

The Forgotten Revisionist: Douglas Jay and Britain's Transition to Affluence, 1951-1964

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In the aftermath of the Labour's 1959 general election defeat, Douglas Jay, one of its frontbench spokesmen, generated a furore by suggesting, in an article in *Forward*, that the party should rethink its nationalization proposals, and should consider changing the party name to 'Labour and Radical' or 'Labour and Reform'.¹ Responding to his critics in a further article the following month, he emphasized that he was by no means opposed to further public ownership, but that this should not take the form of the extension of public monopoly into manufacturing industry and the distributive trades. Rather, he argued, in a world of full employment and long-run capital gains, expanding ownership of industrial shares and other property by the community could supply the revenue for better pensions and public services without high rates of personal taxation. He declared: 'This is a form of socialism which the public will both understand and desire, in the more affluent society into which we are now moving – a fairer sharing of the nation's growing wealth at home and abroad.'²

Jay's explicit attempts to evolve a socialist response to the phenomenon of affluence marked him out as a key figure in Labour revisionism, albeit one whose contributions during the 'thirteen years of Tory misrule' have largely been forgotten. Admittedly, he is often mentioned in the same breath as Hugh Gaitskell, Tony Crosland and Evan Durbin, the group often being credited with providing (posthumously, in Durbin's case) an important intellectual influence on the party in between 1951 and 1964.³ Jay is also invoked by supporters of Tony Blair as one of the 'first voices of modernizing dissent' within the Labour Party.⁴ Yet, unlike his fellow revisionists, Jay has received little serious scholarly attention – perhaps partly because he did not have the glamorizing advantage of an early death! However, a detailed examination of his thinking during the long years of opposition suggests important lessons about Labour's ideological adjustment from the era of rationing to that of rock and roll.

This chapter will draw on a range of Jay's speeches and writings in order to test the powerful argument that during these years Labour failed to come to terms with working-class affluence. According to Lawrence Black, the consumerist values of the 'affluent society' were seen as overwhelmingly negative by socialists, whom, he argues, 'can be seen to have to a large extent brought upon themselves their alienation from popular affluence.'⁵ This argument – essentially that Labour was a victim of its own cultural snobbery – still has a strong political relevance today.

Philip Gould (Tony Blair's pollster) has used it to support New Labour's modernizing agenda. In contrast to the Blair years, he suggests, in the 1951-64 era and beyond Labour ignored and betrayed 'the hard-working majority as they moved from austerity to aspiration and demanded a new politics to match their new ambition.'⁶ Was this true in Jay's case? It is certainly true that Jay had important doubts about affluence (although that was not a term he used until after the publication of J.K. Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* in 1958). Yet it would be wrong to suggest that these doubts were wholly spurious, or that they were exclusively the product of cultural or moral panic. Moreover, his desire to widen Labour's appeal was based on an acknowledgement that 'The better-off wage earners and numerous salary-earners are tending to regard the Labour Party as associated with a class to which they themselves don't belong.'⁷ All the same, his brand of revisionism was one from which advocates of New Labour will be able to draw only limited comfort in the search for respectable Old Labour lineage for their own ideas.

The life of Douglas Jay

Douglas Jay was born on 23 March 1907. He was educated at Winchester College. In 1926, the year he went up to New College, Oxford to read Greats, the long miners' strike 'aroused my political feelings and left me by the autumn an ardently convinced supporter of the Labour Movement.' In October 1929 he joined *The Times*. Concurrently, he began to study economics, and in 1930 was elected a fellow of All Souls, Oxford. In 1933, he joined *the Economist*.⁸ He was attracted by Hugh Gaitskell's ideas on the inefficiency and injustice of the financial system, and in particular by his contribution to G.D.H. Cole's edited collection *What Everybody Wants to Know About Money* (1933).⁹ The contacts with Gaitskell that followed helped bring Jay into the Labour movement in an active role, as did the patronage of Hugh Dalton.¹⁰

In January 1937, Jay started work as City editor of the *Daily Herald*. His book *The Socialist Case* was published later the same year, and was generally well received, albeit with some important reservations from fellow socialists. It contained, however, a remark which would later be used as a stick to beat him: 'in the case of nutrition and health, just as in the case of education, the gentleman in Whitehall really does know better what is good for people than the people know themselves.'¹¹ After the outbreak of war in 1939, Jay remained at the *Herald* until he was recruited into the Ministry of Supply in December 1940. In September 1943 he became personal assistant to Dalton, now President of the Board of Trade. After Labour's 1945 election victory he became personal assistant and adviser on economic policy to Clement Attlee. In July 1946 he was elected MP for Battersea North. In October 1947, he became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Dalton as Chancellor. Shortly after Dalton resigned the following month, Jay was appointed to the new post of Economic Secretary to the Treasury. He became Financial Secretary to the Treasury after the election of February 1950, and after Labour's 1951 defeat he became a front bench opposition spokesman.

