CHAPTER SIX

COMPROMISE OR CONSENSUS: 1945–1951

This chapter brings me to a consideration of the first of the two core issues tackled by this book—how to account for the fact that, by the time of the 1951 general election, broad political agreement existed between the two major parties about the essential constituent elements of welfarism. Was it that a consensus, of whatever sort, had existed at the end of the period of Coalition Government and simply been carried forward? Or, conversely, had the Conservative Party made compromises—perhaps in recognition of the strength of public opinion—to bring its policies on social welfare into line with the systems developed by the Attlee Governments? Many eminent historians have considered this question since 1951, and their differing views are outlined later in this chapter. The second core issue, my conclusion on which was foreshadowed in the Introduction—which party can claim most credit for the creation of the Welfare State—is addressed in detail in the following chapters.

Of the many historians who have sought to tackle the question of what we mean by a welfare state, José Harris, in my view, dealt with it most succinctly in her 1990 essay “Enterprise and Welfare States: A Comparative Perspective.” Discussing the importance of definitions, Harris asks whether the welfare state can be characterised as “a Beveridge-based system of contractual social insurance.”[[1]](#footnote-1) “Or”, Harris continues:

do we mean the modern residue of a much older system rooted in economic status and citizen rights? Or do we mean the whole complex of social and educational policies and institutions which in modern societies bear upon individual and collective socio-economic needs? Do we mean something peculiar to Britain or do we see some form of welfare state system as well-nigh universal throughout the developed world?[[2]](#footnote-2)

Harris points out that the term “welfare state” was not invented in Britain; rather, it was devised “by the old Prussian right in the dying embers of Weimar Germany.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

At the start of the same essay, Harris wrote:

for several hundred years, models of civic morality which emphasise independence and self-sufficiency have jostled with alternative models which emphasise paternalism, altruism and organic solidarity. Few phases of social policy in Britain…have not contained elements of more than one approach. Even the New Poor Law, notorious for its subordination to market pressures...often lapsed into practices that were suspiciously communitarian; while Edwardian New Liberalism, famous for its philosophy of organic solidarism, in practice tempered social justice with the quest for “national efficiency.” These varying emphases have all been reflected in the fashions and phases of welfare state historiography—fashions and phases that appear to have been at least partly determined by the vagaries of the prevailing political climate. Thus, in the aftermath of the Second World War historians tended to portray the history of social policy as a series of governmental battles against private vested interests—battles in which the mantle of civic virtue was worn by an altruistic administrative elite, while civic vice was embodied in the motley crew...of [those] who viewed social welfare as a commodity in the market. A slightly later generation of historians, heavily influenced by nineteen sixties-style Marxism and French structuralism, then shifted towards a different stance—emphasising not the conflict but the symbiosis between welfare and private enterprise. Social policy appeared increasingly not as the brake but as the tool of industrial capitalism.[[4]](#footnote-4)

One of my chief concerns throughout this study has been to test the validity of this analysis—first, through scrutinising the relationship between the Churchill Coalition Government’s consideration of looming post-war “problems of reconstruction” and the emergence of a so-called welfare state, and, second, by exploring the part played by the Conservative Party, both before and during the war, in assisting or hindering that process. Were the Conservatives determined to achieve broad, cross-party agreement during the Coalition years? Did the Conservatives have to fashion an internal consensus as a precondition for reaching such an agreement? As my starting point, I want to summarise the claims made by historians and commentators over subsequent years—reflecting what José Harris calls “the fashions and phases of welfare state historiography.”[[5]](#footnote-5) These claims include the assertion that the legislation from which these welfare systems emerged mirrored, perhaps unconsciously and without an explicit understanding of what was happening, a consensual approach between the parties; and that this legislation was, in effect, an acceptable carry-over of the “agreements” reached, essentially on the Beveridge proposals, during the period of Coalition Government. In other words, there was a sufficient majority of both Labour and Conservative politicians who viewed the wartime attention paid to future social reform as the necessary preparation for what many characterise as a post-war “social revolution.” Of course, for every claim that there was consensus, there is a counter-claim that there was no such thing. I shall also consider the basis for the alternatives which these counter-claimants have advanced.

