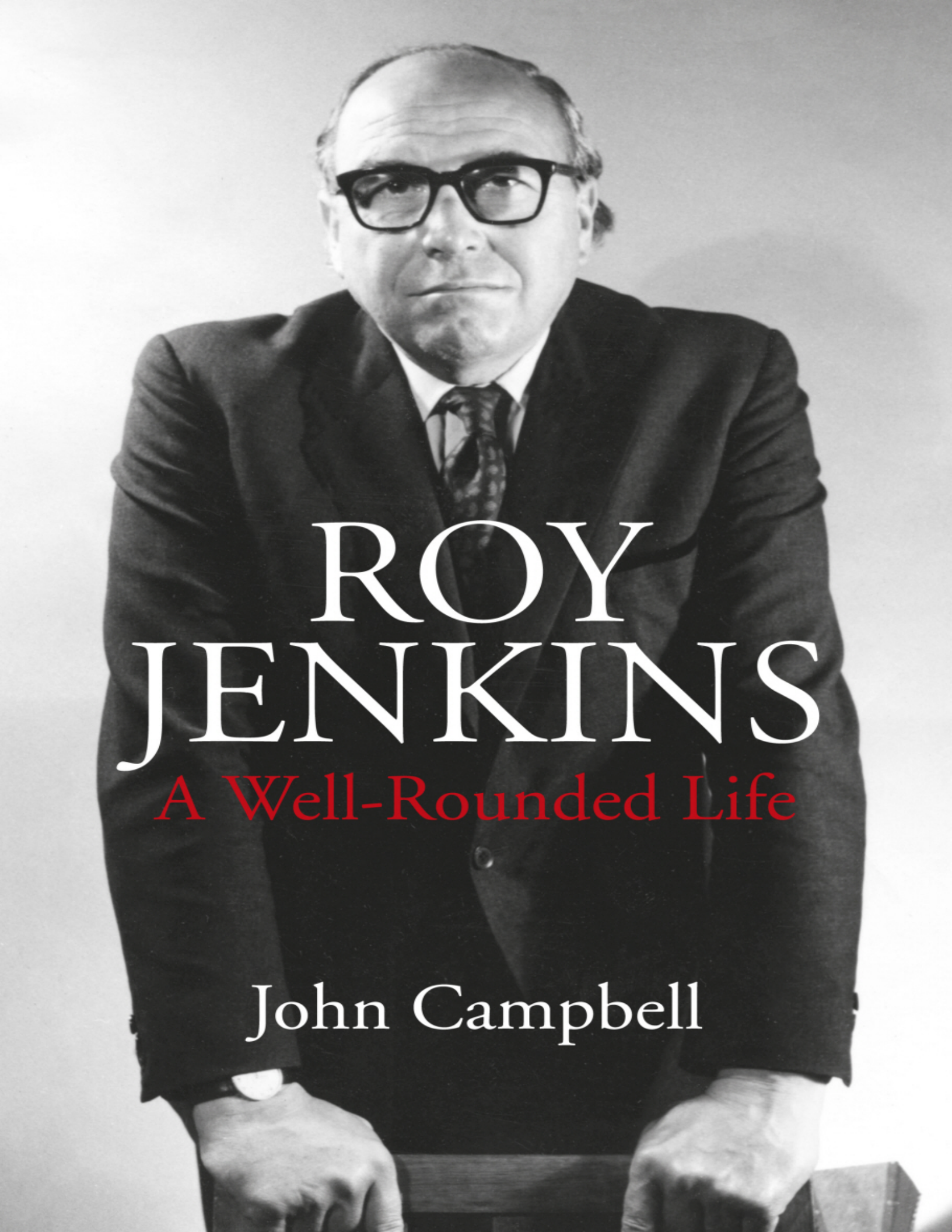

ROY JENKINS

A Well-Rounded Life

John Campbell

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About the Book

Roy Jenkins was probably the best Prime Minister Britain never had. But though he never reached 10 Downing Street, he left a more enduring mark on British society than most of those who did. His career spans the full half-century from Attlee to Tony Blair during which he helped transform almost every area of national life and politics.

