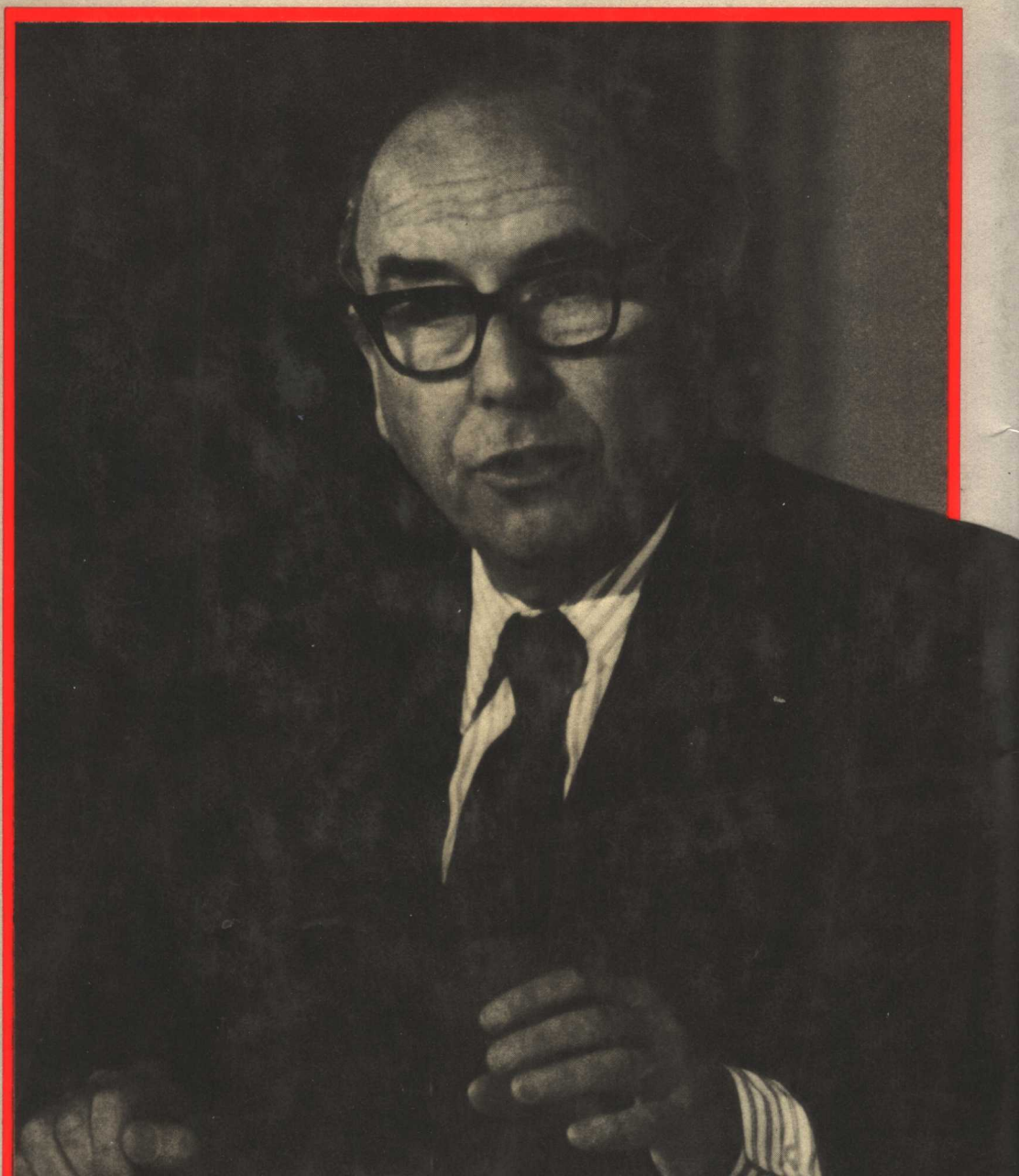


— JOHN CAMPBELL —

ROY JENKINS

A BIOGRAPHY



Roy Jenkins,

(A BIOGRAPHY)