As Chapter Four demonstrated, the Coalition years were characterised by tensions between and within the two main parties over the substance and possible long-term effects of Beveridge. As Ben Pimlott put it in his biography of Hugh Dalton, with regards to the situation within the Labour Party:

The Report brought into the open a conflict within the Labour Party which had hitherto been suppressed: between those who wished to make the adoption of radical policies the price for staying in the Government and those who wanted to get as much as they could out of the Coalition, even at the price of sacrificing a certain amount of radicalism. But there were other reasons too why a Labour politician might criticise the Report; its assumptions, as some saw them, were liberal, not socialist, and the unions [with Ernest Bevin in the forefront] were particularly critical of the recommendations on children’s allowances and workmen’s compensation. There was also a fear that going all-out in support of Beveridge might split the Coalition and precipitate a general election, bringing a massive defeat for Labour.[[6]](#footnote-6)

J.M. Lee characterised this situation by noting that “ [p]aradoxically, it was important for Labour to be in government, but not to show its policy inclinations too overtly.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Tensions on the Conservative side were of a somewhat different nature. Conservative Ministers were not as pressed on the questions of social reform as were their Labour Party colleagues. There was, however, some alarm that Labour Minsters occupying key posts in Government might be allowed to exercise undue influence in the area of forward planning. For example, Hugh Dalton’s appointment to the Board of Trade in February 1942 caused particular anxiety. The office held responsibility for the formulation of future industrial policy, and Dalton’s arrival portended, for some, possible moves toward nationalisation.. In this respect, many Conservatives vocally supported the views championed in von Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*, that associated economic planning with a special type of bureaucratic tyranny. Both before and after publication of the book in 1944, however, various groups were formed to promote “free enterprise.” Continuing anxiety on this question was stimulated by the tone of Churchill’s March 1943 broadcast, in which he promoted his four-year reconstruction plan—a plan that many regarded as a sell-out to Labour. At the same time, the Tory Reform Committee, set up in March 1943, understood that its responsibility lay with making the case for the introduction of forward-looking measures of social reform, broadly along Beveridgean lines. In this respect, the members of the Tory Reform Committee were probably more influential than the Conservative Committee on Post-War Planning. This was under the chairmanship of R.A. Butler, who personally shared the progressive views of the Tory reformers but who was unable, initially at least, to persuade others to embrace his views. Overall, it is probably fair to say that Labour demonstrated a greater measure of unanimity in terms of a cohesive approach to social policy than did their counterparts. They felt they had much to gain by applying pressure; the Conservatives could only lose by not resisting it.

The wartime years were characterised by a range of compromises—an understandable result of negotiations between the different parties over social reform. In the early years of the war (and even in the immediate aftermath of Beveridge) there was a fear that the Coalition could be fatally undermined. An end to the war was impossibly far off, and the prospect of a general election was, in consequence, equally remote. This state of affairs left both main parties with little else to do but lay down markers for the future. As the end of the war hove into sight, however, and the prospect of a general election loomed—despite Churchill’s intention to maintain the Coalition during the immediate post-war period—one might have expected the positions that had materialised post-Beveridge would cause the inter-party differences on future social reform to widen. As the parties were invited in the course of 1944 to debate a series of measures representing the various viewpoints that had emerged post-Beveridge, greater opportunities to gain a political advantage emerged. Yet did this actually happen? Was it inevitable that wartime compromise would necessarily become post-war conflict? Or, conversely, was there a possibility that, compromise might actually be translated into consensus about social reform—a consequence of the wartime experience of the important link between compromise and political stability, and between compromise and the successful pursuit of a common purpose? The benefit of hindsight has not allowed historians to reach a conclusive answer to these questions. Was the Conservative reaction to the policies of the Attlee Labour Government (1945–51) a reflection of consensus between the different groups? Was it a sort of victory within the party for Tory Progressives? Or was the opposition mounted in Parliament during the passage of legislation on social insurance matters, and on the introduction of the National Health Service, a reflection of traditional anti-collective, anti-universalist—indeed, anti-socialist views within the Party?

