



# MONTY AND THE MYTH OF THE UNSHAKEABLE PLAN: HOW BRITAIN WON THE WAR BUT LOST THE PEACE

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## WAR THE TEACHER

Where do people get their ideas of how to do things? Where do national electorates get their ideas — their “models” — of how national success is achieved?

One answer is that people learn during *crises*, and that they all learn together during collective crises. In a time of crisis the nervous system is at its most nervous, and information floods into it. The lessons of how the crisis was created, deepened, survived and — if this is what happens — triumphed over are learned with a special intensity. Vast philosophical package deals are struck, to which the participants will later be intensely loyal, far beyond logic.

War, the ultimate collective crisis, shapes ideas with unique intensity. A society fights for its life, and the peacetime culture that emerges from the ordeal must operate within the philosophical framework that emerges from the fight. Peace is suffused with the “aftermyth” of war.<sup>1</sup>

## IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONS

Mancur Olson’s book *The Rise and Decline of Nations* deals, among many other fascinating things, with the *institutional* effects of war.<sup>2</sup> He explains the much discussed fact that the Second World War’s defeated nations, Germany and Japan, have done economically far better than the nations that vanquished them. This, Olson argues, is because defeat destroys not only people and factories, but also such economically debilitating groupings as cartels, professions, and trade unions, so that afterwards there are no institutional barriers to entrepreneurship. Victory, on the other hand, leaves the special interests — what Olson calls the “distributional coalitions” — untouched. Thus the “British disease”.

So do mere ideas have no effect? Are they mere epiphenomena, which decorate but do not influence the underlying institutional realities? (Olsen speculates gloomily that his theory, even if widely accepted as both true and important, may have no effect on events at all!)

Hardly. Not every nation that loses a war then goes on to win the peace. If Japan and Germany have excelled since World War Two, then part of the reason is that although institutional handicaps were destroyed by war, the cultural assets of these nations that were stored in the memories and traditional practices of the surviving people were not destroyed. Actual functioning institutions may have ended, but the knowledge of and belief in the possibility of functioning institutions did not. The Germans and the Japanese still knew how to get things done. In this respect the fact of war may have been more important than the losing of it. The German and Japanese survivors of war were not looking back on a time of total failure. They had participated with extreme intensity in operations that succeeded, as well as in other operations that failed. Both types of activity are great learning processes.

The equal and opposite point holds true for the victors. They had their defeats, as well as their victories.

## WHAT BRITAIN LEARNED

I want to argue here that, quite aside from the way that the Second World War did not destroy the British Medical Association or Britain’s National Union of Mineworkers, there were other more particular influences at work, in the realm of ideas, that were peculiar to Britain’s particular experience of this particular war.

Briefly, what the British learned from the Second World War about how to get things done was largely wrong. Because of the way we fought the war, or thought that we had fought it, we installed in our minds a model of success which did work militarily, after a fashion, but which could not work economically, and which in due course did not work. Twice we tried to make it work, in 1945 and in 1964, and twice we failed.

Even as I write about what “we” did, I am aware of the limitations of such aggregation. Not everyone became an enthusiast for the welfare state in 1945, or for the “white heat of the technological revolution” in 1964. Nor did “we” all accept that these two great surges of collectivist enthusiasm were later proved to have been unwise, and then all become ardent Thatcherites. The shorthand of such intellectual history as this tends to exaggerate the importance of relatively slight fluctuations in opinion.

But the fact that the words commonly used to describe these ideological fluctuations are inexact is not to say that they never occurred. Even if all that really happened was that a few hundred journalists and publicists wrote different articles for a year or two, until some other equally superficial intellectual fashion came along, the fact remains that this much at least did happen. And it seems decidedly perverse to argue that nothing “real” happened because of these writings that would not have happened anyway. Not only was there talk in and after 1964 of national planning, there was in fact a “national plan”, and it had results. These were not the results desired by the authors of the plan, but some things were nevertheless being done differently because of that plan. The routine political demand for “action not words” does scant justice to the fact that words and actions typically go together. Clearly the decision to take certain actions causes certain words to be spoken by way of accompaniment and justification. But equally clearly, it seems to me, the words people use to organise their thoughts *result* in actions. If I did not think that words influenced events, I would not spend so much of my time putting words on paper myself.

Perhaps the most characteristic “real” result of political rhetoric is not in the form of what is done, but in the form of what is *not* done. The recent British “surge of enthusiasm” for the free market rather than state solutions to problems may not have resulted in much in the way of free

market solutions. But think of all the nationalised “solutions” that have *not* been attempted, of the number of Royal Commissions *not* appointed, of mega-ministries *not* amalgamated, of the engineering companies *not* forcibly merged by the government, of prices and incomes controls *not* imposed.<sup>3</sup> Ideas *do* matter, even if not in quite the way that the enthusiasts for them might desire.

It was the same with the “national planning” phase of the 1960s. The impact of that, I now believe, was in the number of businesses which might then have started, but which were instead caused to remain in oblivion by pre-emptive government economic activity. The British government of the 1960s did badly at car making. Equally important is that others, who might have done better than the government at car making, instead gave car making a miss. Ditto steel. Ditto shipbuilding.

### DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLANNING

It is commonly said that “planning” is an inevitable feature of modern war, no matter who fights it, and that therefore there is nothing surprising about how victory in war created a British predilection for planning. But in war, as in other endeavours, “planning” comes in many different forms.

Consider the illustrations commonly found in military history books, describing the course of a battle. Here is the terrain. Here are the armies, one consisting of black rectangles and the other of white ones. And here are the arrows, describing the motions of the rectangles. A common definition of “planning” is that it means putting your arrows on the map beforehand, saying beforehand where your army will go.

What then of Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding’s victory in the Battle of Britain? During the Battle of Britain it was the Germans who put arrows on the map, and Dowding’s pilots who awaited these arrows. British defenders observed where the German arrows were heading, and sent their pilots up into the sky to try to disrupt the German arrows. The arrows that finally ended up in the history books were not “plans” in any obvious sense. They were *outcomes* — *descriptions* of what happened — compiled during and after the event, rather than by the Luftwaffe or by Fighter Command beforehand.<sup>4</sup>

Dowding’s determination that he and his subordinates must first see what was happening before they decided what to do about it was of the essence of his approach to the battle, and he had to fight another battle on the home front with Fighter Command colleagues who wanted him to “take the initiative”. Sir Trafford Leigh Mallory argued, against Dowding and Sir Keith Park (who later successfully commanded the air defence of Malta) that Fighter Command should get more fighters up into the sky earlier, and thereby attack the Luftwaffe in greater strength, instead of attacking piecemeal, with tiny, heavily outnumbered squadrons scrambled at the last moment. The trouble with Leigh Mallory’s “big wing” strategy was that it depended for its success on always knowing where the German arrows would be, which Dowding’s defenders never did know until very late on. So although attacking a hundred German bombers with a dozen fighters might seem a very illogical way to go about things, it was in fact very logical, and it worked. The Dowding nightmare was of severe German bombing attacks on undefended Fighter Command airfields, with refuelling aircraft perhaps caught on the ground. This seldom hap-

pened. In due course, the Luftwaffe switched to other easier targets, and thus was the Battle of Britain lost and won.

Fighter pilots such as the legless hero Douglas Bader, who spent much of his time being kept in reserve day after day, to fight off later waves of German bombers which often failed to materialise, were understandably frustrated. Wing leader Bader sometimes disobey orders, that is, he behaved as if he already knew where the Germans were going to be.<sup>5</sup> Dowding himself could not afford to gamble thus, and orders were typically obeyed.

