



# Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars

Edited by Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas



INSTITUTE  
OF HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH

University of London  
School of Advanced Study



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## Preface

The essays in *Brave New World*, seven of which are by non-British authors, reflect and contribute to the important changes in the writing of British history that have characterized the last twenty years or so. These have been changes both in emphasis and content. Not only have historians chosen to write about different things, they now write about the old things in different ways. The central themes of *Brave New World* – empire, gender, race, religion and ‘modernity’ – are themselves not new, but they would probably not have appeared in this form in a similar collection published twenty years ago. Absent, for example, in *Brave New World* is any treatment of social class as such. Social class is certainly here, and could scarcely not be, but it does not appear directly as a motor of social change or as a polarizing political agent. This represents the reluctance of contemporary historians to use class as an ‘objective’ political and social phenomenon, something which can be measured and which unites large numbers of people within a more-or-less clearly defined class interest, or to use it as a fundamental political category. If anything, gender is thought more fundamental than class. Discussions of class, as of politics more generally, have been drawn into a more widely defined political culture where linguistic and rhetorical conventions, ways of thinking and speaking, and fluid political allegiances become more important kinds of historical analysis. In *Brave New World*, for instance, politics is not party politics in the formal sense, but is the culture of the press, of the empire and the more amorphous culture of modernity. Furthermore, we can easily see why contemporary historians should give a sophisticated media – press, radio and cinema in the inter-war years – a special place in the construction of a political culture. We only need look around us.

The essays are, broadly speaking, organized around three subjects: the political role of the media, the significance of empire and the extent to which the inter-war years can be thought to be ‘modern’, to fit our idea of modernity. The media, especially the press, is central to the essays by Laura Beers, Ellen Boucher, Adrian Bingham and Geraint Thomas. In her essay, Beers argues strongly that the way the press treated the first generation of women MPs, its emphasis upon their clothes, their style of life, their private life (though their efforts here were, by modern standards, pretty unsuccessful) and the sex-appeal of MPs as a whole, even those who had none, anticipated what was to happen to political culture in its broadest

sense after the Second World War. In this development Beers gives the press a prime role. Bingham, in his study of the most successful paper of the period, the *Daily Mirror* of the late 1930s and 40s, suggests that despite the deliberate expulsion of formal political reporting from its pages, which clearly reflected the wishes of its increasingly huge readership, it was able to construct an influential sort of non-party political radicalism, especially during the Second World War. Boucher, in her essay on the establishment and growth of the Save the Children Fund, demonstrates the dangers as well as the benefits of any relationship with the modern press. The founders of the fund brilliantly exploited the press as a means of publicity and support but then found that they had to change the nature of its appeal and activities significantly in order to retain that support. Assistance could no longer be given to communities – who might, like the Bolsheviks, be politically suspect – but to individual children with whom people were urged to identify, often at the expense of the wider community. Thomas equally notes that whereas political activists in inter-war Britain were reliant on an increasingly national mass media, and knew it, they also resented the way the new media appeared to disrupt a more traditional (and cherished) politics of place and locality.

The empire is the second of *Brave New World's* organizing subjects. But the essays here are not an institutional history of the empire, nor are they about that familiar question – was the empire popular or not? Rather they are concerned with the relationship between the metropole (mostly London) and the empire, and the ways in which the empire was strengthened or weakened by such a relationship. Tamson Pietsch is concerned with the attempt to create an imperial (white) system of universities through the Universities' Bureau of the British Empire, which would give the empire a new kind of political and intellectual coherence – a system based upon an expansive definition of the British nation. This was an attempt, she rightly notes, that has largely been expunged from the history of inter-war Britain. Marc Matera argues for the importance of London itself as a place where young blacks, especially west Africans (some of whom became leaders of African nationalist movements), could establish a kind of agreed critique of colonialism and suggests that the debate over the acceptability or not of the film *Sanders of the River*, one of whose stars was Paul Robeson, was important in establishing such a critique, even though the attitude of many to the film (including Robeson) was ambivalent to say the least. But the attempt to refound the empire on a sort of democratic basis could have perverse or unexpected consequences, as Priya Satia and Aaron Windel argue. Satia suggests that there was a kind of deliberately encouraged ignorance of empire (particularly of the Middle Eastern empire) and the handing over of

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policy to the 'experts' (of whom Gertrude Bell was one) who could expect to make policy on the basis of 'expert' knowledge and without too much democratic interference. Windel also argues that under the influence of Fabianism, and of Sidney Webb as colonial secretary, important aspects of colonial policy, in this case the development of co-operatives in Africa, were in effect transferred to the technocrats, to those who were believed to be expert in the subject, at the expense of popular participation. Certainly, the admiration for the expert was an important element in inter-war intellectual and political behaviour and should be seen as a counter to the equally important view that Britain was now a democracy.

The third organizing subject of *Brave New World* we might call the ambiguities of modernity. Although modernism as a cultural phenomenon and as a concept has its origins in the late Edwardian period, it only emerged fully armed in the inter-war years. It is in the inter-war years that the distinction between the highbrow and the middlebrow is invented: the highbrow understood modernism and the middlebrow did not. It is a distinction that would have had little meaning in the nineteenth century. Modernity was also a feature of daily life: in technology, communication, speed and artistic and commercial styles. Inter-war Britons very much thought of themselves as living in a modern world. Yet the reader of *Brave New World* is struck by how unmodern inter-war Britain remained; how far the preoccupations of Victorian and Edwardian Britain survived in the 1920s and 1930s; how far they even shaped modernity. Thus Beers notes the extent to which the popular press's treatment of inter-war politics was driven by very traditional gender stereotypes which encouraged a conventional and, indeed, often contemptuous attitude to women in political and social life. Lucy Delap also notes how far the beliefs and practices of the nineteenth century continued to influence twentieth-century debates about the role of women in Anglicanism and of women in religion more generally. Bingham argues that the *Daily Mirror*, in media terms, of course, the model of democratic modernity, was successful because it actually exploited well-established populist traditions by attaching them to new technology and marketing. Gary Love suggests that the career of Sir John Marriott, a man who in many ways made a successful transition to modern politics, shows how far the Victorian age continued to determine the thinking of literary Conservatives, while Pietsch argues that the attempts to recast the white empire via its universities were dependent on the Edwardian assumptions of those who founded the Universities' Bureau. Thomas proposes, as we have seen, that the politically active still remained loyal to a nineteenth-century politics of place. Many inter-war Britons were very conscious – as had been their Edwardian predecessors – of Britain's seeming comparative

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economic decline. They thought much about this and as a result much about the country's industrial relations, its 'man management'. Here the influence of American practice was strong and Taylorism or a variant of it – usually called 'time and motion' or the 'Bedaux system' in Britain – was widely adopted. Nonetheless, as Daniel Ussishkin points out, attempts to establish a uniform system of workplace management, or one dominated by a specialist psychology of labour relations, 'morale-management', were frustrated by the survival of Edwardian practices, some associated with the Cadbury family, which emphasized 'character'. The picture of Britain that the contributors to *Brave New World* present is therefore one where much was indeed new or displaced – and given what happened after 1914, the extent to which the First World War reshaped so much of British life, that is hardly surprising. But it is also a picture which many of those who reached adulthood before 1914 would have found recognizable. Whether they would also have found it comforting is, however, a different question.

Ross McKibbin, April 2011

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# Introduction

## *Nation and 'nations' in inter-war Britain*

### ***Springtime of nation-building***

The idea of nation-building is best known as a theory that frames the Eurocentric history of the nineteenth century – a period when nationalisms spawned nation states. In this sense, discussed most astutely by Eric Hobsbawm in his *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, the concept of nation-building does not immediately lend itself as a means of analysing inter-war Britain.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, developments in the field of communication, which theorists identify as the hallmark of nationalism's modernity, were a definitive characteristic of the post-First World War years; likewise, to an extent, the awareness of that corpus of national myths and histories, not least those bequeathed by the Victorians, which represents what Hobsbawm describes as 'the element of artefact, invention and social engineering which enter into the making of nations'.<sup>2</sup> But nationalism, as such, was not a prominent feature of British life between the wars. Whereas the 1919 Treaty of Versailles marked, in the words of Raphael Samuel, a 'springtime of nations' across much of continental Europe, in Britain debates about the nation were confined to the more advanced ideas of 'national identity' and 'citizenship'.<sup>3</sup> There was no new nation state to debate, to rally to, or to dissent from. Nonetheless, many Britons felt that they were bravely – some pessimistically, some idealistically – entering a new, uncertain world in 1918. The response to this amounted to a springtime of nation-building, as both the state and its citizens set out to reshape the country they inhabited. Historians of the early modern era have given considerable attention to conceptualizing political, social and cultural change through the framework of nation-building, or 'state-formation', a term which captures 'the more or less conscious efforts of particular individuals or groups to transform

<sup>1</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 10. See also B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983); E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, ii: *Island Stories – Unravelling Britain*, ed. A. Light, S. Alexander and G. Stedman Jones (1998), p. 4.

the state'.<sup>4</sup> However, there has not, as yet, been a similar effort to consider the reshaping of national identities that took place in the wake of the First World War. Detached from nationalism *per se*, and with nation, state and citizens taken together, nation-building offers an opportunity to rethink many of the central themes in the history of inter-war Britain.

For decades the political, social, cultural and imperial histories of inter-war Britain have taken the 'nation' as an integral category of analysis. Although it is dangerous to generalize, most analysis has been concerned primarily with national *identity* – including national 'character' and the discourse of national 'values' – rather than nation-*building*. This reflects not only the diffuse effects of the so-called 'cultural turn' among historians but also assumptions that, by the inter-war period, the British state had attained most of the apparatus and qualities characteristic of a mature and stable state. Yet it was not long before 1918 that theories of nation-building had been a staple of public debate in British society, as public intellectuals and politicians propounded their solutions to the challenges, both domestic and global, facing the Victorian state. And it was not long after the Second World War, amid the rise of Celtic nationalisms, decolonization abroad and welfarism at home, that figures on the left predicted the 'break up' of Britain, while their counterparts on the right lamented the precipitous 'decline' of a world power.<sup>5</sup> The inter-war years were a dynamic part of this continuum: a period when processes of nation-building were ongoing, continually devised and executed by competing groups with divergent aims and varied results.

The nation-building of the 1920s and 1930s emerged in response to the domestic and international challenges posed by the armistice of 1918. The First World War had thrown society into the melting pot, with no guarantees of how pre-war roles, or indeed the identity and purpose of the roles themselves – class and gender, plus those related to an individual's position as a public figure or one of 'the masses' – would emerge and settle in peacetime. Many people feared that a 'brutalized' society had been unleashed, while the physical and mental scars of one war fostered a fatalistic expectation of 'the next'.<sup>6</sup> Compounding this uncertainty were the implications of the

<sup>4</sup> M. Braddick, 'State formation and the historiography of early modern England', *History Compass*, ii (2004), 1–17, at p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ, 2007); T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-nationalism* (1977); C. Barnett, *The Audit of War: the Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (1986).

<sup>6</sup> J. Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, lxxv (2003), 557–89; S. Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: the Politics of Trauma in Britain, 1918–31* (Basingstoke, 2009); R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919–39* (2009).

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Representation of the People Act (1918), which enfranchised approximately 14 million new voters, and thus in principle facilitated an unprecedented degree of public expression in national politics. This presented the political parties with a new opportunity to expand their appeals and to build upon their following. However, many politicians also felt confronted with a race against time to contain and shape the political character of the electorate amid the dislocation of the post-war world.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, events tested Britain's mettle as an imperial power, despite the empire itself emerging from the war larger than in 1914. Of particular concern was the geopolitical instability consequent upon the protracted peacemaking process (which lasted from the Versailles conference in 1919 to the final settlement of the northern Iraqi border in 1926), the threat posed by colonial nationalisms, and, at home, the cost and public censorship of military commitments. These all carried implications for Britain's projection of itself abroad as well as for the metropole's own sense of the purpose of its imperial project.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the years following 1918 witnessed a renewed impetus behind nation-building. This proved an eclectic and complex web of activity, since it involved various agents, old and new – including the state, politicians, religious groups and civil society in all its multiplicity – each with their own agendas, target audiences and preferred methods of engaging the British public. Indeed, this intense competition to set the mould of post-war society characterized the inter-war period as a whole. D. L. LeMahieu, in his famous study of the relationship between 'elite' and 'mass' cultures, shows that many intellectuals, despite fearing the impact of the 'materialistic and egalitarian values' of commercial culture on a newly enfranchised people, themselves came to manipulate the new media, and by the 1930s the result was 'an emerging common culture [that] provided a shared frame of reference among widely divergent groups'.<sup>9</sup> As other historians' work has similarly illustrated, the desire to define the post-war nation also occupied the attention of other institutions and movements. The Church of England and British feminists, for example, both had specific interpretations of the war and its consequences, which in turn spawned prescribed roles for religion

<sup>7</sup> For a famous account of how Labour benefited in 1918, see H. C. G. Matthew, R. I. McKibbin and J. A. Kay, 'The franchise factor and the rise of the Labour party', *English Historical Review*, xci (1976), 723–52; and for the Conservative party leader's world-view, P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> J. Darwin, *The Empire Project: the Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009), esp. ch. 9.

<sup>9</sup> D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 3–4.

and gender in future social designs.<sup>10</sup> It might therefore be useful to see Ross McKibbin's work on inter-war society, which highlights the importance of class to people's identity, as a study of how people on the ground sought to negotiate the boundaries of the post-war nation and their own position within it. It is surely this, above all, that justifies Stefan Collini's description of McKibbin's *Classes and Cultures* as 'a national history'.<sup>11</sup>

Not least as a result of McKibbin's lead, the last ten years have witnessed something of a renaissance in studies of the 1920s and 1930s, in terms both of the range of historical disciplines the period now attracts and its popularity within degree courses, particularly in Britain.<sup>12</sup> This bodes well for the further development of 'inter-war studies'. But it also means, for the present, an opportunity to take stock, because the creativity of much of the recent work has frequently outstripped any overall analytical coherence for the period. This volume attempts to pave part of the way forward by bringing together political, social, cultural, imperial and transnational historians working on topics and approaches that, for inter-war Britain, too often fail to engage each other across the historiographical genres.

This introduction discusses the historiographies most relevant to the theme of nation-building in inter-war Britain, and how the chapters in this volume both build upon and diverge from previous scholarship. Three general dichotomies appear repeatedly in the historiography: the first recognizes the public and private as distinct, but not always unrelated, spheres of social experience; the second relates to the different experiences as between male and female; and the third centres on the interpretation of developments as either 'conservative' or 'modern' in their impact. By engaging critically with the existing literature, the contributions in this volume highlight the extent to which a further theme – 'nation-building' – is already a common, albeit undeveloped, element in our understanding of inter-war Britain. As a contested process, the nation-building phenomenon offers an effective analytical framework through which to conceptualize the complexities and developments of a formative period in modern British

<sup>10</sup> On the Anglican Church, see J. Kent, *William Temple: Church, State and Society in Britain, 1880–1950* (Cambridge, 1992) and M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004); S. Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: the Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, NJ, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–51* (Oxford, 1998); S. Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> For many students, inter-war Britain provides a major focus for the study of particular cultural and social developments, such as the rise of cultural modernism and sex before the 'sexual revolution'. Increasingly 'inter-war Britain' is being offered as a 'special subject' – see, e.g., Matt Houlbrook's 'The sex age: gender, sexuality and culture in 1920s Britain' in Oxford and, in Cambridge, Jon Lawrence's 'Class, party and the politics of social identity in England, 1918–40'.

history. This way, the world inhabited by Britons between the wars emerges as one heavily oriented towards, but also complicated and sometimes confused by, the plurality and creativity of ideas of the nation.

### ***Histories of inter-war Britain***

#### *Polity and nation*

In the 1960s and 1970s, the political history of inter-war Britain focused primarily on the evolution of the party political system – the rise of Labour, the decline of the Liberals and the dominance of the Conservatives.<sup>13</sup> Social factors – class, in particular – were also of concern, but underlying these early works lay a conceptualization of the political world as a largely self-contained, if not quite closed, phenomenon. Political change was generated from within. To be sure, the electorate could wield real influence, as in December 1923, when voters denied the Conservatives a clear majority and thereby precipitated the formation of the first minority Labour government. To this extent, the early ‘high political’ accounts recognized that voters could, and did, set the parameters within which the parties operated. Nevertheless, in contrast to some of the truly pioneering works on Victorian and Edwardian politics,<sup>14</sup> inter-war historiography at that time did not show a systematic interest in how the voters themselves operated. We learnt about the *consequences* of voters’ actions – most notably, the emergence of the two-party system as the Liberal vote declined and split between the Conservatives and Labour – but without understanding the exact processes through which their allegiances were forged and displaced.

Today, historians have continued to work on the political parties, producing revisionist accounts that question aspects of ‘Liberal decline’ or ‘Conservative hegemony’, and even the very role of parties within a pluralist democratic culture.<sup>15</sup> However, few show an active commitment to the notion of a ‘political system’. As a term, it is now rarely used with purpose.

<sup>13</sup> The classic accounts are T. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–35* (1966); M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920–4: the Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971); C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922–9* (1975); and J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902–40* (1978).

<sup>14</sup> E.g., J. Vincent, *Pollbooks: How Victorians Voted* (Cambridge, 1967); P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., B. M. Doyle, ‘Urban Liberalism and the “lost generation”: politics and middle-class culture in Norwich, 1900–35’, *Historical Journal*, xxxviii (1995), 617–34; D. Dutton, ‘1932: a neglected date in the history of the decline of the British Liberal party’, *Twentieth Century British History*, xiv (2003), 43–60; G. Thomas, ‘Conservatives and the culture of “national” government between the wars’ (unpublished University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2010), ch. 1; H. McCarthy, ‘Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in interwar Britain’, *Historical Journal*, l (2007), 891–912.

The most notable exception is McKibbin, for whom – over thirty years on from his study of the early Labour party and as his Ford Lectures of 2008 amply demonstrated<sup>16</sup> – the story of Britain’s evolving party system continues to provide a strong narrative channel through which to conceptualize political developments. Despite this consistency, however, McKibbin has also been at the centre of the transformation of inter-war political history.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed two developments. The first was a greater concern with society as a dynamic site of political change. McKibbin’s early work on Labour, despite ending with the party’s first government in 1924, pointed the way forward in this regard by rooting explanations of political change firmly in the analysis of social structures. In this case, he attributed the growth of Labour to trade union predominance in the constituencies: ‘the Labour party was not based upon broadly articulated principles, but rather upon a highly developed class-consciousness and intense class loyalties’ and it was the trade unions that ‘cultivated this consciousness and these loyalties’.<sup>17</sup> During this time there also emerged a powerful critique of social determinism in relation to political behaviour. While the fluidity of class identities and its constitutive role in political change is widely accepted among inter-war historians, it is worth noting that such a conceptual approach was pioneered most coherently in studies of Victorian popular politics, in particular by a Cambridge school (of research, if not of thought) inspired by Gareth Stedman Jones. In a famous essay on Chartism, Stedman Jones revealed the critical new insights that could be gained by analysing *language* (‘what Chartists actually said or wrote’). By taking the ‘linguistic turn’, historians since have avoided the pitfalls of ‘decontextualized’ interpretations of a particular group’s social and economic conditions and have instead turned their attention to the often revealing relationship between the social and the linguistic: ‘the [socio-economic] matter determines the possibility of the [political] form, but the form conditions the development of the matter’.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See the resulting book, R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914–51* (Oxford, 2010). In this he traces British politics from the pre-1914 age of equipoise, marked as much by middle-class progressivism as working-class radicalism, through the volatility of the inter-war years into the 1950s. By then, inter-war turmoil had produced a different equipoise, in which the middle and working classes were small-c conservative and both the Conservative and Labour parties stood for moderate social- (rather than liberal-) democracy.

<sup>17</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–24* (Oxford, 1974), p. 243.

<sup>18</sup> G. Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, in his *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 90–178. For a splendid discussion of how the shift away from social determinism has taken shape in the historiography, see J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, ‘Introduction: electoral sociology and the historians’, in *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820*, ed. J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 1–26.

## Introduction

The second, and related, development was the growing interest in cultural readings of history. From the late 1950s, many social historians turned to the blooming field of what became 'cultural studies' in search of a dimension beyond traditional structuralist and economic explanations of class formation.<sup>19</sup> This greatly expanded the subject matter and incorporated into future historical analysis factors including the attitudes and activities of groups marginalized by posterity, the role of the modern media market in displacing 'authentic' culture, the impact of 'mass' culture and the notion of cultural hegemony. All of this shed light on matters described by Carolyn Steedman as constituting 'the bottom line, the real historical reality' of past societies' experiences.<sup>20</sup> By the 1980s, the cultural genre was also deployed to explore both political and economic change.<sup>21</sup> Much of the theoretical impetus behind this came from leftist historians, disquieted by the success of Thatcherism and seeking a cultural coherence for seemingly incongruous social and political phenomena, of which their own particular bugbear of working-class Conservatism – evident from at least 1867 and again under Thatcher – has been the most perennial.<sup>22</sup>

Inter-war historians have embraced these developments – largely without the theoretical baggage – in order to explore the processes by which the British polity was constructed after 1918. The overwhelming focus here has been on the culture of electoral politics. With its emphasis on seats in parliament rather than votes in the country, the first-past-the-post electoral system forced the parties to engage voters from across the 'interest' divide and, insofar as these interests were often understood to be organized according to area (reflecting local industrial, religious, cultural and other characteristics), across various geographic cleavages. In order to form a majority government, the Conservative party would have to look beyond the suburban middle classes; likewise, the Labour party would be forced to look beyond the trade-unionized industrial centres. The parties therefore chose to appeal to certain 'mass' groups within the new electorate. As David Jarvis has shown, the Conservative party, arguably in possession of the

<sup>19</sup> This produced some classic works: R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957); R. Williams, *Culture and Society* (1961); and E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

<sup>20</sup> C. Steedman, 'Culture, cultural studies, and the historians', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. A. Treichler (New York, 1992), p. 617.

<sup>21</sup> The most notable works from this period are M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981); J. H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain, 1900–39* (1986); R. Colls and P. Dodd, *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920* (1987).

<sup>22</sup> For instance, see *Crises in the British State, 1880–1930*, ed. M. Langan and B. Schwarz (1985), including Schwarz's chapter on 'Conservatism and "caesarism", 1903–22', pp. 33–62.

most professional strategists, targeted demographic groups – most notably, women of particular ages – in a way that enabled the party’s appeal to transcend individual and regional interests while simultaneously appearing alive to voters’ class identities.<sup>23</sup> Labour’s ‘targeted electioneering’ emerged as a somewhat less discursive and more physical process. As a still infant party, the immediate goal in the 1920s had to be to secure inroads into the countryside and suburban constituencies; yet, particularly by the late 1930s, Labour too was seeking to appeal to a broad cross-class and cross-gender coalition.<sup>24</sup>

All these strategies were successful to some extent.<sup>25</sup> But if the parties were alive to the plurality of the new electorate, its complexity also threatened to confound them. This is why the parties preferred to locate targeted appeals within more coherent and comprehensive discursive frameworks. Such constructs were the products of elaborate attempts to shape the political nation in a party’s own favour. According to the literature, for instance, the Conservative goal was to secure an anti-socialist paradigm within which the majority of voters could operate. In McKibbin’s classic account of Conservative success, anti-socialism is a deeply negative construct: the party was not going to abandon its commitment to the middle classes – which, according to McKibbin, ‘objectively’ benefited from Conservative

<sup>23</sup> D. Jarvis, ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, v (1994), 129–52, and ‘British Conservatism and class politics in the 1920s’, *English Historical Review*, cxi (1996), 59–84. See also J. Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: the Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009), ch. 4.

<sup>24</sup> C. V. J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: the Politics of Rural Britain, 1918–39* (Oxford, 2007); T. Jeffery, ‘The suburban nation: politics and class in Lewisham’, in *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones (1990), pp. 189–216; L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

<sup>25</sup> In trying to appeal to a variety of disparate groups there was always the risk of alienating those closest to a party’s core value system, and at all times even the most advanced electioneering was susceptible to the effects of what McKibbin calls ‘contingency’ – ‘those unpredicted and unpredictable historical accidents that can still have profound consequences’ (McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. vii). Nonetheless, for an overview of how, and with what success, Labour expanded its sphere of influence, see D. Tanner, ‘The Labour party and electoral politics in the coalfields’, in *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910–47*, ed. A. Campbell and others (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 59–92, and his ‘Class voting and radical politics: the Liberal and Labour parties, 1910–31’, in Lawrence and Taylor, *Party, State and Society*, pp. 106–30. As for the Conservatives, historians have generally not questioned the story of electoral success so much as the factors behind it, but for a forceful declaration of the most common ground between them, namely a belief that the party secured its own success by constructing targeted appeals, see D. Jarvis, ‘The shaping of the Conservative electoral hegemony, 1918–39’, in Lawrence and Taylor, *Party, State and Society*, pp. 131–52.



governments – so it set out to subjectivize the interests of the considerable *non*-unionized section of the working classes and thereby bring them seemingly into line with those of the middle classes, chiefly by propagating a stereotype of the *unionized* working classes as idle and radicalized blackguards continually threatening unreasonable strikes. In this way the Conservatives defined the category of the middle-ground ‘public’ in inter-war politics, laying claim to represent its conventional wisdoms against the sectional interests of Labour.<sup>26</sup> This process was complemented by the more positive anti-socialism of Stanley Baldwin, which, as Philip Williamson has argued, invoked commonalities as a means of assembling a sense of the public – an ecumenical rather than denominational Christianity; a shared rural heritage as antidote to the tensions of mass industrial and suburban psyches; an attachment to both locality and nation. The ‘non-political’ character and content of Baldwin’s speeches was crucial in positioning the party as the guarantor of the public interest.<sup>27</sup>

So, too, for Labour, was the moderate, progressivist strategy of Ramsay MacDonald’s leadership. As Jon Lawrence has recently argued, the Labour party fought for its ‘place within polity and nation’ by constructing a ‘workerist politics’ that, by eliding the economic division between manual and non-manual labour, claimed to speak on behalf of *all* workers – whether they be workers ‘by hand or brain’. Labour thus gave value to the romantic nobility of work and highlighted the substantive issues, such as job security, that united ‘the people’ (a term that Labour used interchangeably with ‘the workers’).<sup>28</sup>

This way, the history of politics between the wars emerges as a battle between competing versions of the nation, in which the two main parties set out to influence voters’ definitions of who belonged to a particular version of ‘the nation’, ‘the public’ or ‘the people’. This was so deeply ingrained in strategic thinking that Labour upheld its centrist, ‘workerist’ appeal throughout the 1930s, despite established hostility towards MacDonaldite moderation and the sense of betrayal engendered by its former leader’s decision in 1931 to lead a ‘National Government’ coalition with Conservative

<sup>26</sup> R. McKibbin, ‘Class and conventional wisdom: the Conservative party and the “public” in interwar Britain’, in *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 259–93.

<sup>27</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*.

<sup>28</sup> J. Lawrence, ‘Labour and the politics of class, 1900–40’, in *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, ed. D. Feldman and J. Lawrence (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 237–60; L. Beers, ‘Counter-Toryism: Labour’s response to anti-socialist propaganda, 1918–39’, in *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900–39*, ed. M. Worley (Farnham, 2009), pp. 231–54.

and Liberal support.<sup>29</sup> However, Geraint Thomas argues for a more critical treatment of political nation-building. His chapter in this volume explores the attitudes and activities of political activists, who occupy a key position in the process by which appeals are mediated between the professional party strategist and the constituency voter. Paying particular attention to the local implications of political mass media, the chapter highlights, on the one hand, activists' growing reliance on a sophisticated presentation of national politics and, on the other, their irritation at aspects of the new politics which cut across *local* nation-building strategies, and thus sheds light on the clash between 'old' Victorian and Edwardian 'politics of place' and political modernity.

Meanwhile, it is difficult to identify an effective *Liberal* version of the political nation at this time. The equivocal fate of two mainstays of Liberal power before 1914, the nonconformist cleavage in the electorate and the nineteenth century's popular belief in free trade, reveals something of the party's survival, but also, crucially, its failure to construct an inclusive strategy. The Liberal vote remained buoyant in large parts of Wales, the West Country, East Anglia and Yorkshire throughout the 1920s, enough for it to seem reasonable to attribute the party's survival to the nonconformist vote; and, somewhat less plausible in hindsight, sufficient to explain how Lloyd George thought he could make a comeback in British politics as late as 1935.<sup>30</sup> But, by the 1930s, it was becoming clear that it was not the political culture of nonconformity itself that had survived the Great War, so much as its Edwardian adherents – who continued to vote Liberal, but whose children turned in large numbers to Labour.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the free trade campaign at the 1923 general election brought the Asquithian and Lloyd George factions of the Liberal party together for the first time since the war, increasing its

<sup>29</sup> Beers, 'Counter-Toryism', pp. 257–8. This contributes to the ongoing debate over the timing of, and factors behind, Labour's recovery from its election defeat in 1931 (when the party won 52 seats on 30.8% of the national vote) to its victory in 1945 (with 393 seats and 49.7% of the national vote). For the most significant instalments in this debate, see B. Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977); S. Brooke, *Labour's War: the Labour Party and the Second World War* (Oxford, 1992); M. Pugh, 'The Daily Mirror and the revival of Labour, 1935–45', *Twentieth Century British History*, ix (1998), 420–38; R. Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy, 1931–51* (Woodbridge, 2003); Beers, *Your Britain*.