Before proceeding to a detailed examination of these problems, it is useful to summarise the views expressed by historians over the years on the vexing question of whether there was a measure of consensus around the emergence of a welfare state, or whether it was imposed by a strong socialist government on an unconvinced and unwilling, weak Conservative Opposition. Obviously, there was no whiff of consensus on such matters as the Government’s nationalisation programme, but in relation to the development of social policies, historians have struggled to agree on a definition of “consensus”, as it might be applied to the post-war Labour Government’s initiatives, and the Conservative Party’s response to them.

To the man in the street, consensus probably means something short of unanimous, unquestioning agreement. It was certainly the received wisdom in the second half of the 1970s that the period after 1945 demonstrated a broad integration of opinions on social reform and that, with Labour in office, it was the Conservatives who shifted their ground to accommodate their political opponents. From this perspective, the Conservatives became, in effect, partners in some major areas of what was called the “Attlee consensus.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Paul Addison, a prominent advocate of this view, has defined it as, at one level, a reflection of the “professional” and “civilised” interests and instincts of politicians of all parties within the modern party system, focused towards achieving the peaceful resolution of problems through their own mediation, and following agreed rules. At “a higher level”, Addison continues, it can be defined as substantial agreement about the way government should be managed between the two front benches in the House of Commons, together with the support of the rank-and-file of their membership. “Consensus”, Addison claims, “presupposes [an]…equal meeting of minds and a…genuine fusion of purpose.”[[9]](#footnote-9) One might be forgiven for regarding Addison’s stance as positively Hegelian, demonstrating what Hegel calls “dialectical change”, the outcome of the collision of two opposites—pithily captured by the phrase “thesis versus anti-thesis equals antithesis.”[[10]](#footnote-10) It was this supposed melding of party positions on how the economy should be managed which later came to be known—in a term coined by the *Economist—*as “Butskellism.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Recently, however, a revisionist position has been developed which claims that the idea of a post-war Labour-driven consensus is a myth. According to this viewpoint, the immediate post-war period was one of fundamentally conflicting approaches and intense disagreements; what *really* took place between 1945 and 1951 was the Conservative Party’s adoption of something regarded as a new “humanised” capitalism, responsive more to international circumstances than purely domestic affairs. At its core was the rejection of the State as a tool to redistribute wealth, or to maintain egalitarian trends introduced during the war years.[[12]](#footnote-12) According to this revisionist position, the Conservative “buy-in” to Labour’s social programme occurred only after 1951, when shifting opinion in the Conservative Party led to the formal adoption, by the Conservatives, of Labour’s social progressivism. Writing in 1996, two decades after the publication of Addison’s seminal work, and with the benefit of hindsight, Nick Ellison drew a distinction between “procedural” and “substantive” consensus. The former, he claimed, conveyed little more than broad agreement amongst political elites about the basic direction of policy-making, while the latter embraced a deeper ideological identification of purpose about the aims and objectives of specific policies. He speculated that in the writings on the post-war period, the level of consensus may have been overstated as an unconscious reaction of those who were anxious (from whatever standpoint) to distinguish the turbulence of the Thatcher years, from the placidity of an earlier period of Conservatism. That apart, he suggested that it was too simplistic to cast consensus in terms of what Labour did—and of Conservative accommodations to it.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris provided a more flexible definition in 1989. They proposed that it was more appropriate to think of consensus as “a set of parameters which bounded the set of policy options regarded by politicians and civil servants as administratively practical, economically affordable, and politically acceptable.” This seems to me, however, to define not consensus itself, but rather a method of establishing how much consensus exists at any particular time. It assumes the permanent existence of a degree of common ground between the parties, and sees the problem as simply the determination of the extent of the overlap.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Writing in 1992, Stephen Brooke approached the question from a distinctively different angle, arguing that it was the “shifting balance of Labour’s own tradition of policy and strategy” which determined that the post-1947 era did not follow a linear process, but instead pursued “series of erratic blips, occasions when the paths of [the] competing political parties crossed, rather than a constant narrowing of party lines.” Even when reconstruction planning started to be taken seriously in 1943, he suggested, consensus was fragile at best, with clear differences of opinion and perception between the Coalition partners over how such general objectives as full employment and social security might be achieved. “To conclude an end of ideology on such a basis” would, in his view, be “illusory.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Brooke’s approach was little different from that taken in 1991 by Kevin Jefferys, who argued that it was the loss of cohesion and radical sense of direction by the Labour Cabinet after 1947 which led to a retreat to internal consensus, and to the adoption of consolidation as a guiding theme. Given that the Conservative Party was not disposed to rock the electoral boat, this effectively left both front benches short of radical options, a situation which invited the attachment of “consensus” as an appropriate label for British politics in the 1950s.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Alongside these differing views of the meaning of “consensus”, as it has been applied to the post-1945 period of Labour Government, it is important to note the views which have emerged since the mid-1970s about when, and how, the political stance adopted by the Conservative Party on its resumption of office in 1951 was shaped. The Addison view, which held the ring for so long, was that it was the wartime Coalition that laid the foundations for the establishment, after 1945, of both a peacetime managed economy and the expanded welfare state envisaged by Beveridge. The wartime Coalition was hence responsible for the convergence of the two main parties—a convergence, in essence, that gave post-war shape to a war-generated elite consensus.