So, was Dowding “planning”? Before the battle Dowding concentrated on two things. He got the strategic vision right, and he got the tactical procedures right. Given those, he let the battle do what it would, the arrows falling where the day-to-day flux of events put them. He understood that the Luftwaffe must not be allowed to fly over Britain unmolested, and he established the correct procedures to ensure that molestation usually occurred. He devised and perfected the command and control system made famous in all the films. There was radar, of course, and there were the middle aged bank manager types — “controllers” — with their telephones, cool and logical. There were the heroically illogical pilots, often Polish. (You can’t get more illogical than a Polish Battle of Britain fighter pilot, as enacted in a film.) And there were the beautiful young ladies with their snooker cues shifting the arrows about on the table. The young ladies could do this job because they were reporting and illustrating, not deciding.

Inevitably it was the illogicality of the pilots which got the publicity at the time, rather than the extreme logic with which they were deployed. The supposedly romantic “few” stole the headlines from their classically calculating commanders.

### OFFENSIVE IMPROVISATION

Now it might be said that the reason that Dowding didn’t lash forth with “plans” was that he was on the defensive. Defence means reacting to the other side’s arrows, and therefore in this sense cannot be planned. The defender is at the mercy of events.

Yes and no. The Germans managed to combine rapid Dowding-like improvisation with attack. Like Dowding’s Fighter Command, the Wehrmacht had a strategic vision, and tactical excellence at all ranks. The strategic vision was that they were outnumbered and would thus, like Dowding’s Fighter Command of 1940, have to rely on their superior fighting abilities. Their tactical preparation ensured that they did indeed possess these abilities.

The German war experience was frankly, rather chaotic. “Blitzkrieg” was based not so much on trying to reduce the chaos, as on intensifying that experience for the enemy, while training your own soldiers to live with the chaos and still fight intelligently with limited information. All was dynamism, mobility, improvisation, and the most hair-raising risks. (Most people still don’t realise just how close the Germans came to *losing* against France in 1940!) Plans were constantly revised, updated, scrapped. The Germans knew that logistically they were up against it, so they had to rely on their brains, wits and nerves.

The German General Staff believed in orthodox planning, of the type that produced the Schlieffen plan with which the Germans had embarked upon, and in due course lost, the

First World War. Consider the Prussian officer who spent his entire late nineteenth century military career speeding up the planned German mobilisation by twenty minutes. Now there was an arrow, lovingly tended for decades before it was finally unleashed in 1914! Then Hitler came along and just told the German generals to attack, let me see now ... here! The dictatorial finger jabs imperiously into the map. The generals were horrified. But they obeyed, and the dynamically opportunistic Panzer armies conquered France within a few weeks, much to the amazement of their gloomy superiors. The ingrained dynamism and self reliance of the German soldiers of all ranks was what made the difference. This time, it was the hastily improvised but brilliantly conducted attack which triumphed against the “planned” defence.

Later the Red Army perfected an even more improvisatory approach to the offensive, which dominated Soviet military thinking from then onwards. The Red Army would attack on all fronts. Some attacks would be successful, others not. Reinforcements would then be sent only to the successful attackers, and kept from the unsuccessful ones, who would be ordered to do their best and hang on. In this case, therefore, there was even less reliance on pre-selected arrows than with the Hitler system of deciding a few days or weeks before the battle. Here the *attackers* were actually awaiting the outcome of events, and allowing *events*, rather than their own staff, to decide which arrows would subsequently figure in the history books. Once again, we see the Dowding pattern, of an overall strategic vision and preordained tactical procedures, followed by an *outcome* that consisted of whatever worked best on the day.<sup>6</sup>

The popular star of the American Second World War effort in Europe was General George Patton, who would charge ahead like the old fashioned cavalry officer he was, until such time as he could scrounge no more petrol. In our own time the Israelis have conducted their wars with similar improvisatory flair, and — like the World War Two Germans with whom they are so often, and with such knowing irony, compared — their achievements are based upon an abundance both of strategic grasp and of tactical excellence at all ranks, resulting in an outcome which the Israeli generals preside over but do not decide.

### PARTLY FREE AND PARTLY COMMANDED

One is reminded of the evolution of the English Common Law, where the vision (“justice”) is there, and the tactics (legal procedures) are there, but where the actual verdict is decided on the day, and often comes as a surprise to all concerned. Even more surprisingly, given modern notions of what law is, English *legal content itself* was allowed to evolve, within this strategic and procedural setting. The very law itself was unplanned! The arrows of legal content were never put their by any Napoleonic legal dictator. The arrows were historical reports of outcomes, which only guided further legal actions and verdicts after they had first evolved.<sup>7</sup>

Another example of the same thing is the kind of philosophy that has evolved in recent years for the successful running of large businesses. Hierarchical staffs have become unfashionable, and have been replaced by slimmed down corporate leaderships whose job is to proclaim not fixed plans, but the corporate “philosophy”. These grandees travel the terrain, preaching the company gospel, and hand-

ing out medals to those who seem to be bringing this alive most effectively. The corporate citizenry do their own “planning”, and once again the arrows of corporate history are reports of outcomes, not the means by which the key decisions were made in the first place.<sup>8</sup>

“Freedom” is not an all-or-nothing matter. One can be totally free, constrained only by such things as the laws of physics. One can be totally enslaved, and obliged to obey every order from one’s superiors with thoughtless enthusiasm, or one can be *partly* free, and *partly* commanded. One may have a catechism of strategic objectives and tactical techniques drilled into one, and then be left to decide how to apply those tactics to the achievement of those strategic objectives. Exactly who makes the vital decisions in a battle, or in a legal system or a corporation, is anything but definite. It certainly isn’t the automatic prerogative of the man at the top of the organisation chart. Dowding supervised the creation of the system within which the all important “scramble” decisions were made during the Battle of Britain, but it was the controllers who made these decisions on the day, not he, and in the end, we all regard the pilots themselves as having been the ultimate deciders of the battle. In the Soviet reinforce-success-and-starve-failure scenario, it was the front-line fighters of both sides who decided with their successes and their failures where subsequent Soviet resources would be applied.

Even if the top man does make the vital decisions, there is still the question of when and how often he makes them. Does he decide on his plan of attack days or weeks in advance, or does he improvise a stream of orders to suit the needs of the day in the manner of the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo?

Those who strongly favour free enterprise and strongly oppose state power are prone to collapse the distinctions between different forms and styles of state power. They are intensely aware of the great variety of styles of command offered by the free market, but unready to concede any corresponding variety in state institutions. It is true that some state power systems command obedience and tolerate no individual initiative whatever. But more common are state systems which tolerate or even command the exercise of initiative.

### BRITISH IMPROVISED ATTACK FAILED

For the first two years of the Second World War Britain’s generals tried to win their land battles by applying the same techniques of heroic improvisation as had been used by Dowding in the Battle of Britain, and by the Germans in France. There were some successes. In North Africa, the British won a spectacular victory at Bada Fomm against the Italians, which, although cleverly planned, was also a triumph for tactical excellence and superior initiative and opportunism on the day, much like the recent Falklands campaign.

Beda Fomm is now largely forgotten, for soon after that battle the Germans under the command of Erwin Rommel arrived in North Africa, which changed everything. In Rommel, fresh from his amazing French successes, we once again observe the master of the improvised attack.

