and Liberal ministers voted with the Government, 97 Labour members, 1 Communist, 3 members of the I.L.P., 9 Liberals and 11 Independents voted against the Government. Only 2 non-ministerial Labour M.P.'s voted with the Government.

In Manchester, the response was one of both great disappointment and anger. The Guardian reversed its earlier support and condemned the Government;

The Government's handling of the debate has been most inept. If it had had a sense of popular psychology the confusion and recrimination of the last three days would not have been allowed to develop. The effect on the Government's reputation at home and abroad has been highly damaging. Ministers have given the very impression of vacillation and half-heartedness that they should most strongly have guarded against. The War Cabinet apparently did not realise what the Beveridge Report has come to mean in the outside world's picture of Britain or in the minds of ordinary people, civilians and servicemen, in this country. 'A bold and imaginative plan' Sir John Anderson called it and then proceeded to stress all the differences the Government had with it. When he did come to say that it was 'accepted in principle' no one could believe him. Sir Kingsley Wood deepened the feeling that the Government was really committing itself to nothing. He pushed social security a long way back in post-war priorities.⁷¹

The Evening News emphasised the disillusionment, and made it clear that it held the Conservatives responsible for the Government's stance;

The Beveridge debate has caused deep disappointment throughout the country. Many who hoped the present Government might so respond to the temper of the people as to lay the foundations for a happier England have now abandoned any such hope because of the evident strength of the reactionary forces in the Commons and Cabinet which seems to have made courageous decision impossible.⁷²

Dissatisfaction with the Government's stance stretched across the Manchester political spectrum, and was equally strong among Conservative and Labour supporters. In the Wythenshawe division (predominantly Conservative), for example, it was reported; "[A] widespread opinion exists that the Beveridge Report, sent out by the Government for obvious propaganda purposes, is not being implemented and that it does not appear to be intended to put the propaganda into serious practice."⁷³ A second Conservative division reported; "There was a general desire that plans be formulated forthwith for post-war reconstruction."⁷⁴ Responding to the cynicism and disillusionment, Churchill broadcast on 21 March 1943, advocating a "Four Year Plan" including a broadening field for state ownership and enterprise, a National Health Service and national compulsory insurance "for all classes, for all purposes" This speech has been described as "the first popular proclamation of the new consensus."⁷⁵ However, it did little to appease the public as he made no direct reference to Beveridge and had warned against "attempts to

over-persuade or even to coerce His Majesty's Government to bind themselves or their unknown successors...to impose great new expenditure on the state."⁷⁶ As The Guardian observed; "When we look at its details, the 'Four Year Plan' does not amount to more than what the Government is already pledged to in the way of reconstruction."⁷⁷ Despite continuing public pressure the Government still moved only slowly towards the introduction of a reconstruction programme. Again pressure came from Conservative areas, with the Southern Divisional Committee, representing areas that habitually gave the Conservatives over 60 per cent of the vote, being the most frequent recorder of public demands for positive action to be taken. In July the Committee again reported "a growing public desire for a Government plan for post-war reconstruction."⁷⁸

Throughout the early years of the War servicemen, or in electoral terms, younger voters, had been particularly interested in social and economic reconstruction and following the fudge over the Beveridge Report the young were felt to be particularly impatient with the Government's prevarication. Wright Robinson noted; "It is fairly clear that this generation will not be content with the things my generation were content to accept."⁷⁹ The impatience and frustration of the young was also referred to by Bill Oldfield M.P. (Labour, Gorton). Speaking in the Parliamentary debate on the Beveridge Report, he declared that "if nothing is done to implement the Report the growing cynicism about Parliament, especially among the young people would be increased."⁸⁰ This impatience would increasingly lead to younger voters looking elsewhere than the Conservative Party to implement the reforms they wanted.

In Westminster a new Reconstruction Priorities Committee was established to consider the Government's reaction to the Beveridge Plan but this proved unwieldy in operation, whilst friction in Cabinet continued. In June the three leading Labour members of the Government, Attlee, Bevin and Morrison, submitted a paper to the Cabinet entitled 'The Need For Decision', arguing that future planning would be fatally prejudiced unless the Government made its own detailed financial forecasts, followed by firm decisions about which items of policy might be acted upon before the end of the War. Churchill replied negatively, and Morrison was left to complain about the lack of reconstruction measures and the "slowing down influence of Kingsley Wood and such

people.”⁸¹ There still existed among Conservatives a widespread suspicion that, in R.A. Butler’s words; “Beveridge is a sinister old man who wishes to give away a great deal of other people’s money.”⁸² Not until November did Churchill create a Ministry of Reconstruction, and the activities of this new committee were to be circumscribed by the need to avoid contentious issues. Only in the field of education, where there was a degree of cross-party agreement was any real progress made, and even here with considerable difficulties.

People hoped the King’s Speech (in November) would contain promises of reforming bills to be introduced shortly. However, on the committee devising the Speech, Butler noted that ministers could only come up with variations upon “We have an Education Bill. When they came to include something else they couldn’t find it.”⁸³ Not surprisingly, the King’s Speech produced only disappointment in Manchester. The Guardian wrote despairingly;

A full employment policy remains only an ‘aim’; there is nothing about ways of achieving it. The whole group of subjects that come under the head of the Beveridge Plan are seen to be pushed well into the future...It is almost a year since the Beveridge Report was published, so it cannot be said that the caravan is moving recklessly.⁸⁴

Similarly, the Evening News observed; “[We have] been bitterly disappointed. On all the major problems of reconstruction, with the single exception of the Education Bill, there are promised only more White Papers, more discussion, more declarations of papers and debates.”⁸⁵ In the ensuing Parliamentary debate, J.R.. Clynes M.P. (Labour, Plating) claimed his constituents felt that “many subjects in the King’s Speech were shrouded in the most uncertain terms and the language and treatment had aroused the fear that delay, not drive, was the chosen method of the Government.”⁸⁶

Throughout 1943 there was constant frustration amongst the population of Manchester concerning the lack of progress on social reform. The cynicism of the early war years intensified and was no longer subjugated by a general willingness to win the War first. What were the political repercussions of this new mood?

A Swing to Labour?

A number of historians, notably Jefferys and Sibley, have argued that during 1943, the public perceived significant differences between the Conservative and Labour parties on the issue of reconstruction, and have consequently identified 1943 as the year people turned irreversibly to the Labour Party.⁸⁷ Rejecting the popular notion that Labour's victory was inevitable from 1940-41, they suggest that it was the massive public frustration with the slow progress on reconstruction issues throughout the year that led to people switching their support from the Conservatives to Labour. Labour, it is argued, were widely seen as the progressive party who were committed to the implementation of the policies the people were clamouring for, while the Conservatives were widely seen as reactionaries. The Beveridge debate is often held to have played a significant role in this characterisation, with Labour pledged to implement Beveridge in full, and the Conservative Party seemingly hostile to Beveridge and all notions of change. For this reason a number of historians, such as Calder, have argued that the debate was a crucial factor in Labour's 1945 victory.⁸⁸

A cursory glance at national by-election results and opinion polls suggests the Jefferys/Sibley hypothesis is highly plausible. By-elections changed in character in 1943. Earlier in the War most by-elections were forced by 'freak' candidates exploiting discontent over the war effort. Whilst the Conservative vote dropped in most of these, the main causes of anti-Conservative feeling had been readily apparent: frustration about the War and restrictions on the Home Front. However, in 1943, independents usually fought on the issue of reconstruction, with Common Wealth and independent Labour candidates (sometimes assisted by members of the local Labour Party, against the terms of the electoral truce) standing on electoral tickets such as "a good socialist policy" or "Beveridge in full, and now."⁸⁹ Their Conservative opponents often had little sympathy for the idea of wholesale social change, with one calling Beveridge a "poets dream".⁹⁰ In some of these by-elections, such as at Eddisbury, the Conservative candidate was defeated (on this occasion by Common Wealth) and the average anti-Conservative swing was an average of 8 per cent. Common Wealth was a Christian socialist party, founded in 1942 under the leadership of the former Liberal M.P. Sir Richard Acland, advocating

policies very similar to Labour, including widespread public ownership. Common Wealth had close associations with Manchester, having been formed by a fusion of J.B. Priestley's 1941 Committee with Acland's Forward March group, the latter having been founded in Manchester in early 1941. Common Wealth held its inaugural party conference in the city in 1942. It is commonly assumed that Common Wealth were a 'Labour substitute', whose votes would switch to Labour in a general election.⁹¹ This was probably true and indeed, in the second half of 1943 the first opinion polls taken since the outbreak of war on the question of party support gave an average Labour lead of 10 per cent.⁹² With the War now going very well, these figures could no longer be dismissed as a protest vote.

In Manchester, one must acknowledge the continuing popular interest in the Soviet Union whilst being careful not to ascribe it, and continuing resentment towards the United States, undue political significance. With the Soviet military position improving, demands for a Second Front diminished, but this did not lessen support for, or interest in, Russia. On 20-21 February Britain celebrated 'Red Army Day', commemorating the 25th anniversary of the creation of the Soviet army and throughout Britain public meetings and military parades were held. Large crowds turned out in Manchester to celebrate the day and hear Colonel Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, catch the public mood with a strongly pro-Russian speech. Throughout 1943 the M.I.C. consistently recorded strong support for Russia. In January it reported; "There is a tremendous number of people stating that Russia is our salvation, and if they had not come in, the war would have been lost by now; that Russia only has been responsible for Hitler's discomfiture etc."⁹³ The way of life in Russia continued to create particular interest and the 1943 Manchester Review (a library publication) concentrated almost exclusively on study of Russian literature, art and music.⁹⁴ The Russian people themselves were held in extremely high esteem by local citizens with the M.I.C. reporting; "People are impressed with the Russians. They are saying 'Of course they are quite different from us, much hardier.'"⁹⁵ Wright Robinson, a fierce critic of Communism, nevertheless unquestionably spoke for the vast majority of the local population in praising;

The unsurpassed valour of the Russian people in the field, in the factory, in the shattered towns and villages, showing unquestionable heroism not blind immolation, but buttressed by consummate planning before and during their terrible ordeal. In twenty-five years this new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has created a staff of planners, of fighters, of workers, of statesmen, of heroes...⁹⁶

Such gushing praise was typical of the nation as a whole: polls revealed that nine out of ten people were willing to give a favourable opinion of Russia.⁹⁷

The depth of public support for Russia provoked genuine concern amongst the M.I.C. that the focus on the Soviet Union was overshadowing Britain's own achievements. The Committee wrote to the Ministry of Information and argued;

[We] feel that a strong effort must be made to stress the vital nature of the victory at the Battle of Britain in the air, of the way we stood alone triumphant for twelve months against Hitler's concentrated might. We should do this without deprecating Russia's effort, but to restore a proper perspective.⁹⁸

In contrast to the overwhelming support for Russia, the Americans remained relatively unpopular. American forces were stationed in large numbers around Britain, including Manchester, and throughout 1943 the M.I.C. organised a number of Anglo-American Friendship Exercises. Despite such attempts, and America's increasingly impressive military performance during 1943, the oft-applied phrase "over paid, over sexed and over here" summed up popular feeling. Across Britain, after the fall of Mussolini in the summer, Americans were actually less well spoken of than the Italians!⁹⁹ Not once did the M.I.C. record widespread public praise for American forces despite their victories, and coloured troops were particularly unpopular. Despite the evidence of a national poll which showed that an overwhelming majority of people were opposed to racial discrimination, racism towards coloured troops in Manchester did exist and was not confined to a tiny percentage of the population. At a March meeting of the M.I.C. "a discussion arose as to the association of young girls with coloured...troops. This was causing grave concern in the district."¹⁰⁰ Racism reared its head again when,

as part of the Anglo-American Friendship Exercises, local people were encouraged to engage in personal hospitality. Upon hearing this, the Eastern Division Committee complained; "personal hospitality is difficult in the Ardwick area as troops are coloured."¹⁰¹ Indeed, the sight of a black sailor kissing a white girl at a railway station set off a series of incidents which led to G.I.'s being banned from places of entertainment in the city for a fortnight.¹⁰²

Although there were no by-elections in Manchester in 1943 from which to draw quantifiable conclusions, the available evidence does suggest that support for the Labour Party was increasing in Manchester in 1943. This was certainly the opinion of the Evening News which, on the first day of the Labour Party Conference in June, commented;

It says a good deal about the inherent strength of the Labour Party that its annual conference, opened in London today, excites as much general interest as it does. The vigour comes from below. Much of it comes from outside the Party itself, from people who desire a better order of things than they have today, and who despairingly but hopefully, cling to the Labour Party as the only visible means of getting it.¹⁰³

However, the evidence suggests that this support was drawn almost entirely from specific sections, rather than a broad cross-section, of the populace and that the Labour Party was still failing to generate widespread enthusiasm. For the first time in the War the membership of the Manchester Labour Party increased, from 4,719 in 1942 to 4,823 in 1943, but a breakdown of party membership reveals that the Party was increasing its support amongst manual workers whilst continuing to lose support in middle-class constituencies. Membership in Labour-held constituencies increased from 2,829 in 1942 to 2,968 in 1943, but in the middle-class Conservative strongholds support decreased again (although only slightly) from 1,890 to 1,855. The Labour Party were clearly failing to attract new support from traditional middle-class Conservative voters. This had the effect of further polarising the class make-up of the overall Labour membership. Middle-class constituencies now provided just 38.5 per cent of the total membership, in comparison to 49.2 per cent in 1940. This evidence suggests that, despite strong popular

support for reconstruction measures existing across the whole spectrum of the electorate, its political repercussions were tempered by class considerations. Continuing class antagonisms served to intensify support for Labour amongst the working-class, who were already beginning to look to the Party as the best means of achieving much-desired reforms. For most middle-class citizens, however, class identification prevented them from supporting Labour, even if they did appear to be the more progressive Party.

Furthermore, despite the overall increase in Labour's membership, contemporary opinion agreed that the Party was failing to generate much enthusiasm, largely through its own shortcomings. The best examples of contemporary criticism came in the aftermath of the Labour Party Conference, with both the Evening News and Guardian being scathingly critical of the Party. The Evening News condemned the party's "lack of crusading spirit" and groaned;

The Labour Conference has done what it was expected to do. It has been cautious, sensible - and uninspired. There was never apparent any appreciation of the fact that great changes have taken place since the war began, that there is a great body of progressive opinion with ideals in many regards similar to those of the Labour movement. [The leadership] seem totally unaware of the fact that by the right kind of appeal, with a proper broadening of their basis, with a new vigour of enterprise they could ensure for this country a generation of progressive Government. The tactical difficulties [i.e. Labour's participation in the Coalition] are undoubtedly great. They cannot be overcome by men in the mood in which the Labour leaders faced this conference. They can be overcome if these men will only realise the extent of the opportunity, unparalleled in our history, which is presented to them.¹⁰⁴

Exactly the same criticism was made by the Guardian;

There is a curious contrast between the mood of the Labour Party Conference and the mood of the country. The last six months have seen rapidly growing interest everywhere in reconstruction. There is more expectancy, more social hope than there has been for years. The Prime Minister recognised this and tried to canalise this in his broadcast. One might have expected that the largest party of the left would reflect this too, that its conference would be an occasion for launching a clear policy for progressives, that its speakers would be thinking keenly about how to put it through and about the kind of political problems we face. Instead the Labour conference has looked back, not forward. It has been readier to

recriminate than to gather itself together with confidence...There are signs of a tired, elderly and hidebound party.¹⁰⁵

Given such views, how can we explain Labour's lead in the polls, the increase in Manchester party membership and the relative success of the 'Labour substitute' party, Common Wealth? The most plausible explanation is that the Party were benefiting from dissatisfaction with the Conservative Party, whose share of the vote in by-elections had dropped significantly. The Conservatives were widely perceived to be hostile to the enormously popular Beveridge Report and the general notion of reconstruction which, although not shaking the allegiances of their traditional middle-class support was perhaps weakening their support both amongst their working-class voters and amongst the young who, we have seen, were particularly strong advocates of reconstruction. Labour, therefore, were perhaps the beneficiaries of negative enthusiasm as the only alternative to an increasingly unpopular Conservative Party.

The first real signs of a shift towards the Labour Party or, perhaps more accurately, away from the Conservative Party, were clearly discernible in 1943. It would, however, be overstating the case to conclude that the Party's 1945 success was inevitable from 1943 onwards. The Guardian, commenting after the Labour Conference in mid-year, did not believe that any firm conclusions could be drawn from the mood of the electorate in 1943, arguing instead that party support was still in the balance. Although admitting that some people were indeed looking to the Labour Party, it suggested that; "Some join the Communist Party, which is ready to make use of them, or fly to the respectable and heady Common Wealth. Others are waiting to see whether the Liberals and Conservatives offer better scope and can give an aspiring lead."¹⁰⁶

In reality 1943, with its changing public attitudes towards reconstruction, should be regarded as the turning point in Labour's fortunes. Although not yet guaranteed future electoral success the Party had, crucially, begun to build its support in the two constituencies - the manual working-class and younger voters - that were most responsible for their 1945 victory.

A Clash of Political Beliefs: Manchester Politics, 1943.

With reconstruction now firmly on the political agenda, the Manchester parties began to address the issue of social and economic reforms. This process served to highlight the continuing lack of consensus between the Manchester Conservative and Labour parties. Indeed, it suggested, the divide between the parties at local level surpassed that which existed between their national leaderships. Despite public support for the Government's proposals, Manchester Conservatives were privately hostile to reconstruction, while the Labour Party were severely critical of any compromising of party policies.

At national level the political reaction to the Beveridge Report highlighted the continuing policy differences of the Westminster parties. A second Bill, the Catering Wages Act, served to re-emphasise these differences, revealing that the future control of industry remained a highly partisan issue. The Bill, produced by Ernest Bevin, proposed the creation of a Catering Wages Commission consisting of two employers, two workers from the industry and three independent persons. Where collective bargaining already existed in the industry, the Commission need not interfere, but where it did not the Commission could recommend the Ministry of Labour to appoint a Wages Board with statutory power to fix pay, hours and holidays. Although the Bill had Government backing, Conservative back-benchers were intensely hostile to the Bill, believing it would produce an intolerable level of state interference in privately owned companies. Consequently, as the Evening News reported; "The debate was conducted by the opposition Conservative group with a sectional bitterness such as has not been known in the House since the war began."¹⁰⁷ The Bill produced the largest back-bench revolt of the War (to that point) with 118 Conservatives voting against it.¹⁰⁸ The Catering Wages Bill demonstrated that party attitudes towards the post-war control of industry were far from consensual.

Importantly, in the light of disputes over Beveridge and Bevin's Bill, local commentators rejected any notion of an emerging consensus. The Evening News was typical in accepting that; "Some progressive Conservatives, perhaps influenced by the knowledge that large numbers of the public will demand far more sweeping changes, are

turning in the same direction as Labour men and Liberals”; but it still maintained; “Everything suggests that the reactionaries still form a majority of Tory M.P.s and control Central Office.”¹⁰⁹ The paper cast its attention forward to the first post-war Government and “hoped it will be formed from men who differ less than members of the present Government on immediate social objectives.”¹¹⁰ In Manchester a similar pattern was emerging. The need to turn minds to the question of post-war reconstruction revealed significant differences in the attitudes of the local Conservative and Labour parties. The two parties differed markedly in three central policy areas: the Beveridge Report, the question of land ownership and the retention of economic controls.

Following the publication of the Beveridge Report, the local Conservative and Labour parties immediately adopted the stance of their respective Parliamentary colleagues. The position of the Manchester Labour Party on Beveridge was clarified both during the Parliamentary debate itself and shortly afterwards at a Party meeting. In Parliament, two of Manchester’s four Labour M.P.s, J.R.Clynes (Platting) and Bill Oldfield (Gorton), spoke decisively in favour of the immediate implementation of the Beveridge proposals, with Clynes deploring the Government’s failure to grasp;

The most amazing chance ever offered a modern Ministry of building up a great social edifice for the future well being of the masses. The workers themselves are quite ready to pay their contributions. [He urged] that the main body of the proposals should be implemented. Parliament could with little difficulty and certainly within this session take the necessary steps to give legislative form to the main proposals.¹¹¹

Bill Oldfield “appealed to the Government not to tinker with small reforms but to see that the magnificent Beveridge Report was fully implemented.”¹¹² The Manchester Labour Party’s position as a whole was made clear in mid-March when it passed a resolution demanding “a clear and unequivocal acceptance by the Government of the Beveridge Report.”¹¹³ However, not all local political figures sympathetic to Labour supported Beveridge. The post-war Labour peer, Sir Ernest Simon was strongly opposed to his proposals. When he received a letter from Kingsley Martin, co-owner of the New

Statesman and Nation, asking him to sign a letter to The Times demanding more support for Beveridge, Simon's reply was unequivocal;

Nothing would induce me to sign a letter to The Times demanding more support for Beveridge, nor to join any organisation for that purpose. If it was a letter about education, housing or health, that would be quite a different matter, but I think the passion for Beveridge is a real danger; if all the money goes there, much more important things will be neglected. So I hope you will do what you can to smash the Times letter!¹¹⁴

Serious opposition in the Labour ranks came from the left of the Party. It was noted that "There is a tendency for certain people, influential ones, to propagate the idea that [Beveridge] is a 'Banker's Ramp'. This idea is anomalously enough being promoted by Socialists."¹¹⁵ The left in Manchester, as elsewhere, believed that Beveridge was merely a measure of social amelioration designed to sustain the capitalist system, and were consequently opposed to its introduction. Such opponents were, however, a very small minority and the vast majority of the Manchester Labour Party were strongly pro-Beveridge.

The Manchester Conservative Association did not issue a statement on their position, and none of their M.P.s spoke during the Parliamentary debate. However, none of their M.P.s were members of the pro-Beveridge faction of the Party and local Conservatives catastrophically underestimated the popularity of Beveridge; George Beattie, the Chief Agent of the Association, argued that "public opinion was being manufactured by the press."¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, Harry Hewlett M.P. was accused of being outrightly hostile to Beveridge, a position he refuted, declaring that he was "perfectly happy with the Government's position."¹¹⁷ Eventually, in October, the leader of the Conservative Group on the Council, C.B. Walker, declared that his party was in "complete accordance with the Government's plan on the Beveridge Report."¹¹⁸ The local Labour and Conservative parties had aligned themselves with their national parties.

The Manchester Liberals were again at odds with national party policy. Whilst the national Party was strongly pro-Beveridge, the Manchester Liberal Federation was more reticent, perhaps surprisingly given that Beveridge himself was a Liberal, and was to stand as a Liberal candidate in the 1945 General Election. Despite the fact that the Withington Division Liberal Association had sent a letter to the Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, suggesting that he should make a speech on post-war reconstruction, the local Party's attitude towards the Beveridge Report was underwhelming. When it came to arranging the Federation's annual meeting the Executive Committee noted; "Resolutions on...the Beveridge Report had been suggested but in view of the shortage of time at the meeting and the fact that Sir Percy Harris [the speaker] must leave at 4:45pm it was agreed to leave the agenda arrangements with the officers."¹¹⁹ One resolution asked the Federation to approve the Beveridge Report, but in response the Federation promised only to give "careful consideration to this suggestion."¹²⁰ These were hardly the statements of Beveridge enthusiasts, emphasising the continuing differences between the national Liberal Party and the Manchester Liberal Federation.

The impressions of strong and lukewarm support for Beveridge given by the Labour and Conservative parties respectively, were reinforced later in the year in a stormy council debate. In September, members of the Labour group gave notice of a motion on the Beveridge issue which read; "This Council believes that the adoption of the Beveridge proposals will lead to the unification of the social services in Manchester, and urges His Majesty's Government to introduce the necessary legislation as early as possible."¹²¹ Bill Johnston, leader of the Labour group, said;

By means of this notice of motion we hope to bring before the council the importance with which we view the Beveridge Plan for Social Security. We feel we are not alone in believing that this important scheme should be adopted by the Government, and we expect to find our fellow councillors ready to voice this opinion and support the motion...We are afraid that if public opinion is not centred on the Beveridge Plan it will be allowed to recede into the political background. Among the Forces there are many who view the 'side-stepping' of this great social scheme with disappointment so we, as members of an influential municipal corporation intend to bring it prominently before the public mind.¹²²

When the motion was debated the two parties stuck to their positions and the debate fell into bitter party acrimony.¹²³ Councillor Tom Nally (Labour), proposing the resolution, said it was “the duty of local authorities to act as the spearhead in great reforms” and asked “what is going to be done to keep the promises made?” Councillor Walker (Conservative leader) explained that his party was in complete accordance with the Government’s position. The debate degenerated with Walker suggesting that the resolution was an attempt by Labour to “steal a march for propaganda purposes”. In these circumstances, he said, he had asked his party to refrain from voting. The debate continued;

Mr George Hall (Lab): You dare not.

Mr Nally (Lab): When the Beveridge Report came out the public reception was such as to fill the hearts of men and women with splendid determination. But no one would deny that there is now a degree of sullenness: a resignation period when men and women were starting to ask themselves ‘Do they mean anything? Is it the same old, old story, and are we to see again the conditions of 1931?

A Conservative: You don’t trust the Government.

From the Labour benches: We do not.¹²⁴

After the debate the Conservative group issued a statement on the decision not to vote, in which they deplored “this attempt to embarrass the Government at a time of grave national crisis.”¹²⁵ The Manchester Conservatives had appeared only half-hearted supporters of Beveridge, and this was reinforced after the meeting when Councillor R.S. Harper told the City News; “Let us try not to make promises which we are likely to be broken, but to move steadily forward improving every phase of local and national life.”¹²⁶ The evidence suggests that the Manchester Conservatives were instinctively hostile to Beveridge, but could not publicly be seen to oppose it, hence their stance in the Council. Indeed, Wright Robinson told the next meeting of the City Labour Party; “The opposition almost pleaded with [us] to be tender-hearted and spare them a division.”¹²⁷

The Beveridge Report created as much partisan feeling in Manchester as at Westminster, but this was not the only issue on which there was a notable lack of consensus. One widely advocated policy was the nationalisation of land, which was the subject of an official study (the Uthwatt Report). The Uthwatt Committee was created to advise on the steps needed to prevent the work of physical reconstruction in bombed areas from being prejudiced by the high price of land. Its Report recommended that the development rights in land outside built-up areas should be vested in the state and that in urban areas, local authorities should have wider powers to purchase areas as a whole, at prices not exceeding the land's 1939 valuation. This Report created enormous partisan disagreement at Westminster with the majority of Conservatives opposed to the idea in principle, and to the compensation clauses in particular, as a serious infringement of property rights. In Manchester also, the question of land ownership brought out very different responses from Conservative and Labour representatives. Sir Ernest Simon had argued for the nationalisation of land in the early years of the War and in 1943, the City Labour Party unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the public ownership of land.¹²⁸ This was anathema to local Conservatives, with one "plead[ing] for the retention of private ownership."¹²⁹ At the end of the year, the Council created a special committee to look at the question of land ownership.

A further difference occurred over the continuation of economic controls in post-war years. The Labour Party supported the idea of the continuation of such controls after the War, becoming a permanent feature of the peace-time economy. The Conservative Party, however, envisioned such controls playing only a short-term transitional role; "While control of business was a necessary expedient, it was hoped that this could be withdrawn as soon as possible."¹³⁰ These widely divergent views are indicative of the parties' wider approach to post-war industry with the Conservatives clearly still thinking of a return to private enterprise, and Labour still favouring a more active role for the state.

Beveridge, land-ownership and economic controls demonstrate that the core political beliefs of the two main parties remained unaffected by the War. This point was acknowledged by the Labour veteran, Leonard Cox, in his inaugural speech as Lord

Mayor, when he admitted that between the parties there existed “real political differences amongst us.”¹³¹ The Manchester Conservative Party remained staunchly neo-liberal in its approach to policy; their attitude towards the role of the state in 1943 was identical to that of pre-war years. The mouthpiece of Manchester Conservatism, the Evening Chronicle, spoke of “the mentality of the servile state” and warned; “this is the danger always latent in the aggrandisement of the power of the state, now envisaged in some quarters as a desirable and unmitigated blessing.”¹³² Despite increasing public pressure for social reform, Manchester Conservatives saw no reason to change the policies that had brought them success before the War, and they were strongly opposed to major, or even perhaps any, changes in social and economic policy. The Manchester Conservative Party was to the right of the national leadership. Although they were publicly supportive of Government policy on, for example, the Beveridge Report, the evidence suggests that they were privately hostile to any notion of change. Firstly, it is significant that none of the city’s six Conservative M.P.s were members of the Tory Reform Group, which sought to push the Party in a progressive direction. A second, and most telling, development occurred at the very end of 1943 which served to highlight the local Party’s reactionary nature. James Mcgrath, the Conservative Councillor for the Ardwick Ward since 1933, resigned from the Conservative Party and applied for membership of the Labour Party (which was accepted in early 1944). He told the local press that “he had resigned from the Conservative Party because he had come to realise that it was not progressive enough and he thought he would find a more advanced policy within the Labour Party.”¹³³ Coming from a long-standing member of the Party, this can be taken as strong evidence of the Manchester Conservatives’ hostility to a progressive agenda.