<sup>30</sup> See M. Kinnear, *The British Voter: an Atlas and Survey since 1885* (2nd edn., 1981), on the patterns of Liberal (pp. 84–6) and nonconformist (pp. 125–9) voting. On Lloyd George in 1935, see S. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (1975), ch. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the "lost generation"'; M. Childs, 'Labour grows up: the electoral system, political generations and British politics, 1890–1929', *Twentieth Century British History*, vi (1995), 123–44.

share of the national vote and pushing the Conservative leadership onto the defensive with a watered-down tariffs policy ('safeguarding'). In the finance and business worlds, however, as in civil society at a time of shifting consumerist concerns, free trade was in decline.<sup>32</sup>

The problem for the Liberals was that their traditional appeals were not *obviously* in decline, and, if anything, remained important in keeping the party's heartlands happy. This obscured, and ultimately impeded, the imperative for the party newly to think out its national appeal. At the popular level, the Liberals were in a mistakenly secure 'centrist' position within the party system; at the same time, Liberals in high political and intellectual circles believed that mass democracy would (eventually) come to recognize the need for a 'rational' and 'moral' direction to solving post-war problems, which only the Liberal party could provide.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, many politicians endorsed the continued applicability of Liberal (often Gladstonian) values of retrenchment and reform as signs of good government – including the Conservative and Labour leaderships, whose inclusive discourses consequently came to rely upon the appropriation of the Liberal inheritance.<sup>34</sup>

The intersection between popular politics and nation-building is not new, of course. For the Victorians, political community was integral to the processes of state-formation.<sup>35</sup> In particular, it was closely aligned with the idea of the constitution as a set of parameters configured in a way that defined the legitimate political community. The Chartists, for instance, caused the language of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' to become a key site of political debate, occupied by subsequent generations of politicians and suffragists as they fought out arguments about the class, gender and racial qualities of their ideal political nation.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See A. Howe, 'The Liberals and the City, 1900–31', in *The British Government and the City of London in the 20th Century*, ed. R. Michie and P. Williamson (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 135–52; and F. Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> See M. Bentley, *The Liberal Mind, 1914–29* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 207–20.

<sup>34</sup> The different discussions of how ideas about Liberal norms and ideals of policy and government informed political debate beyond 1918, including the mid century Keynesian debates about the planned economy, are explored in *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate*, ed. E. H. H. Green and D. M. Tanner (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it was the 19th-century Liberal conception of the political nation that so appealed to Conservative and Labour after 1918. On this, see J. P. Parry, 'Liberalism and liberty', in *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain*, ed. P. Mandler (Oxford, 2006), p. 82.

<sup>36</sup> *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long 19th Century*, ed. J. Vernon (Cambridge, 1996); C. Hall, K. McClelland and J. Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000).

The methods and implications of political nation-building were very different between the wars, however. For one thing, historians too commonly assume that the constitution ceased to be anything like a central political issue from 1918 (and certainly after 1928) because the state, through the franchise, now included all adults.<sup>37</sup> Equally, if not more, important is the social context. Like other modern phenomena, nation-building has its own internal periodization; in other words, the aims, methods and efficacy of the nation-building process(es) all shift as society itself evolves. Consequently, inter-war efforts are best understood in the context of a wider appreciation of the different challenges and new opportunities presented by the post-1918 world.

### *Society and nation*

While the parties touted their rival visions of the national polity, the political world as a whole was confronted by the fact that many Britons after the war were actively redefining the society in which they lived. In a variety of ways the British people embraced, witnessed or resisted changes to their ways of living. Across fields as diverse as employment, the mass media, literature, intellectual culture, leisure and consumption, developments shaped their sense of class, their belief systems and outlook, their experience of the family, the home and the community, and their contact with sex and sexuality.

In conceptualizing the basic shape of inter-war society, three major developments provide us with the key narratives of social change for the period: the decline of the landed classes, the expansion and redefinition of the middle classes, and the redefinition of gender relations. The reorganization of rural society was well underway before the war. However, the challenges facing landed families grew to critical levels in the 1920s as death duties and government rent controls eroded estate incomes. Wartime casualties also disrupted patterns of inheritance, causing ruling families to question their economic and social capacity to survive. The gentry suffered an even steeper decline than the aristocracy: whereas the latter had sufficient resources to diversify or sell in lots, their juniors often had no choice but to sell their

<sup>37</sup> Some aspects of the constitution remained topics of debate, such as House of Lords reform and voting reform (see D. H. Close, 'The collapse of resistance to democracy: conservatism, adult suffrage and second chamber reform, 1911–28', *Historical Journal*, xx (1977), 893–918; and J. D. Fair, 'The second Labour government and the politics of electoral reform, 1929–31', *Albion*, xiii (1981), 276–301), but increasingly 'constitutionalism' became a discursive construct within discussions of 'citizenship', as politicians (and political scientists) turned to the question of how to educate voters once within the franchise. However, for a discussion of House of Lords reform after the discursive turn, see G. Thomas, 'Conservatives, the constitution and the quest for a "representative" House of Lords, 1911–35', *Parliamentary History* (forthcoming).

more modest estates *in toto*.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the history of the gentry has rightly become a more general history of the countryside – but with an emphasis on how the shires became a site of consumption and leisure for the urban masses, rather than on village life itself. No modern social history of the village has yet appeared to complement the debates on the aristocracy and the cultural significance of the rural idyll.<sup>39</sup> But this should not preclude recognition of the very great changes that flowed from the decline of the landed classes, in terms of authority structures, local economies, welfare provision, rural leisure and entertainment.

The second development was the expansion and diversification of the middle class. For much of the 1920s it was still possible to identify the ‘traditional’ Edwardian middle class, whose members typically worked in recognizably pre-industrial occupations across the ‘professional-clerical-commercial’ fields. The 1930s saw the middle class expand in size and alter in composition, as a result of the increased membership of the technical and scientific professions and the distributive service trades. These were salaried occupations, reflecting the displacement of the middle-class employer by the middle-class manager and administrator.<sup>40</sup> Increasingly, middle-class lifestyles reflected the rising living standards associated with the spread of home ownership, the electrification of houses and services, and the wider use of domestic appliances for both housekeeping and entertainment.<sup>41</sup>

The middle class came to assume a uniquely influential role within the inter-war nation, mediating patterns of social behaviour far beyond the confines of the suburban avenue. We can see this in the national decline in the fertility rate (a phenomenon normally associated with comfortable middle-class existence). As Simon Szreter explains, fertility change ‘principally occurred not to whole social classes or to individual occupations but to social groups and communities’. This resulted from the fact that people inhabited ‘communication communities’, in which the influence of social networks, which could develop on a local residential level (for example through intermarriage) or if families in one town aspired to the lifestyle of families in another, created norms of behaviour – for example, in gender

<sup>38</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, ‘English landed society in the 20th century’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xl (1990), 12.

<sup>39</sup> The two classics are D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven and London, 1990) and P. Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven and London, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (1989), ch. 6; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 44–9.

<sup>41</sup> For the diffusion of household appliances, see M. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: an Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851–1951* (Oxford, 2007), p. 431.

and work roles, and in family planning. Thus in the south, including the south-east and the west midlands, where most of the new light industries of the 1930s were located, many in the 'working classes' lived according to standards established by the growing middle class.<sup>42</sup>

If the middle class became more socially diverse, its relative unity was derived politically, owing to what might be called the imagined ideological community created by the class culture of the time. McKibbin has shown that traditional and non-traditional middle classness represented different mentalities and modes of behaviour – the former conservative and politically pessimistic, the latter relaxed and aware of its modernity. The shift from traditional to non-traditional, he argues, also represented the changing character of the middle class over the inter-war years. Yet one factor was able to unite the middle classes and remained more or less constant throughout this period, and this was their anti-working class attitude.<sup>43</sup> McKibbin has stood out among recent scholars for his insistence on the continued primacy of class in shaping inter-war cultural identities. His work is an important reminder that, despite the emergence of a national media culture, more socially variegated forms of cultural association and identification persisted in inter-war Britain.

If inter-war scholarship has generally moved away from a focus on class as Britons' primary social identity, the most prominent exception to this has been the recent work on the changing role of domestic service in post-World War I society. Here, the differing attitudes between servants and masters on the issue of the 'servant problem' are impossible to escape. Adrian Bingham has discussed the role of the press in mediating the debate over whether or not working-class women ought to be forced to take work in domestic service, even if they had no inclination or training in the field.<sup>44</sup> Alison Light's microhistory of the novelist Virginia Woolf's

<sup>42</sup> S. Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain, 1860–1940* (Cambridge, 1996; 2000 edn.), pp. 546–58. For the economic development of the south, see P. Scott, *Triumph of the South: a Regional Economic History of Early 20th Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2007). Historians offer differing views of the impact of new industries on the populations of the depressed industrial centres of the north and west: on the one hand, some of the job security enjoyed by workers in the south, such as in transport services and house-building, spread to towns in south Wales and Lancashire (Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 276–7); on the other hand, most new industries were too efficient to absorb a significant proportion of the unemployed (McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 126–7). For a detailed discussion of 'labour transference', including as a government policy, see W. R. Garside, *British Unemployment, 1919–39: a Study in Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 9; and a regional study of inter-war depression, S. Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales* (Cardiff, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, chs. 2–3, esp. pp. 44–7, 67–9.

<sup>44</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*.

tempestuous relationship with her servants explores the vacillating feelings of guilt, dependence, anger, superiority and love that Woolf felt towards the women employed by her own and her sister Vanessa Bell's households.<sup>45</sup> Most recently, Lucy Delap has documented the evolution of 'domestic service humour' in inter-war popular culture. In their different ways, she argues, the time-worn mocking of servants in publications such as *Punch*, read by the 'educated, servant-keeping classes', and the mockery of both servant and master in bawdy music-hall performances and in the cheap comic press were 'vehicle[s] for managing and negotiating emotional and social investments in the precarious institution of service'.<sup>46</sup> Delap's reading of the fragility of the institution of service offers a different perspective on Selina Todd's recent suggestion that inter-war servants were less emotionally and socially invested in the institution of service than has previously been assumed. Rather than inhabiting a distinct social realm characterized by either deference or defiance, Todd presents service as just another job, and servants as defined principally by their detachment from their employment and their private aspirations to self-improvement. In this respect, inter-war servants had much in common with their increasingly lower-middle-class employers.<sup>47</sup>

Any exploration of domestic service invariably gives rise to the question of gender relations. The inter-war years were a crucial period in the renegotiation of gender boundaries in Britain, as older, principally propertied women received the franchise in 1918, and ultimately all women were granted the vote in 1928. Feminist advances were not limited to the suffrage; the inter-war period also witnessed the increased agency of women in the social processes of nation-building. As Susan Pedersen has argued, the British state responded to – or manipulated – women's struggle to attain social citizenship after 1918 by creating a 'gender-based model of welfare provision' that entrenched a state-defined understanding of gender relations for a generation. The methods used to administer welfare to women were influenced by the wartime strategies of voluntary middle-class social workers, who insisted on upholding the notion of the male as breadwinner and, in his absence or death, the wife's moral rectitude; thus, the extension of such social benefits in the 1920s to civilian as well as servicemen's widows enabled the authorities to create 'a logic of social citizenship' that continually renewed both the status of the male social

<sup>45</sup> A. Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants* (2007).

<sup>46</sup> L. Delap, 'Kitchen sink laughter: domestic service humor in 20th-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, xlix (2010), 623–54, at p. 627.

<sup>47</sup> S. Todd, 'Domestic service and class relations in Britain 1900–50', *Past & Present*, cciii (2009), 182–204.

citizen and the role of the state in moral surveillance. By operating within the ostensibly progressive debate about women's citizenship, and perhaps safe in the knowledge that claimant scrutiny of the authorities' controlling motives was muffled by the real material benefits gained, the state was able to use the heightened topicality of women's concerns after 1918 to mediate social norms more widely.<sup>48</sup>

Feminists tried to make a positive case for recognizing women's unique contribution to the nation. While the 'equal rights' feminists centred around the Six Point Group continued to emphasize gender equality, the New Feminists, led by Eleanor Rathbone, argued that housewifery – wifehood and motherhood – was a function that merited full citizenship.<sup>49</sup> In doing so, some historians have argued, the New Feminist case inadvertently bolstered the conservative nature of gender discourses, according to which the male citizen remained a public figure distinct from women rooted in their private worlds of domesticity.<sup>50</sup> However, women also participated in bottom-up processes of nation-building, as the more recent histories of the changing quotidian lives and life-cycles of women show. After the war, it became common for working-class women, many of them leaving domestic service, to enter the industrial workplace and stay in employment until marriage (at the average age of twenty-four). As Todd argues, 'young women's understanding of their value as wage-earners, breadwinners and workers fuelled their claims to economic independence as well as political citizenship'. Many joined trade unions and became active in workplace politics.<sup>51</sup> Socially and culturally, through her habits in fashion and leisure, the young female worker contributed to Britain's first 'youth culture' and to a working class that was, like the middle class, aware of its own modernity. The decline of live-in domestic service in the 1920s also forced more women, including in the middle classes, to take up the role of active housewife. But, in a trend that both constituted and reflected the rise of the new middle class, phenomena like the 'companionate marriage', 'creative housekeeping' and household consumerism were *embraced* by many housewives in the

<sup>48</sup> S. Pedersen, 'Gender, welfare, and citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, xcvi (1990), 983–1006; also her *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–45* (Cambridge, 1993) and, on the significance of gender more generally in histories of nation-building and state formation, A. Kessler-Harris, 'What is gender history now?', in *What is History Now?*, ed. D. Cannadine (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 104–8.

<sup>49</sup> C. Law, *Suffrage and Power: the Women's Movement, 1918–28* (2000). On Rathbone, see S. Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven, Conn., 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*; H. L. Smith, 'British feminism in the 1920s', in *British Feminism in the 20th Century*, ed. H. L. Smith (Aldershot, 1990), pp. 47–65.

<sup>51</sup> S. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918–50* (Oxford, 2005), p. 13.



1930s, presaging the notion – common by the 1950s – of ‘a happy home and family life [as] the bulwark of a nation’.<sup>52</sup>

These social changes are important in understanding the processes and language of political nation-building. The construction of discourses cannot be separated from the subjectivity either of politicians’ aims or the way they perceived shifting demographics. For Labour, unlike many Conservatives, the figure of the female ‘worker-citizen’ was a promising development; for the Conservatives, meanwhile, rising levels of homeownership proved to be one of the most beneficial legacies of the inter-war years.<sup>53</sup> But the concept of social *identity* has arguably been more important than the narrative of social change in understanding the inter-war generation. Witness, for example, the fact that many homeowners, by their practices and in defiance of the *embourgeoisement* theory, continued to think of themselves as ‘working class’ – a reminder of the assumption, at the heart of the methodologies of recent research, that ‘class’ is not a given analytic category but a discursive construct.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the people whom politicians addressed also need to be investigated in terms of their own subjectivities. This is why historians, including those discussed so far in this section, have turned to cultural categories to assess the formation of social identities. These ‘social and cultural’ histories provide insights into the influences at work on the British population, and how the people responded.<sup>55</sup>

### *Constructing a ‘national culture’*

The most unmistakably new stimulus was that of the mass media and its role in shaping public opinion in the newly democratic polity. Indeed, the national media was arguably the principal vehicle driving the creation of

<sup>52</sup> The last quotation comes from a Mass-Observation witness in C. Langhamer, ‘The meanings of home in postwar Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, xl (2005), 341–62, at p. 344; J. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> A. Bingham, “‘Stop the flapper vote folly’: Lord Rothermere, the *Daily Mail*, and the equalization of the franchise, 1927–8”, *Twentieth Century British History*, xiii (2002), 17–37; J. Ramsden, “‘A party for owners or a party for earners?’ How far did the British Conservative party really change after 1945?”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxxvii (1987), 49–63.

<sup>54</sup> See the discussion of self-defined class identity in J. Lawrence, ‘The British sense of class’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxv (2000), 307–18; and J. Hinton, ‘The “class” complex: Mass Observation and cultural distinction in pre-war Britain’, *Past & Present*, cxlix (2008), 207–36.

<sup>55</sup> On the cultural turn in social history, see P. Mandler, ‘The problem with cultural history’, *Cultural and Social History*, i (2004), 94–117; and for a trenchant response to this and the cultural turn more generally, see P. Joyce, ‘What is the social in social history?’, *Past & Present*, ccvi (2010), 213–48, at p. 218.

a more truly national culture in the 1920s and 1930s. As LeMahieu has argued,

Class, region, generation, and personal idiosyncrasy each contributed to a complex national culture. It was during the interwar era and especially in the 1930s, however, that a relatively new element [the mass media] became part of this configuration. The common culture of the 1930s did not displace traditional patterns of taste as much as provide unifying points of reference among them.<sup>56</sup>

By the late 1930s, three out of four households possessed a licensed radio set, and not only the working classes, but two-thirds of the middle classes, read at least one of the four most popular broadsheet newspapers (the *Daily Express*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mail* and *News Chronicle*).<sup>57</sup> For the first time, women were reading newspapers in nearly the same proportions as men, with the publishers, as Bingham's work has shown, naturally seeking to appeal to this newly feminized market.<sup>58</sup> In addition to women, young people became an increasingly important market in the inter-war period. In his contribution to this volume, Bingham explores the success of the *Daily Mirror* after its makeover as a youthful populist paper in the late 1930s, and its emergence as a particularly important source of news and information for Britain's youth.

The radio and cinema also played central roles in popularizing a potential source of national culture. By 1939, an average of 23 million Britons, out of a population of just under 50 million, went to the cinema each week. Women, young people and members of the working class saw more films than the older, wealthier and better educated; nonetheless, the middle classes were frequent cinemagoers throughout this period as well.<sup>59</sup> Film stars became national celebrities, and the middle and working classes both sought to emulate the styles of dress and language portrayed on the silver screen.<sup>60</sup> These fashions – many imported from America – were further diffused in the pages of the daily and weekly journals, cementing a symbiotic relationship between the press and the world of film. The commercial impetus behind much inter-war cultural production was also evident beyond the film and journalism industries. Chris Hilliard, for instance, has shown how the commercialization of publishing in this period fostered

<sup>56</sup> LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, p. 332.

<sup>57</sup> Beers, *Your Britain*, pp. 14–20.

<sup>58</sup> A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> J. Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930–9* (1984), pp. 11–17.

<sup>60</sup> S. Alexander, 'Becoming a woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s', in *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones; F. Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), pp. 108ff.

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a democratization of poetic, fictional and autobiographical writing, as working-class and provincial men and women, previously circumscribed from literary society, were now drawn in through writers' clubs, magazines, guidebooks and correspondence schools. Hilliard identifies a working-class literary world at once more crassly commercial and less 'intellectual' than that described by Jonathan Rose, but which nonetheless offered inspiration and uplift to a wide group of men and women.<sup>61</sup>

The British dance hall industry did not escape the broader commercialization of culture in the inter-war period, as large dance hall chains popped up across Britain. The emergence of dance halls in Britain has been associated with Americanization. However, as James Nott has argued, the British responded to the American musical incursion by reasserting a 'distinctively British popular music'.<sup>62</sup> Allison Abra's recent work further considers the British commercial dance industry that emerged in the inter-war period. Although these dances, including most famously the Lambeth Walk, were commercially successful, Abra contends that inter-war Britons could see through the synthetic nature of Mecca's cultural productions. Her study of the reception of Mecca's novelty dances suggests that 'the public equally had agency in determining what vision of the nation they would accept, transform or simply reject'.<sup>63</sup>

Nott's and Abra's work brings commercial dance into the ongoing debate over the extent of 'producer' versus 'consumer' sovereignty within the so-called culture industry. While most would accept that the producers and disseminators of commercial cultural had near unprecedented influence in inter-war Britain, scholars have tended to emphasize the importance of consumer choice in shaping media and other cultural content in this period. Thus, while LeMahieu and McKibbin disagree in many respects about the evolution of inter-war culture, both argue that the BBC evolved in the 1920s in response to consumer demands. Despite the BBC's broadcast monopoly, inter-war Britons could, and did, listen to pirate radio stations broadcasting from the Normandy coast. As Nott has shown, the BBC did play dance and jazz music in the 1920s, and began experimenting with the production of musical comedy and variety programming, but entertainment remained

<sup>61</sup> C. Hilliard, 'Modernism and the common writer', *Historical Journal*, xlviii (2005), 769–87; C. Hilliard, *To Exercise our Talents: the Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn., 2001).

<sup>62</sup> J. J. Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 2002), p. 232.

<sup>63</sup> A. Abra, 'Doing the Lambeth Walk: novelty dances and the British nation', *Twentieth Century British History*, xx (2009), 346–9, at p. 369.

only one element in a mix of programming that also including extensive didactic (and often frankly esoteric) talk. While the BBC director-general John Reith saw this balance of programming as a crucial component of his plans to use the BBC as a vehicle of cultural uplift and education, listeners made clear that 'national culture' could not be dictated from Broadcasting House. The decline in popularity of pirate radio in the 1930s reflects the responsiveness of the BBC to listener demands for more light entertainment in the broadcast schedule. ('Between 1930 and 1933 there were only 3 musical comedies adapted for radio; in 1934 alone the BBC broadcast 24 musical comedies.'<sup>64</sup>)

American cultural influences were everywhere apparent in inter-war Britain, as was the case increasingly throughout Europe.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps the only cultural arena that remained immune from Americanization was sport, where Britain's closest links remained with the empire, not the United States.<sup>66</sup> The success of domestically produced variety programming on the 1930s BBC, and the substantial market for British cinema, suggests an appetite on the part of the British public for a cultural product that, while 'modern' and cosmopolitan, was not merely an American import.<sup>67</sup> Peter Bailey has emphasized the hybridity of inter-war tastes, arguing that British music hall audiences were capable of appreciating the slick American performances of men like Fats Waller while still cherishing the traditionally British humour of Harry Champion.<sup>68</sup> Although British culture borrowed heavily from the United States, the result was less a straightforward 'Americanization' than the creation of a uniquely British mass culture, typified, Bingham argues in this volume, in the *Daily Mirror*.

While the new mass culture was undeniably 'modern' and national in its reach, it was not perforce progressive. There were still those who saw the potential of new media in distinctly didactic terms. Under Reith, the BBC took upon itself the role of educating society in the traditions of 'rational recreation', in order to foster a view of 'culture as a form of

<sup>64</sup> LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, p. 289 and ch. 6; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 462–7.

<sup>65</sup> V. de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

<sup>66</sup> R. Holt, *Sport and the British: a Modern History* (Oxford, 1989); D. Birley, *Playing the Game: Sport in British Society, 1914–45* (Manchester, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> On film, see LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, ch. 6; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, ch. 11; Richards, *Age of the Dream Palace*.

<sup>68</sup> P. Bailey, 'Fats Waller meets Harry Champion: Americanization, national identity and sexual politics in interwar British music hall', *Cultural and Social History*, iv (2007), 495–509. See also the other contributions to this special edition on Anglo-American cultural exchange from Chris Waters, Sian Nicholas, Roger Fagge, Andrew Davies and Laura Nym Mayhall.

self-improvement, a means of personal and social discipline'.<sup>69</sup> Nor was intellectual well-being the only concern pursued by public educators through the new media: physical fitness mattered, too. As Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska shows in her *Managing the Body*, debates about health outlived Edwardian anxieties about 'national efficiency' and became part of the effort to promote responsible citizenship after the war. An 'A1 citizen' – unlike a 'C3 anti-citizen' – promised an 'A1 nation'.<sup>70</sup> The exercise and life reform enthusiasts discussed by Zweiniger-Bargielowska were the popular faces of a broader initiative to redefine British society in the inter-war years. Daniel Ussishkin's chapter in this volume shows how sociologists and industrial theorists also made use of evolving notions of 'national efficiency' to posit a central role for 'morale' in both industrial and social policy.

While the new media may have provided a forum for intellectuals and enthusiasts, the views of these men and women were not always embraced by their target audiences. Stefan Collini has identified a generalized hostility to the idea of the public intellectual in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s, and particularly to the Bloomsbury 'highbrows', whose ecstatic avant-garde culture (not to mention their carnal predilections) was at odds with Reith's insistence on culture with a 'moral character'.<sup>71</sup> It is these 'highbrow' intellectuals who form the subject of Richard Overy's *The Morbid Age*. Overy paints a picture of inter-war Britain as a nation teetering under the weight of intellectual doom and gloom. 'Morbid' intellectuals such as Maurice Dobb, Aldous Huxley, Arnold Toynbee and the Webbs brooded anxiously over the inevitable collapse of capitalism and democratic society, drawn to the utopianism of Soviet Russia and fascist Italy.<sup>72</sup> Yet while it is these men and women whose names are most easily recalled and whose writing has survived into the twenty-first century, many middle-brow writers were as, if not more, influential at the time. One of these, as Gary Love's chapter identifies, was the Conservative historian and essayist J. A. R. Marriott. The continued market for his Whiggish histories illustrates a persistent optimism that the British system of representative government could evolve to meet the challenges of mass democracy.

<sup>69</sup> D. L. LeMahieu, 'John Reith (1889–1971): entrepreneur of collectivism', in *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, ed. S. Pedersen and P. Mandler (1994), p. 195.

<sup>70</sup> I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880–1939* (Oxford, 2011), chs. 4–7.

<sup>71</sup> S. Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 5; LeMahieu, 'John Reith'. Also M. T. Saler, *The Avant-garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Overy, *Morbid Age*.

This optimism is perhaps most evident in studies of men and women who devoted their lives to working within the existing political framework to change public perceptions and to direct national priorities towards those causes in which they believed. Helen McCarthy's work on the League of Nations Union has shown how an extra-governmental body used modern organizational and publicity techniques to mobilize British citizens behind an agenda of international co-operation.<sup>73</sup> Yet an increased awareness of international affairs could be a double-edged sword. During the First World War, the popular press had fuelled jingoism and racial animosity. After the war, the media reported on events in Russia in a manner slated to make readers hostile to and suspicious of the Soviet Union. The implications of this media coverage for the evolution of the broad-based Fight the Famine Council, initially formed to combat malnourishment and famine in eastern Europe and Russia, into a narrower organization focused on combating child poverty are discussed in Ellen Boucher's chapter. Here, public opinion conscribed the limits of the possible for the council, and later for the Save the Children Fund (SCF), as British citizens proved reluctant to support aid to Russia or to parts of the former Austro-Hungarian empire. The democratization of Britain and of the British press opened up the scope for greater participation in organized, popular internationalism as more people became informed about international affairs. However, the nature of their sources of information meant that many individuals had deeply prejudiced understandings of the international situation and arguably grew less inclined to be sympathetic to their fellow man than if they had remained 'ignorant' of international politics altogether. Ultimately, the Save the Children Fund's focus on child poverty allowed it to eschew international politics and to focus on the universal humanity of children.

The difficulties faced by the SCF underscore another reality of inter-war culture: while the mass culture provided opportunities for some, it was not always either tolerant or inclusive. Whereas, up to the equalization of the franchise in 1928, the constitution was arbiter of who 'belonged' within the nation, it was clear that editors, producers, publicists and promoters, through the selection of media content, could now seek to dictate what, and hence who, was included in the corpus of national culture. Black Britons were largely excluded and therefore, as Marc Matera explores in his chapter, sought alternative media through which the black diaspora community could negotiate a place for itself in ideas of the British nation. Similarly, as Matt Houlbrook's work shows, not only were homosexual Britons generally

<sup>73</sup> H. McCarthy, 'Democratising British foreign policy: rethinking the peace ballot, 1934–5', *Journal of British Studies*, xlix (2010), 358–87.

excluded from mainstream media, but, insofar as they appeared in the press, they were reported in the context of courtroom proceedings. This, he writes, ensured that ‘public knowledge of “homosexuality” was framed by an overarching narrative of sexual danger’. Queer urban culture thus became the ‘abject *outside* of Britishness’.<sup>74</sup> In the political sphere, Laura Beers has shown how the media fostered fears about left-wing politics, and prejudices against organized labour.<sup>75</sup> In this volume, she examines the ways in which the press retarded women’s political progress in the inter-war period by playing to and perpetuating stereotypes about ‘frivolous’ women, uninterested in politics. Arguably the press were only seeking to cater to the market as they understood it – if women preferred human-interest stories to political news, it did not make economic sense to print serious political news in publications targeted towards women readers. Further, as Billie Melman’s work has shown and as both Beers and Lucy Delap further develop in this volume, prejudicial attitudes about gender difference were by no means limited to the press.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, Beers’s chapter raises questions about the way in which gendered assumptions about men’s and women’s capacity for political citizenship were inculcated and reified in the modern era.

