



ALAN BULLOCK

Tara Heinemann

Alan Louis Charles Bullock

1914–2004

ALAN BULLOCK was born at Trowbridge, Wiltshire, on 13 December 1914. He was the only child of Edith (née Brand) and Frank Allen Bullock, Unitarian minister at Chapel Lane Chapel, Bradford, from 1926 to 1964. In his impressive and admiring memoir of his father published in 2000 Bullock describes the latter's ascent, initiated by a benevolent local squire, from son of a Wiltshire railway signalman to influential Nonconformist cleric, theologian and mystic.¹ The story reads almost like the plot of a Victorian novel. Its key was Frank Bullock's obsessive self-education, driven by an omnivorous intellectual curiosity. Books, discussions in literary societies, debates with local worthies, and literary correspondence shaped his evolution, and created a household awareness of the power and importance of ideas. This was Alan Bullock's intellectual nursery. His father, on arrival in Bradford from a previous incumbency in Leigh, Lancashire, entered him for the Direct Grant Bradford Grammar School, with its record of scholarships to Oxford and Cambridge. Bullock's inherited intellectual ability became apparent there. It was confirmed when on leaving he obtained distinctions in each of his main subjects, Classics and History, in the Higher School Certificate, and was awarded a State Scholarship. In 1932 he failed to gain a scholarship at Balliol College, Oxford, but was awarded one by Wadham, his second choice. His chosen subject on coming up in 1933, aged 18, was *Literae Humaniores*, the study of Greek and Latin literature and Ancient History (subsequent history was called Modern History). On advice from R. V. Lennard, Wadham's Senior Tutor, he took Pass, instead

¹ Alan Bullock, *Building Jerusalem. A Portrait of My Father* (London, 2000).

of Honour, Moderations ('I wasn't so good at the languages'), and then Greats (Ancient History), in which he was awarded a first class in 1936. He elected to stay on and read Modern History, obtaining another First in 1938. The practice of reading two Honour schools has since faded. The significance of a first class in each is obvious. In Bullock's case, it denoted that he was now his father's intellectual equal; or superior.²

The future biographer of Adolf Hitler arrived in Oxford in 1933, the year when the latter was appointed German Chancellor. The Great War and the peace settlement had already pushed European issues to the fore for an English public formerly more inclined to pay attention to India, South Africa or Ireland. Hitler's advent to power, and his swift unveiling of Nazi policies, accentuated this shift, and cast a shadow over the rising generation. 'As a young man, between '33 and '43,' Bullock later observed, 'we had been so depressed, so overshadowed by the power of Germany, that to see that destroyed [in 1945] was like a tremendous nightmare being wiped away.'³ Europe, then, made an impact on him, as on his peers. But his choice of research subject, when he began work on a doctorate in November 1938, after the award of a Bryce Studentship, and a Harmsworth Senior Scholarship at Merton College in the same year, was 'Anglo-French diplomatic relations 1588–1603', with Bruce Wernham of Trinity, later Professor of Modern History at Oxford, and a Fellow of the Academy, as his supervisor. It was the sixteenth, not his own, century that was to be investigated.⁴ This project, however, which only formally lapsed in 1949, was soon overtaken by events. In 1939, while still only beginning on the doctorate, he was recruited to take part in Winston Churchill's *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. Many years later, Bullock held the Dean Kitchin Society at St Catherine's College spellbound as he recounted a visit in February 1940 to Admiralty House, bringing a chapter for the great man, to be treated by Winston, always ready for an audience, however small, to a far-reaching survey of the war, and its probable course, demonstrated on an enormous map.

In the following month of March, 'just before the storm broke over our heads', Bullock entered the BBC, aged twenty five, as a sub-editor in Overseas, subsequently European, News, asthma preventing his recruitment to active service. The significance for his future development of the

² Biographical details from Margaret and Derek Davies, *Creating St Catherine's College* (St Catherine's College, Oxford, 1997), based on conversations with Lord Bullock; and personal recollection of memorialist.

³ 'The Time of My Life, Derek Parker talks to Alan Bullock', typescript, BBC Written Archives Centre, 10 Jan. 1968.

⁴ Data provided by Mr Jeremy Drew, University of Oxford Examination Schools.

ensuing five years, until he resigned in August 1945, cannot be doubted. The war for Bullock, as for many thousands of his contemporaries, represented a second career undertaken before a first was even engaged upon. 'My experience then', he later remarked, 'did alter the whole course of my subsequent career.' As Assistant English Editor in the European Division (1 December 1941), then European Talks Editor under Noel Newsome, the Director of European Broadcasts (2 March 1943), he played a role in building up the corporation's European Service, with its responsibility for 'telling the facts' to occupied Europe as accurately and dispassionately as possible. Truth was thought better policy than lies. Bullock said later, 'I always think, looking back, that we were very lucky . . . to be in on the ground floor of something which was quite new, where nobody had any experience to go on, where we had to work it out for ourselves.' At first, ninety people were involved. They grew to 900.⁵

His education in this period was twofold. First, 'I learnt about European politics and European history on my back, as they say, in Bush House.' This was not just knowledge of facts, present and past, but observation of clashes of opinion within the microcosm of Europeans from up to thirty countries whom he encountered daily. It forced him to become acquainted with the obligations of power, for example gauging the correct tone for area broadcasts, or the dangers of exposing operational plans or encouraging a premature European rising. Sometimes he was present at great events. 'I thought that tall French general would knock his hat off in the doorway, and he did,' he later recounted. The general was Charles de Gaulle. The occasion was the latter's famous broadcast to the French nation on 18 June 1940. The BBC thus introduced Bullock to politics and power. Its second influence on him was his experience that in broadcasting to Europe he was stepping 'into a world that was quite different [from the reality outside Bush House], a shadowy world. You had to try and reconstruct it . . . I realised afterwards that this is what the historian is trying to do.'⁶ Politics and power, then, both in a strongly European context. A further aspect of this time deserves notice. London was a war zone. During the war Bullock lived in Camberwell with his wife Hilda ('Nibby') Handy, a childhood sweetheart and former Oxford student

⁵ For quotations see above, n. 3. Career details provided by Mr David McGowan, BBC Written Archives Centre. For the background, Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the UK*, iii (Oxford, 1970).