The British at first tried to beat Rommel by themselves trying to fight in a dispersed, improvisatory manner, but it didn’t work. General Sir Claude Auchinleck’s Chief of

Staff, an extraordinary person called Dorman-Smith, tried to do what Hitler had done in 1940. He would arrive in the midst of some battered British unit, look at the map, and announce with a gleam in his eye that tomorrow we would attack ... here! The results were not satisfactory. The British soldiers were simply not good enough compared to their German adversaries to put together attacks on this basis. Rommel would see them coming, fire off orders in all directions, and the British would be beaten back with heavy losses.

Rommel was even credited by some observers with having the gift of divining the immediate future, which is a very useful gift if you are relying on improvisation to get your results. This was his “fingerschpitzengefühl”, which would tell him where and where not to stand when enemy shells were due. Often, it is said, he would move away from spots which were engulfed moments later by explosions. True or not, such anecdotes well reveal the moral domination that Rommel came to exercise over the North African theatre. What is definitely true is that in the desert Rommel used sometimes to command his tanks over an open radio channel in uncoded German! By the time the clumsy British got to where the “Desert Fox” had been, he’d gone. The effect of that on British morale may be imagined.

It is possible that the British Eighth Army in North Africa might eventually have discovered their own “Rommel”. They might eventually have found a military leader who matched Rommel’s improvisatory gifts, but who could also (unlike the hapless Dorman-Smith) win battles. But it seems unlikely, because the Hitler/Rommel/Dorman-Smith style depends on having the right human material with which to improvise. It is no good firing off inspired orders for attacks if one’s subordinates then scarcely even go through the motions of obeying them, or if they do obey them do it in a sort of plodding, slow motion stupor. Even more galling was that some of the Eighth Army soldiers, mostly the ones from the Dominions, *would* manage to obey orders like these, but would then have to watch their gains being frittered away by less enthusiastic or less competent comrades.

## CHURCHILL AND MONTY

In the event we shall never know if there was some undiscovered British Rommel waiting in the wings, because instead there emerged into the limelight a very different military personality: General Sir Bernard Montgomery.<sup>9</sup>

The dominant British public personality of the Second World War was, of course, Winston Churchill, and Churchill remained a formidable figure after the War, despite his 1945 electoral defeat. Few now apologise for having been inspired by his wartime leadership. “Monty”, on the other hand, is well on the way to being forgotten.

The film industry has been unkind to Monty. There were no Americans at El Alamein, so no film. American General Patton clashed with Monty, so in the Patton film Monty was shown lobbying ridiculously over a urinal, and causing an absurd Anglo-American altercation in Sicily. Monty got the blame for going — to quote the title of the film — *A Bridge Too Far*, because he supposedly treated the final months of the War as a sporting contest between himself and the Americans. But Monty got no credit for his contribution to the success of *The Longest Day* (upon which day occurred the crucial Normandy Landings).

So far as the public were concerned, Monty did little after the war. He degenerated into a sort of Goon Show character, personifying only the sadness of a soldier whose day has passed. Post war writings focussed on Monty’s military weaknesses as well as on his strengths, and his own memoirs did him less than justice. The victims of the cruel simplicities Monty imposed upon the fog of war with such arrogant confidence re-emerged to have their own embittered say.

How different was Monty’s reputation when he was at the height of his fame! In the autumn of 1942 the British were losing patience with Winston Churchill. There had been a long succession of defeats. There was Norway, Dunkirk, Greece, Crete, Tobruk, and terrible disasters against the Japanese. In North Africa the Eighth Army seemed about to lose Egypt, and quite possible the entire Middle East.

Then Monty took over in Egypt, and at El Alamein won the first great allied land victory of the war against the Germans. Churchill’s career was saved, and although often slow the subsequent allied advance never stopped. Tunis. Sicily. (At the time it was Patton with his notorious slapping incident who was in the doghouse, not Monty.) Italy. D-day, with Monty in charge of the armies and sharing the limelight with Supreme Commander Eisenhower. And then on to Germany, and to its abject surrender. Churchill symbolised defiance and meanwhile survival. Monty meant victory.

We British are now a lot prouder of the way we didn’t lose against Germany in 1940 than of how we won against Germany in 1945, which accounts for the persistence into our own time of the Churchill myth, but simultaneous eclipse of the Monty myth. We now have our doubts about the bombing offensive, about how the Soviets took Eastern Europe, and about the cost to Britain of victory. But at the time of these events the British had no such doubts. They blamed the Germans for the war and wanted them smashed, crushed and humiliated. There would be no fudges like the 1918 ceasefire that enabled the Germans to pretend they hadn’t lost the first of the two great wars. When the Germans *were* duly crushed, the British celebrated with uninhibited joy.

## MONTY’S ARROWS

In August 1942 Monty took over the Eighth Army from the defeated Auchinleck, and proceeded to beat Rommel by refusing to get involved in any mobile battles of the type Rommel was so good at. He slowed Rommel down. He decided where Rommel would launch his next attack, built one unbreakable defensive line, and announced that this would hold. It did.

The turning point of the North African campaign — I would say — occurred *before* El Alamein, at the end of the defensive Battle of Alam Halfa. Rommel had attacked the British with characteristic dash and verve and lack of care for supplies, trusting to his wits and his soldiers to get him through. The Auchinleck plan had been to improvise some kind of day-by-day defence, while always keeping the main body of the army in existence. The Dowding approach, in other words.

Monty did the opposite. He announced where Rommel was going to attack, and greeted him with a ferocious fixed defence from behind the Alam Halfa ridge. Monty sub-

jected Rommel's tanks to much more gunfire than they had expected, because this was now *the* defensive line. Rommel did a sort of motorised war dance down in the valley, trying to lure Monty's tanks out into the open. But Monty kept his tanks dug in. The frustrated Rommel withdrew, and Monty continued with his own preparations for his own attack, in his own time.

Monty then, in October 1942, fought the battle of El Alamein as a "real roughhouse" in which allied material superiority was at last made to tell. El Alamein began with a huge artillery barrage, and ended with a pursuit that was spoilt partly by the slowness of the British motorised cavalry, and partly by Monty's refusal to give Rommel the smallest chance to fight a battle of mobility.

Monty's philosophy of battle was that he always decided beforehand where the arrows would go. He insisted that it was his job to "make the enemy dance to his tune", and that it was up to him to compose the tune carefully beforehand. His attitude was simple. First you arranged for victory to be inevitable, taking as long to do that as you had to. You rehearsed the battle until everyone knew what they had to do. Then you went ahead with the battle, and won it. Then you set up the next battle, and won that, and so on until the war ended. Monty's soldiers were delighted. Thank God for a general who knew how to win battles. The caution for which Monty was later criticised was intrinsic to his huge wartime popularity.<sup>10</sup>

Freedom can be an ordeal rather than a pleasure. There are few things more frightening than being told to improvise an outcome for the achievement of which you feel yourself to be hopelessly unqualified. Monty always tried to spare his soldiers this ordeal, and usually succeeded.

Monty even told the impatient Churchill (during an anxious visit by Churchill to Egypt) that the El Alamein attack would have to wait until he, Monty, considered it ready. Churchill was not used to being treated like this, but rightly smelt victory and waited.

British desert codewords before Monty's time had been numerous, and sporty. They tended to be named after the birds that the upper classes liked to go out and shoot, for fun. "Snipe". "Gamecock". After Monty, the codewords became more modern and technological ("supercharge"), and less numerous. There would be one master plan at a time, and it would succeed. There was no doubt about it.