First, as a radical Home Secretary in the 1960s he drove through the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the legalisation of abortion, abolished theatre censorship and introduced the first legislation to outlaw discrimination on grounds of both race and gender. Attacked by conservatives as the godfather of the permissive society, he was a pioneering champion of gay rights, racial equality and feminism. He also reformed the police and criminal trials and introduced the independent police complaints commission.

Second, he was an early and consistent advocate of European unity who played a decisive role in achieving British membership first of the Common Market and then of the European Union. From 1977 to 1980 he served as the first (and so far only) British president of the European Commission. Public opinion today may be swinging against Europe; but for the past forty years participation in Europe was seen by all parties as an unquestioned benefit, and no one had more influence than Jenkins in that historic redirection of British policy.

Third, in 1981, when both the Conservative and Labour parties had moved sharply to the right and left respectively he founded the centrist Social Democratic Party (SDP) which failed in its immediate ambition of breaking the mould of British politics – largely because the Falklands war transformed Mrs Thatcher's popularity – but merged with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democrats and paved the way for Tony Blair's creation of New Labour.

On top of all this, Jenkins was a compulsive writer whose twenty-three books included bestselling biographies of Asquith, Gladstone and Churchill. As Chancellor of Oxford University he was the embodiment of the liberal establishment with a genius for friendship who knew and cultivated everyone who mattered in the overlapping worlds of politics, literature, diplomacy and academia; he also had many close women friends and enjoyed an unconventional private life. His biography is the story of an exceptionally well-filled and well-rounded life.

About the Author

John Campbell is the author of many biographies including one of Edward Heath, for which he won the 1994 NCR award, *The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, from Grocer's Daughter to Iron Lady* and, most recently, *Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Years of Political Rivalry from Pitt and Fox to Blair and Brown*. He is married and lives in Kent.

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For Kirsty again, in love and gratitude,
and also for the next generation –
Barnaby, Willow and Angus,
Rosie and Isabel

Roy Jenkins

A Well-Rounded Life

John Campbell

JONATHAN CAPE
LONDON

Introduction

ROY JENKINS ENJOYED an exceptionally long career at or near the top of British politics. He was first elected to Parliament at the age of twenty-seven in 1948. He sat in the House of Commons for the next twenty-eight years, rising in that time to be Home Secretary twice, Chancellor of the Exchequer and deputy leader of the Labour party, and appeared well placed to succeed Harold Wilson as Prime Minister until he wrecked his position in the party by his determined support for British membership of the European Common Market. After four years out to serve as the first (and so far only) British President of the European Commission, he returned to the Commons for a further five years as one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party, which, after initial heady success, narrowly failed to break the stranglehold of the Conservative and Labour parties on British politics; he then moved to the House of Lords, where he continued to play an influential role for another fifteen years until his death in 2003. This active parliamentary span of almost fifty-five years is surpassed only by Gladstone in the nineteenth century and Churchill in the twentieth – the titanic subjects of two of Jenkins' bestselling biographies – and matched by very few others.

Moreover, though he failed in his ambition to become Prime Minister – and indeed only held office for just over eight years – Jenkins left a greater mark on British life and politics than many who did successfully climb Disraeli's greasy pole. In three distinct areas – his Home Office reforms of the 1960s, Britain's membership of the European

Union and the reshaping of the centre left of British politics – his legacy is enduring.

First, as Home Secretary for the first time in 1966–7, he saw onto the Statute Book a shopping list of overdue reforms which between them transformed the ethos of British life: legalising homosexuality between consenting adults, allowing easier abortion (ending the scandal of thousands of women dying every year from illegal operations), abolishing stage censorship by the Lord Chamberlain, ending corporal punishment in prisons (capital punishment had already been suspended, after a campaign in which he played a leading part, just before he took office) and taking the first steps to outlaw racial discrimination and (in his second spell at the Home Office in the 1970s) sex discrimination, as well as radically restructuring the police service and reforming key parts of the criminal justice system. When subsequently demonised by conservatives as the godfather of the 'permissive society' and all its attendant ills, Jenkins was always able to point out that no subsequent government – not even Margaret Thatcher with her three-figure majorities – ever tried to reverse any of these measures, which in combination helped to make Britain a freer and more equal society. No doubt they would all have come about sooner or later, but it took extraordinary determination, courage, clarity of purpose and skill on Jenkins' part to drive them through in a very short space of time when he had the opportunity.