During the ‘thirteen years of Tory misrule’, along with Roy Jenkins, he acquired a generally undeserved reputation in left-wing Labour circles as one of the ‘implacable extremists’ in Hugh Gaitskell’s coterie.¹² (Gaitskell became the leader of the Labour Party in 1955). This was due in part to his 1959 *Forward* article, but also to his role as a founder member of the anti-Tribunite Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS). After Labour’s 1964 election victory, Harold Wilson appointed Jay President of the Board of Trade. In August 1967 he was dismissed, in part because of his opposition to British membership of the EEC. He took a prominent role in the ‘No’ campaign during the referendum of 1975, and remained an MP until 1983. He entered the House of Lords in 1987, and died on 6 March 1996.

Jay’s significance

The episode of the *Forward* article aside, Jay’s career in opposition in the 1951-64 era has received virtually no attention – in marked contrast to the huge interest in Crosland, who, if a more fertile thinker, was a more negligible political figure at the time, and who was out of parliament between 1955 and 1959. (As Kevin Jefferys has written, Crosland’s *The Future of Socialism*, after its publication in 1956, was in many respects ‘a slow burner, its influence growing steadily over the course of the next decade. What it did not do ... was to transform Crosland’s career overnight.’)¹³ Admittedly, Jay was never a serious candidate for the leadership, or even for the great offices of state. In 1950, Attlee and Dalton had agreed that he would not be suitable as a replacement for Cripps as Chancellor, for, ‘though very able, [he] had not always good judgement, and wasn’t very personable.’¹⁴ In the words of the financial journalist Nicholas Davenport, Jay was ‘an extraordinary mixture of serious political thinker and economist, and a frivolous-minded eccentric.’ (He had a pathological hatred of draughts, and was so suspicious of foreign food that he took packets of cereal abroad for breakfast.)¹⁵ Jay was close to Gaitskell personally – but not to all of the Gaitskellites (Bill Rodgers, although respecting his ‘obvious cleverness’, thought him ‘mean, anti-semitic and an intellectual snob’).¹⁶ Naturally enough, he did not much endear himself to the left. According to Richard Crossman, ‘Douglas Jay regards himself as a middle-of-the-road man but he talks to me with pained surprise about the undemocratic character of the “party within the party” and said what a pity it was that Nye [Bevan] was not on the Parliamentary Committee. ... Like Christopher Mayhew, Hugh Gaitskell and a good many others, Douglas has had no experience of the backbenches and has grown accustomed to being part of the Government or official Opposition machine, with plenty of room for self-expression. To him it seems real wickedness that other people should set themselves up to challenge the policies he has worked out.’¹⁷

Unlike *The Socialist Case*, his 1962 book *Socialism in the New Society* has not generally been considered a seminal text. Nevertheless, without exaggerating either the originality of his thinking or his centrality to events, Jay’s influence during the opposition was by no means negligible. His impact on policy could be decisive. For example, in 1955, the economist Nicholas Kaldor published a proposal for an

expenditure tax, an issue that provoked ‘violent disagreement’ within Labour’s working party on taxation. One of the group, David Worswick, recalled that:

the decisive moment came when Douglas Jay made a powerful statement to the effect that ordinary people liked to have their tax payments behind them when they thought of spending, not still ahead of them. When an MP invokes the British working man or the people, the professional economist has no comeback, or did not in those days before polls on everything. My recollection is that after Jay’s powerful intervention we might as well all go home.¹⁸

Moreover, in the early fifties at least, Jay’s economic views were not those of a maverick, but were in line with mainstream Labour opinion – and, to a limited and temporary degree, his expression of them helped promote party unity. In a Fabian lecture given in November 1952, he advocated greater public ownership in the chemicals and engineering industries, and heavier industrial investment, twinned with continued physical controls over the economy, as a means of bridging the dollar gap.¹⁹ Richard Crossman noted: ‘Douglas Jay and Harold Wilson really want the same economic policy’; as did Gaitskell.²⁰ As a consequence, Jay received overtures from Wilson and from *Tribune*.²¹ In addition to this influence within the party, his position as a part-time leader writer on the *Daily Herald* gave him an enviable direct link to the voters.

From austerity to affluence

The question of consumption lay at the heart of Jay’s economic vision. He argued in 1962 that ‘one of the fundamental flaws in the system of unregulated exchange is the persistent under-valuation of the need of the poorer consumer. Owing to this, the method of free pricing (*laissez-faire* in the consumer markets) often works badly in allocating resources according to needs. But in so far as initial incomes are redistributed by the social democratic States according to principles of social justice, the price process ... becomes at least a rather better though still imperfect guide to real needs.’²² Since the 1930s, Jay had made this point consistently.²³ What had varied was the degree to which he felt it necessary for the government to intervene directly in the workings of the price system.

In the 1930s, as I have shown elsewhere, Jay was a rare Labour planning-sceptic. However, the experience of WWII and the immediate post-war era converted him to the virtues of planning.²⁴ As he put it in an election speech in 1950:

The unemployment, high prices, poverty, hunger and deplorable housing conditions to be found in the unplanned countries in Europe today are ... largely the consequences of deliberate policy. It is, of course, delightfully easy to throw away controls. It is indeed a very pleasant surrender to mental cowardice and administrative incompetence. How easy to deprive the mass of the people of anything but low wages or a miserable unemployment dole,

let prices raise to scarcity heights, and then brutally announce that one is “de-rationing” the necessities of life and restoring a “free economy”.²⁵

