

# YANK

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## ATTLEE

Something about England's new new Prime Minister and the Labor Party he belongs to.

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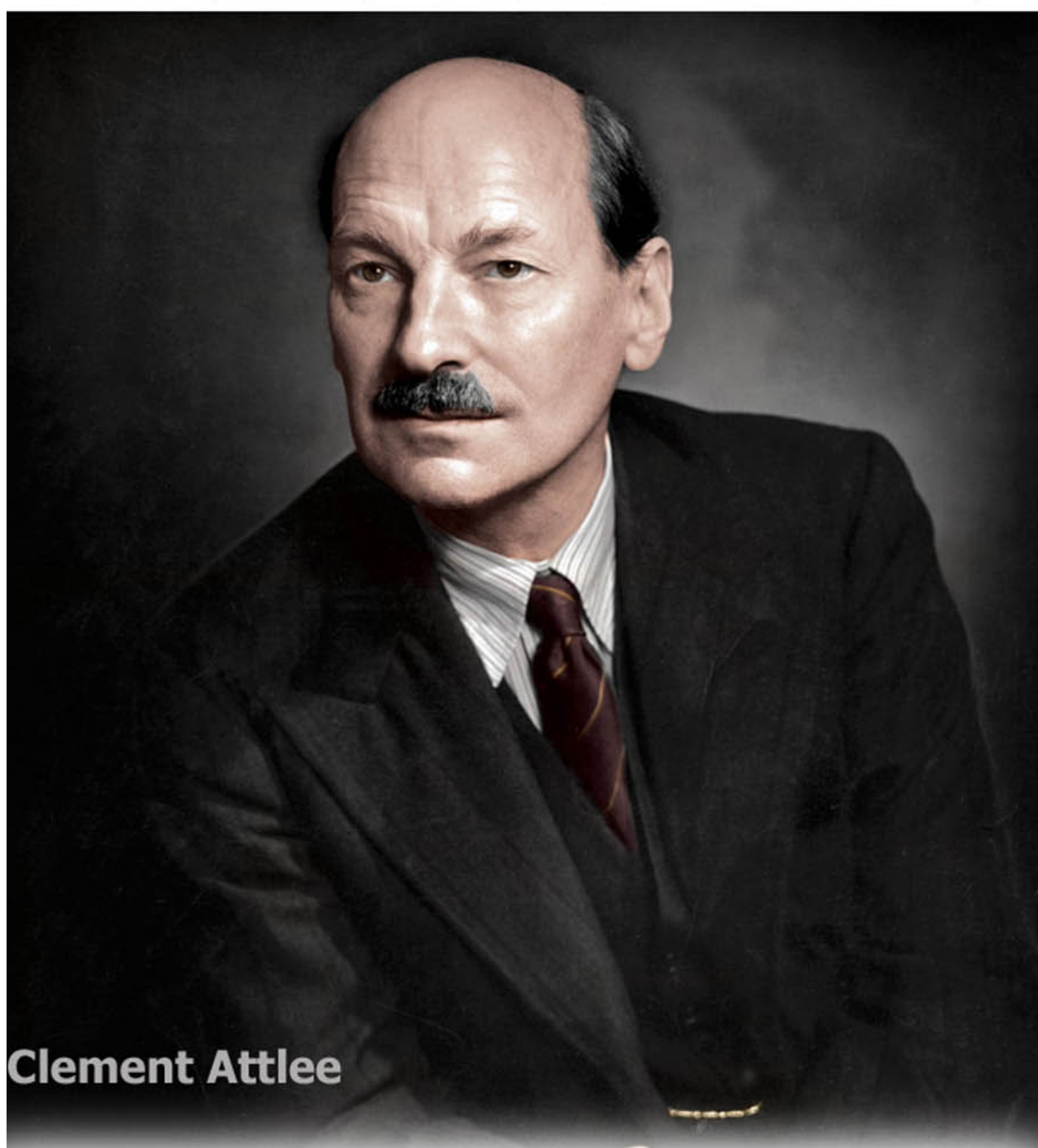
**L**ONDON—The man who was Winston Churchill's deputy, the man who didn't know he was going to be Prime Minister, was speaking at the election rally in his constituency, the Limehouse Division of Stepney, London.

The meeting was held at Trinity Church Hall, the only large hall left in the Limehouse after the blitz and V-bombs. Shreds of VE-Day decorations still hung from the rafters. The crowd of poorly-dressed working people—dock hands, seamen, busmen, housewives—listened, undisturbed by the shunt-engines and suburban trains hurrying through the Limehouse slums on the Great Eastern Railway Line just behind the church.

The speech was unexciting. Elsewhere crowds were cheering or heckling Winston Churchill, but here, in Limehouse, people came out and listened respectfully to Clem Attlee, their Member of Parliament since 1922.