Second, he played a role second only to Edward Heath in taking Britain belatedly into the European Community, campaigning consistently for British membership from the late 1950s onwards, leading a large rebellion of Labour MPs against the party whip to carry the decisive vote in favour of entry in 1971, and then taking a leading part in the cross-party referendum campaign that confirmed British membership in 1975. At the time, and for thirty years afterwards, this seemed an historic and irreversible

decision. Today that certainty is called into question. Not only has Britain consistently baulked at committing to the further evolution of what is now the European Union, from the Social Chapter and the Schengen Agreement to the single currency, but there is now for the first time a serious possibility of Britain leaving the EU altogether. Though in his later years Jenkins was frustrated by the Blair government's failure to join the euro, he was convinced that it was only a matter of time; withdrawal from Europe entirely was unimaginable at the time of his death. Since then the rising tide of Euroscepticism, driven by a relentlessly hostile press and apparently vindicated by the near-collapse of the euro in 2012, inevitably tarnishes this part of his once unquestionable legacy. Nevertheless the argument is not over. In or out, Britain's relationship with Europe will remain a critical subject for debate and decision for years to come; and the pro-Europeans are beginning cautiously to find their voice again. Arguments about markets and sovereignty apart, from the moment he took up the cause the central thrust of Jenkins' case for membership was the belief that Britain must shake off the hangover of empire and learn to live with her continental neighbours as one medium-sized European power among others. In the decade since his death the experience of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and other ill-advised attempts to play the world's policeman alongside the United States has shown that this lesson has still to be learned.

Third, though Jenkins' bold attempt to recast the ossified structure of British politics ended in the short run with the failure of the SDP to break the mould in 1983, the shock of the SDP defection helped to drag the Labour party back from the clutches of the far left and led within barely more than a decade to the creation by Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Peter Mandelson of 'New Labour' – a post-socialist makeover that made Labour electable again by adopting practically everything the SDP had stood for, from continued

membership of NATO and the EU to the abandonment of nationalisation and the ending of old Labour's institutional subservience to the trade unions. The merger of the SDP with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democrats in 1988 created a much stronger and more disciplined third force than the old Liberal Party. Then, in the 1990s, Jenkins hoped to heal the historic breach between the Labour and Liberal parties, which had allowed the Tories to dominate the twentieth century, by persuading Tony Blair to form a Labour–Lib Dem coalition and cement it by introducing some form of proportional representation. Blair's landslide majority in 1997 and the refusal of his senior colleagues to give up a system that had rewarded Labour so handsomely put paid to that: Jenkins' recommendations were kicked into the long grass in 1998 and electoral reform was decisively rejected again by the referendum of 2012. Here again, however, the debate is not over. The devolved parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Mayor of London and British members of the European Parliament are all elected by more or less proportional systems: first-past-the-post for Westminster is increasingly an anomaly, and pressure for reform will continue as elections with a low turnout and a multiplicity of parties continue to produce increasingly bizarre and unpredictable results. Jenkins' 1998 proposals will continue to be the starting point for discussion of a practical and principled alternative.

Thus while Jenkins' social reforms of the 1960s remain unchallenged and irreversible, the other two great causes of his later years appear to have suffered serious setbacks since his death. Britain's membership of Europe could yet turn out to be an historic cul-de-sac; the reformers may never succeed in overcoming the vested interest of the two dominant parties in maintaining the existing voting system. But in the long run the overwhelming likelihood is that in both cases Jenkins' vision will eventually be realised. Britain cannot for ever evade the geographic facts of life that make

it ineluctably a part of Europe, single currency and all; and Westminster must one day accede to the justice of a properly representative electoral system. In all three areas, I believe, Jenkins will ultimately be seen as having been on the side of history.

