

### Whitehall's Second Regicide:

- a counter-factual speculation.

As World War Two drew to its tumultuous close the triumphant leadership of Stalin's Soviet Union had every reason to expect that another world, or at least European, war would very quickly follow it. This next war - in the bright dawn of the new nuclear age - would be fought between the Soviet Union and the United States for possession of western Europe. It was Stalin's intention to win this war and sovietise his new conquests. This sovietisation would be conducted, of necessity, at the highest speed: and in the teeth of ferocious opposition.

Stalin had acknowledged this perspective with perfect clarity in his famous (if not fully authenticated) speech to the Politburo in August 1939: 'the experience of the last 20 years has shown that in peacetime it is impossible to maintain a communist movement throughout Europe which would be strong enough for a Bolshevik party to seize power. The dictatorship of such a party will only become possible as the result of a major war'.

Given this strategic vision at the heart of the Soviet world-view, a successful invasion of Britain in 1945 is not entirely implausible. Compare such a project, after all, to the American and British invasion of German-held France just a year earlier. That latter invasion against a heavily-defended target was completely expected: and yet accomplished with complete surprise and success. (And of course Germany very nearly got off with its long-planned attack on the Soviet Union in 1941: although there were mountains of evidence that the attack was imminent).

A Soviet invasion of Britain, on the other hand, would have been against an undefended target and utterly unexpected - there would have been absolutely every reason to expect it to succeed.

And for the Soviets, this would have been an extremely important invasion. It was brilliantly clear, after all, that the balance of force in the whole of Europe would change hugely just as soon as the Americans had forward airbases from which they could interdict the sea-routes to the newly-Soviet Baltic, and deploy nuclear-armed bombers able to reach the major cities of western Russia. Britain was the obvious static aircraft carrier for these American bombers (as it indeed became in later decades).

It was, then, equally clear that a pre-emptive seizure of Britain would prevent such an American forward airbase in western Europe. It would also deny the Americans a forward naval and air base for the defense of western mainland Europe in the event of a Soviet invasion of western Germany, France and Italy. And in turn it would grant the Soviets themselves a forward naval and air base from which to protect western Europe from any American invasion under cover of nuclear weapons.

Then again, might not this rivalry - this grave likelihood of all-out nuclear war in Europe - have been transmuted into agreed spheres of influence at one or other of the great wartime conferences, such as Tehran in November 1943: Stalin's first trip outside Russia since a party conference in Prague back in 1912? (Stalin had, of course, visited London's Whitechapel in 1907, for the Second Congress of the RSDLP). Might not Britain have been gifted to the Soviet sphere of influence, in strictly bi-lateral negotiations between Stalin and Roosevelt at that fateful conference below the shadow of the Iranian mountains? (Just as Britain,

America and the Soviets had agreed earlier in the war that post-war Iran would be in the western sphere of control, and interests). There was plenty of precedent for just such an arrangement, after all. Great powers had repeatedly swapped occupied territories during the heady days of mercantilist imperialism and colonialism. (An exotic example - from the many available - can be found in the middle of the 18th century. In 1762, Britain grabbed Manila from Spain: but returned it two years later, in exchange for Florida and all the Spanish possessions east of the Mississippi).

So if the Soviets - once the dust had settled around the ruins of the Reichstag - were to have the Baltic republics and Poland and half of Germany, if Britain was to have Greece (and Iran), and if nobody was too sure about who was going to get the Balkans: well - why couldn't Britain be disposed of in the same sort of way, in a private deal between the Americans and the Russians?

There might even have been a choice for the Americans in the discussion of such possibilities. What if the Soviets threatened to take Turkey if they couldn't have Britain? Success in such an endeavour would provide a stranglehold on the Dardanelles (an ancient ambition of the Tsars, in any case) and guarantee passage for the fleets of the Crimea into the old Middle Sea, enclose a protective arm around the volatile Caucasus and put Soviet military power within very close distance of the Near East oil fields. This, after all, was precisely what his generals had urged on Hitler in 1940: a blitzkrieg through Turkey and Syria to seize the Suez canal and the energy reserves of Arabia and Persia. (Not for nothing did Turkey become a forward air- and missile-base for American nuclear power, of the highest strategic importance, during the iciest days of the Cold War!).

Or again, if the Soviets couldn't have Britain - what if they threatened to invade Italy or France, in each of which the communists were extremely powerful, and slavish, puppets of their Kremlin masters?

Given this sort of choice, the United States - having just bankrupted the British Empire - might well have thought it proper to now have it finished-off for ever as any sort of real world power. After all, a Soviet invasion would have the additional benefit of opening Britain's overseas possessions and markets to American capital and strategic interests: and perhaps even open to the Americans the rebellious but still-fabulous prize of India.

Or what about the Roosevelt factor? As the recently-published (and long top-secret) cable correspondence of the American president and the Soviet leader makes clear, the latter ran rings round the former. Roosevelt's astonishingly generous aid, after all, kept the Red Army - and the Soviet Union itself - alive during the critical Winter War of 1941-1942 (and later). What if Stalin had arm-wrestled or tricked Roosevelt into a deal over the destiny of Britain: a deal which could have been agreed in principle between the two leaders at the Tehran conference, and given the final go-ahead by Roosevelt in February 1945, at Yalta - which conference Churchill had initially proposed for Invergordon, where he hoped to host proceedings from one of the Royal Navy's surviving battleships, with jollies to Balmoral, and afternoon tea for Stalin with George VI and his family.

