



P. M. WILLIAMS

## PHILIP MAYNARD WILLIAMS

1920-1984

PHILIP WILLIAMS was a well-known and much loved Oxford figure. He had been an undergraduate and a lecturer at Trinity (where a close friend was Tony Crosland), and a tutorial fellow at Jesus. But it is with Nuffield, where his kindness and pastoral care towards pupils became legendary, that he will always be associated. He was also a much appreciated visitor to the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris, and he was responsible for the successful collaboration between that institution and Nuffield College. He had played a prominent part in arranging the Yale-Nuffield exchange programme in political science and he taught with great success in a number of American universities. As an outstanding tutor and as a man with a gift for friendship, his sudden death in November 1984 was the occasion of great sadness in many countries, especially among his faculty and college colleagues at Oxford.

Philip Maynard Williams was born on 17 March 1920, the son of John and Marjorie Williams. He went to the Stationers' Company School, Hornsey, and in 1937 won a scholarship to Trinity, where he read History, gaining an outstanding First in 1940. After war service he returned to Trinity as a lecturer, and so began a lifetime's career of teaching and research in Oxford, which was broken only by his tenure of visiting professorships in the United States in 1956-7 and 1968. In 1950 he was elected a fellow of Nuffield and stayed there for three years, before moving on to a tutorial fellowship at Jesus College in 1953. During this time he developed his skills as a supervisor and tutor, roles which revealed in him a rare talent. Many colleagues and former students have attested to his qualities: his unstinting willingness to help any scholar who sought his views; his own dedication and painstaking approach to his research; the incisiveness and quick-wittedness of his intellect; his lack of pretension; his insatiable thirst for understanding. In this sense he was a model of an Oxford don. In some respects, too, he represented another variety of that species, now dying out, the bachelor don. His college was his home, and he treated it as such, comfortably moving about

quadrangles and passageways in slippers and less than well-tailored array, his cherubic and cheerful face invariably badly shaven; no cook, but a much loved dinner guest; unable to drive a car, but never short of a lift from friends, colleagues, or their spouses. To that other Oxford stereotype, the distant and lonely dweller within the ivory tower, he bore no resemblance.

He returned to Nuffield in 1958 and stayed there for the rest of his life, eschewing an offer in later years of the Gladstone Chair of Government, which would have meant a move to All Souls, a college without students. As it was, he found Nuffield entirely congenial—a graduate college offering companionship and intellectual stimulus of the highest order. It even offered him an opportunity, when Dean of his College in 1968, to exercise direct political influence at the time of the student ‘troubles’. He approached the task with sympathy and understanding, and while refusing to accept the wilder manifestations of the radical idealists, none the less acquired a reputation for fairness and helpfulness which earned him the ironic soubriquet of ‘Flogger’ Williams. Perhaps his ability to deal with the more robust student elements abroad in Oxford at that time had been enhanced by his agility and low cunning at the table-tennis table, where he bent the rules with an engaging insouciance.

Williams’s academic preoccupations were threefold. He had a considerable knowledge of British history, politics, and government, as he demonstrated when he taught at Princeton for two terms in 1968. Indeed, his first major academic publication concerned British political history in the 1880s. Towards the end of his life he interested himself increasingly in American politics and government, which was gradually becoming a dominant teaching interest. But it is as a specialist on French politics and government that he will be immediately remembered. He faced the difficult and unnerving task of writing upon a subject which was invariably changing, sometimes dramatically. He also faced the problem that the British had never much respect for the political capacity of their nearest neighbour, and that in British writing about French government the shrill note of disapproval often impeded praiseworthy efforts at understanding and explanation. This did not mean that Williams himself was averse to criticizing and analysing what he called the ‘undesirable practices’ of different French regimes (and it is significant that these criticisms are still referred to by French experts on constitutional history, such as Professor Jacques Chapsal). But the main theme of all Williams’s writing about France was his belief that the nature of

the political system, including what he called 'the faults in the political structure of France', arose neither from any supposed weakness of national character, nor from the shortcomings of individual politicians, but from the nature of France's historical and geographical background.