Ilaria Favretto has written of the ‘hostility to planning displayed by centre-right revisionists’ in the 1952-64 period.²⁶ But Jay, for one, at this time retained a firm belief in economic planning based partly on physical controls.²⁷

Nevertheless, he did adapt his thinking in response to the improved economic conditions that contributed to affluence. During the initial period of opposition, his emphasis remained strongly Crippsian. He repeatedly praised, in fulsome terms, Cripps’s record as Chancellor: ‘how right he was; and how small-minded and myopic his critics look today.’²⁸ Moreover, he described the objective of long-term economic planning as being to secure Britain’s economic survival – a reflection of the priorities of the years when he himself had been a Treasury minister under Cripps.²⁹ By 1958, though, the world dollar shortage, which Jay had believed would probably be a lifetime problem, had turned into a dollar glut.³⁰ At the same time, the governments of Churchill, Eden, and Macmillan demonstrated that the Conservatives were able to maintain full employment and rising real incomes, which, in turn, were translated into dramatically increased spending on consumption. As austerity receded, it became politically necessary for Jay and his colleagues to find grounds for attacking the Tories other than the somewhat implausible one that total economic catastrophe was imminent (the latter view having also been held by many on the left of the party).

This helps explain Jay’s criticisms of decontrol and ‘Conservative freedom’ – criticisms which, it should be emphasized, were by no means wholly, or even mainly, a result of hostility to the cultural trappings of affluence. Jay believed – as did many other Labour thinkers – that decontrol was likely to jeopardize the possibility of *higher* national income. He believed that the result of reducing restrictions on consumption, via the relaxation of import controls, was recurrent balance of payment problems, which the government then solved by curtailing economic activity. This was the classic pattern of ‘stop-go’: ‘As soon as things get better, people want to relax, and as soon as they relax, things get worse.’³¹ It could, moreover, be manipulated for electoral reasons: ‘the economy is held stagnant for three years, so that a six months’ spurt may be engineered just before the next general election.’³²

In fact, this view, that growth in Britain was slow because it was peculiarly unstable, although widespread, was open to doubt even at the time.³³ But concerns about British economic performance were accentuated in many people’s minds by the apparently impressive growth rate of the Soviet Union. In April 1956, Jay – who had visited the USSR the previous year – argued as follows:

Just because we rightly detest Russian methods, and rightly suspect her statistics, we should be extremely foolish to underrate her economic challenge. The evidence strongly suggests that Russian production is increasing at about 10 per cent. a year. ... At that rate, the real standard of living in Russia may equal ours in perhaps fifteen years, and even that of North America in a period probably twice as long.³⁴

With the benefit of hindsight, such claims may appear almost wildly improbable. But, as Jim Tomlinson has noted, other right-wing Labour figures expressed similar views.³⁵ (Such views were, of course, also common on the left of the party, which implies that on some substantive issues the Bevanites were often far closer to the Gaitskellites than many historical accounts suggest.)³⁶ Nor was the anxiety merely an economic one: if the Soviets could outpace the democracies in terms of growth, so much greater would be the attraction of communism in the ‘uncommitted’ areas of the world.³⁷ Therefore, it could be argued, by distributing the fruits of economic progress to the voters too freely, the Conservatives were not only risking future performance, but, in so doing, were damaging the West’s prospects in the Cold War struggle of ‘competitive coexistence’. The doubts of Jay and others about Tory economic policies were not, then, caused purely by cultural snobbery about the fruits of affluence, but were heightened by fears about relative British decline and the impact that this might have on East-West conflict.³⁸

Moreover, Cold War anxieties were a major contribution to the success in America of Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*. This was the book that crystallized the concept of affluence for many in Britain, including Jay, who had previously not had a specific word to describe the phenomenon with which they were confronted. As Galbraith recalled, the questioning and anxiety that followed the launch of the first Sputnik in October 1957 made him certain that his attack on affluence would be heard: it now appeared that the USSR was able to make a much more purposeful use than the USA of a much less productive economy.³⁹ In Britain, where the element of hurt pride was perhaps less, reaction to the Sputnik itself was not quite so hysterical as in America. In Labour circles, at least, it did not provoke a frenzied desire to ‘catch-up’. Jay subsequently suggested that the Russians should have spent the money on housing rather than on photographing the other side of the moon.⁴⁰ But Galbraith’s book nevertheless struck a chord with British socialists. Jay found it ‘powerful and eloquent’: ‘His [i.e. Galbraith’s] conclusion – and no intelligent person can deny it, is that the modern community ought to expand greatly its allocation of resources to public services – education above all – and consequently take a more adequate share of the national income through the budget and tax systems.’⁴¹ He reiterated the point in November 1959: ‘We [the Labour Party] stand, in an increasingly affluent society, for the collective devotion of a far greater part of our national resources to those services which must be provided by public effort, and the electorate want.’⁴² This was a logic that Jay would follow in *Socialism in the New Society*.