(Or what if Roosevelt had been so pro-Soviet that such a takeover of Britain needed no arm-wrestling or trickery on the part of Stalin at all?)

And in any case, if the Americans were disinclined to favour such a deal - then the Soviets did enjoy the huge leverage of the situation in the Pacific. What if the Stalin had thrown - or had even threatened to throw - his weight behind the Japanese? Perhaps even as early as Tehran? The Americans after all, in 1943, were engaged in a life-or-death struggle with the Japanese in the Pacific. Suppose the Soviets had let it be known to the Americans that the price of continued Soviet assistance in the war on Japan would be a 'Nelsonian eye' with regard to post-war arrangements for Britain?

Of course, just as the wartime alliance of the Great Powers very quickly degenerated into Cold War, the parties to this deal would soon fall out. The Central Intelligence Agency was founded in the summer of 1947, after all, and one of its first major operations was an extremely dirty (and successful) attempt to prevent the Italian communist party winning Italy's imminent general election.

It is self-evident that by that same summer the agency would have been involved in intelligence and other operations in the second Protectorate. And cocaine, given its value in an economy with a closed and largely worthless currency (and given what we know of the agency's subsequent history!) would be eminently suitable for financing this type of work.

One further point is worth making. By the spring of 1945, the temper of the British people was radical. That summer, after all, they would famously eject Churchill as leader and overwhelmingly elect a Labour government pledged to a left-wing programme of 'public ownership'. The ruling circles of Britain could see this coming only too well. When the ballot-boxes of the radical 8th Army were taken back to Britain by the Royal Navy, for instance, the officers on these ships are reported to have thrown many of the

ballot-boxes over the side. Might not the prospect of a right-wing coup have been contemplated with some interest by these same ruling circles? A coup to deny a radical government in Britain: and a coup which by its nature would be profoundly anti-Soviet and which might yet save what remained of the Empire? Might not Soviet intelligence have reported this prospect to Moscow? And might not this information in turn have made an invasion almost imperative, from the Soviet geo-strategic point of view? At the very least, the prospect of a coup - whether real or imaginary - would have served as an excellent excuse for a Soviet invasion.

How would the Soviets have modelled an occupied Britain? For all its institutional gangsterism, the Soviet state was obsessed with precedent and formal legitimacy: and in this respect, the only possible model would have been that of the first (17th century) Protectorate in Cromwell's England.

(Had the Soviets taken France in 1945, the iconography of revolutionary power would have post-dated the English by 150 years. There, it would be a state of Directory and Guillotine - though there would be no regicide, for there had been no lasting Restoration: but that guillotine would be one from which no Marat could expect mercy. Soviet France would sail under the flags of Terror, of Committees of General Defence, of Public Safety and Vigilance - in the name, no doubt, of All Power to the Communes).

But the English - or British - model would without question be found in the 17th century.

In the middle of that century, after all, the English 'smashed' their parliament, and equally 'smashed' its royal authority by removing the head of the king, Charles I, after a trumped-up travesty

of a trial equivalent to any of the great Soviet show-trials in the 1930s and 1940s. There were some differences, of course. There was no confession to present to the court - for the king took the view that he had nothing to confess. And Charles I would also have astonished any Soviet court by his general air of insolence and specific refusal to even recognise the authority of the 'court'. (But then, of course, Charles Stuart - whose grandmother Mary had also been executed by the English, without any semblance of a trial at all - had not served time in Soviet interrogative detention).

Still, the formal modelling of the second Protectorate on the Cromwellian is highly plausible. For one thing, the record of Cromwell's Protectorate could be deemed to legitimise much of what the Soviets intended to do. Many of the great estates of the 17th century, after all, derived from the expropriation of church lands, property and wealth during the Tudor period. It would, then, be little trouble for the lawyers of the second Protectorate to legitimise the wholesale seizure of land, property and wealth during the later 1940s.

Similarly with the legal system and religious policy. Charles I had his famous Star Chamber as an instrument of royal purpose: why not the second Protectorate? Lilburne was flogged and gaoled by this Star Chamber for sedition; Prynne was branded on the cheek and had his ears cut off for the same sort of offence; Eliot was judicially murdered in prison in conditions not much better than those which in time would pertain in the Gulag: and many a sturdy radical suffered the rack, the boot and the thumbkins for criticising Archbishop Laud or his minions. Taxes were wrung from those with the capacity to cede them; vastly profitable monopolies were granted to those whose support for the state could be guaranteed;

and violent persecution, purge and espionage characterised the Church in its role as ideological guardian of the state.

And then, ever so suddenly, the old order began to fall apart. The Grand Remonstrance of 1641, in which impudent dissidents enumerated their grievances, famously provoked the rage of the king. He arrived at parliament in the company of hundreds of armed men to arrest Pym, Hampden and three others: even more famously, they had fled. The Self Denying Ordinance followed in 1645: a calculated and cunning body-blow at the right of the great lords of England to command armed forces of their own. In 1646 parliament - without bothering to vote - agreed that Unitarians could be put to death, and that Baptists could be gaoled for life (which was much the same thing) for no offence other than their opinions.