The first edition of *Politics in Post-War France* was published in 1954, and the second edition in 1958. It was overcome by the events of 1958 which brought General de Gaulle back to power and created the constitution of the Fifth Republic. In 1960, in collaboration with Martin Harrison (then a lecturer at Manchester University and later Professor of Politics at the University of Keele), Williams published *De Gaulle's Republic* which described the crisis that had destroyed the Fourth Republic and sought to explain the new constitutional arrangements and to indicate the likely evolution of the system. But it was typical of Williams's thoroughness that he felt that he should revise in a complete form his assessment of the Fourth Republic. As he explained, when he had written his previous account, much of the writing having been done in 1953, this was at the time when France was at war in Indo-China, but still at peace in Algeria. The French empire, known as the French Union, still existed, and much of western and equatorial Africa was still ruled from Paris, as was Madagascar, whilst the traditional dominant French position continued to prevail in Morocco and Tunisia. The key to western political union seemed to lie with the projected European Defence Community project, which France had initiated but not ratified, whilst Great Britain had refused to take part in it. In economic terms, Williams considered that industrial production in 1953 lagged at the 1929 level, and whether this was correct or not, there is no doubt that the French economic miracle was unforeseeable. Gaullism seemed to be in ruins and other political developments (Williams mentioned Poujadism) were not yet born. Williams had been writing too before the notable premierships of Pierre Mendès France and Guy Mollet. In all these circumstances an entire recasting of the book was necessary. When *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the Fourth Republic* was published in 1964, it contained eleven new chapters, and of the remaining chapters all but three had been completely rewritten.

But this was not all. Williams did not hesitate to write in the preface to the new book: 'In 1953 I seriously over-estimated the stability of a régime which had yet to face a political and emotional challenge as grave as the Irish question in Britain, or the problem of the South in the United States.' Perhaps in making

this admission he was being too severe with himself. Whilst he almost grudgingly admits that 'different governmental actions and policies could have saved the Fourth Republic, many historians believe that the Fourth Republic was not inevitably doomed in 1958 and that it was by no means certain that de Gaulle would be brought to power as the head of State. Although they would not readily use the word "stability" to describe the Fourth Republic, they nowadays stress both its resilience and its achievements.'

A similar problem faced Williams and his collaborator after the publication of *De Gaulle's Republic* in 1960. During the opening months of the Fifth Republic there were considerable uncertainties and dangers, most of them coming from the Algerian war. In a BBC broadcast in October 1959 (which he reprinted together with an appendix, in *Wars, Plots and Scandals in Post-War France*, published in 1970) he recounted the story of how François Mitterrand, then an ex-minister, claimed that his car had been followed and shot at in the Rue de l'Observatoire in Paris and that he had barely escaped with his life. But a few days later Robert Pesquet, a former Poujadist deputy, stated that he had been in the pursuing car and that the attack had been a fake, arranged at Mitterrand's request. 'I don't pretend to know what really happened', said Williams, but he explained that the Algerian war had poisoned the political climate. By 1958 there were responsible men who had come to think that revolution was their public duty. They believed that the future of France depended upon keeping Algeria French, and they incited soldiers and the police to defy the legal government and they benefited politically from the activities of extremists. But as Williams put it, 'successful conspiracy breeds new conspiracies'. In 1964 when the situation was different, and the Algerian war was over, he expressed the view that the war had nearly cost France two republics, the Fourth, and the Fifth that de Gaulle had installed in 1958. But by 1964 the regime was showing every sign of stability.

There was also the constitutional problem. In 1958 and in 1959, Williams saw Debré as seeking to create a new form of parliamentary system, in which the President would be an arbitrator. But the working of that system was quickly transformed by the actions of de Gaulle, who became a sort of monarchical ruler who did not hesitate to manipulate all forms of governmental machinery and opinions, culminating in the constitutional change of 1962, whereby the President of the Republic, instead of being elected by a restricted electoral college, would

be elected by universal suffrage. Thus it was necessary for Williams to reconsider the Fifth Republic, which he did in a number of articles (notably in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Spring 1963), and eventually he and Professor Harrison produced an entirely new version of *De Gaulle's Republic*, entitled *Politics and Society in de Gaulle's Republic*, published in 1971 (although events nearly overtook this book too, since much of it had been written when de Gaulle resigned in 1969). Williams also produced a more specialized examination of one aspect of the Fifth Republic, with *The French Parliament 1958-1967*, published in 1968.