New policies for the age of affluence

Before he began to write that book, and even before the 1959 election defeat, Jay attempted to devise new policies appropriate for the post-Attlee era. He developed a proposal for small savers to be enabled to invest small amounts in a wide spread of shares through the Post Office Savings Bank and the Trustee Savings Bank. (Nicholas Davenport believed that Jay had got the idea from his own proposal for a State Participation Unit Trust (SPUT).)⁴³ The economic justification for such a

scheme, he suggested, was that ‘there is no reason or justice in the benefits of capital appreciation or rising income being confined to the present charmed circle of about 1,500,000 individuals who own equity shares.’ Moreover, in political terms, because of the growth of private unit trusts, ‘we are faced with a situation in which a movement shown by American experience to be inevitable, will, unless, we act, be distorted into a politically successful attempt to make an increasing section of wage-earners and salary-earners Tory-minded.’⁴⁴ Jay revived the idea, which he originally proposed to Labour’s finance and economic policy committee in January 1959, in articles in 1962-3.⁴⁵ Nothing came of the plan when Labour came to power; but the episode demonstrates that Jay was willing to tackle the political challenge of affluence, even if not all his colleagues had the same degree of enthusiasm.

Much more controversial, of course, was the issue of public ownership, the case for which he consistently emphasized. ‘The truth is that private “enterprise” can’t be justified at all, unless there is free *competition*’, he argued in 1957. ‘If ... firms and the Government simply ignore the Monopoly Commission’s Reports, yet another unanswerable case for public ownership will have been proved.’⁴⁶ However, in line with the principle of ‘competitive socialism’, which he had been advocating since at least 1950, he argued for state participation in private industry through the ownership of ordinary shares rather than the extension of public monopoly.⁴⁷ This was to a substantial degree in line with official Labour Party policy statements, and was a theme that he would follow up in the famous *Forward* article.⁴⁸

In his memoirs Jay argued, justifiably, that the idea that the article had its origins in a Gaitskellite conspiracy, launched within hours of the election defeat, to remove public ownership from Labour’s future programme, sever the link with the unions, and alter the wording of Clause 4 of the party’s constitution, was a myth. He conceded, however, that he had made a mistake in putting his name to the piece, ‘because my close association with Gaitskell led people to believe he had some responsibility for it’.⁴⁹ But even if criticisms of the article were exaggerated, it is easy to see why its hard-hitting phrases caused upset:

The better-off wage earners and numerous salary-earners are tending to regard the Labour Party as associated with a class to which they themselves don’t belong.

Few of them – least of all the women – felt themselves to be members of a ‘working class’. We are in danger of fighting under the label of a class which no longer exists.

...too many wage-earning families, with TV and second-hand car, did not see (unless they were coal miners) so much wrong with Tory Britain.⁵⁰

In the short term, at least, the article proved counter-productive. Tony Benn noted a few days after it was published the collective left-wing opinion that ‘Hugh Gaitskell had cooked his goose’, or rather that ‘Douglas Jay had cooked it for him by raising the Clause 4 issue.’⁵¹ It may, however, have had a somewhat more

constructive longer-term impact. As Jay later pointed out, his belief in ‘social ownership’, but not in the further extension of public monopoly, was a precursor of the National Enterprise Board (NEB) established by the 1974 Labour government.⁵² The NEB was no great success, which, perhaps, has led to the revisionist thought which contributed to its birth being overlooked. It is easy, in the search for proto-Blairite attitudes amongst ‘Old Labour’ thinkers, to forget the extent to which revisionists still had a genuine faith in ‘public enterprise’; and Jay’s belief in its virtues has perhaps contributed to his eclipse by other figures whom it is easier – if not necessarily accurate – to view as prophets of New Labour.

Socialism in the New Society

In the wake of the row, Jay gave a short speech at the November party conference in Blackpool. He did not specifically endorse Gaitskell’s plan to revise Clause 4 – he thought it was a mistake to raise the issue – but stressed once more the need to develop non-monopoly rather than monopoly forms of public ownership.⁵³ Jay recalled that his words were met ‘with incomprehension rather than assent or dissent.’ During the mid-winter weeks of 1959-60, he reflected on the controversies of the previous months, ‘and wondered whether it was worthwhile re-thinking the whole basic issue of the meaning of socialism and the relevance of public ownership.’ By Easter he had decided to write the book that would be published as *Socialism in the New Society*. He wrote in his memoirs: ‘My aim in the book was to write something rather more philosophical and less purely economic, than Tony Crosland’s illuminating *The Future of Socialism ...* Crosland had touched only lightly on the basic question whether any moral virtue resides in the economic consequences of *laissez-faire* and the distribution of incomes generated by a free market.’⁵⁴

When it was published, in January 1962, the book got a mixed reception. Raymond Fletcher, in *Tribune*, wrote that ‘Mr. Jay, one of *Tribune*’s favourite sparring partners, deserves the thanks of all Socialists for documenting a view that unites most socialists’, i.e. that modern capitalism was characterized by increasingly functionless ownership and increasingly concentrated control. However, he disagreed with Jay’s comparatively diminuendo approach to public ownership.⁵⁵ In a *New Statesman* review Richard Crossman (of whom Jay had been fairly critical in the book) noted ‘the shattering impact of the Affluent Society’ on the Labour Party. It was not an impact he felt Jay’s ideas were likely to overcome. Although the book’s exposition was clear and its polemic vigorous, *Socialism in the New Society* was no more than ‘a brave attempt to explain in some detail how Attleeism can be applied once again in the 1960s.’⁵⁶ *The Times* devoted a leader column to the book, which it found ‘substantial and persuasive’, although it did not accept Jay’s arguments for economic equality.⁵⁷ Disappointing reviews appeared in *The Economist* and *The Listener*.⁵⁸ Graham Hutton, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, felt that Jay’s value judgements had ‘lamentably weakened his case and turned what might have been a seminal work into a tract for the converted.’