With the Conservatives sticking doggedly to their pre-war mantras, a social and economic consensus could only emerge if the Manchester Labour Party shifted to the right. This was always highly improbable for, as we saw in the earlier years of the War, the threat of being outflanked by the Communist Party prevented Labour from appearing too close to their coalition partners. In 1943, the Communists continued to cause concern. Manchester Communists were accused of exploiting common grievances for their own political ends; for example, the Wythenshawe Division of M.I.C. noted; “A

campaign for better allowances for wives and dependants of serving soldiers has been instituted in Wythenshawe and elsewhere. It was originated by the Communist Party.”¹³⁴ This caused concern among the representatives for, a month later, it was recommended; “Since there is a constant and growing agitation in certain districts, used politically by the Communist Party, it seems essential that some general enquiry be instituted.”¹³⁵ However, in pure party political terms, it was the Labour Party who continued to fear the Communists most. Labour’s national leadership again rejected the Communist application, with the National Executive stating that although Harry Pollitt (the Communist leader, and a Manchester man) declared his party to be “fully prepared to accept all obligations of affiliation and carry out loyally all decisions reached at the Labour Party’s annual conference” they considered that the Communist Party was in no position to implement this undertaking, as its primary loyalty was to the Comintern.¹³⁶ The National Executive declared;

Communist activities in Britain between September 1939 and June 1941 were characterised by political somersaulting of the most contemptible kind [and that] at the most crucial moment in British history when this country was, in the eyes of the civilised world, the only resisting bastion of democracy the Communist Party seized every opportunity of creating disaffection and defeatism.¹³⁷

Wright Robinson’s diary provides an excellent insight into Manchester Labour feelings against the Communists. At the end of 1942, Robinson received three members of the Communist Party who came to press for a ‘Second Front.’ Robinson noted derogatorily;

The interview lasted over two hours and I began by telling them that every employer was troubled about the disruptive tension of members of the Communist Party in the workshop. My visitors expressed surprise at this because the Communist Party were all out for production. John Owen told me that he had increased production and that complaints were just prejudice. As one of the best employers and best fellows I know told me how glad he was to be rid of Owen, I was not impressed by this...Relations are good except for a few carping Communists.¹³⁸

In April Robinson, referring to his role on the Anglo-Russian Alliance Committee, asked;

Why should I find myself in league and concert with Tom Brown, Pat Devine, Communists and their stool-pigeons against the Town Hall? The Communists never play fair by our standards. The only use they have for me, the Town Hall or our Committee is as a stalking horse for Communist Party propaganda.¹³⁹

In November;

Communist cells cannot run on democratic lines. They do not join or initiate to compromise but to proselise [sic]. What they hope to gain in the long run by founding 'Russia To-Day Societies' and attracting people genuinely interested in Anglo-Russian understanding, who will go so far and no further I do not understand. People refuse to be deluded into becoming Communists and resign when they find out that their liability is being expanded to cover the whole field of Communist propaganda.¹⁴⁰

Here, Robinson cites the war-time Labour Party position of being pro-Russian but anti-Communist. Robinson's hostility to the Communists was representative of Manchester Labour as a whole. In March, the Manchester Council of Labour refused to allow the Communist Party to assist in the organisation of the annual May Day parade.¹⁴¹ Indeed, it was the Manchester Labour Party that sent the main anti-Communist resolution to the national Labour Party for the debate on Communist Party affiliation at their June conference. The resolution read;

This Conference approves the decision of the National Executive Committee in refusing affiliation to the Communist Party of Great Britain, believing that the interests of the workers are best served by a combination of democratic organisations and individuals united in their determination to work loyally together for the immediate establishment of a Socialist state and that if the Communist Party is affiliated, the declared policy of disruption exercised inside that Party will destroy the unity, power and influence of Labour in the country. The Communists represent an ideology which is entirely foreign to the average Britisher. They dare not put across to the British public their views as to a constitution. They do not accept Parliamentary representation; they do not believe in popular elections.¹⁴²

There was some opposition amongst the local Party to sending this resolution but a proposal to send it back to the Executive Committee was defeated by a large majority.¹⁴³

The fear of the future electoral threat from the Communists, and from the emerging Common Wealth, resolved the Manchester Labour Party to maintain its position as the main party of the Left. In consequence, they were firmly opposed to any compromise of party policy by the national leadership. This was perfectly illustrated by the local Party's approach to the proposals of the education White Paper (later to become Butler's Education Act). Education was the one area of reform in which progress had been possible in 1943, but this had only been achieved by all-party compromise. The educational content of the White Paper (which included a raising of the school leaving age) created little real dispute between, or within, the parties and the one sticking point concerned the future of church schools. Since 1902, the cost of maintaining church school had fallen on local government rates, but in the White Paper the Government argued that this was unfair and gave church schools a choice between two alternatives. If the managers or governors of a denominational school were able and willing to provide 50 per cent of the cost of required improvements to school buildings then they could apply for 'aided status' and carry on as normal. If, however, that 50 per cent contribution was considered too great a strain then the school could opt to become 'controlled' (taken over by the local education authority). The option of 'aided status' was largely a sop to Catholic schools who wanted to retain control of their educational syllabus. In a letter to the Manchester Labour Party, the Labour leadership explained that party policy had been to end this 'dual control' by taking all schools under local authority control, but in an effort to compromise (to ensure that some reform measure was passed) the Party had agreed that "on this difficult matter the White Paper's compromise was acceptable to the party."¹⁴⁴ This arbitrary amendment of established party policy was condemned by the Manchester Labour Party, with Wright Robinson, whose passion was education, complaining to the Guardian that "instead of stating clearly its policy the Labour Party wrote a miserable letter about compromise. No Labour candidate would know for the life of him what the party line was."¹⁴⁵ Privately, Robinson was even more scathing. He wrote;

[The Labour leadership] declared the issue to be a difficult one and that compromise was inevitable. That was asking the Government to

compromise still further on a white paper based on a compromise, a white paper which was itself an essay in compromise. The Labour Party offered no separate manifesto. Its whole attitude cannot be explained or reconciled with some of its previous declarations and it has hitherto consistently advocated educational advancement. Its attitude on this historic step on education can only be explained as a cowardly surrender to the R.C. vote.¹⁴⁶

The Manchester Labour Party subsequently passed a resolution “expressing regret” at the attitude of the national Party.¹⁴⁷ This was not, however, the end of the matter for the issue provoked intra-party dissension. The St. Michael’s Ward Labour Party defended the national Party and held a meeting of protest against the action of the City Labour Party. It passed a resolution “disassociating themselves from the decision taken by the City Labour Party” and expressing the opinion that the “decision was the result of the intolerance of certain of the individuals comprising that meeting and was not representative of the national party outlook on this subject.”¹⁴⁸

The education issue highlighted the difficulties the Labour leadership faced in achieving social and economic reform. The differences between the parties meant they could not expect to achieve reform without making compromises on party policy, but when such compromises were made, the Labour grass-roots condemned the Party’s actions. This no-win situation was probably the biggest problem Labour faced as a result of their participation in the Churchill administration.

With both the Manchester Conservative and Labour parties, for their own reasons, holding rigidly to their pre-war policies, there was no scope for a consensus to emerge. Neither party showed the slightest inclination of changing their approach. The divide between the parties at national level was very significant, but at local level was even greater.

Party Rancour in Manchester.

The scope for policy agreement was further limited by continuing rancour and bad feeling between the Manchester parties. Despite the existence of a coalition, party rivalry had been a constant feature of the early war years and, if anything, this was intensified in 1943 as the military situation steadily improved. The acrimonious council debate on the

Beveridge Report was just one such example, but there were several others during the course of the year. Two further incidents on the Council during the late summer were brought to public attention. The first concerned the post-war reconstruction and re-development of Manchester; the Labour group supported the Town Planning Committee's recommendation that a deputy city surveyor should be appointed, a proposal opposed by the Conservatives who suggested that the appointment should not be made while men with the necessary qualifications were in the forces. Bill Johnston, the Labour leader (and also Chairman of the Council's Post-War Reconstruction Committee) said; "It was not right that the work should be held up because of this" and that members of his Committee had a "feeling of frustration." He condemned the Conservatives, claiming that "Manchester is wilfully behind" in its re-development.¹⁴⁹

A different issue saw the tables turned, with Conservatives pointing an accusing finger at Labour. In August the Council's Conservative-dominated Waterwork's Committee decided to terminate the services of three qualified engineers on work at an aqueduct at Haweswater (the men had originally been engaged as temporary staff but had then been offered the jobs permanently). The Labour group opposed the decision, and their tactics were bitterly resented by their Conservative counterparts. The leader of the Conservative group, Alderman Walker, furiously attacked the Labour Party, claiming that "the strongest form of political pressure has been brought to bear to force the Council to alter the decision."¹⁵⁰ Walker told the Evening News that Labour's approach had been "nauseating."¹⁵¹

Two other incidents occurred before this which, although not publicly aired, again demonstrated that party hostility was flourishing, and could be found in equal measure in the two major parties. In May, the Manchester Labour Party sent an invitation to the leading Labour figure, Sir Stafford Cripps (who had been Ambassador to Moscow and, in the opinion of some, had been a political threat to Churchill), to attend an Anglo-Russian Alliance celebration. In the words of Wright Robinson; "[The] first, second and last object [of this meeting] is to do all we know how to promote a wrought iron friendship between this land and people of ours and Russian and her great people, something deeper than just sentiment and shock-proof against post-war stress."¹⁵² However, many

Conservatives hated Cripps and the Conservative Lord Mayor, J.S. Hill, a leading figure on the Anglo-Russian Committee, strongly opposed the invitation. Upon Cripps' acceptance, Hill said he would take no part in the meeting and severed his connection with the Committee. Following this decision, Wright Robinson noted; "Alderman Jackson and I saw the Lord Mayor and said all we could against this drastic decision...Nothing doing. No matter how unpopular it was, whatever political upset it would cause for him or anybody else, he meant what he said and would not go back upon it."¹⁵³

A short time later a similar incident occurred, with the party positions reversed. At a special council meeting in July it was decided to confer the Freedom of the City on Winston Churchill, and one would perhaps not have expected the issue to have aroused party feelings. On the surface it did not; the Council passed the resolution without opposition, and Wright Robinson's speech (he had been asked to second the resolution and had regarded it as a personal honour) was a model in non-partisanship;

Mr Churchill stands out as a man of matchless courage. No leader in history ever offered his people so nearly a crown of thorns as when the Premier offered 'Blood, Sweat and Tears' and it was on that note that he united his people and weaned us from our period of appeasement and abasement before the enemies of freedom and right. It is to his honour that he has so completely and successfully subordinated his views to the one supreme object of uniting the Allies to win the war.¹⁵⁴

Although Labour's response appeared admirably non-political, this was really an exercise in political expediency rather an expression of gratitude to the Prime Minister. With the War now going well, the local Labour Party could not afford to be seen offending the war leader, whose personal popularity ratings had never dropped much below 80 per cent. Behind the scenes it was a different matter for Labour were far from happy with the award. Robinson noted that the idea of rewarding Churchill had first been suggested in late 1942 and he had approached Bill Johnston, the Labour leader, and told him he would like to second the resolution:

“I shall oppose it, the group will oppose it if you do” Johnson said surlily.

“I just don’t understand” I told him.

“Wait until he has done something” he said dourly.¹⁵⁵

Such disputes demonstrate that party political feelings were running high in 1943. This could only further lessen the possibility of the parties coming to a shared view of post-war Britain.

Conclusion

Between the end of 1942 and the end of 1943 there were significant changes in public attitudes, but no change in party outlooks. Crucially, public attitudes towards social reform underwent a major transformation with the publication of the Beveridge Report which crystallised the vague early hopes for a better post-war Britain and which was met with massive popular acclaim in Manchester. This, coinciding with a marked upturn in Allied fortunes, produced an impatience with the pace (or lack of it) of social reform that had not been evident in the early war years. No longer were people prepared to win the War first: they demanded immediate action. This impatience gave reconstruction, for the first time, a political edge, from which Labour began to feel the benefit in 1943. From June onwards opinion polls gave Labour a 10 per cent lead over the Conservatives and in Manchester party membership increased for the first time in the War. However, despite the fact that public pressure for the implementation of reconstruction measures came from the whole spectrum of the population, the evidence suggests that Labour was increasing its support in specific areas of the electorate, rather than across a broad cross-section. Support for Labour was growing amongst the manual working-class and most likely amongst the young, but was continuing to drop in middle-class Conservative heartlands. The political repercussions of popular interest in reconstruction were tempered by class considerations, undoubtedly heightened by continuing class antagonism in the city, and Labour’s increasing support was largely the result of the unpopularity of the Conservatives rather than any great enthusiasm for their own party.

Nevertheless, 1943 should be seen as the turning point for Labour; the elements which would provide their 1945 success began to come together in this year.

In Manchester politics there was no evidence of an emerging local consensus. The reactions to the Beveridge Report revealed a major gulf of opinion between the Manchester Conservative and Labour parties, replicating the conflict witnessed at national level. Further policy disputes, in the fields of land ownership and the retention of economic controls, similarly highlighted the continuing differences between the major parties. The Conservative and Labour parties were entrenched in their pre-war positions with the divide between the local parties actually surpassing the considerable differences between the national leaderships. Manchester Conservatism was strongly hostile to the notion of reconstruction and although they were publicly supportive of the Government's position on the Beveridge Report, this did not reflect their private views. It is significant that none of the city's Conservative M.P.s joined the fledgling Tory Reform Group, and even more significant that the Party suffered the defection of a Councillor to Labour citing the Conservatives' reactionary attitudes as the explanation. These two pointers are more indicative of the real mood of the local Party than their public utterances. They, in fairness, probably saw no need to change the policies that had brought them previous electoral success.

Manchester Labour remained firmly opposed to compromise. With the Soviet Union continuing in popularity, it is understandable that Labour continued to fear the Communist threat, and the Party had now also to be aware of Common Wealth, which replicated many Labour policies. In their determination to remain as the Party of the Left Manchester Labour did not wish to see the national leadership compromising party policies, identifying them more closely to the Conservatives. This was clearly evident over the education issue.

With the two main parties entrenched in these positions, it is almost impossible to see how a consensus could emerge. Continuing party rancour reduced the possibility even further. Acrimony over the Beveridge debate and the Cripps and Churchill issues demonstrate a continuation, even an intensification, of the frosty relationship between Manchester parties witnessed between 1939-42. There was no consensus between the

Conservative and Labour parties by the end of 1943 and, in reality, it appeared highly implausible that one could develop.

References and Notes.

- ¹ Cited in A. Calder, The People's War (Johnathan Cape, 1969), p. 304.
- ² M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 21 November, 1942.
- ³ Calder, People's War, p. 305.
- ⁴ M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 7 December, 1942.
- ⁵ Idem.
- ⁶ Calder, People's War, p. 305.
- ⁷ Evening News, 28 December, 1942.
- ⁸ M.I.C. Central Division Report, 20 January, 1943.
- ⁹ Idem.
- ¹⁰ Wright Robinson Diary, 30 May, 1943.
- ¹¹ City News, 8 October, 1943.
- ¹² M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 5 October, 1943. P. Ziegler, London at War 1939-1945 (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), pp. 245-247 makes clear that London in 1943 shared exactly the same characteristics as Manchester. He suggests that after four years of war "Londoners were tired and jaded". In his study of wartime morale, Thorpe identifies 1943 as the worst year of the War for British civilians. A. Thorpe, 'Britain', in J. Noakes, The Civilian in War. The Home Front in Europe, Japan and the U.S.A. in World War II (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992), pp. 14-35.
- ¹³ Robinson Diary, 25 December, 1943.
- ¹⁴ M.I.C. Eastern Division Report, 17 February, 1943.
- ¹⁵ M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 11 February, 1943.
- ¹⁶ Idem.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 23 July, 1943.
- ¹⁸ M.I.C. Questions and Answers, 17 November, 1943.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 8 July, 1943.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 21 July, and 1 September, 1943.
- ²¹ Chief Constable's Annual Reports, 1942 & 1943. A further interesting comparison can be drawn between the respective national and Manchester statistics for the years 1939

and 1943. In 1939 there had been just over 300,000 indictable offences in England and Wales, which had increased to 373,000 in 1943 - a rise of just over 22 per cent. In Manchester the percentage increase was much greater with the number of indictable offences rising from 5,269 to 7,217 in 1943) - an increase of 37 per cent. Although the exact relationship between social order and crime statistics must be treated carefully they do, in this case, support a general point.

22 M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 3 January, 1943. Manchester was by no means alone in reporting increasing anti-Semitism. In May the North-West region as a whole, the North Midlands and London all reported a similar phenomenon. H. Smith, Britain in the Second World War. A Social History. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 60.

23 M.I.C. Northern Division Annual Report, 1943; M.I.C. minutes of secret discussion on Jewish issue, 12 February, 1943.

24 M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 13 February, 1943.

25 Juvenile Morality Conference (J.M.C.), 2 July, 1943.

26 Idem.

27 Idem.

28 Idem.

29 M.I.C. Juvenile Morality Recommendations, 13 Sept 1943. These included; closer supervision of lodging houses and private hotels, with more accurate and thorough registration of visitors; unlocked air-raid shelters to be visited regularly by Police on their rounds; organised and supervised dances; lectures to troops to be concerned with the moral as well as the physical well being of men and women; the need for legislation to ensure that identity cards of all persons under the age of 21 should bear the date of birth.

30 Daily Herald, 7 July, 1943.

31 Manchester City Council minutes, 10 December, 1943.

32 M.I.C. General Committee minutes, August, 1943. Exact date unspecified.

33 Robinson Diary, 30 May, 1943.

34 J. Stevenson, 'Planner's moon. The Second World War and the planning

movement', in H. Smith, War and Social Change. British Society in the Second World War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 72.

³⁵ Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 526. This is also the view of Midwinter, who claims that the Beveridge-inspired welfare legislation of the 1940s never threatened the preserves of wealthier people and their scope to buy purportedly superior social and medical services, an obvious recipe for the continuation of a two-tier system. E. Midwinter, The Development of Social Welfare in Britain (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), p. 97. Lowe argues that the Beveridge Report was conservative, illogical and utterly impractical. He notes that in contrast to Beveridge's principle of the provision of a subsistence level benefit and its emphasis on voluntary insurance, other countries were already providing earnings-related benefits in return for earnings-related contributions. R. Lowe, The Welfare State in Britain since 1945 (Macmillan, 1993), p. 134.

³⁶ Marwick also identifies the publication of the Beveridge Report as a watershed in popular thinking: "It harmonised fully with the popular concern, formerly only vaguely formulated, but becoming rather better articulated, with social security. Now people began to express themselves more firmly about their belief in social change and they began to be more specific about the particular changes they thought ought to be made." A. Marwick, The Home Front. The British and the Second World War (Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 130.

³⁷ Calder, People's War, p. 528.

³⁸ Articles of War. The Spectator Book of World War Two (Grafton Books, 1989), p. 238.

³⁹ The Times, 2 December, 1942.

⁴⁰ Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 527.

⁴¹ Articles of War. The Spectator Book of World War Two, p. 238.

⁴² Sir Ernest Simon War Diary, 27 February, 1943.

⁴³ Guardian, 2 December, 1942.

⁴⁴ Evening News, 2 December, 1942.

⁴⁵ Evening Chronicle, 2 December, 1942.

- 46 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 7 December, 1942.
- 47 Evening News, 2 December, 1942.
- 48 Guardian, 5 December, 1942.
- 49 Idem.
- 50 Evening News, 22 December, 1942.
- 51 Idem. My emphasis; M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 7 December, 1942. My emphasis.
- 52 M.I.C. Southern Division Committee minutes, 15 February, 1943; Eastern Division Committee minutes, 17 February, 1943.
- 53 Evening News, 8 December, 1942.
- 54 K. Jefferys, The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 119.
- 55 Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 530.
- 56 Ibid., p. 531.
- 57 Ibid., p. 530. Nicholson was very perceptive. Churchill had appointed a secret committee to report the Conservative Party's view on Beveridge. The committee's views were severe: they accepted children's allowances and the principle of contributions towards old age pensions, but were hostile to much of the remainder. They wanted rates of unemployment pay to be considerably lower than wage rates; health insurance to be restricted to those earning less than £420 per year in order to preserve private practice. They were careful to reiterate that everything had to depend on the post-war economy. P. Addison, The Road to 1945. Revised Edition, (Pimlico, 1994), p. 221.
- 58 Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 530. B. Evans and A. Taylor, From Salisbury to Major. Continuity and Change in Conservative Politics (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 66-68 are correct to argue that too much attention has been paid to the Tory Reform Group whilst ignoring the strength of Conservative free market liberalism. As they point out the Tory Reform Group had little impact on government or party policies, and that the neo-liberal National League for Freedom (founded April 1943) carried more influence because it was more representative of the Party as a whole.

For a brief analysis of the internal struggle between progressives and reactionaries within the Conservative Party see J. Ramsden, The Age of Churchill and Eden 1940-1957 (Longman, 1995), pp. 41-45.

59 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 119.

60 Evening News, 22 December, 1943.

61 Guardian, 18 January, 1943.

62 Evening News, 15 February, 1943.

63 Guardian, 15 February, 1943.

64 Calder, People's War, p. 531.

65 B. Pimlott (ed), The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton (Johnathan Cape, 1986), p. 558.

66 Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 531.

67 C. Barnett, The Audit of War. The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation, (Macmillan, 1986), p. 30.

68 Evening News, 17 February, 1943.

69 Guardian, 17 February, 1943.

70 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 121.

71 Guardian, 19 February, 1943.

72 Evening News, 19 February, 1943.

73 M.I.C. Wythenshawe Division Committee Report, 16 March, 1943.

74 M.I.C. Southern Division Committee Report, 15 March, 1943.

75 Addison, Road to 1945, p. 227.

76 Cited in Calder, People's War, p. 532.

77 Guardian, 23 March, 1943.

78 M.I.C. Southern Division Committee Report, 19 July, 1943.

79 Robinson Diary, 25 April, 1943.

80 Guardian, 18 February, 1943.

81 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 123.

82 Ibid., p. 122.

83 Ibid., p. 125.

- 84 Guardian, 25 November, 1943.
- 85 Evening News, 25 November, 1943.
- 86 Guardian, 8 December, 1943. Clynes was the most distinguished Manchester M.P. He had been only narrowly defeated by Ramsay Macdonald in the first Labour Party leadership contest in 1922, and had subsequently served as Home Secretary in the 1929-31 administration.
- 87 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 140. Jefferys does not dispute that there was an anti-Conservative swing in the early years of the War attributable to their being the majority Party and the Party associated with the 'guilty men'. It was only, he claims, after Churchill failed to give a lead on social reform from 1943 onwards that the swing became irreversible. F.Sibley, 'The swing to Labour during the Second World War: when and why?' in Labour History Review, 55,1, (1990), pp. 23-34. Sibley agrees with Jefferys' contention that 1943 was a decisive turning point.
- 88 Calder, People's War, p. 531.
- 89 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 153.
- 90 Idem.
- 91 G. Searle, Country Before Party. Coalition and the Idea of 'National Government' in Modern Britain, (Longman, 1995), p. 209.
- 92 Ibid., p. 151.
- 93 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 15 January, 1943.
- 94 Manchester Review, 1943.
- 95 M.I.C. Public Opinion Report, 16 January, 1943.
- 96 Robinson Diary, 7 November, 1943.
- 97 Calder, People's War, p. 349.
- 98 M.I.C. Honorary Secretary's Report, 15 January, 1943. My emphasis.
- 99 Calder, The People's War, p. 310.
- 100 M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 31 March, 1943.
- 101 M.I.C. Eastern Division Committee minutes, 18 December, 1942. My emphasis.
- 102 J. Gardner, Over Here. The G.I.s in Wartime Britain (Collins and Brown, 1992), p. 155.

- 103 Evening News, 14 June, 1943.
- 104 Ibid., 17 June, 1943.
- 105 Guardian, 17 June, 1943.
- 106 Idem. My emphasis.
- 107 Ibid., 10 February, 1943.
- 108 Calder, People's War, p. 349.
- 109 Evening News, 5 April, 1943.
- 110 Ibid., 27 October, 1943.
- 111 Keesing's Contemporary Archives 1940-1943, p. 5671.
- 112 Guardian, 18 February, 1943.
- 113 Ibid., 15 March, 1943.
- 114 Simon War Diary, 5 June, 1943.
- 115 M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 28 December, 1942.
- 116 Idem.
- 117 Evening News, 7 July, 1943.
- 118 Guardian, 7 October, 1943.
- 119 Manchester Liberal Federation (Executive Committee) minutes, 27 April, 1943.
- 120 Ibid., 29 July, 1943.
- 121 Manchester City Council minutes, 6 October, 1943.
- 122 City News, 24 September, 1943.
- 123 Guardian, 7 October, 1943.
- 124 Idem.
- 125 Idem.
- 126 City News, 8 October, 1943.
- 127 Ibid., 15 October, 1943.
- 128 City News, 15 October, 1943.
- 129 M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 22 June, 1943.
- 130 M.I.C. Central Division Committee Report, 18 January, 1943.
- 131 Speech by Leonard Cox on his inauguration as Lord Mayor, 9 November, 1943.
- 132 Evening Chronicle, 10 April, 1943.

- 133 City News, 31 December, 1943.
- 134 M.I.C. Wythenshawe Division report, 16 February, 1943.
- 135 Ibid., 16 March, 1943.
- 136 Keesing's Contemporary Archives 1940-1943, p. 5621.
- 137 Idem.
- 138 Robinson Diary, 7 December, 1943.
- 139 Ibid., 7 November, 1943.
- 140 Idem.
- 141 Guardian, 27 March, 1943.
- 142 Ibid., 15 March, 1943.
- 143 Idem.
- 144 Guardian, 11 October, 1943.
- 145 Idem.
- 146 Robinson Diary, 25 December, 1943.
- 147 Idem.
- 148 Evening Chronicle, 9 December, 1943.
- 149 Evening News, 1 September, 1943.
- 150 Idem.
- 151 Idem.
- 152 Robinson Diary, 6 June, 1943.
- 153 Ibid., 30 May, 1943.
- 154 City News, 30 July, 1943.
- 155 Robinson Diary, 12 July, 1943.

Chapter Five

1944: A Crisis for Conservatism

Introduction

Chapter Five analyses the political scene in 1944 and argues that, by the end of the year, a number of conclusions could be drawn in relation to the next general election and the question of consensus. The chapter suggests that the year witnessed an intensification of the anti-Conservative mood to such an extent that, by the end of the year, the Party's defeat in the next general election appeared inevitable. It will be argued that the catalyst for this intensification was the publication of a number of White Papers dealing with post-war problems which were regarded as unsatisfactory compromise documents that did nothing to placate popular demands for reform. As in 1943, the Conservative Party was held responsible for the Government's prevarication and Labour, despite many popular misgivings and the continuing inability to attract traditional middle-class Conservative voters, gained a virtually insurmountable lead in opinion polls. The chapter then examines party political attitudes and argues that 1944 saw a hardening of partisan political sentiments, particularly within the Labour Party, that eliminated any possibility of a cross-party consensus emerging. The two main parties remained entrenched in their respective positions and, by the end of the year, it was inevitable that the Conservative and Labour parties would enter the next election offering very different visions of the future. The chapter culminates with a detailed analysis of the Rusholme by-election of July 1944, suggesting that the election served to highlight the reactionary tendencies of the Manchester Conservatives, the hostile attitude of Manchester Labour and the anti-Conservative swing amongst working-class and young voters.

The Continuation of Social Divisions.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the successful invasion of the continent in June, 1944 saw a continuation of the complacency and war-weariness that had characterised Manchester in 1943. This, in turn, served only to feed and sustain social divisions in the city.

The dawn of 1944 saw great optimism in Manchester that victory would not be long delayed, with the Guardian claiming; "This is the year of hope. This is the first New Year's Day since the war began on which we have had reasonable ground to say that the war in Europe may...be carried to victory by the end of the coming year."¹ In the early months the Allies advanced on all fronts but the main campaign, liberation of Europe, had still to be undertaken. Consequently, overconfidence and complacency were still rife in the city (nationally, a wave of strikes had hit the country).² This was observed by the Evening News, which bemoaned; "Poised on the threshold of history's great offensive...the people of Britain are taking things with perhaps irritatingly supreme confidence and a refusal on the part of most to contemplate much else than a vast horde of super-trained troops storming the coast-line of Europe and marching Berlin-wards to victory."³ This over-optimistic attitude was reflected in questions put to the M.I.C.'s Question and Answer service; 'What holidays can be expected during the following year?'; 'Will petrol be available this summer for motor-lawnmowers?', and most remarkably; 'Could not more steel be made available for boning corsets?'⁴ The extent of complacency was such that M.I.C. acknowledged the need to re-awaken the public to the fact that the War had still to be won, and the Southern Divisional Committee urged that wireless and cinema reminders about the dangers of careless talk be re-emphasised.⁵ However, the complacency and war-weariness in the city was endemic in the M.I.C. itself. Although the General Committee continued to hold regular meetings, the Divisional Committees rarely met throughout 1944. In March it was reported; "There was a feeling that the Divisional Committees were working in a vacuum and the members felt they had too little to do."⁶ Some Divisional meetings were cancelled because of poor attendance and some committees held only two or three meetings throughout the year, partly due to apathy at regional and national levels of the Ministry of Information. In April the M.I.C. Secretary, Charles Nowell, reported the mood of the Divisional committees to the Regional Information Officer;

Once again grave concern was expressed at the fact that reports and suggestions emanating from any of these Committees did not seem to produce any results or receive any acknowledgement. The Secretary of one Divisional Committee quoted a number of reports that had been sent in

from his Committee members and in no case had he been able to tell his members that any progress had been made. I am sure the enthusiasm of members of the Committee is being sadly impaired by this feeling that the work they put in and the time they devote to this work is being wasted.⁷

The overconfidence and apathy of the population was recognised by the local press and, prior to the invasion of France, the Manchester papers repeatedly carried articles warning of the difficulties still facing the Allies. The Evening News, for example, warned its readers; “there will be a terrific struggle to secure our bridgehead on the continent and that many of our soldiers will be killed or injured, whilst its military correspondent argued that the Germans had more compelling reasons to invade Britain in 1944 than she had in 1940. The least Britain could expect, he suggested, was parachute landings and a German counter-blow against communication lines, roads, railways, stations and distributing centres.⁸ The Evening News itself went further, claiming that the invasion of Europe would have major repercussions on British civilian life;

A starving, scorched, disease-ridden Europe awaits the Allied liberating armies. The people must be fed and clothed, given medical help and rehabilitated. It must be done from OUR stocks. The pound of jam you might have had in the larder will, instead, make its appearance in Paris, Brussels, Oslo, indeed anywhere.⁹

Despite such efforts, only the launching of D-Day on 6 June shook people out of complacency. On that day;

Manchester received the long awaited news with tempered elation. There was no boisterous display. The bells of some suburban churches were rung. Wherever men and women met, in workshop, office, street or cafe, there was a ready interchange of views or even of the exiguous news itself, but feelings had been too well disciplined throughout these waiting weeks to allow for more. Churches throughout Manchester opened their doors, with the proceedings taking the form of virtually continuous intercession with people coming and going as their occasions allowed them.”¹⁰

During the early summer a new phenomenon appeared in British skies, with Germany launching her much vaunted secret weapon, V-1 and V-2 rockets (or p-planes as they were dubbed). The south was obviously in greatest danger and Manchester received

evacuees with around 7000 having arrived by mid-August, but the north was not immune from attack. On Christmas Eve morning, some 50 Heinkels, adapted to carry the rockets, set out to attack Manchester. They outflanked the defences by releasing their bombs off the coast between Skegness and Bridlington, with thirty bombs observed to cross the coast. One crashed within Manchester's boundaries, five more impacted within six miles of the city centre and a further five within fifteen miles. Thirty-seven people were killed and sixty-seven seriously injured.¹¹ Rumours abounded of rockets whose greatly extended range would enable them to reach New York.¹²

Although the invasion of the continent and the arrival of the V-rockets re-ignited public awareness, this proved only temporary. The mood of war-weariness continued to typify Manchester (and elsewhere). One member of the M.I.C., having conducted a public opinion survey, reported;

If my conversations with various people are typical of the majority the trend is somewhat on the following lines:

- (1) If there are so many thousands of women in war factories who have so little to do but knit, why is the Ministry of Labour still taking people from useful civilian occupations and middle aged women from their household duties?
- (2) Do the firms concerned get additional profit from the employment of surplus staff?
- (3) Is the regimentation of the people the object?
- (4) No wonder the war costs £15,000,000 a day.
- (5) Why contribute to National Savings?

He concluded;

People accepted, often at times of great inconvenience, direction to war-work, when they thought they were contributing to the war effort but they may resent being taken from their homes, and employers and public may resent the calling-up of useful employees unless the rumours of idleness in industry are contradicted.¹³

The writer received a reply the following week stating; "At a meeting of the M.I.C. there seemed to be general support for what you said."¹⁴ Such complaints were just part of a general public temper. The Guardian observed in July; "We are all too eager to think that

'everything is in the bag.'"¹⁵ Similarly, in October the Southern Division Committee stated; "the public generally need rousing again to the fact that the war is not over yet."¹⁶

Against such a background, it was inevitable that 1944 saw a continuation of social divisions. Tensions were heightened by the perceived criminal activities of children. In 1944 there was major concern about the problem of juvenile delinquency, with a widely held perception that juvenile crime had increased rapidly. Indeed Manchester had an unenviable reputation in this respect for Hartley Shawcross, the North-West Commissioner for Civil Defence, said Manchester and Merseyside, were now "probably the worst two regions in the country for damage caused by hooligans."¹⁷ The Guardian observed; "To the children now approaching the adventurous age, peace-time standards of civilised behaviour are matters of occasional precept rather than of daily experience."¹⁸ Late in the year, Manchester held a Juvenile Delinquency Conference attended by representatives of the M.I.C., the Juvenile Panel of City Magistrates, Probation Officers, Police, youth organisations and property owners. The Conference heard the nature of the damage done: windows broken, fittings and woodwork removed, brickwork destroyed and houses rendered uninhabitable or dangerous; "There was no doubt about the prevalence of the trouble and it appeared to be generally accepted that the damage was caused mainly by young boys. 90 per cent of cases of wilful damage in the Juvenile Court came from elementary schools, ages ranged from 9-15, the 12 year olds composing the largest group."¹⁹ Among the various causes and remedies discussed by the conference were:

(1) Lack of training in social responsibility.

(2) Indifference and low moral standards of adults: A national campaign was suggested and heartily recommended in order to bring home the common responsibility for preserving both dwelling houses and public property, as well as the duty of the ordinary citizen to assist the Police. Instruction for parents in the upbringing of children was also advocated.

(3) Natural ebullience and 'devilment'. Greater use of physical training, swimming and dancing were urged. A suggestion which found favour was an ambitious scheme for the establishment of a Youth Centre, conferring facilities for physical training, refreshments and handicrafts.

“The Police are too inactive and the magistrates too lenient” was another popular perception.²⁰

A breakdown of family values was also blamed as attention was given to the social consequences of fathers being away on service and mothers working long hours in factories. The massive increases in the number of working women had led to a new lifestyle for many, as Wright Robinson observed;

The effect on many women of this break with family tradition has been serious. There has been a large increase of drinking amongst women. They do not get drunk or fall foul of the law, but they get careless and the effect on the family is an all-round lowering of the family tone. We men have taken liberties because we have taken it for granted that ‘everything at home is all right’, meaning that the wife would hold the fort while we took our pleasures abroad. Nowadays some men drink with their wives and some wives earning an independent income are allowing themselves the liberties their menfolk have always indulged in as their right. Many single women join the crowd in the pub near the great works on pay day and drink their gill or their pint, or would take short drinks like whisky, gin or port if these were not in short supply and too high in price to be played with. Certainly there is... a very great increase of drinking amongst women.