Delap’s chapter similarly explores continuities and change in attitudes towards gender in inter-war Britain. Drawing on publications such as the *Church Times* and the *English Churchman*, as well as public statements and writings by Anglican men and women, she explores the persistent gender conservatism within the Anglican Church. While she notes the progressive shift in many Anglicans’ attitudes towards overtly misogynous practices, such as the vows of obedience made by wives in the Anglican marriage ceremony, she concludes that inter-war women as well as men continued to adhere to a ‘conviction in divergent sexual qualities and suspicion of female authority figures, though this was now presented as a customary and commonsensical rather than scientifically backed belief’. Writing more than twenty years ago, Alison Light picked up on the paradoxes of a ‘conservative modernity’ in literature that expanded roles for women while also narrowly circumscribing what it meant to be ‘feminine’.<sup>77</sup> Beers and Delap find similar contradictions in the attitudes towards women in the popular and religious press.

<sup>74</sup> M. Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–57* (Chicago, Ill., 2005), p. 239 (authors’ emphasis) and see ch. 9 in particular.

<sup>75</sup> Beers, ‘Counter-Toryism’; Beers, *Your Britain*.

<sup>76</sup> B. Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke, 1988).

<sup>77</sup> A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (1991).

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the idea that public media forged collective identities comes from recent explorations that stress the multiplicity of social experiences. The memory of war, for instance, has long been conceptualized as a combination of collective grief and disillusionment leading to pacifism, constructed through the ‘canonical’ literature of Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon. But studies of commemoration activities have revealed a disaggregated and frequently conflictual process. National and local methods of memorializing, often dictated by elites who sidelined the families of the bereaved, brought into play class, religious, political and other divides. As Adrian Gregory has argued, ‘although literary works played a part in developing [popular] interpretations’ of the war, ‘Depictions of Britain in the 1920s as a traumatized society, with a shattered sense of itself, should be understood for what they are: constructions to cover up a much more complex social reality of winners and losers, continuities and changes.’<sup>78</sup>

Inter-war Britain was a pluralist mass society, but a mass society all the same. Historians trying to make sense of this apparent contradiction have turned to the concept of ‘selfhood’, the site of much innovative research in recent years. According to this, people would use available cultural resources to construct narratives of and for themselves, a process of self-fashioning rendered infinitely richer by the proliferation of mass media in the 1920s and 1930s. The practice of so-called ‘cultivated’ reading has long been regarded as a mark of the self-construction (and social mobility) of the autodidact or working-class radical; but so too, Houlbrook argues, should historians recognize that the consumption of, and ‘creative engagement’ with, allegedly lesser genres – romantic fiction, Hollywood films – enabled individuals to forge a sense of self. Thus, fiction was not just a form of ‘escapism’: it offered a critical perspective through which to negotiate one’s place in the world.<sup>79</sup>

An older form of self-fashioning, certainly critical to the Victorians’ sense of self, now suffered at the hand of media-driven selfhood. In the most recent major work on British (and more especially English) secularization, S. J. D. Green highlights the decline in church attendance among women, especially the young and married. The real significance of this finding is located in the ‘common Victorian understanding of married women as the

<sup>78</sup> A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 257, 272, and see ch. 8. For the key contributions on the ‘literary’ and ‘social’ interpretations of war memory, see, respectively, P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) and A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: the Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>79</sup> M. Houlbrook, “‘A pin to see the peepshow’: culture, fiction and selfhood in Edith Thompson’s letters, 1921–2”, *Past & Present*, ccvii (2010), 215–49.



religious representation of their families in public acts of worship', for fewer female observants gestures towards a more 'pervasive de-institutionalisation' of religion in society (though not wholesale secularization). As Delap shows in this volume, many women did remain invested in religious communities in the inter-war period, but increasingly they sought to challenge the traditional Victorian understandings of women's role, both within the church and in society more broadly. Green recognizes the increasing number of alternative forms of worship, both institutional and non-institutional, available by the mid twentieth century. The real change, however, was the decline of 'puritanism' in the national character, a result of increased material concerns fostered through engagement with the mass media. By the 1940s, 'the British generally, and the English especially, rejected the ideal of abstinence ... they increasingly defined "self-denial" solely in terms of the denial of the self'.<sup>80</sup>

This self-indulgent hedonism takes centre-stage in Martin Pugh's recent study *We Danced All Night: a Social History of Britain between the Wars*. Pugh does not whitewash the serious uncertainty and doubt engendered by the experience of total war – he opens his book with the caveat that 'behind the gaiety, exuberance and irresponsibility of post-war social life lurked a pervasive undercurrent of pessimism, the inevitable consequence of the devastating human impact of four years of mass war'.<sup>81</sup> Yet, for him, the signal characteristic of the age is not this undercurrent but the possibilities and positive reforms that coursed above it, particularly for women.<sup>82</sup>

While Pugh's characters are more concerned with family planning and the availability of mortgages than with national or international politics, they share with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin a conservative optimism and belief in British exceptionalism that, as Peter Mandler has noted, was perceived as particularly 'English'. Mandler suggests that the late 1920s and 1930s saw the 'triumph' of Baldwin's 'specific depiction' of the

<sup>80</sup> S. J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c.1920–1960* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 80, 178, ch. 4 *passim*. Even so, as Matthew Grimley has argued, 'puritanism' remained a powerful if latent component of the 'discursive Christianity' that continued to dominate ideas of the national character until 1945 and, Callum Brown would argue, the 1960s (see M. Grimley, 'The religion of Englishness: puritanism, providentialism, and "national character", 1918–45', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv (2007), 884–906; C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (2000)).

<sup>81</sup> M. Pugh, *We Danced All Night: a Social History of Britain between the Wars* (2008), p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> On inter-war women, see also C. Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England 1920–60* (Manchester, 2000). Susan Pedersen has argued that Pugh's record does unduly whitewash the negative side of inter-war British life, and particularly the social hardships faced by millions of Britain's unemployed ('A Babylonian torch', *London Review of Books*, xxx, no. 21 (6 Nov. 2008), 21–2).

English national character as defined by ‘common sense, good temper, ordered freedom, [and] progress’.<sup>83</sup> As discussed above, many scholars have attributed Baldwin’s phenomenal political success to his ability to articulate and embody a vision of the nation that resonated with a substantial constituency of British voters. Yet Baldwin’s imagined nation was perforce a partial and distorted representation, a reality underscored by his frequent recourse to the term ‘English’ to embody a country of four nations that governed over an empire spanning a quarter of the globe. The following section explores the interrelationship between Britain and her empire in the inter-war period, and the impact of the empire on domestic and imperial concepts of nationality and the nation state.

*British imperialists and imperial Britons*

The experience of the First World War and the subsequent enthusiasm for pacifism and internationalism meant that ‘muscular imperialism’ did not play the same role in national identity in inter-war Britain as it had in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.<sup>84</sup> Rather than defining Britain as an imperial power, inter-war statesmen presented the nation state as a defender of democracy against the threat of both Bolshevik and fascist authoritarianism. Yet, while British national identity may no longer have fashioned itself through antagonism with the French and German empires, inter-war Britain remained an imperial power. A central aim of this volume is to reconcile the domestic and imperial influences on British identity. Britain’s imperial status had profound implications in terms of both how Britons understood themselves and how Britain’s imperial subjects and Commonwealth allies understood their relationship with the metropole. The importance of the empire to British and imperial identity was recently emphasized by Thomas Hajkowski in his study of *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922–53*, which focuses on the use of broadcast technology to reinforce imperial ties.<sup>85</sup> Yet the relationship between Britain and the empire was not limited to the realm of culture. Nationalist movements in the colonies drew on metropolitan models of governance even while

<sup>83</sup> P. Mandler, *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), p. 151.

<sup>84</sup> Notably, while G. R. Searle’s contribution to the *New Oxford History of England, A New England? Peace and War 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004), casts both international and domestic politics through the lens of imperial competition, neither McKibbin’s *Classes and Cultures* (originally intended as the inter-war volume of the *New Oxford History*) nor his more recent *Parties and People* gives much attention to empire. On inter-war pacifism and internationalism, see M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–45* (Oxford, 1980); Overy, *Morbid Age*.

<sup>85</sup> T. Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922–53* (Manchester, 2010).

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rejecting British rule; increased immigration from the colonies to the metropole created new racial and cultural challenges in inter-war Britain; and the continued importance placed on Commonwealth co-operation created new challenges as officials across the Commonwealth sought to forge institutions that would preserve traditional allegiances while allowing room for autonomous development and decision-making.

The British empire reached its widest extent between the wars. The secret negotiations between Britain, France and Russia to divide up the Middle East into spheres of influence that culminated in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 were formally repudiated after the Bolsheviks released copies of the agreement in November 1917. In practice, however, the British and French plans were largely carried out through the implementation of the League of Nations mandates system. Most famously, the formerly Ottoman territories of Mesopotamia, Palestine and Transjordan became British mandates, as did several former German provinces in Africa. Article 22 of the League of Nations charter stipulated that the mandatory powers undertake the 'tutelage' of the territories placed under their trusteeship, ensuring the 'well-being and development' of their inhabitants. How (or whether) the obligations of trusteeship were fulfilled varied across time and space. The only constant was the considerable energy and expenditure required to administer the mandates, at a time when the British government was already committing reserves of both to combating the burgeoning nationalist sentiment in India, as well as the growth of the anti-colonial movement in Africa. Within the Commonwealth, as the confederation of self-governing states under the British crown gradually came to be known in the early twentieth century, the former colonies were also seeking to redefine their relationship with the metropole.<sup>86</sup> Although the ties between Britain and Canada, Australia and New Zealand in particular remained close, changing patterns of international trade and economic obligations incurred by Britain during the First World War left London more dependent on empire than the other way around.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, the growing number of non-white immigrants to Britain from the empire raised new questions about the meaning of Britishness, and the role of race in national identity.

<sup>86</sup> While the British Commonwealth of Nations was formally established with the Treaty of Westminster in 1931, the term Commonwealth had been increasingly used to describe the collective of self-governing crown nations over the previous two decades.

<sup>87</sup> On the changed economic relationship between metropole and empire post-1914, see N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (1998). On the continued close relationship between Britain and the settler colonies in the inter-war period, see A. G. Hopkins, 'Rethinking decolonization', *Past & Present*, cc (2008), 211–47; P. Buckner and R. D. Francis, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005).

It is impossible to understand the development of the British nation in the inter-war period without taking into account the changing role of empire within British national consciousness and experience.

Over the past several decades, the so-called imperial turn in British studies has focused historians' attention on the mutually constitutive relationship, or the 'connexity', between Britain and her empire to an unprecedented degree. In its initial phase, in the 1980s and 1990s, the imperial turn was strongly influenced by post-colonial theory and by modes of analysis borrowed from literary studies. Building upon the work of Edward Said, as well as the earlier analyses of scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, such scholarship sought to 'subject the language of the colonizers to critical scrutiny, deconstructing representative texts and exposing the discursive designs that underlie their surface narratives'.<sup>88</sup> Too often, scholars did not have to look hard to find racist, exoticizing or patriarchal imperial subtexts in literature, art, advertising, leisure activities and other manifestations of British culture. In that such studies had a temporal focus, it tended to be the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth centuries – although a critique of this brand of 'new imperial history' has been its 'failure to contextualize over space and time'.<sup>89</sup> For the early twentieth century, the principal locus of post-colonial analysis has been the Boer War and the racism that both fed it and was fed by it; until recently 'the interwar years [had been] a period in British imperial history that remain[ed] curiously neglected'.<sup>90</sup> While such studies present a picture of a metropolitan culture permeated by empire, Bernard Porter has argued that they overstate the prevalence of the empire in the life of the average Briton.<sup>91</sup> New imperial historians, he contended, overestimate what Peter Mandler has called the 'relative "throw" – the weight or significance' of the texts on which they have based

<sup>88</sup> D. Kennedy, 'Imperial history and post-colonial theory', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxiv (1996), 345–63, at p. 349. E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978); F. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris, 1952); F. Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris, 1961); F. Fanon, *Pour la révolution africaine* (Paris, 1964); A. Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé par portrait du colonisateur* (Paris, 1957).

<sup>89</sup> R. Price, 'One big thing: Britain, its empire and their imperial culture', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv (2006), 602–27, at p. 619.

<sup>90</sup> B. Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919–45* (1999), p. 3. On the Boer War, see S. Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism, and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (Basingstoke, 2003); P. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge, 2004); J. Schneer, *London 1900: the Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).

<sup>91</sup> B. Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004).

their conclusions, and as a consequence miss the Little England forest for the imperial trees.<sup>92</sup>

Porter's reading of Britain's *Absent-Minded Imperialists* caused considerable controversy within the field, and Catherine Hall in particular has been vocal in defending the centrality of the empire to Britons' cultural, emotional and intellectual lives.<sup>93</sup> Yet, in part in response to criticisms of decontextualized analyses, over the past ten or fifteen years the field has moved away from a strict focus on discourse to encompass, to name only a few examples:

monographs on the presence of colonial and ex-colonial peoples in metropolitan spaces; books on the impact of state-sponsored racial policies 'at home'; critiques of the imbrication of imperial politics on the making of domestic legislation; articles and essays on the role of spectacle in producing imperial citizens in the metropole; work on the influence of empire on romanticism, the novel, and 'English' literature more generally; and arguments that attempt to reorient the home/empire model by positing new concepts of political and social formation.<sup>94</sup>

In recent years, scholars have also increasingly sought to view the British empire through the lens of 'transnational networks', decentering Britain from its privileged place as the prime mover of imperial history, and instead examining the myriad ways in which the constituent parts of the empire equally influenced and were influenced by developments in what had previously been viewed as the metropole and the peripheries.<sup>95</sup> This scholarship has also drawn attention to the reality that the empire was only one of the networks in which Britain was enmeshed, and reasserted the centrality of European and international, particularly Anglo-American, connections to Britain's history.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Mandler, 'The problem with cultural history', at pp. 96–7.

<sup>93</sup> Catherine Hall's *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–67* (2002) was published before Porter's work. Since, she has published several texts specifically refuting Porter's analysis, including principally her edited volume with S. O. Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial Word* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>94</sup> A. Burton, 'Introduction: on the inadequacy and indispensability of the nation', in A. Burton, *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham, NC, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>95</sup> For a good conceptual discussion of the applicability of network theory to imperial studies, see A. Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford, 2008). For similar analyses focusing on the modern period, see T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2001); K. Grant, P. Levine and F. Trentmann, *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, 1860–1950* (Basingstoke, 2007); T. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Calif., 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, most scholars have continued to view the empire as the central sphere in Britain's international relations. Jon Parry has controversially posited that European relations retained their paramourcy over imperial concerns even in the heyday of empire (*The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830–86* (Cambridge, 2006)).

Finally, scholars of both the British and other empires have redirected attention to the central role of the state in building and sustaining imperial projects, and the importance of understanding how that state power was constructed, understood and maintained.<sup>97</sup> Certain of these studies have in particular broadened our understanding of the role of the empire and the Commonwealth, and of the citizens of these countries, in defining the new British nation as it emerged in the aftermath of the First World War; and, conversely, the impact of metropolitan developments on nationalist and anti-colonial movements in the empire. The following discussion surveys the literature on inter-war empire, with a particular focus on questions of national identity.

Issues of race and ethnicity are central to the question of how to define the British nation.<sup>98</sup> In central and southern Europe, the period between 1914 and 1945 saw formerly heterogeneous states transformed into much more ethnically homogeneous 'nation states'. As Tony Judt has emphasized, between 1945 and 1991, 'Thanks to war, occupation, boundary adjustments, expulsions and genocide, almost everybody [in continental Europe] now lived in their own country, among their own people'.<sup>99</sup> Yet, while much of continental Europe became less racially diverse over the course of the twentieth century (at least until the fall of the Iron Curtain opened the gates to a new wave of immigration in many European countries), the upsurge in immigration to Britain from the far-flung outposts of empire meant that the imperial metropolis became less and less a collective of men and women of a common descent, language, culture and history.

Of course, Great Britain was never truly a nation state in the sense of France or Prussia. Britain encompassed the traditional homelands of three distinct national groups – Englishmen, Scots and Welsh – and the 1801 Act of Union between Britain and Ireland brought several million Irishmen and women under crown rule. Even after the partition of Ireland in 1922, over a million Northern Irish remained British citizens, not to mention the millions of Irishmen and women who had emigrated to Britain over the past several centuries, and whose descendants continue to make up substantial

<sup>97</sup> Since Richard Price lamented the lack of such scholarship in 2006 ('One big thing', pp. 607ff.), several rich works have emerged on this theme, including M. Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, Ill., 2007); M. Wiener, *An Empire on Trial: Race, Murder, and Justice under British Rule, 1870–1935* (Cambridge, 2008); and Price's own *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in 19th-Century Africa* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> A. D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Boston, Mass., 2000).

<sup>99</sup> T. Judt, *Postwar: a History of Europe since 1945* (New York, 2006), p. 9.

minorities in cities such as Liverpool and Manchester. Each Celtic minority had its difficulties establishing a *modus vivendi* within a country whose culture and government were dominated by the English.<sup>100</sup> Yet, with the possible exception of the Irish, Celtic Britons had an easier time finding a place within the national community than did the many non-white citizens of the British empire who made their homes in Britain between the wars.

Since the publication of Paul Rich's *Race and Empire in British Politics* in 1986 and Paul Gilroy's *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* the following year, several studies have explored the political, social and cultural position of non-white immigrants in post-Second World War Britain.<sup>101</sup> In *'We Ask for British Justice': Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, Laura Tabili looks in depth at the changes in racial attitudes in inter-war Britain discussed by Rich and argues that the distinctions enshrined between white and non-white citizens of the empire in the twentieth century were not foreordained. In her reading, black men were not always 'archetypal strangers' within British society, nor was 'racial difference ... an ineluctable impediment to social harmony'.<sup>102</sup> Instead, the exclusion of 'black' British seamen (a category that encompassed not only Africans and Afro-Caribbeans, but also Asians and Arabs) from full British citizenship was contingent on a series of economic and political decisions taken in the inter-war period. The desire of British shipowners to lower their wage bill led them to embrace a racialized language of difference that identified blacks as particularly suited to unskilled labour. Ironically, the government's desire to curb this exploitation in turn led to the passage of legislation – the Coloured and Alien Seamen Order of 1925 and the Special Certificate of Nationality and Identity of 1932 – that formalized and institutionalized racial difference.

If the racism that emerged and solidified in the inter-war period was dictated by the logic of economic structures, so too, by that argument, were both the racial solidarity that emerged among non-white seamen in

<sup>100</sup> J. G. A. Pocock issued the clarion call for a 'four nations' approach to British history in 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *Journal of Modern History*, lxxiv (1975), 601–28. For a history of the British Isles that emphasizes the interaction between the four nations, see N. Davies, *The Isles: a History* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>101</sup> P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986); P. Gilroy, *'Ain't no Black in the Union Jack': the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987); K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY, 1997); R. Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain: the Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford, 2000). Despite its title, Panikos Panayi's *An Immigration History of Britain: Multicultural Racism since 1800* (New York, 2009) focuses on the post-war period.

<sup>102</sup> L. Tabili, *'We Ask for British Justice': Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), p. 2.

the 1920s and the evident racism of the Liverpool riots of June 1919, when white men and women attacked mixed-race dock communities, looting and terrorizing the homes of black Britons. When black men did band together to ‘ask for British justice’ it was because they had been pushed onto the defensive.<sup>103</sup>

Other scholars have questioned both the argument that racism was not present *a priori* in white British culture, and the representation of black solidarity as primarily a defensive movement. Barbara Bush begins her study of *Imperialism, Race and Resistance* in British Africa in the inter-war period by reiterating Albert Memmi’s conviction that ‘racism is not an incidental part of colonialism (the practical workings of imperialism), but a “constitutive part” – the “highest expression of the colonial system” and the basis of the “fundamental discrimination” between coloniser and colonised’.<sup>104</sup> She goes on to provide a detailed analysis of the ways in which institutionalized racism translated into colonial policy in South Africa, and in Nigeria and the former Gold Coast (now Ghana).

Susan Kingsley Kent has recently emphasized the persistence of racist attitudes in the metropole as well as in the colonies. In her reading, the various riots in port cities in 1919 – in Cardiff, South Shields and the East End, as well as in Liverpool – were clearly racially motivated, and driven by fears of not only economic but also sexual displacement, particularly on the part of white soldiers who returned to Britain after the war to find a conspicuous and threatening surge in interracial relationships. There were only around 10,000 black seamen living and working in Britain, most of whom were based in Liverpool and Cardiff, and scholars such as Jon Lawrence have argued that the extent of riotous behaviour in 1918–19 has been overstated. Nonetheless, for Kent, the riots are indicative of a broad-based racism and brutalization that emerged as a key outgrowth of the experience of war.<sup>105</sup>

Seamen, of course, made up only one-third to a half of non-white men and women in inter-war Britain. In addition to domestic servants and other low-wage labourers, imperial subjects were increasingly coming to Britain to study, and staying to work in the arts and the professions in the inter-war period. Once arrived in London (and the majority were based in London), black students and professionals frequently congregated, many staying in boarding houses such as the West African Students Union hostel in Camden

<sup>103</sup> Tabili, ‘*We Ask for British Justice*’, pp. 149–50.

<sup>104</sup> Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Kent, *Aftershocks*; J. Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain’, *Journal of Modern History*, lxxv (2003), 587–9.



Town, and often gaining political consciousness through their involvement with such groups. Susan Pennybacker's recent work on race and political culture in the imperial metropolis offers an insight into the process by which politically active blacks such as the Trinidad-born communist George Padmore, and the future Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta, constructed a narrative of international racial solidarity in the inter-war period.<sup>106</sup>

The transnational and international exchanges that Pennybacker highlights underscore the extent to which black activists in Britain were enmeshed in a project that went beyond reforming British racial attitudes. Further, in emphasizing the links between the anti-racist movement in the United States, campaigns against African slavery, resistance to Nazi racial policies and the international communist movement, Pennybacker greatly widens our understanding of the importance of Marxist thinking to much inter-war anti-colonial agitation. She expands our appreciation of the role of London as a hub for socialists and anti-imperialists from around the globe that Nicholas Owen had previously highlighted in his work on the British left and India,<sup>107</sup> and Barbara Bush had explored in her discussion of the African diaspora. Yet, as Marc Matera's contribution to this volume suggests, an emphasis on international co-operation can also obscure what was unique to the experience of black British subjects in the inter-war period. Matera highlights the differences in outlook and understanding that emerged between London's black intellectuals, who saw themselves as engaged in a specifically anti-imperialist project, and African-Americans such as the actor and singer Paul Robeson. The Trinidad-born writer and anti-colonial activist C. L. R. James summed up this sense of difference in his critique of Robeson as

not a colonial and [hence someone who] never really understood British imperialism. In fact, it took him a long time to grasp the damage done by a movie like *Sanders of the River* ... Paul was an American and a Westerner, not an African. As an American I don't think he understood what the British had done in the colonies and how wrong it all was, even though it was so like his own situation in America.<sup>108</sup>

While James and Robeson shared many of the same goals, the national and racial consciousness of black British activists was necessarily informed by their experiences as citizen-subjects of the British empire.

<sup>106</sup> S. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

<sup>107</sup> N. Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885–1947* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in M. Matera, 'Black intellectuals in the imperial metropolis and the debate over race and empire in *Sanders of the River*', pp. 246–7.

Of course, imperial bonds did not only have an impact on the development of national identities and notions of citizenship among black Britons. Of all of Britain's former colonies, India has received the greatest attention in imperial scholarship. While most of this work has focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several recent studies have shed new light on the relationship between Britain and India between the wars. Mrinalini Sinha's study of the international reaction to the 1927 publication of Katherine Mayo's scathing indictment of Hindu society's treatment of women, *Mother India*, highlights the unexpected interplay between Western and Indian politics. Sinha shows how middle-class Indian women, hitherto marginalized within a social system (supported by the British government) that privileged a male-dominated communal identity over an individualistic notion of citizenship, used Mayo's evidence of widespread sexual depravity to lobby for a national law protecting girls from child marriage that, for the first time, brought social legislation outside the bounds of the community and identified a universal set of rights and responsibilities for all Indian citizens. The use of the *Mother India* controversy to further the cause of women's emancipation within the sub-continent illuminates the importance of the "translational process" through which the supposedly generic concepts and practices of European modernity were both adopted and adapted in the colonial context'.<sup>109</sup> Martin Wiener's recent study, *An Empire on Trial: Race, Murder, and Justice under British Rule, 1870–1935*, similarly foregrounds this process of translation. Through a series of case studies, not only in India, but in Africa, the Caribbean and Australasia, Wiener shows how the empire's subject peoples were able to use the seemingly colour-blind letter of English law to expose and challenge the racism and hypocrisy of colonial rule. In each of these studies, the impact of the ideas and political language of the metropole are evident in the development of the anti-imperial movements of the inter-war period.

The links between the metropole and the white settler empire remained just as vital in the inter-war period. Scholars of the Atlantic world have emphasized the continued transatlantic connections between Britain and America.<sup>110</sup> But the continued linkages between Britain and the

<sup>109</sup> M. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: the Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Atlantic history emerged from 18th-century studies. Among the most notable of these are *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. D. Armitage and M. Braddick (Aldershot, 2nd edn., 2009); and B. Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005). Recent studies of modern transatlanticism include K. Burk, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (2007); and 'Beyond "Americanization": rethinking Anglo-American cultural exchange between the wars', *Cultural and Social History*, special issue, iv (2007).

## Introduction

Commonwealth have only recently come under similar scrutiny. To name only a very few examples, from the political, social and cultural spheres, respectively: Duncan Bell has drawn attention to the persistence of ambitions for a robust imperial union even after the collapse of the political campaign for a 'Greater Britain' in the late nineteenth century;<sup>111</sup> Andrew Thompson has highlighted the links in terms of personnel and finances between metropolitan and colonial branches of unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers through the inter-war period;<sup>112</sup> and Chris Hilliard's work on the publishing industry illustrates the extent to which imperial networks remained crucial to periodical publishers seeking outlets for syndication.<sup>113</sup> Ellen Boucher is currently completing a study of the treatment of inter-war 'child migrants' by the British state and by private welfare organizations such as Barnardo's, which illustrates the extent to which those groups still saw the white empire as a British space to which they could transplant these children. Recent apologies issued by Gordon Brown and the Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd to children who had been sent from Britain to Australia between 1930 and 1970, in many cases without their parents' consent, and suffered abuse or abandonment at the hands of Australian caretakers, show the extent to which the impacts of such policies continue to resonate.<sup>114</sup>

Fortunately, imperial exchanges were not always so controversial. Organizations such as the League of Empire fostered educational linkages within the settler empire through teacher and curriculum exchanges.<sup>115</sup> And Tamson Pietsch's contribution to this volume, on the Universities' Bureau of the British Empire, founded in 1912, illuminates the different ways in which such exchange operated at the level of higher education. While the League of Empire helped to bring a new brand of popular imperialism to millions of schoolchildren in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and beyond, the Universities' Bureau harked back to a nineteenth-century vision of an imperial elite – a small cadre of crown subjects educated, if not at Oxford

<sup>111</sup> D. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> A. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the mid-19th Century* (Harlow, 2005), ch. 3.

<sup>113</sup> C. Hilliard, 'The provincial press and the imperial traffic in fiction, 1870s–1930s', *Journal of British Studies*, xlviii (2009), 653–73.

<sup>114</sup> Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, div. no. 4, 6th ser. (24 Feb. 2010), col. 301; Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, *Debates*, xvi, 1st session, 6th period (16 Nov. 2009), 11647–50.

<sup>115</sup> M. Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Patriotic Leagues and the Evolution of Popular Patriotism and Imperialism in Great Britain 1914–32* (Kingston, Ont., forthcoming).

or Cambridge, then along Oxonian and Cantabrigian lines – who could all be trusted to share the same values and priorities. Richard Toye's study of Winston Churchill's often fraught relationship with the British empire highlights the extent to which a uniquely 'imperial mentality', inculcated from childhood, influenced his approach to both imperial and domestic policy throughout his long political career.<sup>116</sup> Like many men of his age and class, Churchill viewed imperial subjects as the, often ungrateful, beneficiaries of Britain's investment of manpower, resources and expertise, and thus had little natural sympathy with the growing anti-colonial movements in Africa, the Middle East and south Asia – particularly when, as was increasingly the case in the inter-war period, these movements turned to violence to destabilize the colonial regime and draw international attention to their cause. Toye cites a 1920 letter to Hugh Trenchard, chief of the air staff, in which Churchill lobbied for the use of gas bombs in Iraq on the grounds that such non-lethal 'punishment' was an appropriate response to the uprisings of 'recalcitrant natives' in the region.<sup>117</sup>

The consequences of what Priya Satia has called this 'official mindset' for the Iraqi mandate formed the subject of her recent monograph.<sup>118</sup> In this, she argued that the myopia and prejudices of the imperial establishment in Mesopotamia, an establishment reliant on an actively 'anti-empirical way of knowing', enabled the creation of an imperial administration premised on violence – one that came to believe 'official conspiracy theories' that painted the native population as untrustworthy, if not actively insurgent, and that led to an unprecedented reliance on aerial surveillance and bombardment. In this volume, she further explores the implications of the government's conspiratorial mindset in Iraq for its relationship with the public at home. Secrecy breeds secrecy, she argues. Just as the government relied on a web of hushed whispers in Arabia, it sought to secure public acquiescence in its policy by obscuring from the British press – and hence from the public – the details of government operations in the region. This 'agnotology', or officially fostered ignorance, was a sinister example of imperial policy corrupting domestic democracy.