Moreover, ‘Of those three most recent apologists for socialism only the youngest, Mr. Crosland, sides with Aristotle. Like Mr. Galbraith, Mr. Jay comes down heavily on the side of Plato, the governing few, and the gentleman in Whitehall.’⁵⁹

Hutton’s comment, if true, would seem to imply that Jay did indeed fit into the alleged general Labour pattern of ‘alienation from affluence’. He was certainly not wildly enthusiastic about many modern trends. As he commented in the Commons 1962, ‘It is rather pathetic sometimes to remember that ten years ago some people were talking about a new Elizabethan age in this country. What we have had, in fact, is a new Edwardian age. We have had a decade of Premium Bonds, take-over bids, betting shops, hire-purchase frauds and all the rest. Under the party opposite, capital gains have almost become the national sport, and [the multi-millionaire takeover king] Mr. Charles Clore almost our national hero.’⁶⁰ However, in *Socialism in the New Society*, he drew back from endorsing the more extreme anti-consumerist arguments made, for example, by Dennis Potter in *The Glittering Coffin* (1960). He characterized (or caricatured) these arguments as follows:

The avaricious profit-seekers have got hold of so many of the weapons of persuasion (‘mass media’ if you prefer the jargon) that the ordinary man has no longer a genuinely free choice as voter, reader, viewer, thinker, or indeed human being. We are so belaboured and bemused (the argument runs on) by commercial TV inanities and venalities, by sordid newspaper circulation-seeking, by advertising persuaders – loud, silent and secret – and all sorts of other hideous nightmares and horrors of modern life, that we are really dancing about like puppets controlled by hidden hands behind it all and cherishing only an illusion of free choice. Our tastes and standards are thus debased; our political, cultural and even shopping preferences, made for us without knowing it; and most of our freedom and dignity, as free individuals in an allegedly free society, cunningly filched away.⁶¹

Jay conceded that there was, indeed, some truth to this picture. ‘Much, though not all, of our commercial advertising is an insult to the public’s intelligence ... Much (but not all) of our commercial TV programmes, even between advertisements, can only be described as an expense of spirit in a waste of shame. Worst of all, the present state of the British Press, with its daily papers declining into little more than entertainment sheets, its women’s weeklies compounded so often of little but snobbery and greed, its mass Sunday papers delving with a cunning almost worthy of Goebbels into the murkiest depths of human nature, can only fill anybody who has known thirty years of British journalism with distaste bordering on despair.’⁶²

Nevertheless, Jay argued that this picture, left by itself, was neither fair nor in perspective: ‘Though millions may expend their spirit in the arid wastes of TV entertainment, tens of thousands hear broadcast classical music who would never have heard it fifty years ago. Sales of books, good and indifferent as well as bad, mount and mount’. Moreover, he pointed out, attendance at concerts providing ‘serious’ music was far greater than before 1939, and more than twice as many people visited London’s Tate Gallery in 1960 as in 1952. Furthermore, ‘Many times more people (though still too few) go to universities than before the War ...

Even at the despised levels of political argument ... it cannot be denied that the normal level of discussion is markedly higher.’⁶³

The truth, he concluded, was that ‘in Britain and other open societies a battle is being fought ... between corrupting forces on the one hand, and civilizing forces on the other for the public mind.’ Surely, he suggested, ‘it should be the major purpose of the democratic State to join in on the side of enlightenment, and not to confess defeat and conclude that the only solution is authoritarian control of all the persuaders, hidden and otherwise.’ Public authorities, therefore, should support and enrich all the cultural activities that unbridled market forces would tend to drown.⁶⁴ As Jay commented to Gaitskell in 1956, ‘people cannot very well choose themselves between the football match and the art gallery if they have never been given the chance to appreciate one of them at all.’⁶⁵ (It remains unclear whether Jay himself had ever attended a football match.)

Overall, Jay’s views do offer a certain amount of support for the view that Labour thinkers were suspicious of many of the trappings of affluence; but this was not, perhaps, the most important factor in determining his attitudes. As he had written in May 1957:

Some M.P.s in last week’s Press debate seemed to think the chief fault of the newspapers was the appearance of too many photos of Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield. I don’t share this view at all. I am all in favour of these pictures. ...

The real danger is different. Communists have always argued – it is to me one of their few strong points – that Parliamentary elections in a capitalist democracy would be, sooner or later, turned into a farce by concentration of newspaper ownership in the hands of a few millionaires.⁶⁶

Jay was not a complete cultural pessimist, nor did he think it advisable to restrict people’s freedom of cultural choice. Therefore Hutton’s comment about ‘the governing few, and the gentleman in Whitehall’ does not seem wholly fair. This does not, of course, mean that Jay did not in some ways lay himself open to misrepresentation, and thus contribute to the *perception* that Labour was hostile to affluence, even if close reading of his opinions indicates that in his case it was not true.