But Jenkins was much more than just an unusually thoughtful politician. He was also a prolific writer, author over his lifetime of twenty-one books, including four full-length political biographies, four shorter biographies, two biographical collections, his own autobiography and several volumes of assorted essays, speeches, book reviews and other journalism. His writing was done mainly on holiday, in parliamentary recesses and at weekends; but it was much more than a hobby. It was a second career, which he sustained alongside his primary dedication to politics – while somehow managing to earn a reputation for being lazy! Except for the relatively few years when he was in government Jenkins, like Churchill, earned far more by writing than he did from politics and supported his family and an expensive lifestyle largely by his pen. And at least three or four of his books will continue to be read for years to come.

Above all, Jenkins was for at least the last thirty years of his life the embodiment of Britain's liberal establishment – that calmly (or complacently) superior elite of overwhelmingly Oxbridge-educated politicians, dons, mandarins, judges, broadcasters and commentators loathed equally by the old Labour left and the Thatcherite new right. From an early age Jenkins made it his business to know everyone in this cosy world, anatomised in 1990 by his friend Noel Annan in his book *Our Age*. He belonged to all the most exclusive clubs and dining clubs in London and lunched with some member of 'the great and the good' almost every day of his adult life. He collected honours and awards of every sort, from the chancellorship of Oxford University and the presidency of the Royal Society of

Literature to the Order of Merit. He was the Grand Panjandrum or Pooh-Bah of British public life – an extraordinary apotheosis for a miner's son from Abersychan. This is why I have thought it important to try to narrate his political career in the context of this wider social, literary and quasi-academic life: more than any other individual, Jenkins' immense network of friendships illuminates the assumptions and values of the British governing elite of the second half of the last century. It is also why I have not shied away from revealing his unconventional private life which reflects so much of the hidden world of that class in that era. I have tried to present the whole man in the round, and not just the politician.

I also believe, however, that Jenkins' long career throws a particularly clear light on the transformation in the conduct of politics over this half-century. When he was first elected to the House of Commons in 1948 the life of politics had not changed essentially since the days of his hero Asquith forty years earlier. Reputations were made and lost by speeches in the Commons chamber, while communication with the public was by speeches at packed and sometimes rowdy meetings up and down the country, fully reported in the newspapers. Television was in its infancy and even radio was largely barred from discussing current affairs. Politics was completely dominated by two class-based, ideologically opposed and well-supported parties: one predominantly middle- and upper-class and capitalist, the other largely working-class and avowedly socialist – though of course there was some overlap at the edges and generally cordial relations of mutual respect between the two. Both equally assumed that the future would be increasingly collectivist and egalitarian: Labour welcomed and sought to advance this process, while most Conservatives – before Margaret Thatcher – merely hoped to slow it. Up until the mid-1980s politics was genuinely a contest of ideas, between parties and within them: party conferences – particularly the annual

Labour conference – were occasions for real argument and real power struggles, passionately conducted in public – and in due course televised – even if the vote was decided in advance by union block votes in smoke-filled rooms.

This was the world in which Jenkins rose to become deputy leader of the Labour Party. He did it largely by being the most effective debater in the Commons when the floor of the House was still the cockpit of political conflict. By the time he left for Brussels in 1976 this was already beginning to change, as more and more political debate took place in radio and television studios, in interviews and soundbites rather than in set-piece speeches. When he returned to the Commons in 1982 Jenkins no longer fitted in. The Asquithian style that had dominated the House in the 1960s now seemed ponderous and old-fashioned; the satirical sketch-writers who had largely replaced the straight reporting of Parliament mocked his pomposity, and he was embarrassingly uncomfortable on television. Briefly in its early days the SDP managed to resurrect the crowded public meetings of an earlier age; but it did not last. Under Mrs Thatcher and Tony Blair and the insatiable demands of twenty-four-hour news, politics became the affair of strictly controlled media manipulation, trivial point-scoring and damage limitation that we suffer today. If I have devoted considerable coverage to the controversies and arguments of Jenkins' era, it is because they seem to come from a different age when politics was a serious pursuit, taken seriously by serious people and seriously reported – yet at the same time more fun and more rewarding because real issues were felt to be at stake. Above all, it was still an age of optimism and rising expectations, unlike the present dismal era of cutbacks, economies, narrowing options and widening inequality. Coming out of the war, Jenkins' generation (Labour and Conservative alike) had perfect confidence in a future of ever-increasing national wealth, expanding public services and personal leisure – a