Old inhibitions, particularly the religious ones have broken down and have not always been replaced by a working code of morals. There is less and less belief in the wrath of God. I believe a larger proportion are more vulnerable than ever before, the more careless because they have no codes, and a more thoughtful section because they believe that no penalty is involved to an unwanted child, it is a matter for personal choice and not one for social interference. Little hard observation needs to be undertaken to show that under the pressure of war conditions, an increasing number of women allow themselves a latitude that would shock their mothers and horrify their grandmothers.²¹

The examples of juvenile delinquency and attitudes towards the behaviour of working women are reflective of a wider trend of social and class division. As will be seen later, Labour Party membership statistics suggested that the social classes were more polarised in 1944 than at any previous point in the War.

Reconstruction, the White Paper Chase and Political Repercussions.

In the early months of the year, with the invasion of the continent imminent, public interest in reconstruction was perhaps at its peak, a point acknowledged by both the Guardian and the Evening News. The former asserted;

In politics, both at home and abroad, there has been good progress though here again the coming year is one of responsibility no less than of hope. If we are right in assuming the bare possibility that the war may end this year, there is no time to be lost in laying the practical foundations for a post-war world about which we still talk of vaguely. There was a time when our plight was such that we might reasonably postpone discussion of domestic reforms but with victory coming our way - and we hope soon- we should make sure that in 1944 we devote to the task of social betterment the stubborn energy and concentration which, as a part of the national character, we seem always to produce for purposes of war.²²

The Evening News similarly commented; "The chief criticism of British policy is the lack of it. The mass of the people would like to see the Government clearly proclaiming a policy of social and economic liberation at home."²³ The Guardian returned to this theme shortly afterwards; "The more Mr Churchill and his Government bring the war towards a successful end the more do people ask for proof that they are being put on the right track for the promised land."²⁴ A survey conducted on a Gorton estate found a *keen interest in reconstruction issues, and concluded*; "The tenants were, generally speaking, alive to the possibilities of post-war reconstruction and were eager to give voice to their ideas, which were intelligent and practical."²⁵ Housing was still the predominant concern of Mancunians with the City News observing; "There is one problem which juts out from all others, one problem which takes precedence in the minds of men and women serving at home and overseas. It is HOUSING."²⁶ Realising this, the City Council held a housing exhibition, where the task facing Manchester was revealed by a former Town Clerk, who asserted; "Apart from London, Manchester has the biggest housing problem in the country."²⁷ The findings of the M.I.C. suggest this was probably true. The Committee was informed by the Council's Tenancy Assistant "how very great were the

difficulties and the magnitude of the task. There was a waiting list of 8,500 applicants, involving 35,000 people and the vacancies average 7-9 per week. Applicants number 173 per week.”²⁸ Questionnaires found the majority of people preferred detached, or semi-detached dwellings, and deplored what they termed ‘houses in rows’. The question of block flats was also mentioned with the preponderance of opinion favouring block flats only for spinsters and bachelors. The numbers visiting the exhibition was further evidence of popular interest in housing: in total, 86,110 people attended.²⁹

With the end of the War in sight, such public pressure forced the Government into action - the Coalition had to bring forward detailed plans before the War was won. Consequently, a rash of White Papers were published covering health, employment policy, town and country planning, social insurance and education in what has become popularly known as the ‘White Paper Chase’. Proponents of the consensus thesis regard these papers as the crowning point of cross-party agreement, a signifier of a mutually shared view of the shape of post-war Britain. Others argue that they were merely compromise documents that expressed the views of neither the Labour or Conservative parties, and which neither Party intended to implement without change. Education and family allowances apart, no reconstruction measure got beyond the legislative stage before the end of the War. The revisionist school has the more persuasive argument, for virtually every Bill passed during 1944 provoked fierce disagreement between the Coalition partners. In consequence, the need to prevent coalition threatening disagreements resulted in a series of vague and occasionally contradictory White Papers. This can clearly be seen by briefly examining their political background.

The Health Service White Paper.

The White Paper on the National Health Service (published in February) proposed a free and universal service, a substantial role for local authorities, a guarantee for the future existence of voluntary hospitals, and the suggestion that new doctors be required to practice on a full-time salaried basis for a fixed number of years before they could treat private patients. A number of these proposals were objected to by one party or the other.

A draft White Paper, which satisfied neither Labour or the Conservatives, had been submitted to the War Cabinet by the Conservative Minister of Health, Henry Willink, with disputes over the continuation of voluntary hospitals (which Labour opposed), salaried employees working in group practices at health centres (disliked by Conservatives), the principle of private medical practice (sacrosanct for Tories), and the status of consultants. Consequently, although both parties accepted the White Paper, each stated that they did *not consider themselves bound by its proposals*. The Parliamentary Labour Party's praise was economical; it was welcomed only as a "great contribution towards the plan which we, in the fullness of the time would like to see established in this country."³⁰ The emphasis was firmly on future modifications in line with party, not coalition, policy. The Conservatives in the War Cabinet and Reconstruction Committee accepted the Paper only after the Minister of Reconstruction, Lord Woolton, warned; "If discussion of the whole scheme is to be re-opened...I fear that the Labour Ministers may withdraw their support of the scheme and stand out for something far more repugnant to Conservative feeling."³¹ Woolton was correct, for Attlee warned Churchill that Labour members of the Reconstruction Committee had accepted so much that was unpalatable in the White Paper that they risked censure within their own party.³² Even so, Willink was quick to re-assure Conservatives that the White Paper was only a consultative document. In the words of the leading historian of the Health Service; "Although a skilful cosmetic exercise the 1944 White Paper signified little progress in resolving acute disagreements over the future direction of policy".³³

Employment Policy.

The Government's White Paper on employment policy (June) provoked similar conflict. Often held to represent a shared acceptance of the need to achieve full employment by using Keynesian techniques to regulate demand (the War had proved that Government action could sustain full employment by keeping demand high), the White Paper was little more than an unsatisfactory compromise between two widely divergent views. It did not even refer to full employment, with the Government pledging only to achieve and sustain a 'high and stable level of employment'. Labour's employment policy, crafted

throughout the War, committed the party to a quasi-Keynesian approach with the Government regulating demand, alongside 'economic planning' (although no one seemed sure what this entailed). As part of this 'planning' Labour would nationalise the 'commanding heights' of the economy and retain most wartime economic controls.

The Conservative emphasis, in direct contrast, foresaw a return to free trade and the pre-war predominance of private over public enterprise coupled with the removal, at the earliest possible moment, of economic controls (regarded by Conservatives as 'war socialism'). This theme was stressed by the Minister of Production, Oliver Lyttelton, a powerful figure in the Conservative hierarchy. The Conservative Party, he argued, should aim for a high level of employment and accept some 'positive action' by the state, but that this should be kept "down to a minimum. It is quite a delusion to draw the inference that because the state in war is highly efficient in industry, that the same applies in peace."³⁴ For the vast majority of Conservatives, unemployment was to be avoided, if not by a wholesale return to pre-1939 conditions, then by a "heavy reliance on traditional remedies such as the stability of sterling, the expansion of the export trade and the encouragement of private enterprise."³⁵ Furthermore, as Lowe has pointed out, there remained within the Party an undercurrent of feeling that the threat of unemployment was necessary to ensure industrial discipline and wage restraint.³⁶

With two such divergent party positions, the White Paper inevitably contained several contradictory paragraphs as its authors strove to find an acceptable compromise. One paragraph ruled out the possibility of deliberately planning for a budget deficit, only to be contradicted by a paragraph which stated that Government should not be restricted by "a rigid policy of balancing the Budget each year."³⁷ Similarly, the question of the future ownership of industry was left in the air; as one economist has stated, it was unclear whether the Paper "actually represented any single widely held position."³⁸ Sir William Beveridge, busily working on his own employment proposals, was scathingly critical; "The White Paper virtually never mentions full employment and does not define it."³⁹ Privately the Chairman of the Conservative Party, Ralph Assheton, admitted that the full employment pledge was a "series of empty shams."⁴⁰ A further sign of the lack

of consensus on this issue came with the document's reception in the two parties, with Conservative and Labour M.P.s taking comfort from opposing parts of the White Paper.⁴¹

Town and Country Planning.

The question of land ownership had been beset by difficulties, with Lord Woolton admitting; "I cannot remember any Government document that caused so much trouble and about which it was so difficult to get agreement."⁴² Woolton was referring to the Uthwatt Report of 1942 which recommended that authorities should have the right to take possession of any land (even if privately owned) at 1939 values, with the betterment in values accruing to the public purse. The Report had provoked violent disagreement between the parties, with Labour supporting its findings, and the Conservatives bitterly opposed. "We Conservatives", one M.P. noted, "got as far as coming to the conclusion...that the Uthwatt proposal was a bad one."⁴³ The consequence of these intractable differences was that the Town and Country Planning Bill (published in the summer of 1944) fudged the critical issues of development rights and compensation. Nevertheless, Conservatives viewed the Bill as an invasion of property rights and sought to insert an amendment designed to weaken powers of compulsory purchase, whilst Labour M.P.s attacked the Bill for failing to adopt the principle of national planning. Indeed, only 10 Labour M.P.s voted for the Bill, with the great majority abstaining. The major problems surrounded the compensation clauses, which provoked such partisan feeling that Churchill feared for the continuation of the Coalition. A number of concessions were made to Conservative opinion but, speaking for Labour, Arthur Greenwood condemned the compensation concessions and made it clear that if further modifications were made, the Party would vote against the Bill in its third reading.⁴⁴

The Ownership of Industry.

The future ownership and control of industry remained particularly contentious. Labour ministers were encouraging the nationalisation of industry and the railways but, as Lord

Beaverbrook told Churchill, Conservatives would not yield to demands for the nationalisation of banks, transport and coal.⁴⁵ Conservative ministers, led by Butler, refused to countenance the re-organisation of the electricity industry into a public corporation. Butler told Lyttelton that he “objected violently” to a measure that would treat private investors in the electrical companies unfair and remove all “responsibility and incentive.”⁴⁶ These contrasting attitudes had been seen in the Employment White Paper where the issue of future control had been left unresolved. The White Paper contained no definite suggestions “about what changes should be made in the pre-war balance between public ownership and private ownership.”⁴⁷

Education and Family Allowances.

Two measures did get beyond the legislative stage, but even here we must be careful not to exaggerate the depth of consensus. Butler’s Education Act, creating a tripartite education system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools was passed but Butler admitted that the Government had “been prompted the way of education because it has been very difficult to obtain agreement between the parties on any matters which involve property or pocket.”⁴⁸ Family allowances were also introduced, but although appearing to indicate consensus it can be argued that the two parties supported the policy for totally different reasons. While Labour welcomed family allowances as part of a social reform programme, the work of Land and Macnicol on the history of family allowances suggests that the Conservatives supported the policy partly to curb wage demands and partly to palliate wartime taxation.⁴⁹

Only the White Paper on social security met with enthusiastic support, though this did not last long. Upon its publication the Evening News eulogised; “Let us praise the Government! Let us hail the coalition! Its White Paper on Social Security published today is a splendid document. It promises the largest social advance the people of this country have ever made at one step. The fear of acute poverty is to be removed.”⁵⁰ The Guardian was more guarded, pointing out that the principle of subsistence benefits (wanted by Labour, opposed by Conservatives, who feared it would destroy the ‘work

ethic') was deemed 'not practicable'. The enthusiasm expressed by the Evening News disappeared when the Government announced that the Social Insurance Bill would take a further five months to draft. This pronouncement was met by incredulity with the Guardian groaning; "We can now drop all hopes of any progress towards putting the Beveridge scheme on the statute book before the election. The plain man will rot his eyes at the stupendous pace at which our civil servants and their ministerial superiors work."⁵¹

Despite the Coalition's efforts, contemporary opinion in Manchester was strongly critical of the Government. Far from seeing the White Papers as consensual, the Manchester press immediately realised that they were, in fact, unsatisfactory compromises between two divergent policy positions that had evaded the most politically contentious issues in order to avoid potentially coalition-threatening arguments. In consequence they were met with little enthusiasm. Following the publication of the White Paper on health, the Evening News observed; "The Government plan for a national health service is so comprehensive a compromise that almost all sections of opinion have been able to give a cautious welcome, however qualified."⁵² Similarly, the Guardian commented; "The National Health Service outlined in the White Paper is essentially a compromise, an attempt to reconcile and unify two widely divergent schools of thought."⁵³ The press were similarly unimpressed by the employment White Paper. The Guardian realised;

The Government proposals for preventing mass unemployment after the war are both cautious and bold. They are cautious in that they aim at evening out fluctuations in business activity without imposing permanent control of industry. They are almost revolutionary in committing the Government to an active policy of economic management.⁵⁴

The Guardian hit on the core of the problem; the Paper had to be both 'cautious and bold' to satisfy the two opposing schools of thought in the Coalition. The Evening News similarly realised that the parties had been able to agree to the White Paper only because it shirked all mention of the future control of industry.⁵⁵ The Government's

Town and Country Planning Bill was also met with real scepticism, for it had avoided the most important issues. The Guardian stated;

It leaves the Left dissatisfied because it does not in itself make comprehensive planning possible, because even the patchwork reconstruction it permits will be hampered by a slow and expensive procedure for public acquisition, and because even this defective procedure will be available for too short a period. It frightens the Right because it does not exempt all holders of land and buildings from the general levy on property imposed by war finance...The Government, unable to agree on this issue simply procrastinated, until a decision on one particular aspect of land policy could no longer be postponed and then hoped to pass an 'ad hoc' measure on its merits and its urgency without committing itself either way on the principles involved...and it leaves the fundamental one still to be decided.⁵⁶

Of course, the negative reaction of the press was very important, for it helped to shape popular responses to the White Papers. Crucially, the White Papers manifestly failed to satisfy the demands of the general public, and in reality they served only to intensify the degree of public exasperation and cynicism. The Guardian captured popular feeling when, in September (with only the White Paper on Social Insurance still to be published), it complained;

In spite of all the warnings of the last war, the edge of victory finds the Government behind with its plans. Not a single major piece of reconstruction planning has gone through Parliament except the Education Act. This is a shocking reflection on the Government's capacity. How much can be put through before the present session ends, and in the following session, which may be this Parliament's last? If the Town and Country Planning Bill is anything to go by, it may not be much. There are White Papers everywhere, either dogs eared or torn through the sectional wrangling over them or still in the capatious realm of ministerial promise. And there is a wide gap between White Papers and accomplished policy. After about 22 months we are about to get the Government's social security scheme. The White Paper is only the preliminary to legislation. What are the chances of having it ready to operate when the war ends? Yet this is what was intended when Sir William Beveridge was commissioned to make his report in 1941 and which he urged in December 1942. And the same holds too of the health service, of local Government

reforms, of employment policy, of the physical aspects of planning, and above all, of housing.⁵⁷

Cynicism amongst Mancunians was widespread. This was best reflected in the public's reaction to the employment White Paper, perhaps the most important of the White Papers given that many people faced losing their war-time jobs at the cessation of hostilities. Despite this, both the Guardian and the Evening News observed that the White Paper had completely failed to ignite the public's enthusiasm with the latter commenting that it "fell so flat."⁵⁸ The Guardian argued that this was entirely due to past experience;

[The pronouncement on a full employment policy] is perhaps the most important declaration we have ever had from a British Government. It is as decisive a thing in its own way as the repeal of the Corn Laws. Why then has it received so little popular attention? The main explanation, perhaps, is that the Government's handling of the Beveridge Report has induced a mood of profound scepticism as to the value of any Government pronouncement. So when the foundation of the Government's post-war policy is announced it finds a public well hardened to official schemes and distinctly sceptical of them.⁵⁹

The frustration felt among Mancunians was indicative of the rest of the country, and in an October B.I.P.O. poll, 48 per cent of people expressed themselves dissatisfied with the steps taken by the Government to deal with post-war reconstruction, against just 31 per cent who expressed themselves satisfied.⁶⁰

Such frustration intensified the anti-Conservative swing for, as in 1943, it was the Conservative Party, rather than the Government as a whole, that was held responsible for the Government's prevarication. This popular mood was captured by the Evening News;

What is the cause of this intrepid war Government's caution when it touches post-war plans? The cause is the large Conservative majority upon which the life of the Government wholly depends. The coalition can travel no faster than the pace which the Conservatives permit. If the end of the European War comes as soon as it is hoped and the reconstruction is

less well prepared than it might be, the country's difficulties, inevitably great, will be magnified and the people will know where to put the blame. The Conservative Party has a great responsibility.⁶¹

By-elections throughout the country highlighted the Conservatives' declining support. Conservative candidates consistently neglected domestic reforms, and were consequently punished by the voters. As the Evening News observed;

The coalition is not unpopular when Labour or Liberal candidates are standing. The problem, as we have said before, is one for the Conservative Party. The Conservative candidate before the electorate today is in an unhappy position. He sometimes does not appear to be a firm advocate even of the ideas of reconstruction which the Government have tentatively advanced.⁶²

The two most telling wartime by-elections occurred early in the year; at Skipton the Conservative Party lost to Common Wealth, a result that "sent alarm bells ringing among senior Conservatives."⁶³ Shortly afterwards came a second defeat at West Derbyshire, a quintessential Conservative constituency with a long-standing record of representation by the Cavendish family. The Conservative candidate, the Marquess of Hartington, however, had little to offer in the way of post-war policy and he based his campaign on the themes of national unity and support for the Prime Minister. His opponent, Charlie White, (who had resigned as the local Labour candidate to stand as an Independent) committed himself to welfare reform. The result was a spectacular victory for White, capturing 57 per cent of the vote; the Conservative majority of some 5,000 was turned into an independent socialist majority of 4,500.⁶⁴

The Manchester press had no doubts that the Conservatives had fared so badly in these by-elections because of their reactionary attitudes towards reconstruction. The Guardian recorded; "Skipton strengthens the widely held belief that opinion is moving to the left. Indeed it would require much ingenuity to find in the result anything else than what seems to be the plain lesson [that voters] are resentful of the Government's delays

and indecision's on the problems of domestic reconstruction.”⁶⁵ The Evening News observed;

If Skipton has not gone red it has at least turned robust pink...Mr Riddiough [the Conservative candidate] talked of national unity and little else. National unity to fight the war is not the issue at all. Everybody today supports the Prime Minister on his war record. But the peace is coming and must be prepared for. The Government which plans one of the most tremendous operations in military history, the invasion of the fortified continent, with magnificent courage, hesitates timorously before the mildest schemes of reconstruction.⁶⁶

After the West Derbyshire result, the Guardian commented; “The majority is too big to ascribe to personal popularity. It has a quite clear political significance: the electors of West Derbyshire share the growing post-war interest concerning the aims for which we are supposed to be fighting and about the present constitution of the House of Commons.”⁶⁷

In mid-1943 the local press believed that opinion was swinging to the left but that this was not irreversible. Then, the Guardian believed the electorate was waiting to see if the Conservatives would give a lead on reconstruction. However, by-election evidence confirmed that attitudes against the Conservative Party hardened during 1944. Labour's Northern Voice noted in February;

There is an extraordinary growth of what is termed Left public opinion. Dismay at the failure of the capitalist order (or should it be disorder) resulting in World War number two has caused an examination of pre-war economic and moral codes. It is being generally recognised that security and employment for every physically fit citizen is cannot be obtained while a small owning class can, for their own purposes, play dukes and drakes with prices and money values. That the greed and ignorance of capitalism's leaders will bring about World War Three unless their imperialistic policy is supplanted by one of international co-operation of all peoples, black, white, red or yellow. The extraordinary achievements of Soviet Russia, both in peace and war have driven home the need for a planned social order based upon public ownership and enterprise for the welfare of all citizens.⁶⁸

This hardening of attitudes was also reflected in opinion polls, which revealed that the Conservatives were dropping further behind Labour. A poll in February found 37 per cent support for Labour and just 23 per cent for the Conservatives, a gap of 14 points. This was an increase of 7 points from a poll taken the previous June.⁶⁹ By early 1945, this lead had increased still further with a poll giving Labour a lead of 18 points. This firmly suggests a continuing swing against the Conservatives throughout 1944.

The evidence of Manchester supports this argument. The Rusholme by-election, which will be examined later in the chapter, provided a strong indication of the anti-Conservative mood in the city whilst Labour Party membership figures continued on their upward trend, increasing by over 8 per cent on the 1943 levels. As in 1943, however, Labour's increasing support was still being drawn only from the working-class and the young, as staunch middle-class Conservative voters were still proving impenetrable to Labour. Indeed, the relative success of socialist independents may have increased middle-class concerns about the future, leading them to further identify themselves with their natural political guardians, the Conservative Party. This increasing polarisation can clearly be seen in a breakdown of the membership figures. Overall, party membership in Manchester increased from 4,823 to 5,247, but the entirety of this increase came from the ranks of the manual working-class. In the four Labour-held working-class constituencies of Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting, party membership increased by a considerable 18 per cent (2,968 to 3,497). In middle-class, Conservative-held constituencies, membership decreased yet again, by over 5 per cent (1,855 to 1,750). Despite the fact that disappointment with the Government was equally rife amongst Conservative and Labour voters, the Labour Party was proving totally incapable of attracting the support of pre-war middle-class Conservative supporters, with party membership in the city's middle-class constituencies now at an all-time low of just 33 per cent of overall membership. Patently, class considerations were still crucially important in defining party support.

The evidence also continued to suggest that, as in 1943, it was dissatisfaction with the Conservatives, rather than real enthusiasm for Labour or the socialist policies of independent candidates, that was responsible for by-election results and Labour's lead in the polls. This is very difficult to quantify but it was certainly the opinion of three contemporary sources, all from different political persuasions. The comments of the progressive liberally-minded Evening News following the West Derbyshire by-election spoke of the swing against the Conservatives rather than a swing in favour of socialism;

Whatever may be deduced from the result of the West Derbyshire election it is certainly evidence of the popular revolt against the plutocratic Toryism that has held the nation in thrall for more than a decade. The revolt is not confined to any one class and it is widely supported outside the ranks of the organised political parties. It is due to the resolve that the war shall be the prelude to such economic and social changes as will ensure for everyone the chance of a decent and dignified life, to the conviction that the necessary changes can be attained by the use of the existing democratic machine, to the second conviction that they will be stoutly resisted by the party that stands and must stand for privilege and money.⁷⁰

Even Labour's Northern Voice conceded that the War was not converting people to socialism, admitting that the Conservatives' inter-war record was the real stimulus behind the success of independent socialists. "Does all [by-election evidence] mean that Mr Nineteen-Forty is now a fully convinced, crisis proof socialist? I am afraid not. There has been a swing against the past and the average man is no longer a political fool. He is in a critical mood."⁷¹ The non-political City News believed that Labour still had much to prove;

Labour will have a tremendous responsibility to fulfil when peace comes, no less than it has had during the war. One of the speakers at the May Day parade of the Manchester Council of Labour declared that to win the peace we must have after the war a Labour movement capable of fulfilling the responsibility of governing the country. Have we such a movement in Britain today? The man in the street, thinking of recent strikes, of the flouting by many thousands of men of the Trade Union leaders who they have voted into office, and of the noisy minority who would prefer to forget all the solid achievements of Mr Bevin and pillorying him for the anti-strike regulation, may well be doubtful of that. 'In unity is strength' - but has the Labour Party sufficient unity within its ranks to be strong?

How far is the strength being frittered away by men who see in the movement a way of bettering their own positions? The workers cannot be expected to believe in the motives of everybody who joins in the talk of a rosy new dawn and a new world - they have heard promises before which were never fulfilled. But with a lack of trust and a spirit of cynicism among their own party, towards their own leaders, how much can they expect to achieve?⁷²

Such statements, coming from a variety of different sources, give credence to the claim that Labour was prospering from widespread dissatisfaction with the Conservatives rather than from any real enthusiasm for their own party. The year had seen a marked intensification of the anti-Conservative temper provoked by the Party's negative approach to reconstruction throughout 1943. By the end of 1944 Conservatism was deeply unpopular outside its core support, as it was held singularly responsible for the Government's weak and uncertain reconstruction programme. Many people therefore did not want to see a Conservative government returned to office, and turned to Labour as the only viable alternative. By the end of the year the Conservatives trailed Labour by an almost insurmountable margin, and Labour looked almost certain to win the next general election.

Coalition Politics Versus Party Political Loyalties.

At Parliamentary and party leadership levels, the 'White Paper chase' highlighted the strictly limited nature of the wartime consensus. Although able to agree on the prosecution of the War, discussions on post-war reconstruction were rancorous, and had served only to emphasise the continuing policy differences between the two major parties. The same picture continued to typify Manchester politics, where the gap between the parties remained even greater than that existent at national level. At the end of 1943 the social and economic policies of the major Manchester parties remained fundamentally different, and it appeared highly unlikely that either the Conservatives or Labour would amend their policy beliefs, allowing a consensus to develop. The chapter will now

suggest that 1944 witnessed a further hardening of party attitudes, particularly in the Labour Party, which totally eliminated any possibility of consensus emerging. By the end of the year, it will be argued, it was certain that the main parties would go to the polls offering the electorate contrasting visions of post-war Britain.

The year represented the nadir of inter-party relations in both Westminster and Manchester. At national level, Labour (against the wishes of some party leaders) and the Liberals, recognising the growing popular frustration surrounding the Government's approach to reconstruction and the damaging effect this could have on their own parties, declared that they would contest the next general election as independent parties rather than participating in a continuation of the Coalition. In Manchester, the Labour Party became extremely hostile to the Coalition. Throughout the War the Party had been highly sensitive to the dangers of becoming too closely aligned with the Conservative Party for fear of losing support to the Communists and this sensitivity intensified in 1944 with the increasing success of Common Wealth, which had styled its appeal on the policy agenda of the Labour Party. As with the surge in support for the Communist Party, it is easy to dismiss Common Wealth's success as a purely war-time phenomenon and to regard them, as Addison has done, as being simply a Labour substitute that would disappear when Labour could re-enter the electoral arena. Crucially, this is not how the Party were seen by contemporary observers in Manchester, many of whom predicted a bright future for Common Wealth. Early in the year the Evening News observed that "Common Wealth is attractive not only to Labour voters but to Labour Party members."⁷³ Similarly, in September the Guardian commented enthusiastically on a Common Wealth policy document;

Common Wealth is moving rapidly. 'Common Wealth Policy 1944-45' documents the emergence, from its original policy manifesto of a post-war programme based not on a political doctrine but on the active human needs of the people. Thus harnessed and put to work, its organisation will be a force to reckoned with.⁷⁴

Although Labour's position as the pre-eminent party of the Left was unlikely to be challenged by Common Wealth, or the Communist Party (who were perhaps now a lesser

threat), the success of Common Wealth could lead to a split in the Left vote at the next general election, with obvious disastrous consequences for Labour. With Common Wealth having a particularly strong base in Manchester, Labour had genuine cause for concern. Manchester Labour's frustration with the Coalition steadily increased and the Party was desperate to distance itself from an unpopular government, and inevitably they began to re-assert their independence even more forcefully than in earlier years of the War. Manchester Labour's stance continued to place them to the left of the leadership. Any Labour Party activity that was deemed to assist the Conservative Party now provoked complete condemnation. At its annual meeting, the Party unanimously passed a resolution "deploring the spectacle of Labour M.P.s speaking on Tory platforms in by-elections" and "calling on the National Executive Committee to take all steps possible to prevent a re-occurrence."⁷⁵ The Secretary of the Womens' Advisory Council, moving the resolution said; "The sending of Labour M.P.s to support the Tory candidate in the recent West Derbyshire by-election was a definite violation of the decision of the Labour Party Conference regarding the electoral truce. It is turning that truce into a political truce."⁷⁶ The President of the meeting seconded the resolution;

He expressed the opinion that the appearance of A.G. Walkden in West Derbyshire was not by invitation but by a Labour Party Headquarters wangle. [Another member] not only attacked the policy of Labour members appearing on Tory platforms but roundly criticised Attlee for sending letters of support and contended that both actions were a violation of the annual conference's decision which only agreed to an electoral truce. He said he had been active in the Labour movement since the days of the Labour Representation Committee and now he was being asked to support Tory candidates. Several thousand Labour voters in West Derbyshire had in effect told Attlee to go to hell.⁷⁷

The Party were very reluctant to punish anyone who had broken party rules by opposing the Conservatives. A veteran Manchester Labour Party Alderman, Joe Toole, had stood as an independent candidate in the Skipton by-election against the terms of the electoral truce and, in line with party regulations, the Party decided that "In view of his candidature as an Independent in the election [he] be expelled from the party and the 'whip' in the Manchester City Council be withdrawn from him."⁷⁸ However this was only a cosmetic

exercise for later in the year he was re-admitted to the Party. The Party's frustration with the Coalition was such that, several months before the national party made the decision, Manchester Labour were already pleading with the leadership to withdraw from the Coalition and prepare for the next election. The Party passed a resolution which referred to the growth of trade union membership of the Party and "urged affiliated trade unions to make efforts to bring about even more substantial increases." The resolution continued;

[The success of such efforts is] bound to be affected by the continued participation of members of the Labour Party in the National Government and their inevitable association with a reactionary foreign policy...and a vacillating policy at home to social reconstruction. The party's participation in the National Government should therefore be ended immediately. A withdrawal can be effected without prejudice to the *speedy conclusion of hostilities in Europe.*⁷⁹

A second resolution called upon the leadership to "speedily draft a minimum campaign programme on which the party intends to fight."⁸⁰

With its concern over Common Wealth and its hostile attitude towards the Coalition, the Manchester Labour Party was in its most partisan position of the War. There was therefore no possibility of the Party rethinking its core political beliefs. Labour remained staunch supporters of the Beveridge Report, land nationalisation and, throughout the year, also pressed consistently for a full programme of public ownership. This became clear following the publication of the White Paper on employment. In the Commons debate on the Paper, Bill Oldfield (Lab, Gorton) stressed; "In my opinion the white paper should be definitely laid down upon the lines of full public ownership."⁸¹ Bill Johnston, the Labour council leader, bemoaned that the compromise represented by the White Paper could not solve the problem of unemployment, and stated that only public ownership could provide the solution; "The authors of the white paper have been weighed down by the difficulty of reconciling a policy that required private ownership with a social system based on co-operation. So long as profit and not necessity determines production unemployment must inevitably continue."⁸² John Owen, on the far left, described the White Paper as the "funeral dirge of expiring capitalism."⁸³ In May, the Manchester City Labour Party called for "the issuing of an invitation to all

organisations subscribing to the general principles of social ownership to ally themselves under that programme in a coalition of all forces opposed to capitalist monopoly.”⁸⁴

In contrast to the local Labour Party, some Manchester Conservatives still hoped to see a continuation of the Coalition into the post-war years. Harry Hewlett M.P., for example, said; “It is my firm conviction that our post-war problems would be just as great, if not greater, than our past problems, and I believe that there should be a continuance, though not necessarily in the present form, of the National Government.”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the Conservatives were keen to maintain a party advantage whenever possible and, early in the year, they were accused of acting in a purely partisan manner. In February, Manchester City Justices rescinded (by 24 votes to 12) a decision they had taken some nine months earlier that had introduced proportional representation as the voting system to be used at all elections to committees. One member, said; “if I had not been assured by successive Lord Chancellors that politics did not enter into magisterial duties I would have suspected a party move.”⁸⁶ The Guardian commented;

It would be news to most of the citizens in Manchester that their unpaid magistracy conducts itself on party lines and has its affairs dominated by a Conservative Party caucus. Yet in spite of the supposed independence and impartiality of the magisterial office this seems to be the case...It is devoutly to be hoped that our worthy Tory magistrates act on more intelligent principles when they sit on the bench.⁸⁷

Throughout the War Conservatives had seen no reason to amend their policies and, crucially, this did not alter during 1944. By-election evidence showing the unpopularity of the Party was dismissed as misleading and unreliable, whilst opinion polls showing a considerable Labour lead were ignored by virtually all parties and political commentators. In consequence the Manchester Conservative Party remained a strongly reactionary body that showed little grasp of popular feelings. Despite all the evidence demonstrating the priority given by the public to issues such as housing and employment, the Manchester Conservatives devoted most of their time to foreign and defence policies. This was made clear at the annual meeting of the Manchester Conservative Association, at which the majority of time was spent discussing these questions with virtually no

discussion of domestic reconstruction.⁸⁸ Further evidence of the reactionary tendencies of the Party was provided by their choice of Lord Mayor. It was the Party's turn to nominate a candidate for the post, and many expected them to choose the first female Lord Mayor, the long serving Miss Mary Kingsmill Jones. Given the major part played by women in the war effort it was widely felt that it would have been a fitting gesture of recognition, but of the three candidates put forward, the Conservative council group gave fewest votes to Miss Jones. This was condemned by some within the Conservative Party itself. Among those disappointed were the five women members of the Conservative group, one of whom described the vote as "unfair victimisation because of sex", and some progressive Conservative men, one of whom said; "If a man had done as much work as Miss Jones, and done it as well, he would have been Lord Mayor long before today."⁸⁹ Such views were in the minority and this issue, together with their seeming inability to grasp the crucial importance of reconstruction, demonstrated that reactionary views still dominated the Party at this late stage of the War.