John Campbell

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Preface

The idea of writing a biography of Roy Jenkins first came to me in the autumn of 1981; but I think that, subconsciously, I had been nursing it for almost twenty years before that. It happens that I was brought up as his near-neighbour, living two doors away from him in Ladbroke Square. Though my parents barely knew him (my mother was quite friendly with Mrs Jenkins over the garden wall) he was the first politician I was aware of as I grew up; and I gradually realized that he was the one with whose public positions I most often agreed. Here I must declare a political interest. For ten years before 1981 I was one of that vast frustrated constituency who found no representation in the Conservative or Labour parties but, as a lukewarm Liberal, was just waiting, impatiently yet confidently, for the realignment of politics that we knew must come; when the SDP was eventually formed, our dominant reaction was relief that at last the break had come. To that extent, this book is undisguisedly partisan. At the same time, I am a professional historian: my two previous books (the second not yet published) were impeccably academic, and though this one had necessarily to be written more quickly and more journalistically, I would claim that it is still a historian's book. Mr Jenkins has very kindly helped me from the moment I first approached him by providing me with press cuttings and factual information, and encouraging friends and colleagues to speak freely to me; but he has not looked over my shoulder as I wrote, nor attempted to influence me in any way at all. He positively declined to read my text until it was beyond a stage where he could be tempted to suggest changes. I am grateful to him equally for his help and for his restraint. I believe that I have represented his views correctly, but there may be points, particularly in the final pages, which he would make differently. The interpretation of his career and the responsibility for any errors is of course entirely my own.

One word about sources: I am very conscious of having relied heavily, in Chapters Five and Six, on the Crossman Diaries, and am grateful to

Hamish Hamilton Ltd and Jonathan Cape Ltd for permission to quote from them. I remember writing in the *New Statesman* some years ago of the danger that the sheer bulk and quotability of Crossman would pose for future historians: I might have been warning myself. I can only say that I have tried to use them with caution; but in a period for which there is as yet little other contemporary evidence, beyond the press, and of which the political memoirs so far published (except perhaps for Douglas Jay's) are entirely useless, he was impossible to ignore. In mitigation of any possible distortion, I plead the fact that Mr Jenkins himself, reviewing the second volume in the *Observer* in 1976, described the Diaries as 'surprisingly accurate'. Nevertheless I am sorry that I did not see Barbara Castle's imminent diary for the same period – or indeed Mr Jenkins' own occasional journal, which he withheld, understandably, for his memoirs.

Otherwise I have been able to supplement published recollections with a number of useful interviews with friends, colleagues and relations (though not as many as I should have liked, had I had more time), as well as two or three conversations with Mr Jenkins himself and Mrs Jenkins (to whose importance in his life I am conscious of having done scant justice). I am particularly grateful to the following for giving some of their time to talk to me: Leo Abse MP; Lord Balogh; Hon. Mark Bonham Carter; Ivor Bulmer-Thomas; Rt. Hon. Sir Ian Gilmour MP; David Ginsburg MP; Lord Harris of Greenwich; Norman Hart; Oliver James; Mrs Pita Karaka; Robert MacLennan MP; Professor David Marquand; Matthew Oakeshott; Hayden and Laura Phillips; Rt. Hon. William Rodgers MP; Madron Seligman MEP and Mrs Seligman; Dick Taverne; Don Touhig (Editor of the *Monmouthshire Free Press*); Mrs Kathleen Tuck; and Philip Williams. Also for more casual conversations with Christopher Brocklebank-Fowler MP; John Grigg; Christopher Layton; Anthony Lester; Mrs Sybil Marchmont; and Roderick MacFarquhar. I should like to thank Mrs Jenkins and Celia Beale for help with pictures.

Among my own friends, I am grateful to Paul Addison for his invariably wise advice; to Ian Chisholm for several conversations about the Home Office; to Kathleen Burk for free use of her unrivalled library of contemporary political history; and to Esmée Roberts and Jill Ford for putting me up extraordinarily conveniently on the edge of the Glasgow, Hillhead constituency for several days in March 1982. I am grateful to many friends and relations, but particularly to my mother-in-law, Mrs Olive McCracken, and my aunt, Mrs Joyce Jackson, for supplying me with recent cuttings from papers I might otherwise have missed.