⁶ 'I learnt about European politics': 'The War of Words', Radio 4 transmission, 27 Oct. 1970, typescript, BBC Written Archives Centre. For other quotations see above, n. 3. De Gaulle anecdote: personal recollection of memorialist.

whom he married in the climacteric month of June 1940, and who was now working as a resettlement officer with Belgian refugees. Together they frequented the neighbourhood bomb shelter, often walking to work ('we were young then').⁷ The thunder of anti-aircraft guns, the accelerating banshee shriek of descending bombs, and the crash of their explosions, only lacked the percussive rattle of small-arms fire to duplicate a battlefield. Even those who only experienced this in childhood will not forget it. Here, too, a European influence, though of a different kind, was present.

A visit to Germany in the summer of 1945 enabled Bullock to see 'the actual overthrow and disappearance of a great and powerful state. In the Ruhr there wasn't a chimney stack to be seen smoking.'⁸ This visit must have clinched his interest in the Europe of his own time. It is not surprising, therefore, that when he returned to Oxford in the autumn of 1945, New College having pre-elected him to a fellowship in Modern History in 1944, his intellectual orientation was partly outside the Modern History syllabus, which then ended in 1914. The Oxford tutor's task is rather to guide, encourage, and assess than to provide expert instruction, and Bullock fulfilled this role admirably, teaching and lecturing on both English and European history from the late eighteenth century, while administering even-handed justice as college Dean. That his real interests were in more recent history, however, was shown by the publication, to much acclaim, of *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (London, 1952) for which his work in the BBC had provided a background. His achievement here signalled two things. The first was that, in an Oxford which still, in arts subjects, tended to suspect that a tutor writing a book was neglecting his pupils, a determined scholar *could* undertake large-scale original work on very recent history. The second was that, given the mismatch between his interests and those of the History faculty, he was unlikely to progress to a readership or chair. Establishment of a Recent History Group with A. J. P. Taylor, and an unsuccessful attempt in 1947 to introduce a new undergraduate syllabus, Modern Greats, which would have joined intensive language study with the history of Europe, were early signs of his powerful instinct for intellectual innovation, shown subsequently by a series of important publishing initiatives. They were not, however, a substitute for personal advancement.

⁷ From conversations with Lady Bullock.

⁸ See above, n. 3.

Chance now offered a way forward. The Censorship of St Catherine's Society, Oxford's institution for 'non-collegiate' male students, was to become vacant from the beginning of the academic year 1952–3. Bullock's appointment to the post marked the beginning of a new phase in his career, which ended with Chancellor Harold Macmillan's formal opening of the fully fledged St Catherine's College on 16 October 1964. In their definitive history of the college's creation, Margaret and Derek Davies show that St Catherine's Society, originating in 1868 as a Delegacy of the University, was a delayed product of the 1850 Royal Commission's recommendations for university reform.⁹ Fitzwilliam House was its slightly later Cambridge equivalent, as was the Society for Home Students (later St Anne's College) for Oxford's undergraduate women. The original intention had been to allow students who were unable to pay for collegiate residence to matriculate as members of the university and study for degrees. The designation 'Non-Collegiate Students' dated from 1884, the name 'St Catherine's Society' (derived from an earlier club named after St Catharine [*sic*]) from 1931, and a social, though not residential, centre in St Aldate's, from 1936. Distinguished alumni included the Regius Professor of History, York Powell, Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham, and Dr Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad. A Victorian experiment, arising in parallel to the foundation of colleges for women, had met a need, and developed its own momentum. By 1952, however, the world had changed. The liberality of post-war student grants, following the Education Act of 1944, and the projected establishment of new universities, altered the assumptions on which St Catherine's Society had been based. A Censor and three Stipendiary Tutors, relying on bought-in tuition for many subjects, and without residential accommodation, clearly needed to develop into something different. What was unclear was the direction development should take.

Appointments determine the success or failure of any institution. This maxim was again to prove correct with Bullock's selection as Censor over eight other candidates. He took office at the beginning of Michaelmas Term 1952. In the succeeding decade, the process of development of the old Society into something different gathered momentum. Three stages can be identified. In the first, lasting to 1956, Bullock thought in terms of retaining the existing pattern, but expanding the number of tutors, paying them more, buying houses near the St Aldate's building for them to work in, and bettering library and social provision in it. By 1956,

⁹ See above, n. 2. The following pages are based on their book.

however, his thoughts had begun to move towards a much more ambitious plan. This was to turn the St Aldate's building into a centre for its existing, and future, graduate students, and to establish a separate college for undergraduates, who would thus acquire residential accommodation, with all its advantages, both academic and social, for the first time. Undergraduate numbers could then be increased, with equal proportions reading science and arts subjects. This would meet the prevailing government wish to expand the science base, and provide a magnet for external donations.

Over the following three years, this simple but powerful idea inched towards realisation. Initial reaction around the university, not uncharacteristically, was that it was unlikely to succeed, and undesirable if it did. Nevertheless, Congregation, the parliament of resident MAs, gave formal approval in October 1956. An appeal to industry for funds was successfully launched in September 1958, signed by the Chancellor, Lord Halifax. A year later a million had come in. An additional £400,000 was eventually squeezed out of the University Grants Committee. Merton College, the second-oldest college in the university, agreed to sell the new arrival a site in Holywell Great Meadow for a modest £57,690. It was felt that the design of the new college should contribute to the architecture of the time in a significant way. A committee comprising Bullock, Bowra, Vice-Chancellor Norrington, and Jack Lankester, the University Surveyor, was appointed, at Lankester's suggestion, to select an architect. After reviewing the home talent, it went to see the work of the Danish architect, Arne Jacobsen. His appointment was announced in April 1959. British architects were not pleased. The new entity acquired legal form as St Catherine's College on 1 October 1960. It deserves record that Bullock himself had urged selection of the college's new head by competition; but Council's committee unanimously recommended him as Master, and Congregation agreed. A Royal Charter of Incorporation dated 1 October 1963 denoted final severance from university control. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh (the latter was to become Visitor in May 1962) symbolically laid a foundation stone on the soggy building site on 4 November 1960. (The stone was promptly abducted by undergraduates, but soon returned.) Bullock's salient role in all this is evident. With no previous experience of large-scale business, he conceived the plan, took the risks, assessed the issues, defined the tactics, and, above all, convinced a spectrum of supporters spanning the academic, administrative and business worlds. In the same period he was also becoming known to a wider audience from his appearances on the radio version of *The Brains*