On the issue of the 1962 change of constitution, commentators have recently fallen into two categories. There are those, mainly political scientists or jurists, who believe that the essence of Presidential election by universal suffrage was already present in the 1958 constitution, as it had been in de Gaulle's Bayeux speech of 1946. There was thus a natural, if not an inevitable progress towards Presidential election by universal suffrage and the only uncertainty concerned the means whereby the new procedure would be installed. On the other hand, certain historians believe that the uncertainty was much greater. At the time when the constitution was drawn up, de Gaulle did not envisage himself as being in power for any length of time. Nor, given his age and his long absence from the direction of affairs, did he necessarily see himself as being as active in all spheres of government as he was to become. It was because of the intractability of the Algerian problem and the fact that he could not entrust this question to his first Prime Minister, Michel Debré, that he found himself forced to direct all matters himself. Furthermore, in 1958, the President of the Republic hoped to become President of the Franco-African community, since all the French African states and Madagascar (with the exception of Guinea) voted in favour of the referendum of 28 September which launched the new constitution. How could such a community elect a President by universal suffrage, or how could the President of the community be elected by universal suffrage in metropolitan France alone? By 1962, with most members of the community having chosen independence, this problem no longer existed. The problem of campaigning in a Presidential election was also resolved since by that date it was clear that television would be the means whereby candidates would seek the votes of some twenty-five million electors.

For Philip Williams, the reform of 1962 was to be explained in more explicitly political terms. To him the key was de Gaulle's

belief, or fear, that once the Algerian problem was resolved then the old political parties would continue and would form an opposition majority which would endeavour to thwart his policies and his methods of governing. When the Evian agreements, which effectively ended the Algerian war, were approved by a referendum in April 1962, then de Gaulle, as Williams saw it, was faced by a strategic problem. Parliamentary elections were due by April 1963 and gratitude for peace in Algeria could well be outweighed by accumulated resentments at home, with the political parties, the press, local politicians, and various interest-groups finding it easy to mobilize opinion since they no longer needed de Gaulle. Therefore he could not afford to wait until April 1963, and many Gaullists, including Michel Debré, wanted to have an election immediately after the referendum. But de Gaulle tried a policy of reconciliation. Replacing Debré by the more reassuring Pompidou, he set out to win the support of the Social Catholics (the Mouvement Républicain Populaire). But within a month his scathing attack upon the idea of federal Europe caused the resignation of the MRP ministers and the alienation of the group as a whole (Williams believed that de Gaulle was surprised by the resignations). Therefore a new policy had to be found, and the opportunity was provided by an attempt to assassinate de Gaulle, which nearly succeeded in August 1962. He warned the country that another attempt might be successful and that there would be chaos in France unless all Frenchmen and women were able to choose his successor by direct election.

This now placed the political parties in a strategic dilemma. If they supported the proposed change, which would be approved or rejected by referendum, then they would be faced with a President enjoying both a democratic mandate and enormous political powers, and their position would consequently suffer. If they refused, their campaign in the referendum would be purely negative, since they were objecting to the people of France having the right to choose their head of government. As Williams points out, de Gaulle made sure that they would refuse by deliberately using a procedure to ensure the reform which was contrary to the constitution and which was officially condemned by the Conseil d'État, the highest administrative court. In October the Assembly carried a vote of censure against the government by an absolute majority, and de Gaulle dissolved Parliament. The political parties were thus faced with a referendum campaign, and by the double ballots of a general election. They lost the referendum and the Gaullists (the Union pour la Nouvelle Repub-

lique and the Union Démocratique de Travail) won an absolute majority in the new Assembly.

Thus Williams, writing close to events, saw the change as important. 'Even if the Gaullist party does not survive its leader', he concluded, 'France will choose her future chief executives by direct election and not through an omnipotent Parliament or a college of conservative village politicians. The effect on political habits is already apparent and will be profound.' Although an authoritative political scientist, his analysis of how the Presidency with a democratic mandate came to be what has been described as the keystone of the constitution, is closer to that of the historian. It is necessary to note the ways in which Williams used history throughout his work on France, on the principle that 'no country can rid itself of its past'.

