

# **The Political Thought of Aneurin Bevan**

**Nye Davies**

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## Summary

Today Aneurin Bevan is a revered figure in British politics, celebrated for his role as founder one of the country's most cherished institutions, the National Health Service. In his day, however, he was regarded as highly controversial and even divisive. There remain fundamental disagreements in the now voluminous literature on Bevan about how we are to interpret his politics and political legacy.

This thesis seeks to develop a clearer understanding of Bevan's politics by engaging in a comprehensive analytical study of his political thought, treating him primarily as a political thinker rather than a practicing politician or institutional pioneer. It has two central aims. Firstly, it seeks to reconstruct Bevan's political thought from his written work; then, secondly, it uses the insights generated by this unique approach to reconsider the debates and disagreements about Bevan's ideas found in the extant literature.

To achieve the first aim, the thesis engages with Bevan's voluminous writing, including his myriad contributions to *Tribune* (a thesis Appendix contains for the first time an index of the contents of Bevan's journalism). On the basis of these very varied and often unsystematic contributions, it then reconstructs Bevan's key ideas within a framework derived from Michael Mann's account of the sources of social power: with the use of 'power' as a heuristic device for the thesis echoing its role as, arguably, the central preoccupation in Bevan's political project.

The thesis argues that Bevan's political thought was fundamentally shaped by his adherence to an orthodox Marxist understanding of social development that emphasised the centrality of the material base of society in determining its political and ideological structures. It highlights how this view was central to both his domestic and international political outlooks; notwithstanding Bevan's reverence for the British Parliament and State.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Today, almost sixty years after his death, Aneurin Bevan is regularly invoked by politicians across the political spectrum. His role in establishing the National Health Service (NHS) secured his legacy and has resulted in his becoming a cherished figure to many. Therefore, if a politician is seen to be protecting Bevan's legacy or following his principles then they can be said to be standing up for important values. Indeed, it is very common to find politicians referring to the principles or values of Bevan.

Even in the Conservative Party, the party he declared as being "lower than vermin", Bevan's name is invoked to defend preferred policies. In his battle with the British Medical Association (BMA) over a dispute with junior doctors, former Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt compared his situation to that of Bevan who faced serious opposition from the BMA when he was establishing the NHS (Steerpikie 2016). Hunt attempted to defend his position by arguing that "had Nye Bevan given way to the BMA there would be no NHS" (HC Deb 25 April 2016). During a debate on creating a "seven-day NHS", former Prime Minister David Cameron insisted that Bevan would have been in favour as "he knew that the NHS was for patients up and down the country". Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn responded by arguing that "Nye Bevan would be turning in his grave if he could hear the Prime Minister's attitude towards the NHS. He was a man with vision who wanted a health service for the good of all" (HC Deb 24 February 2016). Bevan is clearly a go-to figure in debates on health policy, no matter what side of the political divide someone may lie on. Hunt even once proclaimed: "The vision of Nye Bevan before – the vision of a one-nation Conservative Party today" (Hunt 2015). A comment that would of course be seen as sacrilege by Labour Party supporters.

In Wales, the nation of his birth, Bevan is continuously invoked, with politicians – again, across the political spectrum – paying tribute to his achievements. Reporting on an election leadership debate, the Welsh Conservatives used Bevan as a stick with which to beat the Welsh Government's record on health, highlighting comments by an audience member that Bevan would be "hanging his head in shame" at the way Labour manages the NHS in Wales (Welsh Conservatives 2016). Plaid Cymru have also invoked Bevan, its 2016 Assembly election manifesto proclaiming that "Wales now needs to conjure up the spirit of Bevan in reinventing a NHS for tomorrow's Wales" (Plaid Cymru 2016, p. 95). Not simply a 'British' political hero, Bevan is considered a Welsh hero also (BBC 2004).



As might be expected, appeals to Bevan are most commonplace within the Labour Party, to the extent that they have become almost obligatory references in speeches by its politicians. Bevan is held up as a hero of the labour movement, an autodidact who emerged out of poverty to take on the British ruling-class and establish one of, if not the most, cherished institutions in Britain. The late Welsh First Minister Rhodri Morgan, for example, referred to “the traditions of Titmus, Tawney, Beveridge and Bevan” in his ‘Clear Red Water’ speech (Morgan 2002) and the need to “adhere to Nye Bevan’s founding principles” as ways of articulating the values that he argued underpinned the Welsh Government’s policies since devolution (BBC 2008). Labour leaders from Neil Kinnock (Ferguson 2015) to Gordon Brown (Brown 2015) have praised Bevan’s legacy, while former Chancellor Ed Balls declared that Bevan “deserves the title of Labour’s greatest hero” (Balls 2008). In Labour ranks it is clear that Bevan is considered as a symbol for principled politics.

The importance of Bevan to the Labour Party is underlined by historian Kenneth O. Morgan. He writes that “Nye Bevan is firmly established in the socialist pantheon as a hero of Labour. This is not surprising. He was not only a prophet but also a great constructive pioneer” (2011, p. 180). Morgan also points to Bevan’s having been adopted as a figurehead for the centre ground within the Labour Party, something that he notes might seem surprising given Bevan’s position as the figurehead for a left-wing faction within the party. Bevan’s parliamentarianism, Morgan suggests, has meant that he “has been reinvented as a mainstream patriot...The ultimate radical has been transplanted into the centre ground” (2011, p. 182). He points to Tony Blair’s foreword in *The State of the Nation: The Political Legacy of Aneurin Bevan* (1997), a book commemorating the centenary of Bevan’s birth, as demonstrating how Bevan has become “a pivot of the Progressive Alliance” (2011, p. 181). That the legacy of Bevan can be claimed by the centre-ground in the Labour Party, and even by the advocates of New Labour, demonstrates the extent to which, rhetorically at least, he has come to be regarded as a unifying figure across the different, disparate strands and factions of the Labour party.

The championing of Bevan by the advocates of New Labour, in particular, appears counterintuitive. As Morgan points out, when Bevan was an MP, he was a constant thorn in the side of the Labour Party leadership. He was expelled from the party in 1939, almost expelled again in 1944 and in 1955, and his group the ‘Bevanites’ were “accused by the party right of fomenting civil war” (2011, p. 182). Barbra Castle, for instance, took issue with the idea that New Labour were continuing Bevan’s legacy, arguing in *The State of the Nation* that “if he were alive today, [Bevan] would be irritated by New Labour’s claim to have a

monopoly of ideas for bringing the party and the unions up to date” (Castle 1997, p. 66). As Simon Hannah points out when studying the history of the left within the Labour Party, Bevan and his followers were considered by many as fighting against the orthodoxies of the leadership from the left and of being a constant thorn in its side (2018, Chapter Four).

Nonetheless, more recently Bevan has been weaponised against moves to shift the Labour Party in a more leftwards direction. During the 2016 Labour leadership election, Owen Smith regularly invoked Bevan throughout his campaign, claiming to be following in Bevan’s footsteps and being inspired by his politics. Suggesting that Corbyn’s politics were not vote-winning and that the Labour leader was not electable, Smith stated: “I want to be a force for good in the world. Therefore, you need to achieve power. Nye Bevan, my great hero, said it’s all about achieving and exercising power. I’ve devoted my life to that” (Mason 2016), even implying that Corbyn and his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell were not interested in “a Parliamentary route to socialism” (Waugh 2016). Smith’s appeals to Bevan involved emphasising the pragmatic nature of his politics and his focus on practicality. Bevan’s biographer Nick Thomas-Symonds, in supporting Smith, argued that Bevan’s “application of socialist principles to government” and his belief in “pursuing an ultimate goal and seeing the practical route towards it” had similarities with Smith’s own ambitions and politics (Mason 2016).

All this was challenged by Matthew Myers who argues that Owen Smith is not a politician in the Bevanite mould. He rather claims that the “ideas, theories, and experiences that nourished [Bevan’s] development, framed his worldview, and sustained his political activity could not be farther from Owen Smith’s”. Myers points to how, just like Corbyn today, Bevan and his followers were seen as a disruptive group within the Parliamentary Labour Party, aiming to shift its strategy leftwards. Myers concludes by arguing:

Bevan is one of the great figures of British socialism. His career is marked by revolts against the established order, and defence of grassroots and socialist politics. He would have had little affinity with Owen Smith’s campaign or his brand of ‘Bevanism.’ Smith’s sudden and lackluster (sic) conversion to the Left cannot give him credibility. All it reveals is a desperation to garner legitimacy from someone else’s radical past (Myers 2016).

Herein lies a major issue when considering Bevan’s legacy. He is a hero for many different people within the Labour Party, no matter which side of the divide they may sit. He is often used as shorthand for Labour values, whether that be by figures such as Smith, or by figures

on the left of the party, such as Corbyn, who equated Bevan's values with Labour's (Corbyn 2018), even though many figures within the party would contest what those values are. Additionally, a commonality between many of these references to Bevan cited above is that they largely focus on his role in establishing the NHS. Thus, Bevan's values are equated with the values that underpinned the NHS.

It is perhaps inevitable that someone so revered in Labour Party history – and who is considered to be the founder of modern Britain's most cherished institution – would be invoked by different factions and groups across the political spectrum. But if Bevan's politics can be claimed by so many different people on so many different sides of the political debate, then the question arises as to what exactly Bevan's principles were? Beyond his status as 'founder of the NHS' and champion of the values apparently enshrined within it, what were his politics and core political beliefs?

In searching for an answer to this question, a study of the extant literature on Bevan certainly helps to reveal important themes and concepts within his thought. Chapter Two, which reviews this literature, identifies two methodological approaches to studying Bevan: the first is a biographical approach to his life and career; the second involves analysing his place within the political thought of the Labour Party. An analysis of both categories of literature highlights common themes and issues in the interpretations of Bevan's thought. These include the importance of Marxism, Bevan's advocacy of Parliament and public ownership, his views on international relations and his vision for a socialist society.

Yet useful as these various sources are for those wishing to understand Bevan's political thought, they are not without their difficulties or pitfalls. Within the biographies, details of the political controversies that Bevan was embroiled in throughout his career – of which there were many – often serve to obscure a more complete understanding of his thought. Given the significance and inherent interest of these controversies – including his often turbulent relationship with the party leadership, as well as dramatic moments such as his denouncement of unilateral disarmament in 1957 at Labour Party Conference (for some Bevanite followers, the ultimate betrayal) (Hannah 2018, pp. 108-109) – this is hardly surprising. But from the perspective of an interest in Bevan's political thought, focusing on his actions as a practical politician can serve to dilute the attention given to the relationship between his thoughts and actions, let alone the deeper foundations of his political philosophy and world view.

For different reasons, although there is now a significant body of literature that analyses the political thought of the Labour Party, considerations of the political thought of

Bevan himself are often limited. In some cases, this is because studies focus on the Bevanites, the group of MPs for whom Bevan was the figurehead, rather than on Bevan himself. Other works focus on particular dimensions or issues in Labour's political philosophy and/or the process of policy development. While often touching on Bevan's ideas, naturally enough these works do not seek to do so in any detailed, let alone comprehensive, way. Furthermore, in almost all cases, consideration of Bevan's ideas is confined almost exclusively to his 1952 book, *In Place of Fear* (1952a). Given that this was Bevan's only attempt to present his ideas systematically, this focus is perhaps not surprising. That said, Bevan was an extremely prolific author and energetic proponent of his own views (as the bibliography and Appendix to this thesis makes clear), in particular via his voluminous contributions to *Tribune*. Which in turn raises the question of the extent to which these additional, largely overlooked, sources can contribute to an understanding Bevan's political thought?

Furthermore, a review of the extant literature on Bevan – be that the biographical studies or the accounts of Bevan's place within the evolution of Labour's thought – soon reveals that there are debates and, indeed, deep disagreements over a number of core themes related to his political thought. For example, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, there is significant controversy over the extent of Bevan's debt to Marxism and the extent to which he was able to reconcile his socio-economic radicalism with his respect for the British parliamentary tradition. While for some Bevan was undone by his apparently dogmatic Marxism, for others he was a pragmatic and principled politician. On the latter reading, Bevan's continuing veneration of Marx was little more than a legacy of his past life as a militant in the South Wales coalfield – or even, most damningly, an affectation. These various positions on Bevan are, to say the least, not easily reconcilable and yet the existing literature, for all its strengths, makes it difficult to choose between them. This not least because (for different reasons) none of the current treatments of Aneurin Bevan approach his political thought in a systematic way.

In order to move beyond these difficulties with the current literature, this thesis proposes and attempts to deliver on a new approach to the study of Bevan. Rather than focusing on Bevan's life or his contribution to the political thought of the Labour Party, its primary focus is on Bevan as a political thinker. Through a close reading of his published work – i.e. not simply *In Place of Fear* but also his contributions to *Tribune* and other publications – it seeks to reconstruct Bevan's political thought. On this basis, we will then be in a position to assess the various controversies and debates that have developed in the literature about his ideas.

## Aims

The thesis offers a comprehensive analytical study of Bevan's political thought, taking the position that Bevan deserves to be treated as a political thinker, as well as a politician and institutional pioneer. Studying Bevan in this way provides for a better understanding of his ideas and sheds light on the important debates about Bevan and the intellectual history of the Labour Party that continue to this day. More formally, the thesis has two central aims:

- 1) To investigate Aneurin Bevan through the prism of his political thought, reconstructing his political philosophy from his written works; and,
- 2) To use the insights generated by this unique approach to reconsider the debates about Bevan's ideas that can be found in the extant literature.

As has already been noted in the preamble, the first aim represents a new approach to studying Aneurin Bevan. While there are a number of works that cover his life and politics, it is my contention that studying Bevan as a political thinker offers a unique and valuable contribution to our understanding of him. Bevan wrote extensively throughout his career on domestic politics, ranging widely from considerations of the immediate political context to more reflective pieces on the nature of class and capitalist society. His voluminous writings tend not to be extensively studied, and certainly not with the exclusive aim of attempting to reconstruct and articulate his political thought. But this thesis attempts to draw together and draw on Bevan's disparate writings, not only in order to provide more detail than has been offered until now in the existing literature, but also to highlight areas of Bevan's political thought that tend to be neglected or overlooked.

At this point, it is appropriate to make a few comments about sources. As has already been noted, *In Place of Fear* is the only book written by Bevan that can conceivably be considered as a concerted effort at systematising his ideas and, as a result, it is the work most widely engaged with, particularly in studies of Labour Party political thought. This thesis goes beyond *In Place of Fear* to include in the analysis Bevan's other writing. Most obviously, Bevan wrote over three-hundred articles in his own name for *Tribune* between 1937 and 1960 as well as publishing additional articles under the pseudonym 'M.P.' during the early months of the magazine's existence. In addition, during his time as the magazine's editor between 1942 and 1945, weekly editorials were produced, although it is not clear that all of them were written by Bevan as some of them do not appear to be written in the same style (these are referenced as *Tribune*). (In an Appendix this thesis lists the *Tribune* articles published under Bevan's name as well as under his pseudonym of 'M.P.' with the hope that

this will prove valuable to future researchers. The usefulness of this resource is enhanced by the fact that it is organised in such a way that researchers can identify specific articles that relate to core themes in Bevan's political thought.)

His writings are, of course, not the only source we might use to try to reconstruct Bevan's thought. He also spoke frequently in the Commons as well as on innumerable public platforms and records of these speeches provide a vivid insight into his ideas and his oratorical powers as well as his ability to dissect and eviscerate the ideas of his opponents. But given the sheer volume of Bevan's written output – as well as its unsystematic nature – the decision was taken to concentrate on these sources (including, naturally, *In Place of Fear*) rather than try to collect together and analyse all other potential sources on Bevan's political ideas. Whilst this is, of course, a limitation of the current study, it was one necessitated by the challenges of the task that I have set myself and time limits allowed for submission. I am confident that it does not detract from the validity of the analysis presented in the following chapters.

The second aim of the thesis is to use this reconstruction of Bevan's political thought to comment on the debates and disputes in the extant literature both on Bevan himself and on Bevan's place in the development of the political thought of the Labour Party. As also noted in the preamble and as further illustrated in the next chapter, the disputes and divisions are deep and profound. But having reconstructed his thought, Chapter Seven, in particular, will allow us to consider what light the unique approach adopted in this thesis – that is, treating Bevan primarily as a political thinker – allows us to shine on its subject? The chapter considers Bevan's core ideas, their relationship to ideas of the Labour Party, as well as making a broader assessment of their limitations.

A final note is required in this broad statement of the thesis' aims. As has already been noted, because of the unsystematic nature of Bevan's writing – in which only one book, *In Place of Fear*, can be considered as an attempt to provide overarching account of his political philosophy – treating Bevan as a political thinker involves trawling through a very large body of writing, identifying and presenting the key ideas across it and making connections between them. In doing so, I have sought to adopt an approach characterised by philosopher John Rawls as 'interpretive charity'.

The editor's foreword to Rawls' *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (2007) includes an excerpt from an essay titled 'Some Remarks About My Teaching', written by Rawls in 1993 and left amongst his papers. In it he describes his approach to understanding and interpreting the work of others in the following terms:

Another thing I tried to do was to present each writer's thought in what I took to be its strongest form...I didn't say, not intentionally anyway, what to my mind they should have said, but what they did say, supported by what I viewed as the most reasonable interpretation of their text. The text had to be known and respected, and the doctrine presented in its best form (Rawls 1993 cited in Rawls 2007, pp. xiii-xiv).

By applying interpretive charity in my reading of Bevan I have sought to present his thoughts in their strongest form, trying to make the most reasonable possible interpretations when there is ambiguity or uncertainty. This does not preclude criticism or pointing out weaknesses or contradictions where they exist, but it does mean – perhaps hopefully – that such criticism is based on a fair assessment of what he thought and might have been trying to say.

### **Structure: Power as a Heuristic Device**

Given the sheer range of written sources and their unsystematic nature, reconstructing Bevan's political thought presents challenges. The task is made all the more difficult by the very broad range of issues to which Bevan turned his attention. In order to facilitate the task of reconstruction, some method for organising the discussion is clearly required. This thesis has been organised around the concept of 'power'.

This has been chosen as a lens through which to analyse Bevan's thought because of the importance he placed on achieving power for the working-class. On the opening page of *In Place of Fear*, Bevan famously proclaimed:

I started my political life with no clearly formed personal ambition as to what I wanted to be, or where I wanted to go. I leave that nonsense to the writers of romantic biographies. A young miner in a South Wales colliery, my concern was with the one practical question, where does power lie in this particular state of Great Britain, and how can it be attained by the workers? No doubt this is the same question as the one to which the savants of political theory are fond of addressing themselves, but there is a world of difference in the way it shaped itself for young workers like myself. It was no abstract question for us. The circumstances of our lives made it a burning luminous mark of interrogation. Where was power and which the road to it? (1952a, p. 1).

Since then, Bevan's lifework has been portrayed as a search for power to allow the working-class in Britain to improve its position. Michael Foot, for example, states that a moral "deeply embedded" in Bevan's thinking was that "*politics was about power* [Foot's emphasis]"

(1975a, p. 27), while Nick Thomas-Symonds paints Bevan's life as a continuous search for power, declaring that Bevan "sought power with a purpose" (2015, p. 5). We have already noted the way that Owen Smith also stressed the importance of power for Bevan's self-proclaimed followers. The importance that Bevan placed on power makes it extremely useful as a lens through which to analyse his political thought.

Power, of course, is an extremely broad concept. In political science, power is regarded as an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie 1956), or "what the philosopher Wittgenstein terms a 'family resemblance' concept. This entails that when we use the concept in different contexts its meaning changes sufficiently so that there is no single definition of power which covers all usage" (Haugaard 2002, p. 1). It should be stressed, therefore, that this study does not attempt to engage with the myriad of understandings of power that exist, let alone contribute to that literature. Rather it simply adopts (and slightly adapts) Michael Mann's now famous framework outlining four sources of social power model as a heuristic framework for its analysis.

Mann's model has been chosen because of the (broad) relevance of his categorisation to Bevan's political thought as well as its flexibility. Starting from Marxist-inspired beginnings (Lawson 2006, p. 3), Mann arrived at a broad (in his terms, non-reductionist) conceptualisation of power: the IEMP model of power, which encompasses ideological, economic, military and political forms of power. He regards these four sources of power as being separate from each other but overlapping in different ways, in different societies. Using this framework, Mann has written a hugely ambitious four-volume work that aims to provide an historical analysis of power from Neolithic times through to the present. This is premised on his central claim that a

general account of societies, their structure, and their history can best be given in terms of the interrelations of what I will call the four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military and political (IEMP) relationships. These are (1) overlapping networks of social interaction, not dimensions, levels, or factors of a single social totality...[and] (2) They are also organizations, institutional means of attaining human goals (1986, p. 2).

Unsurprisingly given his self-professed debt to Marxism, economic power was of central importance to Bevan, a politician who sought to develop strategies that would allow the working-class to transform its position within society using political power, and in so doing transform society itself. Military power was also a key preoccupation of Bevan's as part of



his wider, keen interest in international relations. Mann describes ideological power as “deriv[ing] from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices with others” (2012, p. 6), all themes with which Bevan was concerned. The Mannian framework, is therefore broad enough for the breadth of Bevan’s political thought to be captured.

It should perhaps be stressed again that Mann’s framework is used here as no-more and no-less than an organising device. This thesis is not a Mannian reading of Bevan nor, indeed, does it seek to establish a rival ‘Bevanite’ conceptualisation of power. Mann’s framework is a heuristic device that has been utilised to organise Bevan’s unsystematic and voluminous output. In structuring this thesis, Mann’s original IEMP framework has been reorganised as an EPMI model, allowing us to better illustrate the determining role of the economic sphere in Bevan’s thought. As such, the reconstruction of Bevan’s ideas moves from the economic to the political and then to the military/international before ending with a discussion of Bevan’s political thought through the lens of ideological power.

Although this framework allows us to explore all the major themes in Bevan’s work, it is important to recognise that not every issue with which Bevan dealt – or which might otherwise be thought to be relevant – can be neatly encompassed within it. For example, Bevan’s attitudes towards Wales are clearly of contemporary interest (see Griffiths 1993; Smith 1997; Williams 2015; Gwalchmai 2019) but it would be hard to argue that they played a centrally important role in his political thought and they are not discussed in the following pages. In addition, following in this regard from Mann, it is clear that not every issue with which Bevan dealt can be confined under one heading or ‘type’ of power. For example, Bevan’s analysis of economic power directly impacts his consideration of other issues. Nonetheless, the Mannian framework adopted assists in the task of reconstructing the main themes in Bevan’s political thought.

To summarise the approach of this thesis, three core interpretative decisions have been arrived at:

- 1) To focus on Aneurin Bevan primarily as a political thinker rather than a politician or institution builder;
- 2) In doing so, adopting power as a lens/framework through which to view and understand Bevan’s political thought; and in particular,
- 3) Adopting Mann’s typology of power as a heuristic device that is particularly suitable for analysing Bevan’s political thought.

Overall, this is an approach that allows for a unique engagement with Bevan and his politics.

## **Chapter Overview**

Following this introduction, the thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter Two analyses the current literature pertinent to understanding Bevan. It begins by analysing the major biographical texts on Bevan. These biographies provide insight into Bevan's life and career and describe important aspects of his political philosophy, allowing us to identify some of the key arguments and debates about Bevan's political thought. Studies of Labour's political thought are also analysed in order to understand the debates about the nature of the party's ideology and the claims made about Bevan's intellectual influence over the party's ideas and policies. An analysis of both types of writing provides a foundation and starting point into studying Bevan's political thought, helps identify important themes within it and allows us to locate the place of Bevan's thought within the literature and key interpretations of the Labour Party. Most importantly, this chapter identifies the main gaps or disagreements in our understanding of Bevan as well as the dominant debates concerning his political thought; debates that will be engaged with throughout this thesis.

Following the literature review, the next four chapters of the thesis – Chapters Three to Six – attempt a comprehensive analysis and reconstruction of Bevan's thought, within the EPMI framework. Chapter Three analyses Bevan's writing on economics, exploring his analysis of capitalism, class conflict and the economic development of societies. It then proceeds to assess the strategies that Bevan contemplated to achieve economic power for the working class, including industrial action. This chapter identifies an orthodox Marxist understanding of the economy in Bevan's political thought, which emphasised the material economic base and the importance of property relations in society. It also notes that Bevan's strategy to change these property relations was premised on the development and strength (as he saw it) of democracy in Britain. Although related to political power, Bevan's support for democracy is included in this section as it acts as bridge between understanding his conception of class conflict and his strategy for obtaining power for the working-class.

This discussion of Bevan's belief in British democracy as the strategy for working-class action leads directly into Chapter Four, which focuses on political power, including Bevan's analysis of Parliament and his vision for nationalisation and public ownership. This chapter details how Bevan envisioned the Labour Party's taking control of Parliament and consequently the functions of the British State in order to manage key industries and to enact

principles of economic planning. Although his reverence for liberal institutions represented a significant departure from orthodox Marxist political strategy, Bevan's analysis of the economy nonetheless remained central to his understanding of political power and the role of the State in changing property relations.

Chapter Five analyses Bevan's attitude to international relations. Here we move beyond Mann's conceptualisation, focusing on Bevan's ideas about and hopes for international society rather than simply his views on military power – even if the latter also remain of central importance. Thus, the chapter ranges broadly, examining Bevan's analysis of the relationship between capitalism and war, his rejection of military power in international relations and power politics, his critique of the rise of nationalism throughout the world and his desire to see strong democratic international organisations. Through its analysis of Bevan's writings on developing nations and communist societies such as the Soviet Union, China and Yugoslavia, this chapter emphasises the centrality of Bevan's understanding of the relationship between the economic base and political superstructure of society.

The last of the four chapters organised around conceptualisations of power, Chapter Six, discusses the role that ideology plays in Bevan's analysis, his critique of capitalism and communism and his vision for a democratic socialist society. It outlines the ideological battle that Bevan identified as taking place between the working-class and the ruling-class, his vision of how values of collective action could permeate society, his desire to see positive relations between individuals in society and the need for a greater understanding between society and the State. This chapter explores themes that are often overlooked in the literature, and again demonstrates the central importance of Bevan's analysis of the economy to his understanding of how ideas shape material conditions and vice versa.

In presenting Bevan's political thought these four chapters involve a substantive analysis of his work and reconstruction of his key ideas. Chapter Seven then concludes the thesis by engaging in a more critical and reflective analysis of Bevan's political thought. It engages with the key debates that emerge from the discussion of the literature (in Chapter Two, in particular) and assesses the contribution of this thesis to them, reflecting on the extent to which it contributes to the current knowledge of Bevan. It also offers its reflections on the coherence (or lack thereof) of Bevan's political thought.

The fundamental argument that emerges from this analysis is that Bevan's political thought is characterised by an orthodox Marxist understanding of economic development that emphasises the central importance of the material base of society in shaping its political and

ideological superstructure. As the four-chapter reconstruction of Bevan's thought shows, this understanding of base and superstructure permeates Bevan's writings on both domestic and international politics, and of both war and peace. The thesis emphasises the role that Bevan envisioned for the State in changing property relations and demonstrates that, despite the fact that, pre-1945 at least, he offered the outlines of more creative ideas around nationalisation and, relatedly, more critical analyses of the role of the State, these ideas were never properly developed. Rather, his political thought ultimately appears to have become trapped between a rather orthodox (pre-New Left) understanding of economic development and a benign view of Parliament and related State-power that were limitations of his political thought. Bevan's thought, it is argued, failed to develop in ways that took into account the changing economy of 1950s Britain or that recognised the difficulties of using British Parliament as a means through which to transfer power to society. It is also argued that many of the core assumptions of Bevan's thought, rooted in the political traditions in which he was situated, fitted comfortably within the mainstream of Labour Party ideology, specifically the ideology of labourism.

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Aneurin Bevan is an historical figure who has been subject to much debate with no sign that that discussion or interest are about to diminish. Regarded as one of the most controversial political figures of his day, he is also almost universally considered to be one of the most successful ministers that the Labour Party has ever produced. Disagreement over Bevan's legacy – and attempts from across the political spectrum to be regarded as its true inheritors – mean that he is likely to remain the subject of intense debate and disagreement for years to come. This thesis is a study of Bevan as a political thinker. It seeks to reconstruct his political thought in order to offer an alternative perspective on this complex figure and provide new insight into his intellectual development and the ideas that drove his politics. In this way, the study seeks to make a significant contribution to the existing literature, enhancing our understanding of a key figure in Welsh and British politics.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Before analysing his writing directly, this chapter explores the secondary literature on Bevan. It is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the biographical studies of Bevan and the second discussing literature that examines the Labour Party's political thought. There have been a number of biographies written about Bevan and there also exists a vast literature assessing the political thought of the Labour Party, some of which includes specific analysis of Bevan himself. The first section of this chapter outlines the existing biographical literature and draws out key themes emerging from it in relation to Bevan's political thought. The second section then categorises the literature that exists on Labour's political thought and identifies the core arguments over its nature and Bevan's place within it.

This review assists in contextualising the study of Bevan's political thought. The biographical accounts of Bevan provide a valuable insight into his life and career and elucidate some of the key ideas underpinning his thought. It is also important to study the literature on Labour's political thought in order to understand the theoretical and ideological foundations of the Labour Party and Bevan's relationship to them. Most importantly, this chapter identifies the key debates emerging from the literature concerning Bevan's political thought. This chapter identifies common understandings of Bevan as well as highlighting the disagreements in the literature, which this thesis aims to address.

### Biographies

The first biography of Bevan written by Vincent Brome and entitled *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography* was published in 1953. Written while Bevan was still alive, it presents a basic account of his life, containing little that is not covered in greater detail in the later biographies. Following this, Mark Krug's book *Aneurin Bevan: Cautious Rebel* was published in 1961, providing an American perspective of Bevan's career. The first significant biography of Bevan was published by his friend and political ally Michael Foot. The first volume was originally published in 1961, covering the years 1897-1945, while the second volume was published in 1974, covering the remainder of Bevan's life up to his death in 1960 (this thesis references the 1975 editions). The two-volume works are incredibly detailed and are vital resources for understanding Aneurin Bevan and the history of the Labour Party during his lifetime. Not as detailed as Foot's, but providing valuable insight into Bevan's life and career, is Jennie Lee's autobiographical account *My Life With Nye* (1980), which provides a first-hand account of their political lives together. As a response to what he

considers to be a work of hagiography by Foot, John Campbell's *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism* (1987) offers a more critical perspective of Bevan. Campbell raises questions about Bevan's legacy, particularly his status as a Labour Party icon. Campbell is more critical than Foot of many aspects of Bevan's career. He also aims to assess Bevan by tracing "the development of his political ideals and see how far they were realised and how they stood up to reality when put to the test" (1987, p. xii). Indeed, Campbell's biography is the most detailed in terms of exploring Bevan's political thought.

The most recent biographies of Bevan are Clare and Francis Beckett's *Bevan* (2004), a short introduction to Bevan's life, and Nick Thomas-Symonds' *Nye: The Political Life of Aneurin Bevan* (2015). Thomas-Symonds provides a balanced view of Bevan's life and career compared with Foot and Campbell, as he attempts to

move beyond the two views adopted by Foot and Campbell...[as the] analytical space between the two biographies is vast. Foot may at times lapse into hagiography, but, equally, the life of the creator of the NHS should not be castigated as a failure on the Campbell thesis (2015, p. 12).

Susan Demont's unpublished PhD thesis *Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan: a society and its political articulation 1890-1929* (1990) and Dai Smith's *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (1993) are essential to understand Bevan's early life in Tredegar and its impact in shaping his political outlook. In 1997, a collection of essays on Bevan's legacy *The State of the Nation: The Political Legacy of Aneurin Bevan* was published with contributions from politicians and historians, such as Barbara Castle, Dai Smith and Michael Foot, that are primarily reflections on Bevan's legacy. Although not a biography of Bevan, Mark Jenkins' *Bevanism: Labour's High Tide* (1979) is also treated as part of the biographical literature. It is an historical account of the Bevanite *movement* rather than on Bevan himself, but it does provide some insight into understanding his political thought.

There are other book chapters and articles that discuss Bevan's life and legacy in varying detail, but the literature outlined above is the most important because of the detail it provides and the fact that it generates competing claims concerning Bevan's life. The biographies written by Foot, Campbell and Thomas-Symonds, in particular, offer the most significant and interesting insights into Bevan's life and career and the development of his political thought. The key themes emerging from this literature are now analysed.

## Key Themes

As well as focusing on Bevan as a politician, detailing his life and career, the biographical literature also explores the political beliefs held by Bevan that informed his decisions and his attitudes towards society and politics. The themes that emerge from this literature include: Bevan's Marxist education; his analysis of class; his attitude to syndicalism; the importance he placed on democracy and Parliament; nationalisation and economic planning; his views on international society; and the relationship between the individual and society. The biographies also emphasise the ideological battle between Bevan and the 'revisionists' – figures in the Labour Party who were opposed to Bevan's brand of socialism – as well as the dichotomy between Bevan as a pragmatic politician and Bevan as a political thinker. Although certain themes are common between the different studies, the analysis below reveals disagreements within the literature as well as limitations to the biographical approach, that this thesis seeks to address.

### *Class and Capitalism*

A fundamental feature of Bevan's thought identified in the biographies is the emphasis that he placed on class struggle and the need to transcend capitalism. Foot and Thomas-Symonds point to Bevan's belief in the Marxist theory of class struggle (Foot 1975a, p. 82; Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 20), while Campbell notes that this understanding of class struggle was informed by Bevan's recognition of the need for ideology to be based on social experience (1987, pp. 264-265). Thomas-Symonds emphasises the influence of Bevan's Marxist education on his thought (2015, p. 20), as does Smith, who stresses the effect of Bevan's early political and industrial experiences in shaping his belief in collective action (1993, p. 192). Class struggle, according to the biographers, remained central to Bevan's political thought throughout his career.

Demont emphasises how important Bevan's early political education and experiences in Tredegar were in moulding his thought:

From 1917 onwards the development of the town's Labour movement and the maturing of Aneurin Bevan as a political thinker and activist do not merely run parallel; they are intrinsically interwoven, shaping and influencing each other's beliefs and informing each other's actions as both battled against the betrayal of post war 'reconstruction', the onset of the Depression and the resulting unemployment and decline of a once great industrial centre (1990, p. 182).

Demont insists, therefore, that there is a need “to study Bevan in the context of his community, and that community in the context of its most influential leader – the relationship was a genuinely symbiotic one” (1990, p. 182). This experience was supplemented by Bevan’s working-class education, through socialist classes in Tredegar and also through his education at the Central Labour College in London between 1919 and 1921. Chapter Three of this thesis returns to the centrality of class in Bevan’s political thought.

### *Marxism*

Bevan’s biographers identify how his political education and his advocacy of class struggle was directly informed by his reading of Marxism. Foot notes that Bevan “accepted the Marxist stress on the need for a full theory of social change” (1975a, p. 150) and insists that the Marxist theory of class struggle never left Bevan:

His Socialism was rooted in Marxism; whatever modifications he had made in the doctrine, a belief in the class struggle stayed unshaken. Marxism taught him that society must be changed swiftly, intrepidly, fundamentally, if the transformation was not to be overturned by counter-revolution (1975b, p. 17).

Foot points to Bevan’s statement that a fundamental feature of capitalist society was the conflict that existed between poverty, property and democracy as being Bevan’s own “individual elaboration of Marxist prophesy” (1975b, p. 20). Foot does not elaborate on this point, but Chapter Three of this thesis recognises this formulation and explains its relation to Marxism.

Despite Foot’s view that Marxism was central to Bevan’s thought, Campbell argues that Foot underplays the Marxism in Bevan’s thought, asserting that Bevan saw himself “not as an inspired individual but as a scientific socialist, in step with history”. Campbell admits that Bevan was not an orthodox Marxist, continually “modifying his faith in the iron laws of historical determinism” yet proposes that “it is not unfair to suggest that his theoretical education never got very far beyond Marx”. He argues that Marx was the source of Bevan’s strength until 1950, guiding him through political struggles, as well as being the source of “his loss of direction thereafter when he began to realise that history was not working out according to plan” (1987, p. xiii). Campbell shows that Bevan’s view of the historical development of society and class conflict was derived from *The Communist Manifesto*, as evidenced by Bevan’s review of 1921 (to which this thesis returns in Chapter Three). Campbell suggests that Bevan’s belief in the march of socialism was only questioned later in



life when reality made Bevan doubt what Campbell describes as “deterministic Marxism” (1987, p. 346). This argument is challenged in this thesis, where it is demonstrated that Bevan’s Marxism was more sophisticated than Campbell gives him credit for, guiding his thought throughout his career and shaping his understanding of the world. Nick Thomas-Symonds and Dai Smith note the importance of Marxist theory to Bevan’s thought (Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 33; Smith 1993, p. 203), although unlike Campbell they argue that Bevan was not dogmatic in his beliefs, not seeing it as a source of weakness.

Mark Jenkins also sees the importance of Marx to Bevan, arguing that in “many respects Bevan exhibited far greater breadth of mind and depth of insight than his Marxist contemporaries”. He claims that, considering *In Place of Fear* was written during the height of Stalinism, it was “remarkable that Bevan publicly acknowledged his debt to Marxism to the extent that he did”. Jenkins writes that Bevan,

who never professed Marxism [merely acknowledging its strengths], did try for a time to differentiate between Marxism and ‘Soviet Communism’, to project the possible future course of its development and to relate the evolution of socialism to the fulfilment of humans needs on a global scale (1979, p. 302).

Jenkins claims, however, that Bevan’s writings, “whilst often brilliant and penetrating” revealed “little evidence of familiarity with established theorists, Marxists or otherwise, in this field” (1979, p.300). Jenkins also notes that Bevan “combined his enthusiasm towards Marxism with emphatic rejection of what many would regard as its central tenets”, specifically the dismissal of democracy as a vehicle for enacting social and political change (1979, p. 298). Jenkins’ assessment of *In Place of Fear* is that it expressed “considerable scepticism towards parliament, yet embraces it as the means of achieving socialism. It respects Marxism but rejects much of its essence” (1979, p. 302). It is shown throughout this chapter that the relationship between Bevan’s Marxism and his attitude towards parliamentary democracy is a key theme in the literature, as well as being central to the arguments of this thesis. Although Bevan may not have demonstrated familiarity with contemporary Marxist theorists, Marxist understandings of society can nevertheless be recognised in Bevan’s thought.

A number of Marxist writers are, however, identified in the biographies as being important to Bevan’s intellectual development. For example, Thomas-Symonds credits American socialists Eugene V Debs, Daniel de Leon and Jack London as well as South Wales socialists such as Sydney Jones, Walter Conway and Noah Ablett, as influencing Bevan’s

thought and instilling in him a belief in collective action (2015, pp. 24-26). Smith notes the influence of German Marxist Joseph Dietzgen's materialist conception of history on the development of Bevan's political thought. Dietzgen's work was taught at the Central Labour College in London where he was considered an important thinker. Stuart Macintyre explains that Dietzgen "served as an introduction to the philosophical foundations of Marxism for many young working-class autodidacts" (1986, p. 130). Smith contends that "Dietzgen's 'monism' (everything in the world is interconnected and interdependent) appealed greatly to Labour College students...because it provided a readily comprehensible philosophical analysis of thought and matter that emphasized their real unity". Central Labour College students were able to see that "Ideas could interact with material existence to cause further change" (1993, p. 203). Chapter Three goes into greater detail in explaining how the materialist conception of history is reflected in Bevan's analysis of capitalism and permeates throughout his political thought.

### *Syndicalism to Parliamentarianism*

It can be seen, therefore, that there is agreement in the literature regarding central aspects of Bevan's thought. There is, however, debate over the extent of Bevan's commitment to syndicalism before he became an MP in 1929. Noah Ablett, one of the founders of the Central Labour College in 1909 and one of the principle authors of *The Miners' Next Step* ([1912] 1991), a syndicalist pamphlet calling for the miners to "build up an organization, that will ultimately take over the mining industry, and carry it out in the interests of the workers" (Unofficial Reform Committee 1991, p. 28), was a significant influence in South Wales (Bevan 1952a, 19). Campbell claims that up until the failure of the General Strike in 1926, Bevan agreed with Ablett's position and advocated that industrial action should be taken to achieve power for the working-class, pointing out that during his time at the Central Labour College, Bevan was arguing for direct action (1987, p. 18). This claim is supported by the Principal of the College during Bevan's time there, William W. Craik (1964, p. 124). Thomas-Symonds also notes that Bevan was first inspired by syndicalists in South Wales, such as Noah Ablett, but demonstrates that Bevan eventually lost faith in direct action after a number of defeats for the working-class (2015, p. 23).

According to Bevan's own recollection of events, he moved from advocating for direct industrial action to a belief in Parliament as an important source of power for the working-class. Bevan's own reflections on this period support the claim that he saw the failure of the 1919 Triple Alliance and the 1926 General Strike as being pivotal moments in

changing his outlook from industrial action towards Parliament (1952a, pp. 20-21). Smith, however, argues that Bevan's move from syndicalism to parliamentary action should not be identified as a break in his political education. Instead, he claims that it was an acknowledgement by Bevan of the need to adapt strategy to changing events and circumstance, quoting Bevan as arguing that as truth changes, ideas need to be regularly revitalised (1993, pp. 201-202).

By contrast, based on a study of Bevan's early years, Susan Demont (1990) argues that too much attention has been paid to Bevan's recollections and not on his actions, dismissing the idea that Bevan was a syndicalist and pointing out that his activities in the Labour Party during this period demonstrate his belief "in a synthesis of industrial and political action rather than the supremacy of one over the other" (1990, p. 249). Demont contends that the interpretation of Bevan as someone who converted from a belief in industrial action to a belief in parliamentary action

is only viable if one subscribes to the view that the pre-1926 Bevan was an anti-parliamentarian syndicalist for whom the only arena for the conduct of the class struggle was the industrial front – a view borne out neither by his speeches nor his actions from the age of nineteen onwards (1990, p. 330).

During the 1920s, Bevan was a councillor in addition to being an official of the South Wales Miners Federation and held posts on a variety of local groups and institutions, his aim being "to involve the [Labour] Party in every committee, organisation and interest group within the town with a view to influencing the course of events from a socialist stand-point" (1990, p. 355).

Demont also points out that the confusion over Bevan's beliefs "derives in part from the equation of 'syndicalism' with 'direct action' followed by the conclusion that advocates of the latter by definition spurn all forms of orthodox political action". Direct action, Demont argues, "in the form of marches, demonstrations or strikes for a political purpose does not preclude adherence to the labour movement's political wing". The combination of Bevan's political and industrial actions during the 1920s demonstrates that "though not a syndicalist", Bevan was

a supporter of direct action in those instances where there seemed little prospect of his class's needs being met by any other means. This in no sense contradicts his fundamental belief in the political road, however critical he was of some of those who espoused it (1990, p. 243).

Thomas-Symonds arrives at a similar conclusion, highlighting Bevan's time on the Tredegar District Council and the Monmouthshire County Council as a significant period in Bevan's political development, particularly his analysis of democracy and representative institutions (2015, chapters 3 & 4). The relationship between Bevan's analysis of industrial democracy and parliamentary democracy is investigated in Chapter Three of this thesis. It supports Demont's argument that, while there is a lack of evidence for Bevan's having advocated for syndicalism, he did advocate for extra-parliamentary actions through strikes and demonstrations.

### *Democracy and Parliament*

Whether or not Bevan's advocacy for parliament as a vehicle for social change represented a significant change in his thinking, Bevan foresaw that the working-class would achieve power via democracy and through Parliament (Foot 1975a, p. 263). Foot notes that Bevan criticised the failure of democratic socialists to realise that Parliamentary power needed to be captured and used as a weapon against capitalism (1975b, p. 17) and that democracy could lead to revolutionary change (1975b, p. 281). Supporting this view, Campbell presents Bevan's political strategy as:

All the Labour Party had to do – descending from theory to practice – was, first, to unite the working class so as to be able to translate the majority of the population in the country into a majority in the House of Commons; and, secondly, having once won a majority, to use it resolutely (1987, p. 48).

Campbell states that according to Bevan people needed to have political power, insisting that Parliament would deliver this (1987, p. 139). The Labour Party was to be the vehicle of this social change. It is noted by Bevan's biographers that he considered Marx not to have given sufficient weight to Parliament and democracy as a method of achieving social change. Brome, for example, claims that Bevan then revised his belief in Marxism (1953, p. 93). Foot suggests that World War Two led Bevan away from his qualified Marxist principles to liberal and democratic virtues, as he became a champion of parliamentary institutions (1975a, p. 349).

This reveals a possible tension in Bevan's political thought between his Marxist education and his advocacy of British democracy and Parliament. Foot argues that the "British democratic tradition, deriving from the Levellers and the Chartists, was grafted on to Bevan's Marxism" (1975b, p. 18). Campbell considers that Bevan "became paradoxically

from his Marxist starting-point the staunchest champion of the rights of the House of Commons” (1987, p. 57). As identified above, when discussing Bevan’s Marxism, Campbell, although arguing that it acted as a strength to Bevan up until 1950, views it as a fundamental weakness in Bevan’s politics, whereas Foot sees the relationship between Bevan’s Marxism and his location within the British democratic tradition as a more comfortable synthesis. Whether this can be considered as a *tension* in Bevan’s thought or a *synthesis* between two traditions, is an issue explored in subsequent chapters. The relationship between Bevan’s Marxism and his faith in Parliament is also a prominent theme in the literature on Labour’s political thought, as shown in the second half of this present chapter.

### *Economic Planning and the Mixed Economy*

The biographies identify Bevan’s vision of using State power to enact changes for society. They focus on Bevan’s belief that the State needed to take control of industries in order to implement principles of economic planning (Foot 1975a, p. 349; Campbell 1987, p. 268) and to prevent the dominance of private property and private enterprise (Foot 1975b, pp. 71 & 217; Campbell 1987, p. 15; Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 112). Thomas-Symonds, for example, emphasises Bevan’s belief that once the economic power of the nation was in the hands of the people through parliament, policy could be shaped to the needs of society, not private enterprise. Collective action could help to cultivate individual life (2015, p. 210). Foot discusses Bevan’s shopping-list of industries for nationalisation in 1953, including “all rented land, the chemical industry, the aircraft industry and sections of engineering” (1975b, p. 388) and Bevan’s belief that social and economic power passes from one society to another: from a society dominated by private enterprise to one dominated by publicly-owned industries (1975b, pp. 257 & 368-369). Nationalising key industries appears central to Bevan’s conception of socialist society.

The biographies highlight that Bevan had a vision of how nationalisation could improve people’s quality of life by reorganising society. Foot writes that Bevan argued for economic planning as it would lead to the efflorescence of personal liberty (1975a, p. 349). Campbell identifies Bevan’s belief in a synthesis between Soviet economic planning and Western Liberalism (1987, p. 132). Thomas-Symonds points to Bevan’s fundamental belief that poverty was a product of the structure of society and the economy rather than the individual (2015, p. 112), resulting from poor social organisation (2015, p. 148).

The biographies also discuss Bevan’s plans for the structure of nationalisation. They assert that a central feature of Bevan’s outlook was his insistence on State control of industry

as the dominant property form in society (Foot 1975a, p. 492), but also on the need for a mixed economy (Foot 1975b, pp. 255-256; Campbell 1987, p. 206; Brome 1953, pp. 154, 190, 204). An example of Bevan's belief in nationalisation is his decision to nationalise hospitals when establishing the NHS (Foot 1975b, p. 133). Thomas-Symonds writes that Bevan's decision to nationalise the hospitals was an action that emphasised his political philosophy: collective action while "respecting the importance of the individual" (2015, p. 150). Campbell points to Bevan's essay for the Fabian Society 'Plan for Britain' where Bevan outlined his vision of nationalised industries being run by 'able men' under the general control of the House of Commons (1987, p. 131). This essay, however, is not analysed in any great detail by Campbell and does not receive much, if any, attention in other biographies – Thomas-Symonds briefly refers to it only in passing (2015, p. 118). Despite noting the importance of nationalisation, both Campbell and Thomas-Symonds argue that Bevan was vague in terms of outlining the form that it needed to take and what industries needed to be taken into public ownership (Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 234; Campbell 1987, p. 206). Contrary to this view, Chapter Four in fact argues that, particularly pre-1945, Bevan did develop proposals for nationalisation. The Fabian Society essay referenced above, as well as his articles in *Tribune*, provide greater insight into Bevan's vision for economic planning and public ownership.