Trust between 1957 and 1961, and on its television equivalent from 1955 to 1961: to tut-tutting from university conservatives.¹⁰

The project up to this point was a university one, supervised by a 'St Catherine's College Committee', with complete autonomy to date only from the college's formal opening which, as seen, was in October 1964. In practice, the interim period was one in which the substance of autonomy progressively developed. But this third of the stages referred to earlier proved to be extremely taxing. The expense and complexities of Jacobsen's design, the technical hazards of the site, above all the pressing need for money, and more money, were to create huge difficulties. They were overcome; but it was a close-run thing. Arne Jacobsen was a leading Danish architect, with a substantial practice in Copenhagen. He had recently completed the design of the Scandinavian Airways hotel there, and this influenced some of his St Catherine's thinking. He was famed as a perfectionist, requiring unity of design, his design, for buildings and furnishings, down to the last lamp. He was not initially accustomed to the idea that dialogue with a client may speed, rather than impede, progress; but gradually, if somewhat unwillingly, came to accept it. With indifferent English, a card he sometimes played with effect, he resided in Denmark, directing the St Catherine's operation through a series of resident subordinates, the first, Knud Holscher, taking the initial strain. Problems quickly appeared. All building projects since the Pyramids have outrun the estimates of their cost, and it was soon clear that St Catherine's was no exception. Jacobsen's design was expensive, both externally and internally. A revised costing in June 1961 indicated that only £250,000 would be available for endowment, against a wished-for £600,000. At this crisis, grants of US\$250,000 from the Ford Foundation, £13,000 from a private donor for the Music House, and, above all, a donation of US shares worth £190,000 from an alumnus, Dr Rudolph Light, dramatically altered the situation. Light was a doctor, who had read physiology at St Catherine's Society from 1932 to 1935. His family had founded Upjohn Chemicals, a leading US drugs company. In 1962 he made a further donation of equal amount, and at his death in 1970 his estate contributed US\$2.4 million more. In all, St Catherine's received £1.6 million from him, in the high tradition of American charitable generosity. It is of interest that he was 'discovered' initially by a senior fellow of the college, John Simopoulos, who was a dedicated critic of Jacobsen and all his works.

¹⁰ See above, n. 5; also personal recollection.

Light's initial donation, important though it was, did not remove all the problems. Timing, like cost, is usually underestimated, and this proved to be true here. The college was supposed to open in October 1961. It did so, with difficulty and in spartan and incomplete form, a year later. Parts of the plan, notably the Wolfson Library and Bernard Sunley auditorium building, were not completed until 1964. Some of the initial cuts, like double-glazing, were also not restored. But by the time of the official opening in October 1964 Bullock was able to feel that he had sailed through stormy waters to safe harbour. In 1993 the building received Grade I listed status. The college subsequently modified the initial residential buildings with generous help from the Arne Jacobsen Foundation (2003–4) and completed a new quadrangle outside the first site to an imaginative design by Richard Hodder Associates (1995, 2005). Taking a longer perspective, it can be seen that St Catherine's was one of a sub-population of earlier and later new collegiate foundations—Nuffield, St Antony's, Linacre, Wolfson, St Cross, and Green Colleges—all of which, as Bullock later put it, were initially wards of the university. But only St Catherine's was primarily an undergraduate college.

From the official opening of the college, Bullock played an active role as Master until his retirement in 1980. He presided over the admission of women as members in 1974, St Catherine's being in the first group of colleges to do so, and as late as 1981 he secured a further grant from the Sunley Foundation to pay for a new conference centre named after Mary Sunley. He governed on an easy rein, leaving the fellows to follow their own paths, and skilfully chairing the governing body. ('If you can handle an Oxford governing body, you can handle anything', he later claimed.¹¹) He also actively pursued his intellectual interests, as shown below. However, in retrospect at least, his career after 1964 recognisably moved on to the higher levels of university, national and international life. His vice-chancellorship was the first important step. The Franks Commission on the structure and reform of the university (1964–6), an internal response to the criticisms of the earlier Robbins Committee, proposed, among much else, that the vice-chancellor should in future hold office for four years instead of the previous two, and should be elected by Congregation. The Hebdomadal Council of the university was to nominate the candidate. Previously the office had rotated by seniority between heads of colleges. It was a tribute to the effect which Bullock's fifteen years on Council had made on his colleagues that they chose him as their

¹¹ Interview with John Grigg, *The Times Magazine*, 26 Nov. 1994.

candidate early in 1968; and that Congregation agreed. The appointment was to date from October 1969.

