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"Downhill all the way: thirteen Tory years 1951-64"

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In "Downhill all the way: thirteen Tory years 1951-64", Dilwyn Porter clearly explains why the Conservatives lost power after thirteen years of rule. Dilwyn's main position is that the period 1951-64 was one of decline for Britain which the Conservatives sought to mask by behaving like Britain was still a world power.

According to Dilwyn, the Conservative Party was able to gain power in 1951 by broadening its appeal through "a commitment to full employment and the welfare state" and "an acceptance of the mixed economy inherited from Attlee's government." The Conservatives wanted to avoid a repetition of "the bad, black days of interwar Britain," and, as Dilwyn shows, they succeeded. Dilwyn writes that "during the 13 years of Conservative government after 1951 unemployment remained low by inter-war standards. In 1955 the monthly average of registered unemployed dropped to 232,000, just over 1 percent of the work-force.

In retrospect these are fairly amazing figures Only once, in 1963 when it reached 573,000, did the monthly average exceed half a million and even that figure represented a negligible unemployment rate of 2.6 percent." During the same period, infant mortality declined sharply, there was an upsurge of new home construction, and there was a substantial increase in consumer expenditures. In short, "at the start of the 1960s most British people were healthier, better educated, better housed and more prosperous than they had been before. Poverty, the giant evil 'want', appeared to have been virtually banished from the land."

However, the economy was not the only issue of importance

to the British people. According to Dilwyn, the British people *understandably* *so* wanted to believe that their country was still a world power. Dilwyn refers to "the tenacity with which the British electorate in the mid-twentieth century adhered to a vision of the nation which belonged to the past" and quotes one Tory MP as saying that "this reluctance to escape from the tradition of greatness is, I think, common to all the social classes." Accordingly, the Conservative governments, as Dilwyn shows, projected an appearance of confidence to maximize Conservative support, and behaved like Britain was still a world power, such as in the ✓ Suez crisis in 1956 and the decision to become a nuclear power. But Dilwyn shows that this behavior was based on a illusion - Britain was no longer a world power. Dilwyn writes that "Suez was for Britain a painful lesson in the realities of the new world order" and despite becoming a nuclear power, "dependence on American-made missiles remained" as the British-made missiles ✓ became obsolete.

Dilwyn also points out that "there was, of course, a widely perceived connection between Britain's economic performance, and its ability to sustain a world role." Dilwyn shows that Britain simply no longer had the productive capability to maintain its role as a great power. "In mid-1960," according to Dilwyn, "the short sharp burst of expansion in the British economy stopped" and there was "little further growth." Dilwyn cites an OECD survey in March 1962 which took "an especially pessimistic view of Britain's economic performance over the previous decade." During that period the government had "to

impose frequent measures of restraint" that were unpopular with the people. The report also identified "the problem of Britain's 'relatively large burden of defense expenditure overseas'."

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Thus, Britain lacked the economic base necessary to sustain her position as a world power and caused the government to enact economic measures for which "the political cost was considerable."

Dilwyn further shows that Britain experienced a series of reverses before the truth of Britain's decline as a world power was finally faced. In addition to the Suez failure, Dilwyn cites how "Britain's Conservative rulers" had to reluctantly adjust "to reduced circumstances", as reflected by Eden's successor "urging white South Africa to bend before the 'wind of change'" and Britain's retreat from Africa. But the diplomatic blow that indubitably marked Britain's decline as a world power was the French veto of Britain's entry into the

Macmillan
perhaps this can be interpreted more positively
✓ EEC in January 1963. Dilwyn writes that "the French veto of January 1963 was a crippling blow, a savage exposure of the state of relative impotence to which Britain had declined. 'General de Gualle said 'No', and Britain's own views on her national destiny suddenly appeared absurdly irrelevant." As Dilwyn shows, "sustaining the Tory hegemony after 1951 had involved sheltering the electorate from such awkward realities" of Britain's weakness. When these weaknesses became obvious, the "Tory hegemony", based upon an untenable premise that Britain was still a world power, was bound to end.

Britain's position in the European Community has never recovered

Solid Summary,