### *International Relations*

There is a considerable focus in the biographies on Bevan's views on foreign policy and international relations, reflecting the international tensions that occurred throughout Bevan's life. Jenkins insists that an international focus is needed for studies of the Bevanites, rather than one that focuses on the group's parliamentarianism and its organisational structure. A more profound problem than domestic issues, he argues, was "Bevanism's inability to present a rounded out analysis of the world into which it was born – the world of the two 'camps' [the United States and the Soviet Union]" (1979, p. 3). Jenkins argues that the Bevanites never pronounced a "truly international perspective of socialism. They behaved as if the establishment of Socialism was a task to be achieved within a fundamentally British perspective". He points to an inability of the Bevanites to develop their attitudes to economic and political problems that acknowledged the interdependence of the working-class throughout both western and eastern Europe (1979, p. 4). The focus of Jenkins' work, however, is predominantly on the group rather than Bevan's own ideas. It is also inaccurate to suggest, as he does, that Bevan failed to articulate an international perspective of

socialism. Chapter Five demonstrates the place of international society in Bevan's political thought.

International issues are considered in the literature. An aspect of Bevan's analysis of international relations was his consideration of war and its effects. For instance, Campbell notes Bevan's critique of rearmament: capitalists, Bevan argued, were using the rising demand for arms to entrench their own positions (1987, p. 76). According to Campbell's interpretation, Bevan saw World War Two as a fight for socialism and a new society, accusing the British ruling-class of wanting to maintain its dominant position after the war (1987, pp. 86, 93 & 120). Thomas-Symonds cites Bevan as quoting Marx's phrase "war is the locomotive of history" to describe the effect of war on society (2015, p. 112). Bevan's critique of war also appears to have informed his view on post-war international relations, as Chapter Five of this thesis demonstrates.

Emphasis is also placed on Bevan's desire to see the needs of small nations met (Foot 1975a, p. 495) and on the importance that he placed on international institutions in shaping the organisation of international relations (Foot 1975b, Chapter 14; Campbell 1987, p. 269). Foot writes that Bevan applied his domestic analysis of Marxism to smaller nations that were going through their own industrial revolutions and which needed to be given support and aid (1975b, p. 584), a feature that is also recognised and developed upon in Chapter Five of this thesis. He also notes that Bevan accepted "the general Marxist thesis that capitalism caused the imperialist rivalries which in turn caused war" (1975a, p. 209). Campbell writes about Bevan's desire to see the creation of a world organisation that would weave national pride and patriotism into a pattern of world organisation. He demonstrates that Bevan envisioned a more rational ordering of international society after World War Two (1987, p. 124). According to Campbell, Bevan did not want the UN to be a body that enforced old imperialist "spheres of influence". Campbell views this as Bevan's losing "contact with the realities of power politics" (1987, p. 324). It can be seen that Bevan's analysis of international organisations encompasses discussions of both military and political power. Chapter Five supports this, but also demonstrates that Bevan's writings on international affairs also include analyses of nationalisms and economic development throughout the world.

There is also discussion in the literature of Bevan's reflections on Britain's role in international affairs. Campbell describes Bevan's position as wanting Britain to be a third power in international relations, charting an independent course from the foreign policy of the United States (1987, p. 192). Campbell argues that Bevan and the Left demanded a peaceful settlement to world tensions, advocating a third way foreign policy and a non-aligned

movement that would take in anti-colonial movements around the world (1987, p. 284-285). Thomas-Symonds notes that Bevan distinguished “between a ‘third force’ (which he advocated) and a ‘third bloc’, which he saw as dangerous”, although the precise difference between the two is not made clear (2015, p. 213). Chapter Five seeks to clarify this distinction.

Bevan’s desire to see Britain as a third force was based on his argument that there needed to be a reduction in military spending by the world superpowers. The biographers agree that Bevan wanted military aggression to be replaced by the strengthening of international cooperation. Foot points to Bevan’s belief that the Soviets were not seeking military conflict with the rest of the world and that a new cooperative attitude was needed towards the Soviet Union (1975b, p. 304). Campbell writes that Bevan saw the potential of political democracy to lead the way in converting the world to peace, not weapons (1987, p. 228), and that a common theme for Bevan was that war should be against social conditions which led to poverty and gave rise to communism (1987, p. 262). He points to Bevan’s desire for direct military spending to be turned into aid (1987, p. 269). These themes are further considered in Chapter Five; this thesis, however, places greater emphasis on the insights that can be gleaned from Bevan’s writings concerning the importance of the materialist conception of history in his analysis of international relations. The linking of these two dimensions in Bevan’s thought is not often undertaken comprehensively.

A common discussion in the biographies concerns Bevan’s position on the development of nuclear weapons. Bevan’s denunciation of unilateral disarmament as Shadow Foreign Secretary at the Labour Party Conference in 1957 is one of the most (in)famous moments of his political career. It is a moment that appears to reflect Bevan’s acknowledgement of the fragile nature of international agreements, as he argued that unilaterally disarming would have meant denouncing all prior treaties with other countries, which were based on armaments (Foot 1975b, p. 600). Bevan had called all bombs “immoral” and although he wanted to keep the hydrogen bomb, he demanded a strategy that meant it would never be used (Campbell 1987, p. 295). Campbell describes Bevan as an “orthodox multilateralist” who believed Britain needed to possess its own weapons (1987, p. 331). According to Thomas-Symonds, Bevan had been in support of the decision to develop the atomic bomb as he thought it would give Britain status and a measure of foreign policy independence from America (2015, p. 173), although, contrary to Campbell, Thomas-Symonds claims that Bevan did not want Britain to develop the hydrogen bomb (2015, p. 217). Bevan’s attitude towards nuclear weapons is analysed in this thesis, although it avoids



focusing on the personal controversies between Bevan and his supporters that resulted from his actions in 1957 and instead focuses on how Bevan's actions contribute to understanding his political thought.

The debate concerning Bevan and the bomb reveals the limitations of the biographical approach in explaining his political thought. While armaments, international relations between states, the third force and international relations are important to understanding Bevan's thought and his ideas, this thesis, while acknowledging these, attempts to link his thinking on international relations to his critique of capitalism, his conception of class conflict and the materialism that underpins his political philosophy.

### *Individualism and society*

An important theme emerging from the biographies is Bevan's vision of a socialist society after economic planning. Foot identifies Bevan's vision for a cohesive society based on strong communities (1975b, p. 76) and points to Bevan's love for his class and his desire for beauty to be brought into politics (1975b, p. 77). In housing, for example, Bevan focused on the aesthetic value of housing and his desire to see quality housing developed for the working-class (Campbell 1987, p. 156). Brome considers Bevan to have been influenced by the American critic Lewis Mumford, wanting cities and towns to be "full of light and grace...[and] express a way of life unscarred by slums and the ugliness of poverty" (1953, p. 114). Foot argues that the biggest theme of Bevan's *In Place of Fear* was the combination of individualism and collectivism (1975b, p. 366). Chapter Six reveals that this indeed was an important theme in Bevan's political thought.

Uruguayan philosopher José Enrique Rodó is commonly identified as an influence on Bevan's reflections on capitalism. Foot identifies Rodó as informing Bevan's outlook on modern industrial society (1975a, p. 195). Campbell is very critical of Bevan's admiration of Rodó. He describes Rodó as reeking of cultural snobbery and accuses Bevan of elitism for reading his work (1987, p. 67). Campbell argues that Bevan took from Rodó ideas about a classless society, in which there would not be boring sameness and where everyone could reach a higher purpose and flourish as individuals (1987, p. 69). Ultimately, Campbell sees Rodó as being "impossibly idealistic...[illuminating] something important about Bevan that he should have taken him as his personal prophet" (1987, p. 67). Thomas-Symonds considers Rodó to have been "far more influential than Marx in Bevan's critique of capitalist society". He writes that Bevan considered American capitalism to be "vulgar and materialistic at the expense of human spiritual fulfilment" (2015, p. 228). Smith notes Rodó's *The Motives of*

*Proteus* as being a source of inspiration for Bevan (1993, p. 184). The influence of Rodó in shaping Bevan's ideas is considered in Chapter Six, particularly the suggestion that Bevan's critique of capitalism can be attributed more to Rodó than Marx. Although, while acknowledging the commonalities between Bevan and Rodó, it is argued that, in disagreement with Thomas-Symonds, Marx still appears to be the more influential, or at least the more prominent, thinker in Bevan's writings.

### Bevan and the Revisionists

Up to this point, the writings of Bevan's biographers have been studied to identify common understandings and disagreements concerning Bevan's thought. The biographies also locate Bevan's ideas within the theoretical debates that were taking place in the Labour Party. The ideological debate between the left and the right of the party is prominent in defining Labour's history, particularly during the 1950s. Foot writes of how debates within the party post-1945 initially centred on the differences between Bevan and Herbert Morrison, Deputy Prime Minister during the 1945-1951 Labour government and Deputy Leader of the party until 1956 (1975b, pp. 254-255). After Bevan's resignation from cabinet in 1951, the debate then centred on the differences between the Bevanites and the revisionists, who were led by Hugh Gaitskell, Chancellor from 1950-1951 and then Labour leader from 1955. Bevan complained that the party was not left-wing enough, accusing Gaitskell of being an opponent to everything that the Labour Party stood for (Campbell 1987, p. 227). Campbell claims that these debates practically destroyed the party, which became "riven in two, doomed to waste itself in fractious opposition for half a generation, until both the principal protagonists were dead" (1987, p. 245). This split certainly frames the literature's consideration of Bevan's role within the Labour Party during the 1950s.

It appears that much of the debate between the two positions centred on disagreements over the extent to which nationalisation should be pursued as party policy. Campbell states that Bevan considered public ownership to be the difference between Labour and the Conservatives and notes that Bevan argued that Labour's not pushing for it enough was a betrayal of socialism (1987, p. 351). Thomas-Symonds identifies the debate between "consolidation versus advance" that took place within the Labour Party during the 1950s – advocates of consolidation arguing that the role of government was to manage capitalism after Labour's nationalisation measures between 1945-51 and advocates of 'advance' arguing that public ownership needed to be extended. He claims, however, that, contrary to the view of much of the literature, Bevan was more in favour of consolidation than it at first seems,

arguing that the debate over nationalisation in the party “was to prove more theoretical than practical” (2015, p. 193). Instead, Thomas-Symonds points out that the deeper divisions within the party concerned foreign policy, claiming that there was not much difference in the domestic positions of Bevan and Gaitskell. He argues that tensions flared up as Bevan started to look for an alternative to the Anglo-American alliance (2015, p. 207). Nevertheless, a reading of the biographies does suggest that there was also a split over domestic policy, particularly over nationalisation.

Even if Thomas-Symonds’ argument that the differences over nationalisation were theoretical is correct, it is still important to clarify what these differences were. Thomas-Symonds notes that Anthony Crosland, a contemporary of Bevan, who published *The Future of Socialism* in 1956, insisted that the problem of private-property rights had already been dealt with in Britain and that “the Attlee government’s achievements had made it possible to pursue a goal of equality without needing to stymie wealth creation”. According to Thomas-Symonds, Crosland argued that wealth needed to be created in order to be redistributed and State ownership should not be an end in itself. Thomas-Symonds asserts that Bevan disagreed that private-property rights had been dealt with. Rather, Bevan argued that the economic affairs of the nation could not be managed unless the government had control of the “commanding heights” of the economy (2015, p. 209). Thomas-Symonds argues that *The Future of Socialism* and *In Place of Fear* defined the theoretical debate within the Labour Party (2015, p. 193). Both Campbell and Thomas-Symonds consider that, in this ideological debate, it was the revisionists who had the ascendancy.

Campbell argues that Bevan was unable to develop a theory of nationalisation that matched the theoretical strength of the revisionists. He contends that Bevan’s *In Place of Fear* failed to become the bible that Crosland’s *The Future of Socialism* was to become (1987, p. 271). He asserts that the left did not offer a “coherent analysis of what was wrong with welfare capitalism and a clear programme to set Labour back on the road to socialism” (1987, p. 375). Thomas-Symonds appears to agree, arguing that the issue of nationalisation highlighted the lack of coherent thinking from the Bevanites. He states that a belief

in public ownership was an abstract principle without practical proposals for implementation. Thus, it was the revisionists who provided a practical policy to show that public ownership should be seen as a means with which to achieve greater equality, rather than an end in itself (2015, p. 234).

Thomas-Symonds suggests that while Bevan wanted workers to manage nationalised industries, going against the Morrison and Crosland models of nationalisation that had been agreed upon by the party, he did not offer a coherent plan for workers' democracy in nationalised industries (2015, p. 165), claiming that Bevan did not do enough to argue for this while in cabinet (2015, p. 254). Chapter Four, however, demonstrates that there were instances when Bevan did develop plans for nationalisation, such as in the Fabian Society essay overlooked by Campbell and Thomas-Symonds. Chapter Seven subsequently explores possible reasons for Bevan's failure to achieve ascendancy for his political thought.

### Pragmatic or Dogmatic Bevan?

A prominent theme in the biographies is the apparent dichotomy between Bevan as a pragmatic politician, willing to compromise on certain principles, and Bevan as a dogmatic politician who refused to budge from his ideological beliefs. For example, when Bevan was urged by some of his political allies in Tredegar to join the Communist Party, Foot claims that Bevan refused as he was never dogmatic about Marxism. He insists that Bevan's Marxist training taught him "never to freeze his own mind in rigid attitudes", attitudes that Bevan felt the communists represented (1975a, p. 52). Despite considering him pragmatic, Foot argues that nonetheless, Bevan was a principled politician,

in the sense that his purpose was to apply general principles to the dilemmas of the time and in the sense, too, that to sustain his principles in practice was the motive power of his political life, the passion that absorbed him (1975a, p. 303).

Thomas-Symonds also insists that Bevan's socialism was constantly changing, and that Bevan argued for socialists to be concerned with the world as it was (2015, p. 236). Smith contends that Bevan "tried to act as if his principles or his philosophy should not, in any unbending manner, prevent some kind of viable outcome, acceptable even if compromised" (1993, p. 258).

Campbell, on the other hand, argues that Bevan's career was a failure because he stuck too rigidly to dogma and did not understand the changes of history. He writes that:

The sad, even tragic, fact which the biographer has to face is that Bevan's life – the immense achievement of the National Health Service notwithstanding – was essentially a failure...because his great gifts were all his life in thrall to an erroneous dogma (1987, p. xii).

Campbell claims that there was a difference between Bevan the theorist and Bevan the robust practical politician. He argues that

the most striking quality of Bevan's socialism when he tries – very ingeniously – to restate first principles for modern conditions is its extreme vagueness, revealing behind the confident neo-Marxism a disappointingly naïve idealism which is in sharp, even tragic contrast to the robust practical political Bevan was when he was not trying to theorise. By 1950 his anger and his intellect were coming apart. It was a painful process, not only for himself but for the party (1987, p. 213).

As well as arguing that Bevan did not correctly read the lessons of the twentieth century (1987, p. 368), Campbell also claims that Bevan, particularly later in life, had been acquiescent in letting through watered-down policy documents (1987, p. 330) and eventually put in little effort to push for nationalisation (1987, p. 328). As stated earlier in this chapter, Campbell argues that Bevan began to doubt his “deterministic Marxism” later in life (1987, p. 346). This apparent tension within Bevan's career may be a reason for potential divergences or contradictions within his thought. As noted, however, this thesis aims to move away from an empirical analysis of Bevan's political actions and focus on the ideas underlying his political philosophy. It therefore argues that when studying Bevan's writings, there is little evidence that Bevan departed from his advocacy for nationalisation or that his economic analysis fundamentally changed.

### Summary

The biographies of Aneurin Bevan reveal some important, if sometimes contradictory, insights into his political thought. Although of course not dedicated solely to exploring Bevan's ideas, their engagement with his work and their attempts at explaining the underlying principles of his politics mean that important insights can be gleaned from their analyses. In terms of assessing Bevan as a political thinker, the authors reach different conclusions. Foot considers Bevan to have been “the man who did more than any other of his age to keep alive the idea of democratic Socialism”. He argues that nobody else could give democratic socialism “a vibrant and audacious quality and make it the most ambitious and intelligent and civilised of modern doctrines” (1975b, p. 655). Campbell describes Bevan as a “unique mixture of philosopher/politician/rebel” (1987, p. 12), but he criticises many aspects of Bevan's political thought. For example, he views *In Place of Fear* as being outdated and ignoring the experiences of World War Two and the Labour government, demonstrating that

Bevan's "historical theorising had failed to keep up with the progress of history". Campbell claims that Bevan's division of society into "poverty and property" was out of date by 1952 (1987, p. 265). Thomas-Symonds focuses on Bevan's desire to put principles into practise, stating that Bevan believed that "flexibility was a central tenet of his socialism" (2015, p. 236). Smith emphasises the multi-faceted nature of Bevan's character, arguing that what made Bevan important as a socialist was "his giving more weight to both his philosophy *and* his practice than to concomitant notions of unionism, parliamentarianism, patriotism or mere party service" (1993, p. 210). After analysing Bevan's *In Place of Fear*, Brome concludes that it demonstrated that Bevan was "was no more the political buccaneer bent on destroying the pillars of society than he was a political philosopher bringing society's unhappy contradictions into a new system of thought". He argues that the "red-robed Danton, capable of wrecking democratic institutions, just was not there, and little in the credo would disturb orthodox Left-wing thinkers" (1953, p. 219).

Despite disagreement over Bevan's strength as a political thinker, there are common themes emerging from this review. The biographical literature emphasises the importance of Bevan's early industrial and political experiences in shaping his political outlook, particularly his analysis of class and capitalism, which appears to have been underpinned by an interpretation of Marxist political theory. It details the strategies Bevan advocated in order to achieve power for the working-class, predominantly through Parliament and democracy, as well as the need to use the State to take control of the commanding heights of the economy to change society. The biographies also identify Bevan's concern with the international environment. It is also evident that there exist some tensions in Bevan's thought, particularly between its Marxist and Parliamentary aspects and over his pragmatism and his position in the Labour Party's theoretical debates.

Although they provide insight into Bevan's thought, this thesis considers aspects of it that are not expanded upon in the biographies. For example, the arguments of Thomas-Symonds and Campbell that Bevan did not develop detailed policies for nationalisation are contested in Chapter Four of this thesis, which identifies Bevan's proposals pre-1945. The biographers note Bevan's principles concerning international relations, but Chapter Five places greater emphasis on how Bevan's writings on this theme reveal significant information about the nature of his political thought, namely his understanding of the materialist conception of history. Chapter Six also seeks to provide greater insight into Bevan's analysis of ideological power and its importance to his conception of class struggle than considered in the biographies.

This review of the biographies also reveals disagreements over Bevan's thought and tensions that this thesis seeks to resolve. For example, the nature of Bevan's Marxism is a matter of dispute. Campbell argues that Foot downplays its influence on Bevan's politics, instead insisting that Bevan was dogmatic in his Marxism and it was ultimately this that failed him, whereas Foot saw it as being synthesised with his position as a parliamentarian. There is disagreement, therefore, over whether the Marxist and British democratic elements of Bevan's thought can be considered as a tension or a merger of two different principles: this is an issue explored further in the thesis. Also emerging from the biographical literature is the suggestion that Bevan was a pragmatic politician who would adapt his principles to particular situations, his socialism constantly changing. This argument is contradicted by Campbell's view that Bevan was limited by a dogmatic Marxism, although he himself argues that Bevan acquiesced in letting through watered-down policy towards the end of the 1950s. This debate is taken up in Chapter Seven after the main features of Bevan's thought have been identified and analysed in Chapters Three-Six.

Having explored and presented the analysis of Bevan's thought made in the biographies and studies of his life and career, this chapter now turns to the broader studies of the political thought of the Labour Party in order to examine the accounts and characterisations of Bevan's thought found within them.

## **Labour Party Political Thought**

This section has two aims: firstly, to understand how the Labour Party's political thought is interpreted; and secondly, to analyse the different ways in which Aneurin Bevan has been treated in the literature, drawing out the various interpretations of his political thought. This analysis begins to locate Bevan within the context of Labour Party ideology, the theoretical discussions taking place within the party and the academic debates regarding his political thought. The section outlines the different categories of literature available on Labour's political thought and at the same time explores the different interpretations of Bevan's thought within those literatures.

To allow for more clarity in the consideration of what is a very large literature, this review distinguishes between three different approaches to the Labour Party's political thought: critiques of the ideology of labourism; more general studies of Labour's thought; and thematic studies. While no claim is made to comprehensiveness of treatment or, indeed, that this categorisation is itself without its problems – some of the works could have been

placed in a number of categories – nonetheless, this approach allows common themes to emerge. The literature has been chosen based on its appropriateness for achieving the aims of the thesis and its engagement with the thought, ideology or philosophy of the Labour Party. It is clear that many studies of the Labour Party have been written, yet those referenced here are considered most relevant to this section insofar as they include a discussion on the ferment of ideas in the party and elucidate aspects of Labour and Bevan’s political thought.

This section seeks to highlight the competing claims about Bevan’s thought and present the core principles that are said to characterise the Labour Party’s political thought, thus outlining the relationship between the two. It is also demonstrated that much of the literature focuses on analysing Bevan in the context of the Bevanite movement, thus often limiting the analysis of Bevan’s thought to the 1950s. As in the previous section, this analysis seeks to identify the key debates and areas of disagreement that this thesis aims to engage with. As will become clear, there is much overlap with the biographies with the key themes that this section identifies including: Bevan’s Marxism, his analysis of democracy, the importance of public ownership, international relations, the Bevanite-revisionist conflict, the ideology of labourism and Bevan’s pragmatism.

### Labourism

Serious critiques of the Labour Party’s political thought began to emerge during the 1960s via the work of the New Left, reflecting on the record of the post-war Labour governments and the party’s subsequent period of opposition after its defeat in 1951. The critiques focus on ‘labourism’, a formulation that expresses the non-revolutionary character of the party and captures a set of principles that marks it out as an inherently moderate, rather than radical, party. These critiques are commonly associated with thinkers such as Ralph Miliband, Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson. Some of their most prominent works include Miliband’s *Parliamentary Socialism* ([1961] 2009), Nairn’s two-part analysis ‘The Nature of the Labour Party’ (1964a & 1964b), and Anderson’s ‘Origins of the Present Crisis’ (1964) in *New Left Review*. These writers have influenced a number of subsequent studies of Labour and critiques of labourism (Thompson 1993; Elliot 1993; Coates 1975; Coates and Panitch 2003; Saville 1975). Critiques of the Labour Party have, unsurprisingly, existed since the party’s inception, but the work of the New Left is marked by its opposition to “both the acceptance of capitalism implied by Gaitskell and Crosland, and the effective refusal by the Labour Left to accept that a new analysis was necessary for the post-war situation” (Davis 2003, p.41). It



is a literature that identifies Bevan as playing a part in this perceived failure of the Labour left.

The arguments of these writers focus on the limits of labourism, the development of the labour movement in Britain and its relationship with the Labour Party. The critique is often developed through a Marxist lens, focusing on “the limitations placed upon the party by its particular history, ideology and structure” and its commitment to parliamentarianism (Davis 2003, p. 42). Miliband defines labourism as

an ideology of social reform, within the framework of capitalism, with no serious ambition of transcending that framework whatever ritual obeisances to ‘socialism’ might be performed by party leaders on suitable occasions, such as Labour Party or trade-union conferences, to appease or defeat their activist critics. Labourism, in other words, is not, like Marxism, an ideology of rupture but an ideology of adaptation (Miliband 1983, p. 293).

He also criticises the Labour Party for its heavy focus on parliamentarianism, arguing that:

Of political parties claiming socialism to be their aim, the Labour Party has always been one of the most dogmatic – not about socialism, but about the parliamentary system...[T]he leaders of the Labour Party have always rejected any kind of political action (such as industrial action for political purposes) which fell, or which appeared to them to fall, outside the framework and conventions of the parliamentary system. The Labour Party has not only been a parliamentary party; it has been a party deeply imbued by parliamentarianism (2009, p. 13).

According to Miliband’s interpretations, Bevan and his followers were unable to present themselves as a strong opposition to the party leadership and were also limited by following the principles of labourism.

Nairn identifies “two basic conditions of Labourism as a system”. They are, firstly, “the very defective ideological matrix behind British socialism, and secondly – and intimately related – the weakness of the entire left-wing political tradition incorporated into Labourism”. He describes labourism as “in part an organized contradiction between the two really vital sectors of the working-class movement, a system according to which they mutually inhibit one another instead of engaging in a genuine dialectic of growth towards socialism” (1964a, p. 65) (the two vital sectors appearing to be the unions and the party). Labourism is therefore characterised as an ideology that fundamentally prevented the

development of any sort of revolutionary character within the Labour Party. According to Madeleine Davis, the conclusion of these critiques is that the Labour Party has been defined and limited by four characteristics:

- 1) the pre-eminence of the trade unions;
- 2) the inherent weakness in indigenous British socialism and the Labour Left;
- 3) the acceptance of parliamentarianism;
- 4) and the failure of intellectuals to forge a counter-revolutionary hegemony (2003, p. 44)

The New Left's criticisms of Bevan relate to the argument that left-wing socialists were a failure within the party. Miliband argues that the Bevanites on Labour's Executive were willing to "suffer the burdens of collective responsibility" and were too willing to compromise on issues. They were uneasy with the policy direction of the Labour Party yet were unable to "articulate their unease into clear alternatives". Miliband points to their failure to challenge the "basic assumptions of Labour's foreign policy" and, while arguing that there should be more public ownership, they were unable "to offer an alternative analysis of the narrow Fabian view of its necessity and purpose". "In other words," Miliband states, "many of the ambiguities of parliamentary Bevanism were but a reflection of its ideological ambiguities" (2009, p. 327). The thesis assesses these so-called ambiguities.

The left of the party, Miliband argues, was unable "to present either a clear diagnosis of the Party's troubles or a solidly-based argument for such policies as it wanted to see adopted" (2009, p. 331). Bevan and his followers were unable to present themselves as a strong opposition to the party leadership and were also limited by following the principles of labourism. Nairn argues that the

only alternatives it [the left of the party] has ever had have been either to leave the Party, to resign, to threaten a split – or to submit, collaborate, make the best of a bad job within the rigid structures of Labourism, and tell itself that it may make things a little less bad than they would otherwise be and that in any case there is no 'practical' alternative (1964b, p. 49).

He concludes that this "chronic and impossible choice" – to submit or to collaborate – was "illustrated to perfection in the career of Aneurin Bevan". He states that this choice was imposed by "the Left's lack of any real alternative, of a permanent point of view superior to

the shabby middle-class limbo of Fabianism and containing in itself the source of a socialist hegemony over the movement, and ultimately over society” (ibid.).

These conclusions on Bevan offer interesting avenues for the thesis to explore. Beyond citing Bevan as representing the failure of the left, however, an extensive analysis of his political thought does not emerge from the New Left analysis. He appears to simply be dismissed as a failure in transcending the ideological limits of labourism. This thesis, particularly Chapters Three and Four, examines Bevan’s advocacy of British parliamentarianism and the role of the British State; therefore, it can contribute to understanding Bevan in the context of the analysis of the New Left of the Labour Party. Chapter Seven goes further in confirming these criticisms by discussing how these issues emerge not just in the political strategy of the left, but in fundamental and important features of Bevan’s political thought.

Critiques of labourism have also emerged from a diametrically opposed position to the New Left. David Marquand, as a social-democrat thinker, argues that the ideology of labourism has prevented the party from achieving a progressive alliance and securing the support of a larger proportion of society beyond the working-class. Marquand maintains that the Labour Party has been too attached to the trade unions for it to appeal beyond the labour movement (Fielding and McHugh 2003, pp. 134-135). He argues that the party’s commitment to a single class, the working-class – the “extraordinary, sometimes almost pathetic, loyalty” to its core constituency – inherent in the ideology of labourism, meant that the party was always a defensive party, and in government its instincts were “cautious, even conservative, to a fault” (Marquand 1999, pp. 21-22). Marquand’s work is considered to be an exemplar of the ‘social democratic’ interpretation of the Labour Party (Fielding and McHugh 2003, pp. 134-135). His critique of labourism, therefore, does not reflect the same concerns as those of the New Left.

Fielding and McHugh identify five limits imposed by the ideology of labourism as interpreted by Marquand (2003, pp. 140-141):

- 1) Liberals could and should have integrated labour interest into a progressive alliance after the First World War;
- 2) Labour’s own nature prevented it from shaping non-working-class voters’ interests;
- 3) had “Labour assumed a different character – akin to the New Liberals’ – it would have enjoyed a happier electoral history”;

- 4) Labour was the exception to the rule within continental social democracy; and
- 5) social democracy's failure was due to the "flawed means by which it was articulated".

Marquand describes how Bevan was "kicking against the pricks of Labourism", yet was never able to transcend it (1999, p. xi), mourning what could have been if Bevan had lived up to what he regards as his undoubted potential and transcended labourism. He laments the fact that Bevan's time in office was short relative to his time in opposition and that his practical abilities were not utilised to a great enough extent, the causes that he championed ultimately ending in defeat. For Marquand, Bevan's achievement in establishing the NHS demonstrated his potential. Marquand's exploration of Bevan as a thinker is considered in more detail in the next section exploring the wider studies of Labour thought.

### Wider Studies

The term labourism has also been adopted by writers providing a more general overview of Labour's ideology and political thought. The most significant of these is Geoffrey Foote's *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History* (1986). He argues that up until the publication of his book, no comprehensive overview of Labour's political thought had been produced. Certainly, it is difficult to find a book as substantial as Foote's in terms of analysing the many different factions and theoretical positions within the Labour Party's development. Nonetheless, a number of studies engage with a similar task. These include Robert Leach's chapter 'Socialism and Labourism' in *Political Ideology in Britain* (2002), which studies the influences and ideas behind the party's ideology, John Callaghan's chapter 'The Left: The Ideology of the Labour Party' in *Party Ideology in Britain* (1989) and Bealey's *The Social and Political Thought of the British Labour Party* (1970), a collection of essays and extracts from key thinkers in the Labour Party's history, the introduction to which outlines some of the main themes emerging from the party's political thought since its inception. Henry Drucker's *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party* (1979) also explores the character of Labour's political thought.

Considering the prominence of the debate between the Bevanites and the revisionists in the literature, it is notable that there have been few studies dedicated to the study of the Bevanites beyond Jenkins' historical account discussed in the previous section. There are a number of studies of the revisionists in the Labour Party (Haseler 1969; Desai 1994; Diamond 2004; Jeffries 2005; Jackson 2005; Nuttall 2005; Favretto 2005), yet a comparable

body of work, of similar weight, has not developed that undertakes a theoretical analysis of the key ideas of Bevan and the Bevanites. There are a few instances where Bevan has had works dedicated to his political thought, such as a chapter in Foote's book on the Bevanites that includes an account of Bevan's own political thought (1986, Chapter 12) and a chapter on Bevan's politics in Roger Spalding's *Narratives of Delusion in the Political Practice of the Labour Left: 1931-1945* (2018), a generally critical account of the Labour left and the "narratives, presented as analyses, which justified and rationalised its positions and arguments" that it employed to sustain itself (2018, p. 12). Studies of the Bevanites include David Howell's pamphlet *The Rise and Fall of Bevanism* (n.d.)<sup>1</sup>, Anthony Arblaster's chapter 'The Old Left' in *The Struggle for Labour's Soul* (2004), a collection of essays on the history of the Labour Party, and John Callaghan's article, 'The Left and the 'Unfinished Revolution': Bevanites and Soviet Russia in the 1950s' (2001), which details the Bevanites' attitudes towards the Soviet Union during the 1950s. Foote's work remains the most detailed in outlining Bevan's political thought, while the other works provide an assessment of the Labour Party's political thought in broader terms. Crucially for the purposes of this thesis, they reveal themes and questions that need to be kept in mind when assessing Bevan's thought.

One of these themes, continuing from the work of New Left and social democratic critics, centres on the use of the term labourism. In this literature, it is often employed to describe the party's political thought in a non-critical way. Foote presents the following as the characteristics of labourism: "the theory that labour receives little of the wealth that it creates, redistributionism, hostility to capitalists and maintenance of capital, workers' self-reliance, and loyalty to the nation state". He contends that these characteristics "survived to become a set of assumptions in the labour movement... flexible enough to accommodate many different political ideas – while distinct enough eventually to exclude the Liberal Party on the Right and various types of revolutionary on the Left" (1986, p. 11). Leach echoes this analysis, arguing that the most important factor in the development of socialism in Britain has been the dialectic between evolutionary and revolutionary socialism, which eventually led to accommodation between different groups (2002, pp. 70-73). He defines labourism as:

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<sup>1</sup> The publication does not contain a date, but Nuffield College Political History Archives dates the 'Labour Party Discussion Series', which the pamphlet is from, as 1981. See: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/media/1901/politicalhistory-handlist.pdf> [Accessed: 4 August 2019].

an ideology which articulates the felt interests of labour, or the working class, involving the protection of free collective bargaining, improvements in living standards and welfare benefits, such as cheap public housing and free health care, but accommodation with, rather than a fundamental challenge to, the dominant economic, social and political order (2002, p. 80).

Drucker identifies many of the same characteristics, explaining them as characteristics of the 'doctrine and ethos' of the Labour Party. He describes a doctrine as "a more or less elaborated set of ideas about the character of (in this case [Labour's]) social, economic and political reality which is accepted by a considerable group of people" (1979, pp. 8-9) and the ethos of the party as a set of values which emerge out of a particular experience: in the case of the Labour Party, it has reflected the experience of the working-class in Britain which has been an experience of exploitation (1979, pp. 9-11). This set of assumptions concerning the Labour Party has meant that a variety of different positions and theories of socialism have been encompassed within the party's political thought, which have often competed for dominance within the party. Although not approaching labourism and the political ideology of the Labour Party through the same critical lenses as the New Left and the social democrats, there is common ground with the wider literature in defining the nature of Labour's political thought.

When it comes to analysing Bevan's individual political thought in these studies, common themes emerge. Just as in the biographies, Bevan's Marxism is prominent in the discussions. According to Foote, Bevan's ideas, particularly those from the 1930s up to 1945 were "a restatement of Labour Marxism, but presented in a manner appealing to the emotions of labourism" (1986, p.273). Foote identifies Labour Marxism as being articulated by those in the labour movement who advocated class conflict and who "sought to build a more genuine Marxist party with roots in the British working-class" (1986, p. 22). It was a Marxism that was acceptable to the Labour Party:

The far left of labourism was to accept Marx's theory of class war, and to warn of the possible contempt for the constitution by the ruling class, but the need raised by Marx for a new type of state was forgotten. This had the indirect effect of removing a major barrier preventing Marxism from becoming assimilated to labourism (1986, p. 23).

Foote argues that Bevan's background made him "the epitome of the proletarian base and purpose of the Party", while his attacks on Gaitskell and the Tories "were designed to point out the middle-class nature of the opposition to Bevanism...Bevan wished to recapture the

socialist strain in the working class from which he had sprung” (1986, p. 273). Foote points to Bevan’s emphasis on two social forces in British politics, which were “were private property and poverty” with the “mediating factor” between them being “democracy”. Private property had transformed society through its “grossly materialistic” creed and produced “misery and poverty” in society. Foote interpreted Bevan’s definition of poverty to be “the awareness of unnecessary deprivation”, which was opposed to property and the accumulation of wealth by the ruling-class (1986 p. 274). These themes are returned to in Chapter Three. Foote goes further than others in analysing Bevan’s Marxism. By associating Bevan with what he describes as “Labour Marxism”, Foote places Bevan within a particular political tradition within the Labour Party. Chapter Seven of this thesis argues that the political traditions to which Bevan belonged are crucial in assessing his political thought. It also contributes to Foote’s assessment that Bevan’s thought was suitable to labourism, suggesting this as a reason for the failure of Bevan’s ideas to achieve ascendancy within the party.

Reflecting a common theme in the biographies, Foote discusses the relationship between Bevan’s Marxism and his faith in Parliament. He briefly discusses Bevan’s early career, documenting the importance of syndicalism to his thought, having been inspired by the likes of Noah Ablett and James Connolly, and then his subsequent move to a belief in Parliament after the failure of the General Strike of 1926 (1986, pp. 271-272). As noted above, this argument is disputed by Demont, but Foote appears to take Bevan’s recollections at face value. Foote points to Bevan’s desire to see the Labour Party represent the interests of the working-class in this struggle through parliament: “With the weapon of the ballot-box, Bevan held that the working class had stepped onto the public stage of history” (1986, p. 274). Foote demonstrates that Bevan wanted Labour to turn parliament into a weapon and “an active assembly fighting the class struggle on the part of the labour movement” (1986, p. 275). Drucker also emphasises the parliamentary Bevan. He argues that Bevan was a politician who held “firmly to nineteenth-century radical views” towards parliament as the means through which to achieve socialism. The Labour left, Drucker maintains, could face both the non-labour left and the labour-right by “upholding the nineteenth-century radical view”. The left of the party could try to convince people that in a capitalist society, the way to achieve socialism was through the Labour Party acting in the House of Commons (1979, p. 69).

Foote refers to Bevan’s discussion in *In Place of Fear* of poverty, property and democracy, discussed above, emphasising democracy as an important social force in this conflict. According to Foote, Bevan was “above all a parliamentary socialist, stressing the

importance of Parliament as an agent of social change with all the intensity of a man whose old syndicalist faith in the unions had been shattered by the defeats of the twenties". He argues that for Bevan, it was "Parliament, not the unions, which had become the most formidable weapon of the class struggle" (1986, p. 278).

As in the biographies, however, there is disagreement in the studies of Labour's thought over the extent of the Marxist and liberalist features within Bevan's political thought. Spalding, for example, would disagree with Foote's conclusion that Bevan's politics represented "Labour Marxism". He writes that "Bevan was not a Marxist. To try and understand him as being one...is not at all helpful". Rather, he considers Bevan to be a "British phenomenon, a product of British political traditions operating at a particular time and in a particular place" (2018, p. 146). He presents Bevan as fitting more into a British radical tradition than a Marxist tradition.

This analysis echoes that of Marquand who argues that to understand Bevan and his political philosophy, he must be seen as a radical dissenter rather than a Marxist. Marquand disagrees with Campbell's description of Bevan as a Marxist parliamentarian, instead arguing that if "we want to understand Bevan we should see him, not as a philosophical Marxist, but as a wonderfully articulate, though distinctly opportunistic, dissenting radical, dressed sporadically and unconvincingly in Marxist clothes". Rather than Bevan engaging in theorising about Marxism or socialism, Marquand claims that socialism for Bevan was an ethic, "a matter of feeling and intuition, not of analysis or strategy". He points to the lack of systematic analysis in *In Place of Fear*, a book "full of haunting phrases" but "a messy, unorganised brain-tub of ideas, some original and some thought-provoking, others second-hand and second-rate". He argues that its author's Marxism "amounted to little more than a vague sense that History, with a capital 'H', ought to be moving towards socialism, [and was] coupled with a nostalgic attachment to the rhetoric of the class struggle". Marquand argues that the "rigour and discipline of systematic Marxism were alien" to Bevan (1999, p. 121).

Marquand's and Spalding's analysis emphasises an important theme identified in the previous discussion of the biographical literature, namely the relationship between Bevan's Marxism and his views on Parliament. Whereas Campbell argues that Bevan was a dogmatic Marxist for much of his career, Marquand and Spalding reject this interpretation and stress Bevan's opinions on Parliament as being the views that defined him. Again, this is an important issue that the subsequent analysis of Bevan's thought seeks to address. The extensive analysis that this thesis undertakes presents a more complex interpretation of Bevan's thought, which, while emphasising Bevan's advocacy for parliamentary action,



argues that Bevan's understanding of Marxism was indeed fundamental to his thought. Marquand's analysis of Bevan is limited in terms of its engagement with Bevan's writing, while Spalding overlooks Bevan's analysis of the economy.

Marquand's analysis also suggests that Bevan's political thought was limited. This is a common theme in the literature, which suggests that Bevan's political thought was no more than a reflection of broad or vague principles. For example, Bealey characterises Bevanism as a movement with clear socialist principles but one that offered little in terms of concrete solutions. Pointing to *In Place of Fear* as representing the politics of the group, he writes that it "had much to say about the fundamentals of socialism but little about the details of nationalisation" (1970, p. 40). Desai describes the Bevanites as "a poor excuse" for a "vigorous (and theoretical) working-class movement" (1994, p. 102). Campbell also emphasises the vagueness of Bevan's Marxist principles (1987, p. 213). It is further demonstrated in the next section on thematic studies that this theme is prominent throughout much of the literature.

Another theme in the literature is Bevan's analysis of international politics, although Foote is the only author amongst the wider studies of Labour's thought who deals with this in any detail. His analysis of Bevan's views on international relations echo those of the biographies. He identifies Bevan's faith in the third force of non-aligned countries and his desire to see arms budgets channelled into aid to foster the development of poorer nations (1986, p. 279). Nonetheless, Foote contends that Bevan did not reject power politics entirely. Instead, he argues, Bevan always understood the importance of military strength (1986, p. 280). Foote also asserts that Bevan's criticisms of the government in the 1930s, regarding the class elements of its foreign policy, had abated in the 1950s and that Bevan did not see Britain and the United States as imperialist powers (1986, p. 281). Chapter Five of this thesis confirms much of Foote's analysis, but it also demonstrates that Bevan's views towards the foreign policies of Britain and the United States still contained the notion that they were engaged in imperialism (particularly Britain's role in Egypt). It also places greater emphasis than Foote on how Bevan's view of international politics demonstrated his underlying belief in the fundamental nature of the relationship between the economic base and political superstructure.

Callaghan, however, does recognise that this understanding of society is evident in Bevan's thought. He argues that Bevan derived a view of the development of the Soviet Union based on the writings of Isaac Deutscher, a Polish Marxist who often wrote articles for *Tribune*. According to Callaghan, Deutscher's argument was that the modernisation of

Russia, achieved through totalitarianism, raised a contradiction that could only be solved through institutional changes. He writes that:

Those who took the view that material changes paved the way for subsequent cultural advances – like Bevan the quasi-Marxist – were also susceptible to the argument that democracy in Russia was only a question of time, if it was allowed to evolve ‘normally’ (2001, p. 68)

The analyses of Bevan’s thought in Chapters Five and Seven concur with this argument, irrespective of whether it was derived from Deutscher or not (it is not clear that it was). They demonstrate that Bevan’s analysis of Russia and other communist countries reiterate a materialist conception of history that underpinned much of Bevan’s thoughts on the economy and society.

Finally, this literature echoes the conclusions of the biographies in pointing to the revisionists’ ideological ascendancy within the party. Callaghan asserts that Bevan and the Left argued primarily from a defensive position and failed to develop a sufficient programme of action. Callaghan argues that what set Bevan apart from the revisionists in the party was his view of nationalisation, which was based on “the Marxist conviction that such limited democracy as Britain already possessed could not be placed on a secure footing until it was greatly extended against the capitalist autocracy in industry” (1989, p. 32). He states that this was the reason why Bevan was arguing in *Tribune* that “public ownership remained central to the socialist strategy of democratizing society”. However, as pointed out above, the left failed to develop a programme of reforms and “new thinking was the preserve of the so-called revisionists Gaitskell and Crosland” (1989, pp. 32-33). Callaghan’s argument is supported by Foote’s conclusion that the “revisionists seemed to have the edge in theoretical terms as well as in terms of political power during the decade” (1986, p. 281).

Foote recognises, however, that Bevan supported the idea of a mixed economy. He argues that this was “in perfect accord with the main traditions of the Labour Party’s political thought”. He states that the mixed economy was “one of the characteristics which excluded a full-blooded Marxism from ever being accepted, and belief in it was one of the unifying factors between Right and Left in the party” (1986, p. 276). While both Bevan and the right of the party agreed in principle to nationalisation, Foote identifies a major difference between them, namely the importance that Bevan placed on power “as the main instrument which could secure welfare and equality”, arguing that Bevan saw the need for the planned sector to be dominant in the economy. Foote states that “Where the revisionists believed that the old

arguments about capitalism were outdated, Bevan held that the domination of the economy by capitalists or by the State was still the crucial element determining all other socialist aims” (ibid.).

Marquand also notes Bevan’s acceptance of the mixed economy. He argues that Bevan’s problem with the revisionists’ proposals for the mixed economy was “the moral and emotional logic of its arguments for embracing the mixed economy, not the fact that it had embraced it”. Marquand asserts that what Bevan disliked about Gaitskell and the revisionists was

the character of its revisionism, not the fact that it was revisionist...He saw the revisionism of the Labour right as a surrender to the rising tide of acquisitive individualism which was gradually overwhelming those values [the values of the South Wales mining communities Bevan was instilled with] and destroying the culture from which they sprang (1999, p. 122).

Bevan’s real failure according to Marquand, was that “he never managed to hammer out a coherent alternative [to Gaitskell’s revisionism]; that his tentative and uncertain gropings for a different kind of revisionism never got further than the occasional mordant insight”. Marquand predicts that had Bevan done so, “the subsequent history of the British left might have been much happier. As things are, we can only mourn what might have been” (ibid.). In contrast to this reflection on Bevan and the revisionists, it is demonstrated in this thesis that it was not just the moral character of the ideas for the mixed economy that formed the basis of the disagreements between Bevan and the revisionists. An examination of Bevan’s thought reveals that there was a fundamental disagreement over the respective analyses of the economy. Chapter Four echoes the argument that the mixed economy was important to Bevan, yet it also argues that this understanding of the economy appears to derive from the Marxist elements of Bevan’s thought, which Marquand dismisses. This is further discussed in Chapter Seven.

In the ensuing ideological debate, Desai declares that the Bevanites offered a “stunted” ideological challenge to the revisionists (1994, p. 101) and Arblaster concludes that the Labour left merely countered with “erratic” responses on both domestic and international issues (2004, p. 21). The argument that Bevan failed to attain ascendancy for his politics in the Labour Party is prominent throughout the literature. This thesis aims to explain and assess this argument based on a consideration of the features of Bevan’s political thought. Chapter Four, for example, demonstrates that Callaghan was correct to identify the Marxist element in

Bevan's approach, although he does not provide significant detail of how it shaped Bevan's politics. This thesis seeks to provide that detail, thus providing a possible explanation for why Bevan's thought failed to gain ascendancy in the party.

This literature provides a useful analysis of the nature of the political thought of the Labour Party and the place of Bevan within this political thought. It is also evident that the same arguments that pervade the biographies of Bevan are prominent here. The importance Bevan placed on class, parliament and international relations are key themes, especially in the more detailed work of Foote. In terms of Bevan's place within the Labour Party, there also appears to be agreement concerning the failure of Bevan to challenge the ideological ascendancy of the revisionists within the party. There still remains, however, disagreement over Bevan's Marxism and his views on Parliament. Spalding's argument, that Bevan cannot be considered as a Marxist, echoes that of Marquand, but cannot be reconciled with Campbell's argument about Bevan's apparent dogmatic Marxism and Foote's argument concerning Bevan's Labour Marxism. These are disagreements that the thesis evaluates and contributes to. The following sub-section shows that many of the same arguments emerge in the literature that develop thematic studies of the Labour Party.

### Thematic Studies

Beyond wider studies of Labour's thought, there exists a body of literature that analyses the Labour Party through particular conceptual lenses. They largely concern the issue of equality but have also encompassed: quality of mind, time, freedom, and various other themes engaged with by the party. This includes studies of Labour policies – for example, Martin Francis' *Ideas and Policies Under Labour 1945-1951* (1997) and Rhiannon Vickers' two volume account of Labour's foreign policy throughout its history (2003 & 2011). Jeremy Nuttall has been the most prolific in analysing Labour through different lenses. He has written studies on the synthesis of ideas in the party (2003a), Anthony Crosland's politics (2003b; 2004), "quality of mind and character" (2005; 2006), equality and freedom (2008), and even 'time' in the thought of the British left (2013). Nicholas Ellison (1994) focuses on egalitarianism in Labour political thought as does Ben Jackson who has also analysed the concept of equality and egalitarianism in the British left more widely (2005; 2007). A common theme of these studies is that they demonstrate the variety of concepts that form the foundations of Labour's political thought.

Ellison's study of egalitarianism focuses on three distinct visions of the future that existed within the Labour Party: technocratic, Keynesian socialist and qualitative.

Technocratic socialists “understood equality in terms of economic power”. They focused on the power of private interests and argued for nationalisation as a way to reduce these interests. Keynesian socialists believed that social reform, rather than economic ownership, was the most important issue concerning egalitarian politics and therefore “concentrated on redistribution”. The qualitative socialists held a vision of society based on fellowship and fraternity. Deciding which group offered a more complete vision of socialism was difficult, however, because there is no agreed upon definition of socialism (1994, pp. ix-x). Ellison places Bevan within the category of technocratic socialists. He concludes that:

For Bevan and those who were to follow him for the greater part of the 1950s, the egalitarian vision could – indeed should – be reduced to basic technocratic principles held as self-evident and straightforward enough to be amenable to the powerful oratory and journalism at which these individuals excelled. Those who believed that policy and ideas required deeper foundations were left unsatisfied by this outlook (1994, pp. 50-51).

