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The American Presidency:
Transformation and Change
Harry Truman,
President 1945-1953
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ROOSEVELT TO BUSH

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY:

TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE

HARRY TRUMAN, PRESIDENT 1945-1953

Professor Vernon Bogdanor

Ladies and gentlemen, the last two lectures were devoted to Franklin Roosevelt, the only American President to be returned for four terms in office. He was returned for the fourth time in the Election of November 1944, and his fourth term began in January 1945. By then he was a very sick man, and those who saw him at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the conference with Stalin and Churchill, were shocked by his appearance, that he seemed very near death. On 12th April 1945, just three months into his second term, he died, and his successor, Harry Truman, spoke in the following way about him to Congress:

'Mr Speaker, Mr President, Members of the Congress, it is with a heavy heart that I stand before you, my friends and colleagues, in the Congress of the United States. Only yesterday, we laid to rest the mortal remains of our beloved President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At a time like this, words are inadequate. The most eloquent tribute would be a reverent silence; yet, in this decisive hour, when world events are moving so rapidly, our silence might be misunderstood, and might give comfort to our enemies. In his infinite wisdom, our Almighty God has seen fit to take from us a great man, who loved and was beloved by all humanity. No man could possibly fill the tremendous void left by the passing of that noble soul. No words can ease the aching hearts of untold millions of every race, creed and colour. The world knows it has lost a heroic champion of justice and freedom. Tragic fate has thrust upon us grave responsibility: we must carry on!

Our departed leader never looked backwards; he looked forward and moved forward. That is what he would want us to do. That is what America will do!

So much blood has already been shed for the ideals which we cherish and for which Franklin Delano Roosevelt lived and died that we dare not permit even a momentary pause in the hard fight for victory. Today, the entire world is looking to America for enlightened leadership to peace and progress. Such a leadership requires vision, courage, and tolerance. It can be provided only by a united nation deeply devoted to the highest ideal. With great humility, I call upon all Americans to help me keep our nation united in defence of those ideals, which have been so eloquently proclaimed by Franklin Roosevelt.

I want, in turn, to assure my fellow Americans and all of those who love peace and liberty throughout the

world that I will support and defend those ideals with all my strength and all my heart.

That is my duty, and I shall not shirk it. So that there can be no possible misunderstanding, both Germany and Japan can be certain, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that America will continue to fight for freedom until no vestige of resistance remains.

We are deeply conscious of the fact that much hard fighting is still ahead of us. Having to pay such a heavy price to make complete victory certain, America will never become a party to any plan for partial victory. To settle for merely another temporary respite would surely jeopardise the future security of all the world. Our demand has been, and it remains, unconditional surrender!

I will give you one more short excerpt, from near the end of his term as President, in early 1952, when he was talking to a group of student journalists.

'I was very much afraid that you're going to talk that admonition of Dr Murphy seriously, but I'm very glad that you didn't, when he told you not to make any noise after the broadcast went on! I'm happy to be with you today. It's a pleasure to talk to the young people who run the school papers of this great country of ours. You probably don't know it, but I was a school editor myself once of a high school paper, in Independence, Missouri, and it was a first edition too! Charlie Ross and four or five other kids and myself got out the first number of the Glean, named after that admonition in Tennyson's poem, after it, follow it, follow the dream. I've been trying to follow it ever since.

From then on, I kept going, and you know the trouble that I'm in today! So you see, if you're not very careful, you may end up by living in the White House, and I'll say to you that it's a wonderful experience indeed, in spite of all its troubles. All my life, I've been interested in the presidency and the way Presidents are chosen. I remember very well the first Presidential Nominating Convention that I attended, that is in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1900, when Bryan was elected, nominated, the second time for the Democratic nomination for the presidency. I was 16, and I enjoyed that Convention very much because I thought old man Bryan was the greatest orator of the time, and I still think so. President Roosevelt said he was one of the great progressives of all time but he was ahead of his time, and a lot of us are in that condition.'

From this you can get an idea of that of how he differed from Franklin Roosevelt. You may remember that Roosevelt was grand eloquent, full of rhetoric; Harry Truman, plain and matter-of-fact and straightforward.

He was born, as he implied, in 1884 in Missouri, so he was nearly 61 when he became President. There had only been one President older than that before Truman came to office, but oddly enough, despite the era of youth since Truman, there have been four Presidents who have been older when they came to office.

His father was a farmer who fell on bad times and had to sell up. The family moved to Independence, Missouri, and they were not very wealthy. Truman never went to university; he was the only twentieth Century President who did not go to university.

He took a series of unremarkable jobs and spent a long time courting his childhood sweetheart. These were not independent as he faced the opposition of his sweetheart's mother, who thought he was not good enough for her. Eventually she relented, but one of the conditions on which she did so was that she was going to live

with the Trumans for the rest of his life. Truman happily accepted that and she lived for a very long period, though many people might balk at it.

