Attlee Lecture

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It gives me great satisfaction to be asked to give the 15th 16th Attlee Commemorative Lecture in the 110th year since his birth. That is a long time, but what perhaps impresses me more, and makes me feel fairly old, is that it is 44 years this coming spring since I published my short Interim Biography of Attlee which was I believe the first book about him to be written. However it was much more important to me than it was to Attlee. Perhaps I may be permitted to start, since it illustrates many aspects of Attlee's character and of my relationship with him, from the page I wrote about that book in my recent autobiography.

> "Then, by acts of almost inexplicable generosity not obviously stemming from his detached character, the Prime Minister launched me on a writing career. First Attlee threw to me the editorship of a volume of his speeches delivered between May 1945 and November 1946, I selected them and wrote a few linking passages and an introduction of five hundred words. For this I was paid £50, which in itself welcome, being worth £1,000 today. Typical of both of us was what then followed. He sent me a cheque himself. I was slow to acknowledge. About five days later I received one of his famous self-typed pungent missives:
>
> Dear Roy, I sent! you a
> cheque fOR £50 a week ago. I
> have nothad? an acknowledgement.
> You'Rs eVer,
> C.R. Attlee

What other Prime Minister would ever have produced such a letter on his own typewriter? However, his acerbity did not hold out against my hasty letter of apology. Moreover there continued intact an arrangement made at the end of 1945 by which I should write a short (85,000 words it turned out) interim biography of him, and have a free run in his 10 Downing Street study of his fairly exiguous private papers in order to do so. This remarkable forthcomingness was really a tribute to my father (which became a posthumous one, for he died in April 1946) to whom Attlee felt deeply indebted for eight years of exceptional service as parliamentary private secretary. Apart from anything else the arrangement guaranteed me a publisher.

I wrote a book over the year from November 1946 to November 1947, and Heinemann published it in April 1948. It was all written in snatches, an evening or at best a weekend. In contrast with my subsequent habit, I never managed a continuous period of a few weeks when it was my central occupation. In these circumstances, and given my complete lack of experience, it was not a bad book. It was not a major work of scholarship or a profound analysis of character, but it was a cool and succinct account of the life up to 1945 of a cool and succinct man, and it reads unembarrassingly today. It did not sell enough

to bring much in the way of direct financial reward, but it got a lot of review space, most of it favourable, and it gave me a certain position as a writer, which meant that I had no difficulty in publishing two more books with Heinemann before I switched to Collins in 1955.

Nonetheless, although I am in no way ashamed of the book itself, I am faintly ashamed of having written Mr Attlee. I do not much approve in principle of writing biographies of living persons, and I have never since contemplated doing one. Much more strongly, however, do I disapprove of books about a subject with whom the author is in a client relationship. And that I overwhelmingly was vis-à-vis Attlee. I was obviously bound to him by close family ties. He had been at our wedding and he was to become a godfather to our first child a year after the book - and in addition my main objective in life at the time was to become a member of his party in the House of Commons. Had I discovered some damaging facts or formed some hostile opinions about him (as it happened I did not), I could not possibly have expressed them without inhibition. Paradoxically, I had less trouble with Attlee or any other member of his family over this book than I have had with the relicts of almost all my other biographical subjects, but the principle

nonetheless holds. I would not write another 'living' biography, although I might well be tempted to return to Attlee and attempt a short reappraisal from the very different perspective of the 1990s."

However, as I know that would be going over ground well covered already in the series, I do not propose to talk primarily about Attlee. I propose to put him in a quartet of long-serving Prime Ministers of this century: Asquith, Baldwin and Mrs. Thatcher. I stress long-serving by which I mean five years or more (but preferably not more than ten) because I am convinced that such a cumulative period in office is necessary to rank as a Prime Minister of major impact. No one of the last hundred years at least who does not fulfill the criterion has achieved the front rank.

So I begin my excursion with the currently rather ill-regarded and under-estimated Asquith. A few years ago I came to re-read my life of him, first published in 1964, after an interval of nearly ten years. I was struck again by the quality of his mind and temperament and hence by his capacity to lead a government. It was not an adventurous mind that breached new frontiers, but he had knowledge, judgement, insight and tolerance. And for at least his first six years as Prime Minister he presided with an easy authority over the most talented Government of this century. How would I illustrate his quality in government? I give two disparate examples.