Ellison argues that Bevan failed to go beyond broad socialist ideas to develop coherent policies. He posits three reasons for the failure of the Bevanites as a group to develop coherent policy: firstly, the bitterness of the debates within the party not being an environment conducive to developing a left-wing strategy (1994, p. 45); secondly, Bevanism being best understood as an “umbrella term for a number of positions which did not accept the mixed-economy-plus-social-equality formula of the emerging Gaitskellite faction” – this meant that the different views of the personalities who were part of the movement were never homogenous (1994, pp. 45-46); thirdly, Bevan himself being one of the reasons for the failure of the group to develop policy as his outlook was “at once principled and simplistic” (1994, p. 46).

Ellison argues that Bevan’s ideas did not go beyond generic principles. He presents Bevan’s thought as being based on the need for the working-class to “capture political power if capitalist exploitation was to cease and socialism to prosper” (1994, p. 46) and on an understanding of class politics that was “constitutional rather than revolutionary”, with State ownership being the most important way of obtaining working-class power. Ellison argues that this broad understanding prevented Bevan from developing more detailed policies and ideas for the Bevanite movement: “Concerned only with the broad nature of socialist ideas Bevan gave the group no intellectual direction” (1994, p. 47). As noted throughout this chapter, this argument is reflected in much of the literature. This thesis argues that rather than

being concerned only with the broad nature of socialist ideas, there was an underlying logic to Bevan's political outlook. As Chapter Seven demonstrates, although there were some limitations to Bevan's analysis, to dismiss it as Ellison does is to overlook important aspects of it.

Jackson also focuses on the concept of equality in his book *Equality and the British Left* (2007), with the aims of deepening understanding of the ideological influences on Britain's political trajectory in the 20th century and studying the history of egalitarian thought. He argues that different thinkers developed innovative and sophisticated understandings of the concept (2007, p. 1). The unit of analysis in Jackson's work is the Left in Britain more broadly. Nonetheless, Jackson engages with key thinkers in the Labour Party and with Labour Party policy. The argument of the book is that certain core egalitarian ideas were transmitted from one generation of progressives to the next, leading to a relatively coherent egalitarian tradition on the British Left. Jackson associates the egalitarian tradition with the left liberals and gradualist socialists that emerge as the dominant ideological force in the period covered (1900-1964). He refers to the tradition as the "progressive" or "social democratic" tradition, since its leading exponents sought to differentiate themselves from the radical left and the radical right (2007, p. 5). The argument of the book is that the left in Britain has been ideologically distinguished from the centre and the right by its commitment to egalitarianism (2007, p. 10).

In his analysis, Jackson emphasises the importance of State ownership to the Bevanites, a prominent theme in the literature. He identifies nationalisation as the fundamental difference between the Bevanites and the revisionists in the party. Pointing to the revisionist's focus on equality, Jackson writes that "In so far as there was a distinctive Labour Left position on this issue it was that while equality, understood in a quantitative, distributive sense, was an important goal for socialists, it should not be seen as exhaustive of socialism" (2007, p.159). Jackson analyses Bevan's views on nationalisation in relation to arguments over redistribution. He states that Bevan argued that society needed to change fundamentally before redistribution could occur. Attempts to "alter the pattern of resource distribution through taxation for public spending" were inconsistent with preserving "a broadly individualist society characterised by private ownership". In an individualistic society "where the bulk of property is privately owned", people would protest about paying increased taxes to pay for redistribution. This did not mean that Bevan viewed redistribution as an unattainable goal: rather, his remarks "showed that public ownership remained a tool of decisive importance for the attainment of the Left's distributive projects"

(2007, p. 160). Chapter Four echoes Jackson's understanding that nationalisation and changing property relations can be regarded as essential to Bevan's conception of socialism.

Jackson contends that the Bevanites "composed fewer theoretical works than the revisionists" and had very little to say on social equality. He posits that "this disinclination to discuss egalitarian ideals did not simply reflect a lack of theoretical interest on the part of the Bevanites", rather "it followed from the Marxian premises that grounded their socialism". The Bevanites were concerned with "the fundamental conflicts of economic interest that characterised capitalism" and were "suspicious of revisionist attempts to rest the entire weight of socialism on the single value of equality". Instead, they argued that any attempt at creating equality had to entail "public ownership of production, economic controls, and the exercise of power by the state, rather than relying on grand moral sentiments purportedly commended by the revisionists" (2007, pp. 159-160). Jackson views this as a weakness. He reiterates the dominant argument that Bevan (and the Bevanites) were limited theoretically. What is interesting about Jackson's argument is that he focuses on the Marxist premises that underline the Bevanites' position and their focus on economic conflict. This is a core theme of the thesis.

Nuttall analyses a variety of concepts within Labour's thought. In his article 'Equality and Freedom: The single, the multiple and the synthesis in Labour Party thought since the 1930s' (2008), he explores the ideas of thinkers who argued for socialism through a range of values, not just one value, and through a synthesis of ideas. He argues that exploring Labour's thought through single and multiple values is helpful to understanding the party's policies and getting "to the heart of its intellectual and ethical visions of social improvement" (2008, p. 33). Further to this, in his article 'Pluralism, the people, and time in Labour Party history, 1931-1964' (2013), Nuttall explores the concept of 'time', referring to different conceptions of social progress in the party, arguing that studies of Labour's history have been marked by the focus on pluralism, with a "growing assertion of the importance of ideas, political culture, communication, ethics and character in influencing Labour's development" (2013, pp. 729-730). He argues that these spheres have "been closely linked to a pluralist view of causation, in which Labour's fortunes are portrayed as having been influenced by a diverse range of factors" (2013, p. 730). Nuttall's work, as with much of the literature, highlights the competing claims over values within the Labour Party.

Nuttall writes of Bevan's desire for the working-class "to seize the immediate, perhaps never to be repeated, potential of the moment, and a wish to alert people to the relative infancy of democracy and working-class empowerment, and its need to be given

proper time to flower”. According to Nuttall, Bevan thought that the need for the working-class to achieve power was urgent, but in 1959 spoke of an “opportunity” for this to happen having passed (2013, pp. 747-748). He notes that Bevan’s “mixed feelings on the issue of working-class agency” were due to “his focus on how power structures held them down matched by an equally insistent belief that this was not an excuse, that ultimately they could, should they choose, shape politics to their will” (ibid.).

Nuttall points to “a surprisingly little analysed historical difference between Labour's right and left”. This difference being:

Durbin, Gaitskell, Jay and Crosland placing great faith in reason and persuasion, the tradition from Laski, through Bevan and Crossman to Castle placing more emphasis on seeking to locate, and thus to control, the centres of power (2003a, p. 244).

He does, however, argue that by the time of his death, Bevan’s position had “become ambiguous” (2008, p. 24). He argues that Bevan’s experience of being a Minister led him to develop “a greater sense of the multi-layered nature and constraints of politics” (2008, p. 25). In Nuttall’s view, this explained Bevan’s eventual embrace of “political pragmatism”. This idea of political pragmatism in Bevan is prevalent in the literature – as well as a shift to the right in the 1950s – but the thesis demonstrates that in terms of Bevan’s political thought, core principles remained constant throughout his career.

When analysing specific policies within the Labour Party, Francis argues that Bevan’s belief in “crude Marxism” was never shaken off but claims that “his version of class politics was constitutional and gradual rather than revolutionary. Moreover, the persistence of Marxist categories in his ideological pronouncements needed to be balanced against his essential radicalism and libertarianism”. In analysing Bevan’s ideas, Francis observes that while Bevan was infused with a strong class-consciousness, his politics was not revolutionary. He concludes that “Bevan was a romantic and a dissenter whose vision of socialism was ultimately humanitarian rather than materialist in inspiration, even if it was obscured by a nostalgic attachment to the rhetoric of class struggle” (1997, pp. 24-25). Francis maintains that Bevan’s socialism “was instinctive rather than considered” and that his book *In Place of Fear* was “decidedly unsystematic” (1997, p. 24). Again, Bevan’s Marxism is dismissed, but this thesis shows that this Marxism was more fundamental to Bevan’s thought than being a nostalgic attachment or rhetoric. Francis’ analysis also reinforces the argument that Bevan’s socialism was underdeveloped.



In terms of Bevan's attitudes towards foreign policy, Vickers, studying the history of Labour and the world, argues that Bevan was less radical than in domestic issues (2003, p. 28). Vickers contends that the Bevanites and the revisionists "actually were very similar when it came to foreign policy. The Labour Party was largely united on the basic principles of a Labour foreign policy based on internationalism, a commitment to the UN and the international rule of law" (2011, p. 29). Vickers notes that Bevan's position moved towards Gaitskell's in the late 1950s, particularly in relation to nuclear weapons (2011, p. 41), arguing that Bevan was never a unilateralist (2011, p. 43). Vickers does not discuss Bevan's advocacy of a third force in international relations, which was prominent in the biographies and in Foote's analysis. Instead, the discussion of Bevan is centred on the ideological debate within the Labour Party between the Bevanites and the revisionists.

These thematic studies offer a different perspective to the general studies of Labour's political thought, engaging with a more detailed account of specific concepts and issues than can be included in a broader study. Further, they provide important insights into many of the key features of Bevan's thought, which are taken up in the subsequent four chapters of this thesis where their validity is considered.

### Summary

Analysing this literature on Labour's political thought assists in locating Bevan's ideas in the context of ideological debates within the party, contributing to understanding his thought in relation to the dominant strategies and principles of the Labour Party. A key theme in the literature is that Labour's political thought has been characterised by its gradualist and reformist nature. The party is seen as a party of modest reform within the capitalist system, rather than one advocating revolutionary change to the structure of society. The veneration of Parliament is a vital part of Labour's ideology. This, together with its links to the trade union movement, created a party whose responsibility it is to defend the interests of the workers in parliament. In addition to these features, the development of Labour's political thought has also been characterised by debates over its strategies and principles of socialism. Bevan's career is evidence of this, as he was involved in a struggle over the theoretical assumptions of the party.

It is within this interpretation of the Labour Party that the development of Bevan's own thought can be understood. As in the biographies, a source of disagreement in the literature on the Labour Party concerns the importance of Marxism in Bevan's political thought. Some writers argue that it was fundamental to Bevan's worldview, while others

criticise the emphasis placed upon it, instead arguing that his parliamentarianism is what defines him. The language of class conflict that some authors argue is the hallmark of Bevan's thought is also considered to be a weakness of Bevan's analysis. This is reflected in the common theme emerging from the literature that Bevan expressed his socialism through vague or broad terms that did not translate into significant proposals for changing society. Bevan's political thought is generally considered not to have had a major impact in shaping Labour Party policy, although Foote does attempt to provide an understanding of the underlying features of it. This has resulted in Bevan's being considered to have lost the ideological and theoretical battle with the revisionists in the party. Critics of labourism, from both Marxist and social democratic positions, also identify Bevan's failure to transcend what they regard as its ideological limits.

Although Bevan has been considered to have played an important part in the Labour Party's history, this has not resulted in a detailed analysis of his political thought. When this has been attempted, it has not provided a thorough critique of all the works written throughout his life. This literature largely focuses on *In Place of Fear* when analysing Bevan's thought, overlooking his voluminous writings in *Tribune* and other publications. This could be due to the dominant feeling in the literature that the Bevanites were theoretically limited. Nonetheless, in order to develop a complete understanding of Bevan's thought, an engagement with his voluminous output is required. Doing so will provide greater accuracy in detailing the key features of Bevan's political thought and provide a greater level of certainty to judgements about his ideas. This thesis demonstrates the benefits of doing this, namely being able to identify continuity throughout Bevan's career, account for moments where he deviated from his broader analysis and recognise the connection between the various different elements of Bevan's political thought.

Two related conclusions can be drawn from this section concerning the ways in which Bevan has been treated within the literature. Firstly, the analysis has largely been focused on the Bevanites as a group, limiting the analysis of Bevan's individual thought and secondly, this has resulted in the analysis of Bevan's political thought concentrating largely on the 1950s when the movement was prominent. Without an understanding of Bevan before he resigned from government in 1951, or even before he became a government minister, a full appreciation of his intellectual development cannot be arrived at. The emphasis on the Bevanite versus Gaitskellite divisions within the party has meant that the focus has often been on explaining the ideological battle within Labour instead of attempting to discern a coherent

philosophy in Bevan's own work. This has led to a failure to understand Bevan's thought on its own merits.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has identified two different methodological approaches to studying Bevan: biographies and studies on Labour's political thought. An analysis of the different approaches to studying Bevan and the Labour Party reveals important features of Bevan's thought that are analysed further in this thesis. These features include Bevan's understanding of class conflict and his Marxist education, which coexisted alongside a belief in democracy and Parliament as the method to achieve power for the working-class through the State's capturing of important economic drivers and nationalising industries for them to be run in the interests of the nation. In addition, important elements of Bevan's attitude to international relations are discussed that emphasise his rejection of traditional power politics and his vision for an international society based on principles of democracy and socialism.

More crucially, this review has highlighted competing claims over certain aspects of Bevan's thought. The tension between his Marxism and his parliamentarianism features prominently, with disagreements concerning the extent to which Marxism was crucial to Bevan's understanding of politics when compared to his reverence for parliamentary institutions. Some authors argue that these two elements of Bevan's thought were compatible with each other, while others see them as incompatible. This is an important point of contention within the literature that is examined in this thesis. The subsequent analysis in Chapters Three to Six demonstrates that these features are fundamental to understanding Bevan's thought, although it also argues that when Bevan's Marxism is emphasised, its precise features are not considered in sufficient detail.

Other contentious issues emerging from the literature include the extent to which Bevan challenged the revisionists in the party, his relationship to the ideology of labourism, his political pragmatism and the extent to which he can be said to have developed a coherent political thought. Throughout the thesis, and more specifically in Chapter Seven, these claims are assessed. The comprehensive analysis undertaken in this thesis seeks to contribute to these arguments and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

The thesis now seeks to provide a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of Bevan as a political thinker than has previously been carried out by his biographers or writers on the Labour Party. It is natural that the biographies place greater emphasis on Bevan's actions and

the events and controversies he was involved in, while the literature on Labour thought does not comprehensively engage with Bevan's voluminous writings, largely relying on *In Place of Fear*. While many of the claims in the literature regarding Bevan's thought may be appropriate and accurate, the approach of this thesis means that it will be in a stronger position to make these judgements. The subsequent chapters provide a detailed analysis of Bevan's writings, organising them in a way that allows a greater understanding of his thought to be achieved as well as highlighting the breadth of his written work and his political thought. The debates and disagreements discussed in this chapter are returned to in Chapter Seven.

## Chapter Three: Economic Power

“Then again, we had a long tradition of class action behind us stretching back to the Chartists. So for us power meant the use of collective action designed to transform society and so lift all of us together. To us the doctrine of laissez-faire conveyed no inspiration, because the hope of individual emancipation was crushed by the weight of accomplished power. We were the products of an industrial civilisation and our psychology corresponded to that fact. Individual ambition was overlaid by the social imperative. The streams of individual initiative therefore flowed along collective channels already formed for us by our environment” (Bevan 1952a, p. 2).

Bevan’s analysis of capitalism and the resulting class conflict was fundamental to his political thought. It stemmed from his experience in industrial South Wales, which was supplemented by his belief in a Marxist theory of capitalism. Bevan was happy to boast in the House of Commons that he considered himself to be “a considerable student of Marx” (HC Deb 15 February 1951). Bevan insisted, however, that it was important to reevaluate Marxist theory. He wrote that a “sympathetic understanding of what Marxists are trying to say to the world is a prerequisite to learning where the Marxist practitioners are liable to go wrong” (1952a, p. 17). As this chapter demonstrates, Bevan’s engagement with Marxism informed his analysis of society.

The first section examines Bevan’s reflections on capitalism, its essential features and its effects on society, as well as his conception of class-conflict, which he saw as a central feature of capitalist society. The second section traces Bevan’s analysis of the historical development of society and begins to identify the relationship between base and superstructure in Bevan’s thought. The third section details the role of working-class action in Bevan’s thought, while the final section emphasises the importance that Bevan placed on the development of democracy in changing the conditions of society. These four sections highlight the economic foundations of Bevan’s political thought and his analysis of power relations in society.

This is the first chapter that engages in the comprehensive analysis of Bevan’s writings through the lens of power. This chapter and the subsequent three chapters seek to achieve the thesis’ first aim of reconstructing Bevan’s political thought from his written works.

## Capitalism and Class

### Capitalism

Central to Bevan's political thought was his analysis of the development of private property and private enterprise. He argued that the "chief characteristic of the modern competitive society is the feverish accumulation of property in private hands" (1952a, p. 76). Alongside the development of private property was the important role "private economic adventure has played in bringing modern industrial techniques into existence. The stimulus of competition, the appetite for profits, and the urge for wealth and power and status – all these played their part in the making of modern society" (1952a, p. 37). The development of private property became the central feature of capitalist society.

Bevan argued that the preservation of private property informed the dynamics of capitalism. Any ideas of public spending or public involvement in the economy were disregarded by the ruling-class of British society, as it was generally "seen as an interference, not only with the rights of the individual, but as an enemy of the process of capital accumulation" (1952a, p. 52). The capitalists were able to make sure that public spending was kept off the agenda and that capital accumulation was the primary concern. For example, during World War Two Bevan argued that the government did not look at the possibility of a large-scale public housing initiative because this would "deprive private enterprise of a most juicy bit of profit-making" (Bevan 1944a, p. 76). He disputed the priority given to private enterprise, believing that the dynamics that capitalism was built upon were deeply flawed.

According to Bevan, capitalism and the privileging of private enterprise was sustained by an incoherent logic. In 1937, he wrote of the government's attitude towards a potential oncoming depression. Rather than the onset of the depression being responsible for the fear of it, the government believed that it was "the fear of it that *causes* the depression" [emphasis added]. Bevan mocked the attitude of the government, presenting their logic as being: "If by some means we could create a more optimistic state of mind in those responsible for the conduct of our industrial life depression of trade need never come... What we need apparently is not statesmen but hypnotists". He described this as "the kind of mystic Mumbo-Jumbo to which capitalism is driven when austere reason pronounces sentence of death upon it" (1937b, p. 5). This "mystic Mumbo-jumbo" could not be relied upon to create a desirable society for the masses.

Although Bevan admitted that capitalism developed and produced great technological advances, he argued that it also created a life of poverty for the masses. Bevan was moved by

witnessing these damaging effects. Thomas-Symonds argues that Bevan's rage was against "a *political and economic system* that could organise the country's resources in such a way to cause this misery" (2015, p. 250). Bevan was a keen reader of Jack London, the American novelist whose novel *The Iron Heel* told the story of a dystopian future and detailed the struggle of the working-class and the mismanagement of society by the capitalists (Bevan 1952a, pp. 17-18). As the novel's main protagonist Ernest Everhard asserted:

In face of the facts that modern man lives more wretchedly than the cave-man, and that his producing power is a thousand times greater than that of the cave-man, no other conclusion is possible than the capitalist class has mismanaged, that you have mismanaged, my masters, that you have criminally and selfishly mismanaged (London 1908, pp. 41-42).

A belief in the mismanagement of society by the capitalist class was a sentiment that would have resonated with Bevan.

Bevan's critique of capitalism's effects on society encompassed a variety of issues. For example, he believed it turned people into prisoners:

Actually, nothing short of the abolition of capitalism can give us a civilised penal code. Capitalism, through unemployment and insecurity, turns people into criminals, and then prohibits them when in prison from undertaking any creative work which might redeem them into good citizenship (M.P. 1937e, p. 6).

He even argued that capitalism created a situation where women did not want to have children as they did not want them to grow up in a capitalist society:

The fact is that the women of Britain in refusing to bear as many children as formerly are exercising a silent vote against the sort of world capitalism is creating for the reception of their children...In denying the progress of mankind capitalism denies the existence of mankind. Judged from this angle capitalism is a vast contraceptive condemning the old world to death by refusing the birth of the new (1937e, p. 7).

Bevan argued that the worker was oppressed in this society and was just seen as a thermostat for when capitalism wasn't working:

Remember you are not only a man and a citizen. You are also a potential 'thermostat' on tap to adjust the fluctuations of private investment. So that every now and then you may be thrown out of work, and then pounced upon and converted into a labourer, engaged on building the 'permanent equipment of society,' probably away from your

family and friends. You will work at that until the public expenditure has pumped enough oxygen into the system of private investment to start it off again. Then you will go back to your work as a mechanic and continue at that until the machinery of private enterprise breaks down again, and then once more you will be converted into a ‘thermostat’ (1944a, p. 56).

The effects of capitalism on economic, political, military and ideological issues are considered in detail throughout the following chapters.

Bevan was consistent in his critique of private enterprise throughout his career. For instance, in 1958 he criticised a debate in Parliament concerning the economy that emphasised to him how capitalism was deeply flawed. He reflected that “Private economic adventure – miscalled ‘private enterprise’ – insists upon mystery. If the behaviour of market forces could be predicted, capitalism could not survive”. He asserted that capitalism was “wholly opposed to the scientific spirit of the age, which strives to understand and to control what is happening around us”. He questioned the wisdom of economists, insisting that a debate on economics

among Western economists is rather like a peculiar kind of crystal gazing. They anxiously read the portents, trying to perceive the significance of almost wholly unknown phenomena. It is impossible to reconcile a belief in economic mystery with the search for predictability (1958j, p. 1).

He argued that if economists succeeded in predicting the future of the economy, they would “destroy that gambling and speculation upon the future which is the essence of an economy based on private economic adventure. You cannot gamble on the temperature of the water if the thermometer is always to hand” (ibid.).

Bevan’s analysis of capitalism reflects an orthodox Marxist understanding of property relations. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels asserted that modern “bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few” (Marx and Engels [1848] 1969, p. 22). Bevan’s thought reflected this view and he explained the development of private property in similar terms. His close connection to orthodox Marxism is further exemplified by his views on the consequences of this property relation: the formation of class conflict in capitalist society, as the next section considers.



## Class

Early evidence of Bevan's engagement with the nature of class conflict is demonstrated in his review of *The Communist Manifesto*, written in 1921. Bevan wrote that the "treating of the development of the modern capitalist class and its counterpart the proletariat" in the *Communist Manifesto* is the "best and most convincing exposition of the Marxian point of view" (1921, p. 20). When Bevan asked, "Where was power and which the road to it?" the question for him and those suffering under capitalism was "shaped into a class form, not an individual form" (1952a, p. 1). Bevan's analysis of the dynamics of capitalism reflected this conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

Bevan emphasised the importance of class and collective action to the working-class, writing that "for us power meant the use of collective action designed to transform society and so lift all of us together". Instead of viewing society as individual self-interest, the working-class, Bevan argued, saw society as the collective striving of classes. Society "presented itself... as an arena of conflicting social forces and not as a plexus of individual striving" (1952a, p. 2). He saw these three forces as being: poverty, property and democracy – "They are forces in the strict sense of the term, for they are active and positive. Among them no rest is possible" (1952a, p. 2). Bevan had previously outlined this formulation in the House of Commons in 1933 (HC Deb 4 December 1933) and in *Why Not Trust the Tories?* in 1944 (1944a, pp. 88-89), paraphrasing a comment made by Thomas Rainsborough to Oliver Cromwell. Poverty, property and democracy are central elements to Bevan's understanding of society. It was in *In Place of Fear* where he elaborated upon it in further detail.

Bevan offered quite broad definitions of these three forces. He defined poverty as "the normal state of millions of people in modern industrial society, accompanied by a deep sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the existing state of social affairs". Property in this tripartite schema was wealth, and those "who, by possession of wealth, have a dominating influence on the policy of the nation" (1952a, p. 2). He described democracy as putting "a new power in the possession of ordinary men and women". He wrote that the "conflict between the forces, always implicit, breaks out into open struggle during periods of exceptional difficulty" (1952a, p. 3). In a capitalist society, the conflict between the three forces "resolves itself into this: either poverty will use democracy to win the struggle against property, or property, in fear of poverty, will destroy democracy" (1952a, p. 3). Bevan concluded that from "1929 onwards in Great Britain the stage was set and all the actors

assembled in the great drama which is the essence of politics in modern advanced industrial democracies". The actors in this great drama corresponded to the three forces in society:

Firstly, there was wealth, great wealth, concentrated in comparatively few hands although cushioned by a considerably developed middle class. Second, there was a working class forming the vast majority of the nation and living under conditions which made it deeply conscious of inequality and preventable poverty. Third, there was fully developed political liberty, expressing itself through constitutional forms which had matured for many centuries and had as their central point an elected assembly commanding the respect of the community (1952a, p. 11).

Wealth concentrated in relatively few hands and a working-class that formed the majority of the nation demonstrates Bevan's interpretation of the class-conflict inherent in society. The clash between poverty and property also represents Bevan's formulation of this conflict.

Two of these forces can be assigned to traditional class distinctions in society: property with the bourgeoisie and the ruling-class, poverty with the proletariat or the working-class. Democracy, however, does not align with a certain class in society. Gerry Healy, reviewing *In Place of Fear* upon its release in 1952 for the Trotskyist publication *Labour Review*, pointed out that "social forces in the scientific sense are classes of people having definite relations to existing types of property and specific functions in the processes of production", these being "capitalists, wage-workers, and a varied range of groupings which are a buffer between them". In contrast, he wrote, "democracy is not a social force", but is a "*political* form, an institution of government arising out of and based upon the relations and struggles of the diverse classes within a country" (Healy 1952, p. 2).

Democracy is a significant element of Bevan's political thought that is analysed further in the final section of this chapter and in Chapter Four, particularly in relation to this class conflict. Healy is correct to identify this formulation as an expression of class conflict: the clash between poverty and property is reminiscent of class conflict as traditionally described by Marx and Engels.

Michael Foot certainly saw it as Bevan's "individual elaboration of Marxist prophecy" (1975b, p. 20). Although Marx did not offer a systematic analysis of the concept of class (McLellan 1971, p. 151), the *Communist Manifesto* saw Marx and Engels posit the formulation of two classes in society:

the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into

two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other –  
Bourgeoisie and Proletariat (Marx and Engels [1848] 1969, p. 15).

While Marx did write of other classes (McLellan 1971 p. 152; Marx [1894] 1959, p. 633), Bevan's own formulation follows an orthodox Marxist approach that relies on classifying class relations into two social classes. Bevan's review of the *Manifesto* and his agreement with the classification of society into two classes support this claim.

Bevan recognised that in capitalist society, economic power resided with the owners of property. He asserted that the discontent of the working-class needed to be aimed at wealth as those who possessed it had “a dominating influence on the policy of the nation” (1952a, p. 3). Bevan viewed the power of the ruling-class as a wholly negative form of power because it derived “from the power to exploit the exertion of others. This is a predatory power made possible by carrying over into modern society the concepts of barbarism, when theft, raid and pillage were accepted ways of acquiring property” (1952a, p. 64). Bevan argued that the “merciless exploitation which formed the basis of the unprecedented accumulation of capital equipment in Britain, was made possibly [sic] only by a class dictatorship” (1952a, p. 39). This predatory power and exploitation was the foundation of Bevan's critique of contemporary society and the relations between poverty (the proletariat) and property (the bourgeoisie).

A class analysis informed Bevan's thought on most issues – a theme that runs through all the chapters in this thesis. From his understanding of war to his views on the values of society, the way struggles shape themselves into a class form were at the heart of Bevan's politics. John Campbell notes that the South Wales coalfield was the ideal location for Marxism to take root. He writes that on paper here was “an almost perfect Marxist situation, ripe for class conflict”, even though he argues that the Marxist struggle did not take place there, no matter how conducive the conditions were to it (1987, pp. 4-5). He presents Bevan's conception of class conflict as deriving directly from the experiences of the industrial masses rather than from a Marxist conception of class conflict. The most “deeply held tenet” of Bevan's socialism, according to Campbell, was that it was based “not on Marx but on the social experiences of the industrial masses”. He continues that “Marx explained that social experience, but doctrine came second to class; his fundamental doctrine was still the class struggle” (1987, p. 257).

Theory and practice cannot be separated when explaining Bevan's intellectual development. Bevan appreciated the importance of Marx in informing working-class experience:

Marx, and the school of thought which he founded, put into the hands of the working class movement of the late nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries the most complete blueprints for political action the world has ever seen...No serious student who studies the history of the last half century can deny the ferment of ideas associated with the names of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Their effectiveness in arming the minds of working-class leaders all over the world with intellectual weapons showed that their teaching had an organic relationship with the political and social realities of their time (1952a, p. 17).

Bevan stressed the importance of working-class self-education in providing him with the theory to explain and make clear his experiences. He wrote that:

In so far as I can be said to have had a political training at all, it has been in Marxism. As I was reaching adolescence, toward the end of the First World War, I became acquainted with the works of Eugene V. Debs and Daniel de Leon of the U.S.A. At that time I was reading everything I could lay my hands on. Tredegar Workmen's Library was unusually well stocked with books of all kinds (1952a, p. 17).

Bevan reflected that he was not alone in this experience. He declared that the "self-educating naturally seize on the knowledge which makes their own experience intelligible". He wrote of how the "self-educating cling to what they learn with more tenacity than the university product...As a general rule he learns only what has a significance in his own life". Bevan declared that the "abstract ideas which ignite his mind are those to which his own experience provides a reference". Therefore,

action and thought go hand-in-hand in reciprocal revelation. The world of concrete activity renovates, refreshes and winnows the ideas he gets in books. The world of abstract thought rises from strong foundations of realised fact, like a great tree, whose topmost leaves move in obeisance to the lightest zephyr, yet the great trunk itself issues the final command (1952a, p. 18).

It is therefore wrong for Campbell to dismiss the ideas that were at the heart of Bevan's socialism: the experience was vital. As S.O. Davies, a contemporary of Bevan's in both the South Wales Miners' Federation and in Parliament, explained, the conditions that Bevan

lived in instilled in him his “torrential vituperation, his deadly ridicule and acid wit” (Davies cited in Griffiths 1983, p. 51) – but it was also underpinned by an analysis of society. Bevan’s analysis of capitalism and class demonstrates the combination between theory and social experience in his political thought.

Together with his treatment of the development of capitalist society and the dominance of private enterprise, the struggles of the working-class were central to Bevan’s political thought. As long as the power relation between the two classes meant that property was dominant, poverty would not triumph. This led Bevan to the conclusion that in order to change society and for the working-class to prosper, there was a need to agitate for the reversal of this relationship and for poverty to triumph over property. This resulted in Bevan’s viewing society as a process of historical development where the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure of society was important.

## **Historical Development**

### Base and Superstructure

Bevan saw the development of society as taking place through stages with the political and ideological superstructure adapting to changes to the economic base. He wrote that the *Manifesto* was “the first time the world learned of that conception of history by which the study of social development matured into a definite science”. He declared that the “Materialist Conception of History runs through the historical part of the *Manifesto* like a golden thread” (1921, p. 20). This materialist conception of history and the relationship between the economic base and the political-ideological superstructure appears to be implicit in Bevan’s analysis of the historical development of societies. As noted in Chapter Two, authors such as Smith identified it as influencing Bevan’s intellectual development (specifically the work of German philosopher Joseph Dietzgen). The study of historical materialism was included as part of the “Lectures on Method” provided by the Central Labour College (Craik 1964, p. 169). To begin with, it is worth noting Bevan’s interpretation of society before the onset of industrialisation:

Before the rise of modern industrialism it could be said that the main task of man was to build a home for himself in nature. Since then the outstanding task for the individual man is to build a home for himself in society. I do not pretend that this definition has any sociological validity. I do claim that it is useful in enabling us to study widely differing experiences in the history of mankind (1952a, p. 34).

Before industrial society, there were few man-made items, agriculture was dominant, and the immediate struggle was with the forces of nature. Social relations were personal relations and social institutions were also immediate and personal. In this situation, “physical nature ruled over all” and the

physical elements were the main source of [someone’s] sorrows as of his joys...Floods, famines, fires, crop failures, earthquakes, the majestic immensity of the heavens and the overpowering violence of storms, all drove home the lesson that by comparison, he was a pigmy grudgingly permitted a brief life, a fleeting smile and then oblivion (1952a, p. 35).

Therefore, in these circumstances, “the social organism was an instrument forged by man to hold in check the forces of nature”. The individual and society became inseparable from each other and it never occurred to the individual to be outside that society, as in exile there was only “death, physical and spiritual. Between him and the terrors of nature stood only his tribe, his clan, his small society. Inside it he was warm, comforted, and to some extent safe. Outside he was nothing” (1952a, p. 35). The difference between that society and the society of the 1950s was, Bevan believed, that the “individual today in the industrial nations is essentially an urban product. He is first a creature of his society and only secondarily of nature” (1952a, p. 35). This description of the move from pre-industrial to industrial society sets out Bevan’s argument on historical development and the influence of material conditions on social life.

Bevan detailed how the individual had overcome the threats of nature as a result of the advancement of technological science. “In short”, he concluded, “man in making society has brought nature under control”. Bevan warned, however, that “in doing so society itself has got out of the control of man”. The problems that individuals now faced “have their source in society. Personal relations”, Bevan wrote, had “given way to impersonal ones. The Great Society has arrived and the task of our generation is to bring it under control. The study of how it is to be done is the function of politics” (1952a, p. 36). Changes in the material conditions of society had altered society significantly, moving beyond the control of personal relations between people.

To bring society under control, Bevan’s focus on the importance of class relations reveals an emphasis on changes to the economic base, specifically property relations. Bevan’s initial view, expressed in his review of the *Manifesto*, was that property had become so concentrated in private hands that the conditions were now in place for the “Social

Revolution” to occur and for the destruction of “*all* private property relations” (emphasis added) to result from this (1921, p. 20). Bevan saw this need to reverse property relations clearly in the coal industry where “the relations between employers and workers have reached a state of chronic maladjustment, resulting in a failure to produce what the nation needs for its life”. He insisted that socialists always recognised this situation as “the classic prelude to a revolutionary solution. That solution is to re-unite the forces of production by changing the property forms. The only change now possible in our society is the abolition of private property in the coal mines” (1944c, p. 7).

The complete abolition of private property is not, however, something he proposed in his later writing. Bevan altered his opinion and did not see the abolition of *all* private property as attainable. While acknowledging the economic power that capitalism possessed to create a modern and technologically advanced society (1952a, p. 37), Bevan insisted that in the future “power relations of public and private property must be drastically altered” in developing a better society (1952a, p. 118). Bevan instead argued for a mixed economy: “It is clear to the serious student of modern politics that a mixed economy is what most people of the West would prefer” (1952a, p. 118). This idea in Bevan’s thought is explored in greater detail in Chapter Four when considering Bevan’s vision of the relationship between public enterprises and private property. For now, it is important to note that Bevan maintained that a fundamental change in property relations needed to be carried out in society.

### Future Society

Bevan described the changing social and economic power relations in terms of moving from capitalism to a new order of society. The concentration of private property led to societal development being halted. Therefore, the relations between private and public property needed to be drastically altered to bring about change. Marx and Engels emphasised that “All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions” ([1848] 1969, p. 23). Bevan supported this interpretation, stating:

Before we can dream of consolidation, the power relations of public and private property must be drastically altered. The solution of the problems I have been discussing cannot be approached until it becomes possible to create a purposive and intelligible design for society. That cannot be done until effective social and economic power passes from one order of society to another (1952a, p. 118).

Bevan's view on the development of society can be seen clearly in his analysis of countries such as Russia. Praising the seven-year plan conducted by the Soviet Union, Bevan argued that the "old Marxist argument that the relations of private property and the social stratifications that come within them tend to stultify and even inhibit technical progress and maximum production of wealth, is receiving fresh reinforcement" (1959a, p. 5). Bevan was here reaffirming a Marxist position that the dominance of private property had become a stumbling block to the economic development of society. The changing of property relations would benefit the masses in society.

Writing in 1958, Bevan concluded that the changes in property relations had not occurred in Britain. He argued that the nature of private enterprise and capitalism prevented further economic development, writing that "increases in national wealth, made possible by new scientific and industrial techniques, have been blocked by the social and political peculiarities of capitalist society". He reflected on the "old Marxist thesis [that] stated that a time would be reached in the development of capitalist society when property relations would limit the expansion of the productive forces". He admitted that this analysis "was too austere". He reflected that the "position today is not that capitalist society is plunged into an epic economic crisis. Instead, the economy functions but in an enfeebled condition, like a patient with a persistent low fever". He concluded that: "We are not in the old phase of boom and bust. There is never a real boom and never a real bust. There is only a persistent sabotage of productive potentialities" (1958j, p. 1).

In 1959, Bevan wrote that private enterprise was still attempting to maintain its dominance but there were no signs that it was effective. Economists were trying to rely on outdated theories, but they did not work anymore. However, he stated that "the more economists are attempting to establish the validity of capitalism, the more clearly they disclose its uncertain and declining state of health" (1959b, p. 9). Although the inevitable destruction of the capitalist system had not occurred, Bevan still maintained that capitalism was not conducive to the development of the economy. Bevan's reflections on property relations persisted throughout his writings.

In the following chapters on political, military and ideological power, Bevan's views on the relationship between historical development and democracy, war and ideas are explored in greater detail together with the relationship between the economic base and the political-ideological superstructure. A study of Bevan's writing on the nature of capitalist development and property relations reveals an orthodox Marxist position on the nature of class-conflict and the development of society, closely related to a materialist conception of



history. The next line of inquiry is to study *how* Bevan envisioned changing the relationship between poverty and property and the economic base of society. This is considered in the next section.

## **Working-class Strategy**

### Praxis

In order to change the property relations in society, the working-class needed to engage in conscious activity. In *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx wrote his famous phrase: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is, to *change* it” ([1845] 1996, p. 15). This phrase explained the importance of seeking to change society rather than just explain its features. This has often been described as Praxis, referring to “the free, universal, creative and self-creative activity through which man creates (makes, produces) and changes (shapes) his historical, human world and himself” (Petrović 1983, p. 384). Bevan also believed in the need for human activity to change society. His political thought cannot be seen simply as a theory of society; it must also be seen as a call to action to the working-class. It was a call for an active engagement in changing the circumstances of their lives. Bevan saw capitalist society as ultimately being transcended by a new order of society conforming to the principles of democratic socialism, an idea that is “based on the conviction that free men can use free institutions to solve the social and economic problems of the day, if they are given the chance to do so” (1952a, p. 96).

Bevan’s early engagement with Marxism made clear to him the need for the working-class to engage in collective action to change their condition. He stated in his 1921 review that the *Communist Manifesto* taught the working-class that “want and misery” alone would not lead to revolution; the means to make one needed to be available. The *Manifesto* had detailed how modern industry had provided those means. Bevan wrote that “Marx points out that the means to end capitalism have been supplied by modern industrial development, and that this development has been the historic purpose of the capitalist epoch”. Previous revolutions had failed because there did not exist a “permanent identity of interests”. Once a dominant class was overthrown, the “class distinctions within the revolting elements came to the surface, thrusting the lowlier classes into what was revealed to be simply another form of economic servitude” (1921, p. 20). Bevan detailed how this could not be otherwise, as during previous revolutions property had been widely distributed: “A successful revolution directed against private property is only possible where property is so centralised that the subject class

is able to see in the ruling class simply a personification of private property”. Capitalism had accomplished this, denying property from nine-tenths of the population. Bevan then referred to the main objective of the next revolution as having “for its main object the destruction of ‘all private property relations’ and with this, the ‘division of society into classes will come to an end’” (1921, p. 20). A reading of Bevan’s work suggests that he initially envisioned that this revolutionary activity would take the form of industrial action.

### Industrial Action

Bevan’s experience in the South Wales coalfield saw him involved in fighting for change through the trade union movement. How the workers could organise to effect social change and to win a conflict for power was Bevan’s main concern, as he explained in his account of the inter-war period in *In Place of Fear*. As noted in Chapter Two, Bevan acknowledged the influence of syndicalist thinkers in South Wales such as Noah Ablett. For them, economic power was at the point of production. Bevan quoted Ablett as asking, “why cross the river to fill the pail?” (1952a, p. 19) – why seek political means of achieving power when power was available for the workers at the point of production? This interpretation of Marxism viewed “Parliamentary action...as an auxiliary of direct action by the industrial organisations of the workers”. Bevan and his fellow workers were taught that power “was at the point of production...Going to Parliament seemed a roundabout and tedious way of realising what seemed already within our grasp by more direct means” (1952a, p. 19). This education would suggest that Bevan initially placed emphasis on industrial action first and foremost.

Bevan’s belief throughout the 1920s in direct action is noted by writers detailing his early political development. W.W. Craik, writing on the Central Labour College where he was Vice-President and a teacher during Bevan’s time there, noted that Bevan was known to debate with his fellow students “into the small hours of the morning, the merits of direct action and the demerits of parliamentary action” (Craik 1964, p. 124). His belief in the merits of industrial action are not surprising considering the type of Marxism that he would have been exposed to in Tredegar and in the Central Labour College. Although syndicalism did not triumph over other forms of action in South Wales, it would have appealed to many workers active in these industrial struggles (Francis and Smith 1980, p. 14).

Although collective power was important, it was meaningless if the will to wield it did not exist. This became perfectly clear for Bevan during periods of industrial unrest in in the inter-war period. He claimed that during the 1919 Triple Alliance and the 1926 General Strike, the Labour leaders had not grasped the implications of mass industrial action and

those that did were not prepared to accept them (1952a, pp. 19-20). The leaders did not take advantage when their coercive power was greater than that of the State (1952a, p. 21). The collective power of the working-class may have enabled the working-class to take control of the means of production and emancipate themselves. Nevertheless, the will to seize this power was not apparent in the industrial leaders of this period.

It was noted in the previous chapter that Bevan's political development during the 1920s is subject to debate in the literature. The popular representation of this period is that Bevan was attached to the industrial and syndicalist outlook of miners' such as Ablett. Perhaps the most significant example of Bevan's belief in collective action is demonstrated through his role in organising the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company colliery lodges into the Tredegar Combine Lodge. Susan Demont presents the motivations behind the establishment of the lodge: one large single organisation "could wield more bargaining power than a series of small, semi-autonomous branches" and it could "exercise a bigger influence over District affairs" (1990, p. 193). The Combine Lodge can be seen as demonstrating Bevan's "belief that collective strength was crucial" (Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 25). Bevan, Demont argues, "played an influential role in the movement to establish the Combine" (1990, pp. 197-198). He was also "deeply involved in the day to day running of the [Tredegar Combine] strike" of 1918 and "he no doubt gained valuable experience as a result". Demont emphasises the importance of this strike as it was a "practical demonstration of the power of the industrial workers, proving at the very least that by withdrawing their labour at a time when demand for it was great they could win important concessions" (1990, p. 214). Bevan was heavily involved in co-ordinating and supporting industrial action in Tredegar.

According to Bevan's own reflections on events, it was after the failure of the General Strike in 1926 that he realised that the industrial weapon was not sufficient to win power for the working-class and the parliamentary route was needed. This representation of his political development is easy to accept as it fits with Bevan's own reflection on this period in *In Place of Fear* (1952a, p. 21). Nevertheless, as noted in the previous chapter, this representation has been disputed, most notably by Demont who argues that too much attention has been paid to Bevan's recollections and not on his actions during this period. Instead, Demont argues that Bevan's views on industrial action should be seen within the context of a wider political strategy. The importance of working-class organisation through trade unions is still evident, although it must be noted that Bevan had a difficult relationship with strikes, particularly during his time as Minister of Labour, Ellen (1984) arguing that Bevan increasingly showed an antipathy towards strikes against a Labour government. When Labour was in opposition,

however, Bevan saw the potential in industrial action (1957e), reflecting the prominent position he assigned to the Labour Party, detailed in Chapter Four.

It has been suggested that Bevan stumbled upon becoming an MP in 1929 and that he could have easily attempted to rise through the ranks of the South Wales Miners' Federation (Foot 1975a, p. 95). Trade unions were a central part to Bevan's political life, and it is in his experiences in the trade union movement that he first attempted to put theory into practice and obtain power for the working-class through practical means. Even when Bevan had become an MP in 1929, he still continued to argue for the importance of trade unions, although he felt that they should not get involved in politics and should supplement, not replace, political action (1938j), even arguing that once capitalism was abolished "trade unions would lose practically all their value... Are we then to preserve capitalism in order to maintain the trade unions? Trade unions are weapons the worker forged in his war against an unjust society" (*Tribune* 1942m, p. 2). The combination of the industrial and the political wings of the labour movement, and the tensions arising from this relationship, become clearer when Bevan's analysis of democracy is considered.

## **Democracy**

### Political Liberty

Bevan's advocacy for democracy is documented in this chapter because, although it lends itself to an analysis of political power, the third force 'democracy' was fundamental to Bevan's vision of working-class strategy. Considering democracy in relation to working-class action provides a bridge between Bevan's economic analysis and his view of political power. Bevan's analysis of the development of democracy in Britain demonstrated why he rejected the thesis that power resided at the point of production and was a significant deviation from orthodox Marxism. In the conflict between poverty and property, Bevan included democracy as an important force that could be used or destroyed. It can also be interpreted in the context of his understanding of the historical development of societies. As material forces developed in Britain, the masses agitated for reform, eventually leading to the enactment of universal franchise in 1929. In Bevan's analysis, the development of political liberty went hand-in-hand with the emancipation of the working-class. As economic conditions changed, political freedom was won by the people:

Freedom is the by-product of economic surplus. I speak here not of national independence, freedom to use one's own language, and religious liberty, although

even these have often been involved in the economic struggles. I am speaking of the full panoply of political democracy which includes these liberties and others besides. It is wholly unhistorical to talk as though political liberty had no secular roots. Political liberty is the highest condition to which mankind has yet aspired, but it is a condition to which he has climbed from lowlier forms of society. It did not come because some great minds thought about it. It came because it was thought about at the time it was realisable (1952a, pp. 39-40).

The development of political freedom was an important aspect of Bevan's analysis. It is not surprising that Bevan had great reverence for democracy, due to his activities in Tredegar and also his understanding of British history. The syllabus for the Central Labour College included a "*Course of Lectures on the History of Socialism in England*" as well as other courses on British (or "English") history (Craik 1964, pp. 169-171).

Bevan's reflections on the strikes that took place during the inter-war years are useful in explaining his understanding of democracy. He attributed the failure of the 1919 Triple Alliance and the 1926 General Strike to the reverence towards democracy existing in Britain:

It was not so much the coercive power of the state that restrained the full use of the workers' industrial power. That is a typical error of the undeveloped Marxist school. The incident I have described illustrates that. The workers and their leaders paused even when their coercive power was greater than that of the state. *The explanation must be sought in the subjective attitude of the people to the existence of the franchise and all that flows from it. The opportunity for power is not enough if the will to seize it is absent, and that will is attendant upon the traditional attitude of the people towards the political institutions that form part of their historical heritage* [emphasis added] (1952a, p. 21).

The failure of industrial action was attributed by Bevan to the "subjective attitude of the people". Bevan wrote that "Even as a very young man, when I was studying Marxism, I was deeply conscious of the failure to take account of what, for want of a better phrase, I call the subjective attitude of the people" (ibid.). The "subjective attitude of the people" towards Parliament was a central component of the psyche of British citizens. Bevan's statement that the miners' leaders paused when they sought to obtain power was an acknowledgement of the importance of democracy in understanding the development of British society.

Bevan proclaimed that "Political democracy brings the welfare of ordinary men and women on to the agenda of political discussion and demands its consideration" (1952a, p. 5).

Democracy could give people a voice and provide the liberty to live life in the knowledge that political representatives were listening to the demands of the people. Bevan wrote that “Political liberty is the highest condition to which mankind has yet aspired” (1952a, p. 40). He stated that political democracy “in a society based on private property, is an instrument which exposes the rich to the attack of the poor” (1943f, p. 11). By utilising political liberty, the people had the opportunity to challenge the ruling-class.

### Marxist Revisionism

Bevan’s conception of democracy represented a deviation from the Marxism that he had studied during his time at the Central Labour College. Although Craik, as noted above, maintained that Bevan argued for the merits of direct over parliamentary action during his time at the College, his analysis of the *Communist Manifesto* also included an insistence that its tactics needed to be adapted to contemporary conditions. He maintained that the *Communist Manifesto* was tactically valueless as “tactics must always be sought in the conditions immediately at hand” (1921, p. 20), insisting that “we should be misunderstanding the spirit of its authors if we attempted for one moment to give its findings the rigidity of a dogma or to make it anything like a touchstone for all time” (1921, p. 21). He assessed the *Manifesto* in the light of events that had transpired since it was written and argued that “time has...rendered obsolete the tactical proposals” that appear at the end of section two of the *Communist Manifesto* (1921, p. 20). Although Bevan did not specifically refer to democracy in the review, it hints at an early acknowledgement of the need to adapt political tactics to contemporary conditions.

Bevan claimed that traditional Marxist theory had not fully appreciated the importance of political democracy in achieving change for the working-class. He wrote that:

Quite early in my studies it seemed to me that classic Marxism consistently understated the role of a political democracy with a fully developed franchise. This is the case, both subjectively, as it affects the attitude of the worker to his political responsibilities; and objectively, as it affects the possibilities of his attaining power by using the franchise and parliamentary methods...This is especially the case in a country with a fully matured parliamentary democracy like Great Britain (1952a, p. 19).