Monty disliked "special operations", the wartime equivalent of free enterprise, regarding them as frivolous and wasteful diversions.<sup>11</sup> Before Monty the Eighth Army was fighting in lots of little "battle groups", each with their own tanks, guns and infantry. Monty made everyone fight with their (much larger) divisions.

Monty's fundamental caution and deliberation was accompanied by a more relaxed attitude towards dress codes. The amateurs of the old school — or so went the myth — all dressed well and dressed the same, disguising their incompetence behind a facade of sartorial correctness. The new professionals were a more sartorially flamboyant lot, which Monty tolerated and even encouraged, so long as the man inside the peculiar clothing knew his job and did it with professionalism. When inspecting his soldiers Monty looked not at *uniforms* but at *eyes*, and no-one subjected his famous stare ever forgot it. Monty himself joined in the sartorial fun by wearing various different sorts of funny hat,

donated to him by his various and nationally variegated subordinates. This now sounds rather like amateurism, but the professional point behind it was that Monty got to know his men, and his men got to know him. It all made a profoundly refreshing contrast to the aloof grandees by whom Monty had been preceded.

Monty knew all about the importance of well staged visits from the man in charge, having served in the trenches in World War I as a junior officer. Then, such visits tended to be done either very badly, or not at all.

## THE AFTERMYTH IS WHAT COUNTS HERE, NOT THE REALITY

When polishing the final draft of this piece after a long interruption it became clear to me that I ought, as President Richard Nixon used to say, to "make one thing perfectly clear". *My judgments about the military "realities" of the Second World War and of Monty's exact contribution are not my central concern here.* To all who regard me as having myself been taken in by the Monty myth, as propagated by the likes of Alan Moorehead, I can only say, maybe I have been. Maybe Monty did so well because he just happened to take command at the exact time when things were bound to improve anyway, thanks to better weapons arriving at last and growing British military professionalism generally, as is still argued. Maybe Auchinleck, having triumphantly won the "First Battle of El Alamein" (the defensive engagement that preceded Alam Halfa and the "actual" Battle of El Alamein) would, if he'd been left in command, have subsequently done even better than Monty. But it doesn't matter if I, with the calm detachment of one who was unborn at the time and has never had his judgment distorted by taking part in an actual battle (let alone any of the battles I am describing), prefer to think otherwise. What concerns me is what people *thought at the time*. Whether they were right is an interesting argument, but is not the one that here concerns me. In describing the Monty myth I must necessarily do my best to describe how and why this myth originated, which is hard to do without taking sides in the various arguments about the real events at the time that gave rise to the myth, but the myth itself — and what it subsequently did — is the point of this piece, not the accuracy of the myth in the first place.

## EVERYTHING ALWAYS WENT ACCORDING TO PLAN

What the British learned from Monty was to prefer professionalism to amateurism, meritocracy to aristocracy, fitness to flab. They learned to admire modernity, science and technology. (One of Monty's favorite phrases was "modern war".) They learned that success in "modern war" comes from refusing to treat war as a game. (In this respect the Monty of *A Bridge Too Far* was the opposite of what he symbolised at the time.) They learned to admire planning, and to distrust improvisation. It would only be "alright on the night" if elaborate rehearsals were held to make sure that it was. They learned to prefer organised teamwork to disorganised individualism. They learned that the rugged methodical, logical infantry of democracy could triumph against the fanatically mobile risk-takers of Hitler's armies.

War was serious business. Those who commanded it had to know about it. Gleeful anecdotes circulated about a fat colonel who, when Monty was training soldiers in the south of

England in 1940, had complained that if he went on one of Monty's training runs he would have a heart attack, and of how Monty had said that it was better for the colonel to have his heart attack during a run than during a battle. (After the war Monty came to be thought of as the type of useless upper class twit that during the war he was famous for sacking.)

Churchill's heroic illogicality was all very well and good, if that was all that was available. The fighter pilots had saved Britain from defeat, and praise be to them. But you didn't *win* wars that way.

For the Germans during the Second World War individualism went hand in hand with modernity, while patient, large scale planning was experienced as old fashioned, large scale planning having been tried unsuccessfully by the Germans in World War One. But for the British, individualism meant old fashioned amateurism, while modernity and large scale planning went hand in hand.

As Monty told it at the time and ever since, everything always went according to plan. He never made mistakes. No battle survivors grieving for their friends, or sorrowing widows grieving for their men, ever heard from Monty about soldiers dying through Monty's mere errors. No. Every death was a direct contribution to the winning of the war, every battle a success. If the men didn't have confidence in their commander, morale would suffer. Winning counted for more than truth. Which, by the way, explains why Monty's memoirs were so unsatisfactory. He remained loyal to his dead soldiers to the end. He was not going to admit that *any* of them had died during cock-ups.

The truth is, of course, that Monty's plans did go wrong from time to time, and that he did himself little justice as a military commander by pretending otherwise. He would change his plans when they failed, and even sometimes when unpredicted success beckoned. But he didn't do this very much. His virtues were simplicity and determination; his vices inflexibility and insensitivity to events. Monty the "master of the unshakeable plan" is a fair picture.

(When Monty's underlings wanted to change his mind they usually failed, and when they succeeded they did it by planting their new idea delicately in his mind, with only one of them in the room doing the talking so that Monty didn't feel pressurised by a mutinous combination. Later Monty would announce the new idea as his own, at which point you forgot about who had really had the idea. The plan was unchanged, and its history was falsified. "Planning" was ever thus.)

At the heart of Monty's success was that the gap in quality between Monty and the average British general was greater than the gap between the best German generals and the average German lieutenant. Germany during the Second World War was a militarised culture. Fighting was in everyone's bones. The British army, by contrast, was a mass of civilians in uniform. They weren't stupid, nor did they lack courage. They just did not know about fighting in the way that the Germans did, and this is just as true of most of the "professional" soldiers as of everyone else. The best British officers were quite good, but the average ones, although worthy, were not in the same class as the German average, and the worst were quite awful.

During the inter-war years, Monty was a most untypical figure, more German than British. He took war seriously!

While his brother officers studied polo or birdwatching or the languages of India, Monty studied infantry tactics, and gunnery, and tank fighting, and air support. By 1939 he knew his trade thoroughly, better than practically any other senior officer in the British army, and *far* better than most of them. (See what I mean about taking sides!)

Monty's ignorance of the wider world of culture was absolute. His post-war selection of "Desert Island Disks" records was stunningly philistine. He called sex "horizontal relief".

Accordingly, for all its much discussed imperfections, the best system for the British army to win battles during the Second World War was for Monty to be put in charge, and for everyone else to do as they were told.

Monty certainly had no doubts that this was the way to do things, and he systematically prepared both himself and everyone else for this procedure ("modern war"). Those who did as they were told with enthusiasm were promoted. Those who disobeyed or flagged were "quite useless" and were sacked.

Monty analysed what each soldier would have to do on the big day, and he made them all rehearse it, hence the delay before El Alamein, and the enormous frustration Monty routinely caused among the more dynamic Americans of the Patton persuasion. During the years and decades before these war winning rehearsals, Monty had trained *himself* in the art of how to run and learn from such rehearsals. He became an extraordinarily effective public speaker.