This resistance to change ensured that the whole tone of Manchester Conservatism continued to be strongly neo-liberal. This was emphasised on a number of occasions throughout the year. One of the city's Conservative M.P.s told a meeting that he accepted that "so long as there is a shortage of raw materials, controls in some shape or form must continue for some time after Germany is beaten" but added that "I hate controls."⁹⁰ A further example of Conservative hostility towards any form of government economic interference surfaced at a council meeting in July. In 1939 the Government had passed the Rent Restrictions Act, which prevented landlords from arbitrarily raising rents, and, five years later Manchester Labour councillors put forward a motion reading; "This Council is of the strong opinion that the provisions of the Rent Restriction Act of 1939 should be continued and that no increase of rent in respect of houses...is justified."⁹¹ Such intervention was not on the agenda of the Manchester Conservatives and the motion was rejected, with the Conservatives voting against it en bloc. This *laissez-faire* attitude was particularly evident in the wake of the publication of the White Paper on employment. The Party's reaction to the document again suggested that the views of the Manchester Conservatives remained to the right of the

national leadership. The White Paper (together with Dalton's Distribution of Industry Bill) proposed that the Government should direct companies to place new industrial investment in areas suffering from high unemployment. Despite having the support of the Conservative leadership, these proposals were criticised by the Manchester Conservatives on the grounds that it involved too much interference with the workings of private enterprise;

While welcoming steps to secure a balanced industrial development, [we] issue the warning that artificial ways of locating industry may bring disorder to the industrial fabric of some areas. Nothing should be done to disturb natural tendencies which arise from the play of economic and other factors. The chief consideration must be 'Where can an industry be carried on most efficiently?' and not 'Where is the greatest need of opportunity for employment?' Productive efficiency should not be sacrificed by allowing the second consideration to prevail when the two conflict, and the Government should therefore rely less upon its powers of direction than its ability to offer inducements. Action should be positive and helpful rather than negative and restrictive.⁹²

The Party adopted the same approach to the contentious issue of the future of the coal industry. Whilst Labour advocated the nationalisation of the industry, the Manchester Conservatives, and their colleagues in business, declared that the industry should be left firmly in the hands of private enterprise;

We believe that only under enlightened private enterprise can the nation be assured of the coal it needs. Planners there are in plenty, many of them well intentioned, but necessarily ignorant. It is the duty of those who are intimately connected with the industry to devise the organisation that is necessary.⁹³

By the end of 1944, the prospect of the political parties entering the next general election with a shared view of post-war Britain had been eliminated. The intensification of disenchantment with the Coalition within the Manchester Labour Party, and their wariness of the success of Common Wealth ensured that the Party remained firmly rooted in their entrenched position. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the Manchester Conservatives remained a staunchly reactionary body. Despite the evidence

of by-election and opinion polls, the Party showed no inclination of making concessions to popular feelings in the wider community.

The Rusholme By-Election, July 1944.

All the political trends explored in this chapter were highlighted and emphasised in the Rusholme by-election of July 1944, the city's most important political occurrence of the War to date. It will be argued that the by-election provided compelling evidence of the reactionary nature of the Manchester Conservatives, the (at best) unco-operative attitude of Manchester Labour and the heavy loss of support for the Conservative Party amongst the working-class and the young.

The election, called after the death of E.A. Radford M.P., took place in a Conservative stronghold; in only one election (out of nine) since 1918 had the seat been won by another party (the Liberals in 1923), and in the last two elections the Conservatives polled 69.3 per cent (1931) and 62.6 per cent (1935). Electoral history was very much on the Conservatives' side and so, importantly, was the timing of the election. Polling day was 8 July, with campaigning taking place throughout June, against the background of the successful Allied invasion of the continent. This success could only boost the popularity of the National Government and decrease the desire to 'rock the boat', assisting the Conservative (National Government) candidate. This was certainly the opinion of the local press. Before campaigning began, the local press had no doubt that the Conservatives would secure a comfortable victory. The Guardian assessed the propitious circumstances favouring the Conservative candidate, and the difficulties facing the other two candidates;

According to present indications the contest is likely to prove little more than a formality. To say this is by no means to disparage the challengers or to belittle the causes for which they stand, but merely to emphasise the obvious fact that the circumstances of the moment favour tremendously the Conservative Party who claim possession under the electoral truce. For the time being, at any rate, the public mind has little disposition towards platform controversy. Its anxieties are centred on events across the English Channel...In nine contests from 1918 to 1935, the seat has been won eight times by the Conservatives and once by the Liberals...Once

more leaving political considerations out of account, the Rusholme Division is the hardest nut [Common Wealth] has yet tried to crack.⁹⁴

The Evening News agreed with the Guardian's analysis; "The Conservative candidate will be the official candidate and, on the eve, or in the early stages of the second front [this was written four days before D-Day], and at a time when the Government's prestige is enhanced by success in Italy and the publication of an employment plan, all the chances are his."⁹⁵ In contrast to earlier war-time by-elections in the city (two of which had been unopposed), it appeared that there might be as many as six candidates standing. However this was reduced to three when the Communists, the Independent Labour Party and an individual independent decided against standing. The main opposition to the Conservatives was provided by Common Wealth, and their candidate H.W. Blomerly, a Prestwich teacher. The Party's activity in Manchester earlier in the year made their decision to stand unsurprising although, as we shall see, this decision was made only after consultation with Labour. Alongside the Conservatives and Common Wealth, a third candidate was a Mr Cecil John Taylor, a Carlisle businessman. He declared his candidacy whilst there was still much confusion over other candidates explaining; "I am fighting because there is so much ambiguity that I think there is a likelihood of the Government candidate getting in unopposed."⁹⁶ Taylor was immediately disadvantaged because of his rather tenuous links with Manchester, in comparison to the local men selected by the other parties. In an attempt to portray himself as a 'local', Taylor informed the Evening Chronicle that *he had been born in Stockport and had attended school in Ardwick*. Furthermore, he pointed out; "I have been described as a Carlisle businessman, but I am only in Carlisle because of the Blitz. The sales side of the manufacturing chemists business with which I am concerned was started in Manchester."⁹⁷ Despite his protestations, Taylor retained his 'outsider' tag.

As with all by-elections, Rusholme was fought on the 1939 electoral register, now five years out of date. It was estimated that, as a result of service calls, workforce conscription, removals and deaths, only half of the 45,842 (1939) electors were still in the division.⁹⁸ Additionally, anyone under voting age in 1939, or people who had moved to the area since that date, was not on the register. The Evening Chronicle estimated that

up to 13,000 people may have been disenfranchised.⁹⁹ The Conservatives were most likely to be affected by the changed nature of the constituency as the majority of those who had left the area were middle-class citizens who were able to move to safer areas. This would inevitably reduce the Conservative vote.

Labour's Stance.

The by-election emphasised Manchester Labour's increasing hostility to the Coalition and, more particularly, the Conservative Party. The one previously contested Manchester by-election, in Clayton in late 1942, had been a model of inter-party co-operation but in Rusholme Labour could barely conceal their antagonism towards the Conservative candidate, with the mouthpiece of the Manchester and Salford Labour movement, Northern Voice, openly calling for a Common Wealth victory.

Even though the terms of the electoral truce prevented Labour from putting forward a candidate, Common Wealth made it clear that they would step aside if the local Labour Party installed a candidate, telling the local press; "Common Wealth's chief aim is to ensure that a progressive socialist be returned to Rusholme. If the present prospective Labour candidate decides to stand we shall give him our full support."¹⁰⁰ The Rusholme Labour Party was the most left-wing of the Manchester constituency Labour parties (witnessed by their support for Communist affiliation) and their prospective candidate, Lester Hutchinson, was certainly a fellow traveller, and possibly even a card-carrying member of the Communist Party (strictly against Labour Party rules). Hutchinson was sorely tempted to stand telling the press, without consulting his constituency party, that he was awaiting the outcome of a party meeting which would "decide whether or not to support me as an Independent Labour candidate."¹⁰¹ Hutchinson's obvious eagerness was misplaced, for Rusholme Labour had no intention of breaking the electoral truce. Hutchinson was immediately rebuked by Councillor Thomas, the Chairman of the Divisional Labour Party who declared; "[Hutchinson's] statement is an extraordinary one. No official Labour Party will support any independent candidate in a by-election while the electoral truce is in operation. We shall not support Mr Hutchinson if he stands as an Independent Labour candidate."¹⁰² The significance of this statement should not be

exaggerated for it was not an attempt to ease the election of the Conservative candidate, and was in reality nothing more than a grudging acceptance of party policy. Rusholme Labour were merely biding their time. This was conveyed the following day, when the Party made known their true feelings towards both the electoral truce and the Conservative Party, and their own hopes for the next general election, to the press;

Although this Divisional Labour Party has always opposed the electoral truce it has been confirmed time and again by successive annual conferences of the Labour Party. We feel, therefore, that it would not be in the best interests of Labour to put forward our candidate, Mr Lester Hutchinson, on this occasion. We feel that Rusholme will rally to Labour when the troops come home and are confident that it will back us to the full in our determination to rid this country once and for all of this disastrous Tory Government which has been directly responsible for leading the world into its present position.¹⁰³

Labour's decision not to stand may also have been the result of a 'deal' struck between themselves and Common Wealth. A fortnight after Labour's decision the Common Wealth candidate, H.W. Blomerly, revealed that he had given an undertaking to Labour to stand down at the general election in favour of Hutchinson, providing he was not attached to a coalition.¹⁰⁴ Private meetings probably occurred before this, and it seems that an 'understanding' was reached.

Throughout the remainder of the campaign Labour officially remained impartial, and did not endorse any candidate. Privately, however, the Party did not wish to see a Conservative victory. This was made clear by Northern Voice;

If the Tory goes back to Rusholme it will prove, we are told, that the country is solid behind the war effort. Rubbish! It will prove, on the contrary, that we have learned nothing and that we intend to change *nothing and that we are no more dynamic in our political outlook than we were nine years ago.*¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, Labour's official non-partisan stance should be contrasted with the open assistance given by Conservatives to the Labour candidate, Harry Thorneycroft, at the Clayton by-election of October 1942. Then, Harry Hewlett M.P. had spoken on Thorneycroft's election platform, and urged Conservatives to vote for Thorneycroft as he

was the National Government candidate. Labour's refusal to return the favour in Rusholme annoyed Conservatives, who did not hesitate to refer to Hewlett's gesture, and the contrast between the two elections signifies that any pretence at unity had disappeared. Unofficially, the Labour Party split three ways, with all three candidates claiming that Labour members were assisting their campaigns, and the evidence suggests this was true. One ex-Labour agent for the Division worked for the Conservatives during the campaign, as did some other members of the Party who felt bound by the spirit of the electoral truce and Hewlett's earlier generosity.¹⁰⁶ However, the Guardian noted; "Mr Blomerly, the Common Wealth candidate, has Labour sympathisers in his band of workers", whilst just days before the election Mr G.B. Cherry, the Secretary of the Rusholme Labour Party was forced to deny that his party was giving its support to Cecil Taylor.¹⁰⁷

The Conservative Campaign.

The choice of candidate, and the campaign run, by the Conservative Party demonstrated the extent to which Manchester Conservatism remained dominated by 1930's neo-liberal orthodoxy. The Rusholme Conservatives selected Major Frederick Cundiff, the son of a former Lord Mayor and a well known local businessman, as their candidate. He possessed an exceptionally distinguished military record, making him an ideal war-time Government candidate; in the First World War he had served firstly in the Army and then as a fighter pilot, whereupon he was shot down and wounded. On the outbreak of the Second World War Cundiff immediately volunteered and served in the early years as a naval lieutenant in the submarine service, seeing action in the Norway campaign. His already considerable reputation was enhanced further still when he subsequently spent four hours adrift in the sea after his ship was blown up whilst on patrol during the Dunkirk evacuation.¹⁰⁸ However, Cundiff was also ultra-conservative and his selection said much about the Party's attitudes towards reconstruction.

Such reactionary attitudes were continually emphasised throughout the campaign, with the Party revealing a complete lack of understanding of public interest in domestic reform. As with most other Conservative by-election candidates in 1944, the main thrust

of Cundiff's campaign was not on the need to implement domestic reforms but rather on the need to support the National Government and Winston Churchill. He began beginning his election address by asking the electorate "to send to Mr Churchill a glorious message of confidence that will hearten him in his grave task of leading the nation to victory."¹⁰⁹ Cundiff described himself as "an all-out supporter of Mr Churchill and his coalition Government. We must have him at the head of the Government when the time comes to dictate peace-terms to the enemy."¹¹⁰ He attempted to label Blomerly as unpatriotic, accusing Common Wealth of "attacking indirectly, if not directly, the Prime Minister" by "calling for an election at this time", whilst simultaneously trying to portray himself as above politics by claiming he "was not fighting the election on party lines. I have seen too much of war and want to win this one quickly, and win the peace too."¹¹¹

Policy issues came a distant second to the eulogising of Churchill but, again, they provided strong evidence of the Party's hostile attitude towards reconstruction and their continuing commitment to the policies of the 1930's. The Guardian was certainly correct in speaking of "the cautious Conservative orthodoxy of Major Cundiff."¹¹² At the annual conference of the Manchester Conservatives the Party had concentrated on post-war foreign and defence policies, rather than domestic issues. Similarly, Cundiff issued a list of policies he would be advocating during the campaign and it is worth repeating the most significant of these, both for what Cundiff says and the order in which they were prioritised;

Post-war Defence: My experiences in all services during two world wars has convinced me of the necessity for a 'strong right arm'. I feel that whatever treaties we might enter into there will always be a clever lawyer on the other side who will put a different complexion on them.

League of Nations: I should want a lot of convincing that a League without the backing of armed forces was ever going to maintain peace-terms.

Germany: We have never appreciated the German mentality. I have travelled though Germany and believe you will never convert an adult Nazi. You may have a chance of moral re-education with German children. Germany led us up the garden path between the two wars. It mustn't happen again.

Peace-terms: This time they will have to be very severe indeed. Unless they are I think Germany will strive to rise again and we shall have another war in fifteen or twenty years.

Hospitals: They lack back-room boys and more money will have to be given to medical research. Every hospital should have a number of full-time pathologists to do this work.

Housing: We are not going to have a repetition of what happened after the last war. Pre-fabricated houses will have to meet a high percentage of the demand whilst permanent ones are made ready.

Beveridge Report: There are many good things in it, but I cannot agree with it all.¹¹³

Two of the most prominent public demands, housing and Beveridge, were bottom of Cundiff's priorities. Cundiff's decision to place foreign and defence issues at the top of his list was surely unwise, for although his 'make Germany pay' pledge had a populist appeal, this was not a predominant issue in public opinion surveys, in which domestic reform remained the overwhelming priorities. Cundiff's comments on domestic issues were hardly likely to satisfy the electorate. His equivocal acceptance of the Beveridge Report would not convince people still suspicious of government intentions, while his strange comments on hospitals gave no mention of the White Paper on the National Health Service, published some months earlier. There was no reference to full employment, either the goal or the recently published White Paper. Only on the housing question was Cundiff in tune with the public, although even here he was careful not to make any real commitments. Cundiff's priorities did not alter as the campaign progressed and in a major speech he again concentrated on defence and peace-terms. Cundiff hinted that his solution to the problem of post-war Germany would be along the lines proposed by the American official, Henry Morgenthau, who advocated the almost total de-industrialisation of Germany, turning it into a rural backwater. In another election meeting, Cundiff declared himself "convinced that German war potential must be destroyed, even if that meant some loss of territory and the occupation of key points."¹¹⁴ On domestic issues, he again emphasised his commitment to pre-war Conservative orthodoxy; "One of the Government's first tasks of reconstruction must be to re-establish

and further extend our export trade”, which must “firstly be built up with reciprocal trade within the British Empire.” Government economic controls were admitted to be necessary in the present circumstances “but should be withdrawn at the earliest possible moment.”¹¹⁵ This emphasis on the removal of economic controls (together with Hewlett’s comments) highlighted the Party’s hostility towards public ownership. Furthermore the emphasis on a return to private enterprise, combined with the need for a *thriving export trade* was the standard Conservative solution to the question of how to maintain full employment in post-war years. Full employment was to be achieved by falling back on traditional economic methods, rather than through government control of the economy and planning, as advocated by Labour.

The Rusholme by-election served to emphasise the reactionary tendencies of Manchester Conservatism. Far from pursuing a progressive agenda the Party had offered only a re-statement of 1930s orthodoxy. Their prioritisation of policies, with domestic reforms coming below foreign and defence policies, highlighted both the Party’s complete lack of empathy with public opinion and their own continuing hostility to the whole question of social and economic reconstruction. This was again emphasised on the eve of the election; in his final address, Cundiff made no reference to domestic issues, appealing only for “a big poll so that Rusholme may the more forcibly demonstrate its loyalty to the Prime Minister and the National Government.”¹¹⁶

The Common Wealth and Independent Campaigns.

The Common Wealth Party viewed the by-election seriously enough for the party leader, Richard Acland, to stay in Manchester for two weeks prior to polling day to help his candidate. Common Wealth based its campaign on exploiting public dissatisfaction with the slow process of domestic reconstruction, and with the widespread continuing suspicion that this war would see a repetition of the broken promises of the last. In a speech made to a public meeting in the Co-operative Hall (attended by around 1,000 people);

[Acland] asked if the fruits of the coming victory were to be thrown away as they were last time. After the last war we were told a great deal about

how the new brotherhood of the trenches was to be carried forward into the task of peace. But surely people must remember what actually happened. Even so soon as 1920 we had poverty in the midst of potential plenty and unjustifiable wealth. Is that to be allowed to happen again? The Government boasted of its achievement and of its plans for the future. For all its fine words and phrases it is merely putting patches upon the old orders of society. If Rusholme people elect Mr Cundiff they will be giving a guarantee that nothing is going to be done this time.¹¹⁷

This message was repeated constantly. Eager to seize a major issue of the moment, *Common Wealth* focused particularly on the discontent surrounding the recently published employment White Paper. Blomerly was sharply critical of the Government's unemployment people; "It leaves far too much to unregulated private enterprise and is full of reservations which will make it largely ineffective."¹¹⁸ Acland told another audience;

Sir William Beveridge condemned the Government's programme as being totally inadequate because, he said, you cannot solve the problem through the machinery of private ownership. This is precisely what *Common Wealth* has been saying for the last two years. We are asking the electorate to show that workers and fighters alike are determined that private ownership shall stand out of the way of full employment.¹¹⁹

Although *Common Wealth's* campaign was essentially negative, they did put forward their own distinctly socialist policies, proposing the nationalisation of land, all major industries, banking and transport, and advocating the redistribution of wealth. To emphasise their socialist credentials the Party sought to portray the election as a battle of the needs of the many against the private greed of the few;

[I ask]the electorate to free their mind from all the personalities and all the red herrings which have been drawn across the land. This election must be decided on one straight issue: are the great resources of the country to be owned as in the past by comparatively few or are they going to be owned and used for the whole of the common people of this country? If you decide that they are to be owned by us then it is your democratic duty, as it is your democratic right, to turn out and vote for the cause which is going to bring the new age of the common man somewhat nearer.¹²⁰

Blomerly predicted a “very close thing”, believing that Common Wealth could “just about pull it off.”¹²¹

Cecil Taylor’s programme was vague and he was seemingly unsure of his own policies. At the outset of his campaign, the Guardian noted; “Mr Taylor’s handbills show his policies do not differ greatly from Common Wealth.”¹²² He declared himself in favour of nationalising the land, railways, mines, banks and heavy industries. After that “there is not much left.”¹²³ However, a week later the Guardian commented;

Mr Taylor is something of a puzzle. In an early leaflet he declared himself of nationalised mines, banks and heavy industry. In an election address, published later, he makes no reference to nationalisation. Asked in what respect his nationalisation policy differs from socialism he replies that his nationalisation is something different from the doctrine of the Socialist Party.¹²⁴

The Result and Analysis.

The Rusholme by-election provided strong evidence of the class polarisation of the electorate. Although the Conservatives retained Rusholme, they had suffered a heavy loss of support and some local observers believed that with another week of electioneering the result may have gone the other way.¹²⁵ Tables 5.1 and 5.2 compare the by-election result with the 1935 General Election result:

Table 5.1: The 1944 Rusholme By-Election Result

Candidate	Party	Votes	Share of Vote (%)
F. Cundiff	Conservative	8340	53.3
H. Blomerly	CommonWealth	6670	42.1
C. Taylor	Independent	734	4.6
Con Majority		1760	
Turnout		15842	34.7

Table 5.2: The 1935 Rusholme General Election Result.

Candidate	Party	Votes	Share of Vote (%)
E.A... Radford	Conservative	19678	62.6
A. Knight	Labour	9258	29.4
Dr P. Mcdougall	Ind. Labour	2525	8
Con. Majority		7895	
Turnout		31461	69.8

There had been a swing against the Conservative Party of 11 per cent, with their share of the vote falling by almost 10 per cent, at a time when the military situation was totally to their advantage. Nevertheless, the Party had still received 53 per cent of the vote; the loss of middle-class constituents since the outbreak of war was bound to lower the Conservative vote, but this figure suggests that the Conservatives had retained the loyalty of the remainder of their core middle-class 1935 support. It was amongst the working-class and the young that support for the Party had haemorrhaged severely, a point recognised by the local press. It was noted that Common Wealth had been promised much support from working-class district with “more interest being taken by Labour people, whose party is observing the electoral truce, than by any other section”¹²⁶ and that; “The young electors in particular are being attracted by Mr Blomerly.”¹²⁷ It was the combination of these two groups, rather than any defection of traditional middle-class Conservatives, that was responsible for the share of the vote of the principal opposition to the Conservatives increasing from 29.4 per cent (1935) to 42.1 per cent (1944). Furthermore the Conservatives had been sheltered from much of the fall-out from youth disenchantment with the Party because the out of date electoral register

precluded anyone under the age of 25 from voting, and many others were away in the services.

A further crucial point lay in the size of the turnout. Despite hard electioneering, it had generally been felt that public interest in the campaign was subdued. A fortnight before the election one local newspaper reported; "According to present indications the contest for the Rusholme Parliamentary vacancy is likely to create little interest. For the moment, people's minds are much more with the soldiers than the politicians and at the moment the disposition in Rusholme is to regard the contest as pointless."¹²⁸ Only in the final week was it reported that interest in the by-election was "developing slowly" although even then the level of interest should not be overstated. The day before polling began (8 July), the Guardian noted; "Although the eve of the poll has produced a slight quickening of the electoral pulse there is no significant change in the Rusholme Division. Blood pressure remains abnormally low."¹²⁹ The Guardian attributed this to the military situation and the relative dullness of the candidates;

Rusholme polls today and the by-election must count as the tamest for many months. It was always expected that once the invasion started, interest in internal policies would fall off and the Rusholme campaign has shown how small our domestic issues seem by the side of the great causes that are at stake in the struggle across the Channel. Then again, the election has been dull because it has reflected the dullness of the candidates. Estimable they may be, but none of them has been exactly inspiring.¹³⁰

However, the size of the turnout did not suggest a lack of interest. The Clayton by-election of 1942 saw a turnout of just 20.8 per cent, while the contest in Rusholme drew a turnout of 34.7 per cent on an even older register. (in the two general elections of the 1930s Clayton had a stronger turnout). This suggests that by mid-1944 there was an increasing political consciousness in the city as well as a greater public interest. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the turnout of 34.7 per cent was measured against the 1939 electoral register. The effective core of this register was now much less than the 45,842 voters of 1939, with the true figures being much nearer 25,000 - 30,000. Assuming this, the turnout was actually in the region of 53-62 per cent, a respectable figure for a by-election, but how can we reconcile a low-profile, low-interest campaign

with a relatively high turnout? If the cause of the low-key campaign was merely pre-occupation with the position in France, then one would expect this to have been matched with a lower turnout. The most plausible answer is that voting intentions had been pre-determined, with the consequence that the campaign had little impact on the electorate. Whilst this remains conjecture, if it was indeed the case then it represented a real blow to Conservative prospects for the general election. It would suggest that the *anti-Conservative swing was irreversible*. Canvassing returns had presented worse news for the Conservatives, having shown that the young were least likely to vote for them. The Party had been sheltered from the effects of this in the by-election because of deficiencies in the electoral register and service call-ups but in the next general election their vote would count, and this could only increase the strength of the anti-Conservative vote. This was presciently recognised (Rusholme fell to Labour in 1945), by the Evening News which claimed; "In post-war elections the Conservatives may find it hard to retain the seat."¹³¹

In the Rusholme by-election, Conservative orthodoxy had been shown to be deeply unpopular with all but their core supporters and only the lack of voting power among the young, possibly in tandem with the successful invasion of the continent had prevented them from losing the seat. Although the seat was retained, Rusholme was a Pyrrhic victory for the Conservatives. The Party was in a critical and almost certainly irreversible position.

Conclusion.

By the end of 1944, two major conclusions could be drawn about the Manchester political scene. Firstly, it appeared inevitable that the Conservative Party would lose the next general election. The year witnessed a strong intensification of the anti-Conservative mood outside the Party's core support, a point demonstrated by opinion polls, by-election results (including Rusholme) and the increase in Manchester Labour Party membership. The main stimulus for this intensification lay in the (perceived) unsatisfactory nature of the Government's reconstruction White Papers published during the course of the year. They were seen not as the basis of real change for post-war Britain but as unsatisfactory

compromise documents that evaded all politically contentious decisions, and that were so prevaricatory as to be virtually worthless. In consequence, they signally failed to placate a general public growing increasingly cynical about the prospects of reforms being implemented before the War was won. This cynicism was perhaps best reflected in the wake of the publication of the White Paper on employment policy; despite its importance it generated very little public interest simply because it was commonly felt to have little real value and very little prospect of implementation. As in 1943 it was the Conservative Party, rather than the Government as a whole, that incurred the wrath of the electorate, but now the anti-Conservative swing appeared irreversible. The quietness of the Rusholme by-election, coupled with its relatively high turnout, suggested that many people had already decided on their political loyalties and would not be swayed by election campaigns. The decline in Conservative fortunes was terminal. However, the evidence continued to suggest that Labour's increasing support was drawn from specific social groupings, with class considerations preventing the Party from making inroads into the core, pre-war middle-class Conservative support. The evidence also continued to suggest that there was no great enthusiasm for the Labour Party or socialism, a point even acknowledged by Northern Voice. In reality, Labour's lead in the opinion polls and the success of Common Wealth candidates was attributable more to the popular revolt against Conservatism rather than to any left-wing fervour.

By the end of the year, it was also safe to conclude that the political parties would enter the next general election committed to fundamentally different political principles. Any possibility of consensus dissipated as Labour became increasingly hostile to the coalition. Aware of the escalating public disenchantment with the Government's reconstruction planning, and concerned about the success of Common Wealth and its implications for splitting the Left vote, the Manchester Labour Party adopted its most partisan position of the War. It openly called for the Party to withdraw from the Coalition and prepare an election manifesto. With such a mood dominating the Party, Manchester Labour would not accede to, or even contemplate, any dilution of party policies. Furthermore, the evidence of by-elections pointed to the continuing success of

candidates espousing Labour Party policies, further reducing the likelihood (and need) of Labour amending their policies.

As was continually emphasised during the year, particularly in the Rusholme by-election, the Manchester Conservatives showed no signs of recognising the anti-Conservative mood in the country and changing their policies as a result. The Party remained hostile to notions of reconstruction. The annual conference of the Manchester Conservatives and the by-election confirmed that the Party had completely failed to comprehend the public's attitude towards reconstruction, with their placement of defence and foreign policies at the head of their priorities being the antithesis of the popular mood. The Party remained wedded to the dominance of private enterprise and, as was demonstrated by their hostility towards the Rent Restrictions Act, a *laissez-faire* attitude towards economic issues.

The divide between the two major parties in Manchester continued to exceed the already significant differences between the national leaderships. With military victory now only a matter of time, there was no prospect of their policies converging.

References and Notes.

- ¹ Guardian, 1 January, 1944.
- ² 1944 was the most strike-hit year of the war. In 1944 there were 3.7m days lost through strike action. Between 1935-39 the average number of days lost per year was 1,977,000; between 1940-45 an average of 1,984,000 days per year were lost. P.Dewey, War and Progress. Britain 1914-1945 (Longmont, 1997), p. 306.
- ³ Evening News, 26 January, 1944.
- ⁴ M.I.C. Questions & Answers, 22 February; 14 March; 20 June, 1944.
- ⁵ M.I.C. Southern Division Committee, Annual Report 1944.
- ⁶ M.I.C. General Committee minutes, 29 March, 1944.
- ⁷ Letter from Charles Nowell to Mr J. Mould, R.I.O. Undated.
- ⁸ Evening News, 26 January, 1944.
- ⁹ Idem.
- ¹⁰ Guardian, 7 June, 1944.
- ¹¹ A.Price, Blitz on Britain 1939-1945 (Surrey: Ian Allen, 1977), p. 178.
- ¹² M.I.C. Southern Division Committee minutes, 17 July, 1944.
- ¹³ Idem.
- ¹⁴ Letter from M.I.C. General Committee to Mr Fry, 30 August, 1944.
- ¹⁵ Guardian, 25 July, 1944.
- ¹⁶ M.I.C. Southern Division Committee minutes, 16 October, 1944.
- ¹⁷ Evening News, 17 January, 1944. Sir Hartley Shawcross QC enjoyed a long and distinguished career. His appearances in celebrated treason and murder trials made him a household name, and he was the Chief Prosecutor at the Nuremberg War Trials. He served, with notable success, as Attorney-General in the post-war Labour Government. Originally a Labour politician (he once notoriously said 'We are the masters at the moment'), he gradually became disenchanted with socialism and the Labour Party. Consequently his Parliamentary nickname was 'Sir Shortly Floorcross', but although he moved to the right, he never joined the Conservative Party. In the Lords he was a Cross-bencher.

- 18 Guardian, 4 September, 1944.
- 19 Juvenile Delinquency Conference, 18 November, 1944.
- 20 Idem.
- 21 Wright Robinson Diary, 29 July, 1944.
- 22 Guardian, 1 January, 1944.
- 23 Evening News, 24 February, 1944.
- 24 Ibid., 27 March, 1944.
- 25 Guardian, 11 May, 1944.
- 26 City News, 14 April, 1944.
- 27 Ibid., 24 March, 1944.
- 28 M.I.C. General Council minutes, 23 February, 1944.
- 29 Ibid., 24 April, 1944.
- 30 S. Brooke, 'The Labour Party and the Second World War', in A. Gorst (ed), Contemporary British History 1931-1961 (Pinter, 1991), p. 8.
- 31 R. Klein, The Politics of the N.H.S., (Longman, 1989), p.11.
- 32 C. Webster, The Health Services Since the War. Vol. 1. The National Health Service Before 1957 (H.M.S.O., 1988), p. 54.
- 33 Cited in K. Jefferys, The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 131.
- 34 K. Jefferys, 'British politics and social policy in the Second World War', in Historical Journal, (1987), p. 138.
- 35 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 172.
- 36 R. Lowe, The Welfare State in Britain since 1945 (Macmillan, 1993), p. 104.
- 37 Ibid., p.102.
- 38 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 173.
- 39 Guardian, 3 July, 1944. Thorpe points out that the White Paper was deliberately vague because no one could agree what level of unemployment was acceptable. The T.U.C., Labour and Beveridge argued for 3 per cent, whilst the Treasury maintained that 8.5 per cent was the desirable level. A figure of 8.5 per cent would have left well over one million out of work. A. Thorpe, A History of the British Labour Party

(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 108.