First, a memorandum on the constitutional position of the Sovereign which he wrote on holiday in Scotland 1913, without any official advice, probably without any reference books to look at, and sent it off direct, to King George V. It was in reply to a rather pathetic cri de coeur from the King, complaining that he would vilified by half his subjects whether or not he approved the Irish Home Rule and almost suggested that he had an equal constitutional choice between the two courses. Asquith's disabusal of this foolish idea was done with erudition and succinctness presented in a framework of muscular argument and treated the King with a firm courtesy untinged with any hint of obesqiousness. I can think of no other Prime Minister this century who could have written out of the resources of his own mind with equal authority: although I would give Attlee the proxime accessit in this competition.

Second, as late as the eighth year, the penultimate year, of his premiership he gave a brilliant and effective display of his talents as an effortless administrator. Kitchener (Margot Asquith's "great poster" successfully masquerading as a great man), had become a focus of indecision at the War Office. It could be held that Asqith ought to have sacked him, but given Kitchener's hold on public opinion, that course was well beyond the limits of Asquith's courage - although I think Attlee might have done so. So I put him ahead there. What he did was to encourage Kitchener to go on a month's visit to Gallipoli, temporarily himself to take over the War Office (as he had done

for four months after the Curragh mutiny in 1914) and quickly to lance several boils which Kitchener had allowed to fester for half a year or more. It was a last display of an exceptional administrative talent, and the fact that he enjoyed doing it contradicts the view that he was over the hill and had become indolently ineffective by 1914 at the latest.

Asquith was lazy only in the sense that by his remarkable skill in the speedy, but perhaps too cooly detached, dispatch of public business he was able to keep a lot of time for pastimes outside politics. Nevertheless, I think he was in office too long and that his style was unsuited to the demands of war-time leadership. It was not so much that Lloyd George, when he replaced him, was a better war leader. Lloyd George's errors of strategic judgement and his ineffectiveness in dealing with a High Command, backed by the King, was just as great as were those of Asquith's. But Lloyd George had the zest and the brio to behave as though he were a better war leader, and that was half the battle.

Although in general Asquith's authority in the government was good, with no suggestion that he was frightened of strong ministers of which he had plenty, or that they wee disrespectful of him, I do not think it could be said that he operated the Cabinet tautly. There was, then, no written record of its proceedings, apart from his own hand-written letters to the King after each meeting. That sounds unimaginable today, but it was

a practice which he had inherited from all his predecessors, including one as efficient as Peel and another as energetic as Gladstone. I think the lack of tautness had other causes. He did not talk much in Cabinet himself. He had other Cabinet occupations, mainly writing letters to ladies. But he rather believed in letting discussion run on, almost exhausting itself before he could see developing what he liked to describe as a `favourable curve' for bringing it to a satisfactory conclusion.

These methods made him good at holding rumbustious colleagues together and good too at avoiding foolish decisions. It made him less good at taking wise decisions ahead of time and at galvanising the less energetic members of his Government. This latter deficiency must be seen in the context of his indisputable achievement of presiding over one of the only two major radical Governments of the past 100 years. He did not greatly interfere in the work of departmental ministers and when he did it was to give them necessary but slightly reluctant support where needed, rather than to correct them. Lloyd George, ironically in some ways, was the foremost beneficiary of this support, both in getting the Budget of 1909 through a reluctant Cabinet and at the time of his Marconi peccadilloes. Asquith allowed Edward Grey an almost complete independence at the Foreign Office, but as that insular statesman was, in my view, somewhat over-rated, the results were not altogether happy.

As a butcher of ministers, Asquith was in the middle grade,

about half way between Gladstone, who regarded his Cabinet colleagues, once appointed, as having the inviolate permanence of members of a College of Cardinals, and Macmillan, who in 1962, axed a third of them like junior managers in an ailing company. But he left the North Sea to engulf Kitchener and the Dublin Easter rebellion to destroy Augustine Birrell, who, in spite of splendid epigrams, ought to have gone much sooner before that rebellion also destroyed the prospect of Irish Home Rule within a United Kingdom. He reshuffled some of his ministers a good deal, although not as much as Harold Wilson, who had not a butcher's but a circus master's approach to reshuffling. Under Asquith, McKenna and Churchill in particular, were subjected to a number of rather pointless changes.