In Satia's reading, British administrators in Arabia were largely indifferent to the 'trusteeship' aspect of their mandatory position in the region. Here, Satia's picture of imperial policy in Iraq contrasts with Aaron Windel's description of the debates over the role of co-operation in rural African societies in the inter-war period. In his chapter in this volume, Windel shows

<sup>116</sup> R. Toye, *Churchill's Empire: the World that Made him and the World he Made* (2010).

<sup>117</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, p. 145.

<sup>118</sup> P. Satia, *Spies in Arabia: the Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford, 2008).

that certain interested parties, in particular Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield), who served as colonial secretary from 1929 to 1931, and the retired Indian civil servant C. F. Strickland, who aided in drafting the Tanganyika Co-operative Societies Ordinance, believed that participation in local co-operatives had the potential to foster ideas of 'self-reliance, responsibility and citizenship' and increase a country's 'capacity for democratic self government'. The efforts of the second Labour government to foster co-operation in Africa were not solely spurred by altruism, and both the interests of the domestic British economy and the desire to subvert nationalist and pan-African movements in the continent informed support for it. However, Windel shows how the introduction of the mandate system served to shift the terms of debate about the goals and obligations of colonial governance.

Windel further highlights an often obscured reality of British colonial policy: the importance of party politics. His chapter explores the link between broader Labour policy and co-operative policy in Africa, and the contingent future of co-operative experiments after the collapse of the second Labour government. Too frequently imperial histories posit 'the colonial state' as an agent above or independent from domestic politics, although several recent studies have brought to the fore the interrelationship between the two. In addition to E. H. H. Green's work on Conservatism and the settler empire, and Owen's work on the Labour party and India, Philip Williamson's study of the formation of the National Government pays particular attention to the role of imperial policy as both a stumbling block to and a facilitator of co-operation between MacDonald, the Conservative party and individual Liberals.<sup>119</sup>

In emphasizing the importance of Article 22 of the League of Nations charter to the development of inter-war imperial policy, Windel endorses Susan Pedersen's argument that the League of Nations mandate system represented a significant move away from the imperial mindset of the nineteenth century.<sup>120</sup> Although the requirements that the mandatory powers oversee their new territories with an eye towards encouraging self-government and establishing democratic institutions were largely observed

<sup>119</sup> E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: the Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914* (1994); Owen, *British Left*; P. Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926–32* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> S. Pedersen, 'Modernity and trusteeship: tensions of empire in Britain between the wars', in *Moments of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, ed. M. Daunton and B. Rieger (2001), pp. 203–20; S. Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, cxii (2007), 1091–117. For an analysis of the league's impact on British foreign policy that goes beyond the mandate system, see P. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: the League of Nations in British Policy 1914–25* (Oxford, 2009).

in the breach, the existence of a commission to which the powers would annually have to justify their administration of the mandates, and where grievances could be aired and debated, created a discursive space in which the muscular imperialism of the previous century could no longer be openly defended. While Satia emphasizes the continued limitations on the information about imperial activity made available to the public, Pedersen focuses on the increased transparency compared to the previous period. Both, however, acknowledge the increasing importance of public opinion to imperial policy.

One of the central themes of this volume is the growing role of public opinion in shaping policy both at home and abroad. The advent of mass democracy after 1918 meant that inter-war Britons had an unprecedented opportunity to shape the development of the British nation. While 'public opinion' had always played a role in policy-making, the franchise reforms of 1918 and 1928 greatly expanded the scope of the political public. The emergence of a new mass media similarly expanded the number of voices claiming to speak for that public, and to articulate an agenda for both domestic and imperial reform. However, nation-building is not only about politics and policies. The chapters in this volume illuminate how Britons sought to redefine what it meant to be British, politically, socially and culturally, in both a domestic and broader imperial and international context. In so doing, they reassert the centrality and complexity of national identity in defining the history of inter-war Britain.

# 1. Political modernity and ‘government’ in the construction of inter-war democracy: local and national encounters

*Geraint Thomas*

The evolution of public politics over the course of the long nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows no sign of abating as an area of interest among political and, increasingly, cultural historians. Covering the period of enfranchisement that lasted from 1832 until 1918 (or 1928, the date of equal franchise for men and women) and the growth of mass media in the twentieth century, these historians’ fascination has essentially been with the relationship between ‘local’ and ‘centre’, ‘people’ and ‘politicians’. Frequently, their analysis has been conducted under the influence of, or while debating, the linguistic turn, postmodernism and a host of other -isms.<sup>1</sup> The inter-war period is a pivotal episode in the transformation they describe, as a time when the plebeian traditions of Victorian and Edwardian popular politics met the modernity of mass-scale political communication. The story that follows demonstrates the formative part played by this confrontation, and by the activists who negotiated it, in forging Britain’s modern democratic culture. From this arise the themes required for us to develop a more subtle awareness of the dynamics between locality and centre in the inter-war polity.

The inter-war Conservative party is considered a pioneering force in the development of new methods of mass political communication. Its wealth enabled it to move quickly towards a professional system of publicity departments, whose innovations set the pace and style of electioneering practice for a generation and more. Cinema newsreels, radio broadcasts

<sup>1</sup> For a synoptic discussion of the general subject matter, see J. Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: the Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009). For the key staging posts in this debate, see G. Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, in his *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 90–178; P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991); J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–67* (Cambridge, 1993); and J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998).

and publications printed in the latest ‘popular’ style were all deployed, with the content of public appeals tailored according to readings of social, cultural and demographic trends. Embodying this strategy was Stanley Baldwin, Conservative leader between 1923 and 1937, who became probably the most familiar political figure of the inter-war years and who is now credited with adapting the party’s public appeal to suit the brave new world of mass democracy.<sup>2</sup> The Labour party, we have tended to think, had an altogether more difficult task harnessing the advent of mass communication. Many in the early Labour party entertained a deep suspicion of the capitalist media, typically reflected in a fraught relationship with the press and its proprietors. But as Laura Beers’s work has shown, this is not to say that the party either lacked the initiative to exploit new media or failed to do so. True, the media’s ‘anti-socialist turn’ of the mid 1920s was the nadir of Labour’s public relations strategy, the combined result of an internal party victory for those suspicious of using the capitalist media to convert voters to socialism and the press’s own acquiescence in the Conservatives’ concerted ‘Red Scare’ campaigns. Yet, this difficult period simply brings into sharper focus the otherwise sophisticated nature of Labour’s media strategy for most of the inter-war years, reciprocated in the early 1920s by some sympathetic press coverage and crucial in the 1930s for laying the groundwork for Clement Attlee’s great victory of 1945.<sup>3</sup>

Following the debates on ‘class’ that raged through the 1980s and 1990s, it is now the idea of ‘modernity’ that assumes centre stage among historians of political culture. Modernity can be used as an analytical category to study the various processes of modernization – capitalism, imperialism, globalization, urbanization, democratization, the rise of civil society. Of late, it has gathered the significance of a subject matter in its own right, with increasing attention paid to examining its discursive forms (that is, its varied constructions and contested meanings) and the notion of ‘consciousness’ (the ways in which society experienced and understood the

<sup>2</sup> J. Ramsden, ‘Baldwin and film’, in *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918–45*, ed. N. Pronay and D. W. Spring (1982), pp. 126–43; S. Nicholas, ‘The construction of a national identity: Stanley Baldwin, “Englishness” and the mass media in inter-war Britain’, in *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880–1990*, ed. M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 127–46; D. Jarvis, ‘The shaping of Conservative electoral hegemony, 1918–39’, in *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820*, ed. J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 131–52; P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), ch. 5.

<sup>3</sup> L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Harvard, Conn., 2010).



Political modernity and 'government' in the construction of inter-war democracy

condition of the modern).<sup>4</sup> Despite this, many of the questions raised by the study of modernity, and especially our understandings of consciousness, have yet to be integrated in any comprehensive sense into the analysis of party politics. The Conservative party may justifiably be thought of as the most 'modern', or advanced, party between the wars, partly for the reasons outlined above.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, British modernity was itself 'conservative' in many ways. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Conservatives stood to benefit most from this 'conservatism' inherent within British modernity, such as that in the popular middlebrow literature famously discussed by Alison Light and in the *longue durée* of democratization which, as Jon Lawrence argues, established (or prolonged) the 'paternalistic' influence of institutions such as the BBC and the established church.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, political modernity, even when perceived as largely 'conservative' in nature, was still mutable and contested in practice. As the Labour party ultimately proved, the traditional idioms and institutions of British political life were available for non-conservative forces to coalesce around and thereby demonstrate their moderation to voters.<sup>7</sup> However, the development of democratic culture between the wars also reveals the controversial impact of political modernity *within* parties; in other words, not only between rival ideological and electoral camps, as might be expected, but between those bound by party loyalties. This raises the question of what the political modernity of the inter-war years meant to political actors in different political spaces. The difficulty facing a party seeking a coherent response to the mass franchise was the essential fact that local and national actors occupied different worlds and so often operated according to conflicting world-views. This was not new, as histories of Victorian political culture

<sup>4</sup> See S. Gunn and J. Vernon, 'Introduction', in *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain*, ed. S. Gunn and J. Vernon (Berkeley, Calif., 2011), esp. pp. 3–7. Other notable works on representations and discourses of British modernity are *Modern Times: a Century of English Modernity*, ed. M. Nava and A. O'Shea (1996); *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–64*, ed. B. Conekin, F. Mort and C. Waters (1998); *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia and National Identity in Modern British Culture*, ed. G. K. Behlmer and F. M. Leventhal (Stanford, Calif., 2000); *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, ed. M. Daunton and B. Rieger (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to n. 2, see R. Cockett, 'The party, publicity and the media', in *Conservative Century: the Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. A. Seldon and S. Ball (Oxford, 1994), pp. 547–77, esp. pp. 549–64; Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, pp. 98–9, 110–11.

<sup>6</sup> A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (1991), esp. pp. 14–16; J. Lawrence, 'Paternalism, class, and the British path to modernity', in Gunn and Vernon, *Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity*, pp. 147–64.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Pugh, 'The rise of Labour and the political culture of Conservatism, 1890–1945', *History*, lxxxvii (2002), 514–37. For a statement of Labour's constitutional conservatism, see Ramsay MacDonald's *Parliament and Revolution* (1919), ch. 8.

tell us.<sup>8</sup> This chapter takes the story forward by exploring some of the specific circumstances surrounding political nation-building after 1918. This involved not only the growing use of mass media by the party hierarchy but, crucially, the responses of local political actors to this manipulation – sometimes promising, sometimes intrusive – of the national political culture. Taken together, it sees the period as one in which the dynamics between local and national, grassroots and leadership, were fundamentally recalibrated as each sought to negotiate the opportunities and challenges of a new democratic age.

Throughout the inter-war years, the activities of local political actors were shaped by two main considerations. One was the assumption, sometimes more deliberately articulated as a key objective, that voters should continue to participate in the political system with a distinctly – though not exclusively – local mindset. This would preserve the key place of locality while also ensuring certain continuities of practice in the new democracy. The other consideration was a systematic interest in the development of mass communication techniques and, consequently, how the new media could carry national discourses that reinforced particular local appeals. Following the great focus in the 1980s and 1990s on the role of language in the construction of political identity, this chapter picks up on recent work on material history in order to recapture the centrality of the material interest in local political life. This does not negate the importance of language – quite the opposite, in fact, since it sheds light on why and how activists were so discerning in their reception of the nationally constructed discourse of their leaders. Section one introduces this world-view of party activists, with particular reference to Birmingham and Ilford.

As the second section argues, for most of the 1920s political leaders and party strategists were pursuing a rather different objective: shaping, rather than representing, public opinion. Ideas about the ‘public’, and indeed the ‘people’, were familiar to politicians long before the First World War,<sup>9</sup> but there was a renewed effort after 1918 to understand the phenomenon. This derived not only from the new imperatives of the adult franchise, but rather arose in combination with advances in the social sciences and especially in social psychology. Here, the new emphasis on applicable theories – what become known as ‘practical psychology’, for use in the real political system – found an audience among party strategists eager to grasp new methods

<sup>8</sup> No better confirmation of this can be had than by reading in succession Lawrence, *Speaking for the People* and M. Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See J. Thompson, ‘The idea of “public opinion” in Britain, 1870–1914’ (unpublished University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2000); Joyce, *Visions of the People*.

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of managing the democratic process. As will become clear, contrasting local and national conceptions of the body politic led to very different and sometimes conflicting political practices. One of the striking implications of this, explored in the third section, is the emergence of a dichotomy in which material politics, favoured by local actors seeking to 'represent' voters, and the politics of 'values', favoured by national actors seeking to 'manage' the mass of voters, formed a constantly shifting balance of local and national agencies. The factor best placed to negotiate these cross currents, and too often neglected in histories of popular politics, was government. As a construct, 'government' was capable both of narrowing the gulf between local and national ideas of controlling mass democracy and of mediating the typically 'national' language perpetuated by the modern mass media. Even though this was true of the 1920s, it only became strikingly clear in the 1930s when, for the Conservatives at least, the circumstances of the National Government enabled the party to reconcile local and national projects.

### ***Political nation-building in the locality***

During the last year of war, Conservatives up and down the country busily took stock of their party's preparedness for the brave new world of British politics following the implementation of the Representation of the People Act, which had reached the statute book in February that year. Local party organization was a major concern, not least because of the redistribution clauses contained within the legislation, which, in the name of 'equalization', had both created new constituencies and altered the constellation of seats in large urban centres such as Birmingham.<sup>10</sup> More than that, this focus on local organization reflected the determination of the grassroots to reconstruct a political nation that unmistakably locked party and politics into the local community.

We can pick out this trend by looking to two areas as examples. In Birmingham, Conservatives in all but one of the dozen constituencies came together to form the Birmingham Conservative and Unionist Association, a central organization charged with co-ordinating Unionist activity in the city. Modelled on the old caucus politics that had shaped Birmingham's reputation as the cockpit of Victorian radicalism, and with Neville Chamberlain as its ambitious architect, the organization clearly anticipated the continuation of a resonant communitarian culture. Its aims were to reaffirm the party's ubiquity in all facets of municipal life and to achieve a high level of self-sufficiency in matters of propaganda and activist training.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kinnear, *The British Voter: an Atlas and Survey since 1885* (1968), p. 70; *Conservative Agents' Journal* (hereafter *CAJ*), Jan. 1918, p. 18.

Local activists proudly referred to their plans as ‘the Birmingham scheme’ of party organization.<sup>11</sup>

What this meant in practice can be seen in the way Birmingham Conservatives responded to Labour’s early post-war advance. The Labour party made its mark in the municipal elections of 1919, taking control of Bradford and a dozen London boroughs, together with the county councils of Durham, Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire. Taken together, the party gained sufficient new ground across the country, including in Birmingham where it won the same number of municipal contests as the Conservatives, for its success to resemble something approaching a national breakthrough.<sup>12</sup> The Birmingham Conservatives’ response was to augment the local as the site of political competition. It did so, to begin with, by establishing a limited company charged with publishing a Unionist monthly, *The Straightforward*, to rival Labour’s *Town Crier*. The magazine had originally been a short-lived project of the party in the West Birmingham division in 1914. Its brief now was to be ‘as local as possible’, with the odd ‘trenchant’ article on national affairs.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a body called the Unionist Propaganda Society was formed. This would become the eyes and ears of the party in the city, reporting to the main association on the state of public opinion, while also recruiting and educating working-class speakers with the aim of encouraging ‘open-air meetings in the streets’.<sup>14</sup>

Such efforts to revitalize the local political scene could not always entail rehabilitating aspects of pre-1914 strategy. Whereas the reassertion of the

<sup>11</sup> Birmingham Central Library, Birmingham Conservative and Unionist Association (hereafter BCL, Birmingham CUA), AQ329.94249, minutes of special meeting, 1 July 1918; *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, i: *the Making of a Politician, 1915–20*, ed. R. Self (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 281–2 (to Hilda, 3 Aug. 1918). After standing aloof in 1918, the party association in the Erdington division entered the central organization in 1920 (BCL, Birmingham CUA, management committee, 20 Jan. 1920).

<sup>12</sup> The Conservative and Labour parties won 9 contests each in Birmingham in 1919, although the Conservatives continued to have an overall majority on the council (66 councillors to Labour’s 24) (S. Davies and B. Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918–38. A Comparative Analysis*, i: *Barnsley-Bournemouth* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 237, 240, 645). The Labour victories of 1919 occurred despite the fact that most of the new and unpropertied male voters traditionally associated with the party could still not vote at municipal level (see D. Tanner, ‘Elections, statistics, and the rise of the Labour party, 1906–31’, *Historical Journal*, xxxiv (1991), 893–908, at p. 906).

<sup>13</sup> BCL, Birmingham CUA, management committee, 15 March 1920, sub-committee, 31 March, 12 Apr. 1920.

<sup>14</sup> BCL, Birmingham CUA, management committee, 9 July 1920. The need for effective party workers is made clear in *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters: the Correspondence of Sir Austen Chamberlain with his Sisters Hilda and Ida, 1916–37*, ed. R. Self (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 99–100 (to Ida, 8 Dec. 1918).

'civic gospel' in Birmingham appeared feasible, given the party's established connections, Conservatives in the new parliamentary seat of Ilford lacked historic civic institutions and had few other sources of continuity on which to draw. Ilford was not only a new seat, carved out of the old county seat of Romford, but also a new town, having expanded from a rural Essex village of just 11,000 inhabitants in 1891 to a desirable outer-London suburb, home to over 85,000 by 1921. The population would expand further still, both in size and social diversity, with the building of the London County Council's Becontree estate, part of which lay in the division. Ilford Conservatives made it their task to shape a civic culture that would impose a strong local imprint on residents' political identity, not only through the routine contestation of municipal politics but also through the politicization of voters' urban experience. Thus, throughout the early 1920s the Conservatives' appeal centred on a campaign to grant Ilford borough status, through which the party hoped to prove itself the champion of the community's urban future, shaping rather than observing Ilford's advancement 'from village pump to Town Hall'.<sup>15</sup>

Given the period under discussion here, during which the political and social vicissitudes of war and franchise reform were felt (and their consequences predicted) most acutely, what should strike us is the *unexceptional* nature of post-war political organization in Birmingham and Ilford. At a time when anxieties about the future of politics gripped members of the three main parties – the Conservatives feared a 'socialist' working class, Labour a 'capitalist' working class, and each party in its own way feared an 'irrational' electorate<sup>16</sup> – constituency parties reverted to localism, which had been a key feature of the construction and expression of political identity before 1914. Of course, the lines dividing national and local politics had been blurred some time earlier, through, for instance, the growth of the popular national press in the late nineteenth century. Even so, political culture continued to be shaped by what Jon Lawrence has called the 'politics of place' – a concept that has helped historians fundamentally to revise the narrative of nationalization by asking 'how national politics were refracted through local political cultures and traditions, and how this process of mediation helped to shape patterns of allegiance within a constituency'.<sup>17</sup> That constituency parties re-established the politics of

<sup>15</sup> *Ilford Monthly*, July, Dec. 1925

<sup>16</sup> D. Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and class politics in the 1920s', *English Historical Review*, cxi (1996), 59–84; S. Macintyre, 'British Labour, Marxism and working class apathy in the 1920s', *Historical Journal*, xx (1977), 479–96; M. Bentley, *The Liberal Mind, 1914–29* (Cambridge, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 6.

place after the war not by default but by design is a signal reminder of the continued centrality of the local to activists' assumptions about political participation in the new democracy.

*Political nation-building from the centre*

Political nation-building after the war, then, involved local as well as national processes. Local activists were not unthinkingly parochial, nor were they immutably hostile to political discourse emanating from the centre; so long as the national rhetoric spoke to their needs, it could often be embraced as an integral component of the politics of place. However, the question of what political issues provided the basis of the nation-building process, and how different political actors intended it to relate to voters, reveals a real gulf between the national and the local that lasted throughout the 1920s.

In particular, local and national politicians differed in their conception of the place and nature of corporate identity within the political system. Lawrence has recently argued that Britain's path to political modernity was as much a 'conservative' as a 'liberal' one. The process of democratization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he argues, came to be shaped by a 'Tory liberal' creed defined by a 'widespread acceptance of patrician ideas about the merits of elite government and the need to preserve (or as often reinvent) "natural" social hierarchies'. Collective identification, facilitated by different social groups – parish, town or nation, church or chapel, club or union – reflected corporate communities within which paternalism and mutuality, but not equality, were legitimate social dynamics. These social structures, continuously in flux and susceptible to periodic reinvention, ensured that the corporate rather than the individual continued as the focal point of political strategies to manage identity.<sup>18</sup>

For national political leaders, this notion of the corporate became more important still after 1918. It constituted an important facet in the 'traditional' Victorian values that underpinned the practices of public and political leadership between the wars; so much so, in fact, that developments including the trajectory of the BBC under John Reith and political broadcasting as practised by Baldwin, both pioneering within the history of communication techniques, might in the broader context be considered little more than new bottles for old wine. But like any vintage, it too changed over time, with ambitions about the scope of the corporate now fashioned by the unprecedented influence wielded by the human sciences in the realm of political practice. In particular, the years following the Great War witnessed a growing recognition of the potential

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence, 'Paternalism, class, and the British path to modernity', esp. pp. 149–53.

of psychology as a solution to a range of social problems. This both built on the Edwardians' popular interest in the psychological dimension of human development and precluded the process of anthropologizing Western (specifically Anglo-American) society that informed the governing practices of the state during the Second World War.<sup>19</sup> This reflected a widespread belief, shared by industrialists, health practitioners and educationalists, that the effective control of social and political change lay not in institutions and structures but in the management of ideas and attitudes. The discipline was now applied by industrialists to employment and labour relations (as well as by philanthropists to the condition of *unemployment*), by businessmen to the design of advertisements, by health practitioners to the treatment of shellshock among war veterans, and by educationalists across many fields seeking to direct the public's understanding of the international and domestic fallout of total war.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, in Britain, where the deconstructive impulse of psychoanalysis and the spectre of the individual subjected to scientific experimentation met cultural resistance, applied psychology developed a unifying, even ameliorating, ethos. In this way it developed *with* the political grain, having much to offer party strategists by way of shaping corporate identities.

In his evaluation of the impact of psychology in Britain by the mid twentieth century, Matthew Thomson argues that its potential was realized more in theory than practice because it was forced by the presence of certain key subjectivities, or 'ideological moods', to be accommodated within existing frameworks. Thus, he claims, the psychology that advanced the

<sup>19</sup> See A. Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind: Education and Psychology in England, c.1860–1990* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. ch. 9; P. Mandler, 'Margaret Mead amongst the natives of Great Britain', *Past & Present*, cciv (2009), 195–233.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to Daniel Ussishkin's chapter in this volume, see D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988), p. 162; R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain between the Wars* (2009), ch. 4. For general accounts charting the rise of psychology in this period, see N. Rose, *The Psychological Complex: Psychology, Politics and Society in England, 1869–1939* (1985); G. D. Richards, 'Britain on the couch: the popularization of psychoanalysis in Britain, 1918–40', *Science in Context*, xiii (2000), 183–230; and M. Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in 20th-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006). Both Rose and Thomson emphasize the applied (non-Freudian) aspects of the discipline, but Thomson goes farthest beyond disciplinary boundaries, highlighting the popular 'excitement' surrounding psychology's potential and paying particular attention to scrutinizing its practical influence within a shifting historical context that involved, as he says, 'messy politics, competing interests, and economic realities' (p. 7). For fascinating examples of the impact of psychology at the level of the individual, and shedding some light on the processes by which Victorian values were slowly broken down or transmogrified across the 1930s–50s, see J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford, 2010), esp. pp. 18, 120, 135.

most was that seen to be ‘validating the essential mental health of British political culture and national character’.<sup>21</sup> Psychology did not transform the political system in Britain as it had done on the continent under the dictators.<sup>22</sup> But to downplay its impact upon the political system is to underestimate the extent to which national politicians were able to apply its teachings creatively and proactively within the status quo, creating different conditions in which others, including grassroots activists, could work.

Of those shaping national politics – perhaps the ‘fifty or sixty’ individuals who mattered to Cowling<sup>23</sup> – we know that some were influenced by the vocabulary and insights of psychology, directly or indirectly. This can be seen in three ways, each of which highlights an intersection between politics and the social sciences that deserves further dedicated research. The first is the politicians’ connections with the literary canon of applied psychology. It is difficult to gauge the full readership of such works as Wilfred Trotter’s *The Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1916) or the many reprints of William McDougall’s *Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908) and Graham Wallas’s *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), but it is possible to deduce the character of those inspired and targeted by them. These works were influential during the war, Trotter’s in particular having been encouraged by the government ‘as a contribution to national morale in wartime’.<sup>24</sup> In his post-war manifesto to the Labour movement, Ramsay MacDonald drew heavily on ideas of the ‘herd instinct’ to craft his thoughts about how the party should engage voters in the new franchise.<sup>25</sup> Public figures including Thomas Jones, the senior civil servant, philanthropist and educationalist, and John Reith, the director-general of the BBC, both of whom were close advisers to Baldwin, were also keen students of psychological readings of post-war problems, especially in industry, and used such insights as they gained in their own fields.<sup>26</sup> Added to this is the fact that the most prolific author of social psychology at the time, Graham Wallas, had himself been active in the Lib-Lab debates of the Edwardian years, like J. A. Hobson, first as a leading Fabian and then as a force in London politics.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., U. Geuter, *The Professionalization of Psychology in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> According to his definition of ‘high politics’ (M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920–4: the Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 3).

<sup>24</sup> D. Holdstock, ‘Trotter, Wilfred Batten Lewis (1872–1939)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Oct. 2006) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36562>> [accessed 24 Oct. 2011].

<sup>25</sup> R. MacDonald, *A Policy for the Labour Party* (1920), p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, pp. 141–54; J. C. W. Reith, *Broadcast over Britain* (1924).

<sup>27</sup> M. J. Wiener, *Between Two Worlds: the Political Thought of Graham Wallas* (Oxford, 1971).



The second factor to consider is the development of political science in Britain and its influence on contemporary political practice. Both the Victorians and Edwardians had shown a keen interest in the 'noble science of politics', especially in times of franchise reform and constitutional crisis. This genre of political science dealt overwhelmingly with the structures of political systems and shaped debates on electoral reform through comparative studies of the two-party systems in Britain and America. These played a part in the franchise debates of 1917–18, which rejected proportional representation as antithetical to the two-party system, and continued to exert influence into the 1920s. One example of this is Baldwin's statecraft, which aimed at displacing the Liberals with Labour so as to preserve (or restore) a two-party system that 'institutionalized' a particular issue – in this case anti-socialism – in the Conservatives' favour.<sup>28</sup> With the input of social psychology, political science became considerably more diverse in its applicability, perhaps more so than contemporaries at the time fully realized. In his *Human Nature in Politics*, Wallas stated that individuals comprehended the complexities of their political environment through 'symbolism', and added that the political party, with its colours, tunes, myths and rituals – more than its ideology – was the ultimate symbol in British political life.<sup>29</sup> After 1918, it was commonly held that the social sciences were slow to make their mark in Britain, in contrast with America, where, McDougall felt, 'the public interest in psychology and sociology is much more widespread than in these islands'.<sup>30</sup> Yet, American political science was remarkably responsive to British social psychology and the American experience of democracy continued to interest politicians and party strategists across the Atlantic.<sup>31</sup> For one American commentator keen to develop the practicable results that could be derived from the social sciences, Wallas's works 'represent[ed] ... the best that sociology has to offer in the way of suggestions to political science'. 'It can no longer afford to concern itself with metaphysical questions about society or with unreal conceptions of human nature, but must deal with actual conditions

<sup>28</sup> A. J. Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin, heresthetics and the realignment of British politics', *British Journal of Political Science*, xxxv (2005), 429–63.

<sup>29</sup> G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (1908; 1921 edn., repr. 1981), pp. 103–17.