The British during the Second World War excelled especially in the art of artillery barrages, because this is an art that has to be rehearsed, and cannot safely be improvised on the day. (There were some notable Monty artillery barrages which went ahead even though it was realised that they would in fact serve no purpose, simply because such plans were best not tampered with once decided upon.) The opening minutes of the attack as enacted in *A Bridge Too Far* are a superbly vivid recreation of a typical British — Monty-inspired — creeping barrage, advancing like a massive beast across the ground towards the terrified defenders. What the British were always worst at was pursuits, at exploiting their victories, because they never knew when and where the enemy would run, or how fast, or how many vehicles either side would have left. Improvisation is always done best by professionals. Amateurs need to be told everything. Amateurs have to be planned.

The Monty approach could go terribly wrong, and occasionally it did, in the manner of a Broadway musical that has to be taken off after two nights with the money all spent. If Monty failed to learn soon enough about the exact strength of the enemy his arrows could hit serious trouble, at which point his stubborn determination to proceed with the plan could be a terrible liability, as was most famously the case at Arnhem, and as was thoroughly explained in *A Bridge Too Far*.

Sometimes Monty unleashed ludicrously over-elaborated plans when a simple attack a fortnight sooner would have done the trick with a fraction of the fuss. According to some, his crossing of the Rhine was just such a pantomime. This was intended to be the first Allied crossing of this mighty barrier, but the Americans had already found an intact bridge, and nipped across first.

But at its best Monty's attitude was a war winner, and never more so than with the Normandy Landings of June 1944. The English Channel really was a barrier. I shudder to think what D-Day might have turned into without Monty to polish up the plans beforehand, and take charge of the final rehearsals. You cannot improvise your way across "the world's biggest anti-tank ditch". There was no bridge across *that* which the Germans had neglected to blow up. That show had to be planned fanatically. On the beaches for which Monty was directly responsible, things went very well. On the American beaches the attack teetered on the edge of disaster. A Montyless D-Day does not bear thinking about.

So preordained were Monty's attacks that if they occurred at night he used to sleep through them. The machine was in motion, so there was no point in him worrying. Throughout the war Monty almost never had less than eight hours of uninterrupted sleep.

### THE FOG OF WAR DISPERSED

Large scale planning is difficult if you don't know what will happen next. One reason that the Monty style was so effective was that throughout the Second World War the allied commanders *did* know what was going to happen next, because they were eavesdropping on the conversations of their German adversaries. This was "Ultra".

Most soldiers must operate in a fog of ignorance, the so-called "fog of war". But during World War Two, for the upper ranks on the allied side, the fog miraculously cleared. All kinds of "macro" projects that would normally have failed became possible. Here was yet another chasm that was fixed between the allied bosses and the allied underlings, this time a chasm caused by knowledge and ignorance, rather than by competence and incompetence.

If the Ultra information had not been available Monty could not have done nearly as well as he did. As it was Ultra suited Monty's safety-first, set-piece approach perfectly. In the Ultra world, plans had to be made only by those privy to the secret, but in such a way that the secret was never revealed, a complex task that required coordination, discipline and enthusiastic but ignorant trust from the lower ranks, the Monty virtues.

By contrast, the less the German underling depended on the plans of his superiors and the security of his communications with them, and the more he depended on himself, the better he did.

By the nature of the secret, Ultra was never any part of the immediate public aftermyth of the war, for the British or for anyone else. But it did pervasively affect things, indirectly. Broadcaster Huw Weldon, to take just one example, appeared on television a few years ago, remembering D-Day, in which he participated, and he said that the big impression he remembered from D-Day was that although he personally did not know what the plans were, he remembered *feeling absolutely certain that events were unfolding in accordance with them.*

If you were a planner in the Ultra world, you could put your own offensive arrows on the map, and at all times during the subsequent battle you knew what the enemy was thinking and doing about your arrows, and could make sure that your arrows were suitable protected. Better yet, the

enemy's arrows, known beforehand, could be included in your own plan.

Informed by Ultra, allied planners made regular use of grand deceptions, because they always knew whether the Germans were being deceived or not. At El Alamein Rommel was persuaded to believe that the main attack would come in the south rather than the north. Both before and after D-day, the Germans expected the main cross channel attack to come in the area of Calais, and treated the Normandy beachhead as a side-show until it was too late.

Monty got off to such a good start with the Eighth Army at Alam Halfa because he *knew* where Rommel was going to attack. His intelligence people had told him! One of Monty's cleverer wartime achievements was to create a mythical Monty figure who could look at maps in a totally scientific and logical manner, and thereby deduce exactly what was going to happen, and to persuade his soldiers that this was how he did it. The would-be improvisatory style of Monty's predecessors had been deeply frustrating to the intelligence people, because they felt that their beautiful Ultra material was not being used properly. But when Monty slowed things down and planned everything, Ultra came into its own.

One of Monty's greatest strengths was the way that he was able to enthuse the people *off* the battlefield, such as intelligence analysts, stores and munitions workers, and so on. Monty made these people feel important (which they emphatically were) and it was these militarily somewhat boring departments that eventually produced the allied victory, rather than battlefield brilliance. The fundamental reason why Monty was such a good choice as Britain's military supremo during World War Two was that Britain was on the logistically superior side. Once America entered the war, the Germans were bound to be defeated, provided the logistical superiority of the allies was brought to bear against them. No other British general could muster the enthusiasm for talking to munitions workers or tank menders the way Monty could.

### MONTY HIMSELF WAS A CHANCE OUTCOME

Not only were Monty's methods themselves very expensive; one should also consider the enormous cost involved in *finding* Monty in the first place. I have perhaps made Monty's rise to supremacy seem inevitable, but of course he only got supreme command after an agonisingly prolonged search process had been gone through. During the search, there were some terrible command failures. At Dunkirk, a general by the name of Barker more or less collapsed on the job. Poor old General Percival did little better at Singapore, against the Japanese.

In other words, taken as a whole, the British military effort in World War Two was much more like the Soviet or "outcome" picture than it was seen as at the time. The generals were all hurled pitilessly into battle. Only one did really well, and he was then given the pick of the remaining resources. Monty was the great planner, but there was nothing planned about the way he got the top planning job in the first place. Monty excelled at Dunkirk, and went on to perform training prodigies back in England. But despite all that he had done, he only got command of the Eighth Army after the first choice for the job, General Gott, had been killed in an air crash! There is no reason to think that the

brave but by then exhausted Gott would have done any better than Auchinleck had.

It's all very well to put your faith in "planning", but it has to be a *good* plan. You cannot rely on arriving at a good plan with your first choice of planning supremo. And what if, as people naturally agonised at the time, Monty's plan for El Alamein had been a bad one? There would have been yet more hideously costly searching for the winning command formula.

### "THERE'S GOT TO BE A PLAN"

Monty was, first, last and always, a professional soldier, *the* British professional soldier of the Second World War. That he used constantly to climb onto the bonnets of jeeps and give little pep-talks to his soldiers, or to visit munitions factories and give speeches to the workers, was not evidence of a desire to go into politics. It simply meant that he wanted his soldiers to fight and the workers to work. What they were doing was important. He told them so, and they believed him. Monty's views on keeping the army out of politics and *vice versa* were entirely orthodox.

Nevertheless, via that crucial military concept known as morale, Monty did permit and even encourage all kinds of politically radical schemes, like discussions amongst the troops of war aims, semi-accurate newspaper reporting of his exploits, readable regimental newspapers and so forth. (All of his battles, after all, were bound to be victorious, so there was no need for him to interfere in the reporting of them.<sup>12</sup>) As a result, the Eighth Army especially was regarded as rather left wing, and Monty himself as a politically somewhat dubious person. There were rumblings.