⁴⁰ Cited in J.Ramsden, The Age of Churchill and Eden 1940-1957 (Longman, 1995), p. 47.

⁴¹ The Labour Party subsequently produced its own document entitled 'Full Employment and Financial Policy', also in 1944. As Brooke points out, there were significant differences between the financial policy tentatively laid out in the Government White Paper and those espoused in 'Full Employment and Financial Policy', particularly on the questions of deficit financing, wages and labour mobility and the retention of physical controls. S. Brooke, 'Revisionists and fundamentalists: The Labour Party and economic policy during the Second World War', in Historical Journal, 32, (1989), pp. 157-175.

⁴² Lord Woolton, The Memoirs of the Rt.Hon. The Earl of Woolton (Cassell and Co., 1959), pp. 287-290.

⁴³ Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 177.

⁴⁴ Idem.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁷ Brooke, 'Revisionists and fundamentalists', in Historical Journal, 32, (1989), p. 169.

⁴⁸ Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 129. Indeed, even on the education issue one must be careful not to exaggerate the depth of cross-party agreement. As Jefferys' points out, Conservative opinion only became grudgingly acquiescent towards the Education Bill after the Minister had made several concessions to the party viewpoint. These involved, for example, retaining diversity among the proposed system of secondary schools. These concessions led to open dissent by Labour backbenchers despite the Party's support for reform as the first item of policy taken to the state of legislation. Jefferys, 'British politics and social policy', in Historical Journal, (1987), pp. 123-144.

⁴⁹ J. Harris, 'Some aspects of social policy in Britain during the Second World War', in W. Mommsen (ed), The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany, (Kent, Croom Helm, 1986), p. 135.

⁵⁰ Evening News, 22 September, 1944.

- 51 Ibid., 1 December, 1944.
- 52 Evening News, 15 February, 1944.
- 53 Guardian, 18 February, 1944.
- 54 Ibid., 27 May, 1944.
- 55 Evening News, 21 June, 1944.
- 56 Guardian, 27 October, 1944.
- 57 Ibid., 25 September, 1944.
- 58 Evening News, 21 June, 1944.
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- 63 Jefferys, Churchill Coalition, p. 155.
- 64 Ibid., p. 157.
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- 66 Evening News, 10 January, 1944.
- 67 Guardian, 19 February, 1944.
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- 69 Sibley, 'The swing to Labour' in Labour History Review, 55, 1, (1990), p. 30.
- 70 Evening News, 24 February, 1944.
- 71 Northern Voice, October, 1944.
- 72 City News, 12 May, 1944.
- 73 Evening News, 28 February, 1944.
- 74 Guardian, 12 September, 1944.
- 75 Evening News, 13 March, 1944.
- 76 Guardian, 13 March, 1944.
- 77 Northern Voice, April, 1944.
- 78 Guardian, 10 January, 1944.
- 79 Ibid., 13 April, 1944.

- 80 Evening News, 11 May, 1944.
- 81 Guardian, 27 May, 1944.
- 82 Evening News, 7 September, 1944.
- 83 Idem.
- 84 Northern Voice, May, 1944.
- 85 Guardian, 21 September, 1944.
- 86 Ibid., 1 February, 1944.
- 87 Idem.
- 88 Evening News, 15 April, 1944.
- 89 Ibid., 10 July, 1944.
- 90 Ibid., 23 May, 1944.
- 91 City Council minutes, 26 July, 1944.
- 92 Ibid., 18 July, 1944.
- 93 Evening News, 20 June, 1944.
- 94 Guardian, 23 June, 1944.
- 95 Evening News, 2 June, 1944.
- 96 Evening Chronicle, 1 June, 1944.
- 97 Ibid., 21 June, 1944.
- 98 Evening Chronicle, 21 June, 1944.
- 99 Idem.
- 100 Ibid., 2 June, 1944.
- 101 Ibid., 3 June, 1944.
- 102 Ibid., 5 June, 1944.
- 103 Ibid., 6 June, 1944.
- 104 Ibid., 20 June, 1944.
- 105 Northern Voice, July, 1944.
- 106 Evening Chronicle, 25 June, 1944.
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- 108 Evening News, 20 June, 1944.
- 109 Evening Chronicle, 28 June, 1944.

- 110 Guardian, 27 June, 1944.
- 111 Ibid., 1 July, 1944.
- 112 Ibid., 8 July, 1944.
- 113 Evening News, 20 June, 1944.
- 114 Guardian, 6 July, 1944.
- 115 Ibid., 25 June, 1944.
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- 118 Idem.
- 119 Evening News, 3 July, 1944.
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- 127 Guardian, 5 July, 1944.
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- 129 Ibid., 8 July, 1944.
- 130 Idem.
- 131 Idem.

Chapter Six.

An Electoral Blitz: The 1945 General Election.

Introduction.

The 1945 General Election campaign and its outcome, the seminal domestic event of Second World War politics, confirms the two central arguments of this thesis. The manifestos and campaigns of the major protagonists show that the parties, despite similar rhetoric, presented fundamentally different visions of post-war Britain to the electorate. The whole ethos of the Conservative programme was dominated by a continuing commitment to neo-liberal ideology, while that of Labour was underpinned by equal commitment to state interventionism. The campaign re-emphasised that the Manchester Conservative Party remained to the right, and Manchester Labour to the left, of their respective national leaderships and was reflected in their selection of candidates.

An analysis of the electorate and the election results shows that 1945 was the most polarised election to date in Manchester's electoral history. Labour's victory was the result of a major increase in support for the Party amongst the working-class and younger voters, particularly those serving in the armed forces, while the core 1935 middle-class Conservative voters remained loyal in 1945. Labour's success was more attributable to a strong mood of anti-Conservatism rather than any real enthusiasm for Labour Party policies which many people did not understand.

The 1945 General Election in Manchester.

By early 1945 the Coalition was near breaking point, with ministers having exhausted the subjects on which they could agree, with the ownership of land and of industries proving particularly unresolvable. It was inevitable that the end of the War would provoke a general election. The War in Europe ended on 7 May with the surrender of Germany. There was no elation in Manchester; "The overriding thing about the end was the complete absence of any sort of Mafeking frenzy."¹ Churchill, keen to settle the political situation, invited (on 18 May) the Labour and Liberal leaders to remain in the Coalition until the defeat of Japan, or face an immediate election. Amongst Labour's leadership,

gathering for their party conference, Attlee, Bevin and Dalton were prepared to continue the Coalition but the remainder of the N.E.C.. rejected this proposal (the only decision the party conference would have accepted). Churchill resigned as coalition leader on 23 May and created a caretaker government of Conservatives and non-party figures, setting election day for 5 July.² Polls suggested a majority of the public had wanted the Coalition to continue until victory was achieved in the East, and this led the parties to blame one another for the Coalition's collapse. The Manchester press entered into these recriminations, with the Guardian suggesting; "We shall probably discover that the idea [of an election] as soon as possible after VE Day has never been far from the minds of Conservative Party organisers." The Evening Chronicle retorted; "The onus for depriving the people [of the coalition] must rest with the Labour Party alone...The Labour Party have decided that they want to return to party politics and cannot wait until the war against Japan has been disposed of."³ Whoever was to blame, the scene was set for campaigning to begin.

i) The Conservative Campaign.

The Conservative election campaign confirmed the extent to which the Party had retained its reactionary outlook and its continuing commitment to neo-liberalism in social and economic policies. The election also emphasised that, as had been the case throughout the War, the Manchester Conservatives remained further to the right than the party leadership. Across Britain the average age of Conservative candidates was 46, but in Manchester the average was several years higher; only one Manchester Conservative candidate was under the age of 40, three were in their late 50s to late 60s and the remainder were in their late 40s. Indeed, John Lees-Jones (Blackley) had intended to retire as an M.P. and stayed on only after pressure from his constituency party, whilst in Moss Side the combined ages of the Labour and Liberal candidates was still one year less than the age of the sitting Conservative M.P., Rostron Duckworth. The relatively high average age of the Manchester candidates was reflected in the fact that although across the country as a whole the Conservatives fielded more servicemen candidates than Labour, in Manchester only three Conservative candidates, Major Jim Currie, Squadron

Leader E.L. Fleming and Major F. Cundiff (and he only briefly) served in the armed forces in the War (not including the Home Guard). Even here, Cundiff and Fleming had also actually served in the First World War. It was not only the age of the candidates that suggested a continuation of pre-war attitudes, for their social backgrounds were no different than they had been in 1935 with, of course, some candidates standing in both. Three, Mrs Nellie Beer (the only woman to be selected by any Manchester party) Harry Sharp and Wilfred Sugden had working-class origins, and they were selected to stand in the Labour held seats of Ardwick, Gorton and Platting. Most were, or had been, businessmen while two were barristers. In reality, some of the Conservative candidates were not of the highest calibre, and after the election the Evening News was to comment; "Some of their candidates were rather weak."⁴ This was perhaps a result of the organisational difficulties facing the Party. Of the Manchester Conservative Agents all but one served in the armed forces and had been out of political contact with their constituencies. Although several had returned home before the campaign commenced (agents were allowed special leave), the election agent of Nellie Beer was in a foreign hospital with a fractured ankle and was unable to return until part way through the campaign whilst another was serving on the Staff in India and could not be released.⁵ One Manchester Conservative official admitted; "The fact that all our agents except one who was over-age went into national service at the start of the war has been a disadvantage from an organisational point of view."⁶

The Conservatives' priorities, at national and local levels, highlighted a lack of commitment to domestic reform. As with the Rusholme by-election a year previously, domestic reforms came a distant fourth in Conservative priorities behind the eulogising of Winston Churchill, ideological attacks on Labour and explanations of their own foreign and defence policies. Given Churchill's massive popularity, it made electoral sense to personalise the election; virtually all Conservative election posters featured his photograph, accompanied by captions such as 'Help Him Finish The Job', the Conservative manifesto was entitled 'Mr Churchill's Declaration of Policy to the Electors' and the public were continually urged to 'Vote for Churchill'. Candidates and the Conservative press trumpeted Churchill, the great war leader, as the only man capable of

ensuring a quick victory over the Japanese, and then taking Britain through the first difficult years of peace;

Can we envisage Britain grappling with the mighty problems of the peace settlement without Mr Churchill? He is by far the most authoritative figure in the English speaking world. To be deprived of his services would in a twinkling diminish the influence and prestige of our country. Looking around the world at all the problems which face us, can we afford this deprivation? The answer, we are confident will be 'No!'⁷

Across the country as a whole, just over 50 per cent of Conservative candidates began their election addresses with a eulogy of Churchill and 95 per cent included it in some part of their address.⁸ Jim Currie (Hulme) told his constituents;

I know there are many men in this country today in whose experienced hands the higher and more internationally important issues could be safely left. But the great majority of the men belong to what is called the CONSERVATIVE PARTY, but which I prefer to call the CHURCHILL PARTY - the Party which, in representing our country, stood for Pride, Race, Courage and Vision in the dark days of 1940. Think well and deeply before you make any other man than Mr Churchill the Prime Minister...[The] OVERWHELMING NEED FOR MR CHURCHILL'S EXPERIENCE, SHREWD JUDGEMENT, AND FAR SEEING EYE IS SUPREME.⁹

Conservatives unfavourably compared the international standing of the Labour leaders to the 'great statesman' figure of Churchill, and suggested that Britain's standing in the eyes of the world would greatly diminish if a Labour government was elected. Harry Sharp asked;

What would be the position in this country if a Labour Government were elected? Clem Attlee, who is having a bit of fun at the moment with Harold Laski, said in 1934: "We have absolutely abandoned any idea of nationalist loyalty." That is the man who hopes to lead this country, and to do the negotiating with important people of Foreign Governments...My [aim] is to ensure that for the next few years those handling foreign affairs should be as well known and respected abroad as at home. Take away Mr Churchill and Anthony Eden and what have you got left? Have you anybody in the country capable of fulfilling those negotiations? Anybody of Churchill's calibre who can say 'No' and mean it? You haven't a man.

The salvation of this country in the present stages lies in the hands of Mr Churchill and Mr Anthony Eden and the National Government.¹⁰

The Conservatives' second priority was ideological attacks on Labour. The Conservatives campaigned on a negative platform for, as Addison points out; "Instead of taking a positive line about what they themselves would do, they concentrated on stampeding the electorate away from Labour."¹¹ This was a high level decision, for in a message to all Conservative candidates the Party Chairman proclaimed that they should not try to outbid the 'appealing prospects' put forward by their opponents.¹² Drawing on the arguments of Hayek's The Road to Serfdom, which claimed that economic planning necessitated the apparatus of tyranny, the Conservatives sought to characterise the Labour Party as doctrinaire, dogmatic, totalitarian and a danger to democracy. Voting Labour meant servitude to the state.¹³ The Conservative press and candidates rarely referred to 'the Labour Party', referring instead to 'the Socialists' in the belief that this sounded more sinister and 'un-British'. The tone for this negative style of campaigning was set by Churchill in his first radio election broadcast, a broadcast that has gone down in history as the 'Gestapo speech'. Churchill told his listeners, an estimated 49 per cent of the population, that;

Socialism is, in its essence, an attack not only upon British enterprise but upon the right of an ordinary man and woman to breathe freely without having a harsh, clumsy and tyrannical hand clapped across their mouths and nostrils. A free Parliament - look at that - is odious to the socialist doctrine. I will go further. I declare it to you from the bottom of my heart that no socialist system can be established without a political police. Many of those who are advocating socialism or voting socialist today will be horrified at this idea. That is because they are short sighted - because they do not see where their theories are leading them. No socialist Government, conducting the entire life of the country, could afford to allow free, sharp or violently worded expressions of public discontent. They would have to fall back on some form of Gestapo...It would stop criticism as it reared its head and it would gather all the powers to the supreme party and the party leaders, rising like stately pinnacles above their vast bureaucracies of civil servants - no longer servants, no longer civil.¹⁴

Manchester Conservatives eagerly followed where Churchill lead; “Mr Churchill, more logical than his opponents, some of whom may not have thought out the ultimate consequences of their doctrines, showed very plainly that socialism can lead only to the erection of an all-powerful state.”¹⁵ Midway through the campaign the Conservatives seized upon the ‘Laski affair’ to highlight Labour’s threat to democracy. Harold Laski, Chairman of Labour’s National Executive Committee, implied that despite Attlee’s presence at the ‘Big Three’ meeting of Britain, the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union, any decisions taken would not be binding for a Labour government because they would not have been ratified by the N.E.C.. Attlee was, he claimed, going only as observer rather than active participant and this appeared to suggest that it was the N.E.C.. that held the real power in the Labour Party. The N.E.C.. was elected by the Labour Conference and, therefore, it was pointed out that under Labour the country would be run by a body unelected by the vast majority of the people rather than by elected representatives. Conservatives shouted “democracy in danger”, spoke of “Gauleiter Laski” and cartoons depicted Attlee as a ventriloquist’s dummy perched on Laski’s lap. The Manchester Conservatives seized on the issue with gusto;

Both Mr Attlee and other socialist leaders take the view that there should be co-operation between the parties on foreign policy. They are not, however, masters in their own home. Professor Laski’s intervention has revealed to the world the real attitude of the party caucus - that socialist ministers should be subservient to it. That would mean that a socialist cabinet, instead of being primarily responsible to Parliament and the nation, will be expected to take its orders from an outside body elected by a section of the community and having no responsibility to the country as a whole.¹⁶

Mr George Beattie, the senior Conservative agent in the city, claimed; “A tremendous constitutional point is at stake in this election. Once the Labour Party got into power and applied the principle expounded by Professor Laski we shall not be rid of it without a convulsion on the part of the electors.”¹⁷

Conservatives argued that a Labour government, with their desire to increase the powers of the state, would result in a major loss of personal freedom. Harry Sharp (Gorton) warned; “This is the most important contest in this country for many years.

The freedom of the individual depends on it...We stand on our feet and say that Britons never shall be slaves - but we'll be slaves all right if we put a Socialist Government in."¹⁸ Similarly, George Beattie warned; "if the socialists are returned they would surround themselves with a ring of laws which might make them immovable."¹⁹ Jim Currie asked people to "realise from our own knowledge and experience of the world today that, as Herbert Spencer [a nineteenth century laissez-faire theorist] puts it 'SOCIALISM IS SLAVERY AND THE SLAVERY WILL NOT BE MILD.'"²⁰

A distant third behind the eulogising of Churchill and the denigration of Labour came the Conservatives' own policies. Here, the Party demonstrated that it had learnt little from the by-election lessons of the previous two years. Throughout the election campaign the Conservatives placed foreign and defence policies ahead of domestic plans in their list of priorities, a major error given that opinion polls consistently showed that the public felt most keenly about housing and unemployment. As Mcallum and Readman point out, the manifesto made it clear that the Conservatives were still thinking predominantly in terms of the dangers that lay ahead both in the Japanese war and in post-war Europe.²¹ The first three items in the manifesto stressed the need for continuing concentration on the war against Japan and the creation of a World Security Organisation, the maintenance of the British Empire and the need for a strong post-war defence policy. Churchill's speeches followed the same pattern. On 13 June he broadcast to the nation on "five tasks to come": the completion of the war against Japan, demobilization, the re-starting of industry, the rebuilding of exports, and the four-year plan of 'food, work and homes'.²² The crucial issues of work and homes appeared to be at the bottom of Churchill's priorities. Most Manchester Conservative candidates structured their election addresses in the same manner. Nellie Beer, for example, began her address with;

The Empire and Our Allies: I stand for the closest possible relations between the Mother country and all parts of the British Commonwealth and Empire. Also for all those measures which will serve to develop the resources of our colonies and so promote their general welfare. In order to ensure **WORLD PEACE AND PROSPERITY** for our generation and those following us, there must be sincere co-operation

between the three great powers, THE U.S.A., RUSSIA AND GREAT BRITAIN together with other Allied Nations.

Defence: To keep Britain SAFE she must be kept STRONG. In order to effect this, pay and conditions in the Navy, the Army and the Air Force and the Merchant Navy must be considerably improved and opportunities provided for those who wish to make a career for themselves in any one of these services.²³

Jim Currie stated; "My immediate objectives will be to support the strongest possible effort in dealing with the Japanese and to work for and support a plan that will ensure that the world shall never again be landed in a major war."²⁴ Only two candidates began their addresses on domestic policies, with Harry Sharp referring to housing and Phillip Smith referring to employment.²⁵

On first inspection the domestic policies of the Conservative Party represented a fairly progressive agenda. On employment the manifesto stated; "The Government accepts as one of its primary aims and responsibilities the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment."; on housing; "In the first two years, as the labour force grows, we intend to build at least 220,000 permanent new homes and have a further 80,000 under way."; on social security; "One of our most important tasks will be to pass into law and bring into action as soon as we can a nation-wide and compulsory scheme of National Insurance."; finally, on health; "We propose to create a comprehensive health service covering the whole range of medical treatment from the general practitioner to the specialist and from the hospital to convalescence and rehabilitation."²⁶ In Manchester, Major F.W.. Cundiff told his constituents serving in the forces that he wanted them to have "On returning home a house to live in, a job to go back to, continuous not spasmodic employment...A health service which gives himself, his wife, his children and his dependants, the best medical service available [and] the best standard of education open to all."²⁷ Wilfred Sugden pledged a "Great housing drive - the earliest provision of decent homes for the people...Full employment...full and adequate pensions for old and disabled people...To give security to the people by carrying out complete schemes of National Insurance, Family Allowances, improved Health and Hospital services."²⁸ Harry Sharp pledged; "Good houses for all the people who want them; 52 weeks wages every year for every man or woman willing to work; equal educational opportunities for

every child, irrespective of station in life; full and adequate pensions for old age and disablement.”²⁹ Phillip Smith stated;

The spectre of unemployment must never return. Jobs for all must be assured...Industrial insurance, social insurance and a National Health Service must become part of the life and security of every family and home...Old age pensions must be increased at once. I favour a minimum of £1 per week and wish to see old age pensions harnessed to a revised cost of living index to ensure that old age does not spell want and deprivation.³⁰

Only Jim Currie failed to refer to the need for full employment and better housing.³¹

In reality, however, the Conservative manifesto envisaged an essentially neo-liberal future, with many of their policies remaining dependent on the vagaries of the market and the dominance of free enterprise. The Conservatives insisted their goals were dependent on a return to the economic policies of the inter-war years: where the state had intervened successfully during the War, it would now have to beat a speedy retreat as the Conservatives pledged themselves to a quick return to the pre-war dominance of private enterprise. In the Conservative manifesto Churchill stated;

As against the advocates of State ownership and control, we stand for the fullest opportunity for push and go in all ranks throughout the whole nation. This quality is part of the genius of the British people, who mean to be free to use their own judgement and never intend to be state serfs, nor always wait for official orders before they can act.³²

The system of economic controls was to be speedily dismantled;

We stand for the removal of controls as quickly as the need for them disappears. Control of labour, of materials, and of prices, is necessary in war, when we have to give up much of our freedom in order to make sure that the war machine gets all that it requires. We intend to guard the people of this country against those who, under the guise of war necessity, would like to impose upon Britain for their own purposes a permanent system of bureaucratic control, reeking of totalitarianism.³³

Industry was to be returned to private ownership, and even in industries acknowledged to be failing, private enterprise was to be given the opportunity of correcting their problems.

The Manchester Conservatives were even more vigorous in support of a return to private enterprise, emphasising their position to the right of the national Party. John Lees-Jones told one meeting;

Under private enterprise, if you are not satisfied with your wages and conditions you can appeal to your employers; if you are not satisfied you can strike. Private enterprise provides more scope for inventiveness, initiative and resourcefulness and demands quick decisions. I defy anyone to get a quick decision from any Department of Government. I don't blame the civil service. It is part of the system.³⁴

Jim Currie told his constituents that he would "ensure that the individual can express his individuality, should he so desire in VIGOROUS, and I repeat VIGOROUS, private enterprise. Nationalization means inefficiency or worse, and I will have none of it."³⁵ Harry Hewlett spoke of a "National Government maintaining a system of free enterprise..."³⁶ In line with the national manifesto, the Manchester Conservatives called for the removal of controls at the earliest possible opportunity. Harry Hewlett pledged; "Removal of unessential Government controls over individuals, industry, and trade as quickly as the international situation and the elimination of shortage permits."³⁷ Lees-Jones said; "I am strongly opposed to the continuation of Government control for one moment longer than is absolutely necessary."; Jim Currie promised "To examine to the utmost every plan for relieving this country as soon as possible from HATEFUL REGIMENTATION and DIRECTION OF LABOUR."³⁸ Nationalisation, or even a continuation of the state's wartime role, was simply not an option for the Manchester Conservatives. The Evening Chronicle argued; "[The state] can co-operate with industry far more beneficially than it can dictate, for the latter inevitably hampers and, in many cases, must destroy individual initiative and enterprise and in doing so must curtail the freedom not of one section of the nation but of all of it."³⁹ Shortly afterwards it returned to the same theme;

Socialists propose to restrict [private enterprise] step by step and rely on [state enterprise], not on any practical worked out plan, but in accordance with a pre-conceived and rigid formula which must in any event retard our

productivity and capture of markets. This attachment to theory for its own sake - always a dangerous course in human affairs - is obviously perilous and frustrating at the present juncture. It is only too likely to prolong scarcity and state effort during the next few years.⁴⁰

For the Manchester candidates full employment could only be achieved by reverting to the dominance of private enterprise and the economic orthodoxy of the inter-war years. E.L. Fleming said; "The removal of unnecessary controls and regulations I shall press for at all times, as the surest way to increase and maintain employment, and to reduce income tax, which hits all of us."⁴¹ Wilfred Sugden pledged;

To support all efforts to increase the efficiency of industry, to ensure thereby full employment, a fair place in the markets of the world and prosperous days for the workers of the constituency. The reduction of taxation is one of the methods to accomplish this, the gradual abolition of controls - both of labour and production - another, and the encouragement of private enterprise a third.⁴²

Lees-Jones stated;

One of the grounds upon which the success of the National Insurance Plan depends is full employment, and the first aim of the National Conservative Party will be to maintain a high and stable level of employment, and this can best be assured by co-operation between the State and Industry, employers and employees, relief from heavy taxation and confidence in sound Government. Cheap money must be made available for the expansion of business and there must be no State or Bureaucratic interference with the conduct of Industries.⁴³

F.W.. Cundiff argued; "A vigorous, broadminded policy for full employment is necessary, guaranteeing steady and continuous work for all our people. This can only be achieved by the promotion and expansion of our home trade and a fair share of world exports trade. Only free and unfettered enterprise can secure this trade."⁴⁴ Manchester Conservatives remained wedded to economic orthodoxy, with no intention of adopting Keynesian policies of demand management. Cundiff re-emphasised this point when he warned; "if a 'left' Government is returned we would be in for a mad bout of squandermania."⁴⁵ While the Conservatives may have preached the gospel of full employment they did not see a direct role for the Government in achieving it. With

employment levels left to chance, the Conservatives' support for full employment was nothing more than rhetorical bluster.

The Manchester Conservatives' overwhelming preference for private enterprise also conditioned their approach to other critical issues, notably housing. When it came to the building of new homes, local candidates advocated a private enterprise solution, only grudgingly accepting the official party line that local authorities had a role to play. Lees-Jones said; *"Private enterprise must be given the fullest opportunity, and be aided as generously as Local Authorities are in the building of dwellings."* Duckworth stated; *"The full resources of the country must be marshalled to meet the urgent need of providing HOMES for the people at rents they can pay. To this end PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AS WELL AS LOCAL AUTHORITIES must both play their full part."*⁴⁶

The whole tone of the Manchester Conservatives in 1945 was strongly neo-liberal, to an even greater degree than was true of the national leadership. Private enterprise was sacrosanct and was not to be undermined and whilst they advocated full employment and a major house building programme, their achievement was to be left, to as great an extent as possible, in the hands of private ownership. The state was to stay out of it. This, Conservatives claimed, offered 'freedom', in contrast to the 'enslaving' tendencies of Labour. Duckworth told the voters of Moss Side; *"My policy is...freedom to choose to work at your own trade, and in your own district."*; Sharp pledged *"The complete restoration of the freedom of the individual."*; Lees-Jones said; *"Men want to return to the freedom which they cherish, and we at home are heartily tired of being directed and our lives arranged for us by Government officials."* Harry Hewlett claimed;

*A great struggle lies before us, not now a struggle for survival from war but for revival in peace. By revival I mean the restoration of the right of all citizens to work and prosper, unfettered and unrestricted except by the laws of decency and honesty, so that all may know the full joy of living.*⁴⁷

Although the Party was committed to the implementation of the 1944 White Papers, the Manchester Conservatives were keen to see their proposals watered down still further. Wilfred Sugden, referring to Butler's Education Act, told one audience that *"several adjustments are needed before the 1944 Education Act will fit in with various*

sections of the community.”⁴⁸ As this suggests, the Party remained instinctively hostile to major reforms. This was further emphasised in their eve-of-poll addresses, with the candidates eschewing all mention of domestic policies and returning instead to their concentration on Churchill and attacks on Labour. Wilfred Sugden said;

I feel it is my duty to ask you to consider the grave and menacing position in the world today and to request you to consider to what extent dislocation and anarchy would prevail were Britain to become sectionalised and weak in the immediate future. The only possible solution of all our difficulties is a National Government, led by the man I support, Winston Churchill.⁴⁹

Rostron Duckworth believed;

*By far the greater majority are wide awake to the perils which would ensue should a socialist government be placed in power, with its attendant policy of nationalisation, killing all private enterprise, ruining trade - both domestic and export - and with no great statesman-like figure approaching Churchill leading them, but only threats of Westminster, the Mother of Parliaments, being dictated to by a sectional body.*⁵⁰

The 1945 election campaign demonstrated that the War had had no impact on policy thinking in the Manchester Conservative Party. They remained hostile to notions of major restructuring of Britain's social and economic life, and went even further than the national leadership in their total support for a private-enterprise dominated post-war Britain. Although they campaigned enthusiastically on the Party's manifesto, the tone of their public statements on, for example, the merits of private enterprise suggested that they would have preferred an even more right-wing statement of policies.

ii) The Labour Campaign.

The Labour manifesto, when compared to that of the Conservatives, served to highlight the major policy differences between the two parties. Whilst the Conservatives presented the electorate with a programme heavily influenced by neo-liberalism, Labour's manifesto, 'Let us Face the Future', envisioned a highly interventionist role for government in social and economic policies. Although the policy rhetoric of the two parties was not dissimilar

(i.e. homes for all, support for full employment), the parties' methods of achieving these goals were fundamentally different.

The campaign also provided further evidence of the Manchester Labour Party's position to the left of the national leadership. This strong left-wing sentiment in the Party was clearly highlighted by the nature of the candidates selected by the constituency parties. Following the selection process, Manchester Labour put forward its youngest and most left-wing panel of candidates in their history. Across the country as a whole the average age of Labour candidates was 46 (identical to that of the Conservatives), but in Manchester the average was considerably lower. All but one of their seven new candidates (three candidates were sitting M.P.s) were under the age of 40 with the youngest, Harold Lever, being just 31 and this relative youthfulness was reflected by the fact that half their candidates (a higher proportion than the national average) had served in the armed forces: Lt. Reg Edwards, Lester Hutchinson (who had recently been discharged with an injured leg), Lt. Bill Griffiths, Flying Officer Harold Lever and Captain Hugh Delargy. The Party's candidates also came from a much broader social background than had previously been the case. Traditionally, most Labour candidates and M.P.s had been drawn from the trade union movement, but by 1945 this had changed; in 1945 only two Manchester Labour Party candidates, Joe Henderson and Fred Lee, came from a union background.⁵¹ The other candidates included teachers, an accountant, a barrister, a consulting ophthalmic optician and a man active in adult political education and journalism. Most importantly, of the seven new Labour candidates, six were firmly on the left of the Party, a telling indicator of the mood of Manchester Labour. Lester Hutchinson was a fellow traveller of the Communists, and had shown his true colours at the Labour Party Conference of 1945 when he said; "The Labour Party should dispose and denounce the emigre [Polish] Government in London, composed of Fascists who libel Soviet Russia and receive finance from the British Government."⁵² In the post-war Labour Government he was one of three Labour M.P.s who consistently followed the Communist line.⁵³ Hugh Delargy and Bill Griffiths both became members of the 'Keep Left' group, and were staunch supporters of Aneurin Bevan in the internal party struggles of the 1950s. Harold Lever (although later to become a staunch member

of the Right) was recommended as a potential member of the 'Keep Left' group, while Fred Lee was to be a regular contributor to the left-wing Tribune. Only Jack Diamond could be described as coming from the Labour Right. Several of the Manchester Labour candidates of 1945 were to become notable names of the future with two achieving Cabinet rank and many having long parliamentary careers, and there can be no doubt that they were a more talented grouping than their Conservative counterparts.⁵⁴

In a revealing and indicative contrast to the Conservative manifesto, Let Us Face the Future addressed the Party's domestic policies at the beginning and foreign affairs at the end. Defence was not raised at all. These priorities were reflected throughout Labour's campaigning. Broadcasts made by Labour leaders dealt with the issues of 'food, work and homes', while their election leaflets and posters hammered home the same message: a typical example depicted a voting slip which said 'Labour: Total War on bad housing, unemployment, poverty, ignorance and ill-health', while another proclaimed 'Fill Your Basket' and pictured a shopping basket filled with packages labelled 'cheaper gas and electricity', 'cheaper food' and 'lower rent'. The Manchester Labour Party's own election propaganda focused on the same themes. Their Election News asked;

Make up your minds - which do you want?

Houses or Hovels

Happy Children or Dead End Kids

Employment or Unemployment⁵⁵

Labour would build houses and provide jobs for all; the Conservatives had said the same but these issues were seen to be Labour's priorities, rather than an afterthought.