Bevan recognised that the likes of Marx, Engels and Lenin had analysed parliamentary democracy to some degree, but he argued that they “never developed this feature of their

philosophy to anything like the extent of the rest [of their philosophy]” (1952a, p. 19). This understanding of democracy echoes that of Eduard Bernstein, the German philosopher who engaged in a substantial revision of Marxism. Bernstein rejected the theory of the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the materialist conception of history (Pierson 1986, p. 32).

Bernstein stressed the importance and potential of democracy. According to Pierson, Bernstein “insisted that the expansion of democracy and the broadening of political rights, through both their concession and their subsequent usage, made possible, and were indeed effecting, a gradual alteration in the nature of society” (1986, p. 33). Bevan certainly shared this outlook on the potential of democracy.

Democracy was a relatively new phenomenon as it was “only with the beginning of the 20th century that ordinary folk emerged from the darkness of despotism into the light of freedom, and began to consciously shape the governments of the world”. In that short time, mankind had

made more progress in the sciences, in the arts, in literature, than was made in the ten thousand years that preceded it. So far from democracy having failed mankind, it lifted man higher and quicker than any other lever which has suggested itself to the brain of man (1941f, p. 12).

Bevan maintained that political democracy was a direct consequence of the build-up of economic surplus (this understanding of the development of democracy is described further when Bevan’s attitude towards the developing world is considered in Chapter Five).

Bevan pointed to the Soviet Union as an example of how political liberty would develop as a result of technological and industrial advances. For example, he contended that the Soviet worker supported the regime due to the “knowledge that all around him the framework of a modern industrial community is being built, that he is helping to build it, and that in the meantime his life is substantially, if slowly, improving” (1952a, p. 139). In a House of Commons debate in 1951, Bevan argued that

Soviet thinking has not adjusted itself to the fact that the most revolutionary power in the world is political democracy. She has not adjusted herself to the fact that progress can only be made in modern complicated industrial civilisation on the basis of peace...

...It has always been assumed that Soviet Marxism would gain its first and easiest victories in the heavily industrialised nations. That was always the assumption. It was

because the theory of Marxism was born in Brussels, London, Paris, and New York and not in the agrarian areas. As a consequence of that, she expected to find easy allies. But I am convinced, as I have said before, that the only kind of political system which is consistent with a modern artisan population is political representative democracy (HC Deb 15 February 1951).

The aims of achieving class empowerment and the transcendence of socialism over capitalism required the development of political liberty.

### Democracy and the Ruling-class

Bevan insisted that major concessions were yielded by the ruling-class only after popular agitation against the government. He argued that the institutions of property had always tried to fight back against agitation from the labour movement, but slowly had to concede to public opinion. Bevan interpreted the art of democracy in Britain as the ruling-class making concessions but being clever about how much it gave:

The political representatives of property were always engaged in nicely balanced calculations as to how far they dare resist the pressure of public opinion and as to how little they need to give in order to buy it off. This delicate and complicated task is the art of ruling-class government in a political democracy. The British ruling class have always won the admiration of their fellows throughout the world by the skill with which they do it (1939c, pp. 10-11).

Bevan warned, however, that the ruling-class would reverse these concessions if it was threatened by democracy. He predicted that in such a situation, the “historical process is reversed. Instead of the people improving their position at the expense of property, property takes the offensive and improves its position at the expense of the people and of the democratic tradition” (1939c, p. 11). Reflecting his view that property could destroy democracy in fear of poverty, Bevan argued that the development of democracy would be fought against by the ruling-class.

Bevan recognised that the development of democracy had not been a peaceful process. He wrote that the “record of the Industrial Revolution in Britain... is a record of bloodshed, misery, oppression, accompanied by a century and a half of social dislocation”. He argued that if “liberty was the foundation of society and not its highest expression, it would be as old as the human race”, but this had not been the case. “Poverty and liberty”, Bevan wrote, “have always been uneasy bedfellows. It is not a coincidence that the history of



mankind, for thousands of years, was the story of poverty joined to tyranny” (1955j, p. 4). The development of democracy was not a natural condition, but one that had to be fought for in the face of the ruling-class.

Bevan saw that the onset of democracy in Britain carried great potential for changing society. Whereas previously the workers had few means of articulating their grievances beyond strikes and demonstrations, Bevan argued that democracy put “a new power in the possession of ordinary men and women” (1952a, p. 3). Through the Labour Party the masses in society could have their voices heard and be represented by a party fighting for their interests against the ruling-class. Although not completely rejecting the role of trade union activity, Bevan’s political thought emphasised the importance of political power and democracy. In Britain, Parliament was the institution that could express the concerns of the working-class and Bevan saw it as an important location of class-struggle in society. The role of Parliament is analysed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

Bevan’s analysis of society reflects an orthodox Marxist understanding of the nature of capitalism and class-conflict. For him, society was an arena of conflicting social forces and these were organised around the forces of poverty and property, roughly representing the proletariat and the bourgeoisie respectively. The class and property relations in society were central to understanding the dynamics of capitalism and the domination of wealth over the vast majority of society. Bevan’s analysis of class conflict and the concentration of property did not differ significantly from his reading of the *Communist Manifesto* and Bevan owed a large debt to it. Bevan’s engagement with Marxism informed and made clear his experiences of South Wales in the inter-war years.

Bevan’s analysis of the historical development of society explained to him how society reached the position where private property and private enterprise were dominant. Bevan argued that as society developed, property became more and more concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few which led to the accumulation of capital and the development of productive forces. This does not depart from Marx and Engels’ elaboration of class conflict outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* and the materialist conception of history, which Bevan praised. The next step in this development, however, represented a deviation from this theory. Rather than arguing for the complete abolition of private property, Bevan was more measured, arguing instead for a reversal in property relations. He argued for public property

to be dominant and for the economy to be run in the interests of the masses in society, allowing, however, for private property to still exist. This idea of a mixed economy is detailed further in Chapter Four.

Bevan's strategy to achieve power, his praxis, also represented a significant revision to orthodox Marxism. Rejecting the thesis that power was at the point of production, Bevan saw the development of democracy as a significant factor in shaping the strategy of the working-class. Political institutions existed in Britain through which the working-class could have their voices heard. The political wing of the labour movement, the Labour Party, was an important vehicle in achieving power for the working-class.

It was established in Chapter Two that Bevan's Marxism is the subject of discussion in the biographies and in the literature on Labour Party political thought. Foot, Campbell, Foote and others emphasise the centrality of Marxism to Bevan's political thought, while Marquand and Spalding disagree, claiming that to understand Bevan he must be seen as a parliamentarian (see Chapter Two). The analysis in this chapter supports the arguments of the former. Although it included revisions and deviations, Bevan's analysis of economic power reveals an approach that corresponds to an orthodox Marxist analysis of capitalism and class. It is also evident, despite claims in the literature, that Bevan's analysis of property relations remained evident throughout his career. Nonetheless, before firm conclusions can be arrived at, further analysis of the many features in Bevan's thought needs to be considered. Chapter Seven provides greater detail into this thesis' place within the literature.

Bevan made significant revisions to his understanding of Marxism, most notably his conception of democracy and parliamentary politics. The third force, 'democracy', identified above is an important addition to Bevan's analysis of the social forces in conflict with each other in society. To understand Bevan's views on the relationships between politics and class-conflict, capitalism and the ruling-class, trade union politics and his arguments to reverse the dominance of property over poverty, his conception of political power needs to be analysed. The following chapter highlights the continuing relevance of Bevan's economic analysis to the role of democracy and parliament in his political thought, as well as the tensions within it.

## Chapter Four: Political Power

“We weren’t born with liberty, we had to win it!” (Aneurin Bevan 1953, British Pathé 2014)

Bevan’s entire parliamentary career was geared towards obtaining political power through the Labour Party. The failure of the trade union movement in the industrial conflicts of the inter-war years led him to develop a theory of political power that, he argued, had been historically ignored by Marxists. He understood that the political power of capitalism was so strong that it was an impediment to the workers. The ruling-class were not only in possession of private property and the wealth that resulted from it, they were also dominant in the political institutions of Britain. Therefore, Bevan stressed the importance of political sources of power.

This chapter highlights the significance of democratic institutions in Bevan’s political thought. It begins by analysing his stress on the role of Parliament as the instrument through which democracy is given form. The chapter then outlines how Bevan envisioned the use of political power to transform the economic base of society through nationalisation. Finally, the chapter explores Bevan’s vision for a mixed economy as a result of the changing relationship between private and public property. This chapter continues to further explore Bevan’s deviations from Marxism to document his reverence for liberal democratic political institutions, although it is demonstrated that his economic analysis was central to his conception of political power.

### Parliament

#### Parliament as a Weapon

Bevan argued that Parliament could be used as a weapon in the struggle against the interests of capitalism. Chapter Three highlighted how Bevan reflected on his own political development as being a move from a belief in the merits of industrial action to a belief in Parliament (although, as Chapter Two noted, his recollection is doubted). Reflecting on his early engagement with Marxism, Bevan concluded that orthodox Marxist theory misunderstood the contemporary importance of the State in the development of society. He wrote that the “classic principles of Marxism were developed when political democracy was as yet in its infancy. The State was a naked instrument of coercion”. Widespread mass inequality may have existed previously, but progress was won by the masses due to sympathy, fear of unrest and the need to educate people in “the techniques of modern

production methods”. Bevan noted that before the onset of mass democracy, the initiative for change always came from the top because the lower stratum of society was politically inarticulate: “Progress lacked the thrust which comes from the people when they are furnished with all the institutions of a fully developed political democracy”. The only inevitable outcome of such a situation was the “theory of the class struggle and the conception of the State, as the executive instrument of the ruling class”. Bevan argued that in such a situation, where “political freedom” did not exist, the only change would come from social revolution and civil war (1952a, p. 22). Bevan did not agree, however, that the State was inevitably an instrument of the ruling-class but considered that it could be utilised as a result of the development of the franchise. The development of democracy was an important deviation from Bevan’s reading of the classical Marxist analysis of historical development.

Bevan conceived of Parliament as being “a weapon, and the most formidable weapon of all, in the struggle”. In Parliament, “from the outset [the Socialist] asserts the efficacy of State action and of collective policies...The Socialist dare not invoke the authority of Parliament in meeting economic difficulties unless he is prepared to exhaust its possibilities” (1952a, p. 32). The fact that the British Parliament had an unwritten constitution meant that it possessed a “revolutionary quality, and enables us to entertain the hope of bringing about social transformations, without the agony and prolonged crises experienced by less fortunate nations” (1952a, p. 100). If socialists were willing to use Parliament effectively then it had the potential to transform society.

Bevan saw the development of democracy as being in direct conflict with the interests of the ruling-class and of big business. He envisioned democracy as “a form of government which exposes the rich to the attack of the poor”. As a response to this, “the rich reply to the attack by depriving the poor of their democratic rights” (M.P. 1937a, p. 7). As democracy involved “the assertion of the common against the special interest” (1938d, p. 7), it posed a threat to the ruling-class. Bevan wrote that the Tories “have doubts about the virtues of democracy. Their conception of a sound democracy is one which is prepared to make whatever sacrifices are necessary for the preservation of the institution of private property”. He even suspected during the 1930s that the Tories began to “look longingly at Fascist States, which do not have to bother about what the people think or want” (1938l, p. 4). Bevan warned that the ruling-class would attempt to restrict democracy as much as possible.

This analysis would suggest that Bevan saw Parliament and the State as instruments of the ruling-class. It is important to note that Bevan did not see British Parliament as an inherently benevolent system for changing people’s lives, particularly during periods when it

was dominated by the Conservative Party. He agitated regularly against what he saw as the class privilege that historically emanated from the institution. In 1944 when the expectations of the people were being built up for “a fundamental and equitable reconstruction of society” after World War Two, Bevan suspected that the Tories were wondering: “how to ride the crisis, how to lie, deceive, cajole and buy time so as once more to snatch a reprieve for wealth and privilege” (1944a, p. 13). Bevan’s 1944 book *Why Not Trust the Tories?* clearly demonstrated his view that the Tory Party’s role in Parliament was keeping the ruling-class in power. He wrote at length on the ways in which the Tories delayed and prevented policies for post-war reconstruction and attempted to preserve the old way of life.

Bevan interpreted the function of the Tories in Parliament as being to preserve the institution of private property and “to protect the profit maker” (1944a, p. 51) as the party was “the politically organised body of the most powerful vested interests in the British Empire” (1940g, p. 13). A *Tribune* editorial declared that the aim of the 1922 Committee, the Conservative parliamentary group, was the defence of private property. The Committee would look upon a bill and declare: “What has been gained if we win the whole world and lose our profits?” (*Tribune* 1943d, p. 2). Bevan argued that whenever the budget was formulated by the Tories, because it affected the “financial well-being of the richer members of the community, and as they are the most articulate and influential class in society, the things that concern them are regarded as of vital importance” (M.P. 1937d, p. 7). Parliament was certainly not immune from vested interests in society.

Particularly during World War Two and during the period of the National Government, Bevan argued that “The resistance of vested interests appears to be stronger than the voice of the people. There is a conflict between what the people desire and what the Government is doing” (1941c, p. 1). Whereas Labour regarded “the House of Commons as a lever to improve the condition of the people”, the Conservative Party saw it as “a means to safeguard the welfare of capital” (1937c, p. 7). The party would “fight to the bitter end for the right of property to exploit the needs of the people” (1938c, p. 7). Bevan saw Parliament as “a conflict between power groups” (1940g, p. 13) and a “conflict of interest” (Bevan 1944a, p. 78). He suggested that the dominance of the capitalist class in Parliament was a reflection of the dominance of private property in property relations in society.

Many years after the establishment of the welfare State by the Labour Party, Bevan accused the Tories of attempting to remove the benefits achieved. He accused the Conservative Party of launching “a carefully prepared attack on the structure of the Welfare State, and upon those principles which Labour fondly imagined had been irresistibly built

into the fabric of British society” (1957e, p. 4). He still suspected the ruling-class of using the Tory Party as a vehicle to preserve its own interests: “In a political democracy, theirs [the Tories’] is the task of holding on to power and to privilege with the consent of popular opinion” (1958d, p. 5). He argued that the ruling-class would not be satisfied with maintaining the changes that had been introduced after the war.

Bevan insisted that the struggle between poverty and property could be waged by the Labour Party by using Parliament as a weapon. He argued that “The British constitution, with its adult suffrage, exposes all rights and privileges, properties and powers, to the popular will”. As well as setting out his analysis in terms of poverty, property and democracy, detailed in Chapter Three, he also wrote of “two sets of forces” striving for ascendancy in human affairs: “There is the collective will as expressed in representative institutions...[and] the will of authority expressed through a variety of other organised groups” (1952a, p. 100). This phrase refers to the battle taking place between poverty and property in capitalist society. Bevan argued that representative institutions should express the collective will of the people and challenge property.

Bevan argued that the working-class could be represented in Parliament through the Labour Party. Bevan wrote that the “first function of representative government is advocacy. The people must know that their representatives are alive to their needs and are pressing them on the attention of the State. To suffer is bad. To suffer in loneliness is death”. He asserted that “Discussion of vital questions in Parliament breaks through the loneliness which always threatens to engulf the individual in modern great communities” (1940i, p. 13). Although he looked upon a Parliament dominated by the Conservative Party as a means for the preservation of private property, Bevan stated that the Labour Party had the ability to change the way Parliament operated so that it represented the people. The link between Parliament and the people can be summed up in the following quote from *Tribune* in 1937:

It is almost impossible for a party to be a good fighting opposition in Parliament unless it is constantly stimulated and egged on by a roused and keen electorate.

Members reflect in the Commons the mood they find in their constituencies (M.P. 1937f, p. 6).

Parliament could act as a voice for the masses.

Parliament was a central forum for the struggle between poverty, property and democracy. In an article entitled ‘People versus Property’, Bevan wrote of how “the will of the people” would come up against the “will of property” in Parliament. The role of

Parliament was not that of a “court of appeal in the struggle between the sectional and the general interest or between Property and the People, which is endemic in capitalist society”, rather it is “one of the weapons of the general interest – the people”. Bevan argued that the “more effectively Parliament asserts the general against the sectional interest the more bitter grows the conflict between the People and Property”. This conflict would continue “until the climax is reached” when “either Parliament destroys the sectional interest, which is Socialism, or the sectional interest destroys Parliament, which is Fascism”. Bevan surmised that in a capitalist democracy political peace “is therefore a time in which the forces of the sectional interests, of Property in short, are universally triumphant”. He continued that a “Tory Government could not be expected to stand up to a vested interest because it is itself a weapon of the vested interest”. A Parliament dominated by the Conservatives is

a Parliament dominated by property, and such a Parliament, so far from mobilising the forces of the people, disperses those forces and renders them impotent. For a Tory majority puts a megaphone in the mouth of Property and a gag in the mouth of the People (1938a, p. 7).

Therefore, to challenge the sectional interests of property, Parliament needed to be controlled by the “democratic forces of the people”:

This, of course, can easily become an empty phrase. The test of its value is the right of the people to organise for political and industrial action, and the percolating of democracy and progress into all functions performed by the State: education, social services, health and the wider cultural and social problems (*Tribune* 1942f, p. 2).

Ultimately, the only fundamental answer to the problems facing the country was that “the power of the State to own and control must at all cost and with a completeness hitherto undreamt of be brought under the progressive control of the Labour Movement” (ibid.). Bevan identified a clear link between the Labour Party in Parliament and the people it represented.

Although some have questioned whether Bevan had always advocated political action (see Chapters Two and Three), his faith in Parliament stayed with him throughout his career. Successive election defeats from 1951 onwards did not shake him from his belief that searching for power through Parliament was what the working-class needed to be striving towards. He continued to defend Parliament as an institution even when it was under attack. In 1959 Bevan highlighted criticisms that had been levelled at Parliament. He took these

criticisms seriously, as he maintained that Parliament was vital to the nation. He argued that Parliament had the support of the nation, but the particular Parliament in 1959 did not. He reiterated his long-held belief that whenever Tories were in power, they simply adopted acceptable elements of their opponent's policies and made it look like they supported them. He contrasted this Parliament to the Parliament of 1945-1951, a Parliament he claimed had engaged with the issues that affected the nation and inspired the people:

Can anyone seriously say that the Parliament after the war was listless, uninspired and unfruitful? Of course not. The Parliament concerned itself with almost every aspect of national life. However controversial its measures, they ignited the imagination of the country, aroused and held political interest, and by so doing, grounded Parliament in the esteem of the British people (1959f, p. 12).

Any problems with the 1959 Parliament were the problems of the Tory Party: "In the last analysis – and this is no extenuation of the Opposition – the vitality or lack of vitality of Parliament is an expression of the vitality of the ruling party. Stabbing water is an unrewarding exercise" (ibid.). Bevan dismissed criticism of Parliament as an institution, instead laying any criticism of poor performance at the door of the government and opposition.

Bevan insisted that to maintain this link to the people, Parliament needed to be continually refreshed as "social institutions, like muscles, depend upon their use. If they are not used they become atrophied" (1941d, p. 7). He certainly did not look romantically on Parliament and did not appreciate the reverence for it as a historical institution:

The future would probably be better and certainly easier to make if the past did not press so closely in upon us, and Parliament would be a more efficient workshop if it were not at the same time a great museum (1938i, p. 3).

Rather than preserving Parliament as it was, it needed to be adapted so that it could be used effectively and respond to the needs of society.

### Parliament and the State

At first glance, it appears that Bevan's strategy for winning power was simply to obtain a Labour Party majority in Parliament and then use that majority to form a government to enact changes. In this situation, a majority would give the Labour Party control of the State apparatus. As discussed in Chapter Two, Campbell certainly presents Bevan's strategy in this way (1987, p. 48). The preceding discussion would also seem to point to this conclusion as



Bevan emphasised the changes that could be enacted by a Labour majority. Nevertheless, there are signs that Bevan understood the difficulty of this strategy.

One article suggests that Bevan was not entirely confident that this approach would lead to obtaining power easily. In an extensive article in *Tribune* in 1938, he critiqued what he argued was the prevailing socialist view of the role of State power:

We have but to achieve a majority in Parliament, so the argument goes, in order to have at our disposal the whole machinery of the capitalist State, to use against our enemies as they have used it against us. From this standpoint the State looks very much like a gun which can be made to point in any direction at the will of the one who, at the moment, is in command of it...

...If the courts are biased against the workers, if the police serve property, if the Civil Service is saturated by Conservative thought, if the armed forces of the Crown are officered by neo-fascists, if the Crown itself fertilises, by insidious channels, all the reactionary growths in society; all this, we are assured, will be transformed when the supreme centre of power the House of Commons is in the hands of representatives of the workers (1938h, p. 7).

Bevan argued that while this “current coinage of Socialist thought in Britain” was naive, it had become so predominant that it was “considered unwise to cast even a shadow of doubt upon it”. Nevertheless, he warned: “doubt it we must, because I believe this point of view is a dangerous delusion”. Bevan did not view the State as an autonomous institution, separate from the class conflict in society or simply as an instrument that could be utilised by the majority in Parliament. He wrote that the State “and the assumption of the supremacy of the ‘will of the people’, upon which it rests, are not immune from the issues of the economic and political struggles of the day”. In fact, he argued that the State was heavily involved in these struggles. He prophesied that “as the struggle grows keener, crevices appear in the formerly solid facade of the State structure, until it breaks and finally melts away in the heat generated by contending social forces” (ibid.). Bevan predicted that

One of the ways in which the cleavage in the structure of the British capitalist State may show itself is in the antagonism between the House of Lords and the Commons, which is latent in the relations between the two institutions (ibid.).

Bevan argued that the existence of the House of Lords challenged “the fundamental assumption upon which certain people approach the possibility of a steady and even Socialist

progress”, the fundamental assumption being that “the will of the people is supreme in the British Constitution”. Bevan understood that the common justification for the Lords was that the immunity from being voted in by the people was its “chief virtue”. He gave the example of the Amendments to the Coal Bill, which the Commons had been discussing in 1938 as evidence of the Lords’ true function. He claimed that the “vulgar self-interest” of the Lords meant that they carried amendments “which were designed to better themselves. They behaved more like highwaymen than legislators (sic)”. Discussing the opposition between the Commons and the Lords, Bevan wrote that the “principle of election in the Commons protects the people from pillage by the aristocratic Lords”. He maintained that the “rapacity of property must always disguise itself before it can win the support of the people”. However, when the “mask wears thin...then the authoritarian principle, which is latent in the British Constitution and enshrined in the Lords, will be invoked to set aside the people’s will as expressed in the vote”. “Thus”, Bevan concluded, “the Constitution itself becomes an issue in the struggle for the control of the Constitution” (ibid.).

This article demonstrates Bevan’s beginning to touch upon the role of the State as being part of the economic struggle of society, foreshadowing debates on the ‘relative autonomy’ of the State that were a feature of the writings of theorists such as Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas (see Miliband 1973). In it, Bevan concluded that the State’s autonomy was limited by the class struggle that was being waged in society. He did not view the State simply as an autonomous institution but as an institution with a more complicated relationship with the economic base of society. Ultimately though, Bevan’s analysis did not go into significant detail on the role of the different elements of the State, instead focusing primarily on differences between the House of Commons and the House of Lords within Parliament. Bevan did not go into further detail about the role of the civil service, the police or other institutions, for example. Nevertheless, this article still demonstrates the importance Bevan placed on the economic conditions of society in structuring the role of the State.

Bevan again reflected on the relationship between the State and private enterprise six years later in 1944. Discussing the Trade Union Congress’ (TUC) report on post-war reconstruction, Bevan criticised its recommendation to create industrial boards for industries left in private hands, which would include collaboration between trade unions and the employers’ federations of the relevant industry. He argued that the unions would be forced to accept decisions arrived at by the Board at the expense of their members, leading to creation of a “Fascist Labour Front”. Bevan predicted that collective organisation of private industry would lead to the development of Fascism. He wrote:

When private interests organise themselves in the fashion recommended by the T.U.C. Report they take over the apparatus of the State itself. The result is not control of industry by the State. It is the control and domination of the State by private interests, disciplined and organised by the necessities and technical requirements of modern industrial society (1944e, p. 7).

Bevan argued that when the economy consisted of competition between small-scale enterprises, the “conflicting interests of different groups of capitalists left a considerable degree of freedom of action by the Government”. He wrote that the State “could be, and was, manipulated by the capitalist class as a whole where and when its general interest was involved as in conflicts with the working class and in waging war”. Nonetheless, he continued, “a particular section of capitalists found it difficult to use the State apparatus in its own narrow interests without coming into conflict with other sections of capitalists”. This situation, he argued, “led many people to the superficial conclusion that the State was above the battle, and able to intervene without regard to what the Americans describe as pressure-groups” (ibid.). He pronounced this view of the State, however, as a “delusion”. He criticised the report for making a fundamental error:

Indeed, its error is even more crass. It appears to think it can facilitate the creation of collective capitalist industrial organisations and yet preserve the power of the State machine to impose concern for the public welfare upon them. In addition to that it imagines it can identify the workers’ organisations with this new capitalist collectivity without affecting the ‘purity’ of the State machine. Where, in these circumstances, do they think the Government is going to derive its power and authority to impose the public will – assuming one can be created in such circumstances? (ibid.)

Bevan criticised what he saw as “the theory of the immaculate conception of the State”. When private enterprise was effectively organised, the State could not play the role of a neutral arbiter. The result, Bevan concluded,

is democratic indigestion, which becomes chronic at a time of economic difficulty – as in Germany – and it finds the institutions of democracy too debilitated to put up an effective defence of itself when Fascist elements carry the logic of the situation to the point of liquidating the then moribund State apparatus (ibid.).

Bevan argued that the conclusion the report should have reached was this:

When collective industrial organisation is the only means by which the technical resources of industry can be properly utilised then the point has come for the socialisation of the industries concerned. It is not the democratic State apparatus which becomes redundant in those circumstances, but rather the private ownership of industry. The T.U.C. proposals attempt to place the benefits of collective organisation at the disposal of discredited private ownership. That is the very essence of the Corporate State (*ibid.*).

This reiterated Bevan's argument in 1938 that the State was not a neutral arbiter in society and reinforced his belief that the State needed to directly change the property relations in society.

Although he saw challenges to the effectiveness of the State, Bevan was still insisting in the 1950s that there were no constitutional limits to socialism in Britain, declaring that "the will of the House of Commons is supreme". He again reiterated that the House of Lords was a potential barrier to important socialist policy and that there was no need for "second thoughts" to be sought when enacting policy as this "usually conceals a wish for a second wind for the vested interests opposed to the legislation in question". He also determined that the unwritten nature of the British constitution was favourable to the development of socialism. He concluded that

we cannot say that we have inherited a constitution that bars the approach to Socialism. But, of course, this is assuming that Socialists do not raise barriers in their own spirit, that we pursue our policies with sufficient dedication and robustness (1954m, p. 1).

The tools to change society were available to socialists in Britain if they were willing to utilise them.

Throughout his career Bevan maintained that Parliament and the State had transformative roles to play in shaping society. For example, in 1957 he was stating that the British people had "come to look upon the House of Commons as being not only their court of appeal but also the most potent instrument in their struggles" (1957b, p. 5). The unique nature of British parliamentary democracy made Parliament a formidable weapon in reversing property relations in society. It is important to keep in mind, however, that, as demonstrated in Bevan's analysis of the State, it was tied up with the economic realities of society: it was not enough to simply take control of Parliament and the other institutions of the State to change society. They needed to be used to transform the economic base of

society. This more critical understanding of Parliament and the State, however, was not followed through in his later writings. The 1938 and 1944 *Tribune* articles discussed above are rare instances of Bevan outlining a more critical view of the State's relationship with economic forces. Post-1945, Bevan returned to extolling the power of Parliament to enact changes, perhaps reflecting his experience of establishing the National Health Service. Nonetheless, Bevan continued to argue passionately that to change the property relations in society, socialists needed to use the power of Parliament and the State to enact the principles of public ownership.

## **Public ownership**

### Economic Planning

Bevan's views on public ownership and the debates within the party concerning its establishment feature heavily in the literature, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution, committing the party to nationalisation, has been a central focus of attempts at changing the party's core principles, with Hugh Gaitskell (unsuccessfully) and Tony Blair (successfully) attempting to revise the clause (see Jones 1997; Riddell 1997). Bevan, however, stressed that it "must never be forgotten that the heart and centre of Socialism is public ownership" (1952c, p. 4). Public ownership was certainly central to his belief in the relationship between politics and the economic conditions of society.

Bevan argued that leaving economic power in the hands of private enterprise would result in Parliament being unable to change society. For example, in 1937 he claimed that Parliament was only able to "offer capitalists a number of bribes to establish industries in the distressed areas", which meant that "Parliament is made responsible for the results, but is forbidden to deal directly with the provision of work, because this is reserved for private enterprise. Parliament is charged with the responsibility but is denied the power." He argued that "it is the denial of effective economic power to the representative assembly which is responsible for the decline of political democracy". He wrote that "For those who believe in private enterprise government is a regrettable nuisance useful mainly for imposing discipline on restless workers. For the Socialist, government is an instrument with which to attain the more intelligent organisation of men's economic activities" (M.P. 1937b, p. 7). Bevan maintained that denying the representative parliament responsibility would limit its effectiveness, therefore it needed to capture economic power.

Early in his career, Bevan argued for the Labour Party to be forceful in its commitment to challenging the interests of property. Writing in John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1932)<sup>1</sup>, Bevan asserted that Labour needed to abandon a 'gradualist' approach to changing society, arguing instead for a dedicated commitment to socialism. He disparaged the argument that the 1931 Labour government was brought down by a bankers' plot, arguing that if a gradualist, "weak and comparatively innocuous Minority Government can be broken by a conspiracy of finance capitalists, what hope is there for a Majority Government, which really threatens the bankers' privileges?". Bevan reflected that if "capitalism is in such a state of self-consciousness that it can conspire against a Government and bring it down by moving its international financial forces against it, what hope is there for a gradual and peaceful expropriation of the bankers?" (Strachey 1932, p. 318). If the capitalists were so well organised, then gradualism as a policy needed to be abandoned by the Labour Party.

There were two options available for the Labour Party in its approach: it could either drop "its gradualism and tackle the emergency on socialist lines", or it could "drop its socialism in the hope of reassuring private enterprise in order to get a breathing-space". The gradualist policy of the Labour Party needed to be "drastically overhauled" (1932, p. 319). Bevan argued that the policy of the Labour Party involved "the assumption that capitalism can be carried on more efficiently by socialists than by capitalists: that the sacrifices demanded of the workers are the result, not of the needs of private enterprise, but of its stupidity". This, Bevan argued, was consistent with gradualism, which required that "private enterprise shall continue reasonably successfully whilst it is being slowly and painlessly eliminated" (1932, p. 320). The interests of property could not be placated if a new society was to be established.

Bevan insisted that the Labour Party needed to "offend" the interests of the individual investor and tackle the class struggle in society. He demanded that a party

climbing to power by articulating the demands of the dispossessed must always wear a predatory visage to the property-owning class...Thus in a society involved in the throes of an ever more heavily waged class struggle, the Labour party must wear the face of the implacable revolutionary (1932, p. 320).

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<sup>1</sup> Although Bevan is not named in the book, he has been identified as the author of the referenced passage (Foot 1975a, p. 152).

He insisted that the Labour Party needed to “fulfil the threat of its face, and so destroy the political conditions necessary to economic gradualism. To calm the fears of private enterprise, it must betray its promise to the workers, and so lose their support” (1932, pp. 320-321). The only way to truly wage class struggle effectively was to use Parliament and the State as forcefully as possible.

Bevan insisted that the economic life of the country needed to be planned. He framed the discussion as a decision between “private or collective spending” (1952a, Chapter IV). A question of central importance in his thought was: “What is most essential and who is to decide it?” (1952a, p. 59). Or, as he set out in one of his most widely quoted phrases: “the language of priorities is the religion of socialism” (Labour Party 1949, p. 172; 1954j, p. 2). This was an issue that went to the heart of the relationship between economic power and the State’s role in possessing it. State power needed to be wielded to prevent the damage that economic power, left in private hands, could inflict. “If economic power is left in private hands”, Bevan wrote, “and a distressed people ask Parliament in vain for help, its authority is undermined”. Bevan maintained that

If confidence in political democracy is to be sustained, political freedom must arm itself with economic power. Private property in the main sources of production and distribution endangers political liberty, for it leaves parliament with responsibility and property with power (1952a, p. 29).

By nationalising key industries, the Labour Party could reverse the relationship between public and private property. Private enterprise could not be directed. Therefore, the only way that Bevan envisioned creating a new society along socialist lines was for Parliament to arm itself with economic power and direct the economy in the interests of society. Bevan maintained that “the area of private property must be drastically restricted, because power over property is the instrument of economic planning” (1940f. p. 11). In Parliament, the Tories’ remedy would be to allow private enterprise to “suck at the teats of the state” (HC Deb 6 March 1946), but Bevan asserted that competitive industry could never solve the problems of the nation. Creating a new design for society could not be done “until effective social and economic power passes from one order of society to another” (1952a, pp. 117-118). The people would not possess “economic responsibility...until the main streams of economic activity are publicly canalised” (1947, p. 7). Bevan stressed that “Socialist planning demands plannable instruments and these are not present if industry is the domain of private, economic adventure” (1955a, p. 1). Because Bevan saw the State as being part of the

class struggle in society, it therefore had the potential to initiate significant changes to the economic conditions of this struggle.

Nationalisation needed to be enacted in such a way that control over certain industries was entirely in the hands of the government. He insisted that if “we are to surmount our economic difficulties it can only be at the expense of industrial and financial interests” (1952b, p. 1). For example, if nationalisation of the coal industry left economic power in private hands then industry would still be in the interests of the coal owners, so when problems occurred it would be State direction that received the blame: “The State steps in not in substitution of private interests but as its guardian” (*Tribune* 1942i, p. 2). In criticising the nationalisation that was carried out by the 1945-1951 Labour governments, Bevan believed that the party bowed to pressure from the press who feared having civil servants in charge, so the result was that nationalised industries were in the hands of management boards. This, Bevan argued, reflected the old belief in private enterprise. He argued for ministerial control of nationalised industries, rather than power over these industries being in the hands of unelected boards (1952a, pp. 97-98). The boards of nationalised industries, he argued, were a “constitutional outrage” (1952a, p. 98). He insisted that an important part of public ownership was accountability through Parliament:

Part of the modern case for public ownership is therefore the need to establish some form of communal accountability for these industrial operations on which so many people depend for a livelihood. Some of the criticisms of nationalisation arise from the fact that this principle of accountability has been lost sight of by not bringing the central boards of the nationalised industries under direct parliamentary control (1954i, p. 12).

Bevan was proud of the achievements of the Labour government but argued that Parliament needed to possess greater responsibility for controlling major economic industries.

Bevan maintained that the only way in which resources could be distributed for the benefit of society was for the principles of economic planning to be followed. He contended that public ownership was not argued for by the Labour Party for its own sake. The party, he wrote, “did not come into existence demanding Socialism, demanding the State ownership of property, simply because there was some special merit in it”. Rather, the Labour Party believed in nationalisation because “only in that way can society be intelligently and progressively organised. If private enterprise can deliver all these goods, there will not be any argument for Socialism and no reason for it” (HC Deb 23 June 1944). Throughout his career



Bevan stressed that governments needed to challenge private enterprise. For example, in 1954 he wrote that governments

dare not, indeed cannot, disinterest themselves in the economic activities of their countries after the fashion of early twentieth century statesmen. They cannot today leave questions of employment and investment to the automatism of a free market and plead the 'laws of supply and demand' (1955d, p. 1).

People were not prepared "to believe that their livelihood and their expectations from life must be left to the mercy of blind forces however impressively these may be garbed in the jargon of the economists" (ibid.). Nationalisation was not an end but a means to an end, a means to establishing a democratic socialist society.

### Bevan's Plan for Public Ownership

At various stages of his career, Bevan set out his vision for the planned economy. For example, he detailed his vision in an essay for the Fabian Society entitled 'Plan for Work' (1943a), largely based on an article he wrote for *Tribune* in 1940 (1940h). In this essay Bevan argued that a plan for action was needed immediately to shape society after World War Two had concluded:

The kind of industrial controls, the forms of political organisation, the relationship between different classes in the community, the texture of all these is being determined by how we are conducting the war and the means with which we are doing it (1943a, pp. 34-35).

Bevan then outlined his plans of how a planned economy could create a new society. He stressed two principles that needed to be adhered to in any plan argued for by socialists: "We seek to obtain the advantages of economic planning in society, and at the same time to retain the benefits of individual liberty and representative democracy" (1943a, p. 35). Bevan worried that corporations were being progressively enfranchised in society, but individuals were not. He warned that

if those who exercise power in the State are not continually subject to the checks and restraints of popular opinion and of organised representative institutions, nothing can prevent the State from becoming tyrannical; because it is the right of the ordinary man or woman to pull at the coat-tails of those in power to exert their influence over them (1943a, p. 36).

Any changes to the economic responsibilities of the State needed to ensure that principles of democracy remained.

Bevan argued for a revolutionary transformation of the economy by the State. He stressed, however, that “if the economic activities of society change, if alterations occur in the relationships between classes in the community, if economic functions undergo revolutionary transformations, then there must be constitutional adaptations to those conditions” (1943a, pp. 36-37). He also warned that attitudes towards public ownership in society would not be positive if the proposals for nationalisation meant handing over power to the bureaucracy of the civil service. He insisted that socialists “have for over a hundred years stood for the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange; but, we may as well confess it, those ancient slogans no longer ring a bell”. Although the civil service was “an estimable organisation” in Bevan’s eyes, he thought that “no one can suggest that the slogan of handing over great industries to the Civil Service of this country would fill anybody with revolutionary zeal”. Nevertheless, he insisted that nationalisation was important because it was impossible to “have control without ownership”. To plan economic life, ownership of key industries was vital (1943a, p. 38). In altering the material conditions of society, Bevan maintained that the principles of political liberty and democracy needed to be preserved but they also needed to keep pace with economic change.

Bevan outlined a list of industries that he wanted to see nationalised. They were light, power, production of steel, shipbuilding, coalmining and transport. He proclaimed that “all those economic instruments must become national property...fairly quickly”. He predicted that if they were not made national property during the war they would “not be made national property after the war without a bloody revolution” (1943a, pp. 38-39) (Bevan at this stage must have not envisioned a Labour government being swept to power two years later). He concluded that “the main economic instruments must be taken out of private hands” (1943a, p. 39). Bevan did not want private enterprise to be in control of industries vital to the country.

After explaining the importance of nationalisation, Bevan then outlined a potential design for society. He set out five organs of the State: firstly, a “Supreme Economic Council”; secondly, a representative assembly; thirdly, a planning commission; fourthly, an auditing commission; and finally, a judiciary. The Supreme Economic Council (SEC) would be formed to take control of the day-to-day running of the newly nationalised industries. Bevan envisioned that it would be formed of a number of “able men”, responsible to the government and with the “right of employment and discharge over their own personnel” (1943a, pp. 39-40). The SEC should also not be subject to “day-to-day questioning and

interrogation in the House of Commons”, instead being allowed to operate without parliamentary interference (1943a, pp. 40-41).

This appears to reduce the role of Parliament in the planning of the economy, but Bevan argued that the role of the House of Commons, “or whatever institution we decide to have”, should exercise “supreme control over the general plans and designs of the Supreme Economic Council”. Plans would periodically have to be submitted to the government, who would also produce its own plans laying down what the SEC was to do. Here, the SEC and the representative assembly would work in harmony with each other (1943a, p. 41). Bevan argued for the separation of economic and political functions between the SEC and the government, believing that the representative assembly should retain control over “all the social agencies of coercion and of education” (1943a, p. 42). He declared that with the

division of function, economic technical administration by the Supreme Economic Council and Parliamentary control over the armed forces of the State, then you have the central design of a society which is coherent, which is self-contained, and yet based upon functionalist principles (1943a, pp. 42-43).

But socialists, Bevan warned, needed to keep in mind that “they cannot permit the economic changes, now taking place, to continue unless they try to bring their constitutional machinery into line with it, because if they allow that situation to continue, then you are bound to have disorder” (ibid.). This essay is the most detailed plan produced by Bevan outlining a vision of public ownership and emphasising the importance of adapting parliamentary institutions to economic changes.

In the essay, Bevan attempted to explain the relationship between economic and political power, insisting that the necessary changes in the economic base of society needed to be driven by a faith in democracy and representative institutions. It highlighted the importance of the base-superstructure relationship in his thought. Whereas classical Marxist thought, Bevan contended, did not take the power of the State into account, he argued that it was a central tool to change the material base of society. This is a fundamental aspect of Bevan’s praxis that representative institutions played a central part in the development of society. This essay is largely overlooked in the literature. A reading of it, however, emphasises a crucial aspect of Bevan’s political thought.

## Workers' Control

It has been suggested by some authors that Bevan's view of nationalisation entailed a desire to see workers' control of industry being established. Thomas-Symonds, for example, believes that Bevan regretted later in life not arguing for workers' control in industry (2015, p. 165), while Campbell suggests that *In Place of Fear* contained an argument for workers' control of industry (1987, p. 266). Krug quotes Bevan as stating to the *New York Times*: "Nationalisation is the transfer of property from the individual to the state. Socialism is the full participation of the people in the administration and operation of that property" (Bevan 1952 cited in Krug 1961, p. 138). In contrast, according to Thomas-Symonds Bevan did not develop a coherent plan for workers democracy (2015, p. 254). Demont also argues that Bevan was "never an advocate of workers' control of industry" (1990, p. 215). There is, however, evidence in Bevan's writing that he envisioned control being handed to the workers in nationalised industries, although these ideas were not fully developed.

Bevan did emphasise on numerous occasions the importance of workers involvement in industries, writing in 1944, for example: "At the workshop level the participation of the worker in the administration of the industry is an essential condition of industrial democracy, and a direct contribution to increased efficiency and smooth working" (1944e, p. 6). In *In Place of Fear*, Bevan discussed the "advance from State ownership to full socialism" being "in direct proportion to the extent the workers in the nationalised sector are made aware of a changed relationship between themselves and the management". He continued that the "persistence of a sense of dualism in a publicly owned industry is evidence of an immature industrial democracy. It means that emotionally the 'management' is still associated with the conception of alien ownership, and the 'workers' are still 'hands':

Until we make the cross-over to a spirit of co-operation, the latent energies of democratic participation cannot be fully released; nor shall we witness that spiritual homogeneity which comes when the workman is united once more with the tools of his craft, a unity which was ruptured by the rise of economic classes. The individual citizen will still feel that society is on top of him until he is enfranchised in the workshop as well as at the ballot box (1952a, p. 103).

This is the strongest evidence of Bevan discussing anything like workers' democracy in industries. He went on to write that because the division of labour made the worker "a cog in the machine", it was "more essential...to refresh his mind and spirit by the utmost discussion

and consultation in policy and administration” (1952a, p. 104). Bevan stressed freedom in industry, writing that:

In the societies of the West, industrial democracy is the counterpart of political freedom. Liberty and responsibility march together. They must be joined together in the workshop as in the legislative Assembly. Only when this is accomplished shall we have the foundations of a buoyant and stable civilisation (1952a, p. 105).

It must be kept in mind, however, that Bevan discussed this in relation to the worker carrying out executive action, therefore following a “general scheme” (1952a, p. 104). Although he called for a new attitude of the managers that would see them value the worker as part of the productive process (1952a, p. 105), Bevan did not call for workers to take control of industry completely and was vague about the way that workers’ control would be organised.

Bevan’s comments on the role of doctors within the National Health Service highlight the same reservations about workers’ self-management:

I have never believed that the demands of a democracy are necessarily satisfied merely by the opportunity of putting a cross against someone’s name every four or five years. I believe that democracy exists in the active participation in administration and policy. Therefore, I believe that it is a wise thing to give the doctors full participation in the administration of their own profession. They must, of course, necessarily be subordinated to lay control – we do not want the opposite danger of syndicalism. Therefore, the communal interests must always be safeguarded in this administration (HC Deb 30 April 1946).

It is true that Bevan wanted workers to play a more involved and important role in the running of key industries, but he did not develop this aspect of his views on nationalisation to any great extent. His insistence on the importance of parliamentary responsibility remained central.

There is evidence that Bevan critically assessed the assumption that Parliament and the State could transform society and also evidence that he considered the form that public ownership needed to take. These aspects of his thought, however, were not developed significantly and he returned to an emphasis on Parliament as a radical vehicle for social change. This section has focused on Bevan’s desire to see the introduction of economic planning and the need for public ownership. The following section now considers Bevan’s

vision of the continuing relationship between public and private property that would result from the State's involvement in the economy.

## **The Mixed Economy**

### Mixed Economy

It was demonstrated in Chapter Three that Bevan's initial view, expressed in his review of the *Communist Manifesto*, was that private property should be completely abolished. This view did not last however, as this chapter has also highlighted Bevan's changing belief that not all forms of private property were bad. Writing in *Why Not Trust the Tories?* Bevan expressed the view that the dominant role in the economy should be played by public ownership. He argued that "A political democracy, based on private ownership of industry, finance and commerce, is an essentially unstable society". He hinted that there was merit in certain industries being kept in the hands of private enterprise, but that public ownership should be the dominant form of property in society: "Whatever merits there may be in leaving certain segments of industry to private enterprise is beside the point of this book. The first consideration is to see to it that the dominant role in society is played by public ownership". Only "once you break the back of the big Tories", Bevan wrote, might it "be safe to allow a few of the small ones to crawl around" (1944a, p. 87). Although arguing for the dominance of public over private property, Bevan still envisioned a level of private enterprise existing in society.

This vision of society was one of a mixed economy, where key industries would be planned in the interests of society, but which also allowed for a measure of competitive business, maintaining choice for the individual. In 1940, he outlined how he envisioned society's economic life comprising of "three main streams". These three streams of economic life were (1940h, pp. 6-7):

1. Industries the products of which are distributed (i.e. they have no price because they are provided for free).
2. "Industries the products of which are sold at an artificially fixed price in order to secure the agreed standard of consumption." Some will be publicly owned, some in a "quasi-private relationship", e.g. milk production.
3. Private economic adventure.

Bevan predicted that society would move from the third stage to the second then to the first, a kind of law of development:

Society will then be provided with a measure of progress – the extent to which products pass from the third to the second and thence to the first category. The conscious application of this idea will give the economic life of the nation a sort of concrete raft, a kind of economic back-bone, fixed and stable, around which the activities of privately owned industry will group themselves, supplying the infinite diversification of products which the caprice of private choice may determine, without at any time threatening economic chaos (1940h, p. 7).

In this view, the stages of development of a society and the taming of economic chaos would be determined by changes in the condition of the products of society.

Bevan reiterated these views in his 1943 Fabian Society essay. After setting out his vision for nationalisation and the relationship between the economic and political arms of the State, Bevan outlined these three categories of product existing after this new society had been established. Bevan insisted that

a Socialist society must always consider how to create mass consumption for the mass production of the modern machine. Therefore, the price of certain categories of products must be designed in order to secure their consumption at the level society thinks to be necessary (1943a, p. 44).

The products of these industries could no longer conform to capitalist price competition (the fixing of prices remained important for Bevan's plan for public ownership) (1944g, p. 9; 1954o, p. 1).

Free market pricing would then be allowed in some sectors of the economy. This element of free market competition would form part of Bevan's vision of a society in which there would be "privately owned industry on a very, very considerable scale, because the purpose of a Socialist economy is to secure enough of those instruments of economic activity through which the central designs of society can be regulated". The society Bevan envisioned would be a "complex society". The purpose of socialists was to "see that right throughout that complex community there runs all the while the dominating principle of Socialist design and sense of direction". Bevan insisted that no socialist had ever "claimed that there is anything wrong with the profit-making motive, if the motive is harnessed to social welfare" (1943a, p. 46). The constitutional changes outlined in Bevan's writings on the Supreme Economic

Council, outlined in his Fabian Society essay, would be sufficient in reflecting the dominance of public property. Despite Bevan's engagement with Marxism and his political thought being based on some key tenets of Marxist economics, he moved quite far away from this position by insisting that the profit motive could be allowed in some industries.

Bevan maintained this position on the mixed economy throughout his career. He saw the balance being too heavily weighted towards private property in society, but this did not mean that he envisioned private property being abolished completely. He would allow for competition to exist in a number of business enterprises, but only as long as the principle activities of society were publicly owned: "We shall be able to afford the light cavalry of private enterprise and competition in a number of business enterprises if the principal economic activities of society are articulated by means of a sector of publicly owned industries" (Bevan cited in Foot 1975a, p. 492). He set out his views in *In Place of Fear* concerning a mixed economy:

It is clear to the serious student of modern politics that a mixed economy is what most people of the West would prefer. The victory of Socialism need not be universal to be decisive. I have no patience with those Socialists, so-called, who in practice would socialise nothing, whilst in theory they threaten the whole of private property. They are purists and therefore barren. It is neither prudent, nor does it accord with our conception of the future, that all forms of private property should live under perpetual threat. In almost all types of human society different forms of property have lived side by side without fatal consequences either for society or for one of them. But it is a requisite of social stability that one type of property ownership should dominate. In the society of the future it should be public property. Private property should yield to the point where social purposes and a decent order of priorities form an easily discernible pattern of life. Only when this is accomplished will a tranquil and serene attitude take the place of the all-pervading restlessness that is the normal climate of competitive society (1952a, p. 118).