In his 'Reminiscences of a former vice-chancellor' published in the *Oxford Magazine* in 1987 and 1988, Bullock describes how he took the Registrar's letter of appointment to Paris, where he had a meeting, in May 1968. 'It was still in my pocket unanswered as I stood trembling in a shop door and watched cars being overturned by students and set on fire . . . The thought crossed my mind that perhaps I *might* hesitate before accepting the invitation.' Oxford's version of the French student revolution in fact had earlier roots, but exploded shortly after he took office. It continued, with varying intensity, until and including Hilary Term 1974, when it suddenly ended. In Oxford, cars were not overturned nor barricades erected. Nonetheless, it was an alarming time. Group psychosis appeared to have displaced reason, and there was an echo of past events. Chancellor Macmillan only half-humorously took this point on 4 March 1970 as student radicals bayed in the snow outside the Canterbury Gate of Christ Church, frustrated at not being able to disrupt *Kanzler* Willy Brandt's reception in the Library after his honorary degree. 'As the red sun set over the snow, the Chancellor put his arm round me. "You know, dear boy", he said, "the Winter Palace, St Petersburg, 1917".'¹² Bullock's handling of the student crisis was an exemplary mixture of firmness, reason, and occasional anger, and deserves a more detailed treatment than can be attempted here. Macmillan as Chancellor was a constant support, telephoning regularly. Michael Brock's verdict on the eventual evaporation of the troubles can no doubt be accepted: 'The dispersal of power, and the relatively close relations between young and old characteristic of a collegiate university and of the tutorial system, had begun to have their effect; and the determination of Oxford's senior members to meet all reasonable suggestions had been put beyond doubt.' Nonetheless, Bullock's view that the student radicals had destroyed any chance of pursuing the appeal for funds to support the graduate work of the university, which he had contemplated in 1969, seems correct.

Bullock had much other, and more rational, business to attend to as vice-chancellor. His views on his office in his 'Reminiscences' are of interest. He believed that a four-year period was right, but that the incumbent should have a firm college base. The Registrar and the university's officials provided the degree of support and permanence which made this

¹² Alan Bullock, 'Reminiscences of a former vice-chancellor', reprinted in *Oxford Magazine*, no. 254, Trinity Term 2006, original printing *ibid.*, nos. 27 and 30, 1987–8.

model possible. A professional vice-chancellorship, American-style, was a less attractive option. The collegiate university (a phrase invented by Franks) provided a source for the spontaneous projects of all kinds which were Oxford's peculiar strength. Nonetheless, the university, and its central executive organ, Council, were, and continued to be, a crucial source of initiative and authority. The vice-chancellor's function was to represent the university internally, in both the efficient and dignified parts of the role, and externally. He must chair Council and relevant committees, and work closely with the Registrar to carry decisions through 'a veritable *thicket* of committees'. Appointments to office, principally professorial chairs, required close, and critical, attention. Visits to the multifarious parts of the academic machinery, from Atmospheric Physics to the Wellcome Research Unit for the History of Medicine, provided an agreeable intellectual stimulus. Prime ministers, Edward Heath and Harold Wilson during Bullock's tenure, had, when necessary, to be managed; the UGC and other officialdom confronted if need be. Bullock thought the balance of his tenure was partly positive (increase of real income, establishment of a new clinical school and numerous new chairs and lecturerships), partly the reverse (inflation, abandonment of new building, student unrest). On leaving office, he correctly forecast that an iron age was coming.

Bullock's academic and practical achievements by the 1960s brought him to government attention. In 1963–5 he chaired the National Advisory Council on teacher training and supply, in 1966–9 the Schools Council, in 1972–4 the Committee on Reading and Other Uses of English Language, which reported in 1975, and in 1976–7 the Committee of Enquiry on Industrial Democracy, which reported in 1977. Richard Crossman as Minister of Housing and Local Government wanted him to chair his commission on local government, recording in his diary that 'He is the one man in England in whom I would have complete confidence.'¹³ Bullock told him he had not the necessary three years to give him. Sir John Maud was chosen instead. The reports on reading and the use of English, and on industrial democracy, were true products of their time. The first, published as *A Language for Life* in 1975, exhaustively examined current practices, opined that 'English, well-taught, should train a sixteen year old secondary school pupil to use the language confidently, appropriately and accurately . . . and to have a care for the correctness of

¹³ Richard Crossman, *Cabinet Diaries*, i (London, 1975) p. 367; our thanks to Sir Brian Harrison for the reference.

written and spoken English', but was evasive about how this was to happen. Margaret Thatcher, who, as Secretary of State for Education, had commissioned the report, had hoped for recommendation of formal rules, grammar, correct spelling, smaller classes, streaming. She did not get it. The report was curiously reluctant to discuss the prevalent relativist philosophy, powerfully indicted by John Honey in *Language is Power* (London, 1997). It was left for Stuart Farrow, headmaster of a Church of England junior school, to argue in a dissenting note that the committee had not made a case for mixed ability teaching, and that 'the move towards mixed ability grouping in British schools is a recent one, and in my view smacks more of social engineering than of educational thinking. Like the movement to abolish grades, class positions and pupil competition, it is really a movement to ensure that no one is seen to excel.' The second report, on Industrial Democracy, addressed the brief how (not whether) union representatives could be put on the boards of private and public companies, in imitation of German practice. It came at a time when government authority, and control of the economy, seemed to be crumbling. Many felt that the trades unions needed to be reined in, not conciliated. The report (which had a dissenting minority) met with fierce business hostility, and the government quietly shelved it. His endorsement of both reports indicated in Bullock an inheritance of late-Victorian idealist liberalism, infused with the elusive concept of social justice, that was characteristic of many progressive thinkers (and particularly graduates of the Oxford Greats school) of his generation. The Industrial Democracy report also imposed severe strain, which carried him briefly into hospital. His adhesion to the new Social Democratic Party in 1981 indicated his retrospective disenchantment with Labour in office.

Bullock also expended his formidable energies in many commitments outside state service: as examples, on the Advisory Council on the Public Records (1965–77), as a director of the *Observer* (1977–81), and as chairman of the trustees of the Tate Gallery (1973–80). The last appointment gave him particular satisfaction. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1967, and a Foreign Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1972. He was knighted in 1972, and made a life peer by Harold Wilson in 1976. (He subsequently played little part in the Lords.) He had a continuing connection with West Germany. He attended and lectured at the Königswinter conferences of the *Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft* (founded in 1949) and at those of the Aspen Institute in Colorado (also originating in 1949). When a Berlin extension of the Aspen Institute, the *Aspen Berlin Institut für Humanistische Studien*

opened on 8 October 1974, under Shepard Stone as its first Director, Bullock was among the board members, who included Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the former Chancellor Willy Brandt, and the future German President, Richard Weizsäcker. The Institute was, and is, a powerful focal point for international discussion. Participants from Eastern Europe regularly attended in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴ Bullock was made a *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* in 1970, and was awarded the *Grosse Verdienstkreuz* of the German Republic in 1995.