Frequently he would stress the religious factor. The Catholic Church being active and powerful in France, and retaining the allegiance of a substantial portion of the population, it was necessarily a focus of controversy. Education remained an explosive problem in France, long after it was resolved in other countries, and the conflict was always bitter. It might have been thought that this type of statement, made in the 1950s and repeated in the 1960s, was perhaps more applicable to the days of the Third Republic. However, the opposition in 1984 to moderate measures proposed by the Socialist minister of education to bring the administration of the mainly Catholic *écoles privées* into line with the State schools, culminating in the massive demonstrations at Versailles on 4 March and in Paris on 24 June, and leading to the resignation on 17 July 1984 of the minister (Alain Savary), suggests that Williams's historical explanation remains relevant today.

Historically too, the form of the State in France, as Williams always pointed out, was open to attack. Changes of government might not be important, but they could lead to, or be associated with, changes in the nature of the regime. Writing at the time of the transition between the Fourth and the Fifth Republics, it was natural to stress the fact that in 170 years, France had had seventeen constitutions, but that this constitutional variation was in contrast to the fundamentally unaltered administrative structure, which has persisted since the time of Napoleon (if not earlier) and which has constantly provided a latent totalitarianism to the French attitude to politics.

In France, Williams pointed out, ancient issues persisted. It was not possible to talk about an association between the Left



and industry, or between the Right and agriculture. The agrarian south was the stronghold of the Left, industrial Lorraine voted Right. Habits, formed in the nineteenth century, when politics were well removed from the realities of day-to-day life, persisted, as did a strange combination of cynicism and idealism, belief in and distrust of the State, civic indiscipline and acceptance of civic burdens. He saw these characteristics as being present in the French Republics which he studied, and he saw them as the result of history. Like that other knowledgeable historian of French politics (with whom he shared an expertise on the United States), Sir Denis Brogan, Williams liked to quote Frenchmen as they explained the paradoxes of their own positions. Thus he was fond of Laboulaye's description of France as 'a tranquil country with agitated legislators'. But the force of the quotation lay not in the paradox, but in the expression of a certain historical negativeness of the dominant centre block in French politics and society, which was opposed to clerical reaction as it was opposed to socialist experiment and which sought to prevent governments from doing anything much. Only in major crises did the contentedness of the dominant section of opinion change. This Williams witnessed and understood in 1958 and the years which immediately followed. With his colleague David Goldey he studied too the crisis of 1968. But did the historical pattern effectively reassert itself afterwards? It could be that Williams was not so sure once, in the words which he and Professor Harrison used, France had married her century.

Again like Brogan, Williams showed a particular interest in scandals and defined France as 'the classic land of political scandal'. He sought to analyse the reasons for this. He noted how few of the scandals concerned the private lives of politicians (like the killing of the editor of *Le Figaro*, Gaston Calmette, by Madame Caillaux in 1914, and the Ballets Roses scandal involving a former President of the National Assembly in 1958), and how most of the great scandals involved the machinery of State. The reasons were historical. The fact that a powerful and centralized State machine was created before liberal or democratic institutions had developed; the deep divisions within the country causing mistrust of political leaders; the ordinary Frenchman feeling that he is not part of the vast official hierarchy; the importance of the police force when both Left and Right felt threatened; the usefulness in political conduct of discovering and denouncing scandal. And since many of the scandals which Williams investigated, involving financial dealings with the enemy in Indo-China, intelligence

leaks at the time of the Indo-China war, military disobedience in Algeria, and the elimination of a Moroccan left-wing opposition leader in Paris, concerned France's role overseas, it was fruitful for Williams to compare the role of scandals in France and Britain. Drawing on his knowledge of British political history, he pointed out that a disproportionate share of the scandalous sensations in British public life in the period preceding Irish independence arose from British repressive policies in Ireland: the Black and Tan outrages were preceded by the Piggott forgeries, the Parnell divorce, the Curragh mutiny, the Sheehy-Skeffington murder, and the use and abuse of the Casement diaries.