This represents a significant deviation from orthodox Marxism. Instead of arguing for the abolition of private property, Bevan's vision for society was based on a combination of both public and private property. A summary of Bevan's discussions of State ownership and the changes in society can be found in an article he wrote for *Tribune* at the end of 1944 (1944g, p. 9).



## Public Ownership and Society

The consequences of nationalisation were central to Bevan's political outlook. He maintained that nationalisation could create new conditions for society, implanting values of cooperation and leading to higher quality of life for the masses. The entire purpose of nationalisation was to create a better society based on socialist principles. Economic planning could lead to "the fullest efflorescence of personal liberty...Without personal liberty an ordered economic life is like a plant that never flowers" (Bevan cited in Foot 1975a, p. 349). Once the economic power of the nation was in the hands of the people through parliament, policy could be shaped to their needs. Collective action could help to cultivate individual life:

There is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual. If the policies of statesmen, the enactments of legislatures, the impulses of group activity, do not have for their object the enlargement and cultivation of the individual life, they do not deserve to be called civilised (Bevan 1952a, p. 168).

The purpose of capturing economic power through the State was to change society so that the life of the individual could be made better, a theme that is explored further in Chapter Six.

Public ownership was central to Bevan's vision of what the 1945-1951 Labour governments needed to work towards. Where once private enterprise was the basis of society, Bevan saw the opportunity for the Labour government in 1945 to transform society to benefit the people. Reflecting in 1955 on the record of Labour government, Bevan wrote that "If public enterprise had not come to the rescue, employment in the basic industries, including agriculture, would now be drastically reduced with disastrous consequences" (1955k, p. 1). The transformation of society that Parliament could enact was to be carried out through these nationalisation measures.

Bevan warned that the relationship between the State and the people needed to be constantly renewed to build upon achievements that had already been made. In 1956, he wrote that the "character of the state has changed in a revolutionary manner". He wrote that it "impinges on the lives of ordinary men and women to a far greater extent than did the personal rule of kings". This could not be attributed to the inevitability of "the complexity of modern society and of the need to maintain a huge apparatus of government administration", but it was vital to consider how the State "affects the modern citizen – especially in the capitalist democracies". Bevan was concerned about the financing of the welfare State through taxation, for "if welfare is to be financed solely by taxes taken from the incomes of private citizens, then a conflict is inevitable". He understood that people would not want to

see their money taken away to provide financing for publicly owned institutions and services but argued that one of the problems was that businesses and people were not treated as equals when it came to collecting taxes. Businesses could get away with avoiding tax by setting up trusts. Bevan suspected that this was happening more and more. The only way, he argued, that communal activities could be extended was by limiting the amount of the national income distributed to private citizens. This is evidence of Bevan's reflecting on the changing nature of the State in society during the 1950s; however, Bevan could go no further than reasserting that this could only be achieved by "an extension of public ownership which gives the state direct control over the revenues of industry" (1956b, p. 5).

Bevan was proud of the achievements of the Labour governments between 1945 and 1951, even if his praise was caveated with criticisms. He reflected that the Labour government elected in 1945 had made advances on three fronts: higher wages and salaries, nationalisation and redistribution. Bevan stated that each advance had been "based upon a philosophical appreciation of the relationship of the working-class in the modern world towards modern society". Nationalisation was a "fundamental change, because it [represented] a transference of power". The redistributive element was "the one which has its roots more deeply in Socialist philosophy than any other". Bevan claimed that it represented "the slow destruction of the inequalities and disadvantages arising from the unequal possession of property and the unequal possession of individual strengths and opportunities" (1948, p. 7). Reflecting in 1958 on the development of public ownership, Bevan asserted that in Britain, "the public sector consists in the main of coal, electricity, roads, railways, airways and, to a partial extent only, steel; and, of course, the National Health Service and schools". He wrote that there was

no mystery about what to do with these. In them, the levers are to our hand. They can be expanded or contracted at the public will and in the service of national objectives. They constitute the rational element in an otherwise irrational society (1958j, p. 3).

While Bevan argued that in the "ethos of capitalism, mystery is equated with liberty", in the public sector "conscious intention can be an instrument of economic activity that the British people are free to bring about an oasis of progress amidst the surrounding chaos" (ibid.). Bevan certainly believed that the relationship between property and the State had altered substantially since the reforms of the Labour government.

Despite significant achievements, Bevan warned that more was needed to change the British economy on a permanent basis. For example, he was wary of the dangers posed by the

Conservatives once they achieved power in 1951. He pointed to the attempts by the Tories to privatise steel in 1953 in the name of creating a “property owning democracy”. Bevan even insisted that the type of public ownership arrived at for steel had allowed Tories to carry out this change of ownership (1953f, p. 1). A year earlier, Bevan had warned against “Fresh Thinkers” and “Socialist Revisionists” in the Labour Party who he accused of attempting to stultify Labour’s drive for public ownership by seeking “novel remedies” instead of “the struggle for power in the state”, and suggesting public ownership was outdated. Bevan urged socialists to be clear that “one of the central principles of Socialism is the substitution of public for private ownership”. He insisted that the success of 1945-51 was because the Labour government stuck to its mandate. He admitted that there were administrative difficulties involved with nationalisation and the attempt to carry out “a revolution by consent” but maintained that the remedy was “a greater ruthlessness...and a wider application of the principle of industrial democracy” (1952b, p. 2). Bevan, however, did not sufficiently elaborate on what this would entail.

In the light of election defeats throughout the 1950s, Bevan had to consistently urge for the continuance of the struggle for public ownership and defend against those who wanted to “blunt the edge of the socialist case” (1954n, p. 1) and those who argued that Labour needed to be more “pragmatic” or “practical” (1956e, p. 4). He insisted that one of the major premises of the labour movement was the transformation of societies based on private ownership to ones of public ownership. He argued that he did not want to be part of the movement if it did not have that as its aim (*Tribune* 1956, p. 7).

Several industries were nationalised by the 1945-1951 Labour governments without much opposition and did not cause controversy. The system of nationalisation that was set up was modelled on the London Transport Board: “Each [publicly owned industry] was to be run by a board; however, rather than have workers as members of these committees, the government appointed members”. The government nationalised the Bank of England, coal, Cable and Wireless Ltd, civil aviation, electricity, gas and rail and eventually steel (Thomas-Symonds 2015, pp. 164). It has been claimed that by 1957, Bevan had acquiesced by letting through policies in Labour manifestos that prevented the extension of nationalisation (Campbell 1987, p. 327) as a result of his becoming closer politically to Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell (1987, p. 330). Krug argues that Bevan had become cautious in his approach to nationalisation and claimed that in 1957 Bevan did not oppose proposals by leader Gaitskell to sell shares in nationalised industries (1961, p. 255). Thomas-Symonds argues that Bevan’s plans for nationalisation highlighted a lack of coherent thinking on behalf of the Bevanites as

their belief in public ownership was “an abstract principle without practical proposals for implementation” (2015, p. 234).

Bevan had outlined a plan for public ownership, however, as described above. His 1943 Fabian Society essay was a concerted attempt to develop a plan for nationalisation of industries. The evidence also suggests that while Bevan may have compromised by not opposing watered-down nationalisation plans, he was determined throughout his career to emphasise the need for Labour to argue forcefully for public ownership and economic planning. Right until the end of his life, Bevan maintained a firm belief in economic planning. After Labour’s election defeat in 1959, he reaffirmed this commitment:

To what extent are hon. Members opposite prepared to interfere with private enterprise in order to plan the location of industries? Are they prepared to stand up against private vested interests to secure the intelligent ground plan for the economy of the nation as a whole? If they are not, then we shall have an aggravation of the problems, with all the social and economic consequences involved.

Unless we plan our resources purposefully, unless we are prepared to accept the disciplines that are necessary, we shall not be able to meet the challenge of the Communist world. As the years go by, and the people see us languishing behind, trying to prevent the evils of inflation by industrial stagnation, trying all the time to catch up with things because we have not acted soon enough – when they see the Communist world, planned, organised, publicly-owned and flaunting its achievements to the rest of the world – they will come to be educated by what they will experience. They will realise that Western democracy is falling behind in the race because it is not prepared to read intelligently the lessons of the twentieth century (HC Deb, 3 November 1959, c870).

Despite claims that Bevan had become more pragmatic in his later career, a study of his political thought reveals that principles of economic planning remained central to his beliefs throughout his career.

## Conclusion

Bevan's analysis of democracy is a fundamental part of his political thought. He deviated from his understanding of classical Marxism in order to highlight the importance of representative institutions. Although his analysis was sometimes limited, a theme emerging from the literature on Bevan and the Labour Party, he did highlight the importance of Parliament and the State to the class struggle taking place in society. While emphasising the role of the economic base in determining the political superstructure of society, Bevan also underlined the importance of this political superstructure in shaping the economic base of society. He believed that political institutions, when used effectively, could represent the masses and be used to transform society. Public ownership was central to this vision, and Bevan argued that key economic industries needed to be taken over by the State and the economy planned for the interests of all. Although he described how the State could be influenced by the representatives of private property and criticised the effects of private enterprise on society, Bevan still envisioned a mixed economy that would allow private enterprise to exist and the profit motive to continue. The more critical analysis of the State that Bevan put forward in the 1940s was not developed in the 1950s. Instead, he reverted to simply insisting on the need for further public ownership and reform through Parliament, rather than developing his proposals for reform of institutions and of nationalised industries.

Bevan's understanding of Parliament and the State represents a significant deviation from the classical Marxism he identified as being important to his political education. As outlined in Chapter Two, many authors identify the relationship between the two strands of Bevan's thought, with authors such as Marquand (1997) and Spalding (2018) arguing that Bevan should be understood within the British radical tradition rather than the Marxist tradition. It is true that although he agreed with the analysis of class conflict contained in *The Communist Manifesto*, Bevan believed that Marxist thinkers had underestimated the potential for change that could be achieved by democracy through representative institutions. This represented a deviation from orthodox Marxist theory, but nevertheless, this chapter has highlighted that Bevan still saw the establishment of democracy as being part of the process of the historical development of society. The establishment of representative institutions such as Parliament was a stage in the process of society's development, and Bevan insisted that this was common not just to Britain but to other societies such as the Soviet Union (discussed in the next chapter). Parliament and the State could also play a significant part in further altering the economic conditions of society and reversing the power relationship between

private and public property. Bevan's emphasis on the economic base of society still remained central to his analysis. Although tensions existed between them, Bevan combined these two strands of his thought.

Chapters Three and Four have focused almost exclusively on Bevan's analysis of domestic British institutions and conditions. An essential part of Bevan's thought throughout most of his career, however, was concerned with the international field, from the Spanish Civil War to World War Two, and the fragile international relations of power politics that emerged in their aftermath. His analysis of other nations also assists in understanding his conceptions of historical development and democracy. The next chapter explores Bevan's analysis of economic and political power in relation to his analysis of international society.

## Chapter Five: Military Power

“The western powers must reconcile themselves to the fact that the framework of the past has been irretrievably broken, and the second half of the 20th century will see the building of the outlines of the future pattern of society” (Bevan 1955m, p. 4).

Bevan’s political career coincided with significant international conflict. He was active in the trade union movement during World War One, campaigned vigorously for support to be given to Spain during the Civil War, came to prominence as a parliamentarian during World War Two and became Shadow Foreign Secretary in 1956 at the height of international tensions. It is no wonder then that Bevan’s writings took on a significantly internationalist character. During World War Two he was arguably the most prominent critic of the National Government, a “squalid nuisance” as Churchill described him (HC Deb 6 December 1945), and his writings concentrated largely on how society would move from a state of conflict to a state of peace. During the 1950s, Bevan sought solutions to Cold War tensions. This focus meant that international relations were a major component of his political thought.

This chapter emphasises Bevan’s attempt to develop a vision of society that would relegate military power behind other concerns. Firstly, it explores Bevan’s writings during World War Two to establish his understanding of war, its causes and its features. Secondly, the chapter examines Bevan’s analysis of the power politics that defined international tensions post-war. Finally, it considers Bevan’s vision for a new pattern for international society based on strong international political institutions and aid to the developing world. This chapter emphasises the relationship between core components of his political thought and his analysis of international society.

### War

#### Capitalism and War

To understand Bevan’s views on war, it is important to reflect on his understanding of capitalist society, as discussed in previous chapters. In Chapter Three, it was established that Bevan’s conception of society centred on the conflict between the working-class and the ruling-class. Bevan believed that war was simply a consequence of the destructive dynamics of capitalism and would be waged to the advantage of the ruling-class. He also argued that war was the inevitable result of power politics between the large nations of the world. In the build-up to World War Two, he wrote that “the Government had abandoned the policy of Collective Security for which they declared themselves at the General Election, and were

now pursuing the old pre-war system of power politics and alliances, which must in the end, result in another blood bath” (1938b, p. 7). Power politics between capitalist nations had created the conditions for war.

Bevan was not a pacifist and supported World War Two, viewing it as a defence of democratic values against the rise of fascism. Nonetheless, he saw that war was an opportunity for capitalists to search for increased profit. For example, his assessment of the rearmament programme which began in the 1930s as a response to the deteriorating international situation was that it was being carried out in the hopes of increasing profit for capitalists and for the continuance of private enterprise. He wrote that “capitalism finds employment for its millions of idle workers – they are put to dig their own graves”. He predicted that:

The whole industry of the country will be geared to the production of munitions; the one voracious and insatiable consumer for the output of modern scientific industry is found where capitalism was bound to finally find it, in preparations for war on a vast scale (Bevan 1937a, p.8).

A *Tribune* editorial reminded readers that wars are caused “by social maladjustments and we must expect that those who benefit by these maladjustments will try to divert attention from the fact” (*Tribune* 1942a, p. 2). Bevan argued that it was the capitalist ruling-class that benefited from these social maladjustments.

Throughout the war, Bevan suspected that the government played a role in protecting the interests of private enterprise, accusing the Tories in government of wanting to increase the profits of big business from arms production. He wrote: “If the immediate outlook makes them feel apprehensive they take comfort in the knowledge of fat bank balances growing fatter each day by unprecedented profits from the manufacture of arms”. He also commented on the collaboration between the capitalist class and the State: “First they make enormous profits by supplying arms to the nation and then they make still more money by lending these profits to the Government” (1939a, p. 9). From the outbreak of war, “the big capitalists dug themselves into every State department...battening on the nation” (*Tribune* 1942c, p. 2). “In every department of State”, another editorial stated, “the nominees of monopoly capital are in control. The working classes, on the other hand, have accepted willingly unheard-of disciplines and coercions”. The editorial accused the ruling-class of wanting national unity “in order to persuade the people to abandon their demands upon private interest” (*Tribune* 1942h, p. 2). The collaboration between private enterprise and a Conservative-led



government was a central feature of Bevan's analysis that was particularly prominent during the war. His theory of class conflict remained central to his conception of the development of war.

Another example of the unhealthy relationship between capitalists and the State was the issue of food supplies. Bevan contended that, while military preparations were in the hands of the government, the nation's food supplies were in the hands of private enterprise. He argued that those controlling food only had the profit motive in mind. The government was willing to protect the interests of private enterprise in this regard, while private enterprise took no responsibility for the health of the nation: "Private enterprise gets us into a war and at the same time is unable to protect us from the threat of starvation consequent upon it" (1939d, p. 9). Bevan believed that this situation was hampering the war effort as workers did not want to struggle for the profit of others. He wrote that: "The evils of profit-making here stand plainly revealed as barriers to the effective prosecution of the war". He argued that people would "risk their lives for liberty" but not when liberty included fighting for dividends (1940d, p. 13). Bevan did not view private enterprise and the effective undertaking of the war as being conducive to each other.

Bevan considered rearmament to be the most explicit example of capitalists taking advantage of the war. He wrote that "Preparation for death is the main thing that is keeping economic life going". He contended that "War and the fear of war afford the only market which the National Government is able to find for the consumption of the product of men's hands, until the men themselves are swallowed by the thing which is fed by their work" (1938e, p. 8). Bevan warned the government that "the workers are not prepared to let the employers get away with the swollen profits of arms production without a struggle" (M.P. 1937c, p. 7). He considered it ridiculous to suppose that the government would use the armed forces "for the furtherance of any of the principles which we have at heart, such as the defence of democracy, or resistance to capitalist exploitation". He demanded that Labour desist from supporting the arms budget of the government as there "can be no greater madness than for Socialists to help arm their class enemies". He was not necessarily against the building up of arms, but insisted that if Labour was in power, they would be used "to protect and not to destroy working class interests" (M.P. 1937g, p. 6). He maintained that "It is no argument to say that because I may need a sword in the future that I should therefore put a sword in the hands of my enemy now" (Bevan 1937a, p. 9). Bevan's reflections on the motives of the ruling-class emphasise his analysis of society as an arena for class conflict, even in situations of war.

As well as being used to maintain the dominance of the capitalist system, Bevan also saw war as protecting Britain's imperial interests. Rather than caring about democracy elsewhere, Bevan accused the British government of only being concerned "with the defence of British Imperialism" and of not caring "a fig for freedom here or anywhere else" (1938k, p. 1). He was concerned that the war was being fought to preserve the old order:

In short, if we are to judge by the specific and definite statement made on our behalf by the British Foreign Office and by the Prime Minister himself we are fighting this war, going through all this agony and privation simply in order to put the old world back on its feet again (*Tribune* 1942n, p. 2).

Bevan's perception of the motives of the ruling-class during the war was based on his underlying belief in the realities of class conflict. In this instance, he also identified class conflict as a phenomenon taking place throughout the world as the ruling-class attempted to protect imperial interests.

### Fascism and the Ruling-class

Bevan did, however, recognise that World War Two was being fought for the goal of defeating Fascism. As well as criticising the government's appeasement of fascism and the lack of emphasis on collective security throughout the 1930s and earlier, Bevan understood the cause of war to rest with the rise of Fascism throughout Europe. By the time war arrived, Bevan argued that his and *Tribune's* prophecies on the impending conflict had come true. He declared, nonetheless, that Socialists needed to fight against the rise of fascism with vigour:

Whatever else may be entailed in the present war there is the possibility and avowed purpose of arresting the progress of fascist aggression. So long as that purpose is behind our efforts, every good Socialist will do his utmost to assist the anti-Fascist forces (Bevan and Cripps 1939, p. 1).

Bevan's analysis of capitalism made him see Fascism as the attempt of the ruling-class to bring order to the anarchy of the economy. He declared that fascism is the "super-imposition of the collective state upon competitive anarchy inside" (HC Deb 10 July 1933). Bevan linked his analysis of fascism with his understanding of poverty, property and democracy, declaring that "Fascism is, in its very essence, the destruction of democratic government" (HC Deb 4 December 1933). Fascism promised "order, security and exemption from the pain of personal decision" and Bevan suspected that economic disorder between the wars fuelled this insecurity across Europe:

In short the social machinery which men had been building up since the beginning of the industrial revolution got out of hand and it came to be realised that the most urgent problem of the day was to bring society once more under control (1940a, p. 12).

He believed people were willing to give up freedom to ensure security in a chaotic world (1940a, pp. 12-13). The importance of control and predictability is a recurring theme in Bevan's analysis of society (see Chapter Six). Although Bevan certainly supported a war effort to destroy fascism, he also suspected that such elements were emerging in Britain.

Whether it be the continuance of imperial interests, or the maintenance of capitalism at home, Bevan maintained that power during the war resided with reactionary elements. Whereas Bevan wanted World War Two to lead to the creation of a new society based on the needs of the people, he suspected the ruling-class to be attempting to maintain its power, denying the fervour for change which he felt existed throughout the country. He argued that "the Tories would risk a victory for Hitler rather than that property should suffer any diminution in its power and status" (1941i, p. 12): "Thus in Fascist and non-Fascist states alike big business remains in control" (*Tribune* 1942h, p. 2). He accused the Tories of not wanting to create a new world, including seeing nothing wrong with the empire and the social situation that existed before the war. Fascism was "the future refusing to be born" according to Bevan, and he suspected that reactionary elements within Britain were following that principle (1940a, p. 13). Bevan outlined how, in 1944, he supposed that a fascist situation was present as the ruling-class attempted to maintain its grip on society:

All the elements of Fascism are present in such a situation. First, a production crisis arising out of a clash between workers and employers in the most socially mature industries. Second, a powerfully entrenched employing class, able to resist the first attacks on their position and, therefore, to prolong the crisis until other sections of the nation become impatient. Third, a leadership of the workers too weak or too involved to mobilise their forces for a final assault, and, therefore, led to reproach their own followers in an attempt to resolve the crisis by sounding the retreat. Fourth, a sullen and confused mass of workers ripe for exploitation by Fascist demagoguery (1944c, p. 7).

Bevan was discussing the situation in the mining industry, and while he believed that the miners could fight against this because they were "the most advanced section of the workers", he worried that the same conditions "in a number of other industries with less politically educated workers...[were] the ideal ingredients for British Fascism" (ibid.). Bevan

argued that property would attempt to destroy democracy when poverty attempted to take control of the functions of property. Bevan's analysis above demonstrates that he saw this as the onset of Fascism in society.

Bevan warned that the Tories could not be allowed to be in charge of planning for future relations in Europe as they would seek to keep reactionary elements in power. He predicted that if a social revolution came, Wall Street and the City would attempt to starve it and suppress the revolution:

If a revolutionary movement seizes power Wall Street and the City will be tempted either to starve it into submission or suppress it by force of arms under the pretext of preserving order and civil conditions. What starts as a campaign of liberation will tend to develop into a counter-revolutionary occupying force. Nor are we entitled to be surprised if and when this happens. If the people of Europe declare the railways, the land, the banks, the mines and the factories public property the owners of similar properties here and in America will take alarm and will try to suppress a revolution which might have unpleasant repercussions for them (1943d, p. 7).

The previous war had produced the Russian Revolution, which, Bevan argued, had been starved at birth by capitalists, and he insisted that this war could "give us the European Revolution if the arms that strikes down the Nazis is not allowed to crush the insurgent spirit of Europe" (ibid.). He stressed the need to fight fascism and warned that the ruling-class could lead Britain to a fascist state if an attempt was made to change property relations in society. Thus, Bevan saw the attempt to preserve capitalist principles as the onset of fascism, not just throughout Europe but in Britain also.

### The Post-war World

Although Bevan was critical of the way in which the government had been conducting the war effort, he argued that behind Churchill was "a united nation in a sense that has never before been achieved" (1940b, p. 12). *Tribune* warned, however, that the Tories stood "for the maintenance of the existing order, therefore they pretend that national unity and defence of Toryism are made one and the same thing" (*Tribune* 1942l, p. 2). Bevan demanded that the war needed to be conducted in the interests of the people. A *Tribune* editorial stated: "We shall not have won the war, if, in the waging of it, the individual man and woman falls out of the picture and their place is taken by an empty generalisation" (*Tribune* 1942j, p. 2). The people needed to be at the heart of shaping military strategy.

Bevan claimed that the war had shifted the mood of the country significantly to the left. He suspected, however, that the National Government was not following that change of mood: "...the stubborn and decaying class which governs us confines the spirit of this country in the old mould". (*Tribune* 1942b, p. 2). To capture this mood, Bevan wanted the war to be directed by people with a socialist mind-set who would have the concerns of the people as their main priority (*Tribune* 1942g, pp. 1-2). He even suggested that the Labour Party needed to join forces with other groups on the left, such as the Communist Party and the Liberal Party. He argued that the main task of the party was "to construct a People's Government, through the instrumentality of what I have called a Coalition of the Left". He believed that it should have been possible "to make concessions so as to harness many diverse currents in progressive politics" (1944c, p. 7). To combat the capitalism which had been the dominant approach to the war, Bevan wanted to see socialist principles applied, for example seeing coalmines taken over and run in the interests of the workers and the nation (*Tribune* 1942d, pp. 1-2). Bevan was thus identifying the importance of public ownership to society.

A central component of Bevan's political thought was his desire to develop a plan for the post-war world. *Tribune* declared that: "A modern army needs modern weapons, but it also needs the confidence that it is led by men with modern ideas" (*Tribune* 1942e, p. 2). It stated that there was a "growing demand that immediate plans should be made for dealing with the post-war world" due to the fear of returning to the pre-war situation (*Tribune* 1943a, p. 1). Bevan claimed that a conception of the war based on the principles of democracy "inspired the common people of Britain", while at the same time it "it frightened the devotees of the old social order who still had their hands on the levers of power". He identified a connection between the structure of society and the way war strategies were carried out. He claimed that the war was being waged in the interests of the ruling-class, therefore proving "that political considerations lie at the base of all military plans and...that the pattern of war follows inevitably the structure of the society which wages it". Bevan wrote that the ruling-class were confronted with "a revolutionary Europe" for which they had no vision (1943g, p. 7). Socialists could provide that vision of a new society to replace the dominant capitalist principles that had prevailed for many years.

Bevan argued further for the need to keep in mind principles of democracy during wartime. He wrote that war had been a constant theme throughout human history and had shaped the way societies had developed:

Men have never been able to go about the ways of peace without keeping an eye on their enemies. War, either active or imminent, always troubled their minds and if they laid the sword aside for a moment it was never far away. It has therefore never been possible for men to turn away from the thoughts of war and dedicate themselves wholly to peaceful pursuits, for both war and peace are woven together inextricably in the patterns of human history (1940c, p. 12).

If war has always been a consideration throughout human history and “if in times of peace the shadow of war marches by our side”, then “so also in time of war we must never abandon the dreams, ideals and ambitions of peace. To do so would be to give war a mastery it has never had” (ibid.). Bevan declared that victory would not be achieved in a narrow military sense but would come “by calling to our aid millions of ordinary people all over Europe, to rise against their tyrants” (1941b, p. 1). Bevan’s belief in democracy was fortified by his analysis of the military situation.

Bevan accused the government of preventing the voice of the people from being heard during the war. He wrote that the “fear of Hitler is to be used to frighten the workers of Britain into silence. In short, Hitler is to rule Britain by proxy” (1937d, p. 6). He was critical of the powers that the government possessed, believing that the Home Secretary had been given the ability to arrest people at will with no defence and declare legitimate strikes as sabotage. He argued that “the first major casualty of war was the liberty of the British people”. He accused the government of trying to limit political discussion and attempting to establish in Britain “those very principles which we are supposed to be fighting to destroy”. Bevan lamented that on the Home Front, “a real blow for the defence of liberty had been struck” (1939e, pp. 4-5). Bevan’s faith in Parliament led him to fight for democratic values at home, while they were being fought for abroad on the battlefield. His defence of democracy came to the forefront during this period.

Bevan argued that war had an educational effect on the British people and allowed them to see clearly the life they were leading. He wrote that: “They [the British people] have been brought to see that the vicissitudes they suffer are not implicit in an immutable pattern of life, but are the direct consequences of a particular kind of social organisation, and, therefore, capable of being dealt with by social action”. He trusted that the war had created a new state of mind in people where all the economic and social ills of society were preventable:

This is a state of mind that I call deeply optimistic...It sees that poverty, ill-health, economic insecurity, unemployment, and war are socially preventable evils. It believes in the secular origin of man's fate, and that, when you come to think of it, is the biggest revolution that has occurred for thousands of years (1940f, p. 10).

He envisioned the task for socialists to be developing economic planning while preserving personal liberties after the war, reiterating that public ownership was vital to creating a new society. Bevan's writings on war, and the potential new society that would come after it, were again informed by his desire to reverse property relations: "...the area of private property must be drastically restricted, because power over property is the instrument of economic planning". Bevan was careful to emphasise that democratic liberties needed to be maintained: "The supreme test for democratic institutions is whether they can bring about a planned economy whilst at the same time preserving the decent personal liberties which were the best products of the Liberal Revolution". He saw socialism as being the only option for society, asking: "Can the state be given power over our work without the same power swallowing the whole of our life? That is the question millions are asking. I believe it can be done" (1940f, p. 11). Bevan argued that Labour ministers in the National Government needed to realise "that the principles of national ownership and public control that they claim to believe are not only the programme of a Party. They are the indispensable conditions for the successful prosecution of the war" (1941a, p. 9). The war strengthened Bevan's faith in Parliament and his belief in public ownership.

As a step to creating a better post-war society, Bevan endorsed the proposals of the incredibly popular Beveridge Report, published in 1942. He was extremely vocal in his criticism of what he saw as the Tory Party's attempt to delay the report's implementation, as they, he argued, did not want to see a social revolution happen in Europe which would alter the fabric of society (*Tribune* 1942o; Bevan 1944a). If Britain showed that it had the "courage, imagination and resilience to embark on a social experiment of such a magnitude in the midst of war, then she may once more assert a moral leadership which will have consequences in every sphere of her activities" (*Tribune* 1943b, p. 2). Bevan argued that the post-war world could only be tackled by forming a new government to fix the "future pattern of our lives" (1944b, p. 7).

An important aspect of Bevan's post-war vision concerned the international arena. He envisioned a post-war world where nations would work in cooperation with each other. Reflecting on World War One, he interpreted it as a war fought for national self-

determination, or “in plainer words, national freedom. We now see how wrong that aim was”. He stressed that World War Two needed to be fought “for the right of individual self-determination, of individual freedom”. This desire was the same all over the world and required cooperation between nations as the “nations of the world are so closely interwoven that the welfare of one is determined by the behaviour of another. There cannot be any absolute national freedom” (1940j, p. 13). Individual freedom is a central element of Bevan’s political thought and is analysed in greater detail in Chapter Six. Bevan appreciated the importance of national sovereignties in the post-war world but envisioned an international society that stressed the importance of collective action.

Ultimately, Bevan argued that war needed to lead to victory for the “Socialist and Internationalist Cause” (1943b, p. 6). World War Two provided a new fervour to the peoples of Europe and highlighted the different conceptions of society being envisioned by both socialists and capitalists. Bevan accused capitalism of trying to profit from war, but he believed it offered a new chance for socialist principles to emerge. His rejection of military power is consistent with his ambitions for society as analysed in Chapters Three and Four. Bevan attempted to articulate a vision of post-war international society that was based on democratic socialist principles. His vision for society also contained his emphasis on radically altering property relations as a means to bring about social revolutions, in Britain and throughout the world.

## **International Order**

### Power Politics

Bevan saw the end of World War Two as potentially ushering in a new period of international cooperation. In reality, post-war international society merely became an extension of the fragile position that had developed before the war. The world was now divided into two hostile camps, each reflecting different ideologies: the capitalist United States versus the communist Soviet Union. The build-up of armaments undertaken by the world superpowers after World War Two, and also by Britain itself, led Bevan to suspect that the same hostile environment would just be perpetuated post-war. As a response to this, Bevan spent much of the 1950s arguing that military power and confrontational power politics needed to be rejected. He urged the great powers to forget about the old world and move on to create a new society. He argued that the “western powers must reconcile themselves to the fact that the framework of the past has been irretrievably broken, and the second half of the 20th



century will see the building of the outlines of the future pattern of society” (1955m, p. 4). The “reality of the modern world”, Bevan declared, was “that power [had] stalemated itself. The price of glory is too high. The great powers confront each other with mutual respect born of mutual fear. They are poised for war and afraid to strike” (1956k, p. 5).

Power politics was taking place primarily between two ideological blocs, communism and capitalism. Bevan’s understanding of these ideologies is analysed in greater detail in the next chapter, but it is important to highlight how Bevan felt the world was increasingly being framed as a battle between these two ideologies and their representatives, the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. He argued that as long as the United States remained “convinced that the chief danger to peace is the military aggressiveness of the Soviet Bloc”, encouraging those in the United States who wanted war with the Soviet Union, then “the danger of war will be immediately upon us”. Due to wealth being “tied up in the war machine”, economic and financial pressures would worsen the situation, thrusting the world “either into military action or the continuation of arms production on a self-defeating scale” (1952a, p. 145). Bevan argued that the Cold War was being driven by anti-communist sentiment as much as by a rational analysis of Soviet intentions.

A central theme of his analysis of the Soviet Union was that it was wrong to attribute aggressive intentions to it. He argued that there was “no evidence to show that the Soviet Union wants a trial of strength” (1952a, p. 127). He was critical of previous Soviet expansion – commenting on Russian influence in Czechoslovakia, Bevan wrote that “in coming so far to the West she overran her sociological frontiers. She could occupy but she has not been able to digest” (1953b, p. 4) – but felt a hostile reaction to the Soviet Union was unwarranted and unhelpful in striving for world peace. Bevan argued that far from solving international issues, the United States’ military aggressiveness was “feeding the peril of Communism as much as they [were] combating it” (1952a, p. 123). He saw that this distrust led to the development of an international society focused on an escalating arms race: “Behind the weapons are the causes of international tension, and these must be tackled successfully before the nations will be disposed to approach even partial disarmament in a favourable climate of world affairs”. Failure to reach an agreement on the development of arms would lead to serious consequences for the world (1955c, p. 3). Mutual suspicion and fear were driving nations to build-up armaments and to the brink of war.

## Arms

Just as it was in the lead up to World War Two, Bevan contended that the increase in arms was being driven by economic considerations. He suggested that economies had relied on war to keep private enterprise going, meaning states and businesses were reluctant to see that end. He admitted that maybe shareholders were not *actively* seeking war, yet he suspected that they would certainly be concerned about their profits if armaments were reduced. He wrote that

Arms production has operated like a great public works programme – as indeed it is – to underpin the economies of the West, providing markets and postponing the depression which has come to be regarded almost as a natural phenomenon in private enterprise economy (1953c, p. 4).

Bevan contrasted this with the Soviet Union, which he believed was not concerned with principles of business when considering war production: “Whatever else makes Russia compelled to make arms, it is not in order to make profits. There is no economic vested interest in the war machine” (ibid.). A few years later, Bevan wrote that “Obsessed by the immediate fear of trade recession and unemployment, the larger danger that an intensification of the arms race might lead to the destruction of our whole world appears to be a mere background consideration” (1958a, p. 5). Again, Bevan attributed economic considerations to the build-up of arms, reflecting his analysis of the relationship between economics and the resulting social implications.

Whatever the reasons for the increase in arms production, Bevan urged for an international programme of disarmament. Weapons had become “a nonsensical and intolerable burden; therefore, what is now required is an agreed way of dismantling the war machine” (1956i, p. 5). Bevan saw disarmament as providing an opportunity for the world to change. Disarmament should have been seen “as a message of hope and deliverance and not as a harbinger of economic chaos accompanied by mass unemployment” (1955h, p. 2). Coupled with this desire to see an end to nuclear weapons was Bevan’s analysis of German unification as an arena which perpetuated international tensions. Bevan insisted that the reunification of Germany was vital, but he did not want the issue to be separated from the issue of disarmament. He maintained that reunification could not take place at the same time as Western Germany was being rearmed (1955b, p. 1). Bevan saw the desire of the West to number Germany amongst its military assets as the chief obstacle to a united Germany. He concluded that “Unity on the basis of neutrality: that seems the only way out” (1954b, p. 2).

Bevan hoped that the issue of German unification would not be separated from the issue of disarmament. A full, not a partial, solution to world problems was needed. Bevan was critical of the rearming of Western Germany as it raised an obstacle to rapprochement with the Soviet Union and in creating peace (1959c, p. 5). The post-war political settlement had intensified tensions between the two ideological blocs.

The central concern defining Bevan's attitude to armaments during the 1950s was the development of the hydrogen bomb. Bevan's writings demonstrate a desire to stop international relations being reduced to military strength and the possession of weapons. He urged world powers to stop testing of nuclear weapons and to step away from the brink of war. Bevan argued that "the existence of nuclear weapons can no longer be regarded as a deterrent to war, but as making war a certainty". He wrote that "so long as weapons of this character are in the possession of governments" then "decisions about life or death, about the future of the human race, have passed out of the control of the civil political institutions". "The conclusion", he wrote,

is inescapable. If the people are to recover control over those issues that are central, not only to the future of civilisation but to its proper functioning, then we must apply our minds to the destruction of nuclear weapons before they have the chance to destroy us (1957g, p. 1).

He insisted that it was "not enough to halt on the edge of the precipice and remain poised there. We must draw back further and further until we reach a place where the nations can settle down in peaceful intercourse" (1957h, p. 7). Bevan's writings reflect a desire to see nuclear weapons destroyed in order to remove military calculations from international relations.

The hydrogen bomb was the subject of arguably the most infamous moment in Bevan's career. Responding to a proposal for unilateral disarmament at Labour Conference in 1957, Bevan rejected it, calling it an "emotional spasm", believing that possessing the bomb would be useful as a bargaining tool for negotiations with other nations and would give Britain status and a measure of foreign policy independence from America (Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 173). Bevan had previously stated that he saw the benefit of Britain possessing nuclear weapons because the United States and Soviet Union had them (1956g, p. 1). He stressed that his opinion was not based on support for nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, his attitude did seem to reflect a reversion back to traditional power politics based on the

possession of weapons that he had previously criticised. This conflicts with his writing during this period.

There were instances when Bevan had hopes that things were changing, suspecting at one time that Soviet leaders were beginning to move away from the principles of an arms race. He wrote that:

The economic exploitation of a modern advanced industrial community by military garrisons imposing an alien ideology is wholly impracticable. The Russians are beginning to learn this at the very time when the West is beginning to forget it...Unless many of the leaders of Western opinion can disentangle themselves from this ideological cats' cradle, they will never be able to think clearly about the inner nature of the problem facing the world today (1958c, p. 5).

As the end of the 1950s approached, however, Bevan did not see signs that the situation was improving (1959g, p. 12), despite insisting that the “concept of massed armies, armed with conventional weapons, traversing great distances surrounded by hostile populations, belongs to the past” (1958k, p. 12). Mutual distrust was prevailing in international relations. Bevan's desire for an international society of cooperation appeared to be a long distance from becoming reality.

### The 'Third Force'

Bevan's writings reflect a desire to see Britain detach itself from the politics of power blocs. He argued that British policy “should align itself with all those forces in the world that make for a peaceful solution to problems” (1953e, p. 1). He pointed to a country such as India as achieving success as a result of separating itself from the two world blocs, arguing that being neutral did not mean it was not effective. He attributed a strong role to India in ending conflict in Korea: “India has proved that military weakness is not the same thing as international impotence” (1954a, p. 4). He also praised communist countries such as Yugoslavia and China for forging their own paths in foreign policy (1956h, p. 5). Bevan wanted Britain to align itself with countries that were standing aside from the machinations of power politics.

It has been claimed by a number of authors that Bevan advocated a 'third force' in international relations (see Chapter Two). Schneer (1984) attributes the development of the Third Force movement to the Keep Left group that emerged during the period 1945-1951, led by *Tribune* MPs such as Jennie Lee and Michael Foot, and became the nucleus of the

Bevanite movement (1984, p. 206). Further evidence for the claim that Bevan advocated a ‘third force’ in international relations appears in a speech Bevan made to the Indian Parliament on a visit in 1953. He was reported as stating:

I believe that not only for you but for mankind it is necessary that there should be a re-alignment of the forces of the world, that there should emerge a third bloc of nations holding the world balance of power and compelling the two giants (the United States and Russia) to listen to what they have to say (Bevan cited in *The Western Mail* 17 February 1953).

This comment was criticised by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who declared that the

idea of a third bloc, or third force, frightens or embarrasses people. Let us rather work to get as large an area as possible of countries which do not want to encourage any tendencies to war, who wish to work for peace, and do not want to align themselves with any bloc (Nehru, cited in *The Times* 17 February 1953)

This comment foreshadowed the non-alignment movement established in 1961 (Lüthi 2016).

*The Times* later reported that Bevan insisted he “had never suggested the establishment of a ‘third force’ between Russian and American blocs”. He was reported as declaring to the Indian Council of World Affairs: “They have been attributing to me a phrase called ‘third force’, but I have always been careful to say that I am not speaking of a third bloc”. What Bevan was actually arguing for, according to *The Times* report, was the prevention of “other nations from lining up with either bloc or getting sucked into the cauldron” (*The Times* 2 March 1953). Foot, reporting on this incident, believes that Bevan’s views were not so different to Nehru’s: Bevan did not argue for a third bloc, but in fact restated the idea of a group of non-aligned countries who refused to sign up to either bloc (1975b, p. 392). As noted in Chapter Two, Thomas-Symonds argues that Bevan distinguished “between a ‘third force’ (which he advocated) and a ‘third bloc’, which he saw as dangerous” (2015, p. 213). He also emphasises that Bevan’s ‘third force’ idea was linked to his “contacts with non-aligned countries, such as Yugoslavia and India, as key to his strategy” (2015, p. 253). Rather than analysing these views in terms of ‘blocs’ or ‘forces’, it could be argued that Bevan’s attitude represents a precursor to the non-aligned movement.

Bevan did not see an issue with Western nations discussing security needs through an organisation such as NATO. Nonetheless, he argued that any international body that requires

the giving up of sovereignty must be based on the lessening of tensions and the seeking of morally beneficial consequences, not military ones. He wrote that “We must be told what steps are contemplated to seek a lessening of the tensions which have led to the creation of this unprecedented military apparatus”. Bevan insisted on the need for nations to develop foreign policy with a level of independence:

We should refuse to surrender the ability to act independently, except in a cause which promises wider and moral beneficial consequences than are likely to be obtained by adherence to our traditional powers...It is not that we should seek to act alone, for that is neither permissible nor practicable in the world as it is today...But if we are asked to merge our sovereign rights with those of other nations, we should be clear, not only about the conditions on which it is done, but on the objectives at which we are aiming (1957p, p. 5).

Just as Bevan argued for smaller nations to create a movement separate from the two main power blocs, he encouraged them to “concert among themselves to defy a leadership so myopic, so smugly self-satisfied, so dangerous, and so unequal to the imperious needs of the time” (1958h, p. 7). Although Bevan was discussing the need for integration, he still envisioned nations acting independently, not being obliged to act within the confines of traditional power politics and refusing to accept the dominance of larger nations.

It is certainly true that Bevan sought to move away from the power politics existing in international affairs. His relationships with the likes of Nehru in India and Tito in Yugoslavia give credence to the view that Bevan sought allies throughout the world beyond the traditional powers, supporting the thesis that Bevan was an early adopter of the idea of a non-aligned movement. It must be kept in mind, however, that describing the strategy as developing a ‘third force’ has its problems, particularly relating to how a ‘force’ or a ‘bloc’ is defined. It is doubtful that Bevan was arguing for a third ‘force’ or ‘bloc’ as a military balance against Soviet and American hostilities, although his ‘emotional spasm’ comments may suggest he was committing the Labour Party to traditional power politics. Bevan’s vision was for nations not to be sucked into power politics. Instead, he envisioned nations working together through strong international institutions.

Rather than continuing on the path of the traditional power politics that was now endangering the world, Bevan called for an international order based on peace and cooperation. To achieve this, he called for a series of measures that would bring the nations of the world closer together. During World War Two he began to argue for the

internationalisation of many aspects of the world economy, believing that in the future national sovereignties “must be limited, and part of their powers vested in an over-riding international authority” (1941e, p. 13). He wanted to apply socialist principles across nations, hoping that a way would be found “to reconcile the claims of cultural independence with the needs of cross-frontier economic planning” (1940e, p. 12). There needed to be a world conference immediately after the war to “reach agreement on the framework of future international society”. Therefore,

out of the agony of war the new world takes shape after the fashion of the old and the dear hope that millions began to hold of a future of assured peace and plenty fades once more before the reassertions of greed and power (*Tribune* 1943c, p. 1).

He argued that the world was “weary of war and the ways of the war-makers. It is time the architects of peace took charge” (1944d, p. 7). Bevan contended that post-World War Two, national sovereignties needed to be consigned to the past in favour of international co-operation.

The creation of this new world order needed to be based on stable international organisation, not on alliances and treaties. Alliances would simply “breed fear and fear will pile up rival war machines once more until the whole world will groan under an intolerable burden of war preparations” (*Tribune* 1945, p. 2). It could not be based on the motives of profit and private enterprise either as he did not want for “our dead [to have] died in order to make the world safe for foreign investment” (1955i, p. 8). This is why Bevan would later reject the idea of the European Common Market, which he interpreted as “an escapist conception in which the play of market forces will take the place of political responsibility” (1957m, p. 5). A new international organisation needed to move away from the dominance of global market forces and capitalism and be based on principles of democracy.

## **World development**

### The United Nations

The organisation in which Bevan put his faith to achieve this new world order was the United Nations (UN). Bevan argued in *In Place of Fear* for an “increasing emphasis on the role of the United Nations” as regional pacts “tend to wear the appearance of instruments of dominant Powers” (1952a, p. 133). Whatever was to be decided for the future of the world, it needed to “command the resources of idealism...to surmount the fears and limited ambitions

in which international relations are now snarled”. He continued, the “instrument for the task cannot be one nation, nor a limited combination of nations. It must be the Assembly of the United Nations itself. Otherwise we shall start off in a climate of mutual suspicion” (1952a, p. 144). The UN presented an opportunity to create a world of co-operation rather than mutual distrust.

Bevan cautioned that the UN must not be used as a military organisation to further the interests of larger nations, but as a vehicle to foster peace in international affairs. He warned that it could not be seen as a military force. Bevan’s reflections on the Suez crisis contained his vision of the role that the UN would play in international affairs. In 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. Britain and France followed Israel in invading Egypt but after the United States, Soviet Union and the UN exerted pressure, they were forced to withdraw. The incident was a humiliation for Britain and Bevan was vocal in his opposition to the invasion. Bevan proclaimed that the arrival of UN troops was “the physical manifestation of a moral idea”, not a symbol of a future war machine. The UN was there in Egypt to facilitate peace, not to further the interests of the world’s largest powers. The people of Egypt needed to see this: “Peace...can succeed only if the area of fear is made steadily to contract and give place to confidence and hope” (1956r, p. 1).

Bevan argued that “The Arab nations will not continue to respect the authority of the U.N.O. Police if they merely symbolise an effort to make them peacefully endure feelings of outraged national pride, unnecessary poverty and imperial exploitation” (ibid.). He reiterated this view the following month:

The strength of the United Nations in the Middle East, in the strictly moral sense, may well depend on the extent to which the Arab nations can regard it as untainted by any suspicion of being an indirect instrument of Western imperialism (1956s, p. 12).

The UN needed to possess the same functions as Parliament, providing a voice to all nations of the world. Just as he did for British society, Bevan argued that democracy was the solution to exploitation by a ruling-class.

Despite high hopes, Bevan admitted that there were issues with the UN. He argued that, due to the veto that states had in the Security Council, power politics were still being played out. In the event of the veto being a stumbling block, nations would still bypass the UN. An example of this was when Britain and France decided to invade Egypt after Nasser took control of the Suez Canal. Bevan saw this action as undermining the purpose of the UN, with Britain and France having been guilty of “destroying the one single institution that offers



the hope of guiding mankind into more civilised ways”. Again, Bevan urged for the principles of democracy to be extended to the international stage:

The essence of democracy is government by discussion. The extension of the same principle to international affairs is not only logical but a pre-condition for the preservation and strengthening democratic processes as it is also for the maintenance of peace between the nations (1956l, p. 2).

The UN would only be a successful institution if it was guided by the principles of democracy.

By 1957, Bevan was expressing the view that the aspiration of collective action through the UN had not been realised. He thought that the UN had become a court simply arbitrating between the views and claims of competing nations. This contrasted with his ambitions for the UN to be “an arena of contending nations where the more civilised statesmen are attempting to build up a code of international conduct which, we must all hope, will eventually win universal approval and acceptance”. The role of the UN was not to freeze the relations of nations where they were, “but to change and mould them in a way in which force, or the threat of force, becomes progressively infrequent” (1957c, p. 5). The UN had been unable to prevent the power politics which had been the hallmark of international relations.

Although in effect the UN had struggled to prevent the waging of power politics, Bevan envisioned it as an organisation that could forge a new path in international relations, promoting peace and cooperation between different nations. If the role of the UN was to bring all the nations of the world together, how could this be achieved? Bevan’s vision was for the UN to play a major part in the economic and social development of the world.

### World Development

Instead of attempting to assert dominance over smaller nations, Bevan wanted international society to foster the development of the poorer nations. He argued that historically “white imperialism” had been inflicted upon people for centuries alongside economic exploitation (1954d, p. 2). Instead, economic resources needed to be organised through the UN to benefit poorer nations. For example, Bevan predicted that there might have been “immense deposits of precious metals and minerals yet to be surveyed and discovered”. He argued that the “attempt to discover them [needed to be] undertaken at once”, but he argued for it not to be conducted by private adventure but

by some agency of the United Nations acting for the whole world, so that they could be extracted under reasonable conditions for the nations and peoples immediately concerned, and shared among the consuming countries in accordance with some carefully worked-out plan of priorities (1952a, p. 164).