Neither is Black’s comment that ‘Disregard for personal issues was characteristic of the socialist condition’ fair in regard to Jay.⁶⁷ For example, in 1958 he strongly supported the proposal of the Wolfenden commission to decriminalize homosexual acts between adult males in private. The law as it existed, he believed, infringed a basic principle of personal freedom:

I do not believe that the State or the criminal law has any right to interfere with the conduct of the individual, unless that conduct has some effect on other people. ... Once we depart from that principle ... we are on a very slippery slope. This seems to me to be the beginning of all intolerance. It is a road which leads – much further on, but going in the same direction – eventually to concentration camps and to the persecution of heretics.⁶⁸

He also wrote in his *Forward* article, ‘we should urge radical reforms of the betting, licensing and Sunday Observance laws – perhaps abolition of hanging and votes at eighteen also.’⁶⁹ Jay was not, apparently, totally consistent in his attitudes – see his 1962 remarks on betting shops, above – but he cannot be accused of *disregarding* personal issues. As he put it in the subsequent article in which he responded to attacks on him, ‘the emphasis must be even more on personal liberty, if the new generation are to respond’ (and, interestingly, this was an area in which he believed his critics agreed with him).⁷⁰ He did, however, put a great emphasis on the divisibility of ‘personal’ and ‘economic’ freedom, and was far keener on the former than the latter.⁷¹ It may be argued, of course, that the distinction was ultimately unsustainable; but this is not the same as saying that Jay was uninterested in personal freedom.

Conclusion

Jay largely figures in the historiography in 4 caricatured guises: a) a farsighted ‘incipient Gaitskellite’ in the 1930s, embracing Keynes and laying the groundwork for 1950s revisionism, b) the arrogant and elitist author of the ‘gentleman in Whitehall’ remark, c) the Gaitskellite extremist author of the 1959 *Forward* article, d) a violent anti-European. With the possible exception of d), these images are all misleading.⁷² Moreover, a) and b) seem to contradict one another to some degree; the view of Jay as a man obsessed with controlling the lives of others sits at odds with the image of him as a farsighted revisionist who eschewed traditional socialist remedies. As regards c), Jay appears to have been justified in defending himself against charges of conspiracy, and his arguments were scarcely extreme. Indeed, his revisionism had many things in common with what Favretto has identified as ‘Wilsonism’ – an emphasis on planning, efficiency, and reluctance to engage in moral condemnation of consumerism.⁷³

Jay can thus be defended against the broad charge – which has been levelled at Labour in general rather than at him personally – that socialist suspicion of the cultural trappings of affluence led to voters’ alienation from the party. His doubts about the era of affluence arose from genuine economic concerns, not purely from socialist snobbery. He did not want the state to *prevent* people from reading *The News of the World* if they chose to do so, but rather he wanted to enhance public provision of the arts. He did care about personal freedom, even if he was not enthusiastic about economic freedom. This was also true, at least to some degree, of other mainstream socialists at the time, even those who did not fall into the ‘centre-right revisionist camp’. For example, the pages of *Tribune*, and the *New Statesman*, as well as those of *Forward*, regularly featured, on the one hand, articles opposing capital punishment, and on the other, attacks on untaxed capital gains and the extension of private monopoly.

One should not, of course, fall into the trap of imagining that all the extensions to personal freedom that Jay and others advocated would have been electorally popular. In other words, voters may have become alienated from Labour as much because its general disapproval of hanging and the willingness of some figures,

such as Jay, to advocate homosexual law reform, as because of its attitude to affluence. Indeed, it is in general very difficult to assess how far 'alienation from popular affluence', was responsible for Labour's electoral troubles. Furthermore, was it not largely inevitable that those voters who were enthusiastic about affluence would, in 1955 and 1959, reward the party that had *delivered* it (or at least presided over its delivery)?

For, if Labour was to be elected, it needed the voters to lose confidence in the government. In the USA, after the launch of the Sputnik, the Democrats were able to successfully exploit concern about the consequences of the 'Affluent Society', by pointing to its implications for national security. Doubts about 'The Stagnant Society', by contrast, only caught the popular mood in Britain after the 1959 election. After this point, there was a general loss of confidence in British economic performance, which episodes such as De Gaulle's veto and the Profumo affair only served to accentuate. 'Amateurism' was blamed, and the scene was set for Wilson's 'white heat of technology' speech.⁷⁴ (Indeed, post-1962 Conservative 'modernization' policies also reflected unease about unregulated affluence.) Thus, Labour's doubts about affluence were in the long run not wholly harmful. It is tempting to suggest, then, that the problem was not so much that Labour was 'alienated from popular affluence', but that, it was only after 1959 that the party found the language or the occasion to mobilize popular concern about the consequences of an unregulated economy. Douglas Jay's contribution to this discourse may have been largely forgotten, but the concerns he articulated were neither marginal, nor hostile to all aspects of affluence, nor a form of incipient Blairism.