G.R. Searle offered a somewhat different opinion in his 1995 book, *Country Before Party: Coalition and the idea of National Government in Modern Britain, 1885–1987.* The hypothesis inherent in the book’s title is expressed in striking and convincing terms:

The 1945 General Election marked a watershed in British politics, ushering in, as it did, a new stable two-party system that was to last for over a quarter of a century, characterised by a Labour-Conservative duopoly. The duopoly largely came about as a result of Labour’s emergence during the Second World War as a credible rival to the Conservative Party.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Citing the changes to the electoral system in the late 1940s—the abolition of the six University constituencies and the two-member boroughs, and the effect of this on reducing the chances of small parties securing parliamentary representation—Searle supports his theory by presenting statistics of the share of votes cast in elections from 1945 onwards. In the first post-war election, Labour and the Conservatives (including the National Liberals) secured 87.6 per cent of the total vote. Following the Liberal collapse of 1951, this proportion rose to an astonishing 96.8 per cent. Although it strays beyond the narrow remit of this study, it is worth noting Searle’s data showing that “as late as 1966, the two main parties still obtained nearly 90 per cent of all votes cast, [and even more tellingly perhaps] that between 1950 and 1970 there were never more than fourteen MPs from the minor parties—and in 1959 a mere six.”[[18]](#footnote-18) To this can be added the fact that throughout this period, Searle notes, “there was an approximate *balance* between the two main parties at Westminster.”[[19]](#footnote-19) It does not take too much imagination to be convinced that this matching of votes cast for the two main parties betokened a centrist or consensual approach to policy-making. Whether this is borne out by facts surrounding policy-making in the welfare field is examined in the rest of this chapter.

It can be noted, *en passant*, that in 1987 John Ramsden argued that the roots of the post-1945 Conservative “transformation” were not established *during* the war, as Searle was later to claim, but rather during the inter-war years. Ramsden was not contesting the post-war consensus theory as such—though he saw it as the result of a lack of choice, rather than a positive choice. He was, instead, simply according to it a much longer gestation period than Addison had done.[[20]](#footnote-21)

I shall now draw on a wide range of contemporary sources, to evaluate the merits of the disparate views outlined above. The aim is to determine (a)whether—and if so, to what extent—any degree of general consensus existed between the parties between 1945 and 1951, and (b), in particular, whether general consensus can be detected in relation to the measures of social reform introduced by the Attlee administration. In other words, can the claim be made, with any conviction, that the Conservative Party made a significant contribution to the creation of the welfare state? Or to pose the problem in a more forthright manner, was the relationship between the parties marked by a conflict or struggle, performed for the sake of political appearances and Party respectability—and always with the next election, however distant, in mind? Without wishing to pre-empt possible answers to any of these questions, I cannot resist recording the sobering views of Lord Woolton, expressed at various points between 1946 and 1951 on the state of the Conservative Party during the period in question. What seems to me to give his views a degree of relevance in the context of this study, is the fact that when he was offered the post of Party Chairman by Winston Churchill in the summer of 1946, he was not a member of the Party and might, one assumes, have considered the offer with an impartial, and perhaps somewhat jaundiced, eye. The following represents a compendium of his views:

The organisation of the Conservative Party was the most topsy-like arrangement that I had ever come across. It had grown up amidst conflicting and—it seemed—almost irreconcilable claims…Large numbers of Conservatives were striving to find a new name for the party because “conserving” seemed to be out of joint with this new world that was demanding adventure and expansion and a rejection of the economic restraints of pre-war life under a Conservative administration. The word “Conservative” was certainly not a political asset when compared with the Socialist word “Labour”…The man who first called the Socialist party the Labour party was a political genius, for indeed the word “labour” implied a party that would look after the best interests of labour…We had our backs to the wall; we had been heavily defeated; we had very little money; the Party was depressed.”[[21]](#footnote-22)

This was certainly a gloomy assessment; yet at the same time, it was also a recognition of sorts that there were those in the Party who sought change. How far they were able to achieve this goal will be analysed in the later chapters.

Before going on to examine the parliamentary manoeuvrings during the post-1945 years, and particularly during the passage of the various measures of social reform, however, it should not be forgotten that two important pieces of Beveridge-related parliamentary business had been transacted before the 1945 election. It thus seems worth considering what indications the attitudes taken on these issues might have given about the future intentions of the parties, as the prospect of an election began to occupy their thoughts and shape their actions.

The Family Allowances Act received its final parliamentary approval in June 1945, during the period of the Caretaker Government; it had been introduced by the Coalition Government, with Clement Attlee as one of its sponsors, three months earlier. The Government, as we have seen, had always been more inclined to adopt a broader, more simplified scheme of family allowances than the one proposed by Beveridge, and this was reflected in the White Paper on Social Insurance published in September 1944, and which provided the template for the subsequent legislation. Despite these modifications of Beveridge’s scheme, however, Labour offered only token opposition. There had, in fact, been an earlier White Paper in May 1942—that is, before the completion of the Beveridge Report. It set out the costings of various levels of child allowance, but it had been shelved so as not to pre-empt whatever Beveridge might have to say on the subject.

Child allowances had, of course, been paid since they were introduced in Lloyd George’s People’s Budget of 1909. There, they took the form of an income tax allowance of £10 per child for taxpayers earning less than £500 per annum. Eleanor Rathbone was the chief advocate of an allowance in the form adopted in 1945. Rathbone had campaigned for a new scheme since 1918, and had highlighted her case in her 1924 book, *The Disinherited Family*. Rathbone insisted that an allowance be paid to mothers, rather than to fathers. When legislation was finally forthcoming in 1945, however, it still envisaged that the allowance would be paid to fathers. This situation produced what has been described as a “cross-party rebellion”, led by the likes of Nancy Astor, Edith Summerskill, and Rathbone herself. It proved necessary to amend the Bill after a free vote had demonstrated the strength of feeling on the matter. Interestingly, Beveridge, by this time an MP himself, spoke in the Second Reading debate in the House of Commons in somewhat acerbic terms:

In coming to their regrettable decision to make payment to the father, I think the Government made a mistake in chronology. They did not realise this was 1945; they thought we were back in the year 1879—the year in which I was born—and in which, before the Married Women’s Property Act, all money belonged to the husband.[[22]](#footnote-23)

If this successful advance of the Family Allowances legislation —which would not face major opposition, once the payee question was resolved—might be seen as reflecting a degree of unanimity on the need to press ahead with widescale Beveridge-style social reform, could the same be said of the reaction to the White Paper on Employment Policy published and debated in 1944, and of the other Social Insurance White Paper proposals brought forward in the same year? If it could, it would lend weight to those who have claimed that the 1945–51 period witnessed a broad Conservative acceptance of Labour’s intentions towards social reform.