I should especially like to thank Robert Baldock of Weidenfeld for putting the book through the press with such (to me unprecedented) speed.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife, Alison, for her unfailing support, encouragement and occasional correction, reading each day's production as it fell from the typewriter and proof-reading under extreme pressure of time; and to our daughter Robin, for giving me the necessary incentive to write faster than I have ever written before.

John Campbell
Ladbroke Square, London
February 1983

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ONE

From Pontypool to Oxford,
1920–1945

A characteristically British controversy surrounds Roy Jenkins' origins. To his critics, particularly on the left of the Labour party – often themselves guiltily middle-class and public school educated – it has always been intensely galling that this superior figure should have been born and raised in the very heart of the Labour movement. The son and grandson of miners, brought up in the South Wales coalfield during the depression, his father actually imprisoned for his part in the General Strike – what would not Michael Foot or Tony Benn give for such a pedigree?

The response of those who cannot match it has always been – even before Jenkins left the Labour Party – that he has betrayed this proud inheritance. Some allege only a political betrayal – one more in the line of good working-class boys seduced by power and money to forget the class from which they sprang. Others, like Leo Abse, the present Labour member for Pontypool and mischievous amateur Freudian, see a deeper psychological betrayal: the true and somehow more authentic Welsh, working-class, Labour allegiance which Jenkins derived from his father was overborne, early in life, by the corrupting influence of his anglicized, social-climbing, petty-bourgeois mother, leaving Jenkins in adult life rootless and *déclassé*.¹

There is just enough truth in this simplistic analysis to make it plausible, though all the evidence is that Jenkins' transcending of the most narrow class stereotypes troubles his class-obsessed critics a great deal more than it worries him. But the reality, when his origins are examined a little more closely, is that Roy Jenkins is quite clearly and comprehensibly the product of his background and the child equally – and with no great conflict – of both his parents.

He was born into the Labour movement, certainly; but he was born very firmly into a Labour élite. There was never any question of Roy going to work down the mine. By the time he was born, on 11 November

1920, his father, Arthur Jenkins, had left manual work far behind him: he was a full-time trade union official, chairman of the Pontypool divisional Labour party and a Monmouthshire County Councillor. He became an Alderman in 1926, a Justice of the Peace, Vice-President of the South Wales Miners' Federation, a member, on and off, of the National Executive of the Labour Party, and in 1935 MP for Pontypool – a position he could probably have had very much earlier if he had been the type of man to push for it. By any reckoning he was a very remarkable man.

Educated at the Varteg Board School only up to the age of twelve, he had gone straight down the pit, but at eighteen won a miners' scholarship worth £30 a year which enabled him to go to Ruskin College, Oxford (he was always thereafter proud to call himself an Oxford man), where he won other scholarships and was able to go on for ten months at the Sorbonne (where he learned to speak French much better than his son ever did, laid the foundations of a deep knowledge of continental mining conditions and made contacts with European socialists which he retained all his life). Thus equipped, he returned to the mines in 1909, became Secretary of the Pontypool Trades Council in 1911, Deputy Miners' Agent for the Monmouthshire Eastern Valleys branch of the South Wales Miners' Federation in 1918, and Agent in 1921.

When he was elected to the National Executive of the Labour Party, he characteristically resigned after a couple of years because it took him too much away from Pontypool, but bowed to pressure later to go on again. When he went into Parliament, he was a model constituency member until 1940, when Attlee rather surprisingly appointed him his PPS and took him into the very heart of the wartime Government. Attlee much later recalled the older Jenkins as one of the three 'most unselfish' men he had ever met in politics.² He had a modesty rare in a successful politician, and an even rarer gentleness: he was never heard to lose his temper, or even raise his voice. Several obituary tributes echoed that of the *Daily Herald*: 'This gentle and sensitive son of Wales seemed . . . more the poet or the student than the man of action.'³ He was, in short, no ordinary miners' leader, but (as James Griffiths, President of the South Wales Miners' Federation, called him) 'one of Nature's gentlemen'.⁴