The year 1647 saw further attempt at coup and counter-coup. The king was kidnapped by Cornet Joyce (in the persuasive company of five hundred republican troopers). Pride's Purge cleared oppositionists out of parliament by the simple expedient of stationing musketeers at its doors, refusing entry to a hundred, and arresting another fifty.

Church, crown and aristocratic estates were expropriated; and those smaller nobles whose estates were not expropriated were required to pay a punitive 'fine', which brought them to the edge of ruin anyway. The House of Lords was abolished by Pride's Rump Parliament as 'useless and dangerous', while the Rump also appointed a Commission to try Charles on the magnificent charge of 'prosecuting his design to subvert the laws and liberties of the nation'.

Technically, this commission was entirely illegal, and though it had 135 members, just 20 could form a quorum. And Charles had

committed no crime in law: after all, he was the law. He appealed to pity and to law: but that appeal found remedy in neither law nor pity. The case against the king was made and led by the lawyer John Cooke: 'And the said John Cooke on behalf of the people of England does for the said treasons and crimes impeach the said Charles Stuart as a tyrant, traitor, murderer and a public and implacable enemy to the Commonwealth of England'.

On January 30, 1649, at Whitehall, the king was beheaded, and monarchy was abolished 'for all time'.

A republic was proclaimed that May. The last fortresses of the old ruling elite were knocked down, that elite was disarmed ideologically and materially, and the army was 'purged' of 'unreliable elements'. The Rump Parliament debated the democratic novelty of a Bill to perpetuate its own existence and grant itself almost unlimited powers: even to the point of choosing who its future members would be! Cromwell had listened to its debates until the last moment and then called in his musketeers to clear the chamber (as Lenin's Red Guards would do with the Constituent Assembly in the young and bitter days of 1918). The Rump was dissolved by force of these arms, and England was now under open military dictatorship.

And if the 17th century offered a general model for its operation, the second Protectorate would find detailed guidance for its legal framework in more recent centuries. The central principle of this framework would be the recognition that the law (in the phrase of the great Leveller leader Winstanley), 'is but the declarative will of conquerors, how they will have their subjects to be ruled'. Indeed, with the Britain of 1945 the second Protectorate would have

inherited a structure of tyranny already in place, or almost already in place, on the Statute Book.

Treason legislation dating from 1351 was still in force in the 1940s (it still is). Under its terms, it was an offence to so much as *imagine* the ending of the monarchy, even by peaceful means (it still is). And any riot or insurrection which demanded a general redress of grievance or alteration of the law was deemed to constitute a levying of war: and was therefore itself treasonable, with all the penalties to go with it. Historically these penalties included death, expropriation, and outlawry (which last was not abolished as a penalty in Scotland until 1949). It would be a small matter for the courts to interpret all of this with reference to the interests of the second Protectorate.

There was, or had been, further provision over very many years with regard to blasphemy, conspiracy, incitement, intimidation, mobbing and rioting (1714), unlawful oaths, societies and drilling (1797, 1799, 1819), vagrancy and malicious damage (1812), seditious meetings (1817): and many other offences against the state, established religion and the public order. Such of this as had been repealed or deemed to have fallen into desuetude could very swiftly be recovered, and returned to the full force force of law.

The courts of the Protectorate would also be able to draw on existing legislation dating from the 1911 Official Secrets Act, with its clause that, 'it shall not be necessary to show that the accused person was guilty of any particular act'; the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act, which effectively made a crime of anything the government disliked; or the 1915 Munitions of War Act, which effectively abolished the free movement of labour. And then, even closer in

time, was the Emergency Powers Act of 1939 which allowed government ministers to lawfully expropriate industrial property.

As for the offence of 'trouble-making' during religious ceremonies (as the Men of Kent had done in Canterbury Cathedral in the early days of the Peasants' Revolt, and as Jenny Geddes had famously once done in Edinburgh's St. Giles): the state had at its service the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act, under which those convicted of 'indecent behaviour' could be sentenced to prison. The Act was last used in 1966 against a heckler of the-then Prime Minister Harold Wilson, with regard to his support for the American war in Vietnam.

(None of this is to overlook much more recent legislation. For example: the Criminal Justice Act 1994, amended and strengthened in 2003; the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; the Terrorism Act 2000, especially section 44; the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, especially section 125; and again, the Terrorism Act of 2006. Or as the incumbent Lord Chancellor gravely observed in the early summer of 2006: 'civil-rights cannot be allowed to stand in the way of national security').

And if the courts chose not to interpret any of this legislation in the spirit that was expected of them, then the officers of these courts and their families could easily be tortured and shot: or the matter could be handled in the first place, under cover of perfectly respectable emergency powers, by State Courts, Popular Tribunals and flying Special Commissions.

These latter might operate in secret, without disclosure of evidence to the accused, while execution of sentence might also be in secret, and immediate. Other powers might allow people to be sentenced in their absence, without any trial at all, to indefinite

periods of detention, at any location, without correspondence or any other rights whatsoever. After all, these were the sort of emergency powers the British government had claimed in wartime for the treatment of suspected enemy saboteurs; and by the summer of 1945, they were still perfectly legal.