Bevan looked upon the history of small nations as a struggle against imperialism and exploitation driven by private greed.

He pointed to instances where the interests of capital had negatively affected smaller countries. For example, he wrote that due to the West's, including Britain's, reliance on the Middle East for oil, "private greed and ambition exacerbate a situation already dangerously complicated". He continued: "When to these ingredients you add ostentatious opulence, cheek by jowl with appalling poverty and ignorance, gimcrack political constitutions, religious bigotry and flaming nationalism, it is scarcely conceivable that the whole area will not blow itself up". He summarised the situation thusly:

Where international co-operation is manifestly a paramount necessity, we have instead intense rivalry and, most insane of all, competition in the supply of arms to nations that do not murder themselves and others only because so far they have lacked the means to do so (1957l, p. 5).

Bevan warned that unless problems were brought "under effective control, it is quite certain that some day one of them will set the world alight" (ibid.). Bevan predicted that American imperialism fuelled by capitalism would lead to the eruption of conflict in the area (1958g; 1959e). To prevent this, he maintained that "the medium of the United Nations offers the greatest hope. It enshrines a conception of the world which gives hope for people everywhere" (1957a, p. 2).

Instead of creating conflict, Bevan wanted larger nations, led by the UN, to foster social revolutions that were taking place "in nations which have lain dormant for thousands of years". "Our task" he stated, was to "accommodate them within a general pattern of world co-operation". He argued that "World leadership must take account of world movements or it condemns itself to futility" (1952a, p. 142). According to Bevan, these revolutions were developing largely in agrarian countries. He insisted that it was the duty of developed countries to help the rest of the world, insisting that the "advanced industrial communities of the West" could make little progress themselves "without sharing the achievements of their industries and sciences with the rest of the world" (1952a, p. 136). Bevan argued that whereas social revolutions had historically been starved from the beginning by the lack of investment

from private enterprise, the UN needed to step in and offer aid for developing countries: “It will not be easy to achieve, but it is preferable to sitting with folded hands while democratic Socialist experiments are throttled at birth” (1956p, p. 12).

Bevan argued that the UN should be the organisation to direct aid to developing countries so that its distribution was not dependent on the foreign policy concerns of each of the major nations (1956a, p. 4). He “always insisted that inter-governmental funds for the development of the backward countries should be canalised through an international agency, preferably one set up by the United Nations” (1957f, p. 3). Private capital could not be relied upon to do this as it would not “flow in sufficient volume to backward countries without guarantees against revolutionary action, and these cannot be provided without, at the very least, appearing to infringe the newly won sovereign rights” (1956n, p. 4). Bevan warned that unless something was done to help poorer nations, “millions of people will be watching each other starve to death through expensive television sets” (1952a, p. 164). Bevan wanted redistributive principles applied internationally.

Bevan’s solution was for spending on arms to be redirected towards development purposes. In 1952, he urged for a reduction in arms spending and for “realistic international discussions [to] take place for the substitution of an ambitious plan of world development to replace a substantial proportion of the expenditure on arms” (1952a, p. 146). He reiterated this point the following year in arguing for a “Pool of Mutual Aid” (1953d, p. 4). In 1955 he set out his proposal for diverting funds from armaments to international aid:

There are two main aspects of it, intermingled; the nations providing aid and the nations receiving it. Both have to be prepared, and it could prove the greatest economic operation ever carried out by man. It would be ten thousand pities if, for lack of effective preparation, it turned out to be a source of misery to both giver and receiver (1955h, p. 2).

Bevan rejected military power in favour of delivering economic power to poorer nations.

To ensure democracy was adopted in these countries, they needed to be helped economically. Bevan argued that the greater part of the world had “lagged behind the other in the application of the industrial sciences...The psychology of the situation is made worse by the fact that the part which has lagged behind was for centuries the prey of the nations which have advanced”. The solution again being offered by Bevan was that economically developed countries needed to pool resources together through the UN and then the “surpluses of the advanced nations should be made available to those which are backward, but it should be

done in a way that avoids any taint of national subordination on the one hand or ‘big nation’ condescension on the other”. Summarising his view on the need for peaceful institutions, Bevan wrote: “It is no use only praying for peace. The institutions of peace must be strengthened and clothed with power and dignity, so that all men can see in them both the source of their material well-being and the hope of its continuance” (1956n, p. 4). Significant political power resided in both domestic and international institutions.

Bevan predicted that the support given to developing economies would contribute to the establishment of democratic institutions. To develop democracy throughout the world, assistance was needed from the West:

If democratic institutions are to be helped to take root in the Orient, it can be done not by sending professors to teach the virtues of democratic constitutions, but by sending the means to raise their material standards. Man must first live before he can live abundantly (1952a, p. 40).

Bevan wrote that collective action

against aggressive war is certainly essential if mankind is to survive. But it is only one half of the answer. The social revolutions of the East will overflow national boundaries and take on the nature of aggressive acts unless their economic tensions are eased by assistance from the West (ibid.).

Further to this, he hoped that emancipated nations would

put their faith in the institutions of political democracy after the fashion of the West...But these depend on popular support, and this will not be forthcoming to a government which appears unable to provide for an improvement in the material conditions of its people (1956n, p. 4).

The materialist conception of history is evident in Bevan’s writings on how societies develop; again, he made the link between economic conditions and political structures in society. The transformation of a nation’s economic base would have profound effects on its political structure.

Bevan insisted that the nature of social revolutions needed to be considered in terms of the unique conditions in a particular society. In relation to China, for example, Bevan stressed that while “the struggle of the British workers in their own country against the forces of capitalism causes them to sympathise immediately with the struggles of the workers in other countries”, it must be remembered that the struggle “takes various forms because it is

fought under different historical conditions”, which impact on the way socialism is achieved. The main difference between the struggle in Britain and in China was the existence of democratic institutions in Britain, converting “the political franchise into a revolutionary instrument if it is used with vigour and determination”. Bevan, speaking to the Chinese communists, declared that: “In the opinion of British Socialists it is this failure to recognise the challenging character of representative parliamentary institutions which has been responsible for much of the political sterility of people who regard themselves as revolutionary” (1954f, p. 2). Bevan saw democracy as capable of playing a large role in transforming societies, as he believed it did in Britain.

Bevan admitted that Britain’s industrial and democratic revolution had been aided by the exploitation of poorer countries. He insisted that young dominions could not achieve their industrial revolutions through surplus like Britain did (at the expense of countries like India that were “raped” by Britain). Bevan argued that these countries needed to develop industry with the active involvement of the people, but also through State control. In order for them to choose a democratic socialist course to industrial development, Bevan insisted that larger nations needed to provide help. This way, “our way of life” (Britain’s) would be developed. By “our way of life”, Bevan meant “the urbanities, the tolerance, and the free institutions to which we are accustomed”. These could only be defended “by economic policies which assist the peoples of the young Dominions to win their way to better material conditions without suffering intolerable privations” (1957i, p. 1). Bevan believed that in order to develop democratic institutions, material conditions needed to favour the masses. The importance of economic planning and the State, discussed in Chapters Three and Four, is again evident.

Bevan acknowledged the difficulties involved with carrying out massive industrial development while at the same time preserving democracy. He raised the question: can “an economically backward nation...build up its capital equipment and technical resources and at the same time enjoy democratic institutions”? It certainly was not achieved this way in Britain: he wrote that the British people “achieved their industrial expansion in a different century, under totally different conditions”, pointing out that it “should not be forgotten that the workers of Europe did not enjoy the full range of political liberty” when going through their industrial revolutions. He wrote that the “building of the capital equipment of Europe was largely an involuntary act by the workers of Europe”. Maintaining democracy while ensuring democratic rights was difficult to achieve, but Bevan suggested that nations such as India had demonstrated that it was possible (1958i, p. 5). The dominance of private property

meant that economic development was halted, highlighting the need for democratic institutions to alter prevailing power relations.

Establishing or maintaining democracy was particularly difficult due to the nature of change taking place in former colonies. Bevan wrote that when “the colonial power is withdrawn by agreement...or driven out by successful revolt, the change is profound – so profound as to constitute for a while almost a trauma”. This is due, Bevan supposed, to the “sudden onrush of responsibility...[that] finds many of the emancipated people unprepared”. He wrote that: “After the first rejoicings over independence comes a sober realisation of the tasks ahead”. He again asserted that “recently emancipated colonial peoples can rarely hope to continue to enjoy personal liberty as well as national independence unless some aid from outside is available”. He continued: “Political liberty, as distinct from national independence, is rooted in economic surplus. The flower of liberty does not flourish on barren soil”. Bevan argued that if Western nations wanted to see democracy extended, then they “must be prepared to compensate for the years of neglect, and to underpin the political institutions of the new nations with part of their own wealth” (1958l, p. 5). Democracy could only flourish as a result of improved economic conditions, which Bevan argued could only be created as a result of assistance from the stronger nations: “Freedom is the by-product of economic surplus” (1952a, p. 39).

Bevan warned of the dangers associated with trying to suppress social revolutions. With reference to the attempt of the US to prevent China’s revolution, he wrote that:

The way to treat a revolution in an agrarian country is to send it agricultural machinery, so as to increase food production to the point where the agricultural surplus will permit of an easier accumulation of the industrial furniture of modern civilisation (1952a, pp. 41-42).

He stressed that one “cannot starve a national revolution into submission”. It could only be starved “into a repressive dictatorship” and “to the point where the hellish logic of the Police State takes charge” (1952a, p. 42). Bevan insisted that the way to peace was not “to treat great nations as political pariahs, but to bring them within the community of nations and by social intercourse and economic co-operation seek to heal the wounds inflicted by civil strife” (1954e, p. 2). He predicted that if this was to continue, nations would be forced into the arms of the Soviet Union to rely on aid and investment. In 1956, as the United States was “cutting back economic aid to backward countries, Russia is emerging on the scene bearing gifts” in the form of industrial and technological expertise (1956d, p. 4). By failing to deliver

economic aid, Bevan argued that smaller nations would look “more and more to the expanding production of the Soviet Union” (1958e, p. 5).

The fact for Bevan was that “most, if not all, the peoples of the world are linked together in an endless variety of reciprocal activities”. Therefore “the condition of each one of us, becomes the concern of all of us”. He saw people in other countries who were being exploited by the West “as our countrymen in the sense that our industry is interlocked with theirs” (1952a, p. 137). By developing collective action, the main goal in international society, Bevan maintained, could be achieved. He saw that goal as being “the defeat of hunger in the most literal physical sense”. He wrote that “Until hunger has been left behind as a racial memory, it will not be possible to say that man has won the decisive victory in his long struggle with his physical environment” (1952a, p. 144). The rejection of power politics and the development of international organisations had as its aim the creation of a new world of peace, co-operation and the development of the material resources of the world. This then was how Bevan envisioned the transformation of international society to move it beyond being rooted in military strength and power to focusing on economic development. The relationship between the base and superstructure underpins Bevan’s writings on world economic development.

### National Sovereignties

Bevan identified a number of issues related to the creation of a new international society based on peace and cooperation. Pooling resources through the UN was important, yet there still existed the issue of national sovereignties and how independence and cooperation would work. During World War Two, Bevan began to argue that nations would have to give up their sovereignty after the war. “No one really believes”, he argued, “in the possibility of sovereign independent states after the war”. This did not mean that nations would be subsumed by larger nations; rather, the war was about “making a peace which will embody the best contributions of the most diverse cultures” (1941h, p. 13). Despite this, following the end of World War Two, Bevan observed a desire for national independence existing in many countries, particularly throughout the British Empire. He saw this as a potential danger to his plan for international cooperation.

The UN was the institution that Bevan supposed could provide a solution to creating a new international society that brought these different nations together, while respecting the national independence and goals of each of them. He considered that the aim of the UN was to “persuade nations to put such inhibitions upon their sovereign powers as will eventually

build up a code of conduct that will operate with the force of law” (1957d, p. 5). Collective action through international organisations needed to make sure that the goals and aspirations of individual nations were not sacrificed. National independence was an important consideration in Bevan’s writings.

For this to be achieved, Bevan argued that larger nations needed to refrain from dominating smaller nations. Bevan was concerned that imperialistic action from nations such as Britain and the United States were fuelling “aggressive nationalism” (1956k, p. 5). He did not want social revolutions in developing countries to be fuelled by aggressive nationalism, but he predicted that this would be the case unless a new order of society could be created with the end of colonial exploitation as its basis. He argued that peace “cannot be based permanently on colonial exploitation” and that the “rule of collective peace in the world must provide for social progress and for the attainment of self-government by subject peoples. Otherwise their legitimate struggles for nationhood will endanger peace. Peace and injustice can never live long together” (1954c, p. 1). In Asia, Bevan considered China to be waging a “struggle for independence against imperialism” (1954f, p. 2). This was also the case in Eastern Europe where Bevan felt the Soviet Union was infringing on national independence, for example in Hungary (1956r, p. 1). Although sovereignty needed to be restricted in the case of international relations, this did not mean large nations imposing values on smaller nations.

A clear indication of Bevan’s attitude to international society and national independence can be seen through his analysis of the Suez crisis. It was a situation that saw the old power politics collide with demands for national independence (1956q, p. 12). The behaviour of Britain and France had converted the crisis into “the old arid struggle between imperialism and the new nations” (1956l, p. 2). Power politics was bankrupt and the “moral sense of the world was outraged by the very brutality of the attempt by great powers to impose their will by armed force on a weaker nation” (1956s, p. 1). Suez was a clear example of the deficiency of power politics and the need for a new attitude to national independence and sovereignty.

At the same time as respecting Egypt’s right to sovereignty, however, Bevan argued that Nasser’s actions were not the precursor for a social revolution. In fact, he argued that Nasser’s movement was largely nationalistic as it “derived its driving power from resentment against Western imperialism”, an inevitable outcome of Western aggression towards Egypt, rather than focused on improving social and economic conditions, which Bevan argued national movements needed to be based on:



If a social movement elects to take the path of revolution, it must pursue it to the end, and the end is a complete transformation of society, accompanied by a transference of power from the old to the new social forces (1956j, p. 5).

The issue that Bevan had with Nasser's revolution in Egypt was that "from the beginning, the Movement was strongly nationalistic, with social and economic objectives playing a secondary role" (ibid.).

Instead of trying to redistribute property, Nasser and his colleagues only focused on nationalist sentiment and on building up the nation-state. Bevan admitted that Nasser and his military generals "resented the extremes of wealth and poverty around them", but he believed that they "saw the solution not as beginning with a root and branch redistribution of property, but as depending upon the building up of a modern state, to a large extent with outside aid". He argued that "Nationalist resurgence could have been canalised for social and economic purposes". Unfortunately for Nasser, Bevan argued, he had "not realised that to keep on stirring the pot of nationalist passions is not conducive to the creation of conditions favourable to long term economic projects". Bevan also lamented that the outcome was that, whereas the canal should have been an international waterway, the situation prevented collective decision-making. He insisted on the importance of national independence but maintained that nations also needed to co-operate with the international world: "Nations should be set free so that they may freely come together. National independence is the basis for international cooperation, not for the indulgence of rabid nationalist excess" (ibid.). Bevan looked upon Egypt as proof of the consequences of imperialist power on smaller nations.

These articles written by Bevan at the height of the Suez crisis reveal his attitude towards national independence, class and international organisation. National independence was a worthy cause if it could break the yoke of imperialism, but it needed to have as its aim the material improvement of the people of that country. For example, Bevan saw in Yugoslavia a positive example of the combination of socialism and national independence. Yugoslavia, he argued, developed an independent strategy during the war, a strategy which combined the ambitions of the peasantry and the urban worker. "For them", Bevan wrote, "the war was essentially a struggle for national independence". What was important about this struggle, in Bevan's view, was that it combined this national struggle with socialist ambitions:

The passionate desire for national freedom, which is the centuries-old tradition of the peoples of Yugoslavia, merged during the war with the revolutionary aims of the Yugoslav Communists. There was therefore a clear understanding between the two. For the urban workers, Socialism, for the peasants, land, and for both national independence (1952a, p. 16).

Thus, Yugoslavia was able to chart a course of action based on national independence but with socialism at its core.

Bevan maintained that co-existence involved “co-operation including cultural, commercial and economic intercourse”. He insisted that policies must not be based on “the leadership of this or that nation...but on the equality of all nations, great or small. Not on blocs of nations seeking to establish uniformity amongst themselves, but on diversity and mutual interplay of natural differences” (1954f, p. 2). There were tensions in the struggle between national independence and co-operation, but Bevan believed that the way to bring about peaceful co-existence was for the principles of co-operation to be followed.

Bevan also insisted that for international co-operation to be successful, a nation’s domestic society needed to be based on democratic socialist principles. He reflected in *In Place of Fear* that “the nation is too small an arena in which to hope to bring the struggle [for power] to a final conclusion”, arguing that “National sovereignty is a phrase which history is emptying of meaning”. He admitted that this led many to “turn away from the difficult task of establishing Socialism in their own country” as it would only mean partial victory (1952a, p. 170). Nevertheless, Bevan insisted that if “you are going to plan the world you must first of all control the part of it that you will want to fit into the whole” (1952a, pp. 170-171). He insisted that while this “was not an argument against international co-operation”, this co-operation “would be given greater reality in action, if governments of the world could speak with authority for the economic behaviour of their own peoples”. He concluded by insisting that “the principles of democratic socialism are the only ones broadly applicable to the situation which mankind now finds itself” (1952a, p. 171). Democratic socialism within a nation is a crucial consideration of the following chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has detailed Bevan's reflections on war and international relations, highlighting the importance he attached to the dynamics of capitalism in creating social and political conditions. Throughout the 1930s and during World War Two, Bevan argued that Fascism was an extreme form of capitalism, representing an attempt by the capitalist class to destroy democracy and to maintain its power over society. The struggle between poverty, property and democracy is given considerable emphasis in Bevan's writings during this period, particularly in the context of fascism. The conflict within property relations was also continually highlighted by Bevan as he accused the ruling-class of defending its interests against attack from the masses, and even using the war to benefit its position. There is an important link in Bevan's political thought between property relations and international relations.

This chapter has also identified a realist understanding of post-war international relations in Bevan's thought where states were in conflict with each other. Bevan hoped for a peaceful post-war settlement but conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union prevented this from developing. Military power was viewed by the largest nations as the most important feature of a nation in the post-war world, leading to the accumulation of armaments. Bevan's writings during this period stressed the need to reduce armaments, although his actions somewhat betray this desire. His emphasis on the need for Britain to possess the hydrogen bomb as a bargaining tool in discussions with the United States and the Soviet Union suggests that Bevan was being sucked into a pattern of international relations that he wished to see changed. His desire to reach out to non-aligned nations does suggest, however, that Bevan was seeking an alternative to a world divided into two competing power blocs.

Although Bevan's interpretation of the international environment was based on a realist perspective that identified mutual distrust between competing states, in seeking solutions to international tensions, he articulated an idealist vision. This chapter has acknowledged the emphasis that Bevan placed on the importance of strong international organisation. He wished to see principles of collective action at an international level, backed up by a strong United Nations. Bevan wanted larger nations to abandon their previous hostility and work towards developing the economies of the poorer nations that they had historically exploited. Bevan wanted democratic institutions to develop in these nations, and he argued that the only way to do this was for large nations to provide aid so that material

conditions were strengthened. The relationship between the economic base and the political and social structure of society, identified in previous chapters, was applied by Bevan to the international stage.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Vickers argues that Bevan's views on foreign policy reflected those of the revisionists, being based on "internationalism, a commitment to the UN and the international rule of law" (2011, p. 29). Although these principles are evident in Bevan's writing, this chapter has also highlighted the centrality of key themes in Bevan's political thought: his criticism of capitalism; the existence of class conflict; the relationship between economic conditions and the structure of society; and his belief in the principles of democracy and representative institutions. Bevan's conception of internationalism included an acknowledgement of the importance of industrial development to increase the material conditions of the masses throughout the world. Bevan envisioned political power through democracy acting as a revolutionary tool to radically improve these conditions.

Bevan's reflections on international relations and military power encompassed the competition between nations and ideologies. He saw the struggle between different ideas as a major cause in fuelling international tensions, demonstrating an understanding of the power of ideas in shaping social organisation. Therefore, he wanted to see the principles of democratic socialism followed in international relations. Bevan's conception of democratic socialism was central to his vision for changing the structure of both domestic and international society and this is considered in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six: Ideological Power

“Society is not a protean mass moulded by dominant ideas, but rather a living organism absorbing ideas, giving varying degrees of vitality to some and rejecting others completely” (Bevan 1952a, p. 12).

Another aspect of Bevan’s analysis of economic, political and military power was the importance of ideas and values in shaping societies. Both domestic societies and the international arena were underscored by competing ideologies and struggles over symbols, values and different conceptions of society. Bevan was aware of the power that ideas had to shape people’s lives and the dominant attitudes and values in a nation. The preceding chapters emphasised Bevan’s interpretation of the relationship between the economic conditions of society and what he called its social organisation. This encompassed not just political structures but also prevailing modes of thought. These are now analysed.

This chapter examines the ways in which Bevan saw ideas shaping society. It begins by outlining his critique of capitalist and communist modes of thought, which led him to reject both in favour of democratic socialism. Following this, the chapter explores Bevan’s view on the way in which the ruling-class attempted to merge its values with those of the rest of society to maintain its power and considers the methods that the working-class needed to employ to capture symbols central to national life. Finally, this chapter analyses the values that Bevan wished to see shape people’s lives. It concludes by emphasising the importance Bevan placed on the relationship between economic conditions and the prevailing ideas and values in society.

### **Ideologies**

#### Capitalism

Despite the development of the franchise in Britain, Bevan maintained that capitalism’s dominance still created a society based on competitive principles. Bevan attributed this to the primacy of private property. Proponents of capitalism were able to enshrine values of competitiveness and self-interest, which, Bevan argued, were not conducive to creating a civilised society. He contended that the drive for increased production “takes on the appearance of an enemy of social stability” (1958b, p. 5). Chapter Three demonstrated Bevan’s recognition of the benefits arising from the technological advances of capitalism. Nevertheless, he argued that the consequences of this development were harmful to society’s values.

Bevan criticised capitalism for failing to create “a discernible order of values” for society (1952a, p. 47). He viewed capitalism as being centred purely on self-interest, writing that the

kind of society which emerges from the sum of individual choices is not one which commends itself to the generality of men and women. It must be borne in mind that the successful were not choosing a type of society. They were only deciding what they thought could be bought and sold most profitably. Nothing was further from their mind than making a judgement on the kind of society that mankind should live in (1952a, p. 60).

Bevan wrote that the “amoral climate of the business world exposes the psyche of the individual to unreasoning compulsions inherited from the remote past” (1952a, pp. 47-48). He expressed the view that capitalism was the assertion of individual choices, creating an environment of competitiveness and the disregard of ordered values conducive to a flourishing society.

Bevan quoted the American economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen, a critic of capitalism, who described the “systems of make-believe” that were characteristic of the “Competitive Society” and that, as Bevan recognised, “still pervade[ed] our thinking” (1952a, p. 43). These systems of make-believe rejected “Collective action” – considered an “anathema” to the competitive society – leaving “the individual to pursue what he considers to be his own advantage in industry and commerce” (1952a, p. 44):

Material success, in this philosophy, is the prize awarded by society to the individual who has served it best, so the zest for profit is really a search to discover the wishes of the community. Though the motive may be selfish the general welfare is served (1952a, p. 44).

Bevan argued that this philosophy resulted in people falling by the wayside into poverty. Capitalism, he wrote,

failed to produce a tolerable home and a reputable order of values for the individual man and woman. Its credo was too grossly materialistic and its social climate too feverish. It converted men and women into means instead of ends. They were made the creatures of the means of production instead of the masters. The price of men was merely an item in the price of things. Priority of values was lacking because no aim was intended but the vulgar one of the size of the bank balance (1952a p. 45).

Bevan argued that “efficiency” was the final arbiter of the competitive society, “as though loving, laughing, worshipping, eating, the deep serenity of a happy home, the warmth of friends, the astringent revelation of new beauty, and the earth tug of local roots will ever yield to such a test” (1952a, p. 45). Capitalism was unable to appreciate these values.

### Communism

Alongside his rejection of capitalist values, Bevan also rejected communism as an alternative. He accused communist parties around the world of sticking too closely to outdated Marxist dogma, which he argued was irrelevant to real existing conditions and incompatible with democracy. His criticism of communism centred on its rejection of parliamentary institutions, Bevan’s experience in Britain having proven to him “how democratic institutions could be used to...solve the economic problems of the post-war world” (1952a, p. 125). Parliamentary institutions were vital to Bevan’s conception of political power; therefore, he rejected ideas that did not allow for them to be prominent.

Bevan interpreted communism as being a dogmatic ideology that stuck too closely to Marxist orthodoxy and was unable to adapt to concrete conditions. He argued that Soviet leaders, rather than undertaking an “austere and objective analysis of the relations between men and their social institutions”, had substituted for it “a sort of third rate theology” (1956f, p. 1). He maintained that despite flaws, western democracy had established “the separation of the judiciary from the executive authority...and the existence of more than one political party” (ibid.). This separation was vital to Bevan. He described the political institutions of communist countries as “too rigid” and concluded that the “doctrine of the inevitability of revolution in the West has received too many dents for it to have its old potency” (1957k, p. 12). Bevan saw this as a failure of the Soviet Union to adapt Marxist theory to objective realities.

Bevan considered that throughout the world the “outstanding fact...is the failure of the Communist practice and theory to adjust themselves successfully to the democracies of the West”. As a result of this, Bevan declared, communists “paralysed working class action rather than provided it with a cutting edge”. Communist parties in western nations had been guided too heavily by Russian policy: “In addition to all this, they have found their domestic policies fatally affected by Russia’s internal situation” (1958m, p. 8). Bevan argued that communists would not be successful if they did not understand the potential of parliamentary institutions.

Bevan criticised the adherence to Soviet interpretations of Marxism, insisting that they needed to tailor policy to national needs and conditions: “In short, what they need most of all is just ‘Revisionism’”. Good Marxism, Bevan argued, is when it goes beyond polemics to be about the material world: “...all this talk of true and false Marxism is not so much a case of philosophical interpretation as it is of pressing material conditions”. He stated that the “realities behind the argument are more substantial than the argument itself. That, at any rate, is in accordance with good Marxism” (1958f, p. 6). Bevan stressed that ideas needed to have their foundation in the economic realities of society.

Bevan’s understanding of communist societies is consistent with his wider analysis of the relationship between the economic base and superstructure of society. His analysis illustrates how he envisioned the transformation of society as a result of economic planning. A *Tribune* editorial declared that since

industrialisation of the Soviet Union began in 1928 with the beginning of the first Five Year Plan...[Russia] has probably made more progress in the creation of heavy industry than even America can show, or Great Britain in the expanding years of the 19th century (*Tribune* 1942k, p. 1).

Even though Bevan considered Stalin to be a tyrant, he praised Russia’s economic development under his rule. He argued that in “the course of his [Stalin’s] lifetime the pattern of Russian society was transformed”. Bevan identified the development of new “professional and technical classes”, recognising that their members “enjoy considerable prestige, even some measure of power and influence in their respective spheres”. He maintained that only “a small section of the Russian people felt suppressed; young people, teachers, scientists, and technicians believed they had already been liberated – liberated from illiteracy” (1953b, p. 4). Far from viewing the Soviet Union as a fractured society, Bevan’s analysis emphasised its positive progress.

Bevan praised the industrial achievements of the Soviet Union. Although his assessment was that the “social assimilation and universal enjoyment” of the benefits of technological advance had not been obtained, he claimed that there was too much focus on its negative aspects. He encouraged critics of the Soviet Union to acknowledge the freedom of self-expression people were able to enjoy due to living in a technologically advanced society, possessing more liberty than they did before the revolution. Bevan also praised education in Russia, stating that in “a society where public ownership of the means of production is the prevailing mode, working and teaching are reciprocal activities”. He argued that where



private enterprise is dominant, the result is a duality between teaching and working where teaching is the function of the State and working is the function of private enterprise (1957o, p. 5). Bevan contended that the abolition of private property had created an educated population, emphasising the importance of changing property relations in society.

As the Soviet Union developed industrially, Bevan hoped that political liberty would result. He insisted that “it must be accepted that the vast mass of workers are conscious of emancipation and not of slavery” (1952a, pp. 138-139). He wrote that a workers’ support of the Soviet regime “rests on his knowledge that all around him the framework of a modern industrial community is being built, that he is helping to build it, and that in the meantime his life is substantially, if slowly, improving” (1952a, p. 139).

Bevan stressed that he was not apologising for aspects of the Soviet regime that he considered oppressive; he did, however, predict that as the material conditions of Russia developed, its political system would become even more democratic, creating greater levels of political and economic enfranchisement. He argued that it was “reasonable to suppose that Russian political institutions, must ultimately yield to the pressure of economic and social changes” (1954h, p. 1):

I believe it can be taken for granted that as the pressure of material privations is lightened, some benign consequences will be felt right throughout the Soviet system...In the course of time, perhaps shorter than many imagine, even those political institutions so much disliked by the Western mind will undergo such modifications that they will be stripped of their more repulsive features (1958c, p. 5).

Bevan predicted the same outcome for communist China (1954i). He assumed that citizens in communist countries would begin to demand more political rights: “Power, when it has to justify itself before reason and the bar of public opinion, is fatally breached” (1957n, p. 6). The State, he argued, would be forced to respond to the demands of the people.

Bevan pointed to the development of democracy in Britain as evidence of how fraught a process it was, describing it as “a record of bloodshed, misery, oppression, accompanied by a century and a half of social dislocation” (1955j, p. 4). The only way in which societies could develop was if economic conditions were significantly changed: “Poverty and liberty have always been uneasy bedfellows. It is not a coincidence that the history of mankind, for thousands of years, was the story of poverty joined to tyranny” (ibid.). Under both capitalism and communism, the task of improving society was fraught with difficulty.

The importance of the base-superstructure relationship is evident in Bevan's analysis. Under capitalism, where private enterprise was dominant, competitiveness and individualism were the dominant values in society, whereas under communism, Bevan argued, the dominance of public ownership gave workers increased liberty and a better standard of education. Different economic conditions existed in capitalist and communist states, but in both instances, Bevan theorised that these conditions affected the political structures of society, the extent of liberty in that society and the attitudes and psychology of individuals. Ultimately, however, Bevan saw both capitalism and communism as incapable of creating a society based on secure and cooperative values. He argued that capitalist society was characterised by competition, individual self-interest and poverty, while the communist states did not allow enough freedom and were too authoritarian and undemocratic. Bevan envisioned a convergence between the two ideologies: democratic socialism.

### Democratic Socialism

In 1952 Bevan stated that there were "three conceptions of society now competing for the attention of mankind: the Competitive, the Monolithic, and the Democratic Socialist" (1952a, p. 43). Democratic Socialism was the choice that Bevan championed. Rather than rejecting communism and capitalism outright, a combination of the two could be beneficial in establishing a new society:

The Soviet Union has been brought into the main stream of western democratic history. She will inevitably make her contribution towards the shape of future society. Her experience of economic planning, the conscious organisation of her productive life, the subordination of economic activity to wider social purposes, which have been essential characteristics of her economy, all are bound to have the most profound repercussions upon western thinking. At the same time, the way in which the ordinary people of Great Britain and America have clung fiercely to traditional liberal conceptions of personal liberty, to the more spontaneous characteristics of social organisation, will bring to the world conference of the future those urbane, and I trust somewhat more civilised conceptions, which will help to modify the more austere contributions of the Soviet Union (1941g, p. 14).

His analysis of both led him to formulate the question which was fundamental to his political thought:

...how can we reconcile the subordination of economic activities, to central state direction, without at the same time sacrificing those principles of personal choice, of personal liberty, and sanctities of private judgement, which are the most cherished contributions of the last 200 years of progress? (ibid.).

Bevan argued that a gradual “coming together, growing ever more broader and more intimate, would enable each to adjust itself to the other and come to appreciate that differences of mental outlook and ways of life do not necessarily express levels of inferiority or superiority” (1955l, p. 4). He foresaw that combining economic planning with political liberty could help create a new society.

By 1957, Bevan was still praising both ideologies and arguing for a combination of the two:

Capitalism has proved that it is capable of harnessing the productive energies of mankind in the creation of material wealth. The Communists have proved they can do the same thing...The economic achievements of the Soviet Union, especially when considered against the horrors of two world wars, foreign intervention and civil wars, are remarkable...But have either Communism or capitalism brought into being the sort of society upon which other peoples will want to model themselves, and live their lives? Are they the designs for living which are likely to inspire the young men and women in the second half of the twentieth century? (1957j, p. 12).

Bevan’s answer was ‘no’. A combination of the most attractive aspects of both was still needed.

Public ownership and economic planning, combined with parliamentary democracy, could lead to a new pattern of life being established. Bevan argued that in society, “stability can be maintained when political liberty is enlarged and economic conditions improved at a pace which is acceptable to the masses” (1952a, p. 22). The important question for Bevan was whether “the state [could] be given power over our work without the same power swallowing the whole of our life? That is the question millions are asking. I believe it can be done” (1940f, p. 11). When establishing new patterns of living, Bevan maintained that the State needed to ensure that the protection of democratic rights was balanced against the system of economic planning. Bevan argued that

You cannot educate a man to be a trained technician inside the factory and ask him to accept the status of a political robot outside. To read blue prints, to make and repair

modern complicated machines, to perform the hundred and one activities inseparable from a modern complex civilisation is consistent with only one type of government - a complete political and industrial democracy (1950a, p. 3)

He asserted a belief in the changing condition of the worker under public ownership:

It [the demand for full employment] means more profoundly that the citizen insists in the depth of his personality that he shall be re-united with his work and with the tools of his work, from which he was forcibly separated by the Industrial Revolution. Only those who have passed through the experience of idle hands surrounded by idle tools can begin to appreciate the deep serenity which will flow in time from the re-uniting of man with the tools of his craft and the sources of his wealth (1950a, p. 3).

Bevan set out what he saw as important in socialist states:

In the first place there is an insistence on full political and industrial democracy as the only condition consistent with the manifold and subtle requirements of modern industrial and social techniques. The background and pre-requisite of this personal liberty implies that the serenities of private life shall not be invaded and disturbed by disharmonies arising from maladjustments in the economic machine. In short the main economic structure must be planned, purposive and reasonably predictable (1950a, p. 4)

It can be seen that Bevan's vision for society rested heavily on the impact that State involvement in the economy could have in changing patterns of life.

Eventually, public ownership would allow democratic socialists to prioritise certain values in society which stressed the importance of equality and the cultivation of individual life. Bevan insisted that the solutions to the problems of capitalism could not be arrived at until it became "possible to create a purposive and intelligible design for society", which would only materialise once "effective social and economic power passes from one order of society to another" (1952a, p. 118). He declared that one of the most important questions of modern society was: "What is most essential and who is to decide it?" (1952a, p. 58). Bevan, however, insisted that the "victory of Socialism need not be universal to be decisive". He had "no patience with those Socialists, so-called, who in practice would socialise nothing, whilst in theory they threaten the whole of private property". He argued that different forms of property could co-exist. Nonetheless, he insisted that it was a

requisite of social stability that one type of property ownership should dominate. In the society of the future it should be public property. Private property should yield to the point where social purposes and a decent order of priorities form an easily discernible pattern of life. Only when this is accomplished will a tranquil and serene attitude take the place of the all-pervading restlessness that is the normal climate of competitive society (1952a, pp. 118-119).

Bevan highlighted the importance of changing property relations in order to create a new society. This again emphasised his view that by using the democratic and representative institutions of the State, the material conditions of economic life could be drastically altered for the benefit of the people, eventually leading to the development of new values.

Bevan warned that if decisions over what to do with economic surplus were left in private hands, then the surplus would be invested “in the goods for which he [the individual possessor of the surplus] thinks there will be a profitable sale”. This would mean that “those who have been most successful for the time being, that is the money owners, will in the sum of their individual decisions determine the character of the economy of the future” (ibid.). He argued that the persistent attitude that regarded “the principles of economic individualism as characteristic of modern man in modern society” prevented the “working out [of] a system of social priorities” (1952a, p. 150).

For example, Chapter Four identified the importance Bevan placed on fixing prices for different forms of consumption. He contended that consumption needed to be arranged “in an order of priority” so that neither supply and demand nor the profit motive was “the sole arbiter of the employment of capital”. He predicted that once

the Competitive Society is compelled to serve a general social aim the automatism of the market is interfered with at every point and we are no longer in the capitalist system at all. We shall have abandoned selection by competition for selection by deliberation (1952a, p. 153).

From this point, “moral considerations [would] take precedence over economic motives” (ibid.). The importance of public ownership for changing society is summarised by the popular Bevan phrase, cited on numerous occasions in this thesis: “Freedom is the by-product of economic surplus”. By creating economic surplus and distributing it in the interests of all in society, freedom can be obtained (1952a, p. 39). This would achieve Bevan’s aim of respecting personal liberty while at the same time developing the economy.

Bevan stressed the importance of technological development for the creation of new values in society. He was, however, keenly aware of the issues regarding automation that could arise from advances in technology. “The impact of its arrival”, he wrote, “is in society and in the homes of the workers. The question for us is whether our society will be able to digest its impact without causing unnecessary suffering and dislocation”. Bevan tried to be positive about the possible implications of automation, seeing it as “the product of scientific and technical brilliance” and suggesting that whether “it becomes a benefit or a curse will depend on our collective intelligence. There is no need for alarm but there is every need for forethought and preparation” (1955g, p. 2). Although he saw automation producing considerable benefits, Bevan also warned that it had potential to cause ruin for society if an intelligent design was not developed.

Bevan emphasised the destructive nature of industrial development, particularly on the environment:

The ugly, dreary, squalid, endless miles of back-to-back cottages and tenements, the careless dumps of industrial waste, the poisoned rivers, the senseless slaughter on our inadequate highways, the silted canals, and innumerable other appalling legacies of a failure of social and political adaptation to swift technical change – these all point to a breakdown of collective intelligence and will (ibid.).

Any advances in technology needed to be controlled in order to mitigate any negative consequences on society.

Recognising this need, Bevan argued that the only way automation could be controlled was by asserting the importance of public ownership: “The real answer is not to attempt to restore the authority of the market where this is manifestly at variance with the needs of capital expansion but to restate, in modern terms, the proper relationship between public and private enterprise”. Where capital investment was vast, “as for instance in steel, oil and chemicals”, Bevan asserted that the remedy was not increased private enterprise but “an extension of public responsibility by taking them into public ownership” (ibid.). He predicted that by redrawing the lines between public and private property, “the relationship of both would be more intelligible and a new social synthesis made possible”. This was the path of “democratic socialism as it is also the way to the smooth assimilation of automation into the national life”. The secret for dealing with the problems arising from automation, Bevan argued, was “the pace of economic and political adaptation” (ibid.).

A retreat from socialism in this scenario would be the wrong path as it was needed to deal with the issues of automation:

The retreat from Socialism, in places where it should be least expected, is therefore the abandonment of collective intelligence at the moment when it is most needed. It results in political indifference and social anarchy under conditions where automation demands sustained communal action (ibid.).

Bevan concluded that: “Automation can be turned from a threat into a challenge and opportunity. What we dare not do is to wait until it is upon us and then hope to muddle through” (ibid.). Public ownership could change the course of economic development, managing automation and integrating it more positively into society.

The relationship between economic and political power in Bevan’s thought was clear: by using political institutions to reverse property relations in society, certain values in society could be prioritised. Bevan praised the economic planning of the Soviet Union and wanted to combine this with democratic institutions and political liberty. This combination was central to creating a new order of values through democratic socialism. There was a risk, however, that this development could be seriously impeded by the actions of the ruling-class.

## **Coercion and Consent**

### Ruling-class Power

Establishing the values of democratic socialism would be a difficult task in the face of opposition from the ruling-class. Bevan argued that the ruling-class would attempt to maintain its power and prevent this evolution – in its extreme form, this would be in the form of fascism, which Bevan described as “the future refusing to be born” (1940a, p. 13) (see Chapter Five). Chapter Three presented Bevan’s argument that the ruling-class had given concessions to the masses due to the fear of unrest, and the need to educate the masses on the modes of production (1952a, p. 22). It is worth returning to this discussion due to the ideological elements of the ruling-class’ activity.

Bevan outlined the methods that the ruling-class utilised to maintain its grip on power in society. As a response to the establishment of democracy and the extension of the franchise, he identified a new question facing the ruling-class: “How can wealth persuade poverty to use its political freedom to keep wealth in power?” (1952a, pp. 3-4; 1959d, p. 1).

The ruling-class would change its behaviour when it wanted to defend its interests. Bevan demonstrated how it would even turn its back on democracy to achieve this:

When the people look like turning them down they begin to see the ‘defects of democracy as a permanent system of government’, and warn us that ‘we must distinguish between freedom and licence’. When we do as they want us to do, it is freedom. When we suit ourselves, it is licence (1952a, p. 5).

Bevan argued that the main objective of the Conservatives was to “preserve the status quo in society. Its main strategy is to make concessions as belatedly and as grudgingly as possible, but with such dexterity as to preserve the reality of continuing power” (1959f, p. 12). He indicated that the ruling-class needed to maintain the support of the people to defend against the challenge that democracy posed to its position.

Bevan argued that the ruling-class could not maintain its power unless it gained the consent of the nation. “No society”, he wrote, “can long endure which fails to secure the assent of the people”. Reflecting on previous societies, Bevan wrote that it was “difficult for us to understand how it was that men and women came not only to tolerate, but cheerfully to acquiesce in, conditions and practices which seem to us at this distance to be revolting”. He did not attribute it to the masses being “held down by sheer physical force”; that was only possible for a short period of time. The rulers required the active consent of the people:

The institutions and modes of behaviour of these societies must have, in part at least, commended themselves to ordinary men and women or they would have been undermined by sheer disapproval. Ultimately, rulers, however harsh, must share the same values as the ruled if their empire is to persist. Obedience is rendered in the last resort, and for any considerable length of time, by accepting the moral and intellectual sanctions that lie behind social compulsions (1952a, p. 55).

Therefore, there always needed to be “compensations and amenities, pleasures and common rituals, making life seem worth while and forming the cement that bound ancient societies together in a continual reaffirmation of willing consent” (ibid.). Bevan argued that the ruling-class of Britain was the master in “the art of avoiding sharp conflict, of muting and smothering the struggle, of encouraging the obscurity which makes the frontiers separating the two parties appear to merge into each other in a sort of grey mist” (1959f, p. 12). He stressed that the ruling-class could not continue to exploit people in society but had to make concessions to the people in order to maintain its dominance.



Bevan's writings echo a Gramscian understanding of the nature of hegemony. Gwyn Alf Williams, analysing the concept in the work of Antonio Gramsci, (1960) writes that by hegemony,

Gramsci seems to mean a socio-political situation, in his terminology a 'moment,' in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation. An element of direction and control, not necessarily conscious, is implied. This hegemony corresponds to a state power conceived in stock Marxist terms as the dictatorship of a class (Williams 1960, p. 587).

Bevan's writings on the ruling-class also emphasise a "certain way of life and thought" which is dominant (capitalism) and is diffused throughout society.

Williams writes that hegemony "is always associated with equilibrium, persuasion, consent, and consolidation" (1960, p. 591). The act of coercion was evident in Bevan's understanding of attempts by the ruling-class to align its interests with patriotic symbols. Towards the end of the 1930s when Bevan considered the working-class to be under threat, he argued that "the class struggle is the underlying motif of politics". Bevan argued that the Union Jack was a central symbol being co-opted by the ruling-class. "The Union Jack", he wrote, "is regarded by [the British ruling-class] as a national flag only when their class interests and the nation's coincide". Bevan asserted that there "is no protection for a British subject under the Union Jack unless he is promoting the interests of the British ruling class". He even suspected that the "ruling class of England [were] ready at any time to exchange the Union Jack for the Swastika should the change over be necessary to preserve their class privileges" (1938f, p. 7). The attempt to maintain power by co-opting prevailing symbols in society demonstrates the importance in Bevan's thought of ideological apparatus being used to establish and maintain ruling-class power.

The strategy of the ruling-class was to associate its interests with those of the masses. This was evident to Bevan during World War Two. For instance, he believed that after the war there existed a "universal desire for privacy and freedom of personal choice". Bevan warned that this desire might be an advantage to the Tories in a post-war election. He wrote that human beings

possess the attributes of the cat and the dog. They want to hunt in packs at one time, and to hunt alone at others... When the war is over the cat nature demands satisfaction, and this takes the form of a romantic nostalgia for a life of freedom from the disciplines of State interference (1944f, p. 6).

Bevan predicted that this could result in “a general lethargy of the collective will. A call to continued State action is irrationally resented, and anyone who resists it easily becomes a champion of personal liberty”. He issued a warning, however, that the interests of the worker did not align with those of the ruling-class: “The worker, engulfed in the full spate of his revulsion against hateful disciplines, mistakes the demands of the ruling class for what he himself feels he needs”. To combat this, the Labour Party needed to mobilise a campaign of “We” against “They” to show the working-class that the ruling-class did not have their interests at heart (1944f, p. 6), otherwise by aligning its interests with the general interest, the ruling-class could defend its dominant economic position in society.

Bevan’s writings outlined the ways in which he suspected capitalism was maintained and extended in society. As Chapter Five demonstrated, Bevan considered adherents of capitalism to be responsible for the conflict taking place in international society. The attempt of the British ruling-class to maintain its power was reflective of a battle over competing conceptions of society. Bevan urged the working-class to engage with it in an ideological struggle.

### Working-class Power

Bevan wanted the working-class to compete over prevailing symbols and institutions, positioning itself against the interests of the ruling-class. Collective action could challenge the hegemony of the ruling-class. “A ruling class”, Bevan wrote,

succeeds by appearing to identify its class interests with the general interest, so that the people are involved in the defence of both at the same time. They are able to represent their sectional interests in terms of the national symbols, and the emotional and traditional associations with which these latter are seeped are an immense source of strength to the ruling class (1938g, p. 7).

Therefore, by opposing the ruling-class and the British State, the working-class “appears to be in opposition to these sacred symbols of the State, and class feeling alone provides an insufficient source of emotional drive”. Bevan predicted, however, that a

moment is reached in the life of the ruling class when it can no longer afford the maintenance of the very traditions for which it formerly appeared to stand. These are the conceptions of liberty and progress, which it waved like flags in its own early battles (ibid.).

He predicted that the “growing economic necessities of the ruling class cause it to attempt to swallow its own social progeny, and to destroy those liberal institutions which were its early pride” (ibid.). This situation reflects Bevan’s formulation that property would attempt to destroy democracy in order to keep its power.

Bevan urged the working-class to take charge of national symbols and institutions when the correct moment arrived: “At this moment the working class steps forward in the defence of these liberal institutions and conceptions of liberty, for they are necessary to its own progress and ultimate victory” (ibid.). Following this, the working-class uses these symbols and creates a new hegemony:

Then begins the struggle for the symbols. In this struggle the working class reverses the position...By defending the symbols which are universally revered, it identifies its own class interest with the general interest and begins to draw strength from both sources (ibid.).

These liberal institutions, analysed in Chapters Three and Four, were important in the ideological battle between the working-class and the ruling-class. Therefore, Bevan argued that the

interests of the ruling class emerge more and more as a naked opposition to the general interest, and members of the ruling class begin to think more and more of their defence in military terms, and less and less in terms of constitutional action (ibid.).

Bevan predicted that once this situation occurred, it was then the

supreme moment for it is at this point that Fascism appears, having for its purpose the destruction of the constitution which hampers the maintenance of the ruling class. We saw this happen in Germany and in Spain, and we see the beginnings of it in Britain (ibid.).

By controlling the ideological superstructure, the working-class could fracture the dominance of property over poverty. In the 1930s, during a period when Bevan argued that the ruling-

class was attempting to maintain its power, Bevan was theorising on strategies to reverse this domination.

Despite acknowledging the achievements of the 1945-1951 Labour governments, during the 1950's, Bevan conceded that this reversal had not been achieved. Bevan still maintained that the working-class would not be content with this situation:

Mankind has never believed that respect for a principle, enshrined in the most sanctified law, should be carried to the point of personal or national extinction...Ask that question of any man starving to death in front of a shop window full of food.

Respect for the policeman is apt to diminish in such a situation (1957c, p. 5).

By actively seeking power, the working-class would be able to transform the economic base of society, thus emphasising new values and ideas that would be a substantial part of democratic socialism. The importance of this struggle reiterates the centrality of working-class power to Bevan's thought, analysed in Chapter Three. It also emphasises the materialism in Bevan's thought. He was interested in political and ideological structures, but these were based on a relationship with the economic base of society.

Between 1945 and 1951, the Labour Party had an opportunity to take control of the levers of political power and bring about a new vision for British society. Bevan's vision for society is now considered in the next section.