The speaker was a man of middle height with a long, bald head and black mustache. He had spoken eight times that day but he relaxed with his own people. They responded to the familiar chords in his extemporaneous speech—the need of people for houses, the bettering of living conditions in the gruesome Limehouse slums, friendship with Russia and the U. S., employment and prosperity after the war.

Clem Attlee had been fighting the cause of Limehouse since 1918, when he came back from the war as an Infantry major. Clem Attlee commanded the landing party of the South Lancashire Yeomen in 1916 at Suvla Bay, where Winston Churchill authored his first amphibious landing on the tragic beaches of Gallipoli. In the relief of Kut, in the Mesopotamian campaign, Maj. Attlee was severely wounded. When he recovered he went to France. He served there in the newly formed Tank Corps.



Clement Attlee



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The voice of the speaker on this June evening in Limehouse was thin. He did not saw the air with his arms or beat out his sentences in a bewitching cadence. He walked around a little and made some mild, sarcastic jokes about Lord Beaverbrook, "the Svengali of the Tory Campaign," but mostly he talked about issues. Since the last war, Limehouse had wanted what he was talking about. Now another war was over, and the people still had their patient hunger for words to come true.

There were people in the room who remembered Clem Attlee being elected Mayor of Stepney in 1919. They had heard the dry, friendly, factual voice talking at Toynbee Hall, a famous East End settlement house before the last war. Like Harry Hopkins, Attlee had once been a social worker.

Clem Attlee had believed in Socialism since 1907, when he was working as a young lawyer on the Poor Law Reform with Sidney and Beatrice Webb, famous Fabian Socialists. As a law student he believed in imperialism and tariff reform. The influence of the Webbs turned him to the mild, evolutionary socialist theories of the Fabians, of which Bernard Shaw was also a prominent advocate. Attlee practiced law for only three years. At the outbreak of war in 1914 he was a lecturer in social sciences at the London School of Economics.

**A**FTER Attlee concluded his sober, friendly speech at Trinity Hall, Mrs. Attlee drove him away in a midget car. His audience walked home through the neglected churchyard with its sooty trees stunted by railroad smoke and stripped of leaves by flying-bomb blasts. One contented elector said to his wife, "Nice, quiet meeting."

That "nice, quiet meeting" and thousands like it throughout the United Kingdom resulted in a political explosion that shook the world and put the quiet man of Limehouse and a Labor government in power for the first time in British history. The party had been in office twice before, but never with a majority.

Clement Richard Attlee first entered the House of Commons in the 1924 election that gave Britain her original Labor Government, in which he served as Undersecretary for War. The platform he supported that year was very much like the one he outlined to his Limehouse voters in 1945. It called for the support of the League of Nations. (Merely substitute "United Nations.") It called for independence for India and nationalization of the mines and railways. And it called for a national housing scheme. The people of Limehouse thought houses were a good idea in 1924 and they still think so in 1945.

**T**HE 1924 platform advocated a capital levy on fortunes exceeding \$20,000, but this change was not attempted when Labor got in, and it was not listed in the 1945 appeal. Two of the 1924 planks have since been realized—independence for Egypt and recognition of the Irish Free State. Little else has changed. The great explosion of 1945 came from a delayed-action charge, which had been quietly accumulating sticks of political dynamite since the last war. The electorate remembered many things.

Attlee himself typifies many of the popular causes which were lost during the years of Conservative rule. In 1927 he was appointed minority member of the Simon committee which went to India to report on conditions there. Attlee has remained an advocate of Indian self-government ever since.

In 1929 the second Labor Government was elected under Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald with a squeak majority of 288 seats to 260 for the Conservatives. In 1931 Attlee, who was then serving as Postmaster General, warned against



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Japanese preparations for assault on Manchuria. He came into open conflict with Prime Minister MacDonald, whom he accused of diverting attention from the aggressive plans of Japan.

In 1931 the consequences of the MacDonald fiasco were a defeat of Labor by a bigger majority than Labor won in 1945. The Tories gained 470 seats to a mere 52 for Attlee's party. Attlee was among the Labor handful elected and he was obliged to sit in a House led by Ramsay MacDonald, whose reward from the winners was the post of Prime Minister of the Conservative-

While Mussolini was warring with Ethiopia in 1935, Attlee was urging the British Government to apply sanctions against the Italian Fascists. The Government, however, encouraged Mussolini by means of the Hoare-Laval agreement, which endorsed his conquest. Attlee introduced a motion in Commons in December 1935, condemning the Hoare-Laval plan as calculated to "reward the declared aggressor at the expense of the victim, destroy collective security and conflict . . . with the Covenant of the League of Nations." The resolution was defeated by 397 votes to 165, but the resulting public outcry caused the Government to withdraw the Hoare-Laval deal. The Laval of this agreement was none other than Pierre himself, the French politician who betrayed his country.