Thus there was always a vital historical context to Williams's political analysis. It is possible, too, to sense a certain political idealism. He recognized that the role of Parliament was different in the three major states which have long-established democracies. In the United States he believed that Congress had largely lost its power to initiate action or to dominate policy, and he saw it as an obstructive force. In Britain he believed that Parliament had become a forum for discussion, a centre where grievances could be ventilated, a means of arousing public opinion. But in France he found a Parliament which had either become too powerful, as in the Third or Fourth Republics, or where it was in a severely diminished state, as in the Fifth Republic. He could not approve of the system where government was paralysed by a number of small parties and by the individualism of deputies and senators. Nor could he approve of a system in which popular criticism could not find effective expansion through the nation's representative institutions. The manner in which, under the Fifth Republic, every weapon was mobilized by the authorities to influence elections, including the distribution of minor benefits to various categories of voters, and the outrageous exploitation of radio and television, were distasteful to him. It is true that he approved of certain of the technical reforms which were carried out by the Fourth Republic: the limiting of parliamentary sessions (in 1954), the better organization of business, the new budgetary procedure (initiated in 1956), the restriction of the private members' rights to propose public expenditure (in 1958), and it seems that Williams preceded those French political scientists who have recently been demonstrating how certain of the constitutional reforms of 1958 had been foreshadowed in the preceding regime. It is true too that he saw an improvement in the evolution of Parliament in the Fifth Republic, moving from the obscurity and impotence (as he put it) of early years, to the more normal

(as he saw it) experience of the 1967 election. Nevertheless, the impression is clearly given that whilst recognizing to the full the historical burden which every French regime is obliged to follow, Williams had a clear idea in his mind of certain principles, or ideals, which a parliamentary system should possess. When he wondered whether, after de Gaulle, the Fifth Republic might evolve in the British direction, he was possibly expressing, in a gentle manner, his own preference.

It has sometimes been said that in Williams's work personalities do not play a very important role. It is true that he was invariably analysing the way in which institutions worked, the functioning of political parties, the importance of issues. Thus the role of men is not of prime importance. Indeed it is one of Williams's repeated beliefs that the men (like the institutions) of the Fourth Republic had many faults, but likewise the new men (and the new institution of the Fifth Republic) were also inadequate. He preferred to demonstrate how an individual adapted himself to the institutional circumstances. Thus, René Pleven is described as being skilful at evacuating office in time to avoid dangerous decisions and therefore ensuring both his return to office at calmer moments and his high reputation for statesmanship; Edgar Faure, 'beneath an appearance of mental agility unembarrassed by any convictions', manipulated the system with great skill and achieved his objectives; Guy Mollet was at the head of a highly disciplined party whose votes were essential to whatever majority was in power, so that he remained a dominant figure in Parliament even when he had lost the premiership. Pierre Mendès France, although obviously admired by Williams, was not singled out for special praise. He was classified amongst 'the reformers', alongside Jules Moch (which is surprising), 'perhaps François Mitterand and even Paul Reynaud'. It is deliberately pointed out that 'the reformers' were not necessarily distinguished by moral superiority, since some of them were as concerned for their careers as any of the traditional politicians.

And de Gaulle? Williams, whether by his sense of history, or by a certain innate liberalism which was suspicious of great men, whether by acute observation or by a critical sense that refused to be stifled, never became an outright admirer of de Gaulle. The pursuit of grandeur overseas did not prevent the pursuit of pettiness at home, was an observation to which he was attached and which he believed. In his own time he shared the comment of Hubert Beuve-Méry, editor of *Le Monde*: '. . . dommage qu'un si grand homme ait tant de petitesse.' He was conscious of a policy

which was, at times, simply one of gestures, which could vary from the sublime to the ridiculous, which could be crude to the extreme, and which could also be totally ineffective. Naturally he recognized, and analysed, the General's skills, his realism, his shrewdness, his boldness. But he was more interested in the triumphant successes which the General enjoyed at home and which enabled him to outmanoeuvre or to silence his domestic critics. Williams saw de Gaulle as someone who continued the obstructionism of the Fourth Republic and who persisted in making people in France believe that what was in the interests of France was to the benefit of all. Thus Williams put de Gaulle within a context. And, probably, Williams saw the Gaullist episode as a recognizable and interim feature of French history.