When America went into the First World War in 1917, Truman volunteered to fight because he thought he ought to do so. He saw a small amount of action and was elected leader of his battery command. This was his first experience of leadership, and he thought he was rather good at it.

In 1919 he came back to America and he made no other foreign visits until after becoming President; he did not leave America again until after becoming President. He hoped to have a permanent career in the Services, but his eyesight stopped that as he was short-sighted, and so with a local friend he set up a haberdashery store. But in 1921 there was a depression in America and the store it failed. This was not through his fault, though he was often called by political opponents a 'failed haberdasher', and he was left in very considerable debts. Rather than file for bankruptcy, he said he would pay it all back, and he was still paying it back up to twenty years later, by which time he was an American Senator.

Eventually, he came to the notice of one of the Democratic Party bosses of Missouri, a man called Tom Pendergast, known as Boss Pendergast, who was a notoriously corrupt man. Indeed, he was later jailed for corruption, but it was Pendergast who gave Truman his first public office, in the role of County Judge. That was not, as you might imply, a legal job; it was an administrative job, in which Truman did fairly well.

Then in 1934, looking for a candidate for the Senate for Missouri, Pendergast's eye fell upon Truman, who was elected to the Senate and re-elected, only just re-elected in 1940. It is fair to say that even Truman's worst enemies never associated him with any form of corruption - no one has ever suggested that he was anything other than honest in his political career - but he did owe his first advancement to a notorious corrupt man. Again, typically of him, he never disowned Pendergast, and when Pendergast was in prison, Truman visited him and then he came to visit him when he was ill and dying. Truman never repudiated Pendergast.

In 1940, after America joined the War, Truman, as a Senator, began to think that there was some inefficiency, if not corruption, in defence contracts. He chaired a committee on defence contracts and what was going wrong, and managed to root out a lot of the inefficiency. His direct and straightforward attitude was perfectly clear, because when he was asked at one point to what he attributed the inefficiency and so on, he said 'to neglect at the White House', despite the fact that Roosevelt was a President of his own Party. He was absolutely direct about that, and this brought him some degree of public attention for the first time as an effective Senator. Though it is fair to say he was not one of the leaders on the Senate.

In 1944, Roosevelt was looking for someone to appoint as his new Vice-President, and he settled on Truman. As perhaps these decisions are always made, this was largely for negative reasons: that Truman had not offended any of the important groups on whom the Democratic Party depended - the trade unions, the minorities, the farmers - and Truman was acceptable to every group. Roosevelt, more or less like a dog dropping a bone, told him he was going to be Vice-President. Truman did not really want it, for two oddly contradictory reasons: he said, first - and he had read a bit of history - the Vice-Presidency is an unimportant position. He said to his sister, 'I bet you can't name half a dozen Vice-Presidents to me of the American Government.' He saw it as an insignificant position. But contradictorily, his second reason for not wanting the vice-presidency was that he realised that Roosevelt was very ill and that the Vice-President would probably

succeed him, and he did not think he could be President. He thought he was not up to the job, and so he should not have it. In the end, he was bullied by Roosevelt, who said to a colleague 'You tell him that if he wants to break up the Democratic Party in the middle of a war that it's his responsibility!' So he had to take it.

Of course, just three months after he became Vice-President, he achieved the Presidency. He'd had very little training in the very serious foreign affairs problems that faced America. He had seen Roosevelt just twice outside Cabinet meetings, and Roosevelt at Cabinet meetings never discussed anything much; he did not use the Cabinet because he preferred more informal procedures.

Roosevelt took a delegation of about a hundred people to the Yalta Conference, but that hundred did not include Truman. Truman did not know about the existence of the atom bomb when he became President. Indeed, Stalin, as Soviet leader, did know about the bomb through his spies in America - he knew it before Truman! So he was in a very difficult position.

As I said, he was quite unlike Roosevelt as well, and he had the problem of succeeding a very charismatic President, and whatever you think of those speeches, they are not the speeches of a charismatic man. Indeed, he was to be succeeded by another charismatic President - Eisenhower. Truman was an ordinary man, and never pretended to be anything else. Again, this is unlike the prior president: Roosevelt prided himself on the skill with which he manipulated different conflicting groups; his indirect and rather evasive style was that Roosevelt seemed to agree with everyone who spoke to him. When people put a proposal to him, he said yes, and people thought that meant he had agreed with him, but actually it meant he had heard what they said, and lots of people therefore took contradictory views of what Roosevelt thought, and so it was sometimes not clear what Roosevelt's policies were. Roosevelt was also very careful, perhaps rightly in the late '30s, about public opinion. He realised public opinion was fairly isolationist, and he wanted to bring it along very gradually to the idea of supporting Britain in the War.