All of which only reinforced the atmosphere of popular leftism which, with hindsight, we can see developing during the latter half of the war. The idea grew that the war was being won by the people, led by popular figures such as Monty and Churchill, but *despite* the old dillettante upper-classes whose scions would sooner shoot a healthy horse than make a speech in a munitions factory. The "men of Munich" merged in the popular mind with the pre-Monty losers of North Africa. The Battle of Britain fighter pilots, even Churchill himself, were perceived as heroic anachronisms.

The point of this essay is that the left-wing attitudes of many of the more thoughtful British soldiers during the Second World War, and the manner in which this war was fought, were no mere coincidental circumstances. Each reinforced the other.

Even as Monty was winning his battles, strictly according to plan, other thin, brainy, persuasive persons were to be seen in the cinema prophesying a planned peacetime economy, again in contrast to the way things were said to have happened at the end of the previous war. Keynes. Beveridge. "There's got to be a plan."<sup>13</sup> Monty in civies.

Again with hindsight, one can see that two surges of British enthusiasm for peacetime "planning" were going to happen. There would be a phase that the soldiers of the Second World War would *vote* for, and there would be another which, twenty years later, they would themselves *offer* to the next generation with an enthusiasm that would be totally genuine and irresistibly contagious. The 1945 election result was a big surprise at the time, and has been much talked about ever since. But the 1964 surge under Prime

Minister Harold Wilson seems to me to be worth dwelling upon here, because the link between *that* and the Second World War has been much less discussed.

The conservative commentator Christopher Booker has written, in a fascinating but now long forgotten book about the sixties called *The Neophiliacs*, of how the 1964 Wilson vision was just that, a vision — an *imaginative* fact rather than any appeal or response to reality.<sup>14</sup> In my opinion 1964 was the second great attempt to win the peace with the methods that had won the war, conducted this time by middle aged men with power who were in their twenties and thirties during the war.

*The correspondence between the sixties vision that Wilson presided over and the Monty myth is exact down to the last detail.*

There is the almost magical fascination with the power of "planning", with the expertise of experts. Little thought was given to the actual content of the plan as such. It was the *idea* of planning that sparkled. There was the same lust for technological modernity. Above all there was the same class imagery. The amateurs were to be swept away by the professionals, the gentlemen by the players, the past by the future, the aristocratic, improvising, ineffectual, free enterprise, boringly dressed and stupid losers by the democratic, planned, effective, centralised, flamboyantly dressed and brainy winners. Goodbye Lord Hume; hello Mr Wilson.

The extraordinary extent to which the sixties were the product of the forties is masked by the fact that the sixties supposedly embodied a rejection of the past. *But this rejection of things past was itself the product of the past.* The sixties was not only the product of the fantasies of the young, but even more strongly, as Christopher Booker explains well, of the fantasies propagated by the middle aged and the elderly *about* the young. The sixties was a myth created by middle aged journalists, using young people as raw material for their dreams of perpetual youth. The young played their parts eagerly. Their elders were telling them that they had invented the sixties all by themselves, and they happily went along with this. But the loathing for upper class twits that figured so prominently in the rhetorical battles of the sixties wasn't so much the result of a battle *between* the generations, as of a civil war going on *within* the older generation.

By 1964 Monty himself was perceived — insofar as he was still perceived as anything at all — as being a thin member of the upper class twit team, so absolutely no mention whatever was made of him by the 1960s myth makers. Nevertheless, his ghost hovered unmistakably over the British political scene of the 1960s.

### "THE SAME DYNAMIC DREAM"

I want to illustrate the correspondence between the Monty myth and the atmosphere in Britain of the sixties by quoting at length from *The Neophiliacs*. Here is Christopher Booker in full flight.

Meanwhile, in the same early months of 1961, the What's Wrong With Britain movement and the clamour for 'dynamism' gathered way in newspapers, magazines and even books. A Penguin Special, *The Stagnant Society*, by a journalist, Michael Shanks (New Oxford Group), sold 60,000 copies, while another, *What's Wrong With The Unions*, actually launched a

whole series under the all-embracing title *What's Wrong With ...*. The vogue was almost entirely the creation of the New Oxford Group (although in the *New Statesman*, Mr. Wilson, catching the whiff of the times, published his own, rather more conventionally phrased 'Four Year Plan' for Britain) and the clamour was particularly strong in those newspapers where the New Oxford Group was by now strongly entrenched, such as the *Observer*, *Time and Tide* and the *Sunday Times*, under the guidance of its new Political and Economic Editor, William Rees-Mogg. It was also catching on with the glossy magazines, *Queen* and *About Town*, who could now throw in alongside their photographs by David Bailey and Terence Donovan, such headlines as 'Wanted — A Minister of Planning' and 'A Shot In The Arm', featuring the 'tonic men for a country half-asleep', photographed against a background of thrusting hypodermic syringes and a cartoon of fading Britannia. It was no accident that it was just these papers which were on the crest of a wave of young, upper-middle class popularity, with their antennae out for any new excitement that happened to be in the air, whether joining the Common Market or candy-striped shirts, economic 'growth' or features on leather jacketed 'ton up kids'.

Even if their impatience occasionally led them into flights of fancy which were obviously wild, certainly the message of the 'What's Wrong With Britain' journalists was clear enough. Britain was being 'strangled' and 'suffocated' by 'complacency', 'inefficiency', 'out-worn attitudes', 'archaic institutions', the 'class system' and 'amateurism'. The remedies, only too obvious, were 'dynamism', 'professionalism', 'ruthless competition', 'tough-mindedness', 'more research', 'more investment', 'more roads', 'more monorails to speed Britain's traffic', more tough ruthless professionalism in every direction. But for all the chunky phraseology that Messrs. Rees-Mogg, Crosland and their confreres were given to, the fact was that it all remained amazingly vague. For all the fearless assaults on 'complacent managements', rarely if ever was such a complacent management actually named. For all the talk about the need for 'classlessness' and an end to the 'top jobs always going to the man with the right tie and the right accent', it was always coming from top journalists with the right public school and university background. And certain passages of the litany began to appear again and again—such as the charge, invariably unspecified, that 'too much British sales literature is going to South America written in English' — like mystic, incantatory runes, all part of the same dynamic dream.<sup>15</sup>

#### EDWARD HEATH — LEAN AND HUNGRY

The Conservative Party responded as enthusiastically to the Zeitgeist as did Labour, a response personified by the election of Edward Heath to replace Sir Alec Douglas Hume as Conservative leader, so reminiscent of the changes that Monty made in North Africa in 1942, and so palpably an attempt to re-enact that miracle.

There was, for instance, the shot in the arm given to the Conservative Party by its election of a dynamic new leader.