This reluctance to indulge in the worship of political personality makes it the more remarkable that Williams decided to put aside French politics in order to write the biography of Hugh Gaitskell. It is true that he was invited to undertake this task by Anthony Crosland, his closest friend as an undergraduate (and who had visited Williams in hospital only a day before himself suffering a fatal stroke), and by Roy Jenkins, who had already written an elegant essay on Gaitskell. Such invitations could not easily be refused. It is also true that Williams wondered (perhaps only half-jokingly) if he wished to spend the beginning of each day scrutinizing *Le Monde*. But the fact remains that to write the life of Gaitskell was a daunting responsibility. There was a problem of documents. There was not much material relating to his early life (some letters written to his mother only became available after the book was in print, although he was able to use them in the paperback edition which was published in 1982 after *Hugh Gaitskell* had been first published in 1979). The public records for 1945-51 were governed by the 'thirty-year rule'. There was a diary (superbly edited and published by Williams later), but it was only kept intermittently. Gaitskell wrote many letters, but the majority of them were written directly to friends and colleagues, and no copies were kept. Tracing them was thus dependent upon identifying the recipients, their having kept the correspondence and being willing to show it to Gaitskell's biographer. To a considerable extent these problems were admirably resolved, by Williams interviewing those who had known him. Since Gaitskell had died at the early age of 56, there were many people alive who had known him in his youth (his housemaster from school days, for example, who was in his nineties when Williams met him), and many people who had worked

with him, either as a civil servant during the war, or as a Labour politician in the post-war period. Although Williams was accustomed to interview individuals who were active in politics, usually French politics, the subject of their conversations was inevitably one which was dominated by immediate issues. It was therefore a novel experience for him to interview some three hundred people about the past, and to confront the problems with which an historian is faced when he is writing the biography of someone who died several years ago. He did so with great success. Williams later wrote wisely and reflectively about the role of interviews in historical technique (in an article in *Political Studies*).

This was by no means the only problem. He had not known Gaitskell well, although he was intimate with several of his contemporaries. Even on occasions when he might have been present, as when Gaitskell made a highly successful speech to the Oxford Union, it appears that Williams was not there. Although Williams rightly states that he was an old admirer of his subject and one who had usually been in agreement with his views, nevertheless it is clear that they were different sorts of men. Although Gaitskell had been an academic, notably a lecturer in the Department of Political Economics in University College London, where he had been much admired as a teacher, nevertheless academic life, as his brother pointed out, was not the mainstream of his life. Although he often went abroad, both as a young man and subsequently, he does not seem to have had any particular love for France. Sweden was a European nation he found more congenial. And whether we think of Gaitskell as an uxorious man, with a close family life, or as someone who liked the distractions of dancing and night clubs, as well as the detailed dissection of economic phenomena, it is difficult to think that the biographer much resembled his subject.

The nature of the subject had its daunting aspects. When Gaitskell became the leader of the Labour Party in 1955 at the age of 49, he was the youngest leader of a major party that the country had known this century. But he was also only partially known to the public. He had only been in Parliament for ten years, he had only been for twelve months a member of the Labour Cabinet which had resigned in October 1951. This rapid rise to power had not been accompanied by any great impact on public opinion or acknowledgement. He was to sit on the Opposition front bench for the rest of his life, and he occupies, along with such figures as Adlai Stevenson and Pierre Mendès France, the position of one who might have done great things.

During the period 1951-63, certainly, Gaitskell established himself as a major statesman, nationally and internationally. But whereas, in the case of Mendès France, his dramatic Premiership during 1954 and 1955 has sharpened the nostalgia for *jamais arrivé*, Gaitskell was never to be Prime Minister, although he seemed on the verge of the highest office at the time of his untimely death. It is fascinating to see how Williams approached this part of his task with all the serious determination of the dedicated historian. When Anthony Crosland suggested that Gaitskell would not have been a success as Prime Minister because he put too much strain on the loyalty of his followers, Williams disagreed, and rather saw this as a revelation of Crosland's own political development. When Michael Foot said that had Gaitskell and Bevan lived, their reconciliation would have persisted, then Williams saw in this an example of Foot's own aspirations for a unified Labour party.