As for concentration camps: the Soviets would immediately have inherited the extensive system of prisoner-of-war camps (in which in 1944 the Devizes Plot was hatched, by which 250,000 captured German prisoners would break out and attempt to seize Britain from within), along with a series of very high-security specialist centres - just one of which was at Cultybraggan, near Comrie in Perthshire.

As for torture-centres at home or abroad outwith the law: these too would the Soviets have inherited from Britain's wartime authorities. A network of such centres was established in Germany as soon as the Allied armies poured over the Rhine - most notably, that at Bad Nenndorf, where conditions were as brutal as they had been in any of the Nazi concentration camps. During the war years, meanwhile, Camp 020 in Surrey and the London Cage (in one of the city's wealthiest districts) were also notorious for the savagery of the conditions which pertained within them.

And - of course - the Soviets had thirty very full years of experience of their own in the imprisonment of huge numbers of people: whether within existing structures of law and administration, or entirely outwith them.

How would the Soviets have securely established their political power in an occupied Britain? Certainly, short-term stabilisation would involve the removal of the leading elements in the state,

which would without doubt include the extended royal family, the entire House of Lords, the members of the government and all the senior civil servants in each of the ministries. Soviet advisers and counsellors would immediately take full control of the Home Office, the police and allied agencies, the BBC and the War Office, for example. The removal of this Establishment would proceed in layers: the first five thousand, the first fifty thousand, and so on, on the basis of long-planned and pre-existing lists - just as the Soviets did in the Baltic republics and eastern Poland before the German invasion of 1941, and just as they did again as they established their post-war empire in eastern Europe.

As for the officer-corps of the armed services. The Soviets had murdered the flower of their own cadre of senior officers in the late 1930s. They had done the same to the Polish officer-class at Katyn in 1943 without hesitation, and at Tehran Stalin had 'playfully' suggested to Churchill over dinner the mass-murder of 50,000 German officers as soon as the war was over. (Earlier that day, Churchill had gifted Stalin a ceremonial sword engraved with the dedication, 'to the steelhearted citizens of Stalingrad, a gift from King George VI as a token of the homage of the British people').

Similar procedures of mass-murder could certainly have been conducted with ease against the British officer-corps. It would not take long, this removal - a matter of weeks - and it would, largely, be uncontested. After all, what was there to contest it with?

As for the House of Commons: many of its members might simply be made to disappear, on a temporary or permanent basis. The threat of such treatment, and the promise of preferment under the new regime, would bring the remainder to their senses very

quickly. So too, of course, would the introduction of highly-divergent performance-related differentials in remuneration.

And then there would be violence and torture, perhaps for specially obtuse or distinguished cases only. It can be asserted with absolute certainty, after all, that a morning's-worth of Soviet interrogative techniques would incline our finest constitutional brains (as many of them like to be known) to re-introduce by the time of the luncheon-sherry the rack, the whip and the surgeon's knife as instruments of state; and to introduce anything else whatsoever by the time of the first gong for dinner.

The existing political parties would be banned from operation, or at least neutered: their leading officers arrested, their headquarters and property seized, their bank accounts frozen, their newspapers and meetings prohibited. Soon, all trade unions would be effectively closed-down too, along with all civil associations that might conceivably represent a gathering point for opinion or independent action.

The middle-classes would be destroyed, inch by inch. Extortive taxation might start the process; punitive 'fines' and compulsory 'loans' would help it along. Bit by bit their wealth would bleed away, in the form of bank-savings, shares, insurance policies and property in houses and land. Having been reduced in this way, the middle-classes would then be more accommodating than ever to any further calls that the state might wish to make on their fortitude, their loyalty and their charity.

In all branches of the economy, control of food supplies would be an instrument of social control: as of course would be access to privileged shops, schools and universities, and trades and professions. In the countryside, the farming surplus of crops and

stock would be seized by brute force, and the farming class ruined and scattered by collectivisation (which began throughout the post-war Soviet empire in eastern Europe in 1947). As the following winter got under way, there would be reports of extreme savagery and starvation in the countryside.

In the towns, meanwhile, industrial policy would be characterised by crude central planning, the imposition of individual work norms and punitive labour-discipline codes, the 'smashing' of workers' representation, and the effective militarisation of labour.

A score of military, security and intelligence agencies would roam the land. Chief among these would be the Militia; an armed political police force (an 'Internal Security Corps') operating outwith the framework of the pre-Protectorate law. The pre-war regional police forces would be controlled by advisers and senior officers appointed by the Protectorate's Home Secretary. The heavily-purged Regulars, or pre-war army, now largely disarmed, would be under the extremely strict control of Soviet officers and political police: it is, after all, seldom wise for an occupying power to disband an existing army, and thereafter abandon its personnel and weaponry to their own devices.

Extra-legal Special Commissions, with their own armed wings, might also roam the land, along with Paramilitary forces, motorised riot-police Specials and industrial-guard Auxiliaries. The countryside, meanwhile, might even enjoy the attentions of a reborn Yeomanry. Heavily-armed battalions of troops from the Fraternal lands of eastern Europe would be held in readiness for those occasions when the native forces might require their assistance.