A central theme of the Labour campaign was a continual reference to the conditions of the 1920s and 1930s. The electorate were urged to remember how promises were made in 1918 and how these were broken as, under Conservative or Conservative-dominated governments, large areas of Britain suffered mass unemployment, poverty and poor housing in the twenty years up to the outbreak of the Second World War. The "people" lost the "peace" last time and this must not happen

again; this was the first message of Let us Face the Future and was also picked up with relish by Manchester Labour candidates who had observed that these tactics had been used by the Common Wealth Party in the Rusholme by-election the previous year, with some success. John Diamond (Blackley) was typical;

What happened after the last war? Again we had a rushed election thrust on people by a great war leader in order to make capital out of his personal prestige and prevent the public from having time to consider the issues involved calmly and without emotion. A reactionary Government was elected, and as a result we had a short boom followed by an all-round increase in prices. The Tories had absolute control of Parliament for 18 out of 21 inter-war years and all they gave us was short periods of boom (during which most employers did very well) and long periods of depression (during which the employed did very badly - the unemployed even worse). Poverty, unemployment and slums - these were the inevitable results of a Conservative Government in a capitalist society.⁵⁶

What were Labour's policies? On first inspection, many of the policies endorsed by Labour appear little different from Conservative pledges, which helped promote the belief that a political consensus had emerged from the War. Let us Face the Future advocated the creation of a comprehensive system of national insurance, a national health service, a great housing drive and full employment, as had the Conservatives. In Manchester, Harry Thorneycroft pledged;

Given power Labour will make the fullest use of Parliamentary time to give to the people a National Health Service and will pass early legislation extending social security for all. It will give better pensions to our old folks to enable them to enjoy the evening of their lives free from want and anxiety, and to our young people the best education at the disposal of the state.⁵⁷

Bill Griffiths pledged; "A housing drive until every family has a well built and comfortable home - built for the people with the speed and ingenuity that built the tanks, planes and Mulberry harbours [used during the Normandy campaign] and the best education to give all children a fair start in life."⁵⁸ Joe Henderson said; "We want to provide a DECENT REGULAR JOB at good wages...We want a full INSURANCE SCHEME to protect and aid us in case of sickness or accident"⁵⁹ Harold Lever told voters; "The Labour Party

intends to institute a comprehensive state medical service which will ensure that every man, woman or child in this country (irrespective of jobs or position) shall be entitled to the best medical attention at all times.”⁶⁰ These policies appear remarkably similar to those of the Conservatives, but underneath this superficial similarity there remained fundamental differences. Conservative candidates pledged themselves only to the proposals outlined in the various White Papers and hinted that even these could yet be *further watered down*, whilst Labour regarded them as only the starting point for legislation. On social insurance Labour’s manifesto commitment was to a more far-reaching scheme based upon reinstating the principle of subsistence-level benefits, a principle dropped from the White Paper on Conservative insistence. On housing and town and country planning Labour committed themselves to implementing the Uthwatt Report as the best means of ensuring effective long-term planning of the environment (ie housing) whilst the Conservatives avoided the land issue altogether. On medical reform, Labour advocated a state salaried health service (which would include the abolition of private practice), while the Conservatives stood firmly behind the Willink plan, which had emphasised the need for ‘thriving voluntary hospitals’ and the importance of private practice. Under the Conservatives private provision was to remain paramount.⁶¹

It was, however, in the field of economic policy that Labour differed most from the Conservatives. While the Conservatives advocated a return to private enterprise and financial orthodoxy, Labour pledged themselves to a mixture of physical control socialist planning and Keynesian-style demand management. Key industries (fuel and power, inland transport and iron and steel) were to be taken under public ownership, war-time economic controls were to be retained and consumer demand was to be kept at a constant level.⁶² The Bank of England was to be nationalised and the operations of other banks were to be ‘harmonised’ with industrial needs. Monopolies and cartels not brought under public ownership were to be subject to strict public supervision “with the aim of advancing industrial efficiency in the service of the nation.”⁶³ Land was to be nationalised. By adopting these policies all of Britain’s productive capacity could be utilised to the benefit of a central plan that would end the boom and bust economic cycle. Furthermore, Labour would be able to use state action to achieve and maintain full

employment. Under a Labour government, employment would not be left to the vagaries of the market. Labour pledged not only to maintain a constant level of purchasing power, but also to create a National Investment Board which would determine social priorities and promote better timing in private investment. The location of new factories was to be controlled and where necessary the Government itself would build new factories to ensure there was no return to the depressed areas of the 1930s. Despite similar rhetoric, Hugh Delargy succinctly explained that the Conservatives advocated a very different approach to the creation of employment;

All parties pay lip service to the idea of jobs for all. The Tories favour full employment - provided they can get it without interfering too much with private enterprise, without interfering with what they choose to call "economic freedom." This peculiar freedom of theirs is freedom for a tiny minority and it is bought at the cost of idleness and misery for millions, at the cost of dole queues which are a constant market for cheap labour.⁶⁴

On housing, the building of new homes would not be left in the hands of private enterprise, but would come under the direct supervision of the state, which could ensure that all necessary materials were made available at reasonable prices;

Only the Labour Party is ready to take the necessary steps - a full programme of land planning and drastic action to ensure an efficient building industry that will neither burden the community with a crippling financial load nor impose bad conditions and heavy unemployment on its workpeople. Labour's pledge is firm and direct - it will proceed with a housing programme with the maximum possible speed until every family in the island has a good standard of accommodation. That may well mean centralised purchasing power and pooling of building materials and components by the State, together with price control.⁶⁵

The message of Labour's manifesto was clear: industry was to be run, or controlled, by the state in the interests of the people, not the interests of the private companies and their shareholders.

Manchester's Labour candidates firmly committed themselves to their party's economic policies, with the emphasis firmly on the need to harness the powers of the state to achieve their goals. Lester Hutchinson told his constituents;

Labour intends that the major industries and services of the nation shall be controlled by the nation in the interests of the nation. The whole of the national resources will be used not in the interests of the profiteers and speculators but in the interests of the people. In this way wages and buying powers will be kept high and prices reasonable. Big Business and Finance will be controlled and the nation's wealth will be invested in essential industries, houses, schools, hospitals etc.⁶⁶

Fred Lee told Hulme;

In the Labour Party we have long recognised that there is ultimately no wealth other than that produced by the labour of men and women. Therefore we want public ownership and control of the banks, mines and the railways and the great iron and steel industries, because we want the way made clear for the wealth to be produced by the total employment of our entire productive capacity. Once we can sweep away any of the treacherous selfishness of powerful interests the road to this goal will be clear and simple. We will produce not for profit but for the need of the nation, and heaven knows we will have more than enough work then.⁶⁷

All the candidates pledged themselves to maintaining a constant level of purchasing power and the creation of a National Investment Board to ensure full employment.⁶⁸

This fundamentally different approach to economic policy effectively shatters the consensus thesis. Whilst the Conservatives re-iterated their orthodox economic mantra, Labour pledged to use extensive state action to ensure their objectives in industry, employment and housing.

Aware that their programme represented a major break with pre-war orthodoxy, Labour took great care to present themselves as a moderate party so as not to frighten floating voters. The ideological aspects of nationalisation, socialism and planning were therefore played down by the Labour Party. Nationalisation, as a means of increasing working-class power, may well have alienated floating voters, and so the justification for planning and public ownership was entirely on the grounds of industrial efficiency. Labour's leaders strove to counter any charge that public ownership was an end in itself. Nationalisation was simply a tool.⁶⁹ The retention of economic controls was not a means of promoting socialism but would protect the 'man in the street' from 'ruthless

exploitation' by greedy bosses. To mollify wary voters, Labour were keen to demonstrate that their policies had been implemented in other countries without any of the Hayekian horrors foreseen by the Conservatives, whilst others suggested that their policies simply involved the maintenance of the wartime position. J.R. Clynes, for example, told the Conservative-supporting Daily Dispatch;

Many fantastic and fearful things have been spread abroad on what will happen under state ownership of industries. [In reality] the position would be similar to the war-time position of many industries and to the peace-time controls and practices in the case of the Post Office (the largest single employer in the country), the Admiralty, Woolwich Arsenal and the thousands of public properties possessed by local authorities.⁷⁰

The Party was quick to suggest that, in contrast to their own commitment to reform, the Conservatives were already backtracking on earlier promises. Fred Lee claimed that there were already sinister intentions afoot amongst "Big Business" and their Conservative allies that would thwart the people's wishes in the post-war years;

The great employers are already launched on a set policy of forcing down wages and the background to such a campaign is a large volume of unemployment. Hungry men, men anxious with family responsibilities, are not in a position to bargain. It seems incredible but that is the cynical aim of those hard-faced men who today find members of the Conservative Party ready to champion their sinister wishes in the House of Commons... We must destroy the power of the Conservative Party, that old general staff that directs the campaign and fights the battle of those great interests. And this is no reckless propaganda - these are facts, and facts that cannot be disputed. Whilst our newspapers splash headlines extolling the glorious advance of our brave men, there are cunning moves behind the scenes. Those who have always had their hands on the ropes of privilege are prepared to fight the battles of peace and defeat all our hopes for a better future. Are they again to crush our aspirations from well prepared and advantageous positions? They will be lavish with their money. In 1935 each Conservative candidate spent £750 on the election, as against £360 spent by Labour candidates. They made frantic efforts to gain a seat in Parliament. They did this for twenty years before the war, and they were so successful that we had hunger marches, long queues at Labour Exchanges, poverty, malnutrition, and we had war.⁷¹

He emphasised that the Conservatives had already made alterations to the all-party White Paper on health and warned;

The Conservatives are destroying the health plan: You have heard about the Health Plan we were promised. A Medical Service was to be provided for every man, woman and child in the country. Each town was to have a Health Centre, housing the latest equipment, worked by skilled doctors and specialists. We welcomed this great promise, and thousands of young doctors were anxious to work in it; but now it is to be destroyed.⁷²

Indeed, Manchester Labour's attacks on their Conservative rivals went much further than the national party and one can sense a real hostility in some of their comments, again suggesting that Manchester Labour was to the left of the national leadership. Some candidates suggested that the Conservatives, and the interests they supposedly represented, had not just been negligent or plain wrong about the threat of Germany in the 1930s, but were actually "friends of Fascism". Harry Thorneycroft claimed; "War-time investigations have revealed that some of [the] British and American monopolies have been working in close co-operation with the interests of their Nazi counterparts."⁷³ Harold Lever was particularly vehement in his criticisms. He spoke of the need to nationalise the Bank of England, "whose sinister part in the financing of the Nazi War Machine should in itself be enough to make the public determined to take the tremendous power this financial giant wields out of the hands of the big bankers who at present control it."⁷⁴ He went on to claim;

The military defeat of Fascism is not enough. Unless we are vigilant it will spring up again in one disguise or another, and it will no doubt enjoy the active support which the Tories gave to the Nazis and Fascists before the war. Even in England the friends of Fascism are already again at work. They have many secret supporters in the highest Conservative Party circles.⁷⁵

The Labour Party manifesto and campaign clearly highlighted the fundamental differences between themselves and the Conservatives. In complete contrast to the Conservatives' neo-liberalism, Labour advocated a much greater interventionist role for post-war governments. Industry was to be controlled by a combination of public ownership and economic controls under a system of "planning". The provision of jobs

and houses was also to be predominantly the task of the state and would not, as the Conservatives advocated, be left primarily in the hands of private enterprise and the vagaries of the market. Social policies were to be expanded beyond those envisioned in the 1944 White Papers while the Conservatives suggested a further watering down of their proposals. The campaign also re-emphasised that Manchester Labour remained to the left of the national leadership, a point particularly borne out by the impressive *left-wing credentials of their candidates*.

iii) The Liberal Campaign.

Throughout the War the Manchester Liberal Party had appeared more reluctant to push for major social reforms than had the national leadership. This internal schism, however, was set aside in 1945 as the Manchester Liberals threw themselves behind 'The Twenty Point Manifesto of the Liberal Party'. A brief analysis of the Liberal manifesto and campaign is warranted, for their programme helped to highlight the major differences between Labour and the Conservatives.

The Liberals focused predominantly on domestic issues: 'food, work and homes' were the major concerns, but Liberals claimed they offered a different approach from the two major parties. Liberals presented themselves as a 'half-way house' between Labour and Conservatives, advocating the use of state power to a greater extent than was envisioned by Conservatives, but to a lesser extent than Labour proposed, with Liberals (echoing the Conservatives) claiming that Labour's economic planning and controls would lead to a diminution of personal freedom, the very essence of Liberalism. Consequently, their manifesto was a hybrid. This was best revealed in their stance over the central question of private enterprise versus nationalisation. The Liberals portrayed the Labour Party as dogmatically committed to nationalisation and the Conservatives as equally dogmatically attached to private enterprise, with themselves in the middle judging cases on merit and believing both systems had an important role to play. Their manifesto claimed;

Liberals believe that the controversy for and against nationalisation is out of date. They approach individual problems without economic prejudice

and since they represent no vested interests of employers or employed, they can plan in the interests of the whole community. They believe in private enterprise and the value of individual effort, experiment and a willingness to take risks. But where public ownership is more economic, Liberals will demand it without hesitation. Where there is no room for further expansion or useful competition in an industry, or where an industry or group of industries has become a private monopoly, Liberals say it should become a public utility.⁷⁶

This equidistant stance was emphasised in Manchester by Leonard Behrens (Withington), who stressed that the private/public ownership debate;

[R]eally was 'dead as mutton'. Neither nationalisation nor private enterprise is a sacred principle: each of them is only a way of doing things. Liberals believe that free competition makes for greater efficiency and for wider freedom, but when competition goes and monopoly comes in, then Liberals would use the state to prevent exploitation.⁷⁷

The Liberals proposed that railways and power should be treated as a public utility; coal was to become a public service, although control would be decentralised with freedom to experiment in different coal undertakings, with the industry paying its way without subsidies from the taxpayer.⁷⁸

In common with the other main parties, Liberals claimed that they were the party of full employment, social security and housing. On full employment, however, the Liberal manifesto was vague, again steering a course between Labour and Conservative policies, stating; "Our national resources, labour, power and skill of brains, are our most precious national assets, and Government and private initiative alike must ensure that none of them stands needlessly idle."⁷⁹ In Manchester, Donald Moore pledged; "More jobs than people to fill them - a real basic wage - 14 days holiday with pay - control of location in industry - no direction of labour - preserve fundamentals of a free society."⁸⁰ Phillip Oliver (Blackley), put forward a Keynesian solution;

Insufficient demand in an age of increased mechanical power is the true cause of unemployment and has been a constant factor except in time of war when demand is unlimited...[I advocate] the creation of a General Economic Staff...to maintain purchasing power through a high basic wage and by the encouragement and stabilisation of investment and by a long-term programme of development [to] ensure year by year a total

outlay sufficient to employ the whole productive resources of the country, so that men shall not wait for jobs but jobs shall wait for men.⁸¹

On housing, the Liberals were much closer to Labour than the Conservatives, on the role of the state. The manifesto stated; "Local authorities [are] to be encouraged and we must control the costs of building materials so as to keep down the prices and rents of the houses we build."⁸² The Liberals stressed that the energies the state had used to produce war materials would now be put into the building of houses; "Houses: On the provision of these the whole resources of the State should be concentrated as they were concentrated on the Normandy landings. No vested interests of land, of capital or of labour must be allowed to stand in the way."⁸³ Moore promised to "Treat housing like 'tanks' and 'planes' - Minister for Housing - full internal equipment on a mass produced components basis - real houses with sufficient living space."⁸⁴ The acquisition and value of land was crucial to the housing issue and again the Liberals were closer to Labour. The Liberals pledged; "Development rights outside built up areas should immediately be acquired for the public and there should be a periodic levy on all increases in site values."⁸⁵ The Liberals also proposed to go further than the Conservatives on social security. Beveridge had declared himself a Liberal and was standing in the election as a Liberal candidate, and the Party as a whole stood for the full implementation of the Beveridge Report, rather than the 1944 White Paper.

On other issues the Liberals were closer to the Conservatives. On taxation, the Liberals joined with the Conservatives in seeking a "progressive reduction in the burden of taxation."⁸⁶ On economic controls, the Liberals committed themselves to their removal as soon as possible, with Behrens stating; "Controls must be continued long enough (but no longer) to give the right of re-entry for those whom the war compelled to give up business."⁸⁷ Controls were to be removed as part of the Liberals' emphasis on free trade. Their manifesto pledged the Party to the "elimination of tariffs, quotas, exchange restrictions and other barriers to trade."⁸⁸ In Manchester, the home of free trade Liberalism, Heric Kenyon claimed; "Every restriction on trade impoverishes some part of the world and so, in the end, the whole. Policy must be directed towards

lowering and removing all trade barriers in a speedy but orderly manner, until there is a free exchange of all the produce of the world.”⁸⁹

The Manchester Liberals were divided on what they wanted to happen after the election. Leonard Behrens was clearly seeking a Liberal government, telling one meeting; “It is a long time since we had a Liberal Government; now the chance has come again.”⁹⁰ Phillip Oliver, however, hoped that a new coalition government would be formed, with Churchill at its head, until the war with Japan was over. He described Churchill as “the obvious leader in the war against Japan” and stated;

While we are at war [the interest of the nation] demands the drive and energy of Winston Churchill in the struggle against Japan, his participation in conference with the Great Powers and his presence at that final settlement of the peace...After the Conservative Party is defeated and a more progressive majority is established in the House let him lead a new all-party Government, reinvigorated by contact with the people until victory against Japan. When that end is achieved the Government can be reconstituted according to the majority opinion in the House.⁹¹

The aim of the Liberal campaign was clear. As well as motivating their traditional support, they attempted to attract the floating voters and, particularly, disaffected Conservatives who did not want to see the Conservatives return to power, but who were wary of voting for Labour. Importantly, by adopting a centrist position on many of the key areas, the Liberal campaign highlighted the divergent views of the Conservative and Labour parties.

The Electorate and the 1945 General Election.

What effect did the parties’ campaigning have on the electorate? Although the Conservatives regained some ground during the campaign, the mood of the bulk of the electorate remained strongly anti-Conservative, particularly in the armed forces. The relative quietness of the election has been wrongly interpreted as indicating apathy; in

reality, there was a keen interest in the election, with its quietness indicating that the majority of the electorate had already decided for whom they would vote.

The Conservative election campaign has often been denigrated by historians, many of whom argue that it was a contributory factor in the Party's defeat or, at least, the scale of the defeat. Sibley and Shaw, to name just two, suggest that the final result would have been closer had the Party not adopted an essentially negative campaign.⁹² However, the evidence clearly suggests that the campaign was successful in rallying many wavering middle-class voters back to the Conservative cause. Harold Mellor, the Evening Chronicle's Special Reporter, toured all the Manchester constituencies and found;

[T]he certainty that Professor Laski's intervention on Mr Attlee's participation in a Big Three Conference has done the Labour cause irreparable harm, at least for this election. A prolonged silence on the details of the proposed nationalisation has made a naturally Conservative nation even more suspicious of the revolutionary change."⁹³

The Evening Chronicle itself reported; "Reports reaching the Evening Chronicle in the last day or so say that there are unmistakable signs that the waverers, the floating vote, are swinging to Mr Churchill's side, consolidating the solid support which the Prime Minister's case had already received."⁹⁴ Of course, coming from the mouthpiece of Manchester Conservatism, it is easy to dismiss such observations as a desperate attempt to boost party morale but national opinion polls gave credence to such views, with Gallup finding a narrowing in Labour's lead in 1945. In February a poll gave Labour their biggest lead yet (18 per cent) with 42 per cent saying they would vote Labour, 24 per cent for the Conservatives, 11 per cent for the Liberals, 11 per cent for other parties and 12 per cent 'don't knows'.⁹⁵ In June this gap had closed considerably, with Labour on 40 per cent, the Conservatives a much increased 34 per cent, the Liberals 8 per cent, 2 per cent for other parties and 16 per cent 'don't knows', a Labour lead of just 6 per cent.⁹⁶ A comparison of these two polls demonstrates that the increasing support for the Conservatives came from the Liberals and 'other parties', so the campaign had succeeded in winning back the support of wavering middle-class voters who had not wanted to vote Labour, but who had given tentative support to other alternatives.

Amongst the bulk of the electorate, however, the Conservative campaign had no such effect. Across the country as a whole 68 per cent of those asked by Gallup felt that the 'Gestapo Speech' had been "bad".⁹⁷ Similarly, in Manchester, the campaign had struck completely the wrong chord with most voters;

The national Conservative campaign appears to have had little effect on the minds of the electors in the north, except to disgust some of them with some of Mr Churchill's advisers and supporters and - what is most to be lamented - with democratic politics in general. In this part of the world we knew hard times between the wars and the electorate are not in the mood to listen to fantasies about the revolutionary nature of the Labour Party or the dictatorial role of its executive committee. They want to know how the parties propose to find work for all, how they will ensure that our shabby homes and wardrobes can be restocked, how international trade will be developed and how, generally, the standard of life in this country can be raised.⁹⁸

On balance of probability, the Conservative campaign did not cost the Party many votes, simply because a strong mood of anti-Conservatism already gripped much of Manchester, a mood canalised in the city by the Guardian and Evening News, who were fiercely hostile to the Party throughout the election.⁹⁹ Amongst Mancunians it was noted that; "There is...a general opinion that there has been a big swing to the left. Conversations, especially, suggest that there is a big, floating, progressive vote."¹⁰⁰ The campaign, therefore, probably served only to intensify dislike of the Party amongst those who had already decided not to vote for the Conservatives.

The whole popular image of the Conservatives was of a negative and reactionary party. Among many Mancunians there continued to exist a strong feeling that the Conservative Party would, if elected, fail to implement the progressive measures that the electorate had supported since the early days of the War. This belief had existed since early 1943 and during the campaign it mattered little what the Conservatives now said, for few believed them. This mood was captured by the Guardian following Churchill's second election broadcast;

It is hard, with the best will in the world, to accept this picture of a Conservative Government all fired with enthusiasm for social reform. Mr Churchill can speak with sincerity of his own record - thirty years ago as a Liberal and in brief intervals since - but he speaks as one handicapped by

his friends. He orates admirably and warmly on social insurance but it cannot be forgotten how his Government, and still more the Conservative Central Office, treated the Beveridge scheme. That is Mr Churchill's misfortune - to put himself forward as a progressive when the instrument through which he has to work, and it is a very powerful one, is so unfitted for the task he sets for it.¹⁰¹

A fortnight later the Guardian raised the same points about Churchill's 'Four Year Plan'.

It condemned the Party as "reactionary", stating;

The Four Year Plan, for what it is worth, is an agreed but extremely incomplete agenda. In the hands of Liberal and Labour ministers it would mean something; in the hands of Mr Churchill's ministers (dependant on and conditioned by a Conservative majority) the promise of the White Papers will be whittled away. We should inevitably get back to the snail's pace in social and economic reform of the days of the last 'National Government.'¹⁰²

The basis of this popular mistrust lay not only in the experiences of this War but in recollections of the rapid abandonment of similar promises made after the First World War;

There are the same vague promises of social reform. It would be an exercise in the ironies of history to go through the 1918 manifesto and note the subjects on which the Government was 'preparing plans' to deal with this or that on a 'large scale' or on 'broad and comprehensive lines' and to compare that promise with the performance by that Government with its colossal majority. "Industry will rightly claim to be liberated at the earliest possible moment from Government control" said the manifesto of 1918. And we know what followed - the orgy of inflation, wages vainly chasing prices until the country was overwhelmed in a cruel depression. "We stand for the removal of controls as quickly as the need for them disappears" more cautiously says the manifesto of 1945" but Lord Beaverbrook prefers the 1918 version and perhaps puts the right interpretation on what the words of 1945 mean. Soon the more innocent of us (with the help of Mr Churchill's Coupon) may be persuaded to believe that we ought to have a one-man Government for its own sake. We had one in 1918 and we know what a mess of things it made both of our foreign relations and of the condition of Britain. Must we repeat the hazardous experiment?¹⁰³

The strongest degree of anti-Conservatism was felt to exist in the armed forces with the Evening News' correspondent, following a visit to the Manchester Regiment (serving overseas) commenting; "One cannot accurately predict the political opinions of the Forces, but it is certain that there is little enthusiasm for the Conservative Party" and attributed this to the fact that; "This must be the most well-informed army that has ever taken the field in defence of Britain. Broadcasts, current affairs lectures and discussions, Penguin Books, a spate of pamphlets and access to newspapers have given them a background of knowledge that was unobtainable by their fathers in the last war."¹⁰⁴

The Conservatives were clearly distrusted by much of the electorate. Furthermore, their programme was widely felt to be inadequate to deal with the problems facing the country. Throughout Britain, domestic issues were overwhelmingly predominant in the minds of the electorate. A Gallup poll inquired; 'What questions do you think will be the most discussed in the general election?', which yielded the following response: housing 41 per cent, full employment 15 per cent, social security 7 per cent, nationalisation 6 per cent and international security 5 per cent.¹⁰⁵ As this poll shows, housing was by far the most dominant issue for the electorate, and this was certainly the case in Manchester. As we have seen, in 1942 68,000 dwellings, one-third of Manchester's total housing stock, had been deemed unfit for human habitation and it is therefore little surprise that housing should have dominated the election in Manchester. William Hodgkins, writing for the City News, said; "Housing is Britain's greatest social problem. It is the major issue of our time."¹⁰⁶ The Evening Chronicle's Staff Correspondent was dispatched to Clayton and Gorton to ascertain people's priorities, and concluded; "Overshadowing all other links is the problem of housing. Against the wider background of national and international questions which form the respective party programmes, housing stands out as home front question number one in both divisions."¹⁰⁷ The Gorton Conservative candidate, Harry Sharp, agreed, remarking that housing was the issue most put to him during his canvassing of the area.¹⁰⁸ Housing was also seen as critical to the female and service vote. Marjorie Cooke's Weekly Article on women's issues, in the City News, claimed;

Countless women are thinking these days about houses. Their hopes of happiness for years to come are conditioned by their chances of starting a home; and with a house - for how otherwise can it ever be a home in the happiest sense?...A political party which could convince women it was able to provide these things, would sweep the board.¹⁰⁹

One serviceman told a local paper that "news items regarding the housing problems are followed with keen interest by us all and have provided material for many debates and discussions on this vast problem that lies before us."¹¹⁰ Crucially, on housing and other key issues, the bulk of the electorate preferred Labour's state-led programme to the Conservatives' emphasis on private enterprise. A national opinion poll asked which party would handle housing best; 42 per cent believed Labour would, as against 25 per cent Conservatives and 13 per cent Liberals.¹¹¹ Similar evidence can be found in Manchester. The Conservatives' policy of leaving the building of new homes predominantly in the hands of private enterprise met with no positive response from the electorate. The Evening News' political correspondent, having attended a number of meetings, recorded; "*The campaign for sweeping away controls has found a limited response and has had to be modified.*"¹¹² In reality, many favoured Labour's pledge to use extensive state action to solve Britain's housing problem. Across the country as a whole Home Intelligence had noted at the end of 1944 that the public wanted the state to tackle housing as it had organised the war effort.¹¹³ This certainly appears to have been the attitude of most Mancunians in the election campaign in 1945. The Gorton Reporter noted that the local Labour candidate received his biggest cheer at one public meeting when he asserted that housing problems would be dealt with by his party in the same way that "difficulties in the war had been overcome."¹¹⁴

The Conservatives did, of course, have Winston Churchill as their electoral ace, and the Party undoubtedly did attract support because he was party leader. Mass Observation found the most frequently stated reason for voting Conservative was loyalty to Churchill.¹¹⁵ One Manchester Labour canvasser recalls that the most oft-cited reason given to him by those who intended to vote for the Conservatives was that "Churchill has done well for us in the war and so we should vote for him now".¹¹⁶ Churchill was

undeniably popular in Manchester, and this was reflected in the huge welcome given to him when he visited the city, on 26 June, as part of his election tour;

It was the loudest, the sincerest expression of loyalty and appreciation yet in the one thousand mile, fifty-odd speech tour of the great leader. Piccadilly - nor all Lancashire for that matter, has ever before seen anything like this. There was a triumphal mood everywhere - the honest outpourings of a people to a leader who exalts free institutions above state regulations. Four miles out, in the suburbs, the smiles, the cheers and the shouts began. They were taken up to swell into a mighty roar from the wildly enthusiastic multitude packing Manchester's industrial heart. It was a fluttering mass of red, white and blue along the whole length of Mosley Street and York Street.¹¹⁷

Photographs 2.1 and 2.2 (overleaf) show Churchill on his visit to the city:



Photograph 6.1: Manchester Greet Churchill, 26 June 1945



Photograph 6.2: The Churchills' Campaign in Manchester, 26 June 1945

However, the extent of anti-Conservative feeling was such that even Churchill was unable to turn the tide. It was widely recognised that the huge welcome he had received reflected popular appreciation of his role as war leader, rather than support for his position as Conservative leader;

It would be dangerous and unreal to suggest that these belated V-E Day Celebrations - for that is what they are - represent anything more than the gratitude of the people; an overwhelming curiosity to see and to thank the man who has borne such a disproportionate part of the burden of war and who is now disposed to shoulder an equally heavy responsibility in the peace. The election tour of the Prime Minister's is providing abundant evidence of his popularity but it is not at all clear what part of this allegiance also belongs to the party of which he is head...It would indeed be a brave man who would profess to find in their happy faces a reliable index to their political opinions. Had they possessed tails they would have wagged them all together and still concealed from Mr Churchill and everyone else the secret of their vote.¹¹⁸

The anti-Conservative mood of much of the city remained unaffected by Churchill, and this mood was again captured and expressed by both the Guardian and Evening News shortly before polling day. Both argued that the return of a Conservative government was the worst thing that could happen to Britain;

Mr Churchill fears that a small Conservative majority would mean weakness. On the contrary it is, short of a Conservative defeat, the only tolerable thing that could happen, both for Britain at home and abroad. The least we can do is to limit the powers for mischief of another Government like that of 1935-37 and in spite of Mr Churchill's excellent intentions, that is what his 'great majority' would give us.¹¹⁹

On polling day it added; "If Mr Churchill were given what he demands [a large majority], the outlook for the British people would be extremely grave...Nothing could be worse than another House of Commons in which the Tory Party was all powerful."¹²⁰ The most eloquent analysis of the Conservatives' unpopularity was made by the Evening News, which argued that the Party simply could not be trusted to implement social and economic reforms, and pleaded with the electorate not to vote Conservative. Their statement deserves full quotation;

Though we are free of all party ties, we are nevertheless devoted to certain political principles and have the most definite ideas about the progress of reconstruction which the country needs. The first thing that needs to be said is that these principles and this programme are not those of the Conservative Party - or the 'Nationals' as they prefer to call themselves. In our view they have little conception of the role of Government at this crucial time. We cannot build a new Britain on old ideas, and nothing less than a new Britain is needed. The Conservatives, it is true, acknowledge the White Papers which promise the framework of some important social legislation and Mr Churchill has told us of his four year plan to put them into effect. But the White Papers were never good enough. They were compromises. There is a vital omission from most of them. The Tories for example, offer not social security but social insurance. They will not provide freedom from want but fixed benefits which are quite inadequate when measured against the cost of living. The Conservatives promise to build houses but they have never been able to agree on a policy for the acquisition of land. They promise too full employment; but the White Paper on this subject, far though it be an advance of Conservative policy during the grim regimes of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, is hampered by financial orthodoxy and restricted by fear of intervening in business. The Tory plan for preventing unemployment is simply to spend money on public works and it is not good enough. There must be direction, too, of private investment if this country is to provide work for all and an increased standard of living. Political parties, of course, must be judged not merely by their promises, but by their past and by the men who lead them. Can anybody believe that the Conservatives will, when a slump once more threatens, prevent it by spending and the encouragement of spending? Would they rather not cut wages, 'economise', retrench? In short would they not retreat to old orthodoxy which, though condemned by every economist of standing, is still firm in the minds of the ignorant or timid politicians and businessmen who see public finance in the terms of a private profit and loss account. We honour Mr Churchill for his wartime achievements; but the reward he demands, the return of a Conservative Government is one, we believe, which the nation cannot afford to pay. It is to be hoped that wherever there is a straight fight against a Conservative, the Liberal or Labour electors will use his vote to keep the Tories out.¹²¹

The campaign may have confirmed popular perceptions of the parties but the Conservatives' fate was sealed long before the campaign began, with the Conservatives defeat having become inevitable before the end of 1944. The 1945 election was perhaps the quietest in recent memory, and this has been equated with apathy. Tom Harrisson, the founder of Mass Observation, claimed the election was characterised by a "dispirited

electorate considering its options under a 'cloak of apathy'" and the first Nuffield general election study found;

Many observers considered that the quietness of the campaign was largely due to apathy, especially during the early stages. The campaign was slow to warm up. Many electors were thought to be resentful that an election should be held in the summer, during the holiday season. Attendance at meetings tended to be disappointing throughout the campaign, except in London. Elsewhere, observers noted the unemotional response of electors to the election, and their lack of fervour. Conservatives were particularly concerned about these signs of apathy. The Labour Party, on the contrary, tended to deny that they had experienced apathy in their constituencies.¹²²

The 1945 election in Manchester suggests a very different reality.