confidence which mounting economic difficulties, the unpredicted rise of Thatcherism, climate change and global terrorism have sadly dented. They may not have felt much like it at the time, but from the perspective of the early twenty-first century the 1950s and 1960s now seem almost a golden age. Of course the over-confident illusions of Jenkins' generation contributed to the failures that Thatcherism set out to remedy; but the cure has been in its own way as bad as the disease. Over the whole seventy-year span from 1945 to the present no single career illustrates the heyday and retreat of social democracy in Britain more painfully than Jenkins'.

For all these reasons this is a long book: I could not have done justice to all the facets of Jenkins' career in a shorter one. It is based on a wide range of unpublished sources. First, since being appointed official biographer I have had full access to Roy Jenkins' own papers, stored until recently at his home in East Hendred, now transferred to the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I am immensely grateful to Dame Jennifer Jenkins for giving me the free run of this collection, including the wonderful wartime correspondence between herself and Roy of which I have made extensive use in Chapters Three and Four. This archive naturally provides the core of the book, though frustratingly for the biographer there are a lot more incoming than outgoing letters: as a professional writer Jenkins did not like to put pen to paper more than necessary unless paid to do so, and always preferred to respond to correspondents over lunch or on the phone. Nevertheless his papers testify to the extraordinary range of his friendships as well as preserving the drafts of all his books, the text of hundreds of speeches and articles, his contemporary notes towards his memoirs, the full typescript of his Brussels diary, his bank statements, tax returns and wine merchants' bills and – most valuable of all – his meticulously kept engagement diaries, which make it

possible to trace his movements and whom he lunched with almost every day for more than fifty years.

In addition to this private goldmine I have used the official records of the 1964–70 and 1974–6 Labour governments, housed in the National Archives at Kew; the Labour Party archive now in the People's History Museum in Manchester; the SDP archive at the University of Essex in Colchester; and other collections of private papers held at the Bodleian (Harold Wilson, Barbara Castle, James Callaghan), the London School of Economics (Tony Crosland, Peter Shore and one or two others), University College London (Hugh Gaitskell) and Churchill College, Cambridge (Enoch Powell, Lord Hailsham, Neil Kinnock and others). I have been lent valuable private material by individuals, including particularly Rosie Alison, Lord Hattersley, Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank, Robert Harris and Patricia Grigg; and I have conducted more than fifty interviews with surviving friends, colleagues and contemporaries, as well as with members of the Jenkins family, who have given me every help and encouragement. Finally I have of course drawn extensively on the immense published literature about the Labour Party, the Wilson governments and the SDP: the diaries of Hugh Dalton, Richard Crossman, Barbara Castle, Tony Benn, Paddy Ashdown and others; the memoirs of Harold Wilson, Jim Callaghan, Denis Healey, David Owen and a dozen more; biographies by Ben Pimlott, Philip Ziegler, Susan Crosland and Giles Radice, to name just a few; countless studies of the period by journalists and historians; as well as Hansard, *The Times* and other newspapers and journals. No period of political history can have been so thoroughly documented as the second half of the last century.