Asquith's own attention was mostly concentrated on the high constitutional issues of which there were plenty in the peace-time life of his Government: on relations with the Lords and with the Sovereign leading to the Parliament Act, on Irish Home Rule, on Welsh church disestablishment and the failed suffrage reform. Although he had himself introduced the first old age pension in his last Budget as Chancellor before becoming Prime Minister, he left the subsequent development of national insurance as much to Lloyd George as, until late July 1914, he did foreign affairs to Grey. Nevertheless it would be quite wrong to think of him as other than the leading figure in his own Government, the one whom his colleagues naturally accepted as the fount of praise or rebuke, with the greatest command over the

House of Commons, the best known to the public. In this last respect, being well known to the public, and only in this last respect, Lloyd George was a near runner-up. When driving from North Wales to London in about the fifth year of his premiership. Asquith visited Stratford-on-Avon parish church, he was amazed that the verger came up and said "Have I the honour of addressing our esteemed Prime Minister?". It was the recognition not the compliment which struck him. Semi-anonymity had its advantages. In the early evening he would frequently slip out of Downing Street and walk, unrecognised and unmolested, to the Athenaeum and read haphazardly in the library there before returning to Downing Street for dinner and bridge. Business had been quickly and effortlessly disposed of earlier in the day.

However he was not quite as anonymous as Baldwin, nearly twenty years later, who was travelling by train alone and in an unusual in an unreserved compartment, as was his Prime Ministerial wont. The man sitting opposite looked at him in a puzzled way for a long time, then leant forward, tapped his knee and said "You are Baldwin, aren't you? You were at Harrow in 1884". Baldwin nodded assent to both propositions. His former school fellow appeared satisfied. But after a few more minutes he again became puzzled and tapped once more. "Tell me", he said, "What are you doing now?"

Stanley Baldwin came to the Prime Ministership in a totally different way. Asquith's was the calmest, the most certain and

assured ascent this century. Baldwin, in contrast to Asquith, came out of the woodwork a bare six months before he was in No. 10 Downing Street. Until then, six months before, there were at least six Conservative politicians who were much better known than he was. Asquith had become the senior Secretary of State at the age of 39, Baldwin was 50 before he became even a junior minister. Baldwin was a Conservative. Asquith was a Liberal. Baldwin was rich, Asquith was not. Asquith was fashionable, partly, but not wholly through his wife. Baldwin was not. In spite of differences, Baldwin wished to model himself more on Asquith than on any other of his twentieth century predecessors.

Did he succeed? His main Government, that of 1924-29, was less talented than Asquith's although with Churchill, Balfour, Birkenhead and the two Chamberlains, Neville and Austen, it could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as negligible in this respect. He was as economical with the attention he was prepared to devote to politics as was Asquith. But his intellectual equipment was much less formidable. When asked what English thinker had most influenced him, he firmly replied "Sir Henry Maine". When asked which particular aspect of Maine's thought had seized his mind, he said Maine's view that all human history should be seen in terms of the advance from status to contract. He then paused, looked apprehensively at his interlocutor, and said, "Or is it the other way round?" This is totally un-Asquithian. Asquith might not have had many original

thoughts but he could summarise the broad doctrines of any well-known philosopher or historian as well as giving you their dates at the drop of a hat.

Baldwin's authority within his main Government in the 1920's was substantially less than Asquith's had been. Baldwin, by then, had escaped from the anonymity of 1923,had won a great election victory and had made his own Cabinet, unlike his first short spell in Downing Street when he had merely inherited one from Bonar Law. He had made it of men many of whom were used to being his political seniors. He certainly inspired no awe. On the other hand, partly by the devotion of vast acres of time to sitting on the front bench in the House of Commons, talking in its corridors, to hanging about in its smoking room, he acquired a considerable popularity in, and indeed, mastery over, the House of Commons. His skill at the new medium of broadcasting was also a considerable and exceptional strength.

Was Baldwin lazy? He was once reported as having spent over an hour in the smoking room, apparently doing nothing except to read the Strand Magazine, perhaps the rough equivalent of today's Readers' Digest. Most likely he was not even reading the magazine, but sniffing it, and with it the atmosphere around him, ruminating, feeling his way, nudging towards a variety of decisions he had to make. He was not indecisive. Indeed Birkenhead once unfavourably described his method of government as "taking one leap in the dark, looking around, and taking

another". But he reached decisions much more by sniffing and then making a sudden plunge than by any orderly process of ratiocination. He rarely applied himself to the methodical transaction of written business.