In an interview in 1985, Bullock said that he loved Oxford University but had always felt an outsider in it.¹⁵ He was certainly not a typical member. His personality was powerful and genial. His wit, like his intelligence, was lightning. His humour, never very far from the surface, was not disinclined to the scatological. His recommended counter, in a business lecture, to a rival soap company's promotion of a detergent, Omo, could not be repeated in our politically correct age. He was a shrewd and generous observer of others' personalities. Though fully versed politically, he was not by temperament an intriguer. His voice, its Yorkshire accent contrasting with his father's standard English, was euphonic. Bullock thought his temperament conciliatory. As Master of St Catherine's, he was liberal to a fault with difficult colleagues. If confronted, however, he effortlessly summoned reserves of power, and, if need be, anger. He could be disconcertingly insensitive towards those less confident than himself. Lord David Cecil complained when a Fellow of New College that he felt like china in a Bullock shop. ('The china in a bull shop' is a variant version.) As chairman of meetings, Bullock combined grasp of issues with imagination and political flair in suggesting solutions to problems. The larger the matter discussed, the better his performance. As indicated earlier, however, he could carry emotion into questions which required only detached intellect. Once discussion descended to details (or what some saw as delicate questions of principle) his natural impatience could show itself by an ill-concealed glance at his watch.

Bullock regarded himself in matters of business as a man for the broad brush rather than the fine print. But he respected masters of fine print. His interests were in art, architecture, ideology, literature, and music, besides history, but not physical in the shape of good food and drink, or holidays in exotic climes, or racing, or sport. One of his most consistent characteristics in everything that he touched was of setting a

¹⁴ Our thanks to the German Historical Institute London for information.

¹⁵ Interview with (Sir) Brian Harrison, Oct. 1985.

rigorously high standard for himself, and demanding it of others. Beneath this severe, at times almost steely, self-discipline there was a deeply dramatic and mercurial temperament. Not for nothing was his favourite musical composition *The Magic Flute*, and his favourite song within it the aria of the Queen of the Night. Throughout his adult life he practised daily meditation, partly perhaps as a spiritual legacy from his father, the Unitarian minister, but also as a means of keeping the black dogs of the twentieth century under control. His truest support was his family, and in particular his marriage of over sixty years to Nibby Bullock. Nibby herself is a clever and charming Oxford graduate, now in her nineties, who has contributed substantially in her own right to many public causes; but nevertheless she devoted herself for more than sixty years to her husband's academic, administrative, artistic, and family life. Bullock contracted Alzheimer's Disease when he was 87. His descent into the abyss was heartrending for those who observed it. But even *in extremis* his remaining conscious concern was his clearly articulated love for his wife.

Like his father, though in different fields, Bullock had consuming intellectual curiosity. This was not confined to reading and writing. *Hitler, Hitler and Stalin*, and his three-volume *Bevin*, his principal books, are considered next. But the record should also include his promotion of collective work by others. The first of these, *The Oxford History of Europe*, was launched in 1954 with A. J. P. Taylor's *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*. Bullock, and his former young tutor at Wadham, F. W. D. Deakin, were the senior editors of a series that by 1999 had run into nine volumes. Bullock proposed *The History of the University of Oxford* to Council in 1966, arguing that 'it would . . . if properly carried out, make an important contribution to the history of learning in general and to the history of English society'.¹⁶ Council made him chairman of the project. The first volume appeared in 1984, the eighth, covering the twentieth century, in 1994. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (with Oliver Stallybrass, 1977) and *The Fontana Biographical Companion to Modern Thought* (with R. B. Woodings, 1983) were other editorial creations. Each was the result of the same interest in ideas that had marked the project for a Modern Greats syllabus in 1947, which Bullock and Sir Isaiah Berlin re-presented as a possibility to the Franks Commission in 1964. It is not fanciful to guess, too, that Bullock found his visits to university departments and programmes the most

¹⁶ Hebdomadal Council Papers 255 (1966) 279–80.

stimulating part of his vice-chancellorship. The Aspen Institute was another, international, intellectual arena.

Bullock's subordinate historical writings, the most extensive of which was his survey *The Humanist Tradition in the West* (London, 1985), will be omitted here, in order to focus on his main works. As noted earlier, the first of these was *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (London, 1952). Odhams Press saw the Nuremberg Trials documents released from 1946 as an opportunity for a biography, and consulted A. L. Rowse, a sixteenth-century historian, about an author. He recommended Bullock.¹⁷ In this way the latter's research moved forward three centuries. Very recent history can appear more easily grasped than the remoter past. But this is often not true, since the facts of the recent past can be inaccessible, contested, or distorted, as Denis Mack Smith reminds us in the Italian case.¹⁸ What tilted the balance was the Nuremberg documents, 'the archives of the most powerful state in the world captured and published within three years', as Bullock later put it.¹⁹ The attraction of the project for him, given his wartime experience, is obvious.

Three things strike the re-reader of the original text. First, its authority, its dispassionate tone, and its *style*. Not a natural linguist in other tongues, as Bullock admitted, he was a master in his own. One example must suffice. In 1930, as depression tightened,

Like men and women in a town stricken by an earthquake, millions of Germans saw the apparently solid framework of their existence cracking and crumbling. In such circumstances, men are no longer amenable to the arguments of reason. In such circumstances men entertain fantastic fears, extravagant hatreds and extravagant hopes. In such circumstances the extravagant demagoguery of Hitler began to attract a mass following as it had never done before.²⁰

Second, that this was above all a *biography* of Hitler, not 'a history of Germany, nor a study of government and society under the Nazi regime', though in fact enough is there to establish the essentials of the latter (cf. the concise, but chilling, account of the Holocaust at pp. 642–4). The support of the lower middle class and peasantry for Nazism is also clearly brought out. Third, the uncertainty whether Bullock's *Hitler* presents his subject as driven by ideas, by a world view, or simply by a personal lust

¹⁷ See above, n. 11.