'It is given to some men', the *South Wales Argus* commented when he died, 'to rise above Party and to do incalculable good in a community sense – to hold certain principles, yet to have a breadth of vision and magnanimity of spirit which carry them into the realm of common service. Such a man was Alderman Jenkins. . . . Kindly, considerate, temperate in all things, he never spared himself in the service of the

people. . . . Few men have achieved so much for a constituency – and, in his case, for the wider area of South Wales and Monmouthshire.’⁵

The young Roy thus grew up with a father who was a highly respected local dignitary – not at all in the sort of household where to be Labour was to be in revolt against society. Despite the setback of 1931, and despite the unemployment of the thirties and the failure to achieve the nationalization of the mines, Labour was marching steadily towards power. Arthur Jenkins was among the leaders of a confident generation who fully expected to see the dawn in their lifetime and did not expect to have to break any heads to bring it about. Though an intelligent and highly cultivated man, he was not an intellectual: his idea of socialism was simply a practical improvement in the conditions of life of working people. ‘He was deeply conscious’, as the *South Wales Argus* put it, ‘that the wheel of social progress revolved slowly, but he tried to give it impetus.’⁶ Of the direction and inevitability of progress he had had no doubt. The political faith which the young Roy unquestioningly imbibed – not so much with his mother’s milk as with his father’s innumerable cups of tea – was that the Labour party was the vehicle of progress: gradual perhaps, but certain, peaceful and constitutional. (On a bleak hillside above Abersychan there is still a working men’s pub proudly named The British Constitution.) It is in this light that the famous incident of Arthur’s imprisonment must be understood.

During the General Strike in May 1926 (when the TUC pulled all its members out in support of the miners) there was an affray between a crowd of locked-out miners and the police outside a colliery at Blaenavon, a few miles up the road from Abersychan. All the evidence is that Arthur Jenkins, as the men’s leader, went to try and cool things down: it would have been out of character for him to do anything else. But the police arrested him and charged him with inciting the riot: in the overheated atmosphere of the moment he was sentenced to nine months in jail. Such was the outcry, however, and the weight of petitions bearing witness to his pacific character, that he was released after only a few weeks. The continuing interest of the story lies in the fact that Roy was not told the reason for his father’s absence until several years later: he was told that Arthur had gone to Germany to look at mines, and he remembers being puzzled by the cheering crowds that greeted him on his return. To those who think that a boy of his background should naturally have been brought up as a good class warrior with an animus against the bosses and the police, this very understandable tempering of the truth towards a child of five is evidence of an early smothering of proper socialist attitudes with a concern for petty-bour-

geois respectability which explains all the adult Roy's subsequent deviations from true socialism. He was brought up – by his mother, it is alleged – to be ashamed of his father's imprisonment when he should have been proud of it. In practice, he cannot as a schoolboy in Abersychan have long remained unaware of the truth. But the wish not to talk about the incident was entirely characteristic of Arthur. He was not proud of it himself. It was certainly not that he was ashamed: to the end of his life he nursed a grievance against the inspector who arrested him. But he did not want to be a martyr, and he did not want his son to grow up with a chip on his shoulder: fighting the police was not his idea of socialism. There was in this matter no conflict between Arthur and Hattie Jenkins: Roy's later indifference to the class war is the very reverse of a betrayal of his patrimony. There are those in Pontypool today who will still shake their heads in disbelief that a man whose father had been in prison could have implemented, as Home Secretary, the Mountbatten Report on prison security. But they are wrong to see any inconsistency. Roy was brought up very firmly in the Labour tradition, but in a confident Labour tradition of civic responsibility and peaceful progress.