Truman took a different view. He said what he thought, and if public opinion did not support him, that was too bad. He once said in his private diaries: 'I wonder how far Moses would have gone if he had taken a poll of Egypt. What would Jesus Christ have preached if he had taken a poll in Israel?' So he was absolutely direct, and direct on all sorts of matters.

During his Presidency, his daughter, who was an amateur singer - not a very good one, I suspect - gave a recital, and a music critic wrote a vicious review of it. Truman wrote a personal letter to this music critic, attacking him, and he realised if he gave it to one of his officials, it would get lost in the bureaucracy, so he put a stamp on himself and went to the pillar box and posted it. The letter was published, and it said more or less, 'My right wing journalist critics are pretty awful, but you're the lowest of the low.' He said, 'I'm very glad we've never met, because if we did, I'd give you such a punch on the nose and in the eye that you would never be able to walk again!' This was actually published when he was President.

Two weeks after Roosevelt's death, he saw the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr Molotov. In contrast to Roosevelt, who tended to jolly people along, Truman accused him straightaway of not carrying out the Yalta agreements with respect to Poland. He said, 'The Yalta agreements promised there should be free governments in Poland,' but Stalin had just arrested some of the members of the Western liberal parties in Poland, who were the non-Communist leaders. He said, 'You're not carrying out the Yalta agreements.'

Molotov, apparently, said, 'I have never been talked to like that in my life.'

Truman said, 'Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that. That will be all, Mr Molotov. I would appreciate it if you would transmit my views to Marshal Stalin.'

It is a nice story but, sadly, when the American Government records came out of the Soviet Union, they gave no indication that that was actually said. But whatever happened, certainly people did notice that Molotov left Truman's presence looking ashen-faced, and Truman said to his associates, 'I gave him the one-two right to the jaw!'

He continued Roosevelt's policy of denying credits to the Soviet Union, and he ended lend-lease immediately to the Soviet Union. Indeed, ships bound for the USSR were told to come home immediately and not to continue supplies to the Soviet Union.

So he was a highly decisive President. Henry Kissinger, the academic, who served as Secretary of State later under Nixon and Kissinger, met him just once in 1961 after he had retired. At that time, Kissinger had a fairly junior position in the Kennedy Administration. Truman asked him how he found Washington, and Kissinger said that he had been very impressed with the strength of the bureaucracy in Washington, which he thought amounted almost to a fourth branch of Government. Truman dismissed his observations as what he called 'professor-talk'; he said, 'If the President knows what he wants, no bureaucrat can stop him. A President has to know when to stop taking advice.'

It is sometimes said that Truman deviated from Roosevelt's policy of conciliation with the Soviet Union and inaugurated a cold war, and that Roosevelt would have preserved friendly relations with the Soviet Union and with Stalin. However, I do not believe that for two reasons. Firstly, as I tried to show in last lecture, Roosevelt was by no means an innocent with regard to the Soviet Union. He was perfectly aware that it was a horrible dictatorship, but he hoped that it might mellow in time, as in fact it did. Secondly, despite the altercation with Molotov which I have described a few moments ago, Truman's first period in foreign policy was characterised by a certain element of floundering and indecision. This was because he still hoped, as Roosevelt had done, that Stalin would prove an amenable partner in the post-War international order. After the Potsdam Conference with Stalin in July/August of 1945, he wrote in his diary: 'I can deal with Stalin.' He also made the odd comparison: 'As near like Tom Pendergast as any man I know,' as if Stalin were a local boss! When he came back he told one of his Cabinet Ministers that Stalin was a fine man who wanted to do the right thing, which was rather a bad misjudgement.

In any case, like Roosevelt, he appreciated that you could not persuade public opinion to turn on a recent ally immediately after the war against Nazi Germany, because Russia not only had been an ally but their losses in the War had been horrendous and far greater than those in Britain and France. Moreover, public opinion in Britain and the United States wanted nothing more than to demobilise. The troops wanted to go home to their families, and you would not have been able to mobilise them to fight a new enemy, an enemy that had recently been an ally. I believe that nothing illustrates the essential peacefulness of American policy at this stage than Roosevelt's remark to Stalin at Yalta that the United States hoped to have all her troops out of Europe within two years of the end of the War, and obviously Stalin was rather pleased with that remark.

Congress and the President cut military expenditure drastically in 1945 with demobilisation. In the year 1945, military expenditure was \$81 billion. By 1947, it was just \$13 billion and it remained at that same low level until June 1950, when the Korean War broke out. I think that refutes any idea that the Americans had particularly aggressive intentions. They very much hoped, perhaps against all the signs, that they could establish a peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union. By mid-1947, the armed forces of the United States were just 1.5 million people, and they lacked the ground forces to intervene anywhere except in a minor territorial dispute. My own suspicion, and it cannot be proved, is that Roosevelt would have altered his policy towards the Soviet Union even more quickly than Truman did. But whether that was right or wrong, I do take the view that Truman followed the broad lines of policy that Roosevelt had set up.