And a dozen or more secret-police agencies (whose very existence would be secret) would stalk the land. Almost certainly,

there would be one for each of religious affairs and educational affairs: each of which would also have an extensive network of part-time informers and sympathisers deeply buried in the ranks of these professions.

This, after all, was how it was in the homeland of the Soviets and their new colonies in eastern Europe. Why - *why, exactly* - would things have been any different in Britain's second Protectorate?

In all of this, Britain's own communists would have played no significant role whatsoever. In general they can have occasioned from Stalin nothing but contempt. After all, they were strangers to underground struggle, prison, torture, exile, revolution, civil war, terror, famine, purge and invasion: strangers to that fearful battle for survival which had been the daily bread of their Soviet counterparts for thirty years.

Nor had the British communists any sort of mass party or influence on the French or Italian scales. In any case, most of the leadership would have perished after standard show-trials. The general-secretary Harry Pollitt would certainly have been one of these. After all he had been a lifelong friend of Rose Cohen whose husband Max Petrovsky had once been a friend of Trotsky: a devastatingly lethal linkage in itself. While living in Moscow with his wife in the spring of 1937, Petrovsky was arrested and shot. That summer, his wife was also arrested and believed to have been shot. Pollitt tried to intervene on her behalf - another hideously lethal linkage. From this point Stalin's NKVD began to accumulate material with which they could at some point in the future physically destroy Pollitt and the leadership of the British communist party.

Indeed, Pollitt had been intended for - and was extremely lucky to escape - a show-trial which had been planned for Moscow in 1937, but then abandoned. He would not have survived another one.

Certainly, a few of the leaders might have been allowed to live, along with some of the major fellow-travellers in British public life.

One of these would surely have been the Wkyehamist barrister and MP Denis Nowell Pritt. Pritt spent the summer of 1932 'studying' Soviet political trials, of which he later wrote, 'The foreign observer gets the impression of an informal, friendly, and even easy-going trial, conducted without heat and with the real co-operation of all concerned, and with a real desire to arrive at the truth'.

Pritt was also present at one of the huge show-trials in 1937, where the public prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky closed his case with the words, 'I demand that these dogs gone mad should be shot - every one of them'. Just days later, Pritt was happy to write in the London press 'of the complete propriety and authenticity of the trial'. Pravda, meanwhile, was more than happy to reprint this authentication, word for word: though this did not prevent the arrest of the paper's editor, Koltsov, on charges of being a spy for Lord Beaverbrook (who had met Stalin in Moscow in the autumn of 1941). Koltsov got ten years without right of correspondence, and died within four.

(It is just conceivable that he was an agent of Beaverbrook too: or, rather, it is certainly conceivable that a contemporary court of lawyers and laymen could have, on the balance of evidence and probability, been persuaded of his guilt in this respect. Consider just some of the 'evidence', after all. The uncle of the journalist Claud Cockburn had been an associate of Beaverbrook in Canada and later in England. Cockburn himself was personally appointed by

Pollitt as diplomatic correspondent of the Daily Worker. Cockburn openly admitted that he spent a great deal of his time in republican Madrid with Kolstov. Later, they also spent much time together in Prague, as the Czech crisis developed. And Kolstov had appointed Cockburn as London correspondent of Pravda! In the political circumstances pertaining, what perfectly respectable court - of any jurisdiction whatsoever - could find these connections deficient in evidential eloquence?)

As for Pritt. At the very least, Pritt - not to mention Vyshinsky - would have had a very influential hand in the constitutional and legal arrangements of the second Protectorate. (It is a matter of fact that Procurator Vyshinsky and Princess Margaret were actually presented to each other in London in the later 1940s).

And yet, and yet: would these arrangements have been sufficient to prevent an insurrection of a native and long-established sort?

The countries of Britain, after all, have a long tradition of insurrection, and subsequent bloody repression by the state. In the 18th century, despite ferocious repression, insurgents contested the power of the state again and again. In the 1760s, a gigantic crowd met at St. George's Fields in London to demand the release of the radical Wilkes, campaigning editor of the North Briton. Troops killed six, and wounded many more.

With the onset of the French revolution, agitation and repression intensified. While the sailors mutined at Spithead and the Nore, Friends of the People groups were formed in the progressive towns. The alarming names of United Englishmen, London Corresponding Society and Convention began to be heard. The state brought in foreign mercenaries and kept them in isolated

barracks, the Yeomanry was established as the private armed force of the state, and the Combination Act was rushed through parliament.

And so it went on, throughout much of the nineteenth century. From Lancashire the Blanketeers marched on London, while at St. Peter's Field in Manchester the mounted Yeomanry charged with sabres a meeting of cotton spinners and killed eleven, while hundreds were wounded. Soon after, a political strike began in the Glasgow area, led by miners. Sixty thousand men struck work, and there was a general expectation of armed insurrection.

In 1831 the National Union of the Working Classes, a precursor of Chartism, was formed. It called for the abolition of the Game Laws and of the death penalty for offences against property.