<sup>30</sup> W. McDougall, *The Group Mind* (1920), preface to the American edition, p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> For American democracy in Victorian political debate, see J. Roper, *Democracy and its Critics: Anglo-American Democratic Thought in the 19th Century* (1989); and R. Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848–67: the Making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham, 2011), ch. 5. One of the broader cultural themes underpinning such exchanges, namely the debate over the relationship of democracy to national identity, is discussed in A. Smith, 'The "cult" of Abraham Lincoln and the strange survival of liberal England in the era of the world wars', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxi (2010), 486–509.

of the present'.<sup>32</sup> Likewise in Britain, where the exchange between social psychology and political science (generally along British and American lines respectively) created a quasi-academic community that dispensed solutions to the challenges of post-war democracy.<sup>33</sup>

The third area is the content of this dialogue, especially the nation-building concerns of both social science and national politicians. Common to all political leaders was a fear of the 'mass mind', something that was hardly new to those seasoned by Edwardian election campaigns but which became more acutely felt with the onset of adult enfranchisement and the proliferation of commercial entertainment after 1918.<sup>34</sup> While it is right to view the concerns of politicians like Baldwin as emanating from the same Victorian cultural 'distrust of the frivolous, the spontaneous, the sensual' displayed by men like Reith, for whom culture was the 'moral governor' of society,<sup>35</sup> their desire to understand the mass mind might also be seen as an attempt to gain greater ability to gauge public opinion in the days before opinion polls. Social psychology's claim to be a science, capable of the 'statistical measurement of human conduct', was thus a propitious starting point.<sup>36</sup> More important than this were the substantive ways in which the discipline addressed itself to how the mass mind could be organized in advanced industrial democracies. Both Wallas, in *Our Social Heritage* (1921), and McDougall, in *The Group Mind* (1920), dismissed as outdated the main organizing forces of the nineteenth century, the territorial state and capitalism. Wallas did so for progressive ideological reasons and McDougall in favour of updated methods. Yet, the category of the 'nation' remained central to their conception of human co-operation and, ultimately, to the way they viewed the electoral objectives of political leaders. As Wallas explained: 'since that scale [of the modern industrial nation] far surpasses the range of our senses, we should consciously aim at creating in our own

<sup>32</sup> H. E. Barnes, 'Some typical contributions of English sociology to political theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, xxviii (1922), 179–204, at p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> See J. G. Gunnell, 'Making democracy safe for the world: political science between the wars', in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*, ed. R. Adcock, M. Bevir and S. C. Stimson (Princeton, NJ, 2007), pp. 137–57.

<sup>34</sup> Commenting on Randolph Churchill's intervention as an unofficial Conservative candidate at the 1935 by-election in Wavertree, Austen Chamberlain lamented 'the love of a stunt[,] which is one of the chief elements in the life of the mass of electors today'. He continued: 'A film star could win almost any seat in the country, and Randolph would make an excellent film star' (*Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters*, p. 475 (to Ida, 9 Dec. 1935)). See also Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, pp. 143–8; *Ramsay MacDonald's Political Writings*, ed. B. Barker (1972), p. 226 (from *Parliament and Revolution*); Bentley, *The Liberal Mind*, esp. ch. 4.

<sup>35</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> Barnes, 'Some typical contributions of English sociology', p. 202.

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minds and in those minds whose training we influence, such an idea of our nation as will form the most reliable stimulus to large-scale co-operative emotion and co-operative action'.<sup>37</sup>

McDougall addressed much of his advice directly to political leaders. In his book of 1908 he argued that the statesman can 'set the tone of political life' through 'eloquence and parliamentary skill', putting in place a process of 'social imitation' whereby people in the constituencies associate with the 'prestige' of a leader and his values.<sup>38</sup> In *The Group Mind*, which has a chapter dedicated to 'The part of leaders in national life', his advice turns to the importance of modern communication facilities in shaping public opinion and transcending the distances involved in modern 'political organisms', whether within nations or across nations within the empire. Recalling the general election of January 1910, he argued that the use of the motor car ('at that time the latest great addition to our means of communication') had boosted voter turnout and thereby produced a 'more complete expression of the will of the people than any preceding' election.<sup>39</sup> By the early 1920s, the wireless set and the 'amplifier' were the latest inventions. As Lionel Curtis, the influential *Round Table* thinker on imperial and international affairs, enthused to Thomas Jones: 'You must realise that by means of this instrument [the amplifier] the P.M. could sit in Downing Street and address audiences of unlimited number simultaneously in Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. It means incredible addition to the power of the political leader'.<sup>40</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter, it is worth highlighting three ideas expounded in the nation-building plans of social psychologists that emerge uncannily centre-stage in the electoral strategy of Conservative and Labour leaders. The first and most general is Wallas's rule that 'national co-operation is more dependent on our social heritage than group co-operation'; that is to say, national identity is constructed and relies on the imagination while group identity is local and derived from experience.<sup>41</sup> This can be viewed as a partial precursor of Benedict Anderson's famous 'imagined community' thesis, which highlights the growing vernacular literacy of the masses and the role of 'print capitalism' in shaping modern national identities in the

<sup>37</sup> G. Wallas, *Our Social Heritage* (1921), p. 101.

<sup>38</sup> W. McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908; 2nd edn., 1909), p. 338.

<sup>39</sup> McDougall, *Group Mind*, pp. 182, 184. Note the book's subtitle: *A Sketch of the Principles of Collective Psychology with some Attempt to Apply them to the Interpretation of National Life and Character*.

<sup>40</sup> *Whitehall Diary*, i, ed. K. Middlemas (Oxford, 1969), p. 206 (Curtis to Jones, 20 Aug. 1922).

<sup>41</sup> Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*, pp. 10, 77–100.

nineteenth century. During the 1920s, as we know, the Conservative and Labour parties forged elaborate national strategies aimed at organizing voters into imagined ideological communities.<sup>42</sup> The second idea relates to McDougall's explanation of the precise relationship between national and local identities under modern conditions:

Easy means of communication promote development in the direction of the organic unity of a nation in another way – namely, they promote specialisation of the functions of different regions; they thus render local groups incapable of living as relatively independent closes communities ... hence they develop the common interest of each part in the good of the whole.<sup>43</sup>

This anticipated Baldwin's attempts to associate Conservatism in the public's mind with 'national values' while still wanting to seem alive to the parochialism of constituents.<sup>44</sup> The third is Wallas's idea of vocationalism as an organizing force, a suggestion he chooses to explore rather than prescribe, owing to the chequered history of guild organization as a method of government over the centuries. As a means of identity, however, he does not doubt the 'vocational tendency among manual and intellectual workers', and this anticipated the unifying workerist ethos which made up Labour's claim to be a 'national' party in the 1920s.<sup>45</sup>

The advent of social psychology had some far-reaching effects on British politics. Most notably it proved seminal in the political thought of the architects of post-war Labour revisionism.<sup>46</sup> More immediately, the value of social psychology for politicians was that it helped them to understand the irrational and instinctive processes of the mind without pandering to them, thus enabling them to use this understanding to manage the modern construction of democracy. The Conservative strategist Philip Cambray had come to appreciate the importance of putting in place a continuous process of campaigning, or fashioning the electorate. Before 1918 it had been necessary for a successful political campaign to influence public

<sup>42</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). See Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and class politics' and L. Beers, 'Education or manipulation? Labour, democracy and the popular press in interwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, xlviii (2009), 129–52.

<sup>43</sup> McDougall, *Group Mind*, p. 184.

<sup>44</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 251.

<sup>45</sup> Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*, p. 104; on the 'workerist' label, see J. Lawrence, 'Labour and the politics of class, 1900–40', in *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, ed. D. Feldman and J. Lawrence (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 237–60.

<sup>46</sup> The key text here is E. Durbin, *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* (1940). See also J. Nuttall, *Psychological Socialism: the Labour Party and Qualities of Mind and Character, 1931 to the Present* (Manchester, 2006), ch. 2.

(not just voter) opinion, on the grounds that voters were swayed by, and would not vote contrary to, 'public opinion'. Adult franchise disrupted this equilibrium: 'The change that has taken place in recent [post-war] years is that *public* opinion and electoral opinion have been made almost coincident ... the two are practically one. The *mass* now exercises direct electoral influence'.<sup>47</sup> In other words, underpinning a general anxiety about mass democracy was a specific concern about the loss of public opinion; once considered, rather paternalistically, as the express will of the masses, public opinion now became more than ever before something that political leaders had to construct with care. The result was that electoral politics in the 1920s came to centre on the construction of multiple publics, as leaders and strategists at the centre saw in the new methods of communication the means not just to appeal to voters but to cast the mass of voters as a legitimate repository of their party's core values. Hence, the (Conservatives') anti-socialist 'public' and the (Labour party's) workerist 'public'.<sup>48</sup>

A particular feature of political modernity as shaped by the social sciences was the tendency to think in terms of reforming the individual, not just the masses. Although more immediately applicable to totalitarian regimes on the continent,<sup>49</sup> this also relates to a specific problem facing British political parties at the time. This was the emergence of a 'silent majority', so called because politicians felt that most voters had turned away from the usual rituals of participatory politics, thanks to either apathy or the distractions of commercial entertainment, and had thus become anonymous figures in the political system.<sup>50</sup> Many articulate figures like Reith, whose enthusiasm for the mass media was important in relaying the possibilities of the social sciences to political leaders, felt that the radio enabled effective communication with these individual voters. Such professional opinion, together with his own experience of broadcasting, convinced Baldwin that the radio, insofar as it reached the individual at home, was the most

<sup>47</sup> P. Cambray, *The Game of Politics* (1932), p. 17 (emphases added).

<sup>48</sup> See R. McKibbin, 'Class and conventional wisdom: the Conservative party and the "public" in interwar Britain', in R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 259–93; and Lawrence, 'Labour and the politics of class'.

<sup>49</sup> For a thoughtful synthesis of the literature, see G. Eghigian, A. Killen and C. Leuenberger, 'The self as project: politics and the human sciences in the 20th century', *Osiris*, xxii (2007), 1–25.

<sup>50</sup> On voter apathy, see Macintyre, 'British Labour, Marxism, and working class apathy', pp. 479–96. On how political practices were adapted in response to the silent majority, see J. Lawrence, 'The transformation of British public politics after the First World War', *Past & Present*, cxc (2006), 185–216, esp. pp. 203–12; and Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, pp. 224–35.

important tool in managing mass opinion.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, many commentators ventured that radio would reconnect the voter with the best traditions of the political meeting – oratory and rational thought – while simultaneously having ‘a disintegrating effect upon the power of crowd psychology’.<sup>52</sup>

***Material interest and the challenge of representation in the 1920s***

Just as Wallas criticized many on the left for ignoring the psychological dimension of political life, so they in return despaired at his insensitive idealism in the face of the economic and social pressures of the post-war years. His latest thinking was concerned with no less than the fate of civilization after war, with the search for a new ‘world-view’, and prompted Beatrice Webb to comment that ‘His sympathies lie more with the young men of the *Round Table* [a movement devoted to promoting imperial co-operation] than with any of the Socialist and radical groups who are in revolt against the existing governing class’.<sup>53</sup> In her repudiation of Wallas’s idealism, the Fabian thinker was the unwitting spokesperson for many political activists in the constituencies, and not just within the Labour party. For Conservative as well as Labour figures toiling at the coalface of the new democracy, the economic and social experiences and ambitions of voters were crucial to defining their political world-view. In this way, the ‘material’ formed an integral and constitutive part of how activists saw the ‘interests’ of voters. Whether it be the cost of food or utilities, the rate of tax, or the impact of infrastructure developments or welfare legislation on household life and finances, the material experience – and activists’ perception of it – helped to define the subject matter of political interests and their discourses. Crucially, the material also impacted on the topicality of different interests.

In turn, these interests formed the core of local activists’ conceptions of how corporate identities were formed and could be appealed to. There were two kinds of material politics. Based on the notion of appeal by association, many politicians sought to appropriate objects that they deemed symbolic to voters. Thus, from the late nineteenth century the pint of beer, together with the paraphernalia of gambling and football, became a staple of Conservative propaganda in urban England. (The same was true of the Liberals’ free-trade loaf after 1906.) It carried the message that Conservative candidates respected the working man’s right to a pint and

<sup>51</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, pp. 83–6.

<sup>52</sup> Viscountess Erleigh, daughter of Sir Alfred Mond, MP and daughter-in-law of the marquis of Reading, writing in the *Radio Times*, 1927 (quoted in LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 182).

<sup>53</sup> Wiener, *Between Two Worlds*, ch. 8, esp. pp. 175–9.

would protect this liberty from the faddist moral agenda of killjoy Liberal governments.<sup>54</sup> Contemporaries on the ground knew full well that the 'working class' did not constitute a homogeneous group in the community, for there were often stark differences in patterns of accommodation and home-ownership, levels of skills, club and trade-union affiliations, religious denomination, and so on. Yet, we see that the Tory claim to champion the social liberalism of 'the workers', expressed through sympathetic references to the consumption of material items, nonetheless became an important shorthand in electioneering, a sort of basic appeal, based on Conservative assumptions about working-class life and leisure. Despite the shift to a discourse of economic liberalism in response to the socialist threat after 1918, and new restrictions on treating voters, objects like the pint of beer, together with those that reflected developing tastes (for instance, cigarette smoking), remained centre-stage in Conservative approaches towards the public.<sup>55</sup> Notwithstanding the often grave anxieties that the permissive tastes of the 1950s and 1960s provoked within the party, these material appeals point to an important strand running through the Tory democratic paternalism of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, the symbolic does not reflect the full scope, nor then the complexity, of the material politics cultivated by activists in the 1920s. Whereas the symbolic rested on a reductive and more-or-less static understanding of voters' tastes, local activists were also alive to what we might call changeable or contingent material interests. As Frank Trentmann notes in his discussion of 'Dingpolitik' (the history of 'things'), objects carry consequences, good and bad. They break down and disappoint as much as they fulfil. The 'fluid' and 'troublesome' nature of objects creates experiences that overflow into politics. They are, therefore, not always reliable as tools of discipline and control in a democracy.<sup>57</sup> The Conservative party in Ilford found this out during the course of the inter-war years. Up to 1926, when the town received borough status, the campaign for incorporation

<sup>54</sup> J. Lawrence, 'Class and gender in the making of urban Toryism, 1880–1914', *English Historical Review*, cviii (1993), 629–52.

<sup>55</sup> Many Conservative associations had entertainment sub-committees dedicated to the task, and treats – often presented as 'prizes' at sports or carnival days – typically included chocolate for the women, cigarettes for the men and penknives for boys (see G. Thomas, 'Conservatives and the culture of "national" government between the wars' (unpublished University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2010), pp. 42, 108–17).

<sup>56</sup> M. Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957–64* (Manchester, 2005). See also L. Black, 'The lost world of Young Conservatism', *Historical Journal*, li (2008), 991–1024.

<sup>57</sup> F. Trentmann, 'Materiality in the future of history: things, practices, and politics', *Journal of British Studies*, xlvi (2009), 283–307, esp. pp. 299–301.

anticipated an urban renaissance symbolizing the material improvement with which Conservatives expected the area's aspiring 'middle class' readily to associate themselves. The exposition rested in large part on symbolic material interests – facilities, including civic parks, and municipal services, of which education was the most important. After 1926, the troublesome nature of material politics became ever more apparent, with infrastructural developments having a knock-on effect on issues ranging from the rateable value of properties to the rights of commuters and the increasing demands on central government funding. This is reflected in the fact that, by 1934, the Ilford ratepayers' association had split in two. The faction in 'new' Ilford, which mostly represented the residents of newly built houses, campaigned for additional civic facilities – and was opposed by the faction representing the residents of 'old' Ilford, for whom the newcomers were to blame for increases in the local rates.<sup>58</sup>

What did this materialist conception of voters' corporate identities mean in practice? How did it fit with, or serve, the localist agenda of activists in the constituencies? As activists saw it, their objective was less to manage voters than to *represent* their interests. This perhaps best exemplifies the different subjective worlds occupied by national and local, or professional and grassroots, politicians after 1918. Local activists acted in the belief that voters responded to self- or group-interest. With this activist sovereignty in mind, we see that the notion of voter rationality was not banished from political practice as much as either the contemporary focus on the irrational and 'unconscious' or present-day scholarly focus on the constitutive power of discourse would have us believe.

In fact, an interest-based rational politics is one of the most under-appreciated results of 'the rise of Labour' and its impact on the culture of British politics. Labour was often effective at tailoring its campaigns to local needs, rooting its discourse in voters' material interests. In the coalmining seats of south Wales, for example, the party's claim to be the advocate of the 'community' was demonstrated through attention to the evolving welfare needs of families, especially (following female enfranchisement) maternity services.<sup>59</sup> In suburbs like Ilford, the party made a decent fist of posing as the disinterested defender of consumers in an economy rife with profiteering. Concerns about profiteering – in the food market, the rental property market, and in respect of commuter travel – were especially topical and common to middle- and working-class voters alike. This way, Labour

<sup>58</sup> *Ilford Recorder*, 12, 19 Apr. 1934.

<sup>59</sup> See D. Tanner, 'Gender, civic culture and politics in south Wales: explaining Labour municipal policy, 1918–39', in *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918–45*, ed. M. Worley (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 170–93.



came close to constructing a discourse that defied allegations of sectional interests, drew on continuities in liberal politics more than redistributive theory, and instituted a co-operative culture whose objectives were not necessarily in contention with the civic mindedness of associational bodies like the Middle Class Union. Through its support for 'local option', which many householders backed in order to protect property values as well as on grounds of temperance, Labour mobilized consumers' interests and so aligned itself with middle-class respectability.<sup>60</sup> Within the discursive war of electoral politics, then, lay key battles over voters' material interests.

Of course, Conservatives required little evidence to reinforce their view of Labour as a movement inextricably, even menacingly, tied to material concerns – or, rather, to the exploitation of material concerns. Not only were the Conservatives ideologically hostile to Labour's policies of redistribution and nationalization, they were deeply nervous about two particular aspects of the political world after 1918: the extravagant public promises, as they saw them, which Labour candidates would make in order to secure a working majority in parliament, and the voters' (in)ability to resist them.<sup>61</sup> All the same, Labour's arrival did consolidate the place of the material in British politics, ensuring that it became the object of a more acutely competitive inter-party dialogue. Labour politics proved less easily dismissible than Liberal fads, as Conservative party workers in the north discovered. Even after Labour's crushing defeat at the 1931 general election, local Conservatives found themselves once more having to contest their opponents' claims to represent voters' material, and especially welfare, interests. Conservatives in the northern counties noted that health and welfare conferences, organized by professionals and lobby groups such as the Maternal Mortality Committee, were being attended by representatives from the Women's Co-operative Guild and other Labour organizations. It was of 'extreme importance', they thought, that the Conservative party showed its commitment to 'social services'.<sup>62</sup> At the national level, too,

<sup>60</sup> For instances of these debates played out in the local press, see *Ilford Recorder*, 10 Sept. 1920, 2 Oct., 27 Nov. 1925. See also K. Manton, 'Playing both sides against the middle: the Labour party and the wholesaling industry, 1919–51', *Twentieth Century British History*, xviii (2007), 306–33, esp. pp. 308–9; and the analysis of the role of 'non-political' associational life in inter-war political culture in H. McCarthy, 'Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in inter-war Britain', *Historical Journal*, l (2007), 891–912.

<sup>61</sup> For Conservative readings of the new franchise's susceptibility to Labour, see Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and class politics', pp. 69–79; and G. Thomas, 'Conservatives, the constitution, and the quest for a "representative" House of Lords, 1911–35', *Parliamentary History* (forthcoming).

<sup>62</sup> Ashington, Northumberland Archives, Northern Counties Area, NRO 4137/8, women's advisory council, 13 June 1933.

Conservatives were forced to respond. It was not only after the Attlee reforms of the late 1940s that the Conservative leadership desisted from repealing Labour's legislation. Shaped by Neville Chamberlain, the party's official policy following the first Labour government in 1924 was to preserve certain legacies (for instance, the Agricultural Wages Board, which saw the National Farmers' Union denounce its former links with the Conservative party) and to construct a Conservative 'social policy'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, while anti-socialists doggedly fought to disprove or trump Labour's claim to represent people's interests, few could deny the fact that Labour wielded real influence in determining the ground on which competition was fought.

As a result, the object of 'government' acquired a new immediacy and subtlety in local politics. Locality and government have had a closely interwoven history in modern times: the social ties and political sub-structures operating at the local level made the parish, county and borough key units in the development and management of modern state bureaucracy. As the work of John Prest, David Eastwood, K. D. M. Snell and others has shown, there was much about the growth (and limitations) of British central government that was distinctly 'bottom up'.<sup>64</sup> In the twentieth century, the question of government became infused with ideological meanings, typically along a left-right axis, and with it a commonplace view emerged of Conservatism, especially at the grassroots after 1945, as hostile to large government.<sup>65</sup> And yet the party had a discernible statist lineage: many Conservative activists between the wars had served their apprenticeship in the Edwardian campaign for tariff reform. What this tells us about the precise nature of the range of Conservative ideological stances towards the state, and how this changed over time, is hard to pin

<sup>63</sup> *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, ii: *the Reform Years, 1921–7*, ed. R. Self (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 18–20, 26; A. F. Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy, 1912–36: a Study in Conservative Politics* (Manchester, 1989), pp. 67–8.

<sup>64</sup> J. Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Mid-19th Century* (Oxford, 1990); D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700–1870* (Basingstoke, 1997); Lawrence, 'Paternalism, class, and the British path to modernity'; K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Many party members opposed the so-called consensus created by the Churchill, Eden and Macmillan governments' accommodation of Attlee's welfare legislation and managed economy after 1951. This anti-statism later gained expression at the party's national level with Thatcher, who was fond of recalling the self-reliance of pre-war society as inspiration for a smaller British state (see E. H. H. Green, 'The Conservative party, the state and the electorate, 1945–64', in Lawrence and Taylor, *Party, State and Society*, pp. 176–200, and his 'Thatcherism: an historical perspective', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., ix (1999), 17–42).

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down.<sup>66</sup> But, crucially, the question of government is about more than just whether or not Conservatives were statist. Rather, it hinges on the fact that it was during the inter-war period, in response to the new franchise, that activists placed 'government' centre stage in constructions of their party's public culture. Central government and locality were once again expected to go hand in hand. Whereas for the party headquarters the new media increasingly held the key to transcending the gulf between objectives set at the national level and the inchoate agenda of a mass of voters, for activists it was government itself that became the key to their conception of how to mediate national and local politics.

Of course, these national and local approaches were not mutually exclusive. Broadcast and wireless technology held a fascination and even became an amateur pastime for many in the 1920s, with radio clubs (like cinemas) springing up in urban – and particularly suburban – communities. For the politically active members of such fraternities, like David Richards, a leading Conservative in Ilford, there was little difficulty in admiring, as many party agents did, the reach of the radio broadcast into households whose occupants could not or would not attend traditional political meetings.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, national campaigns were often successful where they built on local methods. Behind Herbert Morrison's celebrated success as chief Labour strategist in the 1940s was his equally vaunted control of London Labour in the 1930s, which, as Tom Jeffery has demonstrated, borrowed much from the approaches taken by divisional Labour parties in areas such as Lewisham, where the seemingly conflicting political demands of a mixed-class electorate told of the challenge facing Labour nationally. And these approaches had government at their centre: demonstrable competence in local and national government was instrumental for underwriting the party's claims to represent effectively, and success in the former was thought to help beat a pathway to the latter.<sup>68</sup>

If this mutual appreciation of national and local means of communication created the potential for effective propaganda advertising government achievements, the factor that most prevented its routine realization was the vexed question of how best to pitch a party's appeal. In some instances

<sup>66</sup> For discussions, see E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: the Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914* (1996); M. Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism, 1886–1914* (Edinburgh, 1990); and, more broadly, M. Bentley, 'Liberal Toryism in the 20th century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., iv (1994), 177–201.

<sup>67</sup> *Ilford Monthly*, July 1926; *Ilford Recorder*, 26 Oct. 1926; *CAJ*, Aug. 1931, pp. 191 (on apathy), 199 (on the use of cinema vans in attracting voters outdoors to street meetings), Dec. 1931, p. 266 (recognizing the convenience of radio broadcasts for voters in their homes).

<sup>68</sup> T. Jeffery, 'The suburban nation: politics and class in Lewisham', in *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones (1989), pp. 189–216.

activists favoured local methods of reaching the silent voter because of the unsuitable content of national, or central-party, methods. In Birmingham, Conservatives decided that the 'ordinary literature obtainable from the Central office was not sufficiently effective to be worth the trouble of distribution', and so *The Straightforward* was revived as the form of political literature most likely 'to find its way into the houses of the people'. Although run at a financial loss, it remained the cornerstone of Conservative propaganda in Birmingham for four years, always in preference to the party's central literature, until evidence amassed of the 'cordial support' of the daily press in the city.<sup>69</sup>

More common than outright hostility to nationally directed content was the feeling that it cut across, and so failed to support, more relevant political dialogues taking place locally. As one Conservative agent complained in 1927, when urging his party managers to increase publicity of the government's work in order to target male industrial workers, 'it is futile to preach platitudes about the duties of citizenship to a busy man whose efforts to earn his daily bread leave him little leisure'.<sup>70</sup> This critique takes us to the nub of the challenge facing activists by the late 1920s, namely the tension between the politics of material interest and the politics of values. Baldwin liked to model himself as the new Disraeli. As an invocation, this could reasonably be expected to resonate with party members, since it chimed with the desire to be seen as the party of reform and legislative achievements. In the post-1918 world, however, Baldwin spoke not just of Disraeli's famous public health and sanitation programmes of the 1870s but of citizens' democratic duty – what he called the 'spiritual sanitation of our people'.<sup>71</sup> Even when leaders descended on constituencies, on such occasions as would normally boost activist morale and facilitate some (relatively) unmediated communication with voters, national 'management' could cut across idioms of local interest and thus offend the materialist sensibilities of voters and activists alike. This could produce some unexpected verdicts – as when Baldwin was accused by party members in Birmingham of being excessively partisan. Remarking on the prime minister's visit during the 1929 general election to a depressed housing area in West Birmingham, where improvement work had been carried out by the 'non-sectarian & non-political' COPEC Society, Councillor Canning noted of the leader: 'to use his visit during the election, & by inference to claim credit to the Unionist Party for what had been done, was looked upon as trying to make

<sup>69</sup> BCL, Birmingham CUA, management committee, 14 July 1922, 9 Feb. 1923, 19 Sept. 1924.

<sup>70</sup> *CAJ*, Dec. 1927, p. 338.

<sup>71</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 155.

unfair capital for our side'. Canning had to conclude, from the 'resentment in the Division about Mr. Baldwin's visit', that 'the value of the visit was doubtful'.<sup>72</sup> Activists were still negotiating the new political spaces – in this case, the distance between leader and voter – created by the mass media. Such was the existence of party leaders as modifiers of mass opinion at the national level that activists could struggle to deploy them locally, even in what might be regarded as promising instances like West Birmingham, where Baldwin's broader non-sectarian persona should have complemented the material benefits coming from COPEC.

We might ask how aware activists were of the 'management' objective (and psychological methods) guiding the activities of the party leadership. On the one hand, election agents ought to have been relatively well informed, if only from familiarity with party efforts to professionalize the art of electioneering. On the other, the answer is most probably 'not fully': when party members had misgivings about their leaders – and they certainly did – these were most commonly expressed in terms of either the leader's ideological moderation compared with the purity of grassroots doctrine or the leader's social distance from the rank and file member. This was the case in Labour, as studies of MacDonald's gradualism and his 'aristocratic embrace' reveal.<sup>73</sup> A new vocabulary articulating grassroots' views of the national leader, which, if it existed, would betray some understanding of the 'management' idiom, was slow to emerge after 1918. Yet, by the time Labour entered government for the second time in 1929, the political world had been shaped by the forces of two nation-building projects. Local activists tolerated and sometimes encouraged the use of the new mass media, so long as the language complemented their claims to represent local interests. Reactions to the rise of Labour renewed the relevance of government action in the discourse of both main parties; activists hoped that the story of government would substantiate the national language they needed locally. Where national language was unsuitable, there was little that they could do to stop its dissemination through the mass media. The local politics of interest was thus liable on occasions to be contaminated by the national language. Such was the highly subjectivized nature of the activist encounter with political modernity that the national project of management could obstruct the local project of representation, and vice versa.

<sup>72</sup> BCL, AF 329.94249, E. R. Canning to Austen Chamberlain, 21 June 1929.

<sup>73</sup> Some of the main themes are discussed in N. Owen, 'MacDonald's parties: the Labour party and the "aristocratic embrace", 1922–31', *Twentieth Century British History*, xviii (2007), 1–53.

### **Conclusion**

There has of late been a welcome renewal of interest in the politics of the 1930s, and especially how it differed from – and in some ways resolved – the more feverish politics of the 1920s. The most important episode in this narrative is the financial crisis of August 1931, which saw MacDonald take the helm of a cross-party National Government after losing the confidence of the majority of his Labour MPs. Ross McKibbin makes the case for viewing 1931 as a key staging post in the ‘party-political transformation’ of British politics in the early twentieth century, on account of how it ‘re-founded a stable political system based upon a moderate constitutional Conservatism whose electoral hegemony seemed permanent’.<sup>74</sup> Crucially, that same year also put in motion developments in domestic politics that did much to reconcile the competing national and local experiences of democracy described above.