Finally I must declare my bias. Roy Jenkins was the first public figure I was aware of and always the one I most admired. I grew up as a near-neighbour of the Jenkins family in Ladbroke Square. I remember vividly his vigorously eccentric style on the tennis court in the communal garden

and the policeman outside his front door when he was Home Secretary; I even remember when someone scrawled ‘ASQUITH’ on one of the pillars. I was a Liberal at university – an endangered species in the late 1960s – and in the 1970s I was one of those consciously waiting for Jenkins and the Labour moderates to break out of the Labour Party, certain that they would have to do so sooner or later. When they did I was an enthusiastic foot soldier in the SDP, voted for Jenkins as leader and even wrote a short biography of him – my third book – published just before the 1983 election, in the course of writing which I helped at the Hillhead by-election in 1982. I was naturally a strong supporter of merger with the Liberals and took a dim view of David Owen. I met Jenkins several times when he was President of the local SDP branch in Kensington, where I then still lived, and continued to admire him almost without reservation, though to my regret I never came to know him well. I was disappointed when I heard that he had appointed Andrew Adonis to be his official biographer, and correspondingly delighted when the opportunity eventually fell to me after all. All this, I realise, makes me less than wholly objective as a biographer. In previous books, despite having lived through their premierships, I have written of Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher from a judicious distance. I can only hope that in this one my admiration and affection for my subject have not rendered me entirely uncritical.

John Campbell
September 2013

1

His Father's Son

DURING HIS LIFETIME a typically British controversy surrounded Roy Jenkins' origins. To his critics in the Labour party – themselves often guiltily middle-class and privately educated – it was almost inconceivable that this grand figure, with his drawling accent and air of lordly entitlement, should have been born and raised in the very heart of the labour movement. The son and grandson of miners, raised in the South Wales coalfield between the wars, his father actually imprisoned during the General Strike: romantic class warriors like Michael Foot and Tony Benn would have given their eye-teeth for such an impeccable socialist pedigree. Long before he abandoned Labour to found a rival party in 1982, Jenkins' enemies accused him of having rejected his roots and betrayed his class, practically from the moment he went to Oxford. Some alleged a purely political betrayal, asserting with Denis Healey that he was 'never really Labour at all'.[1] Others – most prominently Leo Abse, Labour MP for Pontypool and mischievous amateur Freudian – diagnosed a deeper apostasy: the authentic Welsh working-class identity which Jenkins derived from his father was undermined, Abse claimed, by the influence of his anglicised and socially ambitious mother, leaving the young Roy rootless, pretentious and déclassé.[2]

But most of this is nonsense. Roy Jenkins was indeed born into the heart of the South Wales Labour movement; but he

was born into a Labour elite that saw itself confidently on the way to becoming the new governing class. His father had been a miner, certainly, but there was never any question of Roy following him down the pit. By the time Roy was born, on 11 November 1920, Arthur Jenkins was already a full-time union official, chairman of the Pontypool Labour party and a Monmouthshire county councillor.[fn1] He later became an alderman, Justice of the Peace, Vice-President of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF), a member of the National Executive of the Labour Party and in 1935 – when Roy was fourteen – MP for Pontypool. He then quickly became Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to the party leader, Clement Attlee, and held that position throughout the war when Attlee was deputy Prime Minister. He was briefly a minister in the 1945 government before his early death. In short, Arthur Jenkins was not just a pillar of the local establishment in South Wales – where Labour already *was* the establishment – but also, when Roy was growing to political awareness, at the very heart of government and national politics. More than all this, however, he was also gentle, bookish, internationalist and resolutely unmilitant: all characteristics that he passed on to his son.