One thing that his biographer was determined not to do was to make his work lively through personal revelations and indiscretions. Thus the sort of gossip that is to be found in the diaries of Richard Crossman and the letters of Anne Fleming has no place here. The biography sets out to show how Gaitskell was formed in his early days. A certain radicalism develops at school in Winchester; as a young man he shows dislike of the superior and the rich; at Oxford there is the influence of G. D. H. Cole, and the experience of the General Strike; thereafter follows the emotional impact of life in the Nottinghamshire coalfield as a WEA lecturer. When visiting Austria in 1933 and 1934 he witnessed the crushing of the Socialists, which taught him about the realities of fascism, and the dangers of revolutionary rhetoric. Thus the portrait of Gaitskell as a man who believed in equality rather than public ownership, who thought that Britain should be strong in terms of defence, who wanted a socialism which was practical rather than visionary, begins to emerge.

Williams writes in warm praise of Gaitskell. His commitment to principle, his loyalty to friends, his honesty, and his courage are all stressed. Williams writes boldly, even dramatically, on the many political crises of Gaitskell's brief career, notably his powerful response to his defeat over unilateral nuclear disarmament at the 1960 party conference. Gaitskell amply carried out his promise then to 'fight, fight and fight again'. Incidentally, Williams himself had much personal involvement in this phase of his subject's life, since he was, along with William Rodgers and others, a leading figure in the Campaign for Democratic

Socialism which penetrated the local constituency parties in 1961–2 to rebuff the appeal of CND and to uphold Gaitskell's leadership. At this period of his own life, Williams had been a political activist as well as an academic scholar. He remained a Labour Party member for many years until a final move to the SDP.

Williams criticizes Gaitskell, too. The latter often lacked political antennae, he could move from a moderate and cautious position to one which was strongly committed, even reckless, he made mistakes of judgement, notably over the attempt to abolish Clause Four. Williams puts the record straight on many issues, as he sees it. He tried to justify Gaitskell's position on the 1951 defence budget and the cuts in the National Health Service which led to the traumatic conflict with Aneurin Bevan—although here it must be said that Williams wrote prior to the release of the relevant public records and that the Cabinet minutes of 1950–1 do not altogether sustain his account. Williams also vigorously rebutted what he regarded as the myth that Gaitskell had originally supported Eden's policy on Suez, but had changed his mind because of internal party pressure; here again is disputed territory. Williams successfully shows that the idea of Gaitskell as a cold, calculating figure is far from the truth. His personal warmth and emotional disposition are amply illustrated. Certain curious traits are demonstrated: that Gaitskell liked to separate his friends from each other (Maurice Bowra complained that Gaitskell would not allow him to meet his closest friend, Evan Durbin) and he would not allow an adviser to go beyond a very restricted sphere.

Perhaps surprisingly, Williams did not make much of Gaitskell's attitude towards France, in relation to the Common Market and other issues. On the other hand, his book does bring out—a theme congenial to Williams himself and his academic interests—Gaitskell's strong personal commitment to the American alliance, dating from his time as Minister of Economic Affairs at the time of the formation of the European Payments Union in 1950. Gaitskell's powerful dedication to the Anglo-American relationship, and its political, defence, and economic implications, is a major theme of Williams's book. So, too, is Gaitskell's emotional attachment to the Commonwealth, which influenced both his views on the Common Market and on the issue of black immigration to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. On both aspects Williams, a humane, liberal man, was wholly in sympathy.

Williams's *Gaitskell* was widely acclaimed as a triumphant suc-

cess. So, too, was his almost equally valuable edition of Gaitskell's diary for the period 1945-53, which was published in 1983, and which made available to scholars an indispensable source for British post-war politics. It gave Williams, an indefatigable researcher and author despite much ill health in his latter years, new zest and the urge to work on new subjects, British and American. Cruelly, his premature death, only a short while after his election to the British Academy in 1983, prevented his doing so. He died in a London restaurant shortly after giving a highly successful seminar. Many of his friends thought that this was the death he would have wished for. The memory of a gifted scholar, devoted pastoral tutor, genial faculty colleague, and generous critic, one who was perhaps in Oxford and beyond the most important single influence on the study of modern comparative institutions to emerge since the Second World War, will long be affectionately recalled by his many friends and admirers.

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