Just two weeks after he became President, Truman received a letter from the Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, saying he would like an urgent talk with him on a matter of great secrecy and importance. At that stage, he told Truman that the Americans were just about to test an atom bomb, this new weapon, and that decisions had to be made about it. The advice of ministers and officials was that it should be used against Japan and Truman accepted that advice. He took the view that in capturing the island of Okinawa between April and June, US casualties had been 12,000 dead and 37,000 wounded, and he took the view that to take the mainland islands of Japan would mean many more Americans dead, as well as Japanese dead, so that the atom bomb would, in the end, lead to fewer casualties. The two bombs killed a total of 135,000 people, but within the next five years, another 130,000 were killed. One can compare that with a conventional raid on Tokyo, which killed 100,000 citizens, so there were large numbers in all those occasions.

Truman never had any doubts, and, unlike probably most of us here, he did not stay awake at night worrying about it - he decided and he never had a moment's doubt then or afterwards whether he was right or wrong. I thought you might be interested in hearing what he said about it later in retirement to people who wrote to him about it. One unknown correspondent who wrote to him in 1964, a lady called Mrs Klein, who lived in Alabama, and typically, he replied in a very direct way. He said:

'Dear Mrs Klein,

In reply to yours of 28th July, the matter about which you wrote me, the atomic bomb, is one that is of interest to most people. The only reason the atomic bomb was used was because it was a weapon of war. While I was on the way home from Potsdam, I sent a message to the Japanese Government, asking them to surrender unconditionally, and I hoped they would end the War. They refused, and then I ordered the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, just as I would have used a long gun as the Germans did in the First World War. The dropping of these bombs ended the War, and that was the objective. There was nothing to take home with you to sleep with. It was a means to end the War and save 250,000 men from being killed on our side, and that many on the Japanese side, plus twice that many being injured for life. You will find this information in my memoirs and in any other documents. I have never worried about the dropping of a bomb. It was just a means to end the War, and that is what was accomplished.'

In another letter, sent in 1963, a year earlier, to a friend of his who worked for a Chicago newspaper:

'I appreciated most highly your column of July 30th, a copy of which you sent me. I have been rather careful

not to comment on the articles that have been written on the dropping of the bomb, for the simple reason the dropping of the bomb was completely and thoroughly explained in my memoirs, and it was done to save 125,000 youngsters on the American side and 125,000 on the Japanese side from getting killed, and that is what it did. It probably also saved half a million youngsters on both sides from being maimed for life. You must always remember that people forget, as you said in your column, that the bombing of Pearl Harbor was done while we were at peace with Japan and trying our best to negotiate a treaty with them. All you have to do is to go out and stand on the keel of a battleship in Pearl Harbor, with the 3,000 youngsters underneath it who had no chance whatever of saving their lives. That is true of two or three other battleships that were sunk in Pearl Harbour. Altogether, there were between 3,000 and 6,000 youngsters killed at that time without any declaration of war. It was plain murder. I knew what I was doing when I stopped the war that would have killed half a million youngsters on both sides if those bombs had not been dropped. I have no regrets, and under the same circumstances, I would do it again, and this letter is not confidential.'

Most moving and most interesting of all is his reply to a letter sent from the Hiroshima City Council in 1958, protesting about the atom bomb and demanding that Truman apologise. He said this:

'Your courteous letter enclosing the resolution of the Hiroshima City Council was highly appreciated. The feeling of the people of your city is easily understood, and I am not in any way offended by the resolution which the City Council passed. However, it becomes necessary for me to remind the City Council, and perhaps you also, of some historical events.

In 1941, while a peace conference was in progress in Washington between representatives of the Emperor of Japan and the Secretary of State of the United States, representing the President and Government of the United States, a naval expedition of the Japanese Government approached the Hawaiian Islands, a territorial part of the United States, and bombed our Pearl Harbor Naval Base. It was done without provocation, without warning, and without a declaration of war. Thousands of young American sailors and civilians were murdered by this unwarranted and unheralded attack which brought on the war between the people of Japan and the people of the United States. It was an unnecessary and terrible act.

The United States had always been a friend of Japan, from the time our great Admiral succeeded in opening the door to friendly relations between our two countries. Our sympathies were with Japan in the war between Russia and Japan in the early 1900s. The President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, intervened and brought about a peace settlement.

But in the 1930s, Japan joined the Axis Powers, and when the Hitler regime in Germany and Mussolini's Government in Italy were defeated, Japan was left alone. From Potsdam in 1945, before Russia declared war on Japan, Great Britain, China and the United States issued an ultimatum suggesting that Japan join the Germans and Italians in surrender. This document, sent to the Japanese Government through Sweden and Switzerland, evoked only a very curt and discourteous reply.

Our military advisors had informed Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of China and the President of the United States that it would require at least a million and a half Allied soldiers to land in the Tokyo plain and on the South Island of Japan.

On July 16th 1945, before the demand for Japan's surrender was made, a successful demonstration of the greatest explosive force in the history of the world had been accomplished.

After a long conference with the Cabinet, the military commanders and Prime Minister Churchill, it was decided to drop the atomic bomb on two Japanese cities devoted to war work for Japan. The two cities selected were Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When Japan surrendered a few days after the bomb was ordered dropped on August 6th 1945, the military estimated that at least a quarter of a million of the invasion forces against Japan and a quarter of a million of Japanese had been spared complete destruction, and that twice that many on each side would otherwise have been maimed for life.

As the executive who ordered the dropping of the bomb, I think the sacrifice of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was urgent and necessary for the prospective welfare of both Japan and the Allies.

The need for such a fateful decision of course never would have arisen had we not been shot in the back by Japan at Pearl Harbour in December 1941. And in spite of that shot in the back, this country of ours, the United States of America, has been willing to help in every way the restoration of Japan as a great and prosperous nation.'

I read these excerpts not to convince you that the dropping of the atom bomb was right - that is a matter for you to decide - but solely to indicate what it says about Truman; that he was a man of decision. He made his decisions and he did not worry about them afterwards - they may have been right, they may have been wrong, but once he had made them, you could not do much about them. You may think he was right, you may think he was wrong, but that is the sort of President he was. That was the first of the very major decisions he had to make just a few months into his Presidency.

In 1947, he had to make a further decision. The British Government told him they were no longer able to defend Greece and Turkey against the threat from the Soviet Union, which they perceived to be there, and Truman had to decide what to do. He formulated the Truman Doctrine, by which the United States would defend any country that thought its liberties were at stake. He told Congress: 'I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people's who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.'

This was complemented with the famous Marshall Plan in 1947, named after his Secretary of State, General George Marshall. Marshall proposed to give the European countries the very large sum in those days of \$12 billion to aid European recovery in order to ensure that the continent of Europe did not collapse economically. This showed that America would not make the same mistake of withdrawing from Europe as it has after the First World War. Europe seemed exhausted and the only large reservoir of free machinery and material was in America. But Marshall said the Americans were not just going to hand out the money, but that the money depended on Europe getting its act together and putting forward specific plans for what the money would be used for, and he meant Europe as a whole and not individual European countries. So, in this way, the Americans gave a push, for better or worse, to the movement for European unity; the Europeans had to consult together and produce joint proposals for what they were going to do with the money. The Americans

were particularly worried about protectionist policies in Europe, tariffs between various countries, which they thought had led in the '20s and '30s to Fascism, so they said Europe as a whole had to be responsible for recovery. So that was another great decision of the Truman Administration.

Then, in 1948, when it seemed that the Soviet Union was attempting to block Western access to Berlin, he ordered an air lift, which eventually forced the Soviet Union to drop the blockade and to restore Western rights in Berlin.

Also in 1948, he made a huge decision which was very controversial then and which is in many ways even more controversial now: he decided, against the advice of the State Department and most of his advisors, to recognise the new state of Israel. His advisors were very hostile to this because they said it would affect America's oil imports because the Muslim states in the Middle East would resent this, and they also said that he was doing it to win the election. His Secretary of State, General Marshall, contemplated resignation on the issue, but he eventually decided against this, though he said to Truman that, 'If you do this and I were to vote in the coming election, I would vote against you.'

It is sometimes said that this was of concern for the Jewish vote in America, which was concentrated in a few states, primarily New York. If it was for that, it was not successful because Truman lost New York in 1948, but in fact it was much wider than that because the truth then, and I suspect now also, is that a large majority of the American public favoured the creation of a Jewish state. There were delegations from 33 of the then 48 state legislators supporting that, and 40 State Governors, and 54 Senators out of then 96, and 250 Congressmen, many of them from areas where few or no Jewish people lived. So the truth was, for better or worse, that American public opinion favoured the creation of a Jewish state. Truman himself even, as I said in that quotation, was not that influenced by public opinion - he thought it was the right thing to do. Indeed, he later told the Israeli President that he thought Israel had not really gained all the territory which was due to her and that she had been badly treated given what had happened to the Jews in the War. Again, you may think he was right, you may think he was wrong, but he believed it and it was a decision for good or ill.

All that was before he had to face the electorate in November 1948, and you may think that with this record of decision in foreign policy he would have had have an easy run, but in fact he did not because, he floundered in domestic policy. That was not wholly his fault. He put forward what seemed like a successive programme to Roosevelt's New Deal, which he called the Fair Deal. The Fair Deal involved an expansion of social security, raising the minimum wage, public funds for housing and education, and above all, that measure which American Presidents have tried to achieve since Roosevelt but none of them have done it, a national health service for America. The Republican leader in the House of Representatives said, 'Not even President Roosevelt ever asked so much at one sitting! It is just a case of out-New Dealing the New Deal.' But Truman got nowhere with most of that programme, and Congress prevented it. Actually, his Presidency at that time was marked by perhaps the most antagonistic relations with Congress of almost any President up till then. People were getting fed up with wartime privations and the growth of the federal bureaucracy, and there was a movement away from large government. You had the same in Britain, which returned the Conservatives in the early 1950s. People said that Truman was fumbling and the quotation that came to be used by his Republican opponents: 'To err is Truman'.

American public opinion was becoming more conservative, and in the Mid-Term Elections in 1946, the Republicans used the slogan 'Had enough?' and they became the majority party in both houses of Congress for the first time since 1930, and it looked as if the long period of Democratic rule was coming to an end. Incidentally, a number of people who returned in that 1946 Congress were to play a very important part in American politics in the future: both Nixon and Kennedy were returned to the House of Representatives in 1946, and a more sinister figure, Senator McCarthy, was returned to the Senate, where he began to pursue his anti-Communist line. That Congress did a lot of things that Truman and his supporters did not like. In particular, they passed an act called the Taft-Hartley Act, over Truman's veto, limiting the power of the trade unions. The Democratic Party, like the Labour Party in Britain, were very much the party of the trade unions.

Truman then tried to do something about problems of civil rights and segregation. A committee that he had set up reported at the end of 1946 calling for the elimination of discrimination and segregation in large areas of the federal government - employment, housing, health, transport, public administration. It proposed making lynching a federal crime and proposed federal protection for voting rights and an end to racial discrimination in the Civil Service and the Armed Forces. Truman accepted these proposals, though it has to be said he was far from being a liberal on race matters in the modern or even the sense of those times. Though one has to remember he came from the Southern slave state of Missouri, and his parents had supported the Confederacy. Although he was in favour of civil liberties, he did not believe that white people and black people should mix, and he spoke privately in not very complimentary ways about black people.

However, the attempt to secure these civil rights for black people called a revolt in the Democratic Party, because the Southern Democrats were very strong believers in segregation. They had been the party of the Confederacy in the Civil War and they were very much opposed to the more liberal wing of the Democrat Party of which Truman was a rather conservative representative - there were people much more liberal than him certainly!

At the Democratic Convention in 1948 the Southern Democrats walked out and established their own states' rights party, under the Governor of South Carolina. I should say that, at that time, non-white people in effect did not have the vote in South Carolina and it was entirely white. Governor Thurmond, who lived to a great old age and died only recently (which shows that the wicked do sometimes prosper), established a states' rights party, called the Dixiecrats, which carried four states in the Deep South in the Presidential Election of 1948. It was obviously very worrying for Truman that he faced that defection from the right.

But he also faced the problem of a defection from the left, because shortly after he came to office, he dismissed his Commerce Secretary, Henry Wallace. He had been the Vice-President from 1940 to 1944, but Truman dismissed him because he thought he was too sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Wallace formed another party of his own, called the Progressive Party, in which he claimed that Truman was a cold warrior and that more liberal policies ought to be followed towards the Soviet Union. This party came, it is fair to say, to be infiltrated by many sympathisers of Communism, but at least it was another alternative to Truman's policies.

Therefore it seemed that Truman had little chance of winning the Election, and so there was a strong move to dump him and not to give him the nomination in 1948. This movement was led by the widow of a late President, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Roosevelt's sons. The New Republic, a liberal American paper, had a

headline in April 1948 saying, 'As a candidate for the Presidency, Harry Truman should quit'. There has never been a time in American history when so many leading party figures were opposed to re-nominating the President - usually the President has an easy time to get back.

People looked around for another candidate and they picked on two figures. Firstly, they looked at a Justice of the Supreme Court called William Douglas, but he was not interested. Secondly, they picked on the great general, whose politics were uncertain but interpreted by people as they thought best, General Eisenhower. The Roosevelts tried to persuade Eisenhower to be the candidate for the Presidency. Oddly enough, Truman rather agreed with them that Eisenhower would be a better President than himself. After Potsdam Truman had said to Eisenhower, 'Ike,' (that was his nickname, Ike) 'there is nothing you may want that I won't try to help you get. That definitely and precisely includes the Presidency.' Eisenhower was a national hero. He had a greater reputation than Churchill had in Britain, because Churchill was a Conservative party man. No one knew what Eisenhower's politics were. In fact, they turned out to be much more conservative than Truman or the Roosevelt family thought - he was a Republican. He had actually never voted up to 1948, because he thought a military man should not vote, and when he did vote in 1948, he voted Republican. He was, in many ways, a Republican to the right and not even a moderate Republican, but this was not known. He kept his views to himself, so everyone interpreted him as being a great hero and he agreed with them.

However, Eisenhower said he was not interested, and so the Convention had to nominate Truman. As I say, he was opposed by both sides: Wallace, who attacked him for the Cold War; and Thurman from the South, who said that Truman's civil rights programme had 'its origin in Communist ideology and was intended to create the chaos and confusion which leads to Communism.' In September, about six weeks before the Presidential Election, the main pollster in America issued the results - it was not Gallup, but a pollster called Elmo Roper - which gave Truman's Republican opponent 44% of the vote, and Truman 31% of the vote, and they said that there was no point continuing carrying out polls. Elmo Roper said, 'My silence on this point can be construed as an indication that Mr Dewey, the Republican candidate, is still so clearly ahead that we might just as well listen to his Inaugural.' Newsweek polled fifty top journalists, all of whom saw Dewey as the winner.

Truman took no notice of that, and he campaigned through the country on the train, then dubbed the Whistle-Stop tours. In a very homely way, he used to introduce his wife as 'the boss' and introduced his daughter as 'the boss who bosses the boss'! He said that 'If you do not vote for me, the gains of the New Deal will be lost' - you will lose all the social security benefits and all the rest of it, and you will be back to where you were in Hoover's time.

It seemed not to be successful. The final polls still showed Dewey, the Republican candidate, comfortably ahead. The Chicago Tribune, on the day of the Election, printed a headline called 'Dewey Defeats Truman', and Truman carried that headline along with him to the Inaugural celebrations in January 1949, because when the votes were counted, it appeared that Truman had actually won quite comfortably. It was a very low turnout, but he had actually won quite comfortably. The Wallace group got no states at all. Thurman got just the four states in the South. Dewey, the Republican, got the main industrial states, but Truman got almost all the rest, and he won by 303 electoral votes to 197. He happily carried the 'Dewey Defeats Truman', and the Chicago Tribune took it in good spirits, because they produced at the Inaugural a banner saying 'We are ready

to eat crow, Mr President, whenever you want us to do so!

Truman interpreted his victory as a victory for domestic reform, but it proved not to be that victory, because although Congress reverted back to the Democrats, it was dominated by a conservative coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats. So it was that Truman was able to achieve hardly anything - no national health insurance policy, no civil rights programme, and the Taft-Hartley Act restricting the unions also remained. Truman was in a difficult position because he needed the conservatives for the support of his foreign policy; he could not afford to antagonise them, and even if he had, he would not have got anywhere because they formed a solid majority in Congress and, at that time, the Chief Congressional Committees were led by Southerners who had seniority - they had been there a long time and they were determined to block all reform. Later on, President Kennedy had the same problem, and it was only when President Johnson, in 1964, won a landslide victory he was able to implement many of these reforms, civil rights and so on, but not the health service. As I said, it still has not been implemented - Hillary Clinton did not in 1994 but perhaps she will if she wins next time, we will see.

Truman continued in foreign policy with his policy of containment. In 1949, he helped create the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which bound the countries of the North Atlantic together in collective security, such that an attack on one is an attack on all. The significant point about the NATO Treaty was that it involved the principle of automatic obligation. Unlike the League of Nations or the United Nations or the European Union, an attack on any one member was automatically an attack on the others. But, you may ask, how could you make this possible? The answer was only if American troops remained in Europe, because no other country would have the wherewithal, in the end, to carry out this burden. This was a revolution in American foreign policy: America had not accepted such obligations for the whole of its history; in peacetime to accept collective security agreements to defend other countries. This was absolutely essential because the British, who were, as it were, second in line, would not have agreed to put troops on the Continent to defend France and Germany etc. unless America did the same.

Then, in 1950, Truman made his last major important decision, the decision to aid Korea when South Korea was attacked by the Communist North. At that stage, Truman said, 'If we are going to have this collective security, it means something very difficult for many people in Europe to accept - it means German rearmament. The Germans also will have to play a part in that defence.' People said, 'What have the last fifty years been about if we are now going to rearm the Germans?' But he took the view you could not have a viable defence of Western Europe without the Germans, so that set the pattern for Europe.

Although most people now would say that he was right in the Korean War, his popularity fell at that time because of it. Had he stood for election in 1952, which he could have done because he had not served two full terms, he would have been heavily defeated by Eisenhower. The reason for that is that people perhaps looked at Europe and said, 'Well, at least we've contained Soviet power, but,' they said 'what's happening in Asia?' They said, 'In 1949, the Communists took over China, they got North Korea, and they're attacking the South.' They said, 'During Truman's time in office, the Communist world has expanded from 180 million people to 800 million people - why has that happened?' They said it was due to two things: firstly, misjudgements by the Truman Administration in Asia; but secondly, and related to that, the fact that the Truman Administration had been lax on security in America, allowing many Soviet agents to pass information

to the Soviet Union.

The first bit of information that had been passed was not actually in Truman's Presidency, but it came out in Truman's period. It was the Manhattan Project about making the atomic bomb, which of course was a major bit of information. It is now known that the Rosenbergs, who were executed in 1953, were leaders of a spy ring which gave that information to Stalin, who had it during the War before Truman himself had.

Then it was discovered that Soviet agents in the Treasury Department in America had delayed sending aid to the Chinese Nationalists, who were fighting the Communists, and this had damaged them.

There was a particular case that affected many Americans, the case of the man who had worked in a very high position in the State Department for many years and had accompanied Roosevelt to Yalta. Alger Hiss had been denounced by an ex-Communist as early as 1939 as a Soviet agent and the Government had done nothing about it, and that he and other agents had stolen American documents and passed them to other Soviet agents. Hiss had been very high up indeed in the American Administration: he had been the man in charge of preparing the conference that set up the United Nations; he was the first temporary Secretary General in the United Nations, and indeed, the Soviet Union proposed him as the candidate for the first permanent Secretary General in the United Nations; and he was one of America's leading diplomats, with strong ties to the Democratic Party - not just Roosevelt, but others in it. In 1947, he had become the President of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, a very prestigious organisation, a bit like Chatham House in this country.

When Nixon, amongst others, exposed him as a Soviet agent, this was not believed. Truman said it was a red herring, and the whole of what you might call the New Deal Establishment defended him. Later, declassified State Department memos showed that by spring of 1946, the Secretary of State and those in the Department's security staff believed that Hiss was working for the Communist Party, and the material we now have from the Soviet Union shows that he was indeed a Soviet agent.

In January 1950, he was convicted of perjury and given a prison sentence. The statute of limitations for spying had gone and so he could not be convicted of that. But many Democrats still protested his innocence, saying it was a frame-up. So people were accusing the Democrats of being lax on security matters, and this led to the very extreme attacks on them by Senator McCarthy, and less extreme attacks by people like Nixon, who first made his reputation on that issue.

Truman had the loyalty files sealed so that Congress could not investigate them. His aim was, reasonably, to protect the innocent, but he was accused of being very lax on security. When Senator McCarthy was asked why he did not tell the State Department about all these agents that he said were in Government, he said he did not tell them because they already knew and had done nothing about it. That is a criticism of the Truman Administration, though it is fair to balance it by saying he did not want to get in a hysterical state of simply saying that any radical was a security risk. But there was a substantial problem which Truman perhaps did not combat as effectively as he might have done.

As I said, for that reason, his popularity was very low in 1952, but it has probably risen fairly steadily since, and I want to conclude by summing up Truman's place in history.

As I have said earlier, he made seven crucial major world-shaping decisions: the decision to drop the atom bomb; the decision to protect Greece and Turkey and other countries that he thought might be in danger from Communism; the Marshall Plan; the Berlin air lift; the recognition of Israel; the setting up of NATO; and the Korean War. You may think he was right in these decisions and you may think he was wrong, but you must agree they were decisions of fundamental importance and that Truman actually decided.

Roy Jenkins, in a very short biography of Truman well worth reading, written in 1986, said this: 'Truman presided over the creation of the Western world as it still broadly exists today. The creation of NATO, the Marshall Plan, with its emphasis on European union, the resistance to Soviet expansion, peacefully in Berlin, bloodily in Korea, all had long-lasting consequences.' The decisions he made, for better or worse, set the pattern for post-War international politics: a permanent American commitment to Europe, by contrast with post-1919; the setting up of two antagonistic blocks, sometimes called the Cold War; and not until the 1960s did these two blocks begin to dissolve and a new period began, marked by the independent course taken by countries within each block, particularly perhaps France under De Gaulle and China. Of course, the era which Truman inaugurated, the era of the Cold War, did not really end until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Although some would argue that all the decisions made by this very uncomplicated, straightforward, direct man were all right, some would say they were wrong, but as I say, you cannot deny the power of decisions. It is not clear where he got it - perhaps from a sense of history; he was very widely read and had an extraordinary absence of preconceived prejudices.

What will he want to be remembered by? Henry Kissinger asked him this in 1961, and again, he replied very simply: 'We completely defeated our enemies and made them surrender, and then we helped them to recover, to become democratic, and to rejoin the community of nations. Only Americans could have done that.'

The last word perhaps should go to Winston Churchill. He visited America in January 1953, at the end of Truman's term when Eisenhower was being inaugurated. To most people's surprise, he spent more time with Truman than he did with Eisenhower, and he told Truman very frankly how upset he had been when Roosevelt died. He then said: 'I misjudged you badly. Since that time, you, more than any other man, have saved Western civilisation.' It is not a bad epitaph.