There is no doubt that Hattie Jenkins – born Harriet Harris – whom Arthur had married in 1911, did regard herself as socially a cut above most of her husband's colleagues. She was not of a mining family herself, but was the daughter of the manager of a local steelworks. Most of those who knew her find it hard to deny that she was a bit of a snob, though the family explain that impression by shyness: where Arthur had a warmth and ease of manner with all sorts of people, she appeared rather formidable. In private, she was ebullient, even dominating. But she took little part in Arthur's constituency politics; she never went to his meetings, nor did she associate much with other Labour women. Her preferred society was rather of the level of the local doctor and solicitor; her most conspicuous public service was to 'work like a Trojan' for the annual hospital bazaar. During the 1939–45 war she did a lot of Red Cross work, and after Arthur's death she became a JP. She was unquestionably ambitious, both for Arthur – she liked him bringing important people to the house – and later for Roy. But her role in the partnership was much more that of the traditional Tory member's wife than the tea-making and constituency-visiting role usually assigned to Labour wives.

There are some obvious points of resemblance between Roy Jenkins and his mother. For one thing she was physically somewhat plump, unlike Arthur who was always very slight: as he has grown older, Jenkins

has visibly taken after her. Then, too, she hid a kind heart behind a rather grand manner: his shyness takes the same form. His ill-disguised lack of interest in the chores of politics does not derive from Arthur. In many respects, Hattie fits admirably the cliché of the ambitious mother who is the driving force behind an only child. But it was unquestionably Arthur whom the young Roy revered, Arthur whose career he set out to follow, and Arthur from whom he took his political bearings on the Labour right, his magnanimity and moderation, his internationalist outlook, his sense of historical perspective and his love of books.

The house in which Roy Harris Jenkins was born, on Armistice Day, 1920, just two years after the ending of the Great War, was small but well-built, bow-fronted and gabled, one of a terrace of six imposingly elevated above the main street through Abersychan (it backs into a steep hillside). Abersychan itself is a straggle of houses a couple of miles up the valley from the main centre of Pontypool. When he was two, they moved two hundred yards down Snatchwood Road into a larger, yellow-brick but stone-faced house in a terrace of nine, with a garden at the back and a basement where there was room for a ping-pong table. The front parlour was Arthur's office, where a stream of people could call to see him without going into the rest of the house. In this house they employed a live-in maid – not unusual in quite modest homes at that time, but something Hattie had been used to, and a mark of some social standing. In 1935, around the time that Arthur went into Parliament, the family moved again to a much larger house on the edge of Pontypool itself, a solid white-painted house standing on its own in a substantial garden. (All three houses, confusingly, were called Greenlands, the name of Hattie's childhood home, which they carried around with them at every move.)

Roy was brought up, then, not in any sort of affluence but in a secure degree of middle-class comfort. All three houses were filled with books: he has estimated that his father must have owned between five hundred and a thousand.⁶ He was an only child, and this was important: he was not spoiled – Hattie was a strict parent, and expected instant obedience – but he was never short of anything he needed. He was certainly not short of love and attention. The family was in fact an unusually close one, the three of them enjoying a degree of intimacy and equality that is very rare, and perhaps only possible with a single child. They all had private nicknames: Arthur was Jumbo, Hattie was Pony and Roy was Bunny. Not only did Arthur and Hattie call one another Jumbo and Pony, but so did Roy. The first time their long-serving maid, Kathleen Tuttle, heard him call his father Jumbo she thought he was being rude,

but she soon realized that this was his normal form of address. Roy was then ten. (He had a pet name for Kathleen too – Kathlet – though he would not have used it in front of his mother.)

He had, by the standards of South Wales in the 1920s, a fairly sheltered childhood, but he was not a solitary boy: he had plenty of friends, who came to Snatchwood Road to play in the sandpit in the garden, and later table-tennis in the basement. Nor was he brought up entirely as an only child. He had two elder girl cousins, the daughters of Hattie's sister, who had lost her husband: Sybil and Connie Peppin were always around, particularly in the school holidays, and the families always went away together in the summer to Swansea or Porthcawl. In 1932 their mother died, and Connie came to live with Arthur and Hattie while Sybil went to another aunt. From the age of eleven Roy had for practical purposes an elder sister, though he seems to have treated her, with a boy's assumed authority, as though she were the younger: she joined *his* games, playing cricket in the garden or going trainspotting. She would have been the Indian to his Cowboy if 'Aunt Hat' had not abhorred games with guns. In adult life they have remained very close – closer than many a real brother and sister.