Tom Jones, deputy secretary of the Cabinet who later became one of Baldwin's closest confidants, at first thought him remarkably slow, with barely a fifth of the speed of his prodecessor, Bonar Law, in dealing with papers. It took Jones some time to realise that Baldwin did not work at all in Law's rather unimaginative accountant's sense. But his mind was nonetheless always playing around the political issues. In this way he was the opposite, not only of Law but of Asquith, who certainly did not have an accountant's mind. Churchill wrote of Asquith, "He was like a great judge who gave his whole mind to a case as long as his court was open and then shut it absolutely and turned his mind to the diversions of the day". With Baldwin the court was never either wholly open or wholly shut. It followed from this method of work that he was even less inclined to interfere in the work of departmental ministers than was Asquith. He did not bombard his ministers with declaratory minutes like Churchill, or petulant ones like Eden, or nostalgic ones like Macmillan. Nor did he exercise much control over his ministers by headmasterly promotions, demotions or sackings. He made hardly any changes during his 4½ year period of office, except when Halifax (then Wood and about to become Irwin) went to India as Viceroy; when Curzon died; or when Birkenhead

decided he could not live on his salary. He never seriously thought of getting rid of Steel-Maitland who was a useless Minister of Labour, stationed in the most crucial and exposed segment of the Government's political front. This omission at least had the effect of involving and indentifying the Prime Minister very closely with his Goverment's handling of industrial relations. This was true even before the General Strike. During the strike itself he was also deeply involved, but once the General Strike (as opposed to the coal strike) was defeated, he rather lost interest.

There were five major developments in the life of his second and central Government (1924-29), and this was the only one with which he was centrally concerned. The return to the gold standard in 1925 was very much Churchill's decision at the Treasury, even though he had at first been opposed to it. The Treaty of Locarno, and the European security system created by it, was overwhelmingly Austen Chamberlain's work at the Foreign Office. The housing and poor law reforms were even more decisively the work of his half-brother Neville Chamberlain at the Ministry of Health. Finally, the decisions which enabled the reality of Dominion independence to be combined with the dignity of the Crown/ came from Balfour.

Baldwin was, therefore, more detached from the main policies of his Government than was Asquith and he was, in my view, a less considerable man, although not a negligible one either. He would

not have had the intellectual grasp to write Asquith's constitutional memorandum, but he had the feel to deal successfully with the General Strike, although not the sustained energy to follow this up by dealing equally well with the miners' strike, which was both its cause and its aftermath, continuing long after the General Strike. He dealt still more skilfully with the abdication of King Edward VIII 10 years later. Like Asquith, he preferred to engage with a constitutional issue more than with any other, though his lack of overseas interest (except for India and even that he never visited) meant that that Statute of Westminster slipped by him almost unnoticed. He continued Asquith's practice, interrupted by Lloyd George, of performing as Prime Minister without a surrounding circus. He would walk about London on his own.

Attlee arrived in No. 10 Downing Street eight years after Baldwin had left for the last time. Unlike either Asquith or Baldwin, he inherited a vast government machine which the war had created, and which was in the habit of controlling a great part of the nation's affairs and spending a high proportion of its income. He was also the heir to a post-Baldwin Prime Ministerial habit of trying to run a large part of British foreign policy from 10 Downing Street. Attlee's first duty in his new office was to meet the Russians and the Americans at Potsdam. Neither Asquith nor Baldwin had ever attended an international conference as Prime Minister. Attlee, a very firmly established member of the English upper middle-class, was not rich like Baldwin, or

fashionable like Asquith, but he was similar to both of them in having a natural respect for conventional values and institutions. He liked almost all institutions with which he had been connected: Haileybury, University College Oxford, the Inner Temple, English cricket, his family, Toynbee Hall, the army, the Stepney Borough Council, even the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party.

This conventionality did not make him pompous, for his taciturnity gave him a natural talent for balloon-pricking, and it did not prevent his being the head of an effective radical government just as it had not prevented Asquith or, for that matter, Gladstone before him who both liked conventional values, being in the same category.