Opening the debate on the Employment White Paper for the Coalition in the House of Commons on 21 June 1944, Ernest Bevin, the archetypal trade unionist, spoke with feeling and a strong historical sense about unemployment as a “social disease which must be eradicated from our social life.” Up until now, he argued, the role of the state “has been to deal with the after-effects of the disease, and not to take active measures itself to promote and maintain economic health.”[[23]](#footnote-24) The White Paper, he acknowledged, did not raise the question of what would be privately or publicly owned in future, and he accepted that there were those who would think that “we who represent the Labour Party in the Coalition Government…and who have made our contribution to this White Paper…have abandoned our principle concerning what we think the right ownership for industry ought to be.”[[24]](#footnote-25) Yet what the Government has “tried to do”, Bevin said, “is to devise a plan which, however you may decide the ownership of industry by adjustments which may have to be made, seeks to attain its objective.”[[25]](#footnote-26) It would seek to do this by harnessing “our monetary system, our commercial agreements [and] our industrial practices.”[[26]](#footnote-27)

As we have seen, the draft of the White Paper mirrored a compromise between the Keynesians in the Economic section of the War Cabinet, and those in the Treasury who blamed unemployment on the structural problems of industry. We have also recorded the views of those in the wider Labour Party, who saw the White Paper proposals as a capitalist rejection of socialism. Nevertheless, it was difficult to quarrel with the main aim of the policy, particularly for those who remembered the miseries of the pre-war years—even though it did not commit a post-war Government to maintaining the full panoply of controls which had regulated employment during the war, as proposed in Labour’s previously published statement on “Full Employment and Financial Policy*.*” (The statement advocated a mixture of Keynesianism and socialist-style physical planning—ironically, almost the combination that provided the economic ethic of the post-war Attlee administration.) Yet the White paper did, at least, suggest a Conservative recognition, described by Peter Clarke as “an incremental encroachment”, that maintaining satisfactory levels of employment through Keynesian-style demand management was at least an option. This recognition, it has been surmised, was eased by the fact that it was a strand of thought developed between the wars, and during the war, by a non-socialist intelligentsia.[[27]](#footnote-28) It is important not to overlook the fact that several Conservatives thought that there was no cure for employment, other than a revival of trade. Indeed, no less a person that Ralph Assheton, the new chairman of the Conservative Party, was recorded by *The Times—*in echoes of Aneurin Bevan—as being “scathing about the White Paper…which he thinks no better than a series of empty shams.”[[28]](#footnote-29) The question, therefore, on this score, is whether the uneasy balances achieved in the White Paper demonstrated at least a flavour of consensus which might be carried forward into the next Parliament. Sir Edward Bridges, Secretary of the Cabinet, certainly felt confident that the policy outlined in the White Paper would be followed by whichever party won the forthcoming election.[[29]](#footnote-30)

Were the portents of future consensus detectable in the other two White Papers, on Social Insurance and on Health, published in 1944? In so far as the White Paper on Social Insurance (Cmd. 6550, 1944) was put forward as a result of the conclusions reached on the core insurance proposals in the Beveridge Report, it was clearly going to have Labour’s short-term support, at least. This was the case, despite some misgivings about the extent to which it had departed from the Report’s recommendations, with, for example, the symbolic replacement of the term “social security by “national insurance”, and the abandonment of Beveridge’s emphasis on providing a minimum subsistence income. The Conservatives had stronger reservations, of course, which made their probable reaction to the introduction of a potentially strengthened set of legislative proposals by a Labour Government, should that transpire, at the very least unpredictable. The official Party line, however, led by the Tory Reformers, was enthusiastic support; it was hoped that this would create a better impression on the electorate than during the original Beveridge debate. The White Paper was not fully developed during the life of the Coalition, and its overall intention was to unify and extend the pre-war insurance system rather than to provide income security. It was a clear departure from Beveridge. The signs of consensus, therefore, are hard to find in the positions and attitudes taken up by the parties on this issue. Both were, in effect, playing for time.