That the troublesome nature of ‘things’ (as Trentmann calls them), or the objects of voters’ material concerns, overflowed into political considerations is a rule writ large across the British political landscape in the aftermath of 1931. The effects were far-reaching. We know, for instance, that in some sections of the Labour movement the event occasioned something of an intellectual watershed. This led eventually to the revisionism of the post-1945 party, which diminished the material in favour of the ‘mind’ or ‘character’ as the target of political action.<sup>75</sup> More visible at the time, and arguably just as far-reaching in the long term, was the significant shift at the level of national party strategy in the opposite direction, away from the mind and towards the material. This saw the two main parties embrace the politics of representation more systematically than ever before. Dire economic circumstances (financial and trade deficits, unemployment at over three million) and the resulting policy agenda meant that material matters preoccupied the public utterances of party leaders more than at any time since the 1923 tariff election, and possibly since 1918. For the Conservative party, which constituted the majority of the National Government, this centred on policies promoting economic recovery (tariffs, imperial co-operation and sector reforms, in particular) and addressing the conditions of the unemployed (including the means test, housing and ‘distressed area’ schemes).

This, in turn, occasioned some notable changes in the character of party propaganda. For instance, Neville Chamberlain, as chancellor of the exchequer, assumed a more prominent role in Conservative material. As a result, prior to appeasement his reputation grew as he established himself as

<sup>74</sup> R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914–51* (Oxford, 2010), p. vii, ch. 3.

<sup>75</sup> See above, n. 46.

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the architect and foreman of national recovery.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the aftermath of 1931 demanded that strategists paid particular attention to publicizing results, or what today is referred to as government 'delivery'. While the desire to promulgate government activity was far from novel, strategists in the 1930s – mainly Conservative – had to respond to the pressing imperative to construct a compelling narrative of progress. Thus, common to almost all the publicity campaigns between 1932 and the general election of 1935, when the National Government went to the country defending its majority, was the prevalence of a linear narrative highlighting improvements in different regions and industries since 1931 – and then linking them directly to government policy. Orchestrating this by 1935 was the National Publicity Bureau (NPB), which, although ostensibly non-political, proved effective in producing both film and print informing voters of the government's legislative programme, its implementation and its positive results on the ground.<sup>77</sup> The NPB was founded around the same time as John Grierson's pioneering work at the General Post Office Film Unit, whose task included publicizing the work of the GPO in constructing new communication networks. Many of these, along with the concomitant process of electrification, were among the government's most celebrated job-creating and modernizing initiatives. The GPO and the NPB in the 1930s together shaped a new culture of government, anticipating the public relations revolution of subsequent decades.<sup>78</sup>

Yet, however notable this new culture of government, it was not a paradigm shift towards a predominantly representative conception of what constituted the political objective in a mass democracy. Among national politicians, the urge to manage far outlived the travails of the 1920s. The story of recovery from 1931 was as much a grand narrative, malleable in the hands of party strategists, as it was a breath of fresh air to activists on the ground. It tells us of the ingenuity of the professional politician by the 1930s, especially that he by then saw in the politics of the material a means by which to continue and diversify the essential task of shaping democracy. Indeed, Baldwin and many leading Conservatives entered a new – perhaps heightened – phase of national

<sup>76</sup> For a fuller discussion of Chamberlain's role, see Thomas, 'Conservatives and the culture of "national" government between the wars', pp. 77–8, 81–2. See also the striking portraits that appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on the occasion of his reforms: 13 Feb. 1932 (Import Duties Bill statement to the house of commons), 24 Dec. 1932 (negotiations with the American government on war debts), 21 Apr. 1934 (his 'restoration' budget, which restored the cuts to unemployment benefit and public sector salaries implemented in 1931).

<sup>77</sup> See the NPB's broadsheet, *The Popular Illustrated* (1935–6).

<sup>78</sup> S. Tallents, *The Projection of England* (1932); R. Casey, 'The National Publicity Bureau and British party propaganda', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, iii (1939), 623–34; J. L'Etang, 'State propaganda and bureaucratic intelligence: the creation of public relations in 20th century Britain', *Public Relations Review*, xxiv (1998), 413–41.

rhetoric in the 1930s, primarily in response to the rise of the continental dictatorships.<sup>79</sup> Observing the propaganda machines in Germany and Italy arguably reinforced the faith of British political leaders in the efficacy of mass communication. It was possible to denounce the enslaving universality of the ‘mass mind’ under the totalitarians and at the same time to appreciate how some of their techniques could be used towards different ends within the context of British democracy. Baldwin was surely too canny a political strategist to be only thinking in a simple anti-totalitarian register when, in speeches warning of the threat of extremism, he noted how the new press and the radio “‘annihilated” distance, time, and frontiers’.<sup>80</sup> During the 1935 election, Baldwin’s broadcasts and cinema newsreel appearances reached an unprecedented number of voters.<sup>81</sup> It is little coincidence then that Williamson has viewed the campaign as the pinnacle of Baldwin’s grand strategy to shape and mobilize ‘moral opinion’.<sup>82</sup>

And yet the 1930s were undeniably a significant moment in the history of political representation, when material interests mattered. And it was at the local level that the real significance of this was felt. Although it did not displace the managerial aims of the chief strategists, the new emphasis on ‘good governance’ seemed to speak more directly to the corporate identities of voters in their communities. Of course, there is no guaranteeing the popularity or effectiveness of government policy: the means test proved intensely unpopular among the unemployed and government schemes to regenerate the ‘distressed areas’ had little immediate impact. It is also likely that, by 1945, many voters had come to identify with a popular memory of the 1930s, constructed by Labour party polemics in the aftermath of Munich and Dunkirk, which associated the decade with a distinctly vain culture of unrepresentative and irresponsible government.<sup>83</sup> But for most

<sup>79</sup> See P. Williamson, ‘Christian Conservatives and the totalitarian challenge, 1933–40’, *English Historical Review*, cxv (2000), 607–42.

<sup>80</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 315.

<sup>81</sup> It is estimated that by the mid 1930s around 20 million Britons watched the cinema newsreels each week and that up to half of the electorate tuned in to political broadcasts on the radio during the 1935 campaign (Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, p. 99; T. Stannage, *Baldwin Thwarts the Opposition: the British General Election of 1935* (1980), p. 178).

<sup>82</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, pp. 354–5.

<sup>83</sup> The main instalment in Labour’s history was ‘Cato’ [M. Foot, P. Howard and F. Owen], *Guilty Men* (1940). It could be argued that this account of the 1930s set the scene for Labour’s nation-building project from 1945. Not only did this provide a vision of the recent past that seemed in contradistinction to the party’s radical hopes for the future, it also shaped the conventional wisdoms governing the relationship between political leaders and voters by placing ‘government’ – and with it politicians’ representativeness and effectiveness – as more central still to the process of shaping modern democracy.



Conservative activists at the time, the years between 1931 and 1938 delivered perhaps the most effective culture of national government yet experienced at the grassroots. This was the result of two particular developments triggered by the accident of the economic crisis: the emergence of a more 'relevant' message from the national leadership, scaling down idealism in favour of materialism, plus the dissemination of this new message through updated forms of communication in a way that betrayed greater awareness among strategists of voters' multiple identities. By 1935, party workers in Ilford made enthusiastic use of the government's literature because it showcased infrastructure projects in and around London. These included tube extensions, which spoke directly to suburban commuters' concerns. Meanwhile, commuters travelling on existing tube services were targeted by NPB posters advertising other government achievements.<sup>84</sup> It was possible, after all, to mitigate some of the tensions contained within the activist encounter with modern national politics after 1918.

This helps to explain why, after so famously rejecting the post-war coalition in 1922, local Conservative parties supported the cross-party National Government for so long after 1931. More generally, it shows that local and national conceptions of mass democracy could be reconciled. That this occurred most clearly in the mid 1930s, when the production of party propaganda was most mechanized and centralized, is significant. By focusing on the place of government in local constructions of mass democracy, the political historian comes to see that the hallmarks of political modernity, among them the nationalization of political strategy and language, hint not at the decline of localism in political culture but rather at a new dynamic between the local and national.

<sup>84</sup> Casey, 'National Publicity Bureau', pp. 633–4.



## 2. Whig lessons, Conservative answers: the literary adventures of Sir J. A. R. Marriott\*

*Gary Love*

The question of how public intellectuals and political elites responded to the onset of mass democracy after the franchise reforms of 1918 and 1928 continues to occupy the minds of historians and literary critics. D. L. LeMahieu, Peter Mandler and Susan Pedersen have shown that educated elites responded to the challenges of democracy in different ways. Mandler and Pedersen argue that some liberal elites accepted that they would not be able to remake democracy in their own image. Others ‘fought back’, choosing to defend Britain’s “civilizing” institutions’, which the Victorians had always admired.<sup>1</sup> LeMahieu’s innovative study of the inter-war years did much to flesh out these different intellectual responses to Britain’s evolving democratic culture. If new media were increasingly concerned with profit and the marketplace then educated elites like John Reith, Compton Mackenzie and Stephen Tallents worked hard to deliver highbrow messages to democratic audiences through different media.<sup>2</sup> While LeMahieu’s work dealt with the broader issues raised by the changing nature of inter-war British culture, Miles Taylor’s discussion of the views of the historian G. M. Young demonstrated how a prominent Tory intellectual responded to these challenges. Young lamented the loss of highbrow influence on middlebrow opinion during the inter-war period because he argued that it was instrumental to the formation of ‘culture’. In Young’s view, the sensationalist popular press was a poor substitute for the moral leadership provided by

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<sup>1</sup> *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain. Essays in Memory of John Clive*, ed. S. Pedersen and P. Mandler (1994), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 1–5; Pedersen and Mandler, *After the Victorians*, p. 20. On Reith, see D. L. LeMahieu, ‘Entrepreneur of collectivism: Reith of the BBC’, in Pedersen and Mandler, *After the Victorians*, pp. 188–206.

Victorian elites and intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Richard Overy has tried to bridge the gap between elite and mass culture in inter-war Britain. He argues that the pessimistic views of a select group of left-wing intellectuals informed mass culture to such an extent that the period should be referred to as *The Morbid Age*.<sup>4</sup> As Overy's work reveals, we know far more about left-wing intellectuals during the inter-war period than we do about those on the right, especially those who were associated with the Conservative party.<sup>5</sup> This chapter discusses the literary career of the Oxford historian and former Conservative MP, Sir J. A. R. Marriott. In so doing, it highlights the impact of democratization on a particular kind of inter-war intellectual. Marriott was a Victorian who made his reputation in the Edwardian period, but as a liberal-Conservative he adapted his politics to embrace Britain's new democratic age. A re-exploration of Marriott's literary output allows historians to measure the potential impact of Conservative intellectuals on educated elites and the general public.

J. A. R. Marriott was one of the most prolific Conservative writers of the 1930s, but if we exclude Lawrence Goldman's work on his role as an Oxford University extension lecturer, he has generally been dismissed as nothing more than a 'literary' historian who failed to engage with anything other than 'surface events'.<sup>6</sup> Such a portrayal does not account for Marriott's broader role as a public intellectual during this period. As an 'eminent Victorian' he still identified books and the periodical press as the most important media for influencing politics in the 1930s, and he devoted much of his time to writing for prominent monthly reviews. Indeed, Marriott's decision to write for elite publics was not a bad one. Although Conservatives modernized their approach to publicizing their ideas – the party was the first truly to exploit radio and film in the inter-war period – like other political and intellectual elites they did not immediately abandon more elevated forums for political communication. The literary historian Stefan Collini argues that after the introduction of new media and the specialized academic journal, the broader cultural role of the periodical press, like that of *The*

<sup>3</sup> M. Taylor, 'G. M. Young and the early Victorian revival', in *The Victorians since 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions*, ed. M. Taylor and M. Wolff (Manchester, 2004), pp. 84–5.

<sup>4</sup> R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain between the Wars* (2009).

<sup>5</sup> There are some exceptions. On Arthur Bryant, see J. Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in 20th-Century Britain* (Lanham, 2005). On Bryant, K. Feiling and F. J. C. Hearnshaw, see R. N. Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America: from the Great War to Thatcher and Reagan* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See J. W. Osborne, 'The endurance of "literary" history in Great Britain: Charles Oman, G. M. Trevelyan, and the genteel tradition', *Clio*, ii (Oct. 1972), 12–13; L. Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 76–7.

*Times*, became more limited as competition for readers increased.<sup>7</sup> Collini is right to warn historians that periodicals no longer influenced British society in the way that they did during the nineteenth century, but it is argued here that their status was robust in political circles during the 1930s. Circulation figures for periodicals did not decline between the Victorian and inter-war periods, and if some well-known Victorian reviews had ceased publication they had been replaced by newly established literary ventures.<sup>8</sup> This is why a substantial number of Conservative intellectuals, MPs, peers and party workers, many of whom had a role in educating young Conservatives at Ashridge College, contributed to this public discourse, which was distinct from party election broadcasts, newsreels and the popular press.<sup>9</sup> The regularity of politicians' contributions, and the acknowledgement of each other's work both in private and in print, suggest that the reviews remained influential forums for political debate at least until the Second World War.

Historians of inter-war politics have neglected Marriott's contributions to the periodical press, just as they have failed to utilize his important collection of private papers.<sup>10</sup> Both sources confirm that Marriott was consulted by leading figures of the day. At the same time, his influence extended beyond Westminster: his articles, monographs and letters to *The Times* reached a larger, educated reading public, which was interested in history and politics. Marriott was an independent Conservative who used his skills as a historian to bolster the forces of constitutionalism and parliamentary vigilance in Britain. As Philip Williamson and others have shown, the Conservative party leader Stanley Baldwin worked hard to sustain a 'language of constitutionalism' in Britain, which, in Baldwin's words, was meant to 'educate' British democracy 'before the crash comes'.<sup>11</sup> However, Marriott was no Baldwinite apologist

<sup>7</sup> S. Collini, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics* (Oxford, 2008), p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> Collini, *Common Reading*, p. 225. For a thorough analysis of circulation figures for periodicals during the inter-war period, see G. Love, 'Conservatives, national politics, and the challenge to democracy in Britain, 1931–7' (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 2010), pp. 24–36.

<sup>9</sup> These issues are also explored at length in my unpublished doctoral thesis, which analyses the literary contributions of a range of Conservative intellectuals and MPs (see Love, 'Conservatives, national politics', pp. 1–49).

<sup>10</sup> For an exception, see S. Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party: the Crisis of 1929–31* (1988), p. 246. Ball's principal interests lie elsewhere, which is why he did not make much use of Marriott's papers.

<sup>11</sup> P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 148. See also B. Schwarz, 'The language of constitutionalism: Baldwinite Conservatism', in *Formations of Nation and People* (1984), pp. 1–18. S. Nicholas, 'The construction of a national identity: Stanley Baldwin, "Englishness" and the mass media in inter-war Britain', in *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880–1990*, ed. M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 127–46.

and he often highlighted Baldwin's apparent indifference to constitutional dangers. Unlike most government ministers, Marriott did not limit himself to criticizing dictatorial politics abroad or raising the potential threat from extremist movements at home. He was critical of the National Government because he believed it was using its powers to usurp English traditions of parliamentary government. As an expert on the British constitution, he saw himself as an important influence on the National Government, warning its backbench MPs of the potential pitfalls of a large majority in the House of Commons. Marriott's ideas were also carefully structured to refute inter-war extremist arguments in favour of revolutionizing the British system of government. However, these views conflicted with his favourable impression of Mussolini. Marriott admired the fascist regime's imperialism and nationalism, but distrusted its syndicalist roots. His sympathy for fascist Italy influenced his approach to foreign policy and his arguments added weight to the National Government's policy of appeasement. As a Victorian Conservative, Marriott also rejected claims for self-government in India because he believed the English imperial mission to be incomplete.

These issues, and Marriott's role as a public intellectual, will now be explored in four sections. First, there is a discussion of Marriott's views on the writing of history. A series of examples show how he tried to influence British politics through his histories and political commentaries. This is followed by an account of Marriott's view of fascist Italy and his response to continental dictatorships. Then Marriott's 'Whig interpretation of history' is compared with the ideas of the Conservative historian Arthur Bryant, and the Liberal political theorist Ernest Barker.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Marriott's work is placed within wider debates about the professionalization of history in this period. Finally, discussion turns to Marriott's influence on educated and political elites.

In the early 1930s J. A. R. Marriott was already in his seventies. He was an honorary fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, an Oxford University extension lecturer, a well-known historian, a former MP, a prolific letter writer to *The Times*, a regular book reviewer for the *Sunday Times*, an occasional contributor of political articles to the national press, and a regular contributor to the periodical press. At the same time, he was very much in demand as a public speaker.<sup>13</sup> However, parliamentary politics had been

<sup>12</sup> Stapleton, *Bryant*, pp. 91–4.

<sup>13</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 76–7. J. Marriott, *Memories of Four Score Years: the Autobiography of the Late Sir John Marriott* (1946), pp. 91–101.

his main interest since the First World War, following his election to the House of Commons in 1917. As a former Oxford don, Marriott should have been well suited to his constituency of Oxford City, but he was defeated at the 1922 general election by the maverick Liberal candidate, Frank Gray.<sup>14</sup> Marriott won York in 1923, but lost the seat in 1929, the end of his troubled parliamentary career.

Though little has been written about Marriott's contribution to Conservative politics during these years, the same cannot be said of his work as a historian. John Osborne locates Marriott's historical work within a linear tradition that was largely unaffected by the controversy surrounding the publication of J. A. Froude's *History of England from 1529 to the Death of Elizabeth* in the 1870s, seen by some as the death knell of 'literary' history. Osborne compares Marriott's style to that of two of his contemporaries, Charles Oman and G. M. Trevelyan. He reminds us that their narrative approach remained popular with the educated public until the 1950s.<sup>15</sup> But there was much more to Marriott's literary work. True, books such as *Modern England, 1885–1932* (1934) offered virtually no serious analysis, which explains Osborne's categorization of his work, but such volumes made up only part of his output. Others had direct political messages. This is reflected in the way Marriott viewed himself both in the 1930s and in his autobiography (published posthumously in 1946). He often termed himself a 'publicist' rather than a historian because many of his books and nearly all of his articles for the periodical press were written with regard to current affairs. As Goldman observes, Marriott's 'approach was not bound by the lives of great men'; he paid 'attention to the interconnection of events and movements'; and he presented 'complex historical questions for an educated but non-specialist audience'.<sup>16</sup>

Marriott's politics and his 'Whig interpretation of history' were heavily grounded in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The story of the gradual accumulation of liberty remained, but it now acted as a warning to those who were contemplating breaking with tradition and adopting continental systems of government. In 1936 Marriott revealed those historians he most admired; he identified Lord Clarendon, Edward Gibbon, Lord Macaulay and George Grote as 'the four most eminent, if not the four greatest, English

<sup>14</sup> F. Gray, *The Confessions of a Candidate* (1925), pp. 73–4.

<sup>15</sup> Osborne, 'Endurance of "literary" history', pp. 12–13.

<sup>16</sup> L. Goldman, 'Marriott, Sir John Arthur Ransome (1859–1945)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34887>> [accessed 15 Jan. 2009].

<sup>17</sup> See V. Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill: Private Scholars, Public Culture, and the Crisis of British Liberalism, 1900–39* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), pp. 1–14.

historians'.<sup>18</sup> This judgement was based on the fact that all four men had at some stage sat in parliament (three held office) and that all employed a partisan approach to writing history.<sup>19</sup> Marriot was aware of the dangers of partisanship, but he believed all history to be ultimately political: 'It is as much "politics" as the events recorded in "The Times" of yesterday. History and politics are in truth one; consequently, only a politician can write history'.<sup>20</sup> He argued that politicians like Austen Chamberlain and Winston Churchill were capable of making worthy contributions to the discipline. Of Churchill, Marriott wrote, 'With a vocabulary as copious as Macaulay's he is his equal in vivacity, and in rhythm of his sentences he is both to Macaulay and Gibbon manifestly superior'.<sup>21</sup>

Marriott had publicized his constitutionalist views since 1900, but the challenges of 1929–31 and the rise of political extremism abroad meant that he was keen to deploy constitutional arguments to sustain a 'faltering' political class.<sup>22</sup> To understand Marriott's 'Whig interpretation of history', his thinking and his consistent political message in the 1930s, we must begin with his *The Crisis of English Liberty: a History of the Stuart Monarchy and the Puritan Revolution* (1930). Although written before the 1931 crisis, Marriott's view of the Stuart monarchy represented an attempt to quarry the past for lessons that could be applied to Britain's current political difficulties. These lessons acted as warnings to those who were voicing dissatisfaction with parliamentary democracy. They were to dominate his literary work for the remainder of the decade. As Marriott explained in the preface, the book's only claim to originality was that it was written with 'special reference to problems now insistently confronting us'. These were thought to have been solved in the seventeenth century by struggles for parliamentary sovereignty, but they had now reappeared to 'stir the blood of those who mingle in public affairs'.<sup>23</sup> One reviewer characterized the book as a polemic, not history.<sup>24</sup>

Marriott made no secret of the fact that the book was written for the 'general reader'. He thought that British citizens could 'do their duty to their own generation' only if they were 'familiar with the problems which

<sup>18</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, 'History and politics', *Quarterly Review*, lxxvii (Jan. 1936), 34.

<sup>19</sup> Marriott, 'History', p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Marriott, 'History', p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> Marriott, *Memories*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, 'Cabinet government or departmentalism?', *Nineteenth Century*, xlvi (Oct. 1900), 685–94.

<sup>23</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, *The Crisis of English Liberty: a History of the Stuart Monarchy and the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1930), preface.

<sup>24</sup> R. G. Usher, 'Review of *The Crisis of English Liberty. A History of the Stuart Monarchy and the Puritan Revolution* by J. A. R. Marriott', *Journal of Modern History*, iii (1931), 289–90.



confronted their forefathers'.<sup>25</sup> However, comparing G. M. Trevelyan's *Blenheim* (1930) with Marriott's latest work, R. W. Macan wrote:

I am sure of one small point—that I shall not be distressed in yours, as in his, by any such literary concessions to the proletariat ... I must say that a glance at your 'Table of Contents' makes me think that you take the intelligence and zeal of 'the General Reader' at a figure which is a very high compliment to his General-Readership!<sup>26</sup>

For all Marriott's efforts, print-run statistics from Oxford University Press confirm that he was no more successful than the typical Conservative writer, averaging just 2,000 copies per book. Moreover, Marriott's history books, written mainly for university undergraduates, sold better than those that harboured distinct political messages.<sup>27</sup> The fifth edition of Marriott's *English Political Institutions: an Introductory Study* ran to 5,000 copies in 1938. However, Marriott's books were continuously reissued, unlike those of most literary Conservatives in this period.<sup>28</sup>

But what sparked Marriott's attempt to fuse history with politics? It appears that reading Lord Hewart's *The New Despotism* (1929) led him 'to rewrite the constitutional history of the seventeenth century'.<sup>29</sup> Hewart was a Liberal MP between 1913 and 1922, and the lord chief justice of England from 1922 (the year he was elevated to the peerage) until 1940. In his book, Hewart argued that the executive arm of the constitution (government) was trying to cajole, coerce and use the legislative (parliament) for its own ends. In his view, government wished to bypass parliament and the courts in order to rule supreme.<sup>30</sup> Marriott praised Hewart, declaring that he had

<sup>25</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, preface.

<sup>26</sup> York City Archives, J. A. R. Marriott papers (hereafter YCA, Marriott papers), Acc 140, envelope marked 'Letters of Appreciation and Criticism, mostly dated 1939–40', R. W. Macan to J. A. R. Marriott, 10 Oct. 1930. R. W. Macan was master of University College, Oxford (1906–23) and an expert on historical theology.

<sup>27</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, *Modern England 1885–1932: a History of my own Times* (1934), pp. vi, 529. Marriott explains how his bibliography is intended to be of practical use for students.

<sup>28</sup> Printing statistics for individual books can be found in Oxford University Press Archives, ref. OP275/1584, *English Political Institutions: an Introductory Study* (Oxford, 1938), 5,000 copies printed in Dec. 1938; Long Book Editorial Files from OUP's London Office, LB6500, *The Crisis of English Liberty*, 2,000 copies printed 9 Oct. 1930; LB7622, *The Makers of Modern Italy: Napoleon–Mussolini* (Oxford, 1931), no figures survive for the 1931 edition but a second run of 1,000 copies was printed 3 Feb. 1937; LB6784, *The English in India: a Problem of Politics* (Oxford, 1932), 2,000 copies printed 14 Apr. 1932; LB6895, *Oxford: its Place in National History* (Oxford, 1932), 2,500 copies printed 12 Jan. 1933.

<sup>29</sup> R. Lodge, 'Review of *The Crisis of English Liberty. A History of the Stuart Monarchy and the Puritan Revolution* by J. A. R. Marriott', *English Historical Review*, xlvii (1932), 311.

<sup>30</sup> Lord Hewart of Bury, *The New Despotism* (1929), p. 17, quoted in Marriott, *Crisis*, p. 4.

‘descended from the forum into the market-place and issued *urbi* if not *orbi* his reflections upon the contemporary situation’. He even compared him to Edward Coke, the great defender of the English common law against the Stuart monarchy in the seventeenth century.<sup>31</sup> Marriott’s aim was to present historical struggles for parliamentary sovereignty in the seventeenth century as an amplification of Hewart’s thesis on the dangers threatening the constitution in the present. Marriott attributed these modern constitutional problems to three sources: ‘the exaltation of the “expert” in all spheres of activity; the multiplication of the functions of Government and the consequent expansion of the Public Departments; and, not least, the growing volume of legislation and the increasing preoccupation or heedlessness of the Legislature’.<sup>32</sup> This was paving the way for the transfer of legislation from Westminster to Whitehall, laying the foundations for what he characterized as an autocracy. Worryingly, he argued, unlike ‘amateur’ politicians, professional civil servants were not accountable to the public because they could remain anonymous.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Marriott thought that a number of underlying factors were responsible for this shift of power. Britain was now subject to complex ‘industrial and social conditions’, while its constitution was suffering from both the ‘influence of a Civil Service, consciously or unconsciously permeated by the ideas of Fabian Socialism’ and the rejection of *laissez-faire* in favour of government interference in ‘all the affairs of life’.<sup>34</sup>

Marriott singled out Baldwin as an apologist for what he termed the ‘new order’, which was supposedly eroding the constitution. He argued that Baldwin was defending unaccountable forms of executive power, and he rejected his defence of two remaining constitutional safeguards against the potential abuse of powers to make statutory rules and orders: the courts’ powers to reject an act of legislation and an MP’s right to introduce a private member’s bill to call for an annulment.<sup>35</sup> While Marriott considered the second of these to be ‘almost wholly illusory’ he was even more disturbed by relying on the judiciary rather than on parliament to protect the liberties of the individual. Marriott’s main point was the conflict of interest arising from government departments’ newfound willingness to make law in addition to administering it. The courts could intervene to reject the application of legislation only if an individual member of the public appealed against it. This, he argued, was insufficient protection because

<sup>31</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, pp. 3–4, 461.

<sup>32</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, p. 12.

most members of the public were not aware of their rights of appeal and could ill afford the costs of litigation.<sup>36</sup> Marriott's message was a reminder to MPs to remain vigilant in the defence of both the constitution and personal liberty. The story of the battles fought between the Stuart monarchy and lawyers such as Coke was told to remind MPs of parallel cases in their own time; little wonder that critics and reviewers were unenthusiastic about its contribution to Stuart history. Furthermore, Marriott offered no solution to the constitutional problems he identified other than a committee to consider their implications. This fitted his purpose. It seems Marriott was more concerned about keeping the issue alive within political circles.

As Priya Satia also reveals in this volume, concerns about 'the exaltation of the "expert"' were not restricted to domestic affairs during the inter-war period. The delegation of ministerial powers to civil servants and the influential role of state bureaucracy were essential tools in the governing of what Satia terms Britain's 'covert empire' in the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Calls for more government accountability to parliament on domestic affairs paralleled those on foreign and imperial matters. However, one could argue that Marriott's opposition (and the evidence cited by Satia) to a reliance on the 'expert' went against the grain of British politics in this period. The prevailing mood among Britain's parliamentary elite during the inter-war years was that parliamentary procedure and accountability were too cumbersome. This is why the British cabinet appointed a select committee on Commons procedure in early 1931, which heard evidence from a number of admirers of the Italian 'corporate state', including Churchill, Oswald Mosley and Lord Eustace Percy.<sup>38</sup> Most MPs were in favour of reviewing parliamentary procedure because radicals like Mosley were calling for an even more autocratic system, but mainly because it was a means of limiting the potential effect of universal suffrage on policy-making.