Compared with Asquith and Baldwin, Attlee was the speaker whose style was furtherest removed from oratory, the least expansive personality, and by far the best Cabinet chairman. He developed this last quality even before he had the authority of Prime Ministership behind him. Many recorded tributes testify to the way in which he presided over the War Cabinet during Churchill's frequent absences abroad; rhetoric disappeared and decisions were taken with speed and precision. Yet Attlee was not the obviously dominating figure of his Government, either publicly or privately. Ernest Bevin, Stafford Cripps, Hugh Dalton, Herbert Morrison, Aneurin Bevan and latterly Hugh Gaitskell constituted a formidable array of ministers. I do not

think that they can be quite classed with Asquith's, partly because of the subsequent fame of Lloyd George and Churchill, but also because there was nothing to equal in the Attlee government the non-political distinction of John Morley, Augustine Birrell and Richard Haldane. That Liberal Government apart, however, they are unmatched this century and for most of the last too. Attlee balanced them, steered them, kept them and himself afloat, but he did not exactly lead them; he was a cox and not a stroke. For his first three or four years he distributed their weight brilliantly although latterly he failed to place Aneurin Bevan properly, which led to considerable trouble.

One of his strongest attributes was said to have been his capacity for laconic ministerial butchery. This may be slightly exaggerated. He despatched parliamentary under secretaries with ease, but this was rather like shooting chickens. Of big game he was more cautious. He was probably relieved when an exhausted Dalton shot himself in 1947 but he pulled no trigger on him. Arthur Greenwood he did dispose of but only when that figure had become unwilling to conduct even his morning's business from anywhere except the `snuggery' (I think it was called) of the Charing Cross Hotel. Then towards the end he dismissed Ernest Bevin from the Foreign Office. That was an extraordinary feat. Bevin was the most important Foreign Secretary of this century, by which I mean that he was the one who left the biggest imprint on British foreign policy for a generation ahead. He was a massive but by no means always an amiable personality. He had

been the sheet-anchor of Attlee's support throughout the life of the Government. He had given his support to "little Clem" as he called Attlee, against Morrison, Cripps and Dalton. Yet when his health made him no longer cabable of doing the job, out he went, miserable and complaining, and died six weeks later. This was as act of cold courage on Attlee's part, more difficult even than President Truman's famous sacking of General MacArthur a month later.

With which aspects of government policy did Attlee most concern himself? Like both Asquith and Baldwin, even though both of them had been Chancellors of the Exchequer, I do not think that he understood or was much interested in economics. But the `dismal science' had become far more central to government by his day. He gave his Chancellors and especially Cripps, a very dominant position. His Foreign Secretary had such a position by nature of his own personality. Between Potsdam and Attlee's visit to Washington in December 1950, when Truman had falsely suggested that he might be about to drop an atomic bomb on the Chinese in North Korea, when Bevin was too fragile to cross the Atlantic in less than five days (in other words by ship and not by aeroplane), Attlee intervened in foreign policy no more than Asquith had done.

But the beginning of the end of Empire meant that there was a great range of external affairs which a Prime Minister could concern himself without impinging on the prerogatives of even the

most truculent Foreign Secretary. On relations with America, Russia and the continent of Europe, Attlee supported Bevin. On India, with a rather weak Secretary of State for India, he made his own policy. And determining the future of 450 million people, now 800 million people, was by any standards, in the first league. Perhaps the two biggest impressions on history to be left by Britain in the past 200 years, have been first to govern and then to leave both America and India. So Attlee ranks as a major agent of Britain's world impact.

Internally, constitutional affairs engrossed Attlee less than they did either Asquith or Baldwin. On the other hand, he took more part in the social legislation of his Government than did Asquith in the previous wave of advance in this field. The Attlee Government was also memorable for six or seven major measures of nationalisation. Attlee did not much involve himself in this detail, but supported them all with commitment, even enthusiasm.

He presided over a highly interventionist Government but he did not find it necessary to overwork. He once told me that being Prime Minister left more spare time than any other job he had done. It was partly, he said, because of living on the spot and avoiding the immensely long tube or Metropolitan Railway journeys to which his modest suburban lifestyle condemned him, both before and after Downing Street. But his modesty should not be exaggerated. No other Prime Minister in British history was

ever so richly honoured that he wrote of himself the little piece of doggerel:

> "Few thought he was even a starter
> There were many who thought themselves smarter
> But he ended PM, CH and OM,
> An Earl and a Knight of the Garter"

His reputation went steadily up after he left office and he and Macmillan were almost the only Prime Ministers who enjoyed themselves in retirement more than in active life. Not Lloyd George, not Churchill, not Rosebery, not Asquith, not Wilson, not Eden, not Heath. I doubt whether Mrs Thatcher will be very content. But while they were both good at old age and semi-retirement, Attlee's reputation has in my view not merely survived intact but positively enhanced itself much more than has Macmillan's.