¹⁸ Denis Mack Smith, 'Democracy falsification and Italian Biography', *History and Biography. Essays in Honour of Derek Beales*, edited by T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine (Cambridge, 1996).

¹⁹ See above, n. 11.

²⁰ *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (1952) p. 137.

for power. The evidence here is ambiguous, and has become controversial. Hitler is presented as a German nationalist, hating the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and its ethnic mixture. He believes passionately in race, heroism, struggle, and authoritarian rule, and detests the pacifist and materialist ideas of democracy. The latter are the product of a Marxist ideology promoted by an international Jewish conspiracy. His own predestined role is to play 'Siegfried come to awaken Germany to greatness', by destroying the Versailles settlement, uniting Germans under one rule, and conquering territory in the east for a racially pure *Herrenvolk*. In the process, the Jews will be eliminated (pp. 31–44, 342–52). Bullock also, however, stated in his Epilogue that Hitler's 'twelve years dictatorship was barren of all ideas but one—the further extension of his own power and that of the nation . . .'. And in an interview in 1994 he said 'I originally thought he was driven simply by the lust for power.'²¹ H. R. Trevor-Roper, in his essay 'The mind of Adolf Hitler' prefacing Cameron and Stevens's 1953 translation of Hitler's *Table Talk*, remarked 'even Mr Bullock seems content to regard [Hitler] as a diabolical adventurer animated solely by an unlimited lust for power'. Trevor-Roper himself contended that in fact Hitler was driven by powerful ideas, in which stages of world history, and the struggle between Russian Communism and German expansion to the east, figured prominently. It is arguable, however, that Trevor-Roper, and indeed Bullock himself, understated the extent of the latter's exposition of Hitler's beliefs, derivative though they may have been. Neither historian was prepared to concede that the *Table Talk* is surprisingly interesting.

In 1964, despite his other commitments, Bullock produced a 'completely revised' second edition. This, to take examples, amplified the story of Hitler's youth, corrected the Communist fabrication that the Nazis started the *Reichstag* fire of 1933, and, from the *Table Talk*, with a bow to Trevor-Roper, added four new pages to the discussion of Hitler's ideas. A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*, and Bullock's disagreement with it, were referred to in the Preface, though excluded from the revised bibliography. The general structure of the book (which, in its different formats, has deservedly sold three million copies) remained unchanged. Chapter Six, as in the 1952 edition, reminded readers that 'it does not lie within the scope of this study to present a picture of the totalitarian system in Germany, or of its manifold activities . . .'. A significant footnote referred the reader wanting more to William Shirer's remarkable *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, published in 1960. Shirer, an

²¹ See above, n. 11.

American journalist stationed in Berlin from 1934, tells us, as a German-speaking insider, about the apparent popular acceptance of Nazi rule (before this 'we had the freedom to starve'), the accessibility of Germany to foreign visitors, the rush of German sympathisers to the Nazi Party (academics of all grades were prominent), the disciplining of the churches, persecution of the Jews, distortion of science by racial theory, and systematic indoctrination of the rising generation.

By Bullock's third treatment of Hitler in *Hitler and Stalin. Parallel Lives* (London, 1991; revised in paperback 1998) these aspects of the regime were fully incorporated. The text had become a 'Life and Times'. A huge amount of additional reading made this possible. The bibliography lists 173 secondary studies, excluding those on international relations, published since 1965, the visible sign of 'the Hitler avalanche'. The work of Henry Turner Jr on big business and Nazism; of Ian Kershaw on popular opinion, the Nazi dictatorship, and the Hitler Myth; of Harold James and Richard Overy on the German economy and German armaments, to take some of the most prominent examples, amplifies and modifies Bullock's earlier versions. There are variations on Hitler's early life. The treatment of his ideas again expands (pp. 153–61 of the 1998 edition). The account of the Holocaust is greatly extended (pp. 817–36 and Appendix Three). Summarising at pp. 346–7 the conclusions of the recent literature, 'though not necessarily agreeing with them', Bullock selects arguments that the continuance of German capitalism and the suppression of labour rights constituted a counter-revolution equivalent to Italian fascism; that the construction of rival empires by Himmler, Goering, Goebbels, Ley and others, tolerated by Hitler, created a 'polycratic', rather than monolithic, dictatorship; and that foreign policy was determined by 'the weaknesses, divisions and illusions of the other Powers', or by the necessity of dispersing domestic tensions, rather than by Hitler's single-handed ambition.

The key innovation of this later book, however, is not its extension of the German case, but the addition to it of Stalin and Stalin's Russia. At first blush, this was a project Plutarch would have declined. Bullock's incentive to attempting it was his reflection, while flying into Berlin, deep in the Soviet Sector, in the 1970s, on 'the ironical twist to the end of the war in which Hitler's vision of a Nazi empire in Eastern Europe and Russia was turned inside out and replaced by the reality of a Soviet empire in eastern Europe and Germany'. It is perhaps fair comment that in following up this thought he added a valuable comparative dimension to our understanding of Hitler and Stalin, and their regimes; but that in

doing so he left an even more definitive treatment of Hitler to another biographer, Sir Ian Kershaw. For Stalin, Bullock tapped the flood of titles on twentieth-century Russian history by authors able to draw on the Russian language as he himself could not. Many were recent. Of 135 secondary works (excluding international relations) listed in his bibliography, 106 were published since 1965, 56 of these since 1980. *Hitler and Stalin* could not have been written earlier. Bullock also notes, however, in the 1998 edition the restriction of published Russian source material compared to that of Germany, and the likelihood of new discoveries, a prediction since borne out.