One of the few occasions when Marriott wrote about Conservative politics was in an article on the reformist politician Francis Burdett for *Cornhill Magazine* in August 1931. Marriott identified Burdett, like Coke, as a model for his time, arguing that he was Conservative, despite his radical connections and sympathy for the French Revolution, because he was a defender of personal and political liberty, a champion of the oppressed and

<sup>36</sup> Marriott, *Crisis*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>37</sup> P. Satia, 'Inter-war agnotology: empire, democracy and the production of ignorance', in *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars*, ed. L. Beers and G. Thomas (2011), p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> P. Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926–32* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 136–7.

the suffering.<sup>39</sup> Marriott identified Burdett as the ‘lineal ancestor of Disraeli and the Fourth Party’.<sup>40</sup> He argued that ‘both ardently believed in the compatibility of true Toryism and genuine Democracy’.<sup>41</sup> But he qualified his praise of Burdett, insisting that ‘A few Burdetts are a valuable ingredient in any representative assembly,—but only in minute proportions; many Burdetts would constitute a real political danger’.<sup>42</sup> The message was clear: the Conservative party was a natural home for politicians seeking radical reform, but the bulk of traditional Conservatives would always act as a restraining influence on the reforming zeal of the ‘Tory Democrats’.<sup>43</sup>

In the aftermath of 1931, Marriott wrote a number of articles glorifying England’s response to national crisis. In his article ‘The crown and the crisis’ Marriott argued that the king’s actions vindicated the role of the crown in the British constitution. It was the constitution rather than the political parties that saved Britain from doom, although Ramsay MacDonald was to be congratulated for upholding his constitutional duty, unlike Asquith in 1910.<sup>44</sup> After the 1931 general election, Marriott wrote another important article praising ‘The answer of demos’ to the recent crisis. He argued that the election was more than just a vindication of democracy: ‘It is a vindication of that peculiar type of Democracy—*Parliamentary*, as opposed to *Direct Democracy*—which we English folk were the first to evolve’.<sup>45</sup> Even more important, Marriott concluded, was the response given by poorer members of the electorate who showed their ‘patriotism and good sense’. This, he said, was particularly surprising under the circumstances:

there was at least a hope that the return of the Socialists would have brought some immediate mitigation of the sacrifices now accepted by all. Quite clearly and definitely, then, the mass of the electors refused a bribe. They showed themselves to be (in a fine phrase of Sir Robert Horne’s) ‘not mercenaries, but citizens’.<sup>46</sup>

Marriott believed that the general population was won over by reasoned argument, not just patriotism; the people recognized the potential long-term economic danger of inflation (as witnessed in Germany) and they rejected attempts by the Trades Union Congress to pressurize the Labour

<sup>39</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, ‘The father of Tory democracy’, *Cornhill Magazine*, lxxi (1931), p. 152, reviewing M. W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and his Times* (2 vols., 1931).

<sup>40</sup> Marriott, ‘Tory democracy’, p. 152.

<sup>41</sup> Marriott, ‘Tory democracy’, pp. 150–1.

<sup>42</sup> Marriott, ‘Tory democracy’, p. 152.

<sup>43</sup> Marriott, ‘Tory democracy’, p. 152.

<sup>44</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, ‘The crown and the crisis’, *Fortnightly Review*, cxxx (1931), 586–9.

<sup>45</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, ‘The answer of demos’, *Fortnightly Review*, cxxx (1931), 681.

<sup>46</sup> Marriott, ‘Answer of demos’, p. 682.

government into accepting its demands.<sup>47</sup> But Marriott was unsure of whether the election result would strengthen the British system of government. He warned the National Government that it must act responsibly because no alternative government existed in parliament as the official opposition was in such a minority.<sup>48</sup> Despite Marriott's suspicions of Baldwin, we know that the Conservative leader shared his anxieties. Baldwin was careful to establish the government's 'national' credentials by allowing the prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, to reconstruct the government on his own terms.<sup>49</sup>

Marriott did not, indeed, idealize the National Government. Although he was generally supportive of both it and the Conservative party leadership, he regarded his role as that of critical friend rather than loyal apologist. He constantly warned political elites of potential constitutional, financial and political abuses, and he urged responsible conduct by all MPs. In March 1932 he was critical of the cabinet's decision to adopt an 'agreement to differ' on the Import Duties Bill.<sup>50</sup> For Marriott, this struck at the heart of one of the most sacred aspects of the Victorian constitution, the principle of collective cabinet responsibility, and he could barely hide his distress:

Mr. Baldwin's answer to my questions would, I doubt not, be '*solvitur ambulando*': pedants propounded logical dilemmas; it is the business of statesman to carry on, as best they can, the business of the State. So be it. Englishmen, impatient of theory and disdainful of logic, will wait and see how the thing works. I sincerely hope it will work well.<sup>51</sup>

Marriott was equally critical of L. S. Amery's plans for limiting the cabinet to five members without departmental responsibilities – a 'super-cabinet' like that adopted by the government during the First World War, which was also being advocated by fascists.<sup>52</sup> Marriott argued that Amery was doing the country a great service by raising the issue, but he concluded that it would not improve the British system of government. The introduction of a cabinet secretary, an agenda and official minutes meant that the cabinet

<sup>47</sup> Marriott, 'Answer of demos', pp. 683–7.

<sup>48</sup> Marriott, 'Answer of demos', pp. 690–1.

<sup>49</sup> Williamson, *National Crisis*, pp. 485–6.

<sup>50</sup> D. J. Wrench, 'The needs of the time: the National Government and the "agreement to differ", 1932', *Parliamentary History*, xxiii (2004), 249–64.

<sup>51</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, 'Cabinet government – its future?', *Fortnightly Review*, cxxxi (1932), 318–22.

<sup>52</sup> L. S. Amery, *The Forward View* (1935), pp. 441–58. G. Love, "'What's the big idea?': Oswald Mosley, the British Union of Fascists and generic fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xlii (July 2007), 450–1.

system had already been made more efficient.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, there was evidence to show that a lack of departmental experts within the war cabinet had led to increased friction among its members, resulting in inefficient decision-making.<sup>54</sup>

Financial issues also concerned Marriott. Although he generally admired the National Government's handling of the War Loan conversion scheme he was highly critical of the government's decision to offer bankers commission rates of 5%. Marriott argued that this measure was an act of extravagance during times of financial hardship. He calculated that if the whole conversion was carried out in July 1932 the taxpayer would be liable for £5 million.<sup>55</sup> An article on the House of Commons' control of finance followed in February 1933, urging the government to address a most unfashionable subject, the proper regulation of government spending, which he thought would lead to an overall reduction in expenditure.<sup>56</sup> Marriott even warned the chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, not to take credit for 'cheap money' in December 1934: 'Cheap money is ... an indication not of prosperity but of industrial depression'.<sup>57</sup> He followed this with another letter to *The Times* in response to the Conservative MP Waldron Smithers, who had repeated Chamberlain's claims. Marriott labelled his words as 'partisanship' and warned him, as well as other Conservative candidates at the next election, not to exaggerate the National Government's economic record.<sup>58</sup> Marriott's natural sympathies were for individual initiative, private enterprise, low taxation and low levels of public spending, but it seems he adapted his views on free trade in line with the development of Conservative politics.<sup>59</sup> He supported the introduction of an emergency tariff on manufactured goods, but insisted that no artificial mechanisms be introduced to stabilize the pound because only 'the natural operation of economic forces' could 'guarantee its permanent stability'.<sup>60</sup>

Marriott's writings on domestic politics reveal that his sympathies were directed towards the crown, the constitution and, curiously, the people. The British public had passed a crucial test in 1931 and because they were now wedded to Whig constitutionalism Marriott had little to fear. Party politics

<sup>53</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, 'The machinery of government', *Nineteenth Century and After*, cxxi (Feb. 1937), 188–9.

<sup>54</sup> Marriott, 'Machinery of government', p. 190.

<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 11 July 1932.

<sup>56</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, 'Commons control of finance', *Fortnightly Review*, cxxxiii (1933), 203.

<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 24 Dec. 1934.

<sup>58</sup> *The Times*, 1 Jan. 1935.

<sup>59</sup> Marriott, *Memories*, pp. 134–5. J. A. R. Marriott, 'Adam Smith and some problems of to-day', *Fortnightly Review*, lxxxii (1904), 969–81.

<sup>60</sup> Marriott, 'Answer of demos', p. 691.

were never a key feature of Marriott's writings in the 1930s. This was partly because he was no longer a Conservative MP or subject to the party whip, but it also owed much to his intellectual interests, the nature of the literary spaces in which he published, and the fact that his arguments happened to suit the aims of a Conservative party subsumed within a National Government. When Marriott chose to intervene more directly in party politics he did so usually through letters to *The Times*, but his comments never amounted to more than warnings against the likely excesses of a large Conservative majority in the Commons. Marriott was a self-consciously independent Conservative intellectual who sought to keep Conservative backbenchers and their coalition partners on their mettle to defend principles of parliamentary sovereignty and constitutional government. In this respect, he offered critical support for Baldwin and his ministers and stressed how Conservatives could retain a distinct identity within National politics. Marriott's influential voice acted as an early warning system for the maintenance of Baldwin's centrist coalition of Conservative-Liberal support in elite political circles.

Marriott's anti-socialist, imperialist beliefs resulted in sympathy for Mussolini. In a second edition of *The Makers of Modern Italy* (1931), he gave an account of the rise of fascism and praised Mussolini's successful record on domestic policy. However, although Marriott argued that it was too early to judge the Italian fascist 'experiment', he wondered if too high a price had been paid for rapid improvements to Italian society:

have not all these advantages been attained at the price of that which is more precious than rubies, the enjoyment of liberty, personal and political? The answer to that question depends on the definition of 'liberty'. 'Liberty', said Mussolini, echoing Mazzini, 'is not a right but a duty.' Parliamentary democracy—and all that the phrase implies to an Englishman—has unquestionably been superseded by a dictatorship: the press is muzzled; Parliament has been reduced to the position of a debating society, without the power to legislate, and has no control whatever over the Executive; the new electoral methods seem (at any rate to an Englishman, so far as we can comprehend them) a mere travesty of representative government. Despite many elaborative devices, all real power is concentrated in the Fascist Grand Council and its President.<sup>61</sup>

Marriott warmed to the imperialist-nationalist sentiment of the fascist regime, but he was extremely suspicious of its syndicalist roots. As a result,

<sup>61</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, *The Makers of Modern Italy: Napoleon–Mussolini* (Oxford, 1931), p. 204.

he seized upon Winston Churchill's comments in his famous Romanes Lecture at Oxford in 1930. Marriott wrote that Churchill's mind 'is moving in the same direction as Signor Mussolini's. They are both, consciously or unconsciously, inspired by Syndicalist doctrine'.<sup>62</sup> Marriott's fear of syndicalism and labour unrest had deepened after the 1926 General Strike. In his words, it 'revealed clearly enough that my temper and outlook were essentially Conservative'.<sup>63</sup> However, despite these fears Marriott refused to engage critically with the philosophy of fascism. Instead, he encouraged his readers to examine Britain's own historical record, notably the years of Tudor dictatorship, which he argued represented 'an indispensable prelude to a period of constitutional advance'.<sup>64</sup> Marriott would not accept that there was any conflict between his endorsement of constitutional values at home and his condoning of Italian fascism. He chose to interpret this within the context of his own reading of Tudor and Stuart England. Although he refused to draw direct parallels between the two nations, Marriott hoped for a similar transition from Italy's 'modernizing' dictatorship to some form of parliamentary democracy. In his *Dictatorship and Democracy*, Marriott asked, 'Will repression, having served its disciplinary purpose, prepare the way for the enjoyment of a larger liberty? Will the Italian Dictatorship, like that of the English Tudors, prove itself politically educative?'<sup>65</sup>

Like Churchill, Marriott lamented the loss of national self-confidence in British institutions at the end of the 'long nineteenth century'. He remembered how 'the balanced Constitution of England appeared to mankind to be the quintessence of political wisdom'.<sup>66</sup> But the rise of dictatorships in Europe served only to confirm his belief in a Whig view of the national past. As Marriott explained, 'admiration ... is one thing; imitation is another' and 'there is no reason why the failure of the copyists should arouse among ourselves dissatisfaction with the original'.<sup>67</sup> It was this attitude and his Christian values that led to his support for appeasement. Marriott always stressed that the British should not look down upon their neighbours simply because they could not sustain parliamentary government and democracy. As he argued, 'Forms of government are to be judged not absolutely, according to some preconceived standard of

<sup>62</sup> Marriott, *Makers of Modern Italy*, p. 205. For the Romanes Lecture of 19 June 1930, see W. S. Churchill, *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932), pp. 229–44.

<sup>63</sup> Marriott, *Memories*, p. 139. On Marriott's attitude towards organized labour, see Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> Marriott, *Makers of Modern Italy*, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, *Dictatorship and Democracy* (Oxford, 1935), p. 192.

<sup>66</sup> Marriott, *Dictatorship*, p. 219.

<sup>67</sup> Marriott, *Dictatorship*, pp. 218–19.



excellence, but relatively to circumstances'.<sup>68</sup> These arguments were the by-products of a 'Whig interpretation of history', which had done much to propagate constitutional and democratic values at home. Marriott blamed the Treaty of Versailles for the rise of ultra-nationalism in inter-war Europe, and his memories of the First World War haunted him afresh, but he was aware of the ugliness of dictatorship and of the Nazi regime.<sup>69</sup>

Marriott's views on foreign policy were expressed in a steady flow of articles defending negotiations with Mussolini during the Abyssinian crisis. In his diary, he also acknowledged how he hoped his article *England and Italy* would 'do something to appease bitterness on both sides'.<sup>70</sup> This was certainly wishful thinking, but perhaps he was influenced by a personal letter from Mussolini thanking him for *The Makers of Modern Italy* in 1931.<sup>71</sup> Marriott even wrote a letter of support to the recently displaced foreign secretary, Samuel Hoare, in 1935 declaring that his 'policy will justify itself'.<sup>72</sup> However, it must be said that although Marriott's articles and books added weight to pro-appeasement arguments, they did not cloud his views on domestic politics. R. W. Macan, reading the proofs of Marriott's *The Makers of Modern Italy*, wrote:

I am thinking of the doctrinaire Liberals and Socialists, of both peoples—and it has come upon me, with fresh force, that the essence, or part of the essence of 'Conservative politics' is just, not to be 'doctrinaire', but to be 'evolutionary'—I need not develop the point—for it must be the ABC of your own historical conscience.<sup>73</sup>

Marriott's literary work resonated in academic and political circles, and his message that the Conservative party was the natural defender of the constitution, evolved over centuries, remained clear in the minds of his contemporaries.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Marriott, *Dictatorship*, p. 218.

<sup>69</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, unsorted letters, envelope marked 'Letters Misc. 1910–45, chiefly political', J. A. R. Marriott to Mr. Kenyon, 27 March 1940.

<sup>70</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'Marriott Notebooks', diary (loose leaf), mainly 1933–7, J. A. R. Marriott diary, 1 Aug. 1935. See J. A. R. Marriott, 'England and Italy', *Fortnightly Review*, cxxxviii (1935).

<sup>71</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, envelope marked 'Letters of Appreciation and Criticism, mostly dated 1939–40', R. W. Macan to J. A. R. Marriott, 24 Jan. 1932.

<sup>72</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'Marriott Notebooks', diary (loose leaf), mainly 1933–7, Marriott diary, 16 Dec. 1935.

<sup>73</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, envelope marked 'Letters of Appreciation and Criticism, mostly dated 1939–40', R. W. Macan to J. A. R. Marriott, 4 Dec. 1931.

<sup>74</sup> Marriott's insistence on the continuation of a 'Whig interpretation of history' also led him to express a renewed confidence in the 'civilizing' mission of empire (see J. A. R. Marriott, *The English in India: a Problem of Politics* (Oxford, 1932), pp. 302–4).

In her recent work on the Conservative historian Arthur Bryant, Julia Stapleton compares Bryant's responses to the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 with the views of the Liberal intellectual Ernest Barker. She reveals how Bryant's and Barker's interpretations of 1688 represented a key area of disagreement, which ultimately located both scholars in inter-war Conservative or Liberal politics respectively.<sup>75</sup> Barker rejected Bryant's claim that the negative social consequences of the industrial revolution and the 'unleashing of the aristocracy' after 1688 had undermined the Bill of Rights Act of 1689. Barker argued that the price for political liberty was worth paying, and he suggested Bryant's arguments could in fact be used to defend the extremist politics of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.<sup>76</sup> Stapleton rightly draws our attention to the importance of these differences: 'Barker's wariness of the state was firmly rooted in the securities against the misuse of power which he believed was [*sic*] enshrined in the 1689 constitutional settlement. By contrast, Bryant placed great faith in the capacity of a benevolent ruling class'.<sup>77</sup>

Marriott's Whig view of 1688 and its consequences edged him closer to the thinking of Liberal conservatives like Barker. It was perhaps no coincidence that both Marriott and Barker wrote regularly for the *Fortnightly Review*, which targeted a broad liberal readership. It has also been claimed that religion was a key stumbling block to potential 'Liberal-Conservative agreement against the rising tide of "progressivism"' in the 1930s.<sup>78</sup> While nonconformity may have been a problem for some Conservatives, it was not for Marriott because he never made religion a key feature of his work, despite his commitment to private worship and the Anglican Church.<sup>79</sup> Marriott said that he had never had much contact with nonconformists, 'from no lack of sympathy or appreciation of their many sterling qualities but simply through circumstances'. He was tolerant of the religious beliefs of his academic friends, especially R. F. Horton:

To Horton's own views, ecclesiastical and still more strongly political, I was definitely opposed. His Nonconformity and his Radicalism greatly mellowed, indeed, in old age, and towards the end, while deeply lamenting the virtual disappearance of the Liberal Party, he found, I think, in Mr. Stanley (Earl) Baldwin the nearest approach among modern statesmen to the idol he had worshipped in his political adolescence—Mr. Gladstone.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Stapleton, *Bryant*, pp. 92–3.

<sup>76</sup> Stapleton, *Bryant*, p. 92.

<sup>77</sup> Stapleton, *Bryant*, p. 93.

<sup>78</sup> Stapleton, *Bryant*, p. 94.

<sup>79</sup> For Marriott's religious views, see Marriott, *Memories*, pp. 43–52.

<sup>80</sup> Marriott, *Memories*, p. 43.

Marriott was representative of a form of Conservatism that wanted to meet constitutional and economic Liberals halfway to ensure the survival of Britain's established economic and political order at a time when it was being challenged by statist and unconstitutional ideas from both left and right. Like Barker, Marriott put his faith in the constitutional settlement, but like Bryant and other Conservatives he relied on MPs and the crown to safeguard the unwritten principles of the constitution on behalf of the general public. However, Marriott accepted democracy and he did not fear modern political and social change. He rejected the idea that the nineteenth century had undermined the strength of the English national character.<sup>81</sup> 'As in 1914, as in 1926, so again in 1931–2', he wrote, 'Britons proved that the national fibre is still sound, that in real stamina, moral or physical, there has in fact been no decay'.<sup>82</sup>

Marriott's orthodox economic liberalism reflected an important bridge between the Conservative party and National Liberals in the 1930s, but we should also not forget that his Whig view of 1688 was published in the context of serious debates about the 'professionalization' of history in this period. In *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), Herbert Butterfield warned famously against studying the past for contemporary purposes and it is likely that Marriott was one of his targets.<sup>83</sup> After all, Marriott's *The Crisis of English Liberty* was as close to a perfect example of a Conservative 'Whig interpretation of history' as one could get; and, more important, it was published just one year before Butterfield's work. Most academics anticipated or echoed Butterfield's concerns in their reviews of Marriott's work. Denis Brogan, a lecturer in politics at the London School of Economics, was critical of Marriott's Whig interpretation, but he was also disturbed by Marriott's claims that Britain was dangerously close to returning to a pre-1688 system of government.<sup>84</sup> He was particularly critical of Marriott's inability to look beyond the idea that the legal and parliamentary response to the crisis of 1688 was a purely moral one, disregarding the idea that other personal and professional motives might have played a part in Britain's constitutional 'march of progress'. Brogan was for a more dialectical account

<sup>81</sup> For Bryant's view of the English national character, see P. Mandler, 'The consciousness of modernity? Liberalism and the English "national character", 1870–1940', in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War Two*, ed. B. Rieger and M. Daunton (Oxford, 2001), p. 136; and *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), p. 164.

<sup>82</sup> Marriott, *Modern England*, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> S. Collini, 'Believing in history: Herbert Butterfield, Christian and whig', in Collini, *Common Reading*, pp. 142–3.

<sup>84</sup> D. W. Brogan, 'English liberties', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 Jan. 1931, p. 50.

of history, which Butterfield would have no doubt appreciated.<sup>85</sup> However, one senses that Marriott would not have been overly concerned by the responses of professional historians. For all of his admiration for academic history, politics took centre stage in the twilight of his career. Instead of altering his methodology to suit an emerging historiographical orthodoxy, Marriott justified his ‘Whig interpretation of history’ on the grounds that it could provide the answers to contemporary constitutional dangers.

Marriott’s potential influence can be measured only by documenting the reception of his ideas in political circles. The task has been made more difficult because he crossed out much of his surviving political correspondence in order to provide paper for writing manuscripts. Nevertheless, a number of important letters and diary entries survive, while others can be rescued from their more recent literary homes. The material gives us a strong indication of Marriott’s academic and political connections in the 1930s. The fact that he was an MP in the 1920s gave him greater credibility than other Conservative intellectuals. His writings were undoubtedly popular with educated elites, as a systematic analysis of the periodical press reveals. No author would have been given so much intellectual space if he was of no interest to readers. The editor of the *Fortnightly Review* certainly believed that Marriott’s work appealed to old parliamentarians.<sup>86</sup> The fact that *The Times* published so many of his letters demonstrates that he was a man of stature. Furthermore, the political stance of the periodicals where Marriott chose to publish, mainly the *Cornhill Magazine*, *Fortnightly Review* and *Quarterly Review*, suggests that editors considered his work to be less partisan than that of other Conservative historians, even though he always claimed to be a ‘stern and unbending Tory’ in the national press.<sup>87</sup>

Certainly, the popularization of Hewart’s arguments in Marriott’s history of the seventeenth century and the views that Marriott later put forward in articles for the periodical press registered in Conservative, Liberal and legal circles. His work, for example, greatly influenced the Conservative

<sup>85</sup> Collini, ‘Believing in history’, p. 141.

<sup>86</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, sorted letters 1870–1943, editor of the *Fortnightly Review* to J. A. R. Marriott, 11 Oct. 1932. The article in question was probably Marriott, ‘Commons control of finance’, pp. 194–203.

<sup>87</sup> *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1935. Presumably Marriott was trying to compare himself to the historian T. B. Macaulay who used the same words in a hostile review of W. E. Gladstone’s book *The State in its Relations with the Church* (1838). See R. Shannon, *Gladstone*, i: 1809–65 (1982), pp. 43–4; and B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 485.

backbench MP Harold Balfour, who wrote an important series of broadcasts on the British constitution for the BBC in October 1935.<sup>88</sup> Although Balfour did not fully endorse Marriott's suspicions of the political establishment, his talks touched upon nearly all of Marriott's concerns, and during his first two broadcasts he openly acknowledged the latter's work as important and influential. Marriott's seventeenth-century comparison fuelled Balfour's script with examples of British freedoms won through hard-fought legal and constitutional developments. Balfour advised his audience: 'I only wish that I could assure you that the fears expressed by men like Lord Hewart and Sir John Marriott are groundless'.<sup>89</sup> Balfour's talks were written with Hitler's 'Night of the Long Knives' fresh in the popular mind. Despite trying to nuance his views of the Nazi regime in hope of improved diplomatic relations with Germany, it was obvious from his broadcasts that such qualification struck at the heart of his view of British justice and his high regard for personal liberty.<sup>90</sup>

Marriott's impact on Balfour indicates how academic works could influence 1930s Conservative culture. Both Marriott and Balfour attempted to underpin their constitutional arguments with historical examples in order to convince the public that the parliamentary system was preferable to foreign-style dictatorship. They both recognized that in a new democratic age the public had to be 'educated', but the level of detail that they deployed suggests that their messages were more likely to convince the highly educated elite. Certainly they did have influence with such people. The Conservative MP Duff Cooper expressed interest in Marriott's book *Castlereagh* (1936).<sup>91</sup> Lord Selborne praised his *Oxford and its Place in National History* (1933). The legal world, which played an important role in parliamentary politics, also approved of Marriott's work, especially *The Crisis of English Liberty*. As late as 1944 Humphrey Leggett informed Marriott of a recent encounter with two leading legal experts, the former Liberal MPs Norman Birkett and William Jowitt, who were then working on the 'war criminals question'. Leggett suggested to the two men that Marriott was well placed to write

<sup>88</sup> The broadcast series was 'The citizen and his government'.

<sup>89</sup> Cambridge, Churchill Archives Centre (hereafter CAC), papers of Harold Harington Balfour, 1st Baron Balfour of Inchrye, GBR/0014/BLFR, H. Balfour, 'The citizen and his government. 2. Political liberty. Parliament: the making of laws', broadcast script, 8 Oct. 1935.

<sup>90</sup> CAC, papers of Harold Harington Balfour, 1st Baron Balfour of Inchrye, GBR/0014/BLFR, Harold Balfour, 'The citizen and his government. 1. The free-born Briton', broadcast script, 1 Oct. 1935.

<sup>91</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, unsorted letters, envelope marked 'Letters Misc. 1910-45, chiefly political', Duff Cooper to J. A. R. Marriott, 24 Jan. 1936. See J. A. R. Marriott, *Castlereagh: the Political Life of Robert, Second Marquess of Londonderry* (1936).

a letter to *The Times* on the subject of 'Act of State'. According to Leggett: 'Jowitt and Birkett jumped at this in the most amazing way, and both said that they hoped I would write you at once, urging you to do it. Jowitt added "It would be rendering a very high public service if Marriott would do this, and you may tell him so from me"'. Furthermore, Birkett asked Leggett if he had ever read *The Crisis of English Liberty*. Birkett judged the work to be 'one of the finest books ever written' and argued that 'a man who could write that book is the right man to instruct the British public'.<sup>92</sup>

Marriott's private papers confirm that he was solidly in touch with Conservative politics despite his advancing years. He was valued by Conservative Central Office (CCO) as a platform speaker, campaigning for the National Government during the 1931 general election. The vice-chairman of the Conservative party wrote to Marriott explaining that his former parliamentary status would be an asset during the campaign.<sup>93</sup> Marriott's friend the marquess of Salisbury recommended to Baldwin's private secretary, Geoffrey Fry, that he be nominated for a peerage because of his commitment to Conservative literary 'propaganda'.<sup>94</sup> But Fry rejected Marriott's claims because he was blamed by CCO for losing two safe Conservative seats at previous elections.<sup>95</sup> In the final chapter of his autobiography, Marriott also draws our attention to his more intimate political contacts, particularly those Conservatives and publicists who often joined him at his home for luncheon in the 1930s. Marriott claimed to be in contact with the venerable Viscount Bridgeman and Austen Chamberlain, but a group of former and serving Conservative MPs furnished him with contemporary parliamentary gossip, namely Nathan Raw, Vivian Henderson, Annesley Somerville, William Collins and Servington Savery. Financiers, soldiers and publicists such as Arnold Wilson (also a Conservative MP), Wickham Steed, Harold Nicolson, John Coatman and Owen Rutter (editor of the *Hungarian Quarterly*, where Marriott sometimes published) were also regular visitors.<sup>96</sup>

Marriott was also consulted by Liberal cabinet ministers, including John Simon, the home secretary, who had been recruited by Marriott as an

<sup>92</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, unsorted letters, envelope marked 'Letters Misc. 1910-45, chiefly political', Sir Humphrey Leggett to J. A. R. Marriott, two letters dated 6 and 7 Jan. 1944.

<sup>93</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, letter from vice-chairman of the Conservative party to J. A. R. Marriott, 7 Oct. 1931 (correspondence survives, crossed out, on the reverse of his draft manuscript for 'Oxford: its place in national history').

<sup>94</sup> See Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Stanley Baldwin papers, 167/236, marquess of Salisbury to Geoffrey Fry, 14 Dec. 1931; and CUL, Baldwin papers, 167/241, marquess of Salisbury to Geoffrey Fry, 16 March 1932.

<sup>95</sup> CUL, Baldwin papers, 167/245, Geoffrey Fry to marquess of Salisbury, 22 March 1932.

<sup>96</sup> Marriott, *Memories*, pp. 234-9.

Oxford extension lecturer earlier in his career. That Simon shared Marriott's interest in upholding constitutional values in public life can be seen in a letter that he wrote to Marriott in June 1936. Simon raised the issue of the Budget Disclosure inquiry involving the recent malpractices of J. H. Thomas (National Labour MP for Derby and secretary of state for the colonies):

you will have been much interested in the proceedings and conclusion of the Budget Disclosure Inquiry—a sad business and indeed a very distressing one as regards the individuals, but at bottom a tremendous proof of the integrity of British public life and a lesson to the world on how to set things right if something goes wrong. The contrast with Stavisky and Teapot Dome makes one feel proud of being an Englishman.<sup>97</sup>

Simon's confidence in the superiority of the British constitution and the good conduct of its MPs was in fact backed up by punitive action taken by the House of Commons. Simon saw the result of the Budget Disclosure inquiry as evidence that honourable members were heeding Marriott's warnings about the safeguarding of the constitution.