The Government which Mrs Thatcher ran bore less relation to the three previous administrations I have considered than they each do to the other two. In terms of the quality of the other ministers, I think it must be regarded as the least illustrious Government of the four. It is always necessary to be on one's guard against under-estimating contemporaries compared to their predecessors. It is easier to admire those on whom the gates of history have slammed shut, and there certainly is a fairly constant tendency to see things as always going downhill: to say

that the younger Pitt was not as good as his father, that Canning was not as good as Pitt, or Gladstone as Peel, or Asquith as Gladstone. Such constant regression is biologically improbable. But even with that warning, I do not think that the ministers of the past ten years can be put in the same league as Asquith, Attlee or Baldwin lists.

To some substantial extent this goes with the dominant position within the Government which Mrs Thatcher occupied only too enthusiastically. She has certainly not left ministers as secure in their offices as did Gladstone or Baldwin. She has not been as addicted to the annual gymkhana of a reshuffle, almost for its own sake, as was Harold Wilson. But she nonetheless wrought great changes of personnel in her eleven years. It was an extraordinary self-consuming Government. She first got rid of all her principal colleagues; then the new men devoured her. Eleven years is a long spell for a Prime Minister, but it is a short spell over which for all the leading members of a party to obliterate themselves from office. Yet that is precisely what has happened. In addition, her changes have had far more of a general purpose than did those of Asquith or Attlee. They were not primarily made on grounds of competence. They were designed for shifting the balance of ideology, or perhaps even more of amenability, with the Cabinet.

As a result of these various factors, Mrs Thatcher must be counted the most dominating Prime Minister within her Government

of any of the four. Her control over the House of Commons I would regard as having been much more dependent upon the serried majorities she had had behind her than upon any special parliamentary skill. Her combative belief in her own rightness ensured that she was rarely discomfited and never overwhelmed. But she brought no special qualities of persuasiveness or debating skill which enabled her to move minds where others would have failed. Even an unsuccessful Prime Minister like Eden had, in my view, more capacity to do this than she has had. She never exercised any special command over a medium of communication as Baldwin did in the early days of sound broadcasting, and for much of her nearly 16 years as Conservative leader, both before and after 1979, she was below rather than above her party's poll rating.

Her stamp upon every aspect of her government's policy, on the other hand, was imcomparably greater than that of any of my other three Prime Ministers. There was no question of her reserving herself for major constitutional issues. Indeed, I doubt that she had much sense of what was a constitutional issue and what was not. There is no minister who has been able to sustain an area of private prerogative. It is impossible to imagine her being asked for advice, and saying to Geoffrey Howe, as Baldwin said to Austen Chamberlain, "but <u>you</u> are Foreign Secretary". She was equally interferring in the military, economic, industrial, social security, Commonwealth and law and order aspects of the Government's policy. She sought no respite

from politics, in the sense that did Asquith, Baldwin and Attlee.

Over the period I have been considering the scope of government has increased enormously. Public expenditure has gone up from approximately £170 million, perhaps £5 billion in present day values, to about 1200 times that in money terms and 40 times it in real terms. Great new departments, like Health, Social Security and the Environment, have sprung up with an entirely different pattern of ministerial duties from anything remotely prevailing before 1914. But I do not think that the essential role of the Prime Minister has changed as much as this might lead one to believe. The function of a conductor is not greatly altered by introducing new instruments into the orchestra.

The style is much more a product of a man or a woman than it is of the epoch. Before election hysteria took over we were seeing something of a reversion to the calmer habits, if not of Asquith, at least of Attlee. And President Reagan showed that modern government need not be too strenuous.

What has changed permanently is the necessary involvement of the head of the government of this or any other comparable country in external affairs. The interdependent world, not to mention the European Community, has permanently altered that. The calm insularity of Asquith and Baldwin, even to some extent that of Attlee, has gone for ever.