Notes

- 1 Jay, Douglas: 'Are We Downhearted? Yes! But We'll Win Back', *Forward*, 16 October 1959. See also Jay, Douglas: *Change and Fortune: A Political Record*, London, Hutchinson, 1980, pp. 271-6, where Jay quoted from the article at length and gave an account of its origins.
- 2 Jay, Douglas: 'Too Smug!', *Forward*, 20 November 1959.
- 3 See, for example, Durbin, Elizabeth: in Ben Pimlott (ed.): *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought*, Heinemann, London, 1984, p. 40.
- 4 Gould, Philip: *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, Little, Brown and Company, London, 1998, p. 30.
- 5 Black, Lawrence: 'Coming to Terms with Affluence? Socialism and Social Change in 1950s Britain', paper given at 'Consensus or Coercion? The state, the people and social cohesion in post-war Britain' conference, University College London, 13 March 1999. See also Tiratsoo, Nick: in Anthony Gorst, Lewis Johnman and W. Scott Lucas (eds.): *Contemporary British History 1931-61: Politics and the Limits of Policy*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1991, pp. 44-61; and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina: *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 238.
- 6 Gould: *Unfinished Revolution*, Op. Cit., p. 16.
- 7 Jay, Douglas: 'Are We Downhearted?', *Forward*, 16 October 1959.
- 8 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit. pp. 15-49, quotation at p. 22. For a bibliography on Jay, see Toye, Richard, 'The "gentleman in Whitehall" reconsidered: the evolution of Douglas Jay's views on economic planning and consumer choice, 1937-1947', *Labour History Review*, vol. 67, no. 2, (2002), pp. 187-204, n. 14.
- 9 Jay, Douglas: in W.T. Rodgers (ed.): *Hugh Gaitskell*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1964, pp. 77-8.
- 10 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit. pp. 61-2; Dalton, Hugh: *The Fateful Years: Memoirs 1931-1945*, Frederick Muller Ltd., London, 1957, p. 417n; Davenport, Nicholas: *Memoirs of a City Radical*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1974, pp. 103-4.
- 11 Jay, Douglas: *The Socialist Case*, Faber and Faber, London, 1937, p. 317; Toye, 'The "gentleman in Whitehall"', Op. Cit..
- 12 Mikardo, Ian: *Back-Bencher*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1988, p. 152.
- 13 Jefferys, Kevin: *Anthony Crosland: A New Biography*, Richard Cohen Books, London, 1999, p. 63.
- 14 Pimlott, Ben (ed.): *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1918-40, 1945-60*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1986, p. 466 (entry for 27 January 1950).
- 15 Davenport: *Memoirs*, Op. Cit., p. 103.
- 16 Rodgers, Bill: *Fourth Among Equals*, Politico's, London, 2000, p. 47.
- 17 Morgan, Janet (ed.): *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, Book Club Associates, London, 1981, pp. 136-7 (entry for 14 August 1952).
- 18 Whiting, Richard: *The Labour Party and Taxation: Party Identity and Political Purpose in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 137.
- 19 Fabian Society Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London: C/65/1, Douglas Jay, 'Britain's Economic Survival', lecture given on 25 November 1952. For a summary of the main points of the lecture, see Jay, Douglas: 'The Price of Survival', *New Statesman and Nation*, 13 December 1952.

- 20 Morgan: *Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, Op. Cit., pp. 185-6 (entries for 1, 2 and 3 December 1952).
- 21 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit., p. 226.
- 22 Jay, Douglas: *Socialism in the New Society*, St. Martin's Press, London, 1962, p. 27.
- 23 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit., p. 34. See also Jay, Douglas: in G.E.G. Catlin (ed.): *New Trends in Socialism*, Lovat Dickson and Thompson Ltd., London, 1935, pp. 105-122.
- 24 See Toye: "'The Gentleman in Whitehall'", Op. Cit..
- 25 Hugh Gaitskell Papers, University College, London: C33, speech by Douglas Jay at a meeting in Stafford Borough Hall on 28 January 1950.
- 26 Ilaria Favretto: "'Wilsonism" Reconsidered: Labour Party revisionism 1952-64', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2000), pp. 54-80, at p. 63.
- 27 See for example Jay, Douglas: 'Socialist Plan for British Trade Drive', *Forward* (London edition), 17 January 1953; and Jay: *Socialism in the New Society*, Op. Cit., pp. 165-7.
- 28 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol. 493, col. 344, 8 November 1951.
- 29 Jay, Douglas: 'The Price of Survival', *New Statesman and Nation*, 13 December 1952.
- 30 Streeten, Paul: in G.D.N. Worswick and P. H. Ady (eds.): *The British Economy in the Nineteen-Fifties*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962, p. 109.
- 31 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol. 493, col. 348, 8 November 1951.
- 32 Ibid., vol. 657, col. 1355, 11 April 1962.
- 33 See Cairncross, Alec: *Diaries of Sir Alec Cairncross: the Radcliffe Committee/Economic Adviser to HMG, 1961-64*, Institute of Contemporary British History, London, 1999, p. 37. For a succinct discussion of the impact of 'stop-go', see Howlett, Peter: in Paul Johnson (ed.): *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, Longman, London, 1994, pp. 335-7.
- 34 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol. 551, col. 1462, 23 April 1956.
- 35 Tomlinson, Jim: 'Modernising Britain? The Economic Policies of the Wilson Government, 1964-70', Manchester University Press, Manchester, forthcoming, Ch. 4.
- 36 John Callaghan, 'The Left and the 'Unfinished Revolution': Bevanites and Soviet Russia in the 1950s', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2001), pp. 63-82.
- 37 For Gaitskell's anxieties along these lines see Gaitskell, Hugh: *The Challenge of Co-existence*, Methuen, London, 1957, pp. 81-3.
- 38 See Favretto: "'Wilsonism" Reconsidered', Op. Cit., pp. 61-2.
- 39 See his comments in the preface to the 1962 Pelican edition of Galbraith, J. K.: *The Affluent Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962, p. 10.
- 40 Jay: *Socialism in the New Society*, Op. Cit., p. 144.
- 41 Jay, Douglas: 'The Man who pleads for more taxes', *Forward*, 16 January 1959.
- 42 Jay, Douglas: 'Beyond State Monopoly', in *Where?* Fabian Tract 320, 1959, pp. 20-25 at p. 24.
- 43 Davenport: *Memoirs*, Op. Cit., p. 204. Jay, Douglas, 'Beyond State Monopoly', in *Where?* Fabian Tract 320, 1959, pp. 20-25 at p. 24.
- 44 Labour Party archive (henceforward LPA), National Museum of Labour History, Manchester: Jay, Douglas: 'Equity Shares and the Small Saver', Labour Party Finance and Economic Policy Committee, Re: 480, January 1959.
- 45 Davenport, *Memoirs*, Op. Cit., p. 204.