However, Marriott's relationship with Arthur Bryant was more complicated because he did not lecture at the unofficial Conservative training college, Ashridge, which was under Bryant's control in the 1930s. The Conservative historians F. J. C. Hearnshaw and Hugh Sellon lectured regularly at Ashridge and they often corresponded with Bryant, but there is no record of Marriott ever doing so in either his or Bryant's private papers. However, Marriott met Hearnshaw and Sellon for luncheon on a number of occasions and corresponded with Hearnshaw during the 1930s.<sup>98</sup> Marriott may have decided against being involved because, given Bryant's more partisan influence at Ashridge, he wanted to maintain the appearance of non-partisanship in his own work. Whatever the reasons behind his absence from Ashridge, he was able to reach a reading public different to that of Bryant, Hearnshaw and Sellon;<sup>99</sup> it was much more liberal and it consisted of members and voters of

<sup>97</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, unsorted letters, envelope marked 'Letters Misc. 1910–45, chiefly political', John Simon to J. A. R. Marriott, 12 June 1936. For the Stavisky affair, see B. Jenkins, *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right* (New York, 2005), p. 15. On Teapot Dome, see B. Davis, *The Teapot Dome Scandal* (2007), p. 15. The Budget Disclosure inquiry confirmed revelations that J. H. Thomas had disclosed budget secrets before an official government announcement was made (see also Marriott, *Memories*, p. 45).

<sup>98</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'Marriott Notebooks', diary (loose leaf), mainly 1933–7, Marriott diary, 12 Aug. 1935 and 16 Dec. 1936. See also YCA, Marriott papers, envelope marked 'Letters of Appreciation and Criticism, mostly dated 1939–40', F. J. C. Hearnshaw to J. A. R. Marriott, 21 Nov. 1940.

<sup>99</sup> F. J. C. Hearnshaw and Hugh Sellon are discussed in detail in my PhD thesis (see Love, 'Conservatives, national politics', pp. 74–128).

all political parties. This was a significant middle- and upper-class readership, which was needed to support the National Government and Baldwin's centrist Conservative politics in the 1930s.<sup>100</sup>

For all of Marriott's output and influence in the 1930s, we must remember that he derived much from others. His private papers reveal that most of his books and articles drew heavily on newspaper cuttings and other printed documents such as pamphlets; he collected quotations on liberty and fascism by Baldwin, Simon, Birkett, Hearnshaw, Churchill and Robert Bernays to name a few.<sup>101</sup> But he was also a voracious reader of the work of contemporaries. For example, in 1937 alone he read books by Kenneth Pickthorn, Viscount Snowdon, Lord Snell, Walter Citrine, Arthur Bryant and Thomas Dugdale. However, it was always Churchill's books that stood out in his mind. He described Churchill's *Great Contemporaries* as 'wholly delightful' and praised his 'wonderful portraits' of all the great men he covered in his book.<sup>102</sup>

In some ways, Marriott had more in common with Churchill than he did with Baldwin. As we know, he was critical of Baldwin's complacency in the early 1930s.<sup>103</sup> But it is also clear from entries in Marriott's private diary that Baldwin's handling of the abdication crisis impressed him deeply. The episode convinced Marriott to end his scepticism of the Conservative leader:

SB's retirement at the zenith of his popularity + prestige is surely unique in the history of English statesmanship ... Had he resigned anytime before Dec. 1936 he would have gone down to history to a very mixed reputation, + wd never have been put in the 1<sup>st</sup> class of P.M's. Now he is ranked to the Walpoles, Peels + Younger Pitt. The Edw. VIII crisis gave him his opportunity + he rose to it superbly. I doubt if there has ever been a P.M. ... [with] ... fewer enemies, tho' there have been many with more ... friends + admirers. He stands in sharp contrast to Dizzy + Gladstone.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, Marriott drew on Baldwin's anti-fascist speeches as a valuable rhetorical source for his own literary work.<sup>105</sup> As Philip Williamson explains,

<sup>100</sup> It is noticeable, for example, that those who published in the *Fortnightly Review* alongside Marriott included Edward Grigg, Austin Hopkinson, Robert Bernays, Hugh Dalton and George Orwell. It was a very diverse political and literary space.

<sup>101</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'ZWD(Y)', assorted press cuttings. The envelopes of cuttings relate to chapters of certain books and articles over the years and seem to have been continuously updated and reworked using the material.

<sup>102</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'Marriott Notebooks', diary (loose leaf), mainly 1933–7, Marriott diary, 20–31 Dec. 1937.

<sup>103</sup> Marriott, 'Cabinet', p. 322.

<sup>104</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'Marriott Notebooks', diary (loose leaf), mainly 1933–7, Marriott diary, 28 May 1937.

<sup>105</sup> YCA, Marriott papers, box marked 'ZWD(Y)', assorted press cuttings.



Baldwin was largely ambivalent towards democracy, but he accepted it as irreversible and he often invoked Whig interpretations of Britain's *sui generis* past to add weight to his constitutional arguments.<sup>106</sup> Baldwin's inclusive public message allowed a Conservative 'Whig interpretation of history' to thrive in the 1930s and Marriott's publications added weight to this constitutional Conservative message. It did not matter if Baldwin's personal views differed from Marriott's because in the end they worked towards the same national goal.

This chapter demonstrates how strongly the Victorian age continued to grip the minds of literary Conservatives, and how their work could still command an important elite readership throughout the 1930s. Marriott's 'Whig interpretation of history' refused to reject the political and social reforms of the nineteenth century and this provided one way of reaching out to National Liberals and other liberal-Conservative readers. Marriott was an independent Conservative and he warned the National Government against the potential abuse of its powers. He was also a consistent voice against the adoption of fascist ideas at home because he rejected political extremism out of hand. Marriott reinforced continuity in British elite reading circles at a time when radical political change was being implemented abroad and discussed at home. He contributed towards the success of both the Conservative party and the National Government in the 1930s. However, his work also encouraged the party to be politically cautious, arguably helping to cement its position on the 'long road to 1945'.

<sup>106</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, pp. 204, 254–5.



### 3. *The 'Will to Work': industrial management and the question of conduct in inter-war Britain*

*Daniel Ussishkin*

The First World War marked an important turning point in the emergence and implementation of new managerial theories and attitudes, a story that forms an important chapter in the history of social governance in Britain.<sup>1</sup> The first industrial nation was notoriously late to develop a modern expertise in industrial management. Early attempts to devise schemes for rational factory organization, such as those suggested by Matthew Boulton and James Watt or by Charles Babbage, were limited to particular issues such as accounting or the administration of things.<sup>2</sup> It was only in the earlier part of the twentieth century that the human aspect of labour was problematized as the object of expert knowledge and intervention, marked by the appearance of 'man-management' as a new English phrase. In a sense, Britain merely followed broader transnational trends, best exemplified by the work of Frederic W. Taylor in America before the First World War. The new attitude to management, which Taylor had notoriously termed a 'mental revolution', suggested that it was the domain of 'experts' who professed political neutrality. Management, as the new practitioners argued, was 'no longer the "middle man" between Capital and Labour; no longer the wedge which takes all the strain. It stands rather in co-ordinating position between the two, owing allegiance to neither, but acknowledging as master the public will of the community alone'.<sup>3</sup> Lyndall Urwick, one of the leading managerial theorists and later the chair of the International Management Institute in Geneva, viewed the new management thought in terms of the much-discussed rationalization of industries: 'Rationalization',

<sup>1</sup> The title of this chapter is taken from G. H. Miles, *The 'Will to Work'* (1929). I would like to thank Jon Lawrence and Grahame Foreman for commenting on an earlier draft. Research for this chapter has been assisted by the Newhouse Center for the Humanities, Wellesley College, and the Yad Hanadiv Postdoctoral Fellowship in History.

<sup>2</sup> On early practices of industrial management, see, for instance, J. A. Merkle, *Management and Ideology: the Legacy of the International Scientific Management Movement* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980); S. Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management: a Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

<sup>3</sup> O. Sheldon, *The Philosophy of Management* (1924), p. 44.

he explained, 'is not a method or a system: it is a state of mind'.<sup>4</sup> These calls for the professionalization of management gathered into what the historian and critic of management, John Child, has seen as the emergence of the British management movement, driven by the promise of better organization of industry to deliver social progress: 'From now to Utopia', in the often-quoted words of Sidney Webb, 'Management is indispensable and all enduring'.<sup>5</sup>

Yet in another sense, British management writers exhibited a particular trajectory, for, while accepting Taylor's call for a 'mental revolution' in attitudes towards the question of management, they differed sharply as to the shape or content of the new managerial practices. For the most part, the early promoters of expert management in Britain constructed a professional ethos that was presented as being in opposition to the basic premises of Taylorism and other forms of scientific management. They rejected wholesale what they conceived as Taylor's atomizing and alienating methods: the subjection of the worker to the experts' stopwatch, the standardization of work that curbed skill and initiative, and the reduction of workers to mere automata.<sup>6</sup> They articulated their opposition in both practical and ethical terms. First, they argued against policies that seemed bound to arouse opposition and would therefore be difficult, if not impossible, to implement: a policy that 'fixes its attention on the efficiency of the workman as a living tool', explained Edward Cadbury in 1912, 'and disregards every part of his individuality ... [is] bound to awaken resentment'. Such a policy, it was maintained, was inconsistent with 'the democratic temper of the age', and was therefore bound to fail.<sup>7</sup> Second, it was argued that the goals of management must comprise more than merely augmenting the profits of owners. Expert management must work to produce social good, and it would do so by acknowledging that the management of humans would be, so to speak, human.<sup>8</sup> Hence, British management thought developed, or at least styled itself, in opposition to what were seen as American individuating and

<sup>4</sup> L. Urwick, *Management of Tomorrow* (1933), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> J. Child, *British Management Thought: a Critical Analysis*, ed. A. Robertson (Studies in Management, 1969), chs. 3–4; S. Webb, *The Works Manager Today: an Address Prepared for a Series of Private Gatherings of Works Managers* (1917).

<sup>6</sup> There were, of course, other methods that drew similar fire. For a classic articulation, see J. A. Hobson, 'Scientific Management', *Sociological Review*, vi (1913), 197–212.

<sup>7</sup> E. Cadbury, *Experiments in Industrial Organization* (1912).

<sup>8</sup> The 'fundamental principle', Seebohm Rowntree explained, was 'that Industry should everywhere and always serve the needs of citizenship' (B. S. Rowntree, 'Social obligations of industry to labour', in *Industrial Administration: a Series of Lectures* (Manchester, 1920), p. 3).

alienating techniques, and acquired a distinct welfarist inflection that emphasized management's obligation to care for the workers' well-being.<sup>9</sup>

This particular British trajectory in the history of management thought has been correctly viewed as generating 'social' visions of industrial management. Writers on management and later historians have for the most part emphasized continuities between inter-war calls for welfare management and the post-war obsession with human-relations management. Sharp differences, such as the institutional apparatus for generating and disseminating professional industrial management, were recognized (after the Second World War the calls to reform management practices received the support of an enthusiastic Labour government and had a wider appeal more generally), but these have largely been understood as differences in scale rather than in kind.<sup>10</sup> Writing from the perspective of the seeming triumph of 'human-relations' management during the post-war years, British management theorists and historians could posit the 'human relations' school as the natural outgrowth of the British welfarist model of management of the inter-war years. The first to write those histories were central figures in the newly forged profession, such as Lyndall Urwick and Edward Brech, whose famous trilogy on British management established human-relations management as the endpoint of a particularly British trajectory.<sup>11</sup> This view has been mirrored in the critical analysis offered by John Child, whose 1969 *British Management Thought* is still considered the most thorough analysis of management ideas in Britain. In Child's account welfarist managerial practices served one purpose only, that of securing the foundations of industrial societies and economic inequalities. As Child has suggested, late Victorian and Edwardian welfarist management, largely introduced by Quaker employers, sought to reconcile its abhorrence of

<sup>9</sup> Recent research has emphasized the extent to which certain aspects of scientific management have permeated British industry, even among those who professed to offer an alternative (C. R. Littler, *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies* (1982), pp. 80–116; M. C. Rowlinson, 'The early application of scientific management by *Cadbury*', *Business History*, xxx (1988), 377–95; K. Whitston, 'Scientific management and production management practice in Britain between the wars', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, i (1996), 47–75; K. Whitston, 'The reception of scientific management by British engineers, 1890–1914', *Business History Review*, lxxi (1997), 207–29). For a discussion of the politics of remembering the early days of scientific management in Britain, see M. Roper, 'Killing off the father: social science and the memory of Frederick Taylor in management studies, 1950–75', *Contemporary British History*, xiii (1999), 39–58.

<sup>10</sup> C. S. Maier, 'Factory as society: ideologies of industrial management in the 20th century', in *Ideas into Politics: Aspects of European History, 1880–1950*, ed. R. J. Bullen, H. Pogge von Strandmann and A. B. Polonsky (1988), pp. 147–63.

<sup>11</sup> L. Urwick and E. F. L. Brech, *The Making of Scientific Management*, i (1949).

profit made through exploitation, a traditional puritan ethic of hard labour, an egalitarian world-view, and the rejection of conflict.<sup>12</sup> Child has drawn a direct line from the welfarist programmes of the Quaker managers to what he saw as the 'human relations' school in management thought. According to this view, then, the post-war obsession with 'human relations' is understood as a professional re-articulation of inter-war welfarist management programmes.

This chapter argues that such a view conceals essential differences between these two programmes of management, specifically that both were premised on different modalities of human conduct. The first model targeted the worker as an individual, and was related to what the Victorians called 'character', which can be best understood as individual ethical conduct. This model generated management programmes that were largely known as industrial welfare.<sup>13</sup> The second model targeted the workers as groups, and was related to collective attitude, or 'morale', and generated programmes of management known as 'human relations'. The transition from one to the other was a fractured process that could not be explained as a linear development internal to the professionalization of industrial management.

In order to understand the differences between these two programmes of management, and the aspects of conduct each targeted, I will discuss two of the clearest articulations of the aims and methods of each. The programme of industrial welfare is examined mostly by looking at how the new profession of welfare emerged during the First World War and its aftermath, and the ways in which it exhibited important continuities with similar Edwardian trends. The meanings of morale in relation to industrial management and the crystallization of new programmes that targeted it are studied by looking at the work of inter-war British psychologists, who offered some of the clearest articulations of the significance of the management of morale to social stability or reconstruction. In order to do this, I will examine closely the particular trajectories that were specific to each sphere. Other spheres or types of inquiry that are closely related are therefore left out, such as the social-psychological literature, international in its nature, on the moral

<sup>12</sup> J. Child, 'Quaker employers and industrial relations', *Sociological Review*, xii (1965); Child, *British Management Thought*, p. 264.

<sup>13</sup> The concept of character, central to Victorian political idioms, has been explored in a seminal article by Stefan Collini (S. Collini, 'The idea of "character" in Victorian political thought', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxv (1985), 29–50). As Collini explains, the notion of character, closely linked to notions such as self-help and duty, was both descriptive and prescriptive, and it referred to both habit and will.

conditions of the unemployed.<sup>14</sup> It is important to emphasize, moreover, that the lines separating those two managerial programmes and dividing the groups who promoted them were fuzzy. There were important differences within the welfare 'movement' itself. Angela Woollacott, for instance, has demonstrated that significant variations existed between the types of professional ethos and practice promoted by the new inter-war organizations that consisted largely of women, and the older, largely male-dominated associations.<sup>15</sup> The new organizations discussed by Woollacott arguably promoted versions of welfare that placed greater emphasis on its 'social' aspects, which, like the psychological trajectory described below, developed in response to some social and cultural legacies of the First World War and as a coming to terms with the advent of mass democracy.<sup>16</sup>

My point, then, is not to argue that welfare was about individuals and that psychology was about groups or societies. Far from it: welfare, in general, developed strong notions of collective life at the levels of the community and society. For inter-war American or French observers, a British 'social' psychology would have appeared as virtually non-existent. Rather, I aim to analyse modes of theoretical articulations of workers' conduct within the sphere of industrial management, and to suggest that these are important to our understanding of the ways in which inter-war Britons confronted perceived social transformations, and the continuities that such responses exhibited with both earlier and later responses to the political problem of managing the body politic.

### ***The character of individuals***

Before the First World War only a handful of northern industrialists introduced limited schemes of factory welfare, which had usually amounted to the implementation of various profit-sharing schemes or the establishment

<sup>14</sup> This literature is explored and carefully dissected in R. McKibbin, 'The "social psychology" of unemployment in interwar Britain', in R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 228–58. On the relation between the conduct of the unemployed and the problem of work discipline, see A. Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed workers, "enforced leisure" and education for the "right use of leisure" in Britain in the 1930s', *Labour History Review*, lxx (2005), 27–52.

<sup>15</sup> A. Woollacott, 'Maternalism, professionalism, and industrial welfare supervisors in World War I Britain', *Women's History Review*, iii (1994), 19–56.

<sup>16</sup> The managerial aspect of these trajectories was key. Programmes of welfare and the care of morale were both understood in terms of increasing the productivity of British workers while securing social stability through the development of loyalty to the workplace or the working group (rather than, say, to a class or a union). Management, then, is understood both in 'negative' terms (of containment, out-maneuvring class politics, and so forth), as well as in 'positive' terms (maximizing productive capacity).

of mutual-aid funds. The managerial or disciplinary origins of such schemes have not escaped either contemporaries or later historians, who have regarded such initiatives with suspicion. The problem with welfare management was perceived to be its individuation and atomization. As Dorothea Proud, a leading spokeswoman for the early twentieth-century welfare 'movement', lamented, workers were too often suspicious that such schemes aimed at rendering them 'callous to the lot of their fellows' and were designed to weaken the 'social instinct which is humanity's natural safeguard'.<sup>17</sup> Attempting to surpass the power of existing working-class organizations and loyalties, historians have argued, enabled industrialists to 'articulate a philosophical as well as an economic case for freedom of contract or liberty at the workplace', while muting class conflict and rift.<sup>18</sup>

Those who promoted practices of industrial welfare articulated their programmes in both technical and political terms. On the one hand, welfare was offered as a disciplinary solution – how to make workers work: 'The supreme principle', explained Edward Cadbury in his book on the Bourneville Works, 'has been the belief that business efficiency and welfare of employees are but different sides of the same problem'.<sup>19</sup> Welfare, he explained, paid, because the efficiency of workers depended on their 'general attitude and feelings towards the employer' rather than merely on physical conditions.<sup>20</sup> In short, he envisioned a system that took stock of his recognition that 'human beings will insist on being treated as human beings, and not as imperfect machines'.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, these early twentieth-century efforts to secure welfare programmes in the workplace were a direct manifestation of the turn to the social in the search for solutions for the apparent failings of the unregulated free market. The five decades preceding the Great War saw the gradual erosion of liberal forms of government and the intrusion of the state into nearly every aspect of private and public life: education, work, family and morals.<sup>22</sup> 'Organization' became a catch-all slogan that reflected the Edwardian attempt to reconcile the principles of individuality and laissez-faire with the evident

<sup>17</sup> E. D. Proud, *Welfare Work: Employers' Experiments for Improving Working Conditions in Factories* (1916), p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> J. Melling, 'Employers, industrial welfare, and the struggle for work-place control in British industry, 1880–1920', in *Managerial Strategies and Industrial Relations: an Historical and Comparative Study*, ed. H. F. Gospel and C. R. Littler (1983), p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Cadbury, *Experiments*, p. vii.

<sup>20</sup> Cadbury, *Experiments*, p. xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Cadbury, *Experiments*, p. xi.

<sup>22</sup> For general overviews, see J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: a Social History of Britain, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1993); G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004).



failure of these nineteenth-century models to serve as the sole principle of government. What propelled this transformation was not only the realization that the classical principle of laissez-faire generated mounting problems. These problems were increasingly understood as 'social'. A host of issues such as poverty, delinquency, criminality, health, education and personal life now belonged to a domain that emerged in relation to two existing forms of thinking about collective life, namely population and society.<sup>23</sup> However, solutions to problems that were now designated as 'social' were still cast in a distinctly moral terrain and committed to a liberal outlook. As Reba Soffer has demonstrated in her seminal study, this process reverberated across the academic social sciences.<sup>24</sup> Education in character would alleviate the misfortunes presented by the miscalculated work of Adam Smith's invisible hand or would serve as an antidote to the pressures presented by the human aspects of the changes which Graham Wallas, the liberal political scientist, articulated as the advent of Great Society.<sup>25</sup> For Wallas, the term captured the rapid transformations of the 'social scale' in modern societies. Such concerns provided the context for the articulation of social forms of government, such as the calls for 'Socialism in Liberalism', a term that denoted a commitment to 'social problems' within the frameworks of (new) liberal forms of rule.<sup>26</sup>

Industrial welfare was premised on the idea that the workplace could serve as the prime locus for moulding and producing a good society. 'Next to his religion', Cadbury told his readers, 'and home atmosphere, a man's work and its environment are probably the most potent forces in his life'.<sup>27</sup> The stakes were high and the programmes were expansive. Under the title 'Industrial Conditions', for instance, Cadbury discussed every aspect that relates to dignity and moral habits. High standards of work were essential to an individual's pride, hygiene perfected habits of order and promoted self-respect, and the separation of men and women (including separate entrances)

<sup>23</sup> On the social aspect, see N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 98–136. I use the concept of 'domain' in the sense that Mary Poovey has made it available to historians (M. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–64* (Chicago, Ill., 1995), pp. 5–6).

<sup>24</sup> R. N. Soffer, *Ethics and Society: the Revolution in the Social Sciences, 1870–1914* (Berkeley, Calif., 1978).

<sup>25</sup> G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (1908); G. Wallas, *The Great Society* (1914).

<sup>26</sup> A. Venn Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the 19th Century* (2nd edn., 1920); J. A. Hobson, *The Social Problem: Life and Work* (1901). On New Liberalism, see S. Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1979); M. Freedon, *The New Liberalism: an Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978). 'Socialism in Liberalism' was the title of an essay by Hobson, published in his *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909).

<sup>27</sup> Cadbury, *Experiments*, p. 247.

prevented the demoralizing effects of mixing the sexes. A policy that barred the employment of married women would prevent the destruction of homes; the establishment of saving funds and recreation facilities (allotments, libraries, music, games) would inculcate habits of self-improvement; and a disciplinary system which was based on record-book keeping rather than on fines ensured that 'the system was designed to be reformatory, and not merely punitive'.<sup>28</sup>

These typically Edwardian concerns were carried over and gave form to the wartime and inter-war efforts to secure welfare at work. Take, for example, industrial canteens: as James Vernon has demonstrated, canteens, initially devised to feed the body and provide security against malnutrition, gradually emerged as tools of vital importance to produce sociable citizens, who were now able to learn how, what and with whom they were to eat.<sup>29</sup> The 1916 report by the Canteen Committee of the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) boasted that apart from boosting the health of workers and reducing sickness absences, the 500 canteens that had been established by that time, catering for more than 600,000 workers, were also responsible for a decline in drinking, greater contentment, and increase in recreation.<sup>30</sup> As the body was fed, the soul was moulded. This was true for a range of industrial practices. Welfare, explained John Lee, one of the chief promoters of the new welfarist managerial thought, 'will care for physical health, too, and leisure and enjoyment, but they are means to an end *and the end is the development in character*'.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, the desire of workers for 'moral self-realization', as Oliver Sheldon had it (he thought that the struggle of labour was not material!), was linked to the elimination of industrial unrest.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the production of social good was understood in terms of economic utility: 'Character', Cadbury notoriously wrote, 'is an economic asset'.<sup>33</sup>

Few employers had paid attention to such matters before 1914. The prolongation of the war, and the new roles that the state had acquired in

<sup>28</sup> Cadbury, *Experiments*, pp. 7–8, 71–2.

<sup>29</sup> J. Vernon, *Hunger: a Modern History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), pp. 160–80.

<sup>30</sup> The Canteen Committee of the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic), *Feeding the Munition Worker* (1916), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> J. Lee, *The Principles of Industrial Welfare* (1924), p. 36 (my italics).

<sup>32</sup> Sheldon was the director of Rowntree's works at York. He lamented that the 'reversion after the war to conditions where personal gain once more becomes the dominant motive of work, has revealed a great lack in the general scheme of industry which the wartime motive has temporarily supplied' (Sheldon, *Philosophy of Management*, pp. 8, 14). On industrial unrest, see, e.g., B. S. Rowntree, *Industrial Unrest: a Way Out* (1922).

<sup>33</sup> Cadbury, *Experiments*, p. xvii. The emphasis on character also provided a standpoint from which to critique American scientific management. J. A. Hobson, for instance, linked 'industrial servitude' associated with scientific management to a threat to political liberty (Hobson, 'Scientific management', p. 12).

regulating production, meant that welfare, as a profession, had 'taken off', in the words of Angela Woollacott.<sup>34</sup> In September 1915 Lloyd George, then the minister of munitions, appointed a Committee on the Health of Munition Workers; in December that year, a new Welfare Department was created (with Seebohm Rowntree as chair). In the aftermath of the war, welfare emerged as a visible profession, with its own experts, journals, conferences and associations (such as the Industrial Welfare Society and the Central Association of Welfare Workers).<sup>35</sup> Great optimism marked the activities of those early welfare workers, engendering a belief in the new possibilities of a profession of 'social engineers', a term which tells us something about how the members of this emerging profession regarded their job.<sup>36</sup> Welfare was now a discipline.

If the need for welfare was easy to articulate, it was less straightforward to define precisely what welfare comprised. Proud suggested that the only thing that united welfare workers was the 'recognition of the individuality of each worker'.<sup>37</sup> As she further explained, 'building a palatial dining hall, providing tooth-brushes, supervising daily fluctuations in wages, or teaching dancing – all are included in this vague and vaguely named attempt at making the workers better in some way'. Some idea of what welfare was can be formed by looking at Rowntree's memorandum to the Ministry of Munitions: it dealt with issues such as rooms, food, hours, wages, amenities, health and education, supervision, and recreation.<sup>38</sup> Or take the report of E. C. Wagstaff, a welfare supervisor at the Newport National Shell Factory: she observed hiring and dismissal practices, the First Aid Room, the canteen and dining hall, the cloak room and lavatories, overalls and caps, cleaning, platforms to protect from the damp floors, drinking fountains, additional clocks for easy clocking in, management's flexibility, attentiveness to grievances, the health of workers, recreation, and moral tone.<sup>39</sup> Rather than a coherent set of institutional practices, then, welfare was a 'method of factory administration'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> A. Woollacott, *On her their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994), p. 72. Woollacott here refers to the years 1917–18.

<sup>35</sup> Revd. Hyde, a close aide of Rowntree at the Welfare Department, expressed a common sentiment when he noted that the influence of the 'welfare movement' had far exceeded its numerical strength (700 welfare workers in the immediate years after the war) (The National Archives of the UK: Public Record Office, MUN 9/30, Revd. Hyde, undated memorandum on the Industrial Welfare Society).

<sup>36</sup> W. B. Owen, 'Welfare work among men', *Welfare Work*, i (1920), 166.

<sup>37</sup> Proud, *Welfare Work*, p. 67

<sup>38</sup> TNA: PRO, MUN 9/30.

<sup>39</sup> Wagstaff was appointed as a welfare supervisor in September 1916, and issued the report on her own achievements in May 1919 (TNA: PRO, MUN 5/92/346/27).

<sup>40</sup> TNA: PRO, MUN 9/30, 'A record of the history of the Welfare Department'.

Welfare practices within the factory were premised upon liberal notions of individualism, with the typical emphasis on education, recreation and civility. By the Second World War, however, the notion of character, while still an important factor, was no longer the foundational element or organizing principle in thinking about social and political organization; in some cases it disappeared altogether.<sup>41</sup> Morale signalled this process by suggesting a new way of articulating the problem of workers' conduct. Contemporaries themselves viewed the problems of human relations and the welfare of workers as essentially different.<sup>42</sup> Those who spoke of morale and human relations differed from those who spoke of welfare in their reliance upon aspects of conduct that are best described as attitude (often in a psychologized form), in their emphasis on social interaction (and on the subjective aspect of sociality), and in their construction of the *group* (as an abstract referent that connected both).

### *The morale of groups*

In a series of lectures on social psychology, probably written in the late 1920s, the eminent Cambridge experimental psychologist Frederic Charles Bartlett lamented the backward state of British social psychology. It had 'a brilliant beginning', he thought, with the publication of William McDougall's *Introduction to Social Psychology* in 1908.<sup>43</sup> But he also blamed McDougall for the backward state of the science in Britain, notably the latter's emphasis on instinctive reactions, and the controversy that his work had generated: 'in the hurly burly an enormous amount has been said about instincts and comparatively little about social conduct in any special and genuinely *observed* sense'.<sup>44</sup> Bartlett, of course, had a point.<sup>45</sup> McDougall's

<sup>41</sup> Stefan Collini has already noted that the new sciences of society were 'inhospitable' to the Victorian ideal of character (Collini, "The idea of "character", p. 49). This process was uneven and fractured, and for the most part difficult to gauge. