

## **Making the Weather: Six Politicians who Changed Modern Britain**

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*Making the Weather* analyses the careers of six politicians who, although not becoming Prime Minister, set the agenda of post war British politics and, in doing so, deeply influenced all of our lives. Three – Aneurin Bevan, Roy Jenkins and Tony Benn – are from the left; three – Enoch Powell, Sir Keith Joseph and Nigel Farage – are from the right.

The influence of all six can still be felt today. Aneurin Bevan's ideas remain the fundamental point of reference for debates about the future of the National Health Service. He it was who decided to nationalise the hospitals and insisted that the NHS should be funded almost wholly by taxation. He was also the most striking representative since the war of democratic socialism.

Roy Jenkins's libertarian reforms in the 1960s, in particular the legalisation of homosexuality and abortion, helped create what some label the permissive society, but he preferred to call the civilised society. Later he went on to champion the causes of Europe, proportional representation and a realignment of the left.

Tony Benn's espousal of the referendum led to Brexit, while his championing of the right of party members to elect party leaders has had profound effects on both the Labour and Conservative parties.

Enoch Powell was the first leading politician to highlight immigration in the 1960s. His approach led some to regard him as a prophet, but others to dismiss him as a racist. He was also one of the first politicians to champion the ideal of the free market as opposed to the post war mixed economy. His conception of parliamentary

sovereignty has deeply influenced contemporary debates on Europe and devolution.

Sir Keith Joseph provided the intellectual ballast for Thatcherism, developing Enoch Powell's arguments for the market economy. He was a profound influence not only on Conservative governments of the 1980s but also on Tony Blair's 'New Labour' governments after 1997.

Nigel Farage is an even more controversial figure perhaps than Enoch Powell was, and he too has been accused of racism. He nevertheless remains of fundamental importance in debates on Brexit, immigration and a realignment of the Right. Conservative governments since 2010 were in fear of him; and he was a main influence on the commitment of the Cameron government in 2013 to a referendum on membership of the European Union in 2016 and the vote for Brexit, the most consequential foreign policy decision that Britain has taken since the war. He has been responsible for ending the careers of three Conservative Prime Ministers – David Cameron, Theresa May and Rishi Sunak. He can claim to be the most under-estimated politician in Britain and his political career is clearly by no means over.

*Making the Political Weather* seeks to discover how it was that these six were able to exert such great influence. All were contrarians reacting against the conventional wisdom of the day. They sought to educate public opinion, seeking to wrench it away from the consensus of the times, rather than accommodating themselves to that consensus. All sought to be signposts, who said what they meant and meant what they said, rather than weathervanes. They did not wait for opinion polls, focus groups, or spin doctors before articulating their views.

Each of the six made fundamental contributions to the debate about Britain's future. Each remains a living presence.

Vernon Bogdanor, July 2024