In 1937 Attlee vigorously opposed the "non-interventionist" policy toward Republican Spain. He said that the supposedly fair policy of forbidding the sale of British and French arms to either side—either to the government or to the rebel Franco—was denying the legally elected Spanish Government weapons it needed to defend itself against Hitler and Mussolini's war machine. He visited the front in Spain that year. British and American volunteers who were fighting in the International Brigade of the Republican Army named one of their ill-armed units "the Major Attlee Company."

Most of the questions Attlee opposed as minority leader were not hypothetical ones. There were deep party differences as Britain skidded down the last half of this century's third decade on its way to war. Attlee was the most important Labor figure in the attempts to get the British Government to crack down on Fascist dictators. He spoke against the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the invasion of Austria and the Japanese inroads in China.

In May 1940 the Munich Cabinet fell under the ominous threat of an immediate Nazi victory. A general election was due that year—the Tories had ended their constitutional five years of power—but no election was held due to the military crisis. Churchill, and later Eden, the Tory critics of appeasement, came into power. Two of Labor's strong men, Herbert Morrison and Ernest Bevin, were invited into the coalition Cabinet. Clem Attlee came into the Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal and Churchill appointed him Deputy Prime Minister. Churchill meant to insure that the leader of the opposition had a voice in the war decisions of a true unity Cabinet.

But an important change did not take place. The same majority that had supported Munich remained seated on the red leather benches of the House. Governmental power passed from the House to the bold man at 10 Downing Street. People remembered this when the 10 years were up. They did not repudiate Churchill; they repudiated a party which Churchill himself had opposed in 1939, and for the same reasons—they did not think it fit to run





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the country's affairs.

**I**N the Churchill Cabinet, Attlee, as Deputy Prime Minister and as Secretary of State for the Dominions, an additional portfolio he was given in 1942, relieved Churchill of departmental detail which would have distracted the Prime Minister from running the British military effort.

While Attlee stayed home as Acting Prime Minister, Churchill made more than a dozen trips abroad in five years—an aggregate absence from 10 Downing Street of eight months. On Aug. 14, 1941, Attlee broadcast the eight points of the Atlantic Charter while Churchill and Roosevelt were still at sea on the cruiser *Augusta*. Three times Attlee gave war reports to Parliament in Churchill's absence. In September 1943 he was made Lord President of Council.

Attlee did not make headlines. In the more than 2,000 days of war his name was in the top headlines of London papers only a dozen or so times. There was no reason why Attlee should have rivalled Churchill in newsprint acreage. Churchill was the desirable legend, the fighting captain; Attlee was the quiet executive who saw that decisions were carried out. It was a smooth-working team.

Attlee's personal life is the ultimate in normality. He has four children. The eldest, Janet, 22, is a section officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Felicity, 19, is training as a nurse. Martin, 17, is an apprentice in the Merchant Navy. Alison, 15, is at school. Mrs. Attlee keeps house, like Bess Truman. Until recently she had no help. She spent long hours in food queues, like other British housewives. The dark, slender Attlees have uniform, prim good looks.

They live in a small villa in Stanmore, a humdrum London suburb, where they keep chickens and a half-blind airedale. The modest homes in this community are the storied "Englishman's castles," idealized and given names like "Bon Repos" and "The Hollyhocks." The Attlee's front gate bears the name "Heywood."

**T**HE housing plan of the new Labor Government is to provide thousands of new "Heywoods" for the British people, who are "ill-housed" on a scale that makes the late Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1936 plank on housing seem like a frivolity. The Englishman's castle has been crumbling since before the last war; bombing and deterioration of property have lowered home life to a desperate state. This was the biggest issue of the 1945 election. The Conservatives allowed the Laborites to talk housing while they were yelling about the dark plots of Professor Laski, an academic gentleman whom the people did not confuse with a roof over their heads. At the last minute Mr. Churchill talked housing—to be built by private enterprise—but it made no difference.

Attlee was born in Putney, London, in 1883, in the sheltered Victorian home of a Conservative solicitor. In the English legal system a solicitor is a lawyer's business manager. The solicitor solicits and sets up the case; the barrister pleads.

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Attlee's upbringing was staunchly Conservative. He attended Haileybury College, a public school, comprising what in the American school system is the first grade to the end of junior-high school. The English "public school" is not a public school in our sense, but a private tuition school. Haileybury is an Anglo-Indian school. There as a boy Attlee became acquainted with the Indian independence movement. He left Haileybury for University College, one of the 21 colleges of Oxford University.