He went first to school at a primary school called Pentuin, a mile or so from home: Hattie used to pay a girl to take him there and back, which may be the origin of some of the rumours still current in Pontypool of a rather cossetted little boy. But one piece of gossip, maliciously retailed, can be interestingly explained. The fact is remembered that young Roy sometimes went to school in gloves, which was thought very cissy: he did, but only in the strawberry season, when he was allergic to strawberries and had to wear cotton gloves to prevent him coming out in a rash!

When he was ten, rising eleven, he went on to Abersychan County School. The choice was somewhat surprising, since there was a clear disparity in esteem between the two major schools in the area, and West Monmouth School, in Pontypool, was considered the better. Kathleen Tuttle, for one, would have expected Hattie to wish to send Roy there. It may be that she wanted to keep him closer to home (Abersychan was just up the hill at the back of the town within walking distance). It is unlikely that Arthur was influenced by the thought that it might be politically damaging for him to send his son to the 'snob' school: he believed too passionately in education, and was actually a Governor of West Monmouth. Perhaps that was the reason. Anyway, Roy went to Abersychan, where he did well at first, but rather less well later on.

He was not a particularly bookish boy. He had abundant physical

energy, was good at games and mad on cricket, though he excelled, perhaps significantly, at individual rather than team sports: he won prizes for swimming, and used to go bicycling a lot. His academic work he accomplished, even at this age, with little visible effort. Hattie was very firm that he could do nothing else until he had finished his homework, so he acquired the habit, which he has never lost, of getting through work quickly to free himself for pleasure. At fourteen, he passed with credit six School Certificates (English, Geography, French, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry), and added Latin the following year; at sixteen he gained Highers in History and Geography (principal subjects) and English (subsidiary subject). But he was not being stretched sufficiently to fulfil his father's ambition that he should go to Oxford. Perhaps he would have done better at West Monmouth. To spur him on to greater effort, he was sent for three terms to University College, Cardiff, to polish up his History and particularly his French.

Those who believe that Jenkins is ashamed of his background and deliberately blotted out the memory of Wales once he had got to Oxford, attach great significance to his omission of these three terms from his *Who's Who* entry. In fact he used Cardiff merely as an extension of school – a sort of sixth-form college – to bring him to the necessary standard to get into Oxford: he was less than seventeen when he went there, had to travel the twenty miles there and back each day by bus and, though he made two friends with whom he is still in touch, was not in a full sense a member of the university. Having won his place at Balliol, he left Cardiff before the end of his third term to spend some months in France. Even so – as he wrote only recently in a memoir for the college magazine – he looks back ‘with both nostalgia and gratitude for a period of awakening interest.’⁷ Only the most puritanical Welsh fundamentalist could criticize a clever boy of his background for looking ambitiously to Oxford. In any case, the determination that he should try was much more strongly his father's than his own: since his own days at Ruskin – ‘then only a ship moored alongside the University’⁷ – Arthur had nursed a romantic idealization of the dreaming spires. He had only been able to go, briefly, with a miners' scholarship. Though Roy, despite two attempts, did not win a scholarship, Arthur was now earning enough (£600 a year as an MP, plus £90 from the Miners' Federation) to pay for him out of his own pocket. No-one thought in 1938 that such upward social mobility from father to son was a betrayal of socialism; on the contrary, it was part of the march of labour that the opportunities of Oxford should be open to the sons of trade unionists. Arthur was intensely proud of his son.