Public opinion towards these proposals varied between outright scepticism and mild disbelief. Home Intelligence recorded one view, for instance, which expressed the fear that “they’ll give us family allowances for children and then take it away again by reducing the income tax allowance for children.”[[30]](#footnote-31) The plans for maintaining post-war levels of employment, though described by *The Economist* as “revolutionary”, left people unimpressed and raised hardly “a ripple of interest.” Indeed, observers of the situation commented that people’s expectations of what would happen in all these areas when the war ended were basically pessimistic. This was exemplified by the widespread belief that “‘big vested interests’, especially insurance companies, will see that the [Beveridge] proposals [on social insurance] are whittled away.”[[31]](#footnote-32)

The final document to be considered in our search for consensus between the principal partners in the Coalition Government is the White Paper on a National Health Service, known as the Willink White Paper. There are, unfortunately, few signs of such consensus in the discussions which went on both in and outside Parliament. Early in 1943, the Government had accepted the need for a comprehensive health service and used the wartime Emergency Medical Service as its model. The White Paper, published in February 1944, confirmed that commitment, although both parties essentially understood that it was a consultation document. What could not have been entirely anticipated, however, was the determined obstruction to the prospective implementation of the White Paper proposals by professional medical interests. The White Paper plans advanced one of Labour’s most cherished aspirations, though there were some contentious issues in the document when it was published: for example, it rejected the concept of health centres, and the future relationship between voluntary and local authority hospitals. Again, as with national insurance, the main focus of the White Paper was on the evolution from the pre-war system, rather than wholesale change. Did such apparently different outlooks signify a post-war future where the wartime willingness to compromise would give way to ideological conflict over policy formulation? Or would consensus be carried forward under the guise of compromise?

Of course, the great imponderable in all this—which must have been uppermost in the minds of all MPs as they recorded their views on all of these matters—was how the anticipated general election might turn out. We have, of course, seen the result of the 1945 election. What I want to do now, therefore, is to examine what happened in the aftermath of the election, particularly from the Conservatives’ point of view. Did they, consciously or unconsciously, seek consensus or compromise—or neither?

1. José Harris, “Enterprise and Welfare States: A Comparative Perspective”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 40 (1990): 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Harris, “Enterprise and Welfare States”, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Harris, “Enterprise and Welfare States”, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Harris, “Enterprise and Welfare States”, 175–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Harris, “Enterprise and Welfare States”, 175–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John M. Lee, *The Churchill Coalition 1940–1945* (London: Batsford, 1980), 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 270–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 164–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Norman Lebrecht, *Genius & Anxiety: How Jews Changed the World, 1847–1947* (London: Oneworld, 2019), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *The Economist,* 13 February 1954. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah, edd., *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945–64* (London: Palgrave, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Nick Ellison, “Consensus Here, Consensus There…but not Consensus Everywhere: The Labour Party, Equality and Social Policy in the 1950s”, in *The Myth of Consensus*, edd. Jones and Kandiah, 17–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris, *Consensus Politics: From Attlee to Major* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edition, 1994), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Stephen Brooke, *Labour’s War: The Labour Party during the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 342–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kevin Jefferys, *The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics, 1940–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 213–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Searle, *Country Before Party*, 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Searle, *Country Before Party*, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Searle, *Country Before Party*, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. John Ramsden, “A Party for Owners or a Party for Earners? How Far Did the British Conservative Party Really Change after 1945?” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 37 (1987): 49–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Lord Woolton, *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Woolton* (Cassell, London,1959) 331–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Hansard, HC Deb, 8 March 1945, 5th ser. vol. 408, col. 2306. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Hansard, HC Deb, 21 June 1944, 5th ser. vol. 401, col. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Hansard, HC Deb, 21 June 1944, 5th ser. vol. 401, col. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Hansard, HC Deb, 21 June 1944, 5th ser. vol. 401, col. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Hansard, HC Deb, 21 June 1944, 5th ser. vol.401, col. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Peter Clarke, *The Keynesian Revolution in the Making, 1924–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 322; Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Diary of R.M. Barrington-Ward, quoted in Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Lee, *The Churchill Coalition*, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)