- 46 Jay, Douglas: 'Tories keep the brake on action over monopolies', *Forward*, 1 March 1957.
- 47 TNA: PRO PREM 8/1183 'Note of a Meeting held at the House of Commons on 17th May, 1950 at 7.30 P. M. to discuss the Memorandum on the State and Private Industry'; Jay, Douglas: 'Public Capital and Private Enterprise', *Fabian Journal*, July 1959, pp. 9-14.
- 48 Favretto: "'Wilsonism" Reconsidered', Op. Cit., pp. 58-9.
- 49 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit., pp. 271-5.
- 50 Jay, Douglas: 'Are We Downhearted?', *Forward*, 16 October 1959.
- 51 The article had not in fact mentioned Clause 4. Benn, Tony: *Years of Hope: Diaries Papers and Letters 1940-1962*, Hutchinson, London, 1994, p. 318 (entry for 21 October 1959).
- 52 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit., pp. 272, 332-3.
- 53 *Labour Party Annual Conference Report 1959*, Labour Party, London, 1959, p. 121. Institute of Contemporary British History, 'Witness Seminar: The Campaign for Democratic Socialism 1960-64' in *Contemporary Record*, vol. 7 no. 2 (1993), pp. 363-85 at p. 368.
- 54 Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit., pp. 276, 278-9.
- 55 Fletcher, Raymond: 'Ends and Means', *Tribune*, 26 January 1962.
- 56 Crossman, R. H. S. : 'The Taxolaters', *New Statesman*, 23 January 1962.
- 57 'More Than Equal', *The Times*, 22 January 1962.
- 58 'Eternally Deluded?', *The Economist*, 27 January 1962.
- 59 'The Last Puritan', *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 January 1962. For evidence of Hutton's authorship, see the *TLS* Centenary Archive database.
- 60 Clore took over J. Sears (True-Form Boot Company) in 1953 and subsequently masterminded a further string of aggressive takeovers in the footwear industry. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol. 657, 11 April 1962, col. 1355; 'Clore: Where will this man strike next', *Forward*, 23 November 1956; Jay, Douglas: 'The Lessons of Clore and Chambers', *New Statesman*, 12 January 1962.
- 61 Jay: *Socialism in the New Society*, Op. Cit., pp. 349-50.
- 62 Douglas Jay, *Socialism in the New Society*, Op. Cit., pp. 350.
- 63 *Ibid.*, pp. 350-1.
- 64 *Ibid.*, pp. 351, 353.
- 65 Gaitskell Papers, University College, London: A139.1, Jay to Hugh Gaitskell, 15 May 1956.
- 66 Jay, Douglas: 'Don't Stop the Press', *Forward*, 17 May 1957.
- 67 Black, Lawrence: *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64*, *Old Labour, New Britain?* Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2003, p. 84.
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- 70 Jay, Douglas: 'Too Smug!', *Forward*, 20 November 1959.
- 71 See Toye: 'The Gentleman in Whitehall', Op. Cit.; and also Jay: 'Britain's Economic Survival', Op. Cit., p. 8.
- 72 However, in regard to d), see LPA: RD.112, Finance and Economic Policy Sub-Committee, Douglas Jay, 'The Labour Party and the Common Market', February 1961: 'We should urge that the U.K. ... should offer to join the Common Market, if, but only if, the Common Market common external tariff were reduced to zero on all those foods and raw materials which are now imported Duty-free into the U.K. from the Commonwealth.'

This is the only issue, economically, which seriously matters' (emphasis in original). This suggestion was probably a matter of political tactics only, as the Six were unlikely to agree to the condition; but it does imply that Jay took a slightly more ambiguous approach to the European issue at this time than he recalled in his memoirs. See Jay: *Change and Fortune*, Op. Cit., pp. 280-6.

73 Favretto: "'Wilsonism" reconsidered', p. 55.

74 Pimlott, Ben: *Harold Wilson*, HarperCollins, London, 1992, pp. 300-301.