## **Values in Society**

### Democratic Values

Bevan maintained that the working-class needed to articulate a new vision for society that challenged the dominance of competitive values. He stressed that if "individual man is to make a home for himself in the Great Society, he must also seek to make the behaviour of social forces reasonably predictable" (1952a, p. 36). Bevan wrote that the

digging for coal, the making of steel, the provision of finance, the generation and distribution of electricity, the building and siting of factories and houses, the whole complete structure of the Great Society is, for the anti-Socialist, a great arena for private economic adventure (1952a, pp. 36-37).

To the extent that life for the great mass of people was no longer one where they were "stalked and waylaid, harried and tormented, their lives made a nightmare of uncertainty", that was because "the economic adventurers [had] been curbed and controlled in one sphere

of social activity after another” (1952a, p. 37). Bevan maintained that the application of democratic socialist values had already had an impact in changing conditions in society.

The cultivation of individual life was a central priority for Bevan in any society. He rejected the utilitarian principle of “the greatest good for the greatest number”, arguing that this cannot

excuse indifference to individual suffering. There is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual. If the policies of statesmen, the enactments of legislatures, the impulses of group activity, do not have for their object the enlargement and cultivation of the individual life, they do not deserve to be called civilised (1952a, pp. 167-168).

Bevan acknowledged that the preoccupation with the individual led critics to call democratic socialism dull. He detailed complaints made during the period of Labour government between 1945 and 1951 that there was too much rationing, a scarcity of “porterhouse steaks in the fashionable restaurants” and a “lack of colour” in the cities. Bevan disputed this, however, arguing that if critics had

looked closer they would have seen the roses in the cheeks of the children, and the pride and self-confidence of the young mothers. They would have found that more was being done for working people than in any other part of the world at that time (1952a, p. 168).

Bevan declared that democratic socialism was a philosophy that understood the importance of placing the individual within their society. He argued that it was a philosophy that “sees the individual in his context with society and is therefore compassionate and tolerant” (1952a, p. 169). Far from being dull and colourless, Bevan pointed to improvements made to the life of the individual.

The way to cultivate individual life and to create conditions of equality was for collective values to be at the heart of politics, emphasising the interdependence of individuals in society. The technological advancements of the preceding hundred years meant that for the individual in society, the “vicissitudes that now afflict him come from what he has done in association with other men, and not from a physical relationship with the forces of nature” (1952a, p. 46). The development of society, and the division of labour which was its result, wove the individual’s life “into a series of interdependencies involving not only his own

personal surroundings, but moving in ever-widening circles until they encompass most parts of the earth” (1952a, pp. 46-47). Each social grouping in society had become connected.

Contrasting contemporary society to societies that came before, Bevan argued that “various forms of collective action” had been developed “as mechanisms evolved to enable the individual to struggle successfully with his social environment”. He put this impulse for collective action down to human nature, rejecting the view that private enterprise and universal competition were compatible with it. He wrote:

When we are told that these [virtues of private enterprise and universal competition] correspond with the basic impulses of ‘human nature’ we reply that the facts of human behaviour contradict this contention at every turn. Human nature is as much co-operative as it is competitive. Indeed the complicated texture of modern society emphasises over and over again the greater survival value of collective action (1952a, p. 150).

While the “grand priority that subordinated almost everything to individual success [had] come to be insensibly qualified by our obligations to the associations of which we are members, occupational and otherwise”, Bevan referred back to the problems associated with the ideology of capitalism, arguing that “in spite of all this, ‘official’ thinking still persists in regarding the principles of economic individualism as characteristic of modern man in modern society” (1952a, p. 150). Rather than individualism, modern society had connected workers and created an important interdependence.

### Socialist Advance

Bevan admitted that the task of changing attitudes to create a new order of social priorities in capitalist society was a challenging one. He wrote that the “climate of opinion in capitalist society is wholly opposed to this exercise” (1952a, p. 150). This was not a surprise to Bevan as he believed that it was

one of the tragedies of history that the application of social purposes or priorities, or whatever you like to call them, first occurred in economically backward countries. It has therefore been accompanied by excesses that have produced a revulsion against further experiments in the same direction (ibid.).

Bevan insisted, however, that “a number of central aims must be worked out as guiding principles for our social and political activities, and to these all else must be related” (1952a, p. 151). Although the task was difficult, Bevan urged for it to be carried out forcefully.

“Free men using free institutions”, Bevan claimed, “have never tried this before in the long history of mankind”. He responded, however, that this fact “should not frighten us”:

Each social circumstance is new not only in itself but in our disposition towards it. We must not allow ourselves to be deterred from the effort to introduce rational principles into social relations simply because it has never been done before; tradition, habit and authority having been made to suffice (ibid.).

Bevan insisted that the underlying assumptions and values in capitalist society needed to be challenged: “Children are taught in our schools to respect Bruno and Galileo and other martyrs of science, and at the same time they are encouraged to close their minds against those who question the assumptions underlying contemporary society” (ibid.). A project of radical change in the underlying values in society needed to be undertaken.

Many of these values that Bevan wished to establish can be identified in his reflection on the Labour governments of 1945-1951 and his role as a Minister in those governments. Being interviewed in *Tribune* in 1948, Bevan expressed the view that significant steps had been taken by the Labour government to transform society. Socialism had advanced on three fronts: firstly, through increasing “the share of the available social product by way of higher wages and salaries”; secondly, through “the transference of power by the transition from private to public ownership of the forces of production”; and finally, what Bevan described as the front “which has its roots more deeply in Socialist philosophy than any other”, the “distributive front, that is, the slow destruction of the inequalities and disadvantages arising from the unequal possession of property and the unequal possession of individual strengths and opportunities” (1948, p. 7). Bevan proudly reflected on the effects of these advancements in changing the structure of society.

Bevan argued that the new direct social services being put in place would lead to a reduction of inequalities between people. The unjust inequalities that Bevan objected to were being rectified as Labour’s measures had begun to “iron out the differences between one citizen and another which arise as a consequence of the anomalies of the wages system”, which he argued would be reduced as “social services give people a share of the national product in accordance with their need”, therefore emphasising the “distributivist aspect of the Socialist advance”. Bevan admitted that the “wages system is maintained as a stimulus to production, a traditional relationship between the worker and his industry; but distributivist activities undermine the worst consequences of the inequality” (ibid.).

The service with the greatest distributive effect according to Bevan was the National Health Service, for which he was directly responsible. “On the active and administrative side”, he wrote, “it brings to the individual citizen all the battery of modern medicine, irrespective of the individual’s means” (1948, p. 7). Bevan proudly declared that the NHS is “what a socialist really means by socialism”. He viewed it as a “practical illustration of, ‘From each according to his capacity; to each according to his need’” (1950b, p. 14). He argued that “the more and more of the world’s goods that reach the individual in some other, more civilised way than by the haggling of the market, the more progress that society is making towards a civilised standard” (ibid.).

Bevan identified that historically health was the area where “the claims of individual commercialism come into most immediate conflict with reputable notions of social values” (1952a, p. 73). In modern societies, Bevan argued, “the claims of the individual shall subordinate themselves to social codes that have the collective well-being for their aim, irrespective of the extent to which this frustrates individual greed” (1952a, p. 73). In the field of curative medicine, Bevan understood that “individual and collective action are joined in a series of dramatic battles”:

The collective principle asserts that the resources of medical skill and the apparatus of healing shall be placed at the disposal of the patient, without charge, when he or she needs them; that medical treatment and care should be a communal responsibility; that they should be made available to rich and poor alike in accordance with medical need and by no other criteria. It claims that financial anxiety in time of sickness is a serious hindrance to recovery, apart from its unnecessary cruelty. It insists that no society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means (1952a, p. 75).

Collective action could ensure that the individual had access to healthcare, with this not being dependent on considerations of commercialism.

Bevan predicted that society would flourish when people knew their illnesses would be taken care of when they needed help. He argued that:

Society becomes more wholesome, more serene, and spiritually healthier, if it knows that its citizens have at the back of their consciousness the knowledge that not only themselves, but all their fellows, have access, when ill, to the best that medical skill can provide (1952a, p. 75).



The NHS was so successful an institution in Bevan's eyes that he was confident "that no Government that attempts to destroy the Health Service can hope to command the support of the British people" (the current invocations of Bevan's role in establishing the NHS, even by Conservative politicians, supports Bevan's claim). He concluded his chapter in *In Place of Fear* on the health service by insisting that the "great argument about priorities is joined and from it a Free Health Service is bound to emerge triumphant" (1952a, p. 92). Thus, Bevan concluded that asserting social priorities had delivered benefits for society.

Bevan outlined the challenge that he faced regarding society's attitude to the service. He described the NHS as

an attempt at the introduction of egalitarianism through the medium of a society which is certainly not egalitarian, either in its structure or in its inspiration, and further through the medium of a profession, highly conservative, deeply traditional, and in many sections of it, hostile (1948, p. 7).

Nonetheless, eight years after its establishment, Bevan argued that a report into the NHS proved that it was one of the greatest social experiments of the 20th century and he urged other nations to follow the same path (1956c). State action had fundamentally changed British society.

Despite these successes, Bevan argued that Labour had not done enough to completely establish socialism in Britain, insisting throughout the 1950s that the party needed to maintain a radical agenda. Writing in 1955, he argued:

The need for further social experiment is certainly present in Britain. Although she has recovered from the worst consequences of the war there is yet a long way to go before she can afford to relax. But, though the need is there, the mood is not (1955e, p. 2).

He maintained that the character of society needed to be continually reshaped to achieve progress, as it "is the essence of power that it strives to perpetuate the mould most congenial to it". Bevan was not satisfied with Labour's pushing for only minor changes to the economic situation in Britain (1956o, p. 5). The 1945-1951 Labour governments had not done enough, Bevan asserted, to completely alter conditions in society.

Bevan had outlined the difficulty facing the Labour Party two years into the life of the government. He referenced Marx to make his case: "As Marx said, the weight of the traditions of the past lies like an alp on the present, and it will be time enough to go on the

defensive when we have stamped our mark on the bulk of the social economy". A couple of years of Labour advances had meant that "We have political power, as we did not have in 1924 and 1929, but", he cautioned, "we have not yet full economic responsibility, nor shall we have, until the main streams of economic activity are publicly canalised". Bevan promised that after 1948 "the harvest will be as rich as we care to make it" (1947, p. 7). Although he would later state his pride at the achievements of the Labour government, he would claim throughout the 1950s that further change was required.

Since World War Two people in Britain had experienced substantial change, which Bevan argued could explain Labour's defeat in the 1955 General Election. Unemployment was no longer as high as it previously stood, so that the discontent with the capitalist system and the attacks upon it had been allayed by the Tories' management of the economy:

But the consequences of this meditative attitude is that the Government has parliamentary power but lacks the moral reserves that are the main asset of great popular movements. A generation has grown up in Britain that has not experienced the frustration and privation of unemployment. The old keen edge of attack on capitalist society was therefore blunted (1955f, p. 1).

Nonetheless, Bevan did not consider the aims of socialism to be fully achieved.

In 1959, Bevan was arguing for socialist policies to be pushed through more forcefully. "The old Marxist argument", he wrote, "that the relations of private property and the social stratifications that come within them tend to stultify and even inhibit technical progress and maximum production of wealth, is receiving fresh reinforcement". Despite the technical advances of the Soviet Union (such as the launching of Sputnik in 1957), Bevan thought that "the weight of the argument still lies with the defenders of Western democracy". He admitted, however, that it was "inevitable for doubts to arise about the possible lines of future advance". He continued: "It is the socialist case that a certain order of priorities should be voluntarily accepted by a democratic nation. Having been accepted, it should be driven through against all opposition and private vested interest" (1959a, p. 5). Right up until his death in 1960, Bevan was arguing for the need to alter social relations in society and for an order of priorities to be established.

## Future Struggle

Although Bevan expressed a desire to see key principles guide social life, he argued that universality should not be sought – instead, he asserted that values and norms were constantly in flux and were dependent on history and on particular circumstances. The student of politics, he insisted,

must therefore seek neither universality nor immortality for his ideas and for the institutions through which he hopes to express them. What he must seek is integrity and vitality. His Holy Grail is the living truth, knowing that being alive the truth must change. If he does not cherish integrity then he will see in the change an excuse for opportunism, and so will exchange the inspiration of the pioneer for the reward of the lackey (1952a, p. 13).

Bevan argued that nations were made up of various points of view and were constantly adapting. He wrote that nations, “as contrasted with any small governing circle, are the centre of interests, pressures and tendencies, social alignments that grow and wane in strength. The shifting balance of social forces within the nation compels endless adaptations” (1954g, p. 1). Therefore, he described politics as a “conflict between opposing conceptions of society” (1956m, p. 4).

Bevan stressed that democratic socialism needed to maintain principles of private judgement in society. It was outlined in Chapter Four that Bevan accepted that there was a role for private enterprise in society and this meant that the principle of choice needed to be respected. He wrote that because democratic socialism “knows that all political action must be a choice between a number of possible alternatives it eschews all absolute proscriptions and final decisions”. Bevan did not want to see a regimented society, arguing instead for a move towards “an eclectic society”: “we are not going to have a monolithic society, we are not going to have a society in which every barber’s shop is nationalised” (1950b, p. 8). He conceded that democratic socialism was “not able to offer the thrill of the complete abandonment of private judgement, which is the allure of modern Soviet Communism and of Fascism, its running mate” (1952a, p. 169). Choice was important for Bevan’s conception of individual liberty and freedom.

The redistributive effects of public ownership on people’s lives were emphasised by Bevan, particularly in relation to inequality in society. He considered there to be “a sense of injustice arising from gross inequalities”, which public ownership could rectify. He did not, however, consider the discontent arising from inequality to be by itself “fatal to the existing

order”. He highlighted that there had been “inequalities throughout the history of mankind, but they have not always proved incompatible with a certain degree of social stability”. He argued that “Complete equality is a motive that has never moved large masses for any decisive length of time” (1952a, p. 60). He claimed that a “sense of injustice does not derive solely from the existence of inequality. It arises from the belief that the inequality is capricious, unsanctioned by usage and, most important of all, senseless” (1952a, pp. 60-61). These reflections demonstrate an acceptance by Bevan of a certain level of inequality in society, as long as it didn’t emerge from injustice imposed on individuals.

Accepting that people were different, he argued that it was wrong to say that people were born unequal: rather, “we are born with different potential aptitudes”. He contended that whether different aptitudes or qualities “turn out to be of later advantage, and place us higher in the social scale than other, will turn upon whether they are sufficiently cultivated, and... whether they happen to be the sort our particular society finds valuable” (1952a, p. 61). Bevan did not find that workers “resent higher rewards where they manifestly flow from personal exertion and superior qualities”. He maintained that “proper recognition” was given to scientists, artists and inventors, and there was not “a disposition to object to the higher incomes awarded certain of the professional classes” (ibid.).

Bevan did accept, however, that people were beginning to express unhappiness with the benefits that some professionals were receiving, particularly in education, which working-class families did not necessarily have access to (1952a, p. 62). Tensions were beginning to arise when the “standard of life of the student is higher than that of the industrial worker who maintains him” (1952a, p. 63). Bevan asserted that “Resentment against inequality occurs when it quite clearly flows from social accident, such as inherited wealth or occupations of no superior social value” (1952a, p. 64). He appeared to be arguing that there would exist some inequality in society, but that this needed to be based on different aptitudes at birth. It was important, however, for everyone to be given the chance to be the best person they could be. Equality of opportunity was vital.

Bevan’s analysis of equality in society reflects the position of José Enrique Rodó, the Uruguayan philosopher who was identified in Chapter Two as being a source of influence for Bevan. Rodó argued that:

it is the duty of the state to provide all members of the society with the unspecified conditions that will lead to their perfection... [and] human superiorities where they

exist. In this way, if all are granted initial equality, subsequent inequality will be justified (Rodó [1900] 1988, p. 66).

In his 1950 Fabian Society lecture, Bevan quoted Havelock Ellis, writing in the introduction to Rodó's *The Motives of Proteus*, asserting that "Democracy alone can conciliate equality at the outset with an inequality at the end, which gives full scope for the best and is most apt to work towards the good of the whole" (Ellis 1918 cited in Bevan 1950b, p. 13). Bevan's writing reflects this understanding of inequalities in society.

As for the future, Bevan maintained that even in a democratic socialist society there would still be conflict over values and ideas. This conflict, he stated, would be over new values, standards and goals. Progress, he argued, "is not the elimination of struggle but a change in its objectives and we all hope a more civilised way of carrying it on". Even if differences in the future were trivial, they would still be differences and would need to be resolved. "If a Socialist society proves to be so satisfactory", Bevan wrote, "that only unimportant differences survive, then people should still be free to express them after their own fashion". He stated that there "is no last question so there is no last answer". He proclaimed that: "We have two duties; to win our own battles and to keep the arena open for others. A closed arena is a closed mind. It is not by accident that these arise together" (1954k, p. 1).

In 1953, on a BBC Radio programme entitled 'This I believe', Bevan expressed his view that because society meant deciding between competing claims, "then the mood in which we approach our fellow human beings should be one of tolerance" (a far-cry from his infamous outburst that the Tory Party was "lower than vermin", perhaps demonstrating the difference between Bevan as a thinker and a partisan, active politician). He continued:

If, furthermore, I am right in saying that the search for the truth will result in a number of different answers to the extent that the circumstances are different, then to tolerance we must add imagination so that we can understand why the other truth differs from ours. We should 'learn to sit where they sit' (Bevan 1953a).

He concluded: "I believe imaginative tolerance to be among the foremost virtues of a civilized mind" (ibid.). Competing claims needed to be treated with equal dignity, merit and care. Bevan insisted that only when democratic plans are outlined with the contribution of the people can a society be called civilised. He argued that when

you have democratic plans, and when you have assumed the power that should accompany political responsibility...the ordinary man and woman is called into the general conference for the purpose of determining what he considers to be the right way in which the national resources should be spent. When that happens, then the ordinary man and woman has reached full stature (1950b, p. 11).

He asserted that what must be done was to “arrange all your plans in a hierarchical order of values, some above the others”. Therefore, the result is the “reaching of a new kind of authoritarian society, but it is the authority of moral purpose freely undertaken” (1950b, p. 12). Bevan emphasised that democratic socialism is

a child of modern society and so of relativist philosophy. It seeks the truth in any given situation, knowing all the time that if this be pushed too far it falls into error. It struggles against the evils that flow from private property, yet realises that all forms of private property are not necessarily evil. Its chief enemy is vacillation, for it must achieve passion in action in the pursuit of qualified judgements. It must know how to enjoy the struggle, whilst recognising that progress is not the elimination of struggle but rather a change in its terms (1952a, p. 170).

The values that democratic socialism emphasised needed to be constantly renewed in the struggle for a better world.

In his speech to the Fabian Society in 1950, Bevan outlined his vision of society based on public ownership and the purpose of collective action. He declared:

That is why, when eventually the story that we have only just began to see has unfolded itself, and when democratically-elected institutions have armed themselves with the full panoply of economic power; when all the members of the community share an equal responsibility for determining the use to which social resources are put; when we have begun to create a type of society in which everyone will regard himself as the ruler, and having regarded himself as a ruler, will realise that he can rule only by putting the social service first and himself last, only then can we really achieve the best results of all that we are planning to do (1950b, p. 14).

Bevan’s reflections on democratic socialism being of “relativist philosophy” correspond with his attitude towards society as being dynamic and constantly changing. The nature of ideas and values may change, but they had their foundation in the real experiences of society. The teachings of Dietzgen, identified in the literature as an influence on Bevan’s understanding of

the materialist conception of history, may have influenced Bevan in this regard. Macintyre quotes a H Wynn-Cuthbert as declaring: “The Materialist Conception of History shows how changes in ideas result from changes in social conditions, and these from changes in economic conditions. Dietzgen explains *how* our conditions determine our thoughts” (1986, p. 131). As this chapter has demonstrated, this relationship is a central component of Bevan’s political thought and his desire to give order and a plan to the development of society.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the importance of ideas, values and morals in Bevan’s political thought and their relationship to economic development. He argued that the modes of thought resulting from capitalist and communist ideologies, while different, were both informed by the underlying economic structure: the dominance of private property created an individualistic society, while communism created a society based on shared ownership, although it demonstrated features that Bevan thought to be authoritarian. The economic base, therefore, shaped the dominant modes of thought in society. This is not to suggest a wholly economic determinist conception of the development of society. Bevan also emphasised the role that ideology plays in shaping, determining and maintaining the property relations in society and the dominance of a certain class. Bevan’s analysis hints at an understanding of the nature of hegemony in class conflict.

Bevan also understood that in a democratic society there would always be conflicting claims over what form society should take and what values should be dominant. The different classes in society were battling over control of production, while also competing over different values. This battle involved capturing national symbols and associating a group’s interests with the general interest of society. Ultimately, Bevan felt that to create a civilised society people needed to be engaged in deciding on a system of priorities to give order to society. This required the functions of economic planning to transform society, and the assertion of working-class interests to correspond to the general interest.

Chapters Three and Four emphasised the importance in Bevan’s thought of the role of economic conditions in the development of society, particularly political structures. Economic conditions also informed the way values were created and shaped in society. A society based on the dominance of private enterprise would lead to values of individualism and competitiveness, but a society based on the dominance of public ownership combined with democracy could transform people’s lives and include them in the ordering of society’s

values. Similar arguments can be seen in Bevan's analysis of societies that were experiencing their own industrial revolutions. In contrast to Thomas-Symonds who argues that Bevan derived more from Rodó than Marx in his critique of capitalism (2015, p. 228), this chapter has demonstrated that while Bevan's criticisms of the vulgarities of capitalism certainly echo Rodó's, his interpretations of the nature of values and ideas were based on a materialist conception of economics.

Taken together, these four chapters emphasise common themes in Bevan's political thought and demonstrate the connections between them. It has been demonstrated that concepts such as class conflict, public ownership, parliamentary democracy, international power politics and competing ideologies and values were inter-connected with each other. The primary feature that these concepts had in common was the relationship between economic conditions and the social organisation of politics and society. The materialist conception of society is apparent throughout.



## Chapter Seven: Bevan as a Political Thinker

This thesis has developed an interpretation of Bevan's political thought, drawing on his extensive writings to lay out, in detail, its core ideas. This chapter now addresses the second aim of the thesis, utilising the insights generated by this detailed engagement to reconsider the debates about Bevan's political thought that emerge from the biographical literature and studies into Labour's political thought laid out in Chapter Two. It begins by responding to the conflicting claims about the core ideas in Bevan's thought, reflecting on the centrality of his Marxism and how his economic analysis informed his outlook on class struggle, on his attitude towards parliament and political power, on international development and on ideological conflict. The analysis carried out in this thesis also aids understanding of the relationship between his thought and the dominant ideologies of the Labour Party. It is argued that considering Bevan as a political thinker has contributed to an improved understanding of him that is more securely based in the text of his writings. As a result, we are armed to respond more clearly to the ongoing disagreements concerning his political thought than has previously been possible.

### Bevan's Political Thought

#### Core Features

Studying Bevan as a political thinker has been challenging because of the unsystematic nature of his writing. It was noted in Chapter One that *In Place of Fear* was his only concerted effort at systematising his ideas. Therefore, the fundamental task of this thesis has been to reconstruct and organise Bevan's voluminous writing and present it on its own merits. The variety of topics analysed by Bevan has also made it more difficult to achieve this task. Nonetheless, despite the challenges, a study of Bevan as a political thinker has been possible. Although they were often journalistic in style, Bevan's writings in *Tribune* and elsewhere demonstrated his concerted attempt to reveal the forces that shaped political events. In this sense, it can be argued that studying Bevan as a political thinker is rewarding as there was a core set of ideas underpinning the bulk of his writing.

Bevan considered himself to be someone who thought deeply about the underlying processes and patterns of politics. In Chapter Three we saw that he emphasised the importance of political theory in making clear the experiences of people in society. So, although bringing together the unsystematic body of writing produced by Bevan and giving

structure to his political thought has been a challenging task, the persistent focal themes of his analytical reflections on society encourage consideration of Bevan as a political thinker rather than simply as a politician or institution builder. The thesis has sought to lend structure to Bevan's writings by taking its lead from Bevan and analysing them through the prism of power. Specifically, Michael Mann's theory of the four sources of social power has been adapted as an organisational framework within which to analyse Bevan's writing. Organising the analysis in this way has allowed for a variety of concepts, themes and ideas in Bevan's thought to be more systematically drawn out, as well as highlighting how these themes and ideas relate to each other. We start with an evaluation of what have emerged as the two core features of Bevan's thought, which are also the main sources of debate in the broader literature: his Marxist economic analysis and his reverence for Parliament.

### Marxism

As shown in Chapter Two, a common, though contested, theme in the literature is the extent to which Marxism was a consistently important aspect of Bevan's thought. The disagreement centres on those who criticise Bevan for sticking dogmatically to a Marxist interpretation of society and those who argue that while he acknowledged the importance of Marxist thought, Bevan was a pragmatist who sacrificed his Marxist principles when he needed to. Campbell (1987), for instance, argues that Bevan's theoretical education never went beyond Marx and that he clung too closely to a Marxist analysis through most of his career. Other authors, however, such as Foot (1975a & 1975b), Thomas-Symonds (2015) and Smith (1993) deny that Bevan was dogmatic in his beliefs.

This thesis has supported the view that an orthodox Marxist interpretation is central to Bevan's analysis of capitalism. It has emphasised his understanding of the materialist conception of history and the relationship between the base and superstructure as continuing themes throughout his writings, which, whether by referencing Marx explicitly or implicitly, demonstrate that this core analysis underpinned his understanding of politics and society. Bevan viewed the changes in the development of society primarily from an economic perspective and emphasised the role that economic conditions played in shaping its structure. This thesis has demonstrated that the way in which Bevan analysed the development of Britain and other nations heavily reflected an orthodox Marxist interpretation of society and historical development. This became a guide for Bevan to understand the world and consistently informed his political outlook.

This conception of history is evidenced in Bevan's critique of capitalist society through the lens of class conflict. As noted in Chapter Three, the clash between the working-class and the ruling-class was central to Bevan's argument that the dominance of private property characterised capitalism and was responsible for its negative features, namely the creation of poverty, greed and the rejection of collectivist principles. He derived this view from his reading of the *Communist Manifesto*, emphasising throughout his career the importance of radically changing the economic base of society and altering property relations. Bevan anticipated that once property relations in society were altered then this would have a profound effect on the political-ideological superstructure of society. Permeating Bevan's writings was the idea that once the dominance of private property had been restricted, making public property the dominant property form, then principles of economic planning could be followed, and a new order of values could be established. Again, implicit in this analysis is the orthodox Marxist view of property relations in the economic base shaping the superstructure of society.

While supporting the conclusions of those writers who emphasise the significance of Marxism in Bevan's thought, the approach of this thesis has gone into more detail in highlighting the precise nature of Bevan's engagement with Marxism and how he applied it to his analysis. This thesis has also shown moments where Bevan presented a more complicated relationship between the economy and the structure of society than is evident in the majority of his writing. It can be seen from Bevan's writings that he also understood the role that the shaping of ideas played in structuring attitudes, values and politics in a society. Perhaps echoing Dietzgen's focus on both the material and the metaphysical in historical materialism, Bevan highlighted the dynamic nature of societal development resulting from the conflicting nature of ideas. He asserted that ideas in society were not fixed, with values and principles changing depending on cultures and time.

Bevan was also interested in the relationship between the economic base, ideas, values and political culture, expounding his theory on how the ruling-class maintained its power. He pointed to conflict over values and symbols in society between the different classes, similar to a Gramscian understanding of hegemony (although it is unlikely that Bevan would have had knowledge of Gramsci's ideas). For example, this study has highlighted instances where Bevan wrote of the struggle over national symbols (1938f) and how the ruling-class associated its interests with those of the masses (1944f & 1959f). His thought was not completely economically deterministic, contrary to Campbell's argument (1987, p. 346); it also revealed the way that conflict over ideas shaped the economic base of

society. These features of his analysis were not developed extensively, although they do demonstrate a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the relationship between ideas and economic conditions than generally identified. This represents an aspect of Bevan's thinking that is often understated because of the literature's predominant focus on class and the economy in Bevan's thought.

Although Bevan's recognition of the ideological nature of class struggle is an often-overlooked aspect of his thought, it is apparent that his writing was nonetheless still grounded in the theory of class struggle and the materialist conception of history. In terms of providing coherence to his political thought, this outlook equipped Bevan with a clear view and understanding of society. Campbell is quite dismissive and critical of Bevan's continuing to base much of his understanding of the economy on Marxism, whereas authors such as Foot (1975a, p. 303) and Thomas-Symonds (2015, p. 236) praise Bevan for not being dogmatic in his politics. This thesis has demonstrated that the underlying theories in Bevan's thought were more complex than Campbell gives them credit for, while it is also apparent that, although often only implicitly, this understanding of the economy consistently informed Bevan's political thought. It has also been shown that rather than Bevan's appearing to discard his Marxism by the end of the 1950s, as argued by Campbell (1987, p. 346), it was a persistent theme in his work. By analysing Bevan's diverse writings from the 1920s to the 1950s, this thesis has been able to demonstrate the prominence and continuity of Bevan's Marxist economic analysis throughout his career.

### Democracy, Parliament and the State

Nonetheless, despite the evident foundation in Marxism, Bevan deviated from it in important ways, most notably in his advocacy of liberal democratic political institutions. The biographical and academic literature on Bevan firmly establishes him as a parliamentarian who argued that, at least after the 1920s, Parliament, particularly the House of Commons, was the weapon through which to agitate on behalf of the working-class. This thesis supports that analysis, demonstrating that Bevan rejected the traditional Marxist view of the State as an instrument of the ruling-class and argued that representative institutions could be used by socialists as a weapon in the class struggle. A vital force in the conflict between poverty and property outlined by Bevan was democracy, and this formulation defined his strategy for using political power. Bevan envisioned representative institutions as potentially reflecting the voice of the masses in society against the interests of property. His rejection of the classical Marxist understanding of the State demonstrates that he was not a conventional

Marxist. In essence, he was a Marxist in terms of his economic analysis. His rejection of what he saw as “Marxist dogma” meant that he would never join the Communist Party or any other party that would not advocate reform through Parliament. He accepted the Marxist argument of social change yet rejected the orthodox Marxist analysis of the State.

Here, Bevan’s British radicalism interacts with his Marxism. Chapter Two identified the different characterisations of Bevan, with some writers such as Marquand (1999) and Spalding (2018) arguing that Bevan’s politics were rooted in the traditions of British radicalism and that his reading of the history of democracy centred on the reforms won by the British working-class movement. While such views are accurate, this thesis has demonstrated that Bevan’s reflections on the development of democracy, whether in Britain or in other nations, can be understood through focusing on the relationship between the base and superstructure fundamental to Bevan’s political thought. He declared a belief that as the economic base of society was developed, for example in the Soviet Union as a result of central planning, then political liberty would eventually materialise for the people in that country (Bevan’s conception of political liberty being based on British parliamentary democracy). Bevan’s economic analysis merged with his admiration for the advancements won by the working-class throughout history.

This understanding can be seen clearly in Bevan’s writings on developing countries and in his analysis of communist societies. The literature contains discussion of Bevan’s reflections on the need to support the economic development of other nations, but this thesis has demonstrated in greater detail the way in which Bevan’s writings on this issue emphasise the importance of the material economic base in his political thought. Bevan argued that as the economic base of communist societies developed, there would be a resultant change in their political-ideological super-structures. His writings in *Tribune* throughout his career on the Soviet Union (e.g. 1941g; 1954h; 1957j; 1958c) and communist nations such as Yugoslavia (1956h) and China (1954f & 1954i) demonstrated Bevan’s belief that greater political liberty and freedoms are granted in nations as a result of the changing position of the worker in society, a theory in Bevan’s thought identified most explicitly by Callaghan (2001) in his analysis of the Bevanites and the Soviet Union. This aspect of Bevan’s political thought is also echoed through his analysis of the development of poorer nations and the need to establish the principles of global justice. Whereas historically the larger nations had exploited poorer countries, Bevan argued that in the future, that relationship needed to change so that national interests of large nations were set aside for the benefit of developing countries. Throughout Bevan’s writings on this subject, he stressed the importance of fostering

economic development in these countries that would result in the creation of political institutions enshrined with the democratic values seen by Bevan as imperative to the functioning of society. The importance of changing property relations was wedded to Bevan's analysis of the development of democracy, underlining the influence of the materialist conception of history on Bevan's thought.

Bevan's writings on the phenomenon of nationalism are also underpinned by this material conception of society. In particular, his writings in *Tribune* during the Suez crisis focused heavily on the tensions between social revolution, national sovereignty, nationalism and the international community. The emphasis he placed on economic conditions in social revolutions can be most clearly identified by studying articles on Egypt (1956j; 1956l; 1956q). His articles analysing imperialism also demonstrate the connections he made between nationalism, social revolutions and economic conditions (e.g. 1954c; 1954f; 1956k; 1956r).

Bevan's economic analysis, combined with his advocacy of democracy, also drives his analysis of international organisations. He emphasised the role of democracy in international affairs, placing central importance on international organisations, specifically the United Nations, in directing the channelling of wealth to different countries. Just as State-action could change the economic conditions of a country, Bevan argued that collective action through the UN could change property relations in poor nations. This would allow democratic principles to become embedded in these countries. History has perhaps shown Bevan to have been quite idealistic in his vision for the future of international cooperation. His writing on the international world demonstrates his attempting to understand ideas of nationalism, sovereignties and relations between states.

Chapter Two identified a clear disagreement amongst Bevan commentators concerning these two important features of his thought: his Marxism and his parliamentarianism. For example, as noted above, Marquand sees Bevan as a radical dissenter rather than a Marxist and argues that the way to understand him is through stressing the radical side of his politics, a conclusion also arrived at by Spalding. Foot sees Bevan as placing more emphasis, upon becoming an MP in 1929, on liberal and democratic virtues rather than carrying out a Marxist interpretation of political events, with these views being reinforced during World War Two. Francis also argues that Bevan's "crude Marxism...needs to be balanced against his essential radicalism and libertarianism" (1997, pp. 24-25). Foote's consideration of Bevan's politics as a restatement of Labour Marxism includes the caveat that it was presented in a way that appealed to labourism (1986, p. 273).

It is true that Bevan added to his understanding of Marxist economics to include an appreciation of the development of democracy in Britain and the importance of parliamentary institutions, which he understood through an appreciation of British radical history, particularly the Chartist movement and the Tolpuddle martyrs. He saw British history as being a “continuous struggle against [oppression]” (1939b, p. 5). Bevan’s ‘liberalism’ also forms part of his understanding of historical development, which derived from his reflections on the development of productive forces and of working-class agitation in society. However, this thesis has argued that these two themes in Bevan’s thought are inextricably connected.

Marquand and Spalding are incorrect, therefore, to dismiss the Marxism of Bevan’s thought as simply rhetoric or as a “nostalgic attachment to the rhetoric of class struggle” (Marquand 1999, p. 121). This is to ignore Bevan’s emphasis on the centrality of property relations and the relationship between the State and the economy. Bevan envisioned that in Britain the economic conditions of society would be radically altered as a result of the State’s intervening in the economy. He had faith in Parliament, as a tool in the right hands, to alter the economic base of society and therefore change people’s lives through the processes of public ownership and economic planning. Socialists could use the power of the State to take control of the commanding heights of the economy and run them in the interests of all of society. Spalding, in particular, fails to sufficiently acknowledge this crucial aspect of Bevan’s analysis, despite conducting an analysis of Bevan’s writings in *Tribune* between 1937 and 1945. For instance, he makes reference to Bevan’s 1940 article on the planned economy (1940h), which formed the basis for his 1943 Fabian essay ‘Plan for Work’ (1943a), but the limited discussion of it is not included in his chapter on Bevan, thus disconnecting it from Bevan’s broader thought (Spalding 2018, p. 197). When assessing why Bevan saw Parliament as being so vital to the working-class, his logic for promoting public ownership cannot be ignored, being predicated on his interpretation of the materialist conception of history.

Bevan fused his belief that property relations needed to be altered with his conception of state power. Rejecting the Marxist theory of the State as necessarily an instrument of class oppression, Bevan combined his belief in Parliament with his analysis of the economy. This was to prove problematic, as Bevan’s analysis of economics and his belief in parliamentary democracy appeared to confront each other. As Campbell argues, while Bevan’s Marxism was a strength, it also became a source of weakness for him (1987, p. xiii), as the next section demonstrates.

## **Bevan and the Labour Party**

This chapter has demonstrated how the analysis undertaken in this thesis advances our understanding of Bevan's thought by comprehensively reconstructing and evaluating its core ideas, and thus contributes to the at least partial resolution of interpretive disputes in Bevan scholarship. This section now turns to consider debates in the literature focused on Bevan's thought within the Labour Party, particularly the prevailing view put forward that Bevan's ideas failed to achieve dominant status in comparison with those of the revisionists. It begins by detailing the findings of the thesis as they relate to discussions of Bevan and the revisionists, critically analysing Bevan's arguments for public ownership and state power. Potential reasons explaining the failure of Bevan's ideas to achieve ascendancy are identified, focusing on the limits of the political traditions in which Bevan was situated. Finally, in agreement with New Left critics of the Labour Party, it is demonstrated that Bevan's thought did not transcend the ideology of labourism, identified in Chapter Two as central to Labour's thought.

### Bevan, Public Ownership and the Revisionists

Chapter Two identified that studies on Labour's political thought often characterise the 1950s as being a battle between the Bevanites and the revisionists (or Gaitskellites) within the party. Bevan is often dismissed as having failed to develop a theory that challenged the revisionists and the prevailing thought of the Labour Party, resulting in his losing out in the battle for theoretical ascendancy. The dominant view in the literature focuses on the divide between those on the left of the party who wanted to see it reaffirm and extend its commitment to nationalisation and those who expressed concern about public ownership, instead placing an emphasis on ensuring equality, redistribution and managing capitalism (Foot 1975b, pp. 254-255; Campbell 1987, p. 245). This literature identifies the failure of the Bevanites to develop a plan that challenged the scepticism towards public ownership that was expressed by the revisionists. They are accused of being intellectually limited and only developing vague and broad principles of socialism. This judgement is also made of Bevan himself.

There was a significant difference between Bevan's and the revisionist's visions for a mixed economy and the role of public ownership. Marquand and Thomas-Symonds both go too far in downplaying the difference between Bevan and the revisionists on this point, Marquand arguing that it was the moral character of the revisionists' plans for a mixed economy that Bevan was against (1999, p. 122), while Thomas-Symonds contends that the



differences on the mixed economy were theoretical rather than practical, arguing that Bevan was more in favour of the revisionist position of consolidation (the idea that further nationalisation was not necessarily needed) than at first appears (2015, p. 193). Although both sides acknowledged the importance of the mixed economy, Bevan remained committed to a radical transformation of the economic base of society, emphasising the effect that this would have on shaping values and politics. The materialist conception of history that underpinned Bevan's economic analysis represented a significant difference from the revisionists who dismissed Marxist theories of social change (see Crosland [1956] 2006).

As Jackson notes, Bevan disagreed with the revisionists' focus on redistribution instead of nationalisation, arguing that the structure of the economy needed to be significantly altered before that could occur. Jackson focuses on the Marxist principles that the outlook of the Bevanites was premised on (2007, pp. 159-160). Foote focuses on this, stating that while there was agreement on the mixed economy, Bevan placed significant emphasis on the dominance of public over private property (1986, p. 276). The analysis of Bevan's political thought in Chapter Four supports these arguments concerning theoretical differences between Bevan and the revisionists.

While the findings of this thesis generally do not contradict the arguments in the literature that Bevan did not seriously develop coherent plans for public ownership (e.g. Campbell 1987, p. 206; Miliband 2009, p. 327; Thomas-Symonds 2015, p. 234), by considering and analysing Bevan's writing on the State and public ownership throughout his career, it has been shown that there were instances where Bevan attempted to provide more detailed plans for nationalisation. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, Bevan's article for *Tribune* in 1940 (1940h) as well as his 1943 Fabian essay were examples of Bevan's attempting to develop a theory of public ownership and economic planning that accounted for the need to consider the relationship between the economy and representative institutions. These writings demonstrate a much more detailed attempt to outline plans for nationalisation, which are generally, and undeservedly, overlooked in evaluations of Bevan's arguments for public ownership.

Regrettably for Bevan's supporters, he did not attempt to reformulate or reassess his ideas during the 1950s and offer a stronger challenge to the revisionists, failing to develop an alternative model that would have led to the transformation of the economy that Bevan argued was necessary. Jackson argues that there was a failure on behalf of the Bevanites to develop "policies that followed their ideological commitments" (2007, pp. 159-160). It was also noted in Chapter Two that both Campbell (1987, p. 271) and Thomas-Symonds (2015, p.

234) agree that Bevan did not develop detailed plans for public ownership. The nationalisation measures undertaken by the 1945-1951 Labour government took some industries out of private property and Bevan argued throughout the 1950s for further public ownership and for the principles of economic planning to be applied more vigorously. He did not, however, adapt his understanding of public ownership to the economic situation that had emerged after the measures of the 1945-1951 Labour government.

The revisionists in the Labour Party, in contrast, did produce updated proposals for nationalisation, with figures such as Anthony Crosland helping to shape the political direction of the party. In his most famous work *The Future of Socialism* ([1956] 2006), Crosland stated that equality should be the most important aim of socialists as public ownership was unlikely to lead to the attainment of social goals. He argued that after the policies enacted by the 1945-1951 Labour government, society was no longer capitalist (2006, p. 46). Chapter Four of this thesis identified a commonality between Bevan's work and Eduard Bernstein's revisionism, yet it was Crosland who specifically acknowledged Bernstein's work. He saw himself as following in the philosopher's footsteps, writing that he was "engaged on a great revision of Marxism, and will certainly emerge as the modern Bernstein" (2006, p. XII). Bevan's theories in the 1950s were still rooted in the ideas of property relations and the need to move beyond capitalist society, while Crosland was a theorist engaged in the most profound revision of Marxism and socialist principles. It is evidently true that Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*, together with his other writing, represented a more systematic attempt at studying society than Bevan ever managed to achieve.

There is a distinction to be made, however, between *plans* for public ownership and a *theory* of public ownership. Bevan did have a strong theory of public ownership, contrary to arguments in the literature. It was a theory that was inherently progressive because it undermined capitalist property relations and put the means of production into the hands of the working class (at least, indirectly) via the latter's potential control of parliament. It was also underpinned by his materialist conception of economic development. Bevan's Marxism was a guide for Bevan in developing his political theories.

The problem, however, is that his understanding of what public ownership could look like was very narrow. Bevan essentially equated public ownership with state control. Alternative ideas that might have involved cooperative ownership or more workers involvement/control appeared of little interest to him. Bevan's preoccupation with the capacity of the State to achieve significant economic change resulted in his failure to recognise the limits of State action in carrying out public ownership, leading him to ignore

other avenues of collective action. His political education was rooted in the local community, his trade union activity and in organised working-class activity, yet his preoccupation with the State led him to discard or not think about options for collective action that were rooted in other institutions. For instance, in discussing the National Health Service, the anarchist academic Colin Ward argues that Bevan ignored the potential for people to organise themselves for medical means through organisations such as the Tredegar Medical Aid Society. He asks: “Why didn’t the whole country become, not one big Tredegar, but a network of Tredegars?” ([1996] 2000, p. 15). He answers that the reason for this was that political parties began to advocate for the State over society. He contends that the State assumed a monopoly over revenue-gathering:

When every employed worker in Tredegar paid a voluntary levy of three old pence in the pound, the earnings of even high-skilled industrial workers were below the liability to income tax. But ever since PAYE was introduced in the second world war, the Treasury has creamed off the cash which once supported local initiatives (2000, p. 16).

His argument is that the NHS cannot be described as “user-controlled”, asserting that:

There once was the option of universal health provision ‘at the point of service’ if only Fabians, Marxists and Aneurin Bevan had trusted the state and centralised revenue-gathering and policy-making less, and our capacity for self-help and mutual aid more (ibid.).

Ward bemoans that in Britain “we have stifled the localist and voluntarist approach in favour of conquest of the power of the state. We took the wrong road to welfare” (2000, p. 17).

Bevan did not necessarily ‘Tredegarise’ Britain, a quote often attributed to Bevan but not traceable (Thompson 2018). Rather, it could be argued that he took power away from people and placed it within the hands of the State. Foot notes that a common phrase of Bevan’s was: “the purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away” (1975b, p. 18). This notion was not necessarily reflected in Bevan’s writings, however, which paid little attention to the possibility to include avenues for taking power away from the State. Bevan’s failure to develop a plan for workers’ participation in industry, despite declaring the need for workers to have an elevated status within industry, is an example of the limits to his conception of the State’s role in managing industries. Miliband, in *The State in Capitalist Society* ([1969] 1973b), highlights the limits of nationalisation when it is not extended beyond a minimal

programme (1973b, pp. 97-99). Bevan can be criticised for insisting on the importance of public ownership without developing a significant critique of the State and its functions.

Beyond emphasising the importance of economic planning and the State, Bevan's vision for public ownership was limited. Although the Labour Party in Parliament had achieved many reforms, there was perhaps an opportunity to move beyond Parliament and the State to further consider extending the scope and form of public ownership and the State's relationship with the economy. This gave the revisionists in the Labour Party the opportunity to argue that the State had gone far enough in developing public ownership in society and could not go any further, although it must be noted that Bevan had himself acknowledged in the 1950s that people were tired of reform and unhappy at intrusive actions on individual liberty such as taxation (1956b, p, 5). There were signs here that Bevan understood that society had changed and that the British people were not eager to see further changes being made to the economy. His response, however, did not contain much substance beyond arguing for further measures of nationalisation.

As with his plans for nationalisation, Bevan's writings on the State were occasionally more sophisticated pre-1945 but were not developed further in the 1950s. These writings contained greater critical scrutiny of its functions and its institutions, such as the Civil Service, as well as its relationship with the economy, demonstrating a more nuanced analysis than appeared in his writings post-1945. For example, Bevan's reflections on the relationship between capitalism and the State, the development of Fascism and its relationship to capitalist development and his blueprints for future public ownership are evidence of his attempts to outline the challenges facing socialists and to develop proposals for the future of society. Articles written in 1938 (1938h) and 1944 (1944e; 1944g) showcase Bevan engaging in a more sophisticated analysis of the limits of State power, the different institutions within the State and their functions and the State's relationship with the economy.

Quite often, however, Bevan would pull back to more prosaic concerns just as he appeared to be engaging more critically and creatively with a certain issue (see Chapter Four). His failure to develop the analysis presented in these articles, as well as the ones on nationalisation, might be reason enough for them not to be taken into consideration in the conclusions of the studies identified in the literature. Indeed, these are rare examples of Bevan's thinking through these issues. Although some of the themes are touched upon in later writing after 1945, Bevan does not go further in developing these ideas. *In Place of Fear* returned to asserting the notion that Parliament is supreme and can be utilised to change society, but Bevan's reflections on the limits of the State did not feature prominently here and

it did not contain a blueprint for public ownership that matches the detail of his Fabian essay of 1943 and other writings pre-1945. It is understandable, therefore, that this analysis failed to be taken seriously by the party leadership into the 1950s. This thesis has identified, however, that when the wider scope of his writings is analysed, it is apparent that Bevan did attempt to develop plans for nationalisation and reconsider the role of the State.

### The Limitations of Bevan's Intellectual Inheritance

Why then did Bevan fail, post-1945, to develop upon his more critical analysis of the State and the more detailed plans for public ownership? One possible explanation is that Bevan was unable to commit time to his theoretical writings due to the responsibility placed on his shoulders as a Minister in government. He did not have the time to contribute as regularly to *Tribune* as he did between 1937 and 1945 (as well as the need to meet deadlines that forced him to write and think through political questions); therefore, there is less evidence of his attempting to develop theories or plans for public ownership. In contrast, Anthony Crosland, for example, might have had more time to develop his ideas considering he lost his parliamentary seat in 1955. Therefore, it is understandable that Bevan's thought was limited in some respects. He did, however, publish *In Place of Fear* in 1952 after he had resigned from government and Labour had lost power. Arguably, without the pressures that came with a ministerial position, Bevan would have had the opportunity to carry out a more systematic analysis than he did, as well as engaging in more detailed works later in his career.

Another possible explanation is that Bevan failed to develop his ideas further because of the pragmatic nature of his politics. An argument common in the literature is that Bevan was ultimately a pragmatist who understood the importance of working with and within institutions and the need to compromise in order to get measures through. Nuttall, for instance, considers that Bevan understood the multi-faceted nature of power, leading him to seek compromise with others (2008, p. 25). New Left writers Miliband (2009) and Nairn (1964b) criticise the way that Bevan compromised with the leadership and was willing to shift his position and adapt his views towards certain policies in the name of unity within the Labour Party. This suggests that Bevan acquiesced in letting through certain proposals that he disagreed with. Bevan was certainly pragmatic in his role as a minister and also during the late 1950s when he appeared to develop closer relationships with Gaitskell.