With Bullock's *Stalin*, the reader enters the nightmare world of 'the Russian revolutionary tradition [which] made a virtue of a complete indifference towards human life in the pursuit of a more just and equal society'. He argues that, despite the resemblances, Stalin's Russia differed from Hitler's Germany in important respects. The Communist party, following Lenin's prescription, was like 'a beleaguered garrison in an occupied country'. Its role was 'to mobilise the support of the masses, but keep its distance from them'. It repudiated individual, as opposed to collective, leadership. Authority, in official theory, was central, impersonal, mysterious. Despite this, Stalin, while careful to observe the forms of power, and formally only Communist Party Secretary, craved, and obtained, leadership standing, in the tradition of Ivan the Terrible. Suspicious, and fearful of assassination, he only became more visible in the Great Patriotic War. His support then, Bullock convincingly argues, was due more to Russian patriotism than to Communism itself. In contrast, Hitler was early identified, and accepted, as Leader by his party. After 1933, until 1941, this support, as far as can be judged, widened to the nation. Hitler in these years, as head of state, was publicly on show (though prudently changing routes and timetables) and, while aware of the possibility of assassination, deliberately stood upright in his car. Though the last resort in all big decisions, he tolerated a plurality in authority which Stalin did not. Once Roehm and his crew had been dealt with in 1934, Hitler was indulgent to Party members; Stalin executed his. Hitler courted the peasantry, who voted for him. Stalin made war on his. Bullock points also to the resemblances of men and regimes. Both Hitler and Stalin, he argues, were psychotic, austere, without pity. Each was fully capable of operating effectively in the abnormal worlds in which their lives were set, indeed were ideally suited to them. Ideas gripped them both, and excluded humanity. Each presided over, but played no overt role in, the policies of state-directed terror on which their power rested.

The inclusion in *Hitler and Stalin* of German election results; the scarcely credible roll-call of deaths, military and civil; a Map of Hell of the camps of both sides; and a glossary of names and acronyms, are among its considerable merits.

At the same time that Bullock was writing *Hitler* and then *Hitler and Stalin*, he was engaged with a very different project, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*. In origin, like *Hitler*, it was the product of an outside suggestion, in this case a request for a biography from Arthur Deakin, Bevin's executor and successor in the TGWU. Bullock accepted as 'an historian sympathetic to, but not a member of, the Labour Movement, or of any political party', and stipulated that he was free to write as he chose. He planned at once on an ambitious scale. The subtitle of the first volume, published in 1960, was *Trade Union Leader 1881–1940* (London, 1961) The preface stated that a second would cover the years from 1940 to Bevin's death in 1951. In fact, the second volume, *Minister of Labour 1940–1945* (London, 1967) was confined to Bevin's wartime role. The third, and largest, *Foreign Secretary 1945–1951* (London, 1983), only appeared in 1983, the delay enabling Bevin's, and other, official papers to be used for the first time. Bullock's acceptance of the task must have initially been influenced by the suggestive parallel between his brilliant Nonconformist father's rise from humble origins and Ernest Bevin's ascent from the plough, and the chapel, to the highest offices of state. His execution of it, given the scale of his other commitments, is remarkable.

The first volume is primarily based on original sources, which, given their volume and complexity, cannot have made it easy to write. The story of the first fifty-nine years of Bevin's life is one of a start from nothing to dominant leader in the trade union movement. The portrait of the man which emerges is striking. The illegitimate son of an agricultural labouring family, Bevin was as proud of his birth and of his class as any aristocrat. He bitterly resented England's class hierarchy ('a dictatorship'). He wanted, through organisation, to give Labour negotiating, not revolutionary, power. Beyond this, he wanted, through education, to raise the sights, and status, of the working class as a whole. Like his union peers, and rivals, he hated capitalism, but argued for working with it until socialism, secured through the ballot box, replaced it. Agreements with employers, influence on state policy, increase of trade union muscle, were relevant immediate objectives. Like his biographer, he had creative imagination. He had an innate gift for constructing large and general solutions to particular problems. Suspicious, a fighter, he was a relentless worker. Nervous prostration struck him down in 1918 and 1922, and threatened

him in 1938. He attached chief importance to practicality, reasoned argument, and adherence to agreements made. Loyalty was his watchword. The first volume ends with Bevin's selection as minister in June 1940, Churchill's first choice from the Labour pack.

Bevin's beliefs and characteristics developed and modified during his tenure of the Ministry of Labour and National Service from June 1940 to May 1945, the subject of Bullock's second volume. As noted, Bullock originally intended a shorter treatment of this period. His longer coverage is justified by the complexity and importance of the issues which dominated it. It is salutary to be reminded how much open questioning, argument, and recrimination accompanied the conduct of the war, and must have amazed, and misled, the Axis powers. As minister, Bullock shows, Bevin had three master concepts. First, that he should have control of all labour and its allocation. Second, that he should proceed wherever possible by consultation and encouragement rather than by compulsion. Third, that if the trade unions could be persuaded to cooperate, they would form an indispensable influence on labour opinion generally. At point after point Bullock also illustrates Bevin's humanity and attention to detail in implementing his policies. A small example is the instruction to the once-hated labour exchanges to say 'good morning' to those appearing for work. Bevin wanted to treat people as human beings. Behind this instrumental achievement, Bullock argues, he had a wider philosophy for the future. The state should ensure full employment; ration supply if it was short; provide comprehensive social security; and extend formal and technical education. Besides this, there should be partnership in industrial relations, and joint employer-union influence on government policy (pp. 190-1). Bevin's enemies in the Parliamentary Labour Party, who were not few, accused him of wanting a corporate state, excluding any role for Parliament. Bullock's text, with its liberal extracts from Bevin's papers and speeches, illustrates the rocky path his subject had to tread as minister. Success was not won easily. At first, he was assaulted in Parliament and press for refusing to use his powers of direction. He was a defective, though improving, Parliamentary performer. He had to deal at the same time with Harold Laski and Lord Beaverbrook. The miners, as the resort to the 'Bevin boys' showed, proved the bitterest and most intractable problem of all throughout the war. The aspect which is largely omitted is Bevin as Cabinet (and War Cabinet) Minister, the papers for which were at the time of Bullock's research for the book unavailable to view. What is conclusively demonstrated is Bevin's increase in competence and stature under the pressure of necessity.