Jenkins went to Oxford, as his father wished, with no chip on his shoulder, but firmly Labour in his allegiance. A distinct stage in his life was now over: Oxford was the gateway to wider horizons, in which he would leave Pontypool far behind. The question must be asked, because they sometimes seemed in later life to have left so little mark, what he had drawn from these eighteen formative years in South Wales, living among great poverty but not in it. One curious legacy is perhaps that fastidiousness which has always been remarked as one of his characteristics. His critics would put this down to a sense of social superiority, instilled by his mother and confirmed by Balliol. It can better be explained by embarrassment at the consciousness of his own good fortune, a desire not to intrude upon or claim a share of a suffering that was not his own. He has never made the political capital that he could so easily have done out of his background, because he knows that it would be fraudulent in one who comes, not from the true working class but from what he has called the 'Labour squirearchy'. What was possible for his father, who had raised himself by his own efforts, was not possible for him, who had been raised on his father's shoulders. He grew up with a strong inherited belief in the urgency of progress towards an order of society in which injustice should be mitigated or abolished; but it was an intellectual belief, or perhaps rather an inbred assumption, rather than the product of searing personal experience. He did not, as a boy, help with Arthur's constituency work, or go canvassing, any more than Hattie did. He was deliberately distanced from that. As soon as he was old enough to form an ambition, he knew that he too should go into politics, which meant without question Labour politics. But his would be – had to be, by the nature of his upbringing – the high Oxford road, not the trade union and local authority low road.

Despite this diffidence about assuming a class identity that he could not wear with conviction, Jenkins never had any doubt that he belonged in the Labour party. This political self-confidence distinguished him in later years from other Oxford-educated socialists in the Wilson Cabinets – Denis Healey, Tony Benn, his friend Tony Crosland – in all of whom one can detect a certain straining to prove their Labour identity at critical moments by self-consciously siding with 'the workers'. The strength Jenkins has always drawn from his roots is that he feels no need to strive for a spurious proletarianism. During the revisionist controversies of the 1950s and early 1960s, when there began to be murmurs that he was really a Liberal, it never occurred to him that his loyalty to the Labour party could be in doubt: born and raised in the party, he did not have to keep making obeisance to party myths and traditions

which he thought exhausted. Politically, it might have been wiser if he had, but he never saw Labour as an exclusively working-class party, and always protested against it becoming so. It can be traced as a fundamental attitude in the formation of the SDP that it does not idealize the working class as holding the monopoly of political virtue.

A further question is whether Jenkins today thinks of himself as being Welsh. During the Hillhead by-election, in 1982, he took rather suddenly to insisting that he was not an Englishman, when his apparent Englishness seemed likely to be a serious handicap with the Scottish electorate. But he has more often described himself as a borderer, taking advantage of Pontypool's position in the very last valley in Wales. In practice he thinks of himself as British. Leo Abse would maintain that he has deliberately rejected Wales and suppressed his whole Welsh inheritance, as a result of Pontypool's rebuff when he sought to succeed to his father's seat in 1946: he claims that when he (Abse) arrived at Westminster in 1958 as the member for Pontypool, Jenkins could not bear even to look at him! But Oxford and the war had already taken him out of Wales, and it is very doubtful if he wanted to succeed to Arthur's seat, where he could never have been more than his father's son. He had no traumatic reason to turn his back on the scenes of a singularly happy childhood; but the introverted Welsh culture of pub, rugby club and chapel had never meant anything to him - why should it? It was his father who gave him wider horizons, and his limited visual sense was not excited by the bare, brooding landscape of the valley. Those in Pontypool today who still hold that no good man would ever leave, only exemplify the parochialism he was glad to leave behind. Transplanted into a wider field of opportunity, rather than rootless, Jenkins' life only really began to flower when he got to Oxford.

Oxford has been the nursery and forcing house of aspiring politicians of every generation going back at least to Gladstone's day in the 1820s. Whatever the academic claims of Cambridge, it is overwhelmingly from Oxford that the governing élite of the country has reproduced itself. The rise of the Labour party interrupted the tradition only briefly. The pioneers, naturally, had not been to university at all. The London School of Economics made a stab at becoming Labour's university between the wars. But by the time Labour came fully into its inheritance after 1945, its younger leaders were increasingly Oxford men, and very often dons, like Hugh Gaitskell, Douglas Jay, Patrick Gordon Walker, Richard Crossman and Harold Wilson. In 1976 five of the six contenders for the party leadership - Foot, Jenkins, Healey, Crosland and Benn -