Arthur exemplified, in Alan Watkins' words, 'the great (now largely lost) tradition of Welsh self-improvement'.[3] He was born in 1882 at Varteg, a bleak moorland mining community five miles up from Pontypool in the easternmost valley of the Welsh coalfield, and educated up to the age of twelve at the Varteg Board School, when he left, like most of his contemporaries, to follow his father down the pit. After a dozen years at the coalface, however, educating himself through evening classes and discussion groups, he won a miners' scholarship (worth £30 a year) to Ruskin College, Oxford – the enlightened institution founded in 1899 to offer the opportunity of higher education to working men who would otherwise have had no chance of it. The fact that Ruskin was not strictly part of the university did not stop

Arthur regarding himself ever afterwards as an Oxford man. From there he gained another scholarship to study in Paris for ten months, where with his friend Frank Hodges (later general secretary of the Miners' Federation) he forged lasting contacts with leading French socialists while learning to speak and read French better than his son ever did. 'The classics of Russian fiction in his considerable library,' Roy wrote years later, 'were in French translations, which was unusual in the house of a South Wales miners' agent.'[4] Jenkins' love of France in particular, and Europe in general, was directly inculcated by his Francophile father.

Returning to Pontypool in 1910 after this two years' mind-expanding absence, however, Arthur had little choice but to go back down the pit. Working in a reserved occupation, he was spared the still greater horrors of the trenches which culled so many of his generation; but he spent less and less time underground as he made his career in the union. In 1911 he became secretary of the Pontypool Trades Council; in 1918 he was appointed deputy miners' agent for the Monmouthshire Eastern Valleys, and in 1921 he succeeded as agent. By this time he was also a county councillor and a governor of several local schools. Arthur was a good speaker and evidently not without ambition; yet he was an unusually unassuming politician – not at all a firebrand in the florid Welsh style associated with Nye Bevan, for example, raised in the next valley a decade and a half later. When Arthur died in 1946, aged only sixty-three, the obituaries all emphasised his scholarly manner. 'This gentle and sensitive son of Wales seemed, at a first meeting, to be more the poet or the student than the man of action,' wrote the *Daily Herald*.[5] The *South Wales Argus* mourned 'a man of outstanding personality and vision – an idealist and an internationalist, a self-taught man who started at the bottom of the ladder and, by perseverance and brilliant attainments, gained nationwide distinction without seeking it'.[6] Other tributes praised his integrity and selflessness.

Attlee called him one of the three most unselfish men he had met in politics.[7]

Meanwhile Arthur had married, in 1911, Harriet (always known as Hattie) Harris, daughter of the foreman of the Bessemer steelworks at Blaenavon, three miles further up the valley. In the social hierarchy of the Welsh valleys her background was several notches above his. But her mother died when she was four and her father when she was seventeen; so when Arthur met her she had come down in the world, living in lodgings in Pontypool and working as an assistant in a music shop. By marrying the already up-and-coming Arthur it was Hattie who was bettering herself, though doubtless she was keen to regain the social position to which she had been brought up. After three years in a miners' cottage at Talywain, Arthur and Hattie moved to a small but respectable terraced house set rather grandly above the main road through Abersychan – then a distinct village a couple of miles up the valley from Pontypool, with its own shops, police station, Working Men's Institute and no fewer than six chapels – Baptist, Methodist and Congregational – as well as an Anglican church and a Catholic chapel.[8] They named it Greenlands after the house where Hattie grew up. In 1915 she bore a stillborn son, and it was another five years before she conceived again, by which time she was thirty-four and Arthur thirty-eight. As the only child of mature parents, it is not surprising that Roy was cosseted and somewhat spoiled. Curiously, however, Arthur's diary for the days around his birth barely mentions the event. He merely noted that 'H. is going along very nicely indeed' and went into Newport as usual on 11 November for a council meeting.[9] Fathers did not get involved in childbirth in those days.

Before Roy was three the family moved again, 300 yards down the Snatchwood Road to a slightly larger house – also called Greenlands – less elevated but boasting a bathroom and a sizeable back garden running down to a railway track

(and a monkey-puzzle tree in the tiny front garden). Arthur was now earning an unquestionably middle-class salary of £300 a year. Their neighbours were the headmaster of the local primary school on one side and the builder who had developed the terrace on the other. They had a live-in maid, and the union soon gave him the use of a motor car. The front room of the house was Arthur's office, where a constant stream of people came to see him about their problems or union business. A cousin, interviewed in 1972, remembered 'a very cosy house . . . there were always bright fires during the winter and vases of fresh flowers in the summer. And books! Why, there were books everywhere.'[10]

