

Letter to Wall Street Journal, September 3, 2015

Another Take on Britain's Post-War Left-Right Divide

Churchill would never have acceded to the premiership had Clement Attlee's Labour Party not insisted on it.

Phil Dorsey doesn't have it quite right about Winston Churchill losing to the left in 1945 ([Letters](#), Aug. 20). It was a wartime coalition, not the Conservatives alone, which won the war. And Churchill would never have acceded to the premiership had Clement Attlee's Labour Party not insisted on it. The Tories distrusted Churchill and preferred Lord Halifax, an old appeaser, to succeed Neville Chamberlain.

The average Briton also fought to redeem David Lloyd George's failed promise of 1918 that Britain "would be made a land fit for heroes to live in." They remembered the postwar return to normalcy, with its chronic recession in the 1920s, culminating in depression, the "Geddes Axe" which savaged spending on services and the return to the gold standard which induced deflation and for which Churchill, as chancellor of the exchequer, had been held responsible. It was the soldiers' vote that gave Labour its landslide victory in 1945.

Mr. Dorsey makes reference to "the political consensus that followed," wherein Tories embraced the mixed economy and the welfare state, proving to be judicious stewards of both. This system served Britons well for nearly 30 years, bringing a historic level of prosperity and social mobility.

From about 1970, failed policies rather than anything intrinsic to the postwar consensus led the economy to run aground. Even Margaret Thatcher, for all of her efforts to privatize and to cut spending, maintained the essence of the mixed economy and welfare state. And today there is even a developing consensus that privatization hasn't always lived up to its promise.