On 22 July, Sir Alec Douglas Home brought to an end his eighteen-month interregnum as Conservative leader. During the five-day campaign to elect his successor, the first election of its kind the Conservative Party had held, the national press came out almost unanimously in support of the eventually successful candidate, Edward Heath. Here are some of the phrases that were used to describe him at that time:

'Mr. Heath ... a man of action ... young, determined, reserved, tough-minded bachelor.' *Sunday Times*

'He is aggressive in thought and speech, a tactician but also a man of action'. *Daily Mail*

'Mr. Heath ... tough, energetic'. *Daily Sketch*

'Mr. Heath ... tough, ruthless'. *Daily Express*

'Ted Heath ... the more aggressive and dynamic leader'. Chairman of the Bow Group

'DYNAMIC MR. HEATH IS LEADER'. Headline in *Bristol Evening Post*

'Mr. Heath is abrasive and has the energy of a powerhouse'. *Daily Mirror*

'Mr. Heath and Mr. Wilson ... an abrasive pair'. *Sun*

'Heath ... the more abrasive man'. Clive Irving — *Twentieth Century*

'The abrasive Mr. Heath'. *Evening Standard* — twice in one edition

For several weeks the build-up continued always with the same insistence on 'toughness', 'energy', 'youth', 'efficiency', 'professionalism' and, above all, 'classlessness'. 'Do you appreciate,' breathed a *Sunday Times* interviewer, Nicholas Tomalin, 'that you are the first Tory leader with wall-to-wall carpeting?' The *Weekend Telegraph* even went so far as to publish a picture of Mr. Heath carefully posed with his master-builder father outside their 'ordinary terrace house' in Broadstairs, with the caption 'Ted Heath ... has no interest in exploiting his class-origins to win votes'. As was to be expected, the colour supplements in particular went to town on the new Tory leader: the *Weekend Telegraph*, in a profile, mentioning his:

'hard, direct stare ... slightly harsh voice ... a tough, restless man ... with no taste for small talk. ... Deviousness irritates him ... ceremonial rather bores him, heavy emphasis on tradition irritates him and convention often irks him ...'

And it was not just Mr. Heath himself, with his 'astonishing capacity for hard work, great grasp of detail and prodigious memory', his Albany flat furnished in 'impeccable taste', his 'ruthless dieting', and his 'fierce desire to see Britain more competitive', who came in for such generous journalistic appraisal. There were also his young assistants, 'a group of young Tories', as the *Observer Magazine* put it, 'from very different backgrounds, but all sharing the same pre-occupation with efficiency, personal and political', and who in the months before their leader's promotion had been at his right hand during the Conservative Party's 'long policy rethink', following its election defeat in 1964:

‘Ted Heath likes to gather people, younger people, around him. He summons them on the telephone. They come to breakfast with him at his chambers in Albany. Like Kennedy he is very intelligent, but no intellectual. But he *ruthlessly* uses intellectuals and experts to advise him, to feed him with facts ... it is part of the technique, the computer mind at work’.

More and more, as these eulogies continued, with their succession of grainy, wide-angle photographs of Heath’s young lieutenants, such as Peter Walker (‘self-made ... passionately interested in efficiency’), Edward du Cann (‘like Heath and Walker [he] deploras the amateurishness of British politics’), David Howell (‘in his late twenties ... with a talent for lucid exposition of the New Tory philosophy of efficiency’), self-consciously posing in their ‘extravagantly, almost senatorially furnished’ flats or their down-to-earth, classless Highgate gardens, alongside such ‘efficiency’ symbols as multiple telephones and portable television sets, the more a pattern emerged. Behind one or two immediate differences, such as the heavier emphasis on ‘efficiency’ and the references to President Kennedy, it was to a remarkable extent the pattern of that same collective ‘dream image’ — ‘young’, ‘classless’, ‘irreverent’, ‘crisp’, ‘superbly professional’ — that gilded the New Aristocracy and the heroes of ‘Swinging London’.<sup>16</sup>

All this is pure Monty, as seen through the eyes of those who revered him. Monty himself was not young when at the height of his fame and achievement, but just like the lean and hungry Edward Heath of sixties myth, he demanded youthful vigour and fitness both from himself and from his subordinates, and was noted also for preferring the company of subordinates to that of equals or superiors, with whom he was notably crisp, abrasive, professional, and so on. The sixties were not even original in stressing, quite suddenly and seemingly out of the blue, the virtue of sartorial flamboyance. That too had been pre-echoed by the Eighth Army, and by Monty.

### HISTORY REPEATED AS FARCE

So, what did this attempt to re-enact the Monty transformation in sixties Britain achieve in practice?

The worship of the non-upper class young was splendid for churning out pop music, but the economics of doing a Monty to the British economy as a whole were doomed from the start. Monty’s way with material resources was fine during the World War Two, given that money was, during World War Two, no object. But as an economic exemplar to post-war Britain he was an absurdity. In the 1960s there was no identifiable enemy whose plans could be eavesdropped upon. There was no agreed definition of victory. Above all, the idea in the 1960s was to *make* money (‘revitalise’ Britain’s *economy*), not to spend it in the pursuit of non-economic aims such as crushing Germany.

Nor, in the 1960s, was there any Monty. Wilson turned out to be no better at commanding the British economy than anyone else chosen with a pin would have been. He soon turned from “planning” to “pragmatism”, to improvisatory muddling. Rousing, Monty-like speeches on the television were useless (“quite useless” as Monty would have said) given that the plan itself was unsound. The Labour cabinets of both 1945 and 1964 were simply not prepared for the

task of high command that they had set themselves in the way that Monty had prepared himself. Between them and the British at large there was no gap, either of competence or of knowledge. The nationalisation of the coal industry in 1945 was commanded by ... Manny Shinwell! The “national plan” of the sixties was presided over by ... George Brown! Brown was touted in the sixties as the “cleverest man in England”. If he had been he would never have got this absurd job for himself in the first place.

Monty, who really was a clever man, had immersed himself to the point of obsession in the question of what supreme command in a real war was going to be like. He became an expert at “visualisation” techniques and “role playing” long before these phrases became fashionable commonplaces of business-speak. Manny Shinwell later confessed that when he first faced the job of nationalising coal, he realised that he had given no thought to the question of how this was actually to be done.<sup>17</sup>

### WHAT NEXT?

Without any wartime folk memories to sustain them, the British are now painfully relearning the ancient truths of economic success, just as they had to learn the hard way how to win the Second World War. That seemingly wasteful but in fact essential search process known as capitalism is now being ploddingly rediscovered.<sup>18</sup>

Even now, some of our more elderly Cabinet Ministers imagine that they can themselves “pick winners”,<sup>19</sup> rather than allow the job to be done by the interaction between the — unidentifiable beforehand — winners themselves and the flux of events. They still think that the arrows of economic success are theirs to command rather than matters for business historians.

Many ancient members of the British political profession still seem to imagine that there exist no economic problems that cannot be solved by the government writing out more blank cheques. Decaying persons who imagine themselves to be behaving with impeccable logic are *still* “dancing to the tune” written by an old general who died a quarter of a century ago.

If Monty is still the secret hero of this now dying generation, this is understandable. Monty is my hero too, or one of them. But that is because he did what he had to do, with the resources at his command, in a way that then made sense. Britain’s problems now are very different. If we can learn from Monty, it is only in the generalised sense that we should vigorously and confidently confront our problems with solutions that are appropriate to the problems we now face.

The age-groups that now dominate the British electorate and British decision-making have experienced “planning” only as a farcical disappointment, and planners — including Monty himself insofar as anyone has still heard of him — as thoroughly ridiculous. This is cruel to the memory of Monty, who was an admirable man and a great soldier, but it bodes well for the British economy.