As noted earlier, the final volume of the trilogy, *Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary*, did not appear until 1983. The delay was due to Bullock's wish to use Bevin's private papers and the Cabinet Office records, filed in the Public Record Office and previously withheld. He also drew on a huge range of printed sources and an extensive secondary literature. He correctly defends the ensuing length (896 pages) by the importance of the issues which this brief period contained. Among them were the first phase of the Cold War, the Marshall Plan, NATO, the division of Germany, the creation of Israel, and the outbreak of the Korean War. The book, in consequence, is not only biography, but 'a . . . study of British foreign policy from 1945 to 1951'. A purely human point should nevertheless be made. Like the peace settlements of 1814–15 and 1919–21 and their aftermaths, these years combined practical questions of huge complexity, and fervent ideologies of various stripes, with the episodic threat of renewed war. And, like them, they imposed intense strains on the protagonists. Bevin, aged 64 in 1945, is a prime example. Overweight, beset by cardiac problems, smoking and drinking too much, he effectively put his life, as well as his talents, at the service of his country.

Bullock tells us how Bevin became Foreign Secretary on 27 July 1945 with only twenty-four hours' notice, having previously hoped to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. Dalton, who wanted the Foreign Office, became Chancellor. An aspect of this switch which Bullock does not consider is of interest. Bevin had 'a great grasp of economic and commercial questions—such as few if any Foreign Secretaries have had', as Duff Cooper observes in his diary published in 2005.²² Bullock's previous volumes had shown how Bevin acquired this mastery at practical level. But those volumes, as this, also show Bevin's hope for cooperation between capital and labour, and his almost transcendental faith in the power of state control of the economy to eliminate incompetence and hardship. It is not clear how he would have dealt with the realities of nationalisation, the strains of the free labour market, and the huge difficulties of Great Britain's post-war economy. At least there would have been far less scope for his abilities. What is clear, as Bullock fully demonstrates, is how Bevin's previous experience prepared and fitted him to be a Foreign Secretary whom professionals were prepared without embarrassment to place beside Castlereagh and Salisbury.

Bullock shows how, for nearly two years after Bevin became Foreign Secretary, the USA, the dominant power, regarded the British Empire,

²² *The Duff Cooper Diaries*, ed. John Julius Norwich (London, 2005), p. 440, 28 June 1947.

rather than the USSR, as its primary problem, and hoped to disengage from Europe. The British Empire, in its view, stood for protected trade and old-style diplomacy, while America wanted free trade and open agreements supported by an international umpire, the United Nations Organisation. Only the threat of Europe falling piecemeal to Communist infiltration sponsored by the USSR prompted a hardening of American attitudes, and led, with a retrospective inevitability certainly not experienced at the time, to the Marshall Plan (1947) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (1949). Bullock describes Bevin's role in promoting these in fascinating detail. In the first, 'relying solely on his own intuitive judgement, he threw all his energy into conjuring up a European response of sufficient weight and urgency to give substance to Marshall's implied offer of American support' (p. 404). It is not unfair to see in this one example the abilities often attributed to Napoleon I: knowing at once what to do; knowing how to do it; and doing it now. The formation of NATO, Europe's defence shield, provides a second case. In tracing the history of these steps to a divided Europe under American protection Bullock disposes convincingly of the American revisionist school of the 1970s which argued for a cautious and peaceable Stalin reacting against an imperialist, aggressive, United States. Many subtexts are included. The French appear, wanting the Saar and an internationalised Ruhr, as though 1923 had never been. Stalin was prepared to squeeze Germany dry by reparations which would have fallen most heavily on the British zone. Above all, an imperial issue, the Palestine mandate, plagued Bevin (India, another, was not his responsibility). The Mediterranean, to Bevin, was of crucial importance to England. (He paid little attention to Attlee's bizarre alternative of a land route across Africa.) Failure to hold a British position in the Mediterranean would, in his view, destabilise all the European states bordering it, from France to Turkey. Palestine was therefore a link in a chain. But it was a link that could not hold. Bullock traces the progressive collapse of the mandate under the pressure of illegal Jewish immigration and ruthless Jewish terrorism. He documents the capture of American policy by the Zionist lobby in the United States, which led to President Truman's sudden recognition of the state of Israel in 1948. It is impossible not to conclude from the evidence in this book that Adolf Hitler was the true patron of the state of Israel; first, by stimulating immigration in the 1930s from outside Germany, and second by giving an international boost to Zionism with the Final Solution. Bullock's impartial narrative earned him abusive Zionist protests. Bevin himself was condemned at the time, and often since, as anti-Semitic. The startling

resemblances between the story of the mandate as recounted here and the formation, philosophy, and tactics of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and its US supporters since 1969 cannot be overlooked.

What assessment should be reached of this immensely ambitious corpus of work? First of all, it can plausibly be argued that Bullock treated his prime subjects before anyone else, and in doing so established a general shape of the history of the period. This enabled his successors to address particular themes in detail. It is significant, too, that he reached, and educated, a huge and admiring international audience. Some further points should be noticed. *Hitler* and *Hitler and Stalin* were pioneering works based on absorption and interpretation of printed primary material and secondary literature. *Bevin* is based far more on original sources, in the first two volumes ones not available to other writers. The entire output is on a large scale. *Hitler* in its original 1952 version had 776 pages, in its revised one of 1964, 848. The third volume of *Bevin*, as noted, had 896. *Hitler and Stalin* in 1991 had 1,188. Extent does not by itself denote merit. In Bullock's case it is justified by his consistent attempt to understand and explain; and doing so both in fine detail and within a broader framework of historical knowledge and imagination. He was able, without apparent effort, to take in and digest huge amounts of information. The power of his mind, the force of his style, his dispassionate tone, are evident. So is his stamina. *Hitler and Stalin* was published when he was 77; its revised version when he was 84. He was a distinguished exponent of what he called history from above, of the importance of will and action, hence of biography, as against 'impersonal forces'. It should also be acknowledged that, like Clarendon or Burnet, he was making, and knew that he was making, a significant contribution to the understanding of his own time. Alan Bullock died at the Guidepost Nursing Home, Oxford on 2 February 2004.

PETER DICKSON

Fellow of the Academy

JOSE HARRIS

Fellow of the Academy

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