Recalling the spirit of the Self Denying Ordinance of 1645 (and anticipating the spirit of the Polish Solidarity movement by 150 years) the National Union also demanded the, 'discharge of the machinery of despotism' - the state's monopoly of military force - and the establishment of a democratic workers' army, the National Guard. It also organised a National Convention demanding reform, while one of its leading supporters called for a Grand National Holiday - or, in other words, a very political general strike.

The Poor Man's Guardian published a special supplement, advising on how to street-fight and build barricades. A number of farm-workers was arrested at Tolpuddle in Dorset, and they were sentenced to deportation to Australia. One hundred thousand people marched in protest at their martyrdom across London, from Copenhagen Fields to Kennington.

Throughout these years - the high-water mark of Chartism - the idea of armed insurrection was never far from the surface of

popular agitation; notably among the miners. In 1838, 150,000 people marched in Glasgow, 80,000 in Newcastle, 100,000 at Bradford and 200,000 at Birmingham: where there was an almost-continuous mass-meeting in session at the Bull Ring. At Kersal Moor near Manchester a quarter of a million workers rallied. Insurrection was very near: workers began to arm and drill, and sometimes came armed to meetings. One famous placard, at Ashton-under-Lyne, proclaimed, 'Universal Bread or Universal Blood! Men of Ashton, prepare your Dagger, Torch and Guns'.

A few years later, with revolutionary events shaking the mainland of Europe, there was yet more trouble. In Scotland the formation of a National Guard had begun. In London a gigantic meeting was called for Kennington Common, after which the participants would march on Westminster. The state, fearing a revolutionary upheaval, mobilised huge numbers of Regular soldiers, Militia troopers and police Specials: and the leadership of the march (not for the last time in the history of 100,000-strong processions through London) backed down.

But agitation continued. In the 1860s, there was a demand for repeal of the Master and Servant Law; and in the 1870s, the Nine Hour League's agitation for a shorter working day culminated in a victorious five-month strike in engineering.

In 1887, over 100,000 marchers converged from Clerkenwell Green on Trafalgar Square (where such meetings had been banned since the previous year). The marchers came under savage attack from police and Grenadier Guards, the latter having fixed bayonets and loaded live ammunition. Huge funeral processions followed the coffins of those who died during the fighting.

In 1910 there was a renewed wave of strikes among dockers, railwaymen and miners, and also in cotton and engineering. Ten thousand miners struck work at the Cambrian Combine in the Rhondda valleys; by the following March, a million miners were on strike. During World War One the miners formed a Triple Alliance with other unionised workers in heavy industry: and soon afterwards, came the great industrial unrest that led directly to the ill-fated General Strike of 1926.

The state had begun to prepare for this strike a year earlier. An Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was established. The country was divided into ten regions for emergency government (pretty much as Cromwell had done in the 1650s with his major-generals, and pretty much as post-war governments did with regard to provision for emergency governance during the long years of an expected nuclear winter).

In some parts of London, during the strike, there was trouble every night - especially in Vauxhall, Hammersmith, Poplar and Bermondsey. In some districts the strikers were in complete control. In the north-east, meanwhile, the Council of Action for Chopwell, Blaydon and Ryton was accused (by its enemies) of establishing a 'reign of terror'. So too was the Central Strike Committee at Merthyr Tydfil. In some districts, workers' defence corps - or Popular Guards - were established. At Chatham and Colchester, these Popular Guards defended meetings; at Methil in Fife, some hundreds of workers were on patrol; at Sowerby Bridge in Yorkshire, Popular Guards took over the role of the police.

When the strike finally collapsed, Trades Disputes legislation was enacted to break the back 'for ever' of union power. But it did not break it fully, for Britain by this time had the longest-established

industrial working class in Europe. This working class was also well-organised, very large, highly conscious of its traditions and record, and politically sophisticated.

By 1945 it could draw on a remarkable record of strike action, some of which was very recent. In 1944, for example - with the war yet to be concluded - 87,000 of the 100,000 Welsh miners went on strike and 156 of the 200 Welsh pits closed. The following year, 43,000 dockers struck work for a national minimum wage of 25 shillings a day: this strike lasting for no less than seven weeks.

During World War Two over five million British workers were engaged in some form of military or related service: and another million in munitions production. The Home Guard published countless manuals on the manufacture of irregular weaponry, and on the theory and practice of insurrectionary and guerrilla warfare. Leftists and veterans of the Spanish civil war had a key role in the formation of this People's Army. The writings of these 'Osterley Park socialists' offered a political rationale and the para-military tactics for resistance to fascist occupation. And the British working-class had also, of course, its own very long traditions of direct-action politics on which to draw.

It is, then, entirely reasonable to suppose that any insurrection during the second Protectorate would draw on these recent experiences and older traditions.

As for the second Protectorate's treatment of the royal family and King George VI. The Soviets had obliterated their own Romanovs (the youngest was just thirteen) with no ceremony whatsoever in a basement in Tsaritsyn not so many years earlier (the Soviets at that time holding, perhaps, to the medieval view that formal regicide was

just too horrible a thing to contemplate). And there was plenty of precedent in Britain - or at least England - for the same sort of murderous conduct.