This cousin denied that Roy was spoiled, 'but his parents thought he was absolutely IT, there was no doubt about that'.[11] Another agreed that Hattie 'was very ambitious for him, from the earliest age, and made a tremendous fuss of him'.[12] When, years later, the press began to look into his background, neighbours were happy to furnish memories of a rather pampered little boy. For instance, Derek Powell – the son of the next-door builder and one of Roy's two best boyhood friends – remembered:

> Hattie literally smothered Roy with love. She would hardly let him walk down the street alone. He was always a shy boy. I sometimes wonder if that was because his mother swamped him . . . His mother . . . tried to shelter him from everything. For example when he was at primary school she religiously saw him across the village road every day. He could have become stand-offish as a result of this, and of being an only child. But with me and our little gang he was not given the chance.[13]

The daughter of the other neighbours agreed:

> His mother was loth to let him out of her sight. When he had an ordinary appendix operation in hospital Hattie stayed with him for three days and nights refusing to go home. Even when Roy went down the road to Pontypool railway station to collect train numbers, along would go Hattie to sit and knit on the platform with him.[14]

That may be a bit unfair. The appendix operation, when Roy was seven, was serious enough to involve three weeks in hospital and six months off school; and Hattie certainly did not follow him around all the time, as Derek Powell's memory of their 'little gang' makes clear. In most respects Roy was a quite normally active, if privileged, boy:

> We were pretty lucky kids. Other boys in the valley . . . played on slag heaps. They had little else to do. But Roy and I had bicycles and splendid model railways and plenty of good things at Christmas.[15]

He also loved cricket, rugby and swimming. Moreover he was not entirely an only child, since for much of his childhood two elder cousins, Sybil and Connie Peppin, the daughters of Hattie's widowed sister, stayed with the Jenkinses much of the time, particularly in the school holidays: Sybil and Connie played with Roy in the sandpit, and later cricket in the garden – not cowboys and Indians, as Hattie did not allow guns; and in the summer the two families would go together to Swansea, Porthcawl or Weston-super-Mare. Later, when their mother died, Connie came to live with the Jenkinses. She was five years older than Roy, but he used to treat her, with a boy's assumed authority, as though she were the younger: 'He treated me like a sister. He'd give me worms to hold.'[16]

At the same time he was always a studious boy; and unusually – indeed, obsessively – numerate. 'The main thing

about Roy as a boy was his addiction to numbers,' Connie remembered. 'He was always silent and counting or working out some sum. He was like that ever after!'[17] He loved collecting facts, and once he had learned them he never forgot them, as he characteristically demonstrated in an essay on Glasgow written in the last year of his life:

> An excellent encyclopaedia (Harmsworth's) published in the early 1920s, to the study of which I devoted many childhood hours, gave with complete confidence the exact population of every major city down to the last digit. Glasgow then scored 1,111,428 compared with Edinburgh's 320,318.[18]

Likewise he relished cricket not so much for the game itself as for the statistics that it generated. As a boy, he wrote nostalgically in 1996, 'my life was dominated by cricketers, their scores and their enshrinement in the temporary pantheon of Players' cigarette cards'.[19] All his life he loved making lists and grading things – cities, wines or Prime Ministers – in rank order.

Like many boys in those days, his love of numbers found an outlet in trainspotting. Not only did the Eastern Valley line from Newport up to Ebbw Vale run past the bottom of his garden; but Pontypool Road, just three miles away, was then a major railway junction where the GWR (Great Western Railway) expresses from Bristol and Plymouth up to Manchester and Glasgow crossed – 'sometimes exchanging coaches' – with those from Cardiff to Birmingham.[fn2] 'The train for Glasgow, I remember vividly, had two engines, which made me feel that it must be both a distant and an important destination.'[20] Trains and distant destinations captivated him. 'He used to plan train journeys,' another schoolfriend recalled, '– complete with times and interchanges – to Jerusalem and Constantinople, and he could recite all the stations on the Paris metro at a very