This argument has merit when analysing Bevan's ministerial career and his becoming closer to Gaitskell from 1955-onward: Bevan had to compromise on some issues when he was developing the NHS; he had to work within restrictions placed upon his ministry when

developing the government's house-building programme; and he was also willing to compromise on Labour Party policies that did not go far enough in pushing for socialism. His 1957 Brighton speech on the bomb is perhaps the most prominent example of the 'pragmatic' Bevan. Despite this, however, in stepping back from the personal and political controversies of Bevan's career this thesis has demonstrated that his writings contained consistent arguments throughout the 1950s that were out of step with those of the leadership of the Labour Party. Although he was willing to compromise and adjust his position in the name of unity, this thesis has demonstrated that Bevan was still arguing the same central points in his writings, which reflected a foundational belief in the idea of altering property relations in society and the need to move beyond capitalism to a new order of society (e.g. 1959a). Campbell's argument that Bevan doubted Marxism in the late 1950s (1987, p. 346) is not supported by the analysis in this thesis of Bevan's writings during this period. As Ellison points out, personal ambition and actions do not necessarily equate to the abandonment of someone's vision for society (1994, p. XI). Bevan's pragmatism does not, therefore, provide a satisfactory explanation for his failure to develop his ideas further: the need to compromise did not prevent Bevan from arguing his case in the pages of *Tribune*.

A more satisfactory explanation can perhaps be found by considering the limitations of the intellectual traditions from which Bevan emerged. Macintyre notes the competing theories of the State between Labour Party socialists and Marxists in Britain that emerged post-World War One. He asserts that "Labour leaders regarded the state as the political expression of the community" (1986, p. 177). At various points the State was misused, but, he argues, this did not mean that Labour leaders felt it needed to be discarded. He presents the Labour socialists' argument as being based on a belief that through "the state the community would take control of economic life; it would confiscate private wealth and take industry into public ownership" (1986, p. 178). Barry Jones and Michael Keating argue that the Labour Party "has rarely given any sustained attention to the form of the state whose power and role it is pledged to extend" (1985, p. 2). They assert that this neglect

stems from a sheer intellectual failure on the part of Labour leaders and policy makers...to specify the changes in the state necessary to achieve their policy goals while preserving and extending individual and associative liberties; or to identify and frankly recognize the limits to state power (1985, pp. 2-3).

British Marxists, on the other hand, argued that the "very function of the state was class coercion". They also, Macintyre contends, "appreciated that the capitalist state was far more

complex than earlier forms of state organisation”. Macintyre also argues, however, that in other ways British Marxists in their analysis of the State “were far more simplistic”. According to Macintyre, they saw the State simply as an organ of the capitalist class and institutions “as mere camouflage for capitalism”. Macintyre argues that this “was pervasive in British Marxism, and is closely related to its over-simple view of the materialist conception of history” (1986, p. 179). Within the two political traditions that Bevan was most associated with, Marxism and labourism, there existed serious issues with their analyses of the State.

The Marxist analysis of the economy and the radical traditions of Parliament and British democracy from which Bevan drew were both insufficient to provide sophisticated understandings of the British State and the limits of political power. It was after Bevan’s death that critics began to question the British State (Anderson 1964; Nairn 1977 & 1981) and develop a critical understanding of State power. Writers such as Raymond Williams also began to develop critiques of materialism in Marxist thought (Williams 1973 & 1978). Alongside this, theorists such as Ralph Miliband (1973b) and Nicos Poulantzas ([1978] 2014) began to engage with substantial critiques of the role and character of the State in Marxist theory. Writing in 1970, Miliband argued that “the exercise of *socialist* power remains the Achilles’ heel of Marxism” (1970, p. 309). Christopher Pierson in *Marxist Theory & Democratic Politics* (1986) outlines the many different attempts to overcome weaknesses in the Marxist tradition by “building their differing accounts of state, society and democracy upon a critique of the more familiar premisses [sic] of conventional Marxist analysis” (1986, p. 133). As detailed above, there were instances where Bevan began to question the exercise of State power in relation to his analysis of the economy. He did not, however, begin to question it systematically, nor even persist with his questions.

The core foundations of Bevan’s thought – class conflict, property relations, economic development, the importance of Parliament and democracy – are evident in his writings throughout his career. His thought, however, was not extensively developed beyond these initial foundations. Bevan appeared stuck in a certain period, analysing society in the terms he understood from the 1920s-onward, not moving away from this materialist conception of capitalist society. Referring to the Bevanites as a movement, rather than Bevan himself, Raymond Williams questions the relevance of their politics to the 1950s. He argues that “they did not understand at all the changes of post-war Britain. The capitalism they were describing was the capitalism of the thirties which led inevitably to depression and dire poverty” (1981, p. 368). Speaking of Bevan individually, Williams states that he “never

thought Bevan was defining the problems of contemporary British society”, Bevan seemingly being unable to identify what the problems were in Britain (1981, p. 369). This is not to argue that Bevan should necessarily have followed the arguments of the revisionists in the party; but certain aspects of his political thought could perhaps have been developed further. As noted in this chapter, Crosland, for example, attempted to comprehensively reassess the nature of British society and British socialism. Throughout the 1950s Bevan did not try to do the same. As discussed above, Bevan’s most insightful analysis of the State came pre-1945.

His reliance on classical Marxist understandings of the economy can be considered as a reason why Bevan never revised his analysis during the 1950s. Foote notes that Bevan had once declared that “if private enterprise could provide security there would be no need for public ownership, yet that was precisely what private enterprise appeared to be doing, at least in Britain” (1986, p. 282). He argues that Bevan’s politics and stress on the struggle between poverty and wealth were not appropriate to the “wealth and boom” of the 1950s. He asserts that Bevan gave the impression of “a society frozen in the political and social attitudes of twenty years before”. Foote goes on to argue that Bevan’s “Labour Marxism [outlined in Chapter Two] belonged to an earlier age than that of washing machines, televisions and rising living standards” (1986, p. 281). This thesis confirms Foote’s conclusion. Bevan’s evaluation of society as a clash between poverty and property, a clash between the working-class and the ruling-class, did not reflect the ways in which class and economic conditions had changed in Britain. Capitalism no longer appeared as a threat to society as it was being effectively managed by the State. The conflict between public and private property did not seem as stark as Bevan had defined it. The failure to fully appreciate this change was a weakness in the development of Bevan’s thought. It may help explain why he never reassessed his proposals for nationalisation post-1945.

Foote points to Richard Crossman, a prominent Bevanite in the Labour Party, as someone “who was aware of the need to develop a new analysis more suited to conditions of prosperity” (1986, p. 282). He argues that as early as 1952 Crossman “was aware of the sterility of merely repeating old nostrums of Labour Marxism” (1986, p. 283) and that the Labour left had failed to take account of “Keynesian economic techniques [that] had made unemployment and economic crisis nightmares of a past never to return” (1986, pp. 283-284). Although a presumptive argument to make – economic crises have been a regular occurrence in liberal democracies since the 1950s – it is clear that Bevan did not engage systematically in revising his thought to take account of economic changes to British society. This is not to argue that Bevan should have rejected his beliefs, but rather to state that if Bevan had



engaged in a process of revision then he may have been able to offer a more convincing theory of social change.

It has been established that authors such as Campbell argue that Bevan was too dogmatic in sticking with outdated principles (although he argues that Bevan abandoned his Marxism in the late 1950s). In Bevan's defence, however, it is perhaps understandable that in the 1950s he would have retained a faith in his initial view of socialism. Although he was critical of the Labour government's not going far enough in its nationalisation measures, he was still proud of the measures that it implemented between 1945 and 1951. As the Minister responsible for establishing the NHS, he would have experienced first-hand what could be achieved through parliamentary action. David Howell asserts that there was "a tendency to assume that the post-war reforms provided a springboard for Socialist advance – that somehow they marked an invasion of capitalist priorities by those of a Socialist alternative". He argues that this "positive appraisal led to Socialists taking a relatively benign view of the British State... Now much of the Labour Left takes a much more limited view of the record of 1945-51 and has little illusion about the role of the State". Howell asserts that it

is unfair to say simply that a later generation has seen through the illusion of an earlier period – unfair because given the contrasting political experiences of the 30s and 40s, such illusions were hardly surprising... Awareness of the limitations of post-war Labour reforms has sharpened the Left's perceptions of the complexities of capitalist power (Howell n.d., p. 37).

A reading of Bevan's political thought throughout the 1950s demonstrates that he maintained a benign view of the State, although it has been detailed in Chapter Four and in this chapter that Bevan did begin to question the extent to which the post-war Labour reforms had radically altered society. His political thought reflected an adherence to an orthodox Marxist analysis of the economy that he did not attempt to reassess during the 1950s, as well a benign view of the State that has been the hallmark of the labourist tradition in Britain. Bevan did not appear to have the intellectual toolkit necessary to move beyond or develop upon these political traditions.

## Labourism

Ultimately, adherence to these political traditions probably explains why Bevan never moved beyond the core assumptions of labourism. Nairn and Miliband, writing after Bevan's death in 1960, argue that Bevan reaffirmed the dogmatic faith that the party had in parliamentary institutions, leading him to regularly compromise with the its leadership (Miliband 2009, p, 327; Nairn 1964b, p. 49). It is claimed that the structure of the party placed limits on what the left could achieve. Leach (2002), for example, argues that due to the dialectic between evolutionary and revolutionary socialist positions, accommodation between different groups was an important feature of labourism.

The analysis carried out throughout this thesis supports the claim that Bevan's thought fitted comfortably within the ideology of labourism. Arguably, Bevan placed too much faith in Parliament's ability to radically transform society. Bevan rejected the thesis that the State was inherently an instrument of the ruling-class and of class oppression; this was a feature of the Tories in government. Instead, Bevan maintained that the State could be used to transform society in the interests of the working-class. New Left critics, however, claim that the Labour Party was led by figures who did not share Bevan's desire to see society radically transformed. Bevan appeared to recognise this, regularly arguing that leaders Attlee and Gaitskell were too moderate in advocating for socialism. As detailed in Chapter Four, Bevan wanted to guard the party against 'revisionists' and proponents of 'pragmatism' and 'compromise', arguing that the Labour Party needed to go further in its reforms than it did between 1945 and 1951. His vision was not shared by the Labour leadership.

The problems with the Labour Party identified by critics of labourism were also recognised by Bevan himself. He consistently argued for the party to push for more radical change, criticising what he saw as its conservative nature and arguing, particularly during the 1950s, against moderation and those who wanted to see the Labour Party become more "pragmatic" (1956e, p. 4). He accused the leaders of the largest trade unions within the party as being too conservative and having too great an influence on party policy to the detriment of socialist aims (1943c; 1943e; 1954p). He insisted on the need for the Labour Party to provide socialist education to the working-class to raise class consciousness and he also argued for a form of nationalisation that went beyond the bureaucratisation of industry, although as noted above he did not extensively detail what this would entail. Therefore, it could be argued that the structures of the Labour Party and the nature of labourism would

have prevented his ideas from being adopted even if they were presented more systematically or if he had been more forceful in asserting them.

Nairn and Miliband do not provide a detailed analysis of Bevan's political thought, instead focusing on the actions of the Bevanites and the left of the Labour Party in failing to challenge the limits of labourism. The analysis developed in this thesis has led to a possible explanation for Bevan's failure to challenge Labour orthodoxy: namely, that his faith in British parliamentary politics fitted comfortably with the core assumptions of labourism. As already mentioned above, Foote argues that Bevan's politics reflected "a restatement of Labour Marxism, but presented in a manner appealing to the emotions of labourism" (1986, p. 273). This is certainly evident when Bevan's thought is analysed. Bevan appears to have adopted the economic analysis of Marx but dismissed the orthodox Marxist conception of the State, instead maintaining a reverence for British parliament. This allowed Bevan to adapt his analysis of economics to accommodate his faith in parliamentary institutions, arguing for public ownership to reverse property relations but also insisting on the primacy of Parliament and the features of British democracy that went with it (party competition, elections, representatives etc.) Alongside this, Bevan remained acceptable to the mainstream of the Labour Party because he argued for a mixed economy rather than complete socialisation of industry. This thesis has demonstrated, therefore, that Bevan fitted comfortably within the Labour Party without being able to offer a fundamental challenge to its core assumptions.

Whether Bevan *wanted* to challenge these assumptions is difficult to judge. A reading of the 1959 diary entries of Geoffrey Goodman – a journalist with whom Bevan developed a good relationship – while following Bevan on the 1959 General Election campaign, point to someone who was exhausted (often physically) from the battles he was facing within the Labour Party (Foot 1975b, pp. 622-627). In this account, Goodman quotes Bevan as complaining that "No more than about fifty M.P.s [about one-fifth] are socialists" (Bevan cited in Foot 1975b, p. 623) and describing Gaitskell as "a complete gimmick man" (Bevan cited in Foot 1975b, p. 626). Bevan is said to have proclaimed: "I refuse to belong to a Party unless that Party is the vehicle of principles in which I believe – Socialist principles" (Bevan cited in Foot 1975b, p. 627). This account of Bevan's losing faith in the Labour Party as a vehicle for socialism demonstrates his desire to see the party undergo fundamental change. He was not content with its strategy, indicating that arguments Bevan moved to the right of the party in accommodation with Gaitskell are not entirely accurate. The approach of this thesis confirms this reading. By identifying the basic ideological underpinnings of Bevan's

thought and reading his voluminous work, it has been demonstrated that Bevan did not depart significantly from them in the 1950s.

As noted above, throughout his career Bevan identified serious problems that would later be critiqued by the New Left – the moderate nature of the Labour Party, the conservative nature of the State, the limits of working-class consciousness in Britain, the role of culture, civil society and the press in shaping attitudes and values. Although these aspects were evident in his thought, he did not develop them extensively, instead insisting on the centrality of public ownership and economic planning to the building of socialism in Britain. He touched upon the issues identified by the New Left but did not carry out a thoroughgoing critique of the Labour Party.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to Chapter One, this thesis had two central aims: to investigate Bevan through the prism of his political thought, reconstructing his political philosophy from his written works; and, secondly, to use the insights generated by this approach to reconsider the debates about Bevan's ideas that can be found in the extant literature. To achieve these aims, three core interpretive decisions were made. These were:

- 1) To focus on Aneurin Bevan primarily as a political thinker rather than a politician or institution builder;
- 2) In doing so, adopting power as a lens/framework through which to view and understand Bevan's political thought; and in particular,
- 3) Adopting Mann's typology of power as a heuristic device that is particularly suitable for analysing Bevan's political thought.

This approach has enabled a more detailed analysis of Bevan's political thought to be developed than has previously been achieved. It has enabled the first aim to be fulfilled and for Bevan to be studied as a political thinker, his writings to be reconstructed in as coherent a way as possible and the main features of his political thought to be analysed and assessed. By studying Bevan's thought in this way, the thesis has provided fresh insight into many of the features identified in the literature such as his Marxism and parliamentarianism, as well as analysis of concepts and themes overlooked or underplayed in the literature, such as the importance of Bevan's writings on the international arena and on the ideological nature of class struggle.

This thesis has identified the importance of Marxism in Bevan's thought, but it has also highlighted instances where his writing deviates from the Marxism that he appeared to adopt from his initial reading of the *Communist Manifesto*. It has been shown that although Bevan's thought was often rooted in key Marxist concepts, such as class conflict and historical materialism, he would often depart from an orthodox understanding of these concepts. Important deviations from this understanding included his faith in Parliament and liberal democracy to achieve power for the working-class and his argument that property relations needed to be reversed rather than abolished. In addition to this, while Bevan's analysis of historical development often focused on the dominant role of the economic base, he frequently demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the important role played by the political and ideological superstructure in society, making the case that ideas and political institutions could be utilised to alter the economic base of society. The analysis, therefore, has revealed tensions between Bevan's reliance on orthodox Marxist principles and instances where he deviates from them. There is potential to further explore these nuances in future research in order to more fully understand Bevan's engagement with Marxism and its location amongst British Marxist thought during his lifetime.

Despite moments in his career when Bevan sacrificed certain principles for political expediency, core assumptions on economic and political development remained central to his political thought throughout his career. He emphasised the importance of class conflict and the centrality of property relations in shaping the social structure of society and its dominant ideas, attitudes and values. Bevan also applied this philosophy to the international realm. A prominent theme in the literature, however, was that Bevan's politics was based on vague socialist principles that did not add up to a systematic and developed political thought. Francis, for example, argues that Bevan's political thought was instinctive rather than systematic, being based on a mixture of Marxism, radicalism, libertarianism and romanticism (1997, p. 24), Ellison contends that Bevan was only interested in the "broad nature of socialist ideas", meaning that there was a lack of strong foundations in his thought (1994, p. 47), while Campbell emphasises the vagueness of Bevan's Marxist first principles (1987, p. 213). This led authors such as Campbell, Marquand, Foote, Ellison and Francis to argue that Bevan's ideas were not applicable to the 1950s due to their underdevelopment.

This thesis has demonstrated that rather than being based on a vague set of principles, there was an underlying argument and foundation that guided Bevan's political thought. His understanding of Marxism allowed him to analyse the internal politics of Britain and other nations, as well as international relations. This reliance on Marxism, however, while being a

source of strength in Bevan's political thought, was also a source of weakness. His reliance on arguments reflecting the base-superstructure division in society and the centrality of class conflict limited the extent to which he developed his understanding of the world to reflect changes that had occurred throughout the 1950s.

Bevan's deviation from orthodox Marxist *political strategy* to argue for the potential of Parliament to radically change society never synthesised with his economic analysis as he failed to merge his materialist conception of economic development with his reverence for liberal democratic institutions. He noted the recognition that thinkers such as Marx, Engels and Lenin gave to parliamentary institutions, but argued that they did not develop their analysis far enough (1952, p. 19). Bevan's contention that Parliament needed to be used in order to capture State power and intervene in the economy to change property relations led him to argue for public ownership. His reverence for Parliament, however, meant that he was unable to sufficiently develop proposals for public ownership to the extent that he did pre-1945 when he questioned the relationship between representative institutions and state-owned companies.

Bevan's almost uncritical analysis of the State (apart from a few instances pre-1945) can be attributed to the limitations of his intellectual inheritance. The weaknesses of the Marxist conception of the State were identified by Bevan, but he did not recognise the limits to the conception of the State also inherent in the labourist tradition. He maintained a strong faith in the power of parliamentary institutions, enhanced by his reflections on the achievements of the 1945-1951 Labour government, yet he did not develop proposals for public ownership or an analysis of political power that was based on a reassessment of property relations in light of changes in British society that had occurred during the 1950s (largely as a result of the changes made by the Labour government), allowing the revisionists to take the initiative. Crosland developed a significant revision of socialism and has been hailed as the dominant theoretician in the party. After Bevan's death, substantial critiques of the Marxist and labourist understandings of the State began to emerge from thinkers such as Nairn, Anderson, Miliband and Poulantzas. Bevan was not so critical as these writers. Despite proclaiming the need for Labour to become more radical in its socialism and its commitment to public ownership and economic planning, Bevan was unable to transcend the limits of labourism.

Some of his writing, particularly during the 1940s, demonstrated a more critical analysis than his post-1945 writings, particularly concerning the role of the State and the role of ideology in affecting and shaping society. Nevertheless, the views expressed in these

articles were not developed. It is therefore interesting to ponder on what could have been. Ultimately, Bevan did not build upon his early ideas. Several explanations have been offered as to why this is the case. In terms of Bevan's intellectual development, the most convincing explanation can be found in the limits of the political traditions that Bevan's thought was rooted in. He did not develop a substantive theory of the State, its functions and its relationship to the economy or adapt his theory of property relations and the development of the economy. Bevan's political thought meant that he fitted comfortably within the mainstream of labourism, despite often appearing to be a challenger to its core assumptions. His advocacy of Parliament and the British State aligned with the dominant political strategies within the party. This may also help to explain why Bevan has been appealed to by politicians across the ideological spectrum in the Labour Party today.

The approach adopted in this thesis has also contributed to achieving the second aim of using the insights developed in this study to reconsider the debates about Bevan found in the literature. Writers studying Bevan's political thought focus predominantly on *In Place of Fear* to explain its key features. Although it offers an accurate portrayal of his thought, representing his most systematic attempt at articulating it, this thesis has demonstrated the value of analysing a much wider literature. The comprehensive analysis of Bevan's writings has also allowed a temporal analysis of Bevan's thought to be undertaken. This has enabled the identification of the continuity of important themes in Bevan's thought, such as his Marxism, as well as highlighting periods, not adequately captured in the existing literature, when Bevan's writings deviated from his more general analysis (such as instances where he developed a more critical analysis of the State).

By focusing predominantly on Bevan's writings and taking them at face value, it could be argued that this analysis risks ignoring potential contradictions that emerged during his career. The disconnect between much of his writings on international relations and his speech on the bomb is an example of this. It is true that Bevan's writings do not always correspond with his actions. For instance, the argument that he became closer to Gaitskell in the late 1950s and tempered in his radicalism is certainly evident when his actions within the Labour Party are considered. Nevertheless, just focusing on an event such as this does not take into account Bevan's political writing during the same period. Instead, this thesis has attempted to get to the heart of Bevan's political ideas, and, as a result, this analysis offers a different perspective to these debates over Bevan's career. Engaging with Bevan's myriad writings has resulted in the production of a thesis Appendix that for the first time contains an

accessible index of Bevan's contributions to *Tribune* between 1937 and 1960. This index will act as a valuable resource for future scholars studying Aneurin Bevan.

Quite often, this thesis has arrived at similar conclusions to those in parts of the literature. Nonetheless, approaching Bevan through a significant engagement with his writings has allowed for a greater depth of detailed analysis of Bevan's political thought to be carried out than is evident in the existing literature. In addition to this, studies of Bevan's political thought are quite disparate. This thesis has allowed for the various issues considered by Bevan to be brought together and for the connections between them to be established.

This thesis has also contributed to the debates in the literature concerning the nature of Bevan's thought. The most prominent of these debates concerns the precise nature of Bevan's Marxism and his attitude towards Parliament. Indeed, interpretations of the 'radical' and the 'moderate' Bevan are prevalent in political discourse today. Rather than trying to characterise Bevan as either a Marxist or a British radical, this thesis has presented a more complex picture of the relationship between Marxism and democracy in Bevan's political thought. The thesis has reinforced explanations for the limits of Bevan's ideas that focus on the weaknesses of the political traditions in which Bevan was situated. It has, however, contradicted attempts to define Bevan by either his Marxism or his radicalism: these two traditions and the interactions between them in Bevan's writings were both central to his thought. This approach has established a greater understanding of these aspects of Bevan's political philosophy to an extent that has not been possible through a biographical approach or through the more general literature that provides a less extensive analysis of Bevan's work. As a consequence, it has provided explanations for some of the limitations of Bevan's philosophy that build upon the arguments of other theorists. It is hoped that this approach contributes to a greater understanding of Bevan's political thought.

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Despite the plethora of resources available to study Aneurin Bevan, he is often considered to be an enigmatic figure, his precise desires and aims difficult to interpret. He is seen by many as a deeply principled politician, refusing to budge in his desire to achieve a better world. At the same time, however, he is seen as a pragmatic politician, fully aware of the nature of power in British politics and perfectly willing to compromise with those he disagreed with, even on fundamental principles. He was willing to denounce the Tories as vermin and condemn the actions of many in the Conservative party as bordering on Fascism, while at the same time wining and dining with his political opponents. He enjoyed the finer things in life, insisting that nothing was too good for the working-class and that it was important to discuss



and engage with your political opponents. He was a product of the industrial working-class of South Wales, but he also increasingly enjoyed the comforts of the English countryside. He was considered by many as the leader of the left in Britain, yet he was also considered by left-wing critics of the party as not being radical enough. These conflicting views inform many of the appeals to Bevan in contemporary politics. Establishing a definitive interpretation of Bevan is not something that is likely to be achievable.

This thesis has not attempted to do that. It is the nature of discussions on figures who have left such a significant legacy that there will be disagreement. It is regrettable that Bevan never produced an analysis as systematised and as complete as those of other prominent thinkers at the time. Nevertheless, this thesis has demonstrated the value of considering Bevan as a political thinker and attempting a more systematic reconstruction of his voluminous writing. As a figure continuously invoked by politicians for many different reasons, it is vital to understand his political thought. In a time of heated debates between different factions of the Labour Party over its strategy, a study of this kind can shed light on what has come before and where the future road might lie. Over fifty years after his death, the challenges and issues analysed by Bevan are still being grappled with by the left and in increasingly fractious times. In seeking answers to these crises, Bevan will almost certainly continue to be an influential figure in the Labour Party and beyond. This thesis has sought to enhance our understanding of such a complex figure and contribute to these discussions.

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## Appendix: Tribune Articles by Category

A central task of this thesis has been to reconstruct Bevan's voluminous writings. This Appendix collects Bevan's articles in *Tribune* under his own name and under his pseudonym 'M.P.'. The purpose of this Appendix is to enable future scholars studying Bevan to identify which articles discuss a particular subject. Therefore, they have been organised according to the topic under which they provide the most insight. It is inevitable that a number of the articles collected here could be included under more than one category and often cover other related topics. Nonetheless, they have been assigned to their most relevant category.

### Economic Power

#### Capitalism and Private Enterprise

These articles are the most focused that Bevan wrote on capitalism, although, as noted in the thesis, Bevan's critique of capitalism remained central to the vast majority of his writing.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
12 February 1937	Government Offers Dumb-bells to Children Who Want Food (M.P.)	7
23 April 1937	Prim Neville takes his bow for state profiteering (M.P.)	7
18 June 1937	Softening soap for workers and convicts (M.P.)	6
5 November 1937	Cabinet's witch-doctor remedy in "war on slump" dilemma	5
3 December 1937	On babies unborn and fish that's too dear	7
9 September 1955	Society and your pay packet	4-5
23 September 1955	Government by the bankers	4
11 November 1955	Beware of this Tory trap	1
19 July 1957	Spectre over Europe	1&3
30 August 1957	Back to free markets - and the jungle	5
7 March 1958	The slump and the summit	5
30 January 1959	The decline of capitalism	9

## Class Conflict

Bevan's analysis of class conflict, as outlined in this thesis, underpins his writing throughout his career.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
29 January 1937	Baldwin's retreat from freedom in case of the five men (M.P.)	7
5 February 1937	Deportation - the old Tory cure for unemployment (M.P.)	7
19 February 1937	John Simon takes brief from the factory employer (M.P.)	7
26 February 1937	Grenfell and Cripps put the mineowners in dock (M.P.)	7
16 April 1937	£40 a week for our ex-premiers -- 10s for Brain workers (M.P.)	7
30 April 1937	MPs pack commons to listen to rich men's sad woes (M.P.)	7
4 June 1937	The clergyman departs and now the undertaker takes over (M.P.)	6
25 March 1938	Class War In Commons Committee "A"	7
14 April 1938	A bad break for our Dr. Goebbels	7
2 February 1940	The means test	1
18 October 1940	The Tories' prisoner	12-13
8 November 1940	Means test dead and damned	12-13
18 April 1941	The cow, the farmer & the MP	12-13
22 March 1957	A declaration of class war	4

## Trade Unions and Industrial Action

Bevan's attitudes towards the trade union movement, inside and outside of the Labour Party, as well as the power of direct action are collected here.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
2 April 1937	It wants more than words to end arms racketeers (M.P.)	7
7 May 1937	"Peace in our time" Baldwin sings his swan-song, sighing for a quiet coronation (M.P.)	7
22 July 1938	Wanted - a new drive for wages	7
12 August 1938	Big wage problem faces the TUC	3
18 November 1938	Workers fight dictatorship plot in France	13
23 December 1938	For national service make terms - or be tricked	11
17 February 1939	The police were out	5
23 August 1940	A job for the trade unions	12-13
23 July 1943	Trade unions and the Labour Party	6-7
26 May 1944	The Labour Party and the trade unions	6-7
20 May 1955	Why Winston Churchill has been gagged	2&8
17 April 1959	The budget and the unions	1&9

## Political Power

### Parliament and Democracy

Bevan's insights into the functions of Parliament and his advocacy of the House of Commons as a vehicle for social change.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
1 January 1937	When kings and commons meet in medieval tourney (M.P.)	7
12 March 1937	Storm meets Baldwin's efforts to save democracy for the rich (M.P.)	7
9 April 1937	Why Mr Ernest Brown infuriates opposition and Tory members alike (M.P.)	7
9 July 1937	After prayers, when our MPs become curious (M.P.)	7
29 October 1937	People versus privilege lock in combat as Parliament reassembles	7
12 November 1937	Tory benches cheer white-headed boy of reaction	7
17 December 1937	Ernest Brown heads for dangerous waters	7
11 February 1938	People versus property	7
18 February 1938	When the burglar invests in state bonds	7
13 May 1938	How the landowner pays for the experts	7
29 July 1938	MPs recall days of August 1914	3
17 March 1939	Make the government act	10-11
10 November 1939	Attempt to muzzle MPs	5
23 February 1940	Hitler - the bogeyman	1
19 July 1940	Watchdog of liberty	7
15 November 1940	We get a dirty deal from the press	12-13
21 March 1941	MP's tongues must be loosed	6-7
2 May 1941	Hope and new strength	12-13
20 August 1943	Rubber stamp M.P.'s	11
18 May 1951	Wanted - a Minister for Social Services	5
26 November 1954	Can Parliament do it?	1
18 January 1957	Save democracy - have a general election now	5
6 June 1958	How long will it last?	7



5 June 1959	Bevan on Parliament	12
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### The State

Bevan's most insightful and sophisticated analyses of the State. Although, as highlighted in the thesis, his pre-1945 critique of the State was not substantially developed upon.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
8 July 1938	Highwaymen in the upper house	7
13 October 1944	The T.U.C.'s two voices	6-7
30 September 1955	Burgess and Maclean	8

### Public Ownership and Economic Planning

Bevan's advocacy of public ownership is evident in other writings, but his arguments for it are most clearly stated in these articles.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
26 November 1937	When a mines minister wished he wasn't	7
10 December 1937	Labour Takes Honours in Commons Coal Battle	7
1 April 1938	The struggle behind the coal bill	7
3 June 1938	This cabinet of incompetents	7
31 May 1940	The way to win through	12-14
11 October 1940	Blind men are leading us!	10-11
25 October 1940	Next steps to a new society	6-7
13 December 1940	End the great coal muddle	12-13
28 February 1941	All is not well	1
29 December 1944	Who wants controls?	9-10
31 January 1947	Ten Years of Tribune	7
3 February 1950	The people's coming of age	3-4
13 June 1952	The fatuity of coalition	1-2
2 January 1953	The truth about Harold Macmillan	4
30 October 1953	Steel ramp exposed	1-2
18 June 1954	Now will Labour learn?	1
29 October 1954	Rationed - or "free"?	1-2
12 November 1954	Nationalisation and tomorrow	1&12

17 December 1954	Why scrap the bob?	1
24 December 1954	The Coal Board loss	1
21 January 1955	Should we plan wages?	1
4 February 1955	No jam today	1
8 April 1955	Britain without Churchill	1
8 July 1955	Automation: The socialist answer	2
13 January 1956	Facts and taxes	5
10 January 1958	Who has to hold the baby?	5
7 November 1958	Tory gamblers pour £1,500 millions down the drain	1&3
9 January 1959	Private enterprise vs public ownership: The moon and the £	5
11 December 1959	How to avoid shipwreck	5

### Labour Party

Despite being a consistent advocate for the Labour Party as *the* vehicle to achieve socialism, Bevan had a troubled relationship with its leaders and many of its key figures. These articles contain Bevan's criticisms of the party, his thoughts on its links with the trade union movement and his views on its attitude and approach to socialism.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
23 December 1937	Attlee, Cripps, Morrison and Greenwood	7
6 May 1938	When Attlee spoke for united party	6
7 October 1938	Call a Labour conference at once	16
25 November 1938	You will want to attack me for this	11
2 December 1938	Sham fight for the workless	9
10 February 1939	They've said it!	13
10 March 1939	End this party tyranny	16
26 May 1939	An open letter to conference delegates	10-11
19 January 1940	Neville's meat is poison for the Labour Party	6-7
5 March 1943	Labour must stay in the government	6-7
11 June 1943	To any Labour delegate	6-7
18 June 1943	Coalition of the Left	6-7
5 October 1951	"Destroy the Tory challenge"	2-3

26 September 1952	All set for a new thrust forward	4
17 October 1952	Build Labour unity, says Nye Bevan	1-2
3 December 1954	Why we lost West Derby	1
31 December 1954	The block vote	1
1 April 1955	Bevan's statement to the NEC	1
3 June 1955	Aneurin Bevan gives his verdict	1-2
7 October 1955	The Struggle for Socialism: Why I am standing for treasurer	1-2
16 December 1955	Clement Attlee	5
24 February 1956	Being very, very practical	4
2 March 1956	Labour must believe in freedom	4
12 October 1956	Now-let's give a Socialist lead	5
7 June 1957	Labour takes the lead	5
21 February 1958	Are they working for another 1931 coalition?	6

### The Conservative Party

Bevan saw the Tories as the representatives of the capitalist class. Although he criticised the party throughout his writing, these articles focus particularly on his condemnations of Conservatism and its leading figures.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
15 July 1938	Fox and hounds in Sandys case	7
16 December 1938	Premier's future depends on Rome	4
12 January 1940	Hore-Belisha	1
7 June 1940	Guilty ministers must go	12-13
30 August 1940	Portrait of Churchill	12-13
1 August 1941	The problem of Mr Churchill	12-13
8 March 1957	The Tories on the rocks	5

## **Military Power**

### Spain

Bevan was actively involved in the Popular Front campaign in support of the Republicans in Spain. His writings on the Spanish Civil War contain his critique of war, capitalism and fascism. Bevan's description of his trip to Spain in 1938 – 'Inside Teruel' – is a stark insight into the destruction and fear that engulfed Spain during the war and the struggle of the Republicans.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
25 March 1937	When Labour's front benchers gave up ghost on Spanish policy (M.P.)	7
2 July 1937	Spain and the big guns go booming (M.P.)	6
23 July 1937	Eden shows white flag at Gibraltar battle in commons (M.P)	6
21 January 1938	Inside Teruel	8-9&11
18 March 1938	Spain: Labour's challenge	3
3 February 1939	Spain: does Parliament know what the people really think?	17
3 March 1939	The blackest page in Britain's history	5
25 April 1941	Stop fooling with Franco	12-13

### War and Capitalism

These articles demonstrate Bevan's attitude towards World War Two and potential conflict post-1945. They show how Bevan related war to the destructiveness of capitalism.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
19 February 1937	Giant Strides to the next war: We must oppose Arms Plan Root & Branch	8-9
5 March 1937	Tories join merrily in the Chancellor's death dance (M.P.)	7
19 March 1937	Why benches empty when Labour speaks on arms estimates (M.P.)	7

25 June 1937	Neville's tax hoax: Will Labour put its own house in order? (M.P.)	6
30 July 1937	MPs doubts and fears as they depart for their holidays (M.P.)	6
19 November 1937	The man who cried out with a loud voice	6
11 March 1938	Labour and arms	7
29 April 1938	Simon's hand in the worker's pocket	3
20 May 1938	Britain's 1,700,000 forgotten men	8-9
27 May 1938	Honours in air debating – but	3
24 February 1939	Eight hundred million pounds go up in smoke	9
14 July 1939	What is happening to the people's food?	9
29 December 1939	War on your wages: Big business plan explained	1
9 February 1940	Britain's food peril	1
9 August 1940	Beaverbrook: And what next?	12-13
6 September 1940	A plan for air raid warnings	12-13
20 September 1940	This gross negligence must be punished	12-13
6 December 1940	Why are there still idle men?	12-13
4 July 1941	Now is our chance to strike	12-13
8 August 1941	Coal muddle - who is to blame?	12-13
22 May 1942	Labour must lead now	6-7

### Fascism

Although Bevan's account of the rise of fascism is apparent in his writings on World War Two more generally, these articles are focused on analysing its features and reasons for its rise.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
2 December 1938	If Lady Astor Had Her Way	5
24 May 1940	Are you a traitor? - answer now	12-13
26 July 1940	Freedom is not enough	12-13

## War, Liberty and Society

Bevan's defence of liberty during the war and his arguments for democracy to be upheld even during wartime.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
3 November 1939	A bandage for wounded liberty	4-5
24 November 1939	End the political truce!	6-7
1 December 1939	Labour should turn on the heat	6-7
15 December 1939	The mental black-out	8-9
5 January 1940	Challenge - or die!	3
8 March 1940	The fate of the "Daily Herald"	5
15 March 1940	It's time Labour was tough	12-13
5 April 1940	Set the Commons free	12-13
14 June 1940	Incompetents: the danger within	12-13
28 June 1940	Bevan letter to local Labour Party secretary	12-13
2 August 1940	The voice of the White Knight	12-13
16 August 1940	Let us deserve our fighters	12-13
27 September 1940	The morale of the people	12-13
7 February 1941	Choose now, to live or die	1-2
14 February 1941	Workers in Britain and America unite!	8-9
10 October 1941	The people demand action	12-13
24 October 1941	These men are paralysed	12-13
11 December 1942	Labour and the Coalition	1-2

## Post-war Society

Bevan's vision for society after the war are contained in these articles. Some of them include references to the need for public ownership as part of a wider call for socialist principles to be applied post-war.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
8 September 1939	Our duty! (with Stafford Cripps)	1&3
21 June 1940	The end of retreat	12-13
5 July 1940	Editorial board manifesto (with others)	12-13
4 October 1940	War aims begin at home	12-13

10 January 1941	Gentlemen, do read Hansard!	8-9
25 June 1943	We and the Germans	6-7
3 September 1943	The politics of strategy	6-7
11 February 1944	A Labour plan to beat the Tories	6-7
17 March 1944	Are miners different?	6-7
14 April 1944	What Eden cannot do	6-7
10 November 1944	Shall they cheat you again?	6-7

### Arms

After World War Two, rearmament was a major concern in international politics, particularly the threat of nuclear weapons.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
1 March 1940	Holes in the blockade	1
12 January 1945	How do we keep Germany disarmed?	6-7
31 July 1953	No settlement of the German problem unless we disarm	4&8
1954	It need not happen: the alternative to German rearmament ( <i>Tribune</i> pamphlet for which Bevan contributed)	All
12 February 1954	We must not despair	1-2
28 January 1955	Western double-talk	1
18 February 1955	Why did Labour change its mind?	1&8
25 February 1955	American bases in Britain	1
11 March 1955	Churchill confesses	3
19 August 1955	We can't leave it all to the Russians	8
2 December 1955	The H-bomb: now there's a new chance for sanity	1&12
23 December 1955	The second Cold War	4
6 April 1956	Arms: there is real hope now	1
11 May 1956	The disarmament breakdown	5
24 May 1957	Destroy the bombs before they destroy us!	1
31 May 1957	Cut arms to save peace - not to balance the budget	7
21 June 1957	Is MacMillan a candidate in the German elections?	5

2 August 1957	A Western conspiracy in favour of Adenauer!	5
31 January 1958	Arms and the slump	5
7 February 1958	Khrushchev's cocktail	5
9 May 1958	Polish plan could bridge the way to real peace talks	5
30 May 1958	H-tests: Russia should accept Eisenhower's new offer	5
31 October 1958	Tests: don't throw this chance away	1-2
14 November 1958	A nuclear free zone in Europe would be a benediction'	12
10 April 1959	Now we know	5

### Power Politics

The conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union was the dominant feature of post-war international relations. These articles represent Bevan's attempts to find solutions to the conflict in order to ease international tensions. Also included is an article from 1938 where Bevan discussed a similar situation of power politics pre-World War One.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
8 April 1938	Schoolmates cheer a slapstick act	7
23 February 1950	Britain's policy for peace	9-11
1951	Going our way ( <i>Tribune</i> pamphlet for which Bevan wrote the introduction)	3
1951	One way only: a socialist analysis of the present world crisis ( <i>Tribune</i> pamphlet for which Bevan wrote the foreword)	3
18 September 1953	We asked for it	1&6
19 November 1954	America: a warning	1
15 July 1955	Aneurin Bevan attacks radioactive nonsense	4-5
18 November 1955	Russia and the Middle East	6-7
27 January 1956	Which nation drew back?	4
20 April 1956	Welcome to B & K	6-7
4 May 1956	What happened to Eden's plan?	1-2
1 June 1956	When Eden sold out to the soldiers	4
23 November 1956	The last chance for statesmanship	1&12
23 August 1957	The clash of the giants	5



6 September 1957	Statesmanship is the only answer to the rockets	7
8 November 1957	Talk with Russia on the Middle East: Bevan tells America	8-9
29 November 1957	Here's a real peace policy for Europe	7
3 January 1958	An open challenge must be openly met: Yes, there must be a summit meeting	5
17 January 1958	Someone must tell Eisenhower the whole truth	7
20 June 1958	Mr. Khrushchev's new letter shows - the west is stalling on summit talks	5
5 December 1958	A hundred words that could spell real peace for Europe	6-7
8 May 1959	Mr Nehru, China and the Russians	5
22 May 1959	Britain in the Middle East	12
19 June 1959	The new spectre that haunts Europe	4
28 August 1959	Eisenhower and Khrushchev	12

### International Organisations

Bevan's solution to rising international tensions was for principles of democracy to be enshrined in the United Nations. As well as detailing Bevan's advocacy of the UN, these articles also contain Bevan's reflections on national sovereignty and the plight of exploited nations.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
4 September 1953	Labour and the United Nations	1-2
1 January 1954	The year of hope	4
16 September 1955	Uneasy peace	8
6 January 1956	The United Nations should send aid	4
5 October 1956	Give the United Nations a real job to do	4
19 October 1956	It's naked and brutal imperialism	12
16 November 1956	Wanted: a new bold policy for peace - that will save Hungary	1
21 December 1956	How Ike can take the lead	1&12
4 January 1957	Dollar diplomacy? That's no answer	1-2
11 January 1957	A war for holy oil?	5

1 February 1957	Crisis time for United Nations	5
15 February 1957	When the two guilty men meet in Bermuda	5
15 March 1957	No double standards at UN	5
12 July 1957	At last the Socialist International wakes up!	12
1 November 1957	Patch up NATO - that's the new Anglo-U.S. plan	6
13 December 1957	Platitudes won't save mankind	5

### Social Revolutions and World Development

Bevan placed great emphasis on social revolutions throughout the world and on the need for larger nations to help in the development of poorer nations. These articles also reveal Bevan's understanding of the materialist conception of history.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
7 August 1953	Here is a real plan to put the war machine in reverse	4&8
16 April 1954	America must be told: "You go it alone"	1&3
29 July 1955	Verdict on Geneva	1-2
17 February 1956	Eisenhower's greatest blunder	4
10 May 1957	Needed - a sane world policy to take the place of hate	6-7
11 April 1958	Russia's proposals put Eisenhower on the spot	5
5 September 1958	We must save India - or lose democracy's hope	5
1 January 1960	The biggest question for our century	6

### Empire and Imperialism

Many of the countries that were going through social revolutions were the victims of a history of empire and imperialism. These articles reflect Bevan's critique of imperialism and the effects of empire.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
4 March 1938	Britain's black empire put in the dock	7
17 June 1938	In the shadow of an empire's flag	7
9 December 1938	Our reply to Anderson	1
18 December 1953	Empire and the Tories	1-2
23 April 1954	Britain will not fight in Indo-China	1-2
25 May 1956	Bases: the plan that failed	12

24 August 1956	Bring back Makarios and talk peace	4
31 August 1956	"The times" gets a bad attack of nostalgia	5
9 November 1956	Two crimes we can never forget	12
28 June 1957	Tory financial policy could smash the Commonwealth	1
5 July 1957	My answer to Guy Mollet	1&12
25 July 1958	Bevan on the crisis	1&12
10 October 1958	Has Macmillan sold out to the Turks on partition?	12
6 March 1959	After the peace settlement in Cyprus: Makarios and the future	5

### Nationalism and National Sovereignty

Bevan understood the increase of nationalist sentiment throughout the world to be a result of western imperialism. Although Bevan's analysis of nationalism and national sovereignty is contained in articles placed in other categories, these articles contain Bevan's most explicit accounts of this phenomenon.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
20 December 1940	Stop that nonsense now!	12-13
4 April 1941	Why is Duff Cooper so bad?	12-13
5 September 1941	Complacency will not win the war	12-13
18 September 1942	India: Pride and Prejudice	6-7
25 October 1957	'Family, patriotism, religion!'	5
23 May 1958	De Gaulle	5
21 November 1958	Independence - then hard work: how to maintain the frontiers of liberty	5

## Egypt

A number of the themes contained in previous categories can be illuminated by reading Bevan's dissection of the Suez Crisis in 1956. These articles saw Bevan reflect on the nature of social revolutions, nationalism, national sovereignty and international organisations.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
3 August 1956	It must be world control for all the commercial waterways	5
10 August 1956	It must not be all "take", Colonel Nasser	12
17 August 1956	Don't risk one British life	1&12
14 September 1956	Aneurin Bevan asks: Do they want to wreck the United Nations?	2
7 December 1956	Suez: the excuses are demolished	6
17 May 1957	Suez: Now what?	1&3

## **Ideological Power**

### Ideological Struggle

Bevan identified class conflict as fundamental to capitalist society. These articles contain Bevan's interpretation of the ideological conflict being waged between the working-class and the ruling-class

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
24 June 1938	A swastika nailed to England's mast	7
1 July 1938	This is how fascism is born	7
17 November 1939	Labour - the prisoner of the Tories	1
26 January 1940	Political black-out	1
5 December 1941	Conscription: why MPs revolted	12-13
1 December 1944	The parties' line-up in Parliament	6-7
21 November 1952	Baldwin and Butler	4
28 September 1956	This minor Caesar	4
21 March 1958	Two faces of Macmillan	5

### Communism

A materialist conception of history is evident in Bevan's writings on the ideology of communism. These articles contain Bevan's engagement with communism more broadly. Assessments of specific communist countries are categorised below.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no(s).</b>
24 July 1953	The peasants who dictate to Moscow	4
25 November 1955	Russia must take her share of the blame	4
22 June 1956	What next for Western Communists?	1&12
29 June 1956	This may be the real chance for Italian socialism	5
6 July 1956	Will the Poles learn the real lesson of Poznan?	6-7
26 October 1956	Gomulka holds the aces	1-2
16 August 1957	A very dangerous game	1&12
27 September 1957	The world of Gomulka, Tito - and Djilas	6
14 March 1958	Communism or suicide? That's not the real choice	5
11 July 1958	The real arguments behind the Tito-Khrushchev row	6

28 November 1958	The Communist failure in the West	8
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### Soviet Union

The Soviet Union takes a prominent place in Bevan's thought due to his hopes for its potential to develop into a representative democracy as a result of economic planning. Bevan's materialist grasp of economic development is apparent in these writings.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
18 July 1941	Meaning of the alliance	12-13
17 October 1941	Russia and ourselves	12-13
17 July 1953	In place of the Cold War	4
24 September 1954	My private talk with Malenkov	1-2
1 October 1954	Kremlin personalities	1-2
9 March 1955	Don't write off these Kremlin charges as just another 'plot'!	6-7
23 March 1956	After Stalin: the big test for communists	1
27 April 1956	Farewell to the Trojan Horse	5
11 October 1957	Why Russia wins space race	5
18 October 1957	Khrushchev has the trumps	7

### China

Bevan's writings on China, including his account of his trip there with a Labour Party delegation, also contain important pointers to Bevan's political thought.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
4 June 1954	Why we are going to China	1-2
3 September 1954	Do not dismiss our ideas of freedom	2
8 October 1954	Marx versus birth control	1&3
15 October 1954	I put a question mark against his judgement	4
22 October 1954	How much freedom in the new China?	4
10 December 1954	Will this mean war?	1
26 August 1955	Give China the help she needs	4
14 June 1957	Has America got a government?	5
15 August 1958	Dulles must be defied	7

24 October 1958	Quemoy: stumbling in the dark	6
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### Immigration

The article below appears to be Bevan's only explicit engagement with immigration.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
11 February 1955	Jamaicans: where the danger lies	2

### Health

Bevan did not often return to his achievements in establishing the NHS, but these articles include his advocacy for health policy within factories and his claims that his plans for the NHS had been vindicated by a 1956 report into the service.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
14 January 1955	Health in the factory	1
3 February 1956	This famous victory	1&12

### Democratic Socialism

Bevan's vision for democratic socialist society can be discerned throughout the variety of his writings and appears very prominently in *In Place of Fear*. These articles contain noteworthy descriptions of what a democratic socialist society would look like for Bevan.

Date	Title	Page no(s).
2 July 1948	July 5th and the Socialist Advance	7
5 November 1954	Freedom and socialism	1
7 January 1955	Private schools	1
4 March 1955	Scrap this levy	1