One must immediately start by drawing a distinction between reactions to the election among servicemen and civilians. Amongst the armed forces the election came a distant second in their order of priorities to demobilisation; "In the main, they are just not interested. Chief topic is 'When am I going to get home to the wife and kids?'"¹²³ A month later, less than two weeks before polling day, the *Guardian's* Cairo correspondent made the same findings;

The number one interest among servicemen is not the general election but 'When shall I get home?' Partial demobilisation and alterations in the python scheme have increased discussion on this question and therefore the election remains only of secondary interest. The majority have their chosen party and nothing said now is likely to shake their allegiance, particularly as so many seem to have grown extremely cynical about politics. At present it is safe to say that there is very little interest. Paradoxically, however, there is genuine interest in the ultimate result.¹²⁴

These reports are very much in line with national findings among servicemen. During the summer of 1944 it was discovered that many members of the home based forces had not registered to vote. It seems that if left to their own devices about three-quarters of soldiers would have failed to fill in the appropriate form.¹²⁵ In the election itself, out of three million service voters, only about 1.75 million (59.4 per cent) actually cast a vote.¹²⁶ However, it is perhaps significant that there was genuine interest in the final

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result, for an apathetic electorate would have little interest in the outcome. With servicemen having been home only fleetingly in the previous few years, it would have been remarkable had their overwhelming priority not been coming home as soon as possible and it was perhaps this, rather than apathy, that caused a relatively low service turnout.

AMONG THE CIVILIAN VOTERS IN MANCHESTER attitudes were very different. It was, undoubtedly, a very quiet election.¹²⁷ A week before polling day, the Chief Conservative Agent in the city, George Beattie, said that "It is the quietest election I have known in twenty-five years."¹²⁸ It is important, however, not to mistake quietness with apathy, as both the local press and candidates of all parties commented on the interest being shown by the voters; Leonard Behrens, for example, found "people serious and interested in their attitude and questions."¹²⁹ The Labour and Liberal candidates for Moss Side, Lt Bill Griffiths and Donald Moore, "both report[ed] a newly awakened interest in politics among the electors."¹³⁰ After the election Wright Robinson wrote; "The election itself was unlike any I had any part in. People were keenly interested...But they were so quiet; so undemonstrative yet business like, coming to meetings, reading literature."¹³¹ It was also generally agreed that the Manchester electorate of 1945 had a higher degree of political awareness than had previously existed; "There seems to be no doubt that the electorate is politically far more knowledgeable and instructed than the electorate of 1935."¹³²

The size of the turnout in 1945 also suggests that apathy was not prevalent in the city. In 1945 the Manchester turnout was 70.37 per cent which was, admittedly, fractionally down on the 1935 turnout of 71.46 per cent, but a combination of two factors suggest that the actual turnout was higher in 1945. Firstly, only 60 per cent of servicemen voted and as their votes were counted as part of the constituency turnout, this would have the effect of reducing the overall turnout figure. Secondly, the short period between the end of the war with Germany and election day meant that work on a revised electoral register, now six years out of date, had to be rushed and was, inevitably, unsatisfactory. All parties complained of the inadequacy of the register, which was described as "shocking" and "a scandal."¹³³ Many people in Manchester complained that they had not been put on the register and had been unable to vote, therefore it is safe to

assume that many names were still on the list even though they were no longer in the constituency. These two factors render the official turnout unreliable and the real turnout in Manchester was almost certainly higher than in 1935. When searching for reasons to explain the relative quietness of the campaign the most plausible hypothesis is that voters had already decided for whom they would vote before the campaign had even commenced. A Nuffield sponsored public opinion survey found that 84 per cent of people had made their minds up on how to vote before nomination day.¹³⁴

It was perhaps the quietness of the election that was responsible for the difficulty contemporaries had in predicting the outcome. Few observers accurately predicted the likely result, with many expecting the Conservatives to win. Throughout the campaign the Conservative leadership remained confident of winning the election, although accepting it would be with a reduced majority. Churchill advised the King to expect a Conservative majority of between 40-60, and the leader of the Tory Reform Group, Quentin Hogg, who had long argued that the Conservatives had to change, still believed that his party would win by a narrow margin.¹³⁵ Only a handful of Conservatives, including Butler and Macmillan, believed the Conservatives would lose. Manchester Conservatives were even more confident than the party leadership and were actually thinking seriously in terms of increasing their representation. The Daily Dispatch said; "There is no evidence of any real swing to the left...Whatever the odds in the rest of the country, it is slightly more than 6 to 4 on the Government candidates going back to Parliament."¹³⁶ Its political correspondent, Frederick Truelove, claimed; "The trend is still reported to be in the right direction and a comfortable majority for the Government is predicted. Whether that majority will be over or below a hundred is anyone's guess."¹³⁷ Harold Mellor, the Evening Chronicle's Special Correspondent, said; "It is unwise to forecast election results. Nevertheless, what I have seen prompts me to believe that Lancashire and Cheshire on the whole will prove to be pro-Conservative."¹³⁸ Conservative Headquarters in Manchester reported to Central Office that they had good hopes of increasing their representation.¹³⁹

Few in the Manchester, or national, Labour Party believed that Labour would actually win the election. Labour never felt under threat in any of the four constituencies

(Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting) they had won in 1935; "It appears reasonably certain that Labour will be returned for at least four of Manchester's ten seats."¹⁴⁰ The Labour Party Organiser in Manchester, R.E. Thomas, was even more confident declaring; "I do not think there is the possibility of us losing a single seat in the city."¹⁴¹ However, this view was held by only a minority of the Manchester Labour Party and after the scale of Labour's victory became known, Wright Robinson noted in his diary;

Up to the count I expected a Tory Government with a barely working majority, with sufficient Liberals to be a balancing party. I discerned no signs of a landslide, and did not expect a Labour majority. Only a very few people did. Leeming gave 370 Labour, 250 Conservatives, and 20 others a fortnight before the election. Reg Wallis was of the same mind as I was on the eve of the count.¹⁴²

Manchester's non-Conservative press expected a very close result; a hung Parliament or a narrow Conservative majority were thought the likely outcomes. A Labour victory, let alone a landslide, was discounted at the outset of the campaign, and it remained unaltered. On polling day, the Guardian said; "We should remember that the scales are heavily weighted in favour of a Conservative majority. The chances (or danger) of a clear Labour majority to carry out a socialist programme are slender, almost remote."¹⁴³ The Evening News believed that no party would get a majority;

What effect [Churchill's popularity] will have is impossible to estimate, but it must be considerable, despite Churchill's loss of prestige as a result of his election antics. The Left swing may, therefore, have been halted, possibly even slightly reversed, but I think it is still there sufficiently strong to prevent the Tories getting a clear majority. I think therefore that the Conservatives will lose their majority [losing] 120 seats, 90 to Labour, 30 to the Liberals. This would give the Conservatives and their friends about 300 seats, Labour and its friends about 285, Liberals about 50 and 5 oddments.¹⁴⁴

The Outcome.

The election result provides conclusive evidence in support of the argument that Labour's victory was overwhelmingly due to the votes of the working-class and first time voters of

all classes and that pre-war middle-class Conservative voters stayed loyal. Labour gained a massive 227 seats, increasing their representation from 166 seats in 1935 to 393 in 1945 whilst the 1945 election was very much the “Waterloo of the Conservative Party”.¹⁴⁵ Their representation had fallen from 361 seats to just 189, a loss of 172. Only twice had the party been reduced to a lower Parliamentary strength, in 1832 and 1906. The Conservative allies, the Liberal Nationals, saw their representation fall from 27 to 13, a loss of fourteen seats. The Liberal Party lost eight, falling from 20 to 12. Labour therefore had an overall majority of 146 over all other parties. In terms of numbers of votes, however, Labour’s victory was not quite as impressive. Labour received 11,967,746 votes (a 30 per cent increase on their 1935 support), while the parties forming the Conservative alliance received 9,972,010 (a decrease of 16 per cent). In percentage terms, Labour had received 47.6 per cent of the total vote (as against 38 per cent in 1935), and the Conservatives 40 per cent (53 per cent in 1935). There had been an impressive 12 per cent swing from Conservative to Labour. The Liberal Party had most cause for complaint. Their vote had increased from 1,443,093 to 2,252,430 between 1935 and 1945, an increase of 46 per cent, with their share of the vote rising from 6.5 per cent in 1935 to 9 per cent in 1945, but their representation had decreased to 12 M.P.s.

Manchester followed the national trend, with Labour candidates sweeping into office throughout the city. In 1935 out of the ten Parliamentary seats, six had been won by the Conservatives and four by Labour. In 1945 nine were won by Labour (five was their previous best) and only one, Withington, by the Conservatives. On a turnout of 70.37 per cent, down on the national average of 73 per cent, Labour retained Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton and Platting with ease; won Hulme for only the second time; gained the newly configured, largely working-class Exchange constituency for the first time; and, also for the first time, won the pre-war middle-class strongholds of Blackley, Moss Side and Rusholme. Rusholme was one of the closest results in the country, for it took four recounts to decide that Lester Hutchinson had won by ten votes.

Labour’s performance in the city surpassed that of the Party nationally whilst the local Conservatives fared worse than the national Party.¹⁴⁶ In 1935 Labour had received 135,084 votes in Manchester, but this increased to 168,188 in 1945, an increase of 33,104

(20 per cent) on a reduced electorate. In terms of share of the vote, in 1935 Labour had polled 39.17 per cent of the votes cast, but received 52 per cent in 1945, up 13 per cent. Their share of the vote was 4.5 per cent higher in 1945 than the Party as a whole. Conversely, the Conservative vote of 182,785 in 1935 fell sharply to 123,136 in 1945, a decrease of 59,649. The Conservatives' had therefore lost one-third of their support. In 1935 the Conservatives had received 53 per cent of the total vote, dropping to just 38 per cent in 1945, a fall of 15 per cent. Their share of the poll was 2 per cent lower than was achieved by the Party nationally. Overall, the swing from Conservative to Labour in 1945 in Manchester was 14 per cent, 2 per cent higher than nationally, and 4 per cent higher than the figure for Lancashire.¹⁴⁷ As in the rest of the country the Liberal Party increased their vote in Manchester from 24,419 (7 per cent) in 1935 to 31,803 (9.8 per cent) in 1945. However this was almost entirely due to the fact that they fielded two extra candidates in 1945 and two of their candidates, Donald Moore and Heric Kenyon, actually lost their deposits.¹⁴⁸ Tables 6.1 and 6.2 compare the electoral data of 1935 and 1945:

Table 6.1: The 1935 General Election Results by Constituency.

Constituency	Turnout (%)	Conservative	Labour	Liberal
Ardwick	71.40	14,556 (47.21 %)	16,364 (52.9%)	–
Blackley	78.10	15,355 (44.30 %)	9,370 (27.1 %)	9,893 (28.6 %)
Clayton	77.00	16,557 (46.30 %)	19,225 (53.7 %)	–
Exchange	63.30	15,956 (54.1 %)	8,313 (28.2 %)	5,228 (17.7 %)
Gorton	77.70	15,833 (44.1 %)	20,039 (55.9 %)	–
Hulme	66.70	17,072 (60.3 %)	11,221 (39.7 %)	–
Moss Side	63.20	15,199 (58.7 %)	10,694 (41.3 %)	–
Platting	76.50	17,015 (48.1 %)	18,352 (51.9 %)	–
Rusholme	69.80	19,678 (62.6 %)	9,258 (29.4 %)	–
Withington	70.9	35,564 (62.3 %)	12,248 (21.4 %)	9,298 (16.3%)
Totals:	71.46	182,785 (53 %)	135,084 (39.17 %)	24,419 (7.00 %)

Table 6.2: The 1945 General Election Results by Constituency.

Constituency	Turnout (%)	Conservative	Labour	Liberal
Ardwick	68.20	8093 (36 %)	14,360 (64 %)	–
Blackley	74.90	14,747 (33.7 %)	19,561 (44.7 %)	9,480 (21.6 %)
Clayton	69.60	9,883 (30.6 %)	22,401 (69.4 %)	–
Exchange	70.20	7,050 (35 %)	11,067 (55 %)	2,018 (10 %)
Gorton	75.50	10,799 (30.9 %)	24,095 (69.1 %)	–
Hulme	64.70	9,600 (44.4 %)	12,034 (55.6 %)	–
Moss Side	59.20	7,423 (36 %)	10,201 (49.5 %)	2,525 (12.3 %)
Platting	72.60	9,262 (36.1 %)	16,427 (63.9 %)	–
Rusholme	74.60	15,398 (43.4 %)	15,408 (43.4 %)	4,673 (13.2 %)
Withington	74.20	30,881 (46.3 %)	22,364 (34 %)	13,107 (19.7 %)
Totals:	70.37	123,136 (38 %)	168,188 (52 %)	31803 (9.8 %)

The 1945 election saw the electorate polarised along class lines to an extent never previously witnessed, shattering the myth of a people united by war. Originally it was believed that a significant number of middle-class voters had switched their support from Conservative to Labour but more recent research suggests this has been exaggerated, and Labour's victory was due to unprecedented support from the working-class.¹⁴⁹ This is supported by evidence collated by Gallup:

Table 6.3: Voting by Social Group/ Occupation in 1945 General Election (%).

Group	Labour	Conservative	Liberal	Other
Professional	26	60	12	2
Salaried	30	53	16	1
Small proprietor	21	71	8	-
Waged, industrial	77	15	6	2
Waged, agricultural	53	34	11	2
Waged, other	55	35	8	2

The most significant movement of opinion had occurred not in the middle-class but in the manual working-class, so Labour's victory "was principally the result of wage earners [voting Labour]."¹⁵⁰ Amongst industrial workers, over three-quarters voted Labour. Middle-class voters varied considerably in their response to Labour. Only about 10 per cent of top business people and 15 per cent of higher professions voted Labour.¹⁵¹ Amongst the middle-class, Labour support was concentrated in the lower echelons of the group, and particularly among the young; "The Labour Party's best friends are the clerks, typists, canvassers and agents."¹⁵² Almost a third of such people had voted Labour, but even here, the section of the middle-class in which Labour did best, almost twice as many had voted Conservative. It is therefore essential not to exaggerate the level of middle-class support for Labour in 1945, or in the War.

Manchester bears out these national trends. The percentage of working-class voters supporting Labour increased dramatically at the expense of the Conservatives, with one Labour canvasser remembering; "There was almost total support for Labour in the factories."¹⁵³ The increase in the Labour vote in the city's five working-class

constituencies (Ardwick, Clayton, Gorton, Hulme and Platting) appears unimpressive, increasing from 85,201 (1935) to 89,317 (1945), a rise of just 4,116 (4.8 per cent). Indeed, in both Ardwick and Platting Labour retained the seats whilst receiving less votes than in 1935 but the combined electorate of these five seats had fallen from 224,578 (1935) to 194,354 (1945), a decrease of 30,000 (13.3 per cent), and the turnout was almost 4 per cent lower in 1945 than in 1935 (70.46 per cent against 74 per cent). *The most telling statistic concerns the Conservative vote, which fell from 81,033 in 1935 to just 47,637 in 1945, a fall of 33,396, so the Conservative working-class vote fell by a massive 42 per cent, the vast majority of whom switched directly to Labour.* This strong swing among Manchester's working-class is perhaps best illustrated by the result in Hulme. Although this was a predominantly working-class constituency, it had been represented by the Conservative M.P. Sir J.Nall, for all but two years since 1918 (1929-31). In 1935 Nall received 17,072 votes (60.3 per cent) against his Labour opponent's 11,221 (39.71 per cent), but this substantial majority was overturned easily in 1945. Fred Lee, in a reduced electorate and poll, received 12,034 votes (55.6 per cent) against Jim Currie's 9,600 (44.4 per cent). This demonstrates the strengthening of the core Labour vote among the working-class and the respective percentage shares of the vote highlights the Labour gain was at the Conservatives' expense. In 1935 Labour received 51.25 per cent of the vote, the Conservatives 48.74 per cent; in 1945, Labour received 65.21 per cent, with the Conservatives down to 34.78 per cent.

In the middle-class constituencies, Labour fared well. The Exchange constituency is excluded from this analysis because a change in voting rules makes any comparison with 1935 uninformative.¹⁵⁴ In Blackley, Labour more than doubled their vote from 9,370 to 19,561 to come from third place in 1935 to win the seat in 1945; in Rusholme, Labour's vote increased from 9,258 in 1935 to 15,408 (an increase of 66 per cent) to win the seat by 10 votes in 1945, and in Withington their vote increased from 12,248 to 22,634 (an increase of 84 per cent) in the same period, although still coming second. Combined, these three seats had provided Labour with 41,570 votes in 1935 and 67,804 in 1945 (an increase of 61 per cent), with their share of the poll increasing from 28.23 per cent to 40.90 per cent.

However, very few middle-class people who voted Conservative in 1935 deserted the party in 1945. Although their share of the vote had fallen from 55.2 per cent (1935) to 41.80 per cent (1945), the number of votes for the Conservatives in these three seats remained remarkably stable; 65,014 votes in 1935 and 61,026 in 1945, a decrease of only 6 per cent. Furthermore, many of those who did switch their allegiance voted Liberal rather than Labour: in Rusholme the Liberals received 4,673 (13.2 per cent) votes in 1945, having not fielded a candidate in 1935. Had all these voted Conservative, the Party would have recorded more votes in 1945 than they had in 1935. In Withington the 5,000 decline was almost matched by a 4,000 increase in the Liberal vote.

Labour's improved performance in these constituencies is explained by changes in the areas' social character in the War. Their electorates had increased from 210,916 to 230,573 between 1935 and 1945, largely due to an influx of war workers, with Blackley's electorate, for example, increasing from 44,314 to 58,437. Assuming that many of these workers were drawn from the existing working-class, this represented a dilution of Conservative support and, in line with trends, Labour would also have received increased support from existing working-class voters in these constituencies. These factors alone, however, cannot fully explain Labour's significantly improved performance. The rest of Labour's support came from first time (anyone under the age of 30) middle-class voters. The service turn-out demonstrates that the young were the least likely grouping to vote, but those who did voted solidly for Labour. Butler and Stokes calculated that 61 per cent of new electors voted Labour in 1945 (up from 45 per cent in 1935) with younger middle-class men more likely to vote Labour than young working-class men were to vote Conservative.¹⁵⁵ Observers at the Rusholme by-election in July 1944 had noted that the young were particularly anti-Conservative in their views, and therefore it is reasonable to argue that the increase in Labour's vote in these seats was, in part, due to young, middle-class people voting Labour rather than established Conservative voters switching. The evidence of Manchester supports recent research which plays down the extent of established middle-class Conservative support for Labour.

Outside the Party's long-standing core support, the motives behind those voting Labour are difficult to establish, but anti-Conservatism, rather than real enthusiasm for

Labour, was the main driving force. Following the election, it was a common assumption that Labour's victory represented widespread support for the Labour programme, with *The Economist* typical in asserting; "Beyond any possibility of a mistake, the country wants a Labour Government and a Socialist programme."¹⁵⁶ This view, as we have seen, is shared by a number of historians. Of course, many people undoubtedly "did hope - manual working class and middle class alike - that Labour's support for welfare reform was genuine. By implementing Beveridge and building houses they trusted that Labour would stand a good chance of preventing Britain returning to pre-war and misery."¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless positive support for Labour was limited. One must be careful not to exaggerate the level of Labour support; "In 1945 Labour won just over one-third of the votes of those eligible to exercise the franchise. Yet the impression is given that the Party was swept to power on a tidal wave of left-wing fervour."¹⁵⁸ Since 1918, six Governments had been elected with a higher share of the vote than Labour received in 1945. Thanks to Britain's simple plurality rule electoral system, Labour had won 61 per cent of the seats with 47.6 per cent of the vote while the Conservatives and allies (including the Ulster Unionists) had just 33 per cent of seats on 40 per cent of the vote. In Manchester, the Conservatives had a 1 per cent greater share of the poll in 1935 than Labour achieved in 1945. Secondly, post-election polls indicated very few people had voted Labour because of their policies. An August 1945 poll found that only 9 per cent cited Labour's policies (usually housing), 19 per cent thought it was 'time they had a chance', 9 per cent claimed to have always voted Labour, and 51 per cent were grouped together under a range of different motives ('best for the working-class', 'belief in socialism', 'the best party', 'they promised so much').¹⁵⁹ Many people did not even understand Labour's policies. Despite making it a centrepiece of their campaign, the policy of nationalisation attracted very little interest with a Manchester Labour canvasser remembering; "Outside of Labour activists, and by no means all of these, there was very little real understanding of what nationalisation would entail."¹⁶⁰ Oral evidence, contemporary comments and poll data suggest a confused Manchester electorate; "The people [were] almost painfully anxious to do the right thing if only they could find out what that was."¹⁶¹ This supports Sibley's view that, at best, people identified with

Labour in a vague and general way.¹⁶² Local observers found considerable residual disquiet about the Labour Party in 1945. The Gorton Reporter acknowledged in early August (the same month as the poll cited above) that; “After the unexpected landslide of the General Election, the country awaits with interest mixed with a certain anxiety.”¹⁶³

Labour won in Manchester because of the deep unpopularity of the Conservative Party (outside their core support), a finding supported by recent studies suggesting that anti-Conservatism was the dominant factor behind Labour’s national triumph. Thus;

Labour’s 1945 victory owed much to the way the Second World War led many voters to regard the Conservatives in a new and critical light. As a few, more perceptive commentators noted, a large number of people supported Labour for the first time because they actually disliked the Conservatives more than Attlee’s party. Labour’s supporters were not for the most part enthusiastic about the cause of ‘socialism’ - as some in the Party considered. They were not even particularly sympathetic to Labour’s nationalisation programme.¹⁶⁴

Similarly Fielding argues that there was;

[T]he strong impression that many first time Labour voters gave the party their support despite multifarious misgivings. Simply put, an as yet unspecified number of Labour voters did not want the return of a Conservative Government - at least with its 1935 majority intact - because of the party’s hostility to the Beveridge Report. In such a context - with the Liberals, Common Wealth and Communists not serious contenders for power - Labour was the only possible choice.¹⁶⁵

Media coverage of the election in Manchester by the two main non-Conservative newspapers, the Evening News or Guardian, does not show any real enthusiasm for Labour policies and both campaigned almost exclusively on the need to keep the Conservatives out of power. Both, of course, were essentially Liberal newspapers. On polling day, both concentrated on the dreadful, as they saw them, consequences of re-electing a Conservative government and barely mentioned the other parties. ‘Do not vote Conservative’ was the dominant message. In the aftermath of the election, local observers were united in their view that anti-Conservative sentiment had been critical to Labour’s performance in the city; “That this is a vote for any rigorous application of

socialism is certainly not true. What is more likely is that it is prompted first by a widespread desire to give Labour a chance, as the only available alternative to the Tories.”¹⁶⁶ The Evening News concluded that Conservatives;

[W]ere wrong in the first place because they never understood the fundamental nature of this war. It was never purely a national struggle. It was never a simple war 'For King and Country'. It used to be asked 'What are our war aims?' And the Tories would answer in some platitudinous phrase 'Our war aim is victory' or 'We are fighting for survival'. It was true that for many Conservatives - and they fought gallantly and sacrificed willingly nevertheless - this war was fought for negative aims. But the people of this country and of all Europe saw Fascism not merely as the menace of foreign gangsters but as the effect of reaction everywhere to use tyranny to stifle the swelling demands for progressive reform. They felt themselves to be on the verge of a great stride forward - and here was a black barrier holding them back. That is why the simple radio speeches of Mr Priestley, the idealism of Henry Wallace, and the practical scheme of Sir William Beveridge evoked such enthusiasm. The Daily Mail is right when it says today that Mr Churchill's supporters seemed to be completely out of touch with feeling in the country. Mr Churchill had, it is true, a five year plan that met some of the aspirations of the people. But neither he nor his supporters showed much enthusiasm for it. When the electorate was wondering where the bread was to be got the Conservatives presented them with a choice between an idol and a bogey, as if the people of Britain were children or a primitive tribe. The nation's vote is a condemnation of the past of the Conservative Party, of its' failure to produce a programme to fit the times we live in and in favour of radical change.¹⁶⁷

Labour won the 1945 election as a result of unprecedented support from the industrial working-class and the votes of the younger members of the middle-class; they were unable to attract established middle-class Conservative voters, who overwhelmingly stayed loyal to their party. Labour attracted little new positive support, with many first-time Labour voters voting for the Party in order to keep the Conservatives out of office. This anti-Conservatism had allowed Labour to win the 1945 General Election despite continuing deep misgivings about their own party.

Conclusion.

The 1945 General Election highlighted the significant differences in the Conservative and Labour parties' visions of post-war Britain for, despite not dissimilar rhetoric, the political

principles underpinning their programmes were fundamentally different. This was certainly the view of most contemporary observers in Manchester; "there were fundamental differences of opinion." and; "There are certainly wide differences of principle between the parties."¹⁶⁸ The Conservative Party remained firmly wedded to the tenets of financial orthodoxy and private enterprise. In contrast, Labour pledged little short of a structural overhaul of the pre-war economy. This fundamental difference between the parties was accompanied by other, more subtle, differences in social policies. On housing, social insurance and the health services the amount of common ground between the parties was more than matched by continuing disagreements.

In Manchester the divide between the parties was even greater than that separating the national leaderships. Both the main Manchester parties campaigned loyally on their national manifestos but the tone of their campaigns and, most notably, the nature of the candidates, suggested that the Manchester Conservative and Labour parties remained, respectively, to the right and left of their national leaderships.

The election demonstrated that Labour's victory was due to unprecedented levels of support amongst the working-class, around half of Manchester's 1935 working-class supporters switched directly to Labour, and the votes of many younger middle-class electors. The Conservatives' pre-war middle-class supporters remained loyal to their Party, and here the Conservative campaign was considerably more successful than is commonly allowed, with poll evidence indicating that it succeeded in wooing back such voters. Excluding younger middle-class voters, the British electorate polarised along class lines and many of those voting for Labour for the first time did so with great reservations. Few voted Labour because of their policies. More did so out of a rather vague identification with the Party and, crucially, because they did not want to see a Conservative government returned to power. The 1945 election in Manchester and nationally was much more an anti-Conservative vote than pro-Labour statement from the electorate.

References and Notes.

- ¹ Wright Robinson Diary, 1 June, 1945.
- ² Attlee argued for an autumn election, fearing that an early election would see the Conservatives benefit from euphoria of victory.
- ³ Guardian, 24 May, 1945; Evening Chronicle, 22 May, 1945.
- ⁴ Evening News, 27 July, 1945.
- ⁵ Ill-health seemed to dog the Conservative campaign. Harry Hewlett, M.P. (Exchange) was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, attributed to the combined pressure of his parliamentary work and his involvement in war work at his chemical factory in the city, and was advised by a specialist that he must have complete rest. Perhaps surprisingly he was re-selected as a candidate, but was to play no part in the campaign, leaving all the campaigning in the hands of his wife. The wife of Harry Sharp was suffering a serious illness, while the wife of George Beattie, the leading Conservative Agent, died midway through the campaign. Having to endure such stress can hardly have assisted their campaigning.
- ⁶ Evening Chronicle, 30 May, 1945.
- ⁷ Ibid., 5 June, 1945.
- ⁸ R. McCallum and A. Readman, The British General Election of 1945, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 101.
- ⁹ Jim Currie Election Address (E.A.).
- ¹⁰ Gorton Reporter, 29 June, 1945.
- ¹¹ P. Addison, The Road to 1945. Revised Edition, (Pimlico, 1994), p. 265.
- ¹² Idem.
- ¹³ Such tactics were a direct throwback to the election of 1918, when the Conservatives had made much of the 'Bolshevik threat' represented by the Labour Party following the Russian Revolution of the previous year. It has remained a favourite Conservative tactic, as seen with the 'New Labour, New Danger' campaign in 1997.
- ¹⁴ Guardian, 5 June, 1945.
- ¹⁵ Evening Chronicle, June 5 1945. On the national scene the leader of the progressive

Tory Reform Group, Quintin Hogg, told colleagues "It may interest you to know that in my opinion, that broadcast will lose us between 250,000 and 500,000 votes." Lord Hailsham, A Sparrows Flight (Collins, 1990), p.234.

- 16 Ibid., 26 June, 1945.
- 17 Idem.
- 18 Ibid., 19 June, 1945.
- 19 Ibid., 29 June, 1945.
- 20 Jim Currie E.A.
- 21 McCallum and Readman, British General Election, p. 48.
- 22 Addison, Road to 1945, p. 267.
- 23 Nellie Beer E.A.
- 24 Jim Currie E.A.
- 25 Harry Sharp and Phillip Smith E.A.
- 26 F. Craig, British General Election Manifestos 1918-1966 (Chichester: Political Reference Publications, 1970), pp. 89-92.
- 27 F.W.. Cundiff E.A.
- 28 Wilfred Sugden E.A.
- 29 Harry Sharp E.A.
- 30 Philip Smith E.A.
- 31 Jim Currie E.A. Interestingly, Currie was the youngest Manchester Conservative candidate.
- 32 Craig, Election Manifestos, p. 93.
- 33 Idem.
- 34 Daily Dispatch, 30 June, 1945.
- 35 Jim Currie E.A.
- 36 Harry Hewlett E.A.
- 37 Idem.
- 38 John Lees-Jones and Jim Currie E.A.
- 39 Evening Chronicle, 11 June, 1945.
- 40 Ibid., 4 July, 1945.

- 41 E.L. Fleming E.A.
- 42 Wilfred Sugden E.A.
- 43 John Lees-Jones E.A.
- 44 Evening Chronicle, 3 July, 1945.
- 45 Guardian, 1 June, 1945.
- 46 John Lees-Jones and Rostrum Duckworth E.A.
- 47 Rostrum Duckworth, Harry Sharp, John Lees-Jones and Harry Hewlett E.A.
- 48 Daily Dispatch, 13 June, 1945.
- 49 Evening Chronicle, 4 July, 1945.
- 50 Idem.
- 51 Joe Henderson, the M.P. for Ardwick, had been a member of the Executive Committee of the National Union of Railwaymen, and its President 1934-36 inclusively. Fred Lee was Chairman of the Works Committee at Metrovicks.
- 52 Evening News, 22 May, 1945.
- 53 M. Jones, Michael Foot (Victor Gollancz, 1994), p. 152. The other two were John Platt-Mills and Leslie Solley. In 1949 Hutchinson, along with Solley and Platt-Mills were expelled from the Labour Party and had to sit in Parliament as Independent Socialists. In the 1950 election he stood against Attlee himself in Walthamstow and was soundly beaten.
- 54 Fred Lee was to stand as Harold Wilson's deputy in a leadership challenge in 1960, which they lost to the incumbent Hugh Gaitskell and George Brown. Lee would later become Minister for Power, Secretary of State for the Colonies and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the Wilson Government; Harold Lever, regarded as a brilliant problem solver, was later to become Financial Secretary to the Treasury and would also achieve Cabinet rank under Wilson, again with the post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In this role he was an independent source of information about economics and finance for Wilson, and he had an office in Number 10. He would also play a prominent role in securing the I.M.F. loan under the Callaghan Government. Although a barrister by profession, he was well qualified for these jobs because he also had an outstanding career in business and finance. Jack Diamond, on the right of the party, played a leading

role in Hugh Gaitskell's leadership campaign in the 1950s, and became Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the Wilson Governments of 1964-70. He would become the Leader of the S.D.P. in the Lords following their breakaway from Labour. Harold Lever, Fred Lee and, of course, Jack Diamond all became Lords.

⁵⁵ Labour's Election News, July 1945.

⁵⁶ Jack Diamond E.A.

⁵⁷ Harry Thorneycroft E.A.

⁵⁸ Bill Griffiths E.A.

⁵⁹ Joe Henderson E.A.

⁶⁰ Harold Lever E.A.

⁶¹ K. Jefferys, The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics 1940-1945, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 196.

⁶² Craig, Election Manifestos, pp. 100-101.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁴ Hugh Delargy E.A.

⁶⁵ Craig, Election Manifestos, pp. 102-103.

⁶⁶ Lester Hutchinson E.A.

⁶⁷ Fred Lee E.A.

⁶⁸ Manchester Labour Election Addresses.