In the 12th century, Henry II had occasioned the murder of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his own cathedral. In the 13th century, Edward I had partly-hanged as a traitor till half dead, then disembowelled and finally quartered, the Scottish patriot William Wallace, though Wallace was not, of course, English: a nicety of national distinction that even the Soviets observed in the case of Rose Cohen, who was persuaded to renounce her British nationality not long before she was arrested and supposedly shot in 1930s Moscow.

Early in the 14th century, the English had deposed and murdered Edward II (lover of Piers Gaveston and spouse of Isabella, the 'she-wolf of France') with a hot iron poker embraced in a cool horn sheath. Later in the same century, Richard II had been deposed and then either murdered or starved to death. And in the 15th century, England's Henry VI had been dizzily enthroned, deposed, imprisoned, exiled, restored, deposed, imprisoned and - perhaps with a sense of relief - murdered at last, in the Tower of London.

But above all of these, there was the example of Charles I to refresh the collective memory of the second Protectorate. The Rump parliament took just a matter of days to establish a brand-new High Court of Justice - a Soviet-style Special Commission in all but name - specifically to 'try' that king. After the travesty of a trial, he was dragged out and beheaded before the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall: 'when the bleeding head was held up, the shout of the soldiers was drowned in the groan of the vast multitude'. It seems

entirely reasonable to suppose that the second Protectorate would have dealt with 'its' king - or any of its other enemies - in much the same way.

John Cooke, who had led the prosecution, paid dearly for his zeal after the return of the monarchy at the Restoration. In 1660, he was subject to a trial which was even more of a mockery than that enjoyed by Charles I. He was then half-hanged, cut down while still alive, disembowelled, castrated, decapitated, and his body cut into four quarters: the limbs then being 'piked' around London, and the head 'piked' above Westminster Hall. In the same vengeful year, the remains of Cromwell, who had died two years earlier, were also exhumed. These remains were hanged and then buried at Tyburn, with the exception of Cromwell's head, which was 'spiked' above Westminster Hall: a ritual of the sort to which the remains of the Bible-translator John Wycliffe had been subject, two and a half centuries earlier, when - forty years after his death - his remains had been dug-up and burned with much ceremony. (During the savage Civil War in Russia, the Reds did the same with the body of the White general Kornilov, which was paraded through the streets of the local capital before being burned - with much ceremony - in the town's central square).

The second Protectorate would also have had reason to fear a likely attempt to snatch George VI and his family from its custody. After all, the British had conspired to snatch the Tsar and his family from Soviet custody in the summer of 1918, at the height of the Russian civil war, when large parts of the country were in the control of anti-Soviet forces.

At this point, the Tsar and Tsarina Alexandra (a granddaughter of Queen Victoria) and their children were imprisoned in

their house of Special Purpose in Ekaterinburg. In the early days of their captivity, it had been planned to send them to Britain, to which sanctuary they had been invited by the Tsar's cousin, King George V. Subsequently, there had been an alternative plan for a gigantic show-trial in Moscow, with Trotsky as chief prosecutor, along the lines of the trial of Louis XVI of France in 1793, or of Charles I of England and Scotland in 1649.

The British intelligence mission in (what is once again) St. Petersburg was led by one Stephen Alley (who died as recently as 1969). Alley planned to snatch the Russian royals from Soviet custody, take them by train to Murmansk, and thence to London by the Royal Navy.

But Alley's telegrams to London may have been intercepted by Soviet intelligence: in any case, the Russian royals were savagely gunned down in their basement in the high summer of 1918, before any rescue bid could be launched. But the Soviets would certainly not have forgotten the episode: and would certainly have had the immediate murder of George VI and his family planned, in the event of any attempt to rescue them from the wartime special-operations safe-house at Inverlair in which they were finally imprisoned.

As for an explosion of millenarian hysteria - and perhaps even a hint of witchcraft, which is but another dimension to religious enthusiasm - during the second Protectorate; this too is at least arguable.

After all, the last prosecution in Britain under the 1735 Witchcraft Act was in 1944, when Helen Duncan from Callander in Perthshire was convicted at Portsmouth for 'pretending to raise spirits from the dead', and sentenced to nine months in gaol. (The Act was not repealed until 1951).

As for more general hysteria: tempestuous religious enthusiasms of a mass character have accompanied political and economic upheaval throughout history (and still do). The 14th century, for instance, was witness to Wycliffe's puritanical and (by implication) egalitarian followers, the psalm-singing Lollards, sometimes known as Mumblers. Just after Richard II was stabbed (or starved) to death, Wycliffe's 'obstinate and relapsed heretics' - they were especially strong in Monmouth and Hereford - were being burned at the stake. In the middle of the 16th century, village bells might miraculously ring backwards, shaved dogs be hurled at altars and dead cats dressed in clerical garb be found swinging from impromptu gallows. At the same time, a 'spirit in the wall' in central London was said to have denounced the Mass as idolatory and called for a Holy War on the Pope. If this can be believed - and vast crowds congregated to hear it, and believe it - then it is no further beyond belief that the brass water-faucet of sectaries on Lindisfarne could in the 1940s be said to spout blood at dusk, quote Scripture at midnight and by the following dawn be calling in question the tripartite nature of God.