Politically, Attlee is not a strong man in the Churchill sense. Churchill was a one-man party, with only Anthony Eden as a comparable figure. Because the party Churchill had embraced was without popular support it fell with a deafening crash. To understand the mild Clem Attlee, on the other hand, the make-up of 413 MPs pledged to support his Government must be studied. The strength of the new Government is not so much in the leader as it is in the Parliamentary Labor Party. Clem Attlee is a party man.

The House has been altered drastically in composition. There are 345 brand-new M.P.s. The number of members who come from laboring backgrounds and from the lower middle class has risen to over half the membership total of 640. There are 180 servicemen in the new House, 126 of them Laborites. They range from Army privates to lieutenant generals. Most of them saw active service in this war.

There are trade-union members and journalists and teachers and railroad men and farmers and lawyers and doctors in the new Parliament. In the representative body of what Napoleon called "a nation of shopkeepers" there are only two booksellers, one butcher, one druggist, one pawnbroker and one optician to stand for the middleman. There are 24 women. And the new House is a legislature of young people; the average age of all the Labor members is 43.

**T**HIS House and Cabinet represent a shift in power from the executive to the legislative. If Clement Richard Attlee becomes one of Britain's great Prime Ministers it will be because he best administers the will of the new Commons, and not because of any breath-catching deeds of his own. All of his career heretofore has been as an executive, carrying out the policies of the Labor Party. If the Labor Government wants to go places, Attlee is an ideal administrator.

Labor's long-range objectives are encompassed in a five-year plan, which is not comparable in size or scope with the first or second five-year plans Russia began in 1928. Sir Stafford Cripps, newly appointed to the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade, defined the plan as "the orderly development of the country's resources, bringing some few of the more important industries and services under national ownership while retaining a system of planned and controlled private enterprise for the rest."

The main reform plans of the Attlee Government are the nationalization of coal and the construction of government housing. Housing is first on the list. During the war no repair to a premise was permitted costing more than \$40. The building industry was completely converted to war needs. Now the industry must be remobilized on a nationwide scale to get houses built. The main problems are manpower and acquisition of building materials and land. Building-trades workers must be discharged from the forces, and a centralized authority set up to lead the housing drive. Britain is not a home-owning nation like ours. The Englishman's castle is a rented one.

**P**UBLIC ownership and modernization of coal mining have been vital issues in Britain for 40 years. The Conservative Governments have resisted attempts at nationalization. During the war young men were drafted into the mines in an effort to keep up production. These appren-



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tices, called "Bevin boys" after Laborite Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labor in the Churchill Cabinet, were a rebellious lot. Most of them had had their hearts set on flying bombers rather than crawling through underground burrows, choking with coal dust. In justice to them, it should be said that the mining methods were so antiquated and dangerous that there was no attraction for a young man to make a career of mining.

The Labor Government will probably move quickly on nationalizing coal. A committee of miners, trade-unionists and M.P.s is now drawing up a public-ownership bill. Emmanuel Shinwell, formerly a hard-hitting Labor M.P., is Minister of Fuel and Power, and will have the job of solving the coal problem. There promises to be an acute shortage this winter of houses and coal. The Government will have to act briskly and show results before the cold weather.

Public ownership of railroads is not an immediate issue, and the nationalizing of the Bank of England is little more than a simple technicality. Instead of the Governor of the Bank running the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chancellor will run him. The object of the new Government is to acquire financial control no more drastic than the power the U. S. Government has over banking and investment.

In the field of foreign relations the new Government will be inclined to participate in the world security organization with just as much ardor as the Churchill regime, if not more. The Labor Government seeks the strongest ties with the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. American fears that Britain has gone "red" are groundless. The best proof of this is that the Labor victory aroused great enthusiasm in the right and center democratic circles in Europe, where it was said, "Thank God, now Europe has a left-wing rival for Communism."

**T**HE election results were happily received in India. L. C. M. S. Amery, veteran Secretary of State for India, was defeated in his own constituency, which pleased His Majesty's Indian subjects. Attlee and his Cabinet ministers have long been advocates of Indian self-government. Paradoxically enough, Labor's victory would seem to strengthen the bonds of the Empire. Both the Australian and the New Zealand Labor Governments are expected to be closer to Labor home rule than to a Conservative rule.

The Canadian Liberal Government, with the radical parties of western prairie Canada, welcomed the change. President DeValera of Eire wasn't happy about it, taking the view that he'd rather thumb his nose at a Conservative Government in Britain.

Soviet Russia showed a spectacular disinterest in the results. Nobody in the land of Communism took it as a victory for their cause, although Labor is pledged to stronger friendship with the Soviet Union. The loudest anti-Russian M.P.s were knocked out of the House and dozens of long-time friends of the U. S. S. R. were put in.

Nobody was more surprised at the explosive 1945 election than the winners. Whatever success the Labor Government may have in reconstructing Britain, there is no doubt that the people are behind it.



Attlee smiles happily after the recent Labor victory that made him Prime Minister