## NOTES

1. So far as I know, the coiners of that evocative phrase, the “aftermyth of war”, were the members of the cast of *Beyond The Fringe*, the show which heralded the beginning of the sixties satire boom.
2. Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1982.
3. This piece spent a long time languishing on the hard disk, and time has caught up with me in the matter of prices and incomes restraint. At the time of publication, November 1992, Prime Minister John Major is trying to conjure up another pay freeze, by imposition in the public sector and by exhortation in the private sector. I like to think that the half-hearted way this is being done reflects the half-hearted degree to which such notions are any longer believed in.
4. See Derek Wood and Derek Dempster, *The Narrow Margin*, revised illustrated edition, Arrow Books, London, 1969. This has a foreword by Lord Dowding and tells the story very much from his point of view. The screenplay for the film *The Battle of Britain* used this book as its historical basis.
5. Bader got dragged into the “big wing” argument. See Paul Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky*, Collins, London, 1957, upon which the film with Kenneth More as Douglas Bader was based, and which was itself a notable contributor to the “aftermyth of war”.
6. C. N. Donnelly explains this well in his *Heirs of Clausewitz: Change and Continuity in the Soviet War Machine*, Occasional Paper Number 16, Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, London, 1985. It seems to me that this “reinforcing success wherever it happened to occur” picture makes far better sense of Soviet strategy during the Cold War era than do all those feverish fears about a Soviet “master plan”. Simply, the Soviets bashed ahead on all fronts, and wherever progress seemed to be being made they piled in with whatever further reinforcements they could manage. They didn’t “plan” — for example — the conquest of Eastern Europe, or the establishment of friendly governments in Ethiopia or Vietnam or Cuba, or only in the sense that they had similar plans for all other countries. These were merely things that happened. That the Cold War had a definite pattern is beyond doubt, but this pattern was not one which either the Soviets or anybody else had decided upon beforehand.
7. F. A. Hayek has written at length on the evolutionary nature of the English Common Law, in such books as *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 3 Volumes, 1973, 1976, 1979. Unlike many classical liberals, Hayek is fascinated by the details, real and imaginable, of state power. He spent many years trying to devise an appropriate state framework that might prevent inflation, before giving up and writing, for the Institute of Economic Affairs of London, his *Choice in Currency* (Occasional Paper No. 48) and *The Denationalisation of Money* (Hobart Paperback No. 70), both of which were published in 1976. Perhaps in due course someone will write *The Denationalisation of Justice*, but meanwhile British justice remains a strictly mixed economy enterprise, in which the state holds the ring, but within which the litigants scrap it out. Thomas Sowell’s *Knowledge and Decisions*, Basic Books, New York, 1980, which was rapturously reviewed by Hayek, is also good on the complicated trade-offs between centralisation and individual initiative.
8. Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, *A Passion For Excellence*, British edition, Collins, Glasgow, 1985, has been denounced for the jazzy “management Maoism” approach that made it such a best-seller, but is, I think, better than that. See especially the chapter on corporate innovation, in which the key decisions are seen to be made by the lower ranks, and then serviced and followed up by the upper echelons, Israeli army style. Here too, one sees “corporate policy” *evolving* rather than being merely imposed from on high. Peters and Austin also emphasise the crucial importance of “semi-official” economic resources in decentralised corporations. There has to be lots of money and materials sloshing about, that the lower echelons can use without too much explaining. US Army World War Two “dogrobbers” would have understood perfectly! Patton got much of his petrol on the “black market”. The Soviet economy, which was also far more of an outcome than the “plan” they pretended to work by, worked this way as well. See also my *Design as Outcome*, Cultural Notes No. 15, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1988, for a discussion of how “design” is much more a matter of unpredictable *outcomes* than is generally assumed, not least by Hayek, who uses the phrase “product of human action but not of human design” in a way that is misleading, about *design*.
9. There are several Monty books. The most thorough is the recent 3 volume set by by Nigel Hamilton. Hamish Hamilton, London. Volume 1: *Monty: The Making of a General 1887-1942*, 1981; Volume 2: *Monty: Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944*, 1983; Volume 3: *The Field-Marshal 1944-1976*. This is the definitive “post-Ultra” Monty biography, and abounds with long quotations from Monty and from Monty’s subordinates and collaborators. Hamilton sides with Monty against Auchinleck, and especially against Dorman-Smith, and frankly (for what the opinion is worth of someone who has never seen a shot fired in anger) I agree. The other key Monty biography is Alan Moorehead’s *Montgomery*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1946. Moorehead was a war correspondent who watched it all happen at the time. He played a big part in creating the immediate post war civilian’s version of the Monty “myth”, which in my opinion is basically true, for all its journalistic hype and hero worship. Moorehead regrets that nobody wrote down Monty’s remarkable speech to the Eighth Army Staff on August 13th 1942. Hamilton rejoices that *someone did*, and quotes it in full! What a film *Monty* might have been! And what a part!
10. Correlli Barnett’s *The Desert Generals*, Kimber, London, 1960, gives the pro-Auchinleck, anti-Monty version of all this. Barnett sees definite signs of Rommel-like dynamism in such persons as Dorman-Smith, before Monty arrived and sat on all such stuff.  
I am sceptical of Barnett’s Monty story, but have more respect for his writings about *The Collapse of British Power*, Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1984. Barnett chronicles the *economics* of the British war effort. For Barnett Britain was a conduit for the application of American resources to the winning of the war. Monty was a spender of resources, says Barnett, which Britain alone did not begin to possess, and was thus a key figure in Britain’s economic decline. You can accept the economic facts without regretting them as intensely as Barnett does. The notoriously oversimplified “unconditional surrender” strategy, launched by Churchill, was a particularly expensive formula. Says Barnett: What about Britain’s national interests?! What about them? The Churchill-inspired consensus is that it was worth wrecking the British economy to wreck Hitler. Was this wrong? Either way, Barnett is to be praised for emphasising what a very un-national war the British version of the Second World War was.
11. Another broadly pro-Monty book is Barrie Pitt, *The Crucible of War: Montgomery of Alamein*, 2 volumes, Jonathan Cape, London, 1980 and 1982. Pitt includes (in chapter 2, pp. 34-60, of the third of the three-volume paperback version of this published by Macmillan, London, 1982) a vivid description of some pre-Monty “special operations”. My uncle, the late Jack Micklethwait, commanded a destroyer in one of these escapades, an ill-fated rade on Tobruk, as a result of which Uncle Jack spent the rest of his war as a prisoner.
12. On page 141 of *Montgomery* (see note 9 above), Alan Moorehead, himself a war correspondent at the time, tells the story of Monty’s on the whole highly satisfactory relationship with the wartime media.
13. “*There’s GOT to BE a PLAN!*” I remember this exact phrase being repeated several times and with tremendous intensity and emphasis in a British propaganda film dating from the last months of the war, re-shown some years ago (and I’m sorry, I have no idea exactly when) on Channel 4 TV. Lefties reliving their glory days!
14. Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs*, first published by Collins, London, 1969. My edition, to which the two subsequent page numberings relate, is the Fontana Books paperback, London, 1970.
15. *Ibid*, pp. 157-159.
16. *Ibid*, pp. 27-29.
17. John Jewkes, *The New Ordeal By Planning: The Experience of The Forties and Sixties*, MacMillan, London, 1968, tells the whole farcical story.
18. The “Austrian” school of economics, of which Hayek is such an ornament, especially emphasises the importance of the market as the best setting within which to grapple with the problems of imperfect knowledge. The market is seen as a search process, in sharp contrast to the idea of “perfect competition” which assumes for the purposes of theoretical elaboration that perfect knowledge is already available to all economic actors however lowly.
19. See John Burton, *Picking Losers: The Political Economy of Industrial Policy*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 1983. The title speaks for itself.