During the 17th century Protectorate there was an explosion in the number of sects of precisely this sort: the Diggers, the green-ribboned Levellers, Brownists, Muggletonians, General Baptists, George Fox's Society of Friends - the Quakers - and others. The Fifth Monarchy Men believed that the Second Coming was imminent and that they should rule the country until it did indeed come. The Family of Love - perhaps without any undue surfeit of modesty - believed that the resurrection of the dead was fulfilled in them. The Seekers, forerunners of the Quakers, spurned all organised religion. As a sort of travelling conventicle of heretics (on an ancient model)

they, 'wandered up and down as sheep without a shepherd and as doves without their mates, seeking their Beloved'.

Many of these 17th century sectaries suffered inordinately for their beliefs. Their equivalents in the 20th century (when England had scarcely known serious religious repression since Tudor and Stuart times) would have suffered inordinately too: for the religious policy of the second Protectorate could hardly fail to have been enormously repressive, and to have drawn on precedent in a marvellously ham-handed fashion. 'Muffling the bell-ringers' and abolishing Christmas, after all, was the common programmatic currency of many of the sectaries of Cromwell's Protectorate. So was force by the state in religious affairs: especially with reference to Scotland.

At the time of Wallace, after all, England's Edward I had boldly appointed the Bishop of Durham as his representative in Scotland, 'to help run the country' (just as the fearsome troika of Berman, Minc and Bierut had 'helped run the country' in post-war Poland).

And though Scotland overwhelmingly rejected Laud's prayer-book in 1637, full-blown Laudian episcopacy was nevertheless imposed on Scotland 25 years later (as well as compulsory attendance at church services). This led to a veritable reign of terror. Two hundred people from Edinburgh alone were hanged; two women were sentenced to death by drowning; hundreds of others were tortured by hot boot and thumbkin, while hundreds more died on the ships carrying them to overseas deportation.

So savage persecution of religious dissidents, a forcible merger of the churches of Scotland and England, and the imposition on the former of the latter's liturgy and style of government, in the shape of an archbishop, is precisely the sort of thing the second

Protectorate might have tried. It had all been tried before, after all: and once again it would have ignited religious conflict on a major scale.

As for the arrival of the Messiah into the midst of this ferment - why not? In the early 1940s, after all, one of the deception strategies devised by the War Office's propaganda department was the deliberate rumour that the Messiah - in strictly pacifist form - had just arrived in wartime Germany.

And of course, radical millenarian enthusiasms informed greatly the middling years of England's 17th century. Why not those of her 20th? - or, indeed, those of her 21st? After all, this very focus of expectation is the central ideological passion of the present government of the United States: which appears to take it at face value. Why, then, should observers be expected not to take profession of this passion at the same face value?

And prophetic and messianic visitations pepper history, ancient and modern. For instance, tradition claims that the young Jesus sailed on a tin-trading vessel from Tyre bound for Cornwall, and actually landed on St. Michael's Mount, near Penzance - this name being the anglicised form of the Cornish original Pen Sans, meaning holy headland.

Towards the end of the Elizabethan period, some London Puritans proclaimed William Hacket, an illiterate maltmaker, as the Messiah: for which presumption, the poor Hacket went quickly to his execution.

In the mid-17th century, and famously, a self-styled Messiah rode into Bristol, on a donkey, while his followers threw palm-leaves before Him, or him (or them). The government of England - taking

care, perhaps, to err on the side of caution - spent some hysterical weeks debating the precise status of this self-styled Messiah before coming to the view that he was an imposter. James Nayler was put in the stocks and flogged (just like Jeremiah!), then branded on the forehead, and finally had his dangerous tongue bored all the way through: as a result of which savage treatment he died three years later.

Around the same time one John Mason, inspired by apocalyptic readings of Daniel (eg. 17:26) and Revelation (eg. 20:4), established a community at Water Stratford, near Buckingham. He denounced the 38th of the Thirty Nine Articles, with its admonition against communality of property (or ultra-leftism, as such things were known in a later age), and proclaimed the imminent return of the Messiah. When he died in 1649, his followers confidently expected him to resurrect within days: some even said that they had met with him, and spoken to him, after his death.

In the middle of the 18th century, Ann Lee - a Shaker from Manchester - began to proclaim a new gospel based on what she said was divine revelation. She claimed that Jesus would soon re-appear in a Second Coming as a woman: and some Shakers came to believe that that prophecy was revealed in her own person. Gaoled for street-preaching she emigrated to New York.

A little later in the same 18th century, Joanna Southcott proclaimed herself as the woman of the twelfth chapter of Revelation, and as a prophet of the coming Messiah. Later, when mysteriously pregnant, she let it be known that the expected child was to be the 2nd Prince of Peace. Death, however, intervened: although her followers still believe (they still exist!) that she will rise again.

And in the late 19th century a community of latter-day Shakers established themselves at New Forest Lodge near Lymington. Believing themselves immortal, they were led by one Mary Ann Girling, who had proclaimed herself to be the Messiah. On her death in 1886 she was buried in the churchyard at Hordle, where her remains (presumably) reside to this day.

But as to the coming, second or otherwise, of the Messiah to England's green and pleasant land in the closing years of the second Protectorate: that is indeed another story altogether.