⁶⁹ S. Brooke, Labour's War. The Labour Party during the Second World War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 313. Schneer suggests that the playing down of socialist principles involved in nationalisation led to problems with the Left in later years, eventually giving rise to Bevan's left rebellion in 1951. J. Schneer, Labour's Conscience. The Labour Left 1945-51 (Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1985), p. 26.

⁷⁰ Daily Dispatch, 2 July, 1945.

⁷¹ Fred Lee E.A.

⁷² Idem.

⁷³ Harry Thorneycroft E.A.

⁷⁴ Harold Lever E.A.

⁷⁵ Idem.

- 76 Craig, Election Manifestos, p. 109.
- 77 Leonard Behrens E.A.
- 78 Craig, Election Manifestos, p. 109.
- 79 Ibid., p. 107.
- 80 Donald Moore E.A.
- 81 Phillip Oliver E.A. Oliver had first been a Liberal candidate in the 1920s.
- 82 Craig, Election Manifestos, p. 107.
- 83 Phillip Oliver E.A.
- 84 Donald Moore E.A.
- 85 Craig, Election Manifestos, p. 107.
- 86 Ibid., p. 110.
- 87 Leonard Behrens E.A.
- 88 Craig, Election Manifestos, p. 110.
- 89 Heric Kenyon E.A.
- 90 Evening Chronicle, 30 June, 1945.
- 91 Ibid., 15 June and 30 June, 1945.
- 92 R. Sibley, 'The swing to Labour during the Second World War: when and why?' in Labour History Review, 55,1, (1990), p. 28. E. Shaw, The Labour Party Since 1945 (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 1996), p. 18.
- 93 Evening Chronicle, 5 July, 1945.
- 94 Ibid., 4 July, 1945.
- 95 Sibley, 'The swing to Labour', in Labour History Review, 55, 1, (1990), p. 30
- 96 Idem.
- 97 S. Fielding, 'What did 'the people want'? The meaning of the 1945 General Election' in Historical Journal, 35,3, (1992), p. 632. Wright Robinson commented on Attlee's speech, made on the night following the 'Gestapo Speech' that "Attlee's dignified and effective reply was not surpassed by any speech in the election and settled the question in thousands of minds as to whether Attlee was fit to be a Prime Minister." He proceeded to cite the example of a Manchester banker who, following the speeches of the party leaders said "If Churchill wins the election it will be an international disaster. To hear

Attlee's speech after the one by Churchill was to be exalted. I shall vote Labour."

Robinson Diary, 28 July, 1945.

⁹⁸ Evening News, 25 June, 1945.

⁹⁹ It was perhaps significant that, for the first time, the national press was evenly split in their support for the Conservative and Labour parties. Although the Daily Express and Daily Telegraph remained strongly pro-Conservative, other former supporters of the Conservatives such as The Times had moved to the left and were now markedly anti-Churchill, and while not actually pro-Labour, they were not against them. Labour could count on the support of The Daily Herald and the high-selling Daily Mirror.

¹⁰⁰ Guardian, 21 June, 1945.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 14 June, 1945.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 25 June, 1945.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20 June, 1945. In a moment of classic irony, a Manchester cinema displayed a message imploring the audience to 'Give Mr Churchill Your Support' during a programme that contained the film version of 'Love on the Dole'!

¹⁰⁴ Evening News, 29 June, 1945.

¹⁰⁵ McCallum and Readman, British General Election, p. 150.

¹⁰⁶ City News, 22 June, 1945.

¹⁰⁷ Evening Chronicle, 28 June, 1945.

¹⁰⁸ Gorton Reporter, 29 June, 1945.

¹⁰⁹ City News, 29 June, 1945.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 May, 1945.

¹¹¹ McCallum and Readman, British General Election, p. 241.

¹¹² Evening News, 4 July, 1945.

¹¹³ Brooke, Labour's War, p. 322.

¹¹⁴ Gorton Reporter, 29 June, 1945.

¹¹⁵ Addison, Road to 1945, p. 266.

¹¹⁶ Interview with John Henry, Labour Party canvasser in 1945, 20 November, 1997.

¹¹⁷ Daily Dispatch, 27 June, 1945.

¹¹⁸ Guardian, 27 June, 1945.

- 119 Ibid., 26 June, 1945.
- 120 Ibid., 5 July, 1945.
- 121 Evening News, 4 July, 1945.
- 122 Fielding, 'What did 'the people' want?', in Historical Journal, 35,3, (1992), p. 632.
McCallum and Readman, General Election, p.153.
- 123 Evening News, 28 May, 1945.
- 124 Guardian, 25 June, 1945.
- 125 Fielding, 'What did 'the people' want?', in Historical Journal, 35, 3, (1992), p. 628.
- 126 D. Childs, Britain Since 1945. A Political History, (Routledge, 1992), p. 13.
- 127 There were a few 'rowdy' incidents: several Conservative meetings were disrupted, with one candidate's car almost being turned over; Phillip Smith had the tyres of his car deflated, car light bulbs and shades and a windscreen wiper stolen; Smith also had carbide bombs thrown at him at meetings in Clayton, although it was his unfortunate driver that ended up with a burnt ear.
- 128 Evening Chronicle, 29 June, 1945.
- 129 Guardian, 28 June, 1945.
- 130 Ibid., 27 June, 1945.
- 131 Wight Robinson Diary, 28 July, 1945.
- 132 Guardian, 21 June, 1945.
- 133 City News, 6 July, 1945.
- 134 H. Pelling, 'The 1945 General Election reconsidered', in Historical Journal, 23, 2, (1980), p. 440.
- 135 Hailsham, Sparrow's Flight, p. 233.
- 136 Daily Dispatch, 5 July, 1945.
- 137 Ibid., 3 July, 1945.
- 138 Evening Chronicle, 5 July, 1945.
- 139 Daily Telegraph, 6 July, 1945. Manchester Conservatives were not alone in their confidence. Other areas also gave similar reports to Central Office. Having consulted its Area Agents, Central Office expected to hold 337 seats. In their final prediction, compiled on the day after the votes had been cast, the Area Agents suggested that the

majority would be as high as 211, with their considered view now being that the party would definitely hold 346 seats, with 193 going to other parties and 71 still 'doubtful'.

J. Ramsden, The Age of Churchill and Eden 1940-1957 (Longman, 1995), p.85.

140 Guardian, 20 June, 1945.

141 City News, 6 July, 1945.

142 Robinson Diary, 28 July, 1945.

143 Guardian, 5 July, 1945.

144 Evening News, 4 July, 1945.

145 Ramsden, Age of Churchill and Eden, p. 55.

146 Labour's sweeping victory in Manchester was repeated in cities and towns throughout England, with one of the most marked features of the election being the Conservative defeat in London and the English boroughs and cities. It was in these areas rather than county seats where Labour's victory was secured. In the larger cities, Labour won all but one of six seats in Leeds; all but one of five at Bristol and all but one of four in Newcastle. The most striking Labour victory came in Birmingham, where in 1935 the old tradition of the Chamberlain family was strong enough to hold the city firm.

147 McCallum and Readman, British General Election, p. 264.

148 City News, 27 July, 1945.

149 Fielding, 'What did 'the people' want?', in Historical Journal, 35, 3, (1992), p. 637.

150 S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular politics in 1940s Britain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 64.

151 Idem.

152 Idem.

153 Interview with John Henry, 20 November, 1997.

154 The electorate had fallen from 46,000 to 28,000 and had become the smallest division in Manchester. This was largely due to a change in the rules concerning business voters, who could usually be relied upon to vote Conservative. Previously a person living in one constituency but owning a business in another was automatically granted a vote in each, but this was changed in 1945, with business owners now having to apply for their business vote. Most failed to do so; over 10,000 of the fall of 18,000 was due to the reduction of

the business vote from 13,000 (28 per cent of the vote) to just 3,000 (11per cent). In consequence Exchange, incorporating Cheetham Hill, was now a predominantly working-class area.

- 155 D. Butler, and D, Stokes, Political Change in Britain. The Evolution of Electoral Choice. (Macmillan, 1974), p. 57 and p. 175.
- 156 Fielding, 'What did 'the people' want?', in Historical Journal, 35,3, (1992), p. 625.
- 157 Tiratsoo et al, England Arise!, p. 67.
- 158 Fielding, 'What did 'the people' want?', in Historical Journal, 35, 3, (1992), p. 639.
- 159 Sibley, 'The swing to Labour', in Labour History Review, 55, 1, (1990), p. 28.
- 160 Interview with John Henry, 20 November, 1997.
- 161 Robinson Diary, 28 July, 1945.
- 162 Sibley, 'The swing to Labour', in Labour History Review, 55, 1, (1990), p. 29.
- 163 Gorton Reporter, 3 August, 1945.
- 164 Tiratsoo et al, England Arise!, p. 67.
- 165 Fielding, 'What did 'the people' want?', in Historical Journal, 35, 3, (1992), p. 639.
- 166 Evening Chronicle, 26 July, 1945.
- 167 Evening News, 27 July, 1945.
- 168 Ibid., 23 May, 1945. Gorton Reporter, 25 May, 1945.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to address two central questions. It has firstly addressed the War's impact on the nature of party politics in Manchester and, in particular, has asked whether the War instigated a local cross-party consensus on social and economic issues. It has secondly asked how one can explain Labour's progress from its subordinate position in 1939 to a position in which it won all but one seat in Manchester in 1945. What conclusions can be drawn?

The evidence presented in this thesis has demonstrated that the Addison model of wartime party politics is inapplicable at grass-roots level. At national level profound differences between the coalition partners remained and Addison and his acolytes have unquestionably exaggerated the degree of cross-party consensus in Westminster (a point Addison has subsequently acknowledged), but the divide between the parties at local level was greater still. A high level of continuity, rather than change, characterised Manchester politics during the Second World War, with party political tensions and party policies remaining fundamentally unchallenged by the unique pressures of total war. Despite almost six years of total war and five years of coalition government, by 1945 there was no policy consensus between the Manchester political parties, or even any discernible lessening of differences. Although public and press pressure necessitated a degree of compromise (however unsatisfactory) at Parliamentary level, parties at local level faced no such compunction. In consequence, throughout the duration of the War, Manchester Conservatives remained to the right, and Manchester Labour to the left, of their respective party leaderships.

The Manchester Conservative Party remained deeply reactionary throughout the War and maintained their commitment to neo-liberalism in social and economic issues. In essence, the political philosophy of Manchester Conservatism in 1945 was no different from that expounded in the 1935 General Election. Their irreducible reluctance to embrace the new policy agenda was evident on numerous occasions, but was perhaps best typified by their hostile reaction to the Beveridge Report. Although publicly supportive of the Government's approach to the Beveridge scheme, their private views were much

less favourable, as was demonstrated in the city council debate on the issue and at the Rusholme by-election the following year. The mindset of the Party simply could not accept such a seemingly revolutionary step. This reactionary tendency was re-emphasised by the Party's choice of Lord Mayor (1944) and by the nature of the Parliamentary candidates selected by the Party in 1945. Indeed, such was the extent of hostility within Manchester Conservatism towards major social and economic reform that a long-standing Conservative councillor defected to the Labour Party in late 1943.

Neo-liberalism continued to dominate policy thinking within the Party throughout the War. Manchester Conservatives remained overwhelmingly wedded to the tenets of financial orthodoxy and private enterprise. Economic controls were continually attacked by party representatives, who promised to eradicate them as speedily as possible, and the Government's 1944 White Paper on employment policy was strongly criticised on the grounds that it provided for too much state interference with the workings of private industry. In the 1945 General Election the Manchester Conservatives exceeded the party leadership and election manifesto in their enthusiastic support for private enterprise. On the critical issues of housing and employment, Manchester Conservative candidates continually emphasised the importance of private initiative and played down the role of local authorities and the state in their provision. *Laissez-faire* attitudes were clearly deep-rooted in the Party, and were only grudgingly modified in line with the national leadership.

In contrast, the Manchester Labour Party advocated a highly interventionist role for government in post-war Britain. The language of the two parties was not dissimilar (i.e. jobs and houses for all) but this masked fundamentally different views of how these goals were to be achieved. Whilst Manchester Conservatives were championing the merits of private enterprise, Manchester Labour was committed to widespread nationalisation (to a greater extent than the national leadership), the maintenance of wartime economic controls and the use of quasi-Keynesian demand management. With the adoption of such policies the whole economic life of the country could be 'planned' and full employment could be maintained. This approach to economic policy was the very antithesis of the Conservatives' and therefore shatters the view that the parties had

reached a consensus on economic management. One must look behind the parties' election rhetoric and the differences become real and substantial. On social policy the parties differed less, but the differences remained substantial enough to suggest that the appropriateness of the term consensus on social issues remains highly debatable. Labour advocated the full implementation of the Beveridge Plan, a state-salaried national health service and significantly increased powers for the state over land ownership. The Conservatives were committed to none of these. Had a Conservative government been returned in 1945 there would have been an enhanced welfare system, a national health service and probably some form of land policy but they would not have been as comprehensive as those created by Labour after 1945.

The War had no significant impact on the political differences dividing the Manchester Conservative and Labour parties, and at the 1945 General Election the parties presented fundamentally different visions of Britain's future to the electorate. But, one asks, how could such a cataclysmic event, affecting all of society, have so little impact on politics? In reality, the complete failure of a consensus to emerge in Manchester is of little surprise, for the basic nature of party politics remained untouched by the War. One must see local politics continuing in a vacuum, remaining unaffected by wider events, regardless of their severity. This becomes clear when one considers local party attitudes towards the Coalition itself. From the outbreak of war political co-operation at national level, from the electoral truce to the creation of a full-blown coalition government, was seen as a necessary, but strictly temporary, expedient by the Manchester parties. There was absolutely no consideration amongst the city's political class that the wartime Coalition could lead to a long-term realignment of British politics. This was simply not an option. A future return to 'normal' party politics was taken for granted and was regarded as desirable by the parties. In consequence the parties felt little pressure to amend their customary positions and all three major parties continued to play the party political game. Within days of the declaration of war, the Manchester Labour and Liberal parties were stressing the need to maintain organisational structures and continue party meetings whilst the Conservatives, slightly later, were already bracing themselves for the political battle to come when hostilities ceased. This pattern was continuous throughout

the War. Any political co-operation with the Conservative Party provoked howls of discontent from sections of the Manchester Labour Party; Labour continued to put out party propaganda with the aim of attracting new members and saw visits to the city by prominent Labour ministers (such as that by Herbert Morrison) as primarily party, rather than government, missions, and meetings of the City Labour Party and other prominent party groupings, such as the Labour Women's Advisory Council continued on a regular basis. Manchester Labour were clearly still acting as a single and distinctly separate political entity. This continuing political activity is often contrasted with the supposed lethargy of the Conservative Party. However the evidence of Manchester suggests that it is wrong to argue, as have Ramsden and Addison, that the Conservatives were politically quiescent during the War. Although some local Conservative wished to see the Coalition continue into the first difficult years of peace, they were unrepresentative of the Party as a whole. Although much of the Manchester Conservatives' machinery was closed down, this did not signal a diminution of their determination to pursue party interests. On the contrary, local Conservatives were firmly resolved to maintaining their pre-eminent party position in the city throughout the War. This was most clearly evident in their strident battles with Labour over the allocation of Chairmanships and Deputy-Chairmanships in 1940 and 1941, and later with the appointment of magistrates. Party advantage in the city was to be preserved, whatever the situation in Westminster. To claim that the Conservatives patriotically set aside party loyalties and interests for the good of the nation whilst Labour feverishly pursued their own political agenda is clearly fallacious.

With the basis of party politics surviving unchallenged by the War, public pressure for parties to present a united front at national level inevitably had little effect on inter-party relations in the city, and Manchester politics remained resiliently partisan throughout the War. Even at times of the greatest national peril, including the summer/autumn of 1940, inter-party conflict was unremitting and often bitter. Some local observers felt that the War had actually worsened relations, perhaps evidence of the parties determination to maintain their separate identities. Although early wartime by-elections in the city appeared models of political co-operation, with the three major parties standing firmly behind the electoral truce, they presented a misleading picture.

Fierce city council arguments, particularly those over the enlargement of the Emergency Committee (1940), the chairmanships' of council committees (1940 & 1941), the implementation of the Beveridge Report and the honouring of Winston Churchill (both 1943), allied with public statements made by all three parties on a variety of issues demonstrated the real intensity of local political conflict.

In seeing the electoral truce and the Coalition as strictly temporary measures, the possibility of a local consensus emerging was distinctly limited from the outbreak of the War, for the Manchester political parties could cling to their independence and beliefs in the expectation that 'normal' politics would resume. There was therefore no pressure on the parties to co-operate and reach a shared vision of the future. Crucially, other factors reduced the possibility of consensus still further, with the two main parties having their own (differing) reasons for defending their political beliefs.

It is easy to be scathingly critical of the Manchester Conservative Party for failing to rethink its political philosophy. Could not the Party see that in remaining committed to its pre-war beliefs they were heading towards electoral disaster, as demonstrated by all opinion poll and by-election evidence? This is, of course, an entirely justifiable line of argument but is reached with the benefit of hindsight. In reality, the reluctance of the Conservatives to reconsider its policies was entirely understandable. The inter-war years had proved a remarkably successful period for Conservatism, with the Party dominating Manchester politics. Throughout the period they were the largest single party on the City Council and on two brief occasions enjoyed an overall majority whilst, in terms of Parliamentary representation, the Conservatives had won 58 per cent of the Parliamentary seats between 1918-39 (Labour won only 32 per cent). In the two most recent general elections, the Conservatives had won a staggering sixteen out of twenty seats. They enjoyed overwhelming support amongst the middle-class following the demise of Liberalism and also won a substantial proportion of the working-class vote. Hulme, one of the city's poorest constituencies, only once failed to return the Conservatives in the inter-war period. With such an impressive record behind them, it is of little surprise that the Manchester Conservatives felt no need to amend a highly successful formula amidst the unique circumstances of total war. Evidence pointing towards electoral defeat was

easy to dismiss. Opinion polls were in their infancy and were ignored by all political parties and commentators, whilst by-elections were held on antiquated electoral registers and could be regarded as protest votes rather than as signposts of longer-term electoral intentions. The wartime political mood was misread by the vast majority of observers; even on the eve of the 1945 General Election, politicians (of all parties) and political observers overwhelmingly expected a Conservative victory.

To expect the Conservatives to have launched a radical change of policy in the middle of the War is therefore entirely unrealistic. Political history, even if one takes only the period since the War, demonstrates that only electoral disasters prompt such major self-examinations, as witnessed by the Conservatives after 1945, by Labour after 1983 and by the Conservatives again after 1997.

At national level, participation in the Coalition presented the Labour Party with serious difficulties. Firstly, having secured key positions in the Government the party rank-and-file expected the leadership to make concrete gains in line with party policy, but coalitions necessitate compromise and Labour was never going to achieve enough to satisfy activists. Such expectations limited the leadership's room for manoeuvre, for party leaders had to remain in touch with grass-roots opinion. Secondly, and most importantly, by participating in the Coalition Labour was inevitably associating itself with a government that became increasingly unpopular as the War progressed. Although, as the 1945 Election demonstrated, it was the Conservative Party rather than the Government as a whole that was held responsible for the failure to implement measures of reconstruction, this could not be known with any certainty earlier in the War. In such circumstances, exacerbated by the Party's inability to contest by-elections against the Conservatives, Labour faced a threat posed by the Communists and later by Common Wealth. It is easy to dismiss, with hindsight, the rise of the Communist Party and the emergence of Common Wealth as purely wartime phenomena but to contemporaries in the Labour Party they represented a real threat. The massive tide of support for the Soviet Union dramatically increased Communist membership with the Party holding positions of influence throughout Manchester's factories and workshops, whilst Common Wealth won a number of by-elections, performed well in many others and were regarded

by the Manchester press as having a highly promising future. In such a climate it would have been very surprising had Manchester Labour not been seriously concerned for, although unlikely to supplant Labour as the main party of the Left, the Communists and Common Wealth could cause a serious split in the Left vote once full-scale electoral politics resumed. It was this scenario that prompted the Manchester Labour Party to oppose any dilution of party policy - an action which, it believed, would only increase the attraction of other socialist alternatives. The Party was determined to remain a distinct political entity, if only to protect its hold on its core support. This was most clearly seen with the furore over the Education Act, which provoked real disquiet within Manchester Labour for it involved considerable compromise with established party education policy. The determination to maintain its independence increased as the War progressed and the popularity of the Government waned. This was emphasised by the 1944 resolution calling on the national leadership to withdraw the Party from the Coalition and by the selection, in 1945, of the most left-wing panel of candidates ever selected by Manchester Labour.

Even had Labour faced no competition for its support, its view of the Coalition as a strictly temporary expedient made it unlikely that the Party would have found common ground with the Conservatives. However, the threat provided by other leftist parties ensured that Manchester Labour was in no mood for compromise and reaching a consensus.

The lack of consensus between Manchester political parties can therefore be attributed to two major factors. Firstly the unchanging nature of party politics in the city, with the parties seeing the Coalition as purely temporary, removed any pressure for the parties to engage in detailed co-operation. Instead they could look forward confidently to a return to 'normal' politics in a few years' time. Secondly, each party had its own reasons for remaining committed to its pre-war policies. The Conservatives saw no reason to change a highly successful formula, whilst Labour faced the threat of losing support to other socialist alternatives. The combination of these factors eliminated any possibility of a consensus emerging.

The Popular Political Mood and the Rise of Labour.

The second strand of this thesis has analysed popular political views in Manchester, and has asked how one can chart and explain the movements in public opinion leading to the Labour Party's landslide victory at the 1945 General Election. The conventional view of Labour's electoral success suggests that the Party came to power on the crest of a radical population and with the goodwill of the broad cross-section of the electorate - a popular mood that had existed from 1940 onwards. This thesis has challenged many of the perceptions still surrounding the wartime popular political mood, and a number of conclusions can now be asserted. Firstly, this thesis has dismissed Addison's contention that Labour's 1945 success was inevitable from the summer of 1940, supporting instead the Jefferys/Lowe hypothesis that 1943 was the critical turning point in popular political views. The Allied war effort can be divided into two distinct phases: a long period of reverses with only occasional successes until the victories at El Alamein, Guadalcanal and Stalingrad in late 1942/early 1943, followed by a steady march towards final victory marred only by rare setbacks (such as Arnhem and the Ardennes). Wartime public attitudes towards the issues of social and economic reconstruction and politics can be divided into the same two time-phases. This suggests an incontrovertible (and perhaps unsurprising) relationship between the Allies' military progress and public attitudes towards post-war politics and policies. M.I.C. public opinion reports, combined with newspaper commentaries, unquestionably demonstrate that the early years of the War generated widespread public interest in the shape of post-war Britain. Mancunians, both civilian and in uniform, did not see themselves as fighting solely to sustain the *status quo*. However, throughout the first phase of the War, such impulses were vague and unfocused; certain policy areas, particularly housing, employment and education were frequently noted in public opinion surveys, and it was reported that many expected the state to play a greater role in post-war years, but popular post-war aspirations largely remained no more specific than the building of a 'better Britain'. Such aspirations were accompanied by a considerable degree of cynicism, perhaps greatest among servicemen. The broken promises of the last war were recalled and many interpreted talk of reform as

a carrot with which the Government sought to extract maximum effort out of the population, and which would be conveniently forgotten once the War was won.

Crucially, throughout the first phase of the War such cynicism was subjugated to an overwhelming desire to 'win the War first', with M.I.C. files revealing remarkably little public pressure for evidence of the Government's sincerity in the form of tangible measures of reconstruction. Although the Guardian and Evening News both pressed for action, they were unrepresentative of the city's mood, with opinion surveys highlighting the extent of popular support for Churchill's 'reconstruction later' approach. With the military situation remaining perilous throughout the period, the public evidently did not wish to see high-level discussion of social reform dominate war-matters.

Addison, Adelman and Morgan have argued that public interest in social reform quickly translated itself into support for the Labour Party (or, at least, Labour 'substitutes'). Labour's 1945 victory, Addison suggests, was inevitable from the summer of 1940 onwards; indeed, he argues, such was the strength of left-wing fervour between 1940-42 that had an election been held in this period, Labour would have won a bigger majority than they achieved in 1945. The evidence of Manchester fatally undermines this contention. Throughout this phase of the War, Mancunians' willingness to put aside social reforms until later was matched by a correspondingly low level of interest in politics. With the War going badly party political activity and conflict, whilst satisfying hardened activists, held no attraction for the vast majority of local people, who viewed it as an unwelcome and unnecessary distraction. This apolitical sentiment was expressed in the city on a number of occasions; the Clayton Labour Party admitted in 1940 that there was no public desire for a general election to be held, the M.I.C. made exactly the same finding in the summer of 1942 and the Clayton by-election of late 1942 witnessed a turnout of only 20 per cent. In this apolitical climate public interest in social reform was supra-party political. The public did not, at this stage, identify any political party with future social reform and during this period Labour were widely perceived to be exploiting the reconstruction issue for party advantage at a time of national crisis, creating resentment and anti-Labour sentiment outside its core support. Addison's hypothesis is

unsustainable; Labour's election victory was by no means assured by the end of 1942, let alone in the summer of 1940.

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the publication of the Beveridge Report in December 1942, coinciding with a decisive upturn in the Allies' military fortunes, was the pivotal event in changing public attitudes towards social reconstruction and politics. In the months following the Report's publication Mancunians steadily abandoned their acceptance of the Government's cautious approach to social reconstruction as the generalised desire for a 'better post-war Britain' was crystallised into a massive public clamour, across socio-economic boundaries and political loyalties, for the full and immediate implementation of the Beveridge Report. Throughout 1943, press commentaries and M.I.C. public opinion reports consistently recorded widespread demands for Government action to be taken without delay. The Government's prevarication, inevitable given the intractable differences between the major parties, consequently provoked enormous disillusionment amongst the general public. The latent cynicism of earlier years, repressed then by the seriousness of the military situation, erupted on to the political scene. For the remainder of the War, with the military position improving steadily, the popular mood was one of frustration, cynicism and anger at the lack of visible progress across the whole spectrum of reconstruction. This mood, if anything, intensified in 1944 as the end of the War grew closer and even the publication of policy White Papers, notably that dealing with post-war employment policy, met with little positive response from the public. By that stage, the level of cynicism was such that few believed Government pronouncements on post-war reconstruction. Inevitably, the changed popular mood had political ramifications. Throughout this second phase of the War an increasing political awareness developed in the city, with 1943 witnessing the first wartime increase in Labour Party membership figures and the Rusholme by-election of mid-1944 producing a considerably higher turnout than the Clayton by-election of late 1942, despite the electoral register being almost two years older. Popular perceptions of the parties were now crucial. Labour were seen as committed to the Beveridge Report and other reconstruction measures, whilst the Conservatives were perceived as hostile to Beveridge and the entire concept of reconstruction. It was this difference in the popular

images of the parties that determined the outcome of the 1945 General Election. Throughout the remainder of the War it was the Conservative Party, not the Government as a whole, that bore the brunt of public frustration and cynicism. The Party fared badly in by-elections and opinion polls during 1943 whilst, in 1944, the same sources of evidence demonstrated that the strong mood of anti-Conservatism had strengthened further. By the end of that year, electoral defeat for the Conservatives was inevitable.

This thesis has not only challenged the conventional view of the timing of the 'swing to the left', but also the extent and depth of support for the Labour Party it produced. The study of Manchester has provided strong evidence to suggest that the popular image of Labour winning the 1945 election on the back of massive public support and goodwill is highly misleading. In reality, we can conclude, Labour owed their victory not to a broad cross-class support, but to an unprecedentedly high level of support amongst the working-class combined with the votes of younger members of the middle-class. In short, support for Labour came from specific social groupings, with the electorate as a whole riven along lines of social class. The importance of the working-class vote has been identified by Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, and is supported by the 1945 election statistics in Manchester. In 1945, Labour acquired the support of 65.21 per cent of the working-class vote in Manchester, against 51.25 per cent in 1935. In the corresponding period the Conservative working-class vote fell by a massive 42 per cent. In contrast, pre-war middle-class Conservative voters proved totally impenetrable to Labour. With Labour increasing its grip on the working-class and the Conservatives maintaining theirs on their core support, the 1945 election was the most class-polarised in history. Class polarisation, of course, had begun in the inter-war period but the 1945 election result demonstrated that it had been considerably intensified by the War. How can this be explained? The idea of wartime national unity is well-worn and remains an evocative image of the Second World War; the belief that in times of grave crisis people forgot their differences and 'all pulled together' is, undeniably, an appealing one, but the evidence of Manchester suggests that revisionist historians, most notably Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, are correct to play down the extent to which British society united. Contrary to contemporary (and continuing) myths, far from bringing

people closer together, unique phenomena such as rationing and the evacuation of school children served only to intensify existing social divisions. Amongst the working-class existed a widespread suspicion that they were shouldering disproportionate levels of hardship and sacrifice whilst those higher up the social ladder were living much as they had in peacetime. Amongst the middle-class, the appalling discoveries made during the evacuation of children in 1939, far from provoking sympathy and a determination to improve social conditions, merely confirmed and strengthened their existing (unfavourable) prejudices concerning their poorer neighbours. These tensions existed throughout the period of greatest peril but, if anything, increased as the military position improved and war-weariness became a greater factor. The continuing class tensions intensified working and middle-class identification with 'their' parties, a point borne out by the membership figures of the Manchester Labour Party. In middle-class areas membership of the Labour Party decreased continuously throughout the War, but increased considerably in working-class areas from 1942 onwards. Over the six years of war, middle-class Labour membership fell by over 56 per cent. As a proportion of overall Manchester membership, middle-class constituencies provided almost half the total figure in 1939, but under 30 per cent in 1945. Only amongst young first-time voters, who were the most fervent supporters of major social and economic change (and invariably members of the armed forces) did Labour increase its middle-class support.

With the population so divided, it is imperative not to exaggerate the extent and depth of support for Labour. In reality, the Labour Party received a lower percentage share of the vote in Manchester than the Conservatives achieved ten years previously. In total, only 37 per cent of all those eligible to vote did so for Labour - hardly constituting an overwhelming endorsement of the Party. Labour's landslide performance, in terms of seats, bore no resemblance to the actual number of votes cast. This leads us to a further conclusion surrounding the popular wartime political mood. Although the image of 1945, particularly amongst those on the left, remains one of immense enthusiasm for Labour's radical programme, more recent studies such as England Arise! and Fielding's own surveys of popular political opinion have done much to shatter this myth. The evidence

presented throughout this dissertation supports their argument that, even amongst those who voted for Labour, the Party did not inspire great enthusiasm. In reality Labour's electoral success owed more to the unpopularity of the Conservative Party than to any great socialist fervour. Following their negative stance towards the Beveridge Report, the Conservative Party became increasingly disliked and distrusted throughout the country, a point borne out by a survey of newspaper commentaries and quantitatively in the shape of by-election results (including Rusholme). The Party was widely (and correctly) perceived as reactionary and hostile to nostrums of social and economic change, a disastrous image to present to the electorate at this time. In such a climate Labour could hardly fail to prosper but, crucially, the Party was attracting support for negative, not positive, reasons. The attitude of the press is revealing on this point. By-election results in 1943 and 1944 were commonly regarded as anti-Conservative statements, rather than as evidence of popular support for the Labour-style policies of independent candidates. Furthermore, Labour struggled to inspire favourable comment. The Manchester press were scathing about the Party's 1943 Conference and was little more enamoured with the Party in 1944. The 1945 General Election also suggested that positive support for Labour was distinctly limited. The main policy focus of the Labour manifesto, the nationalisation of essential industries and of the transport system, was widely ignored and even less understood (even by activists). At best people voted Labour through a very vague, general identification with the Party, as a post-election poll demonstrated. However, most first-time Labour voters voted for the Party as the only means of keeping the Conservatives out of power. The constant message of the Manchester press throughout the campaign was the need to defeat the Conservative Party, not to the need to elect a Labour government and the ultimate result was, again, interpreted as a vote against the Conservatives. Anti-Conservatism was the main driving force behind the 1945 election result with Labour winning, as Fielding, Tiratsoo and Thompson have argued, simply because they were less unpopular.

This study of popular political moods in Manchester during the Second World War has supported many revisionist arguments. It has dismissed the argument that Labour's electoral victory was inevitable from 1940 onwards and has demonstrated that

the extent and depth of support for Labour has been too readily exaggerated. As the evidence of Manchester can reliably be transposed on to other urban electorates, it is clear that many powerful perceptions still surrounding the 1945 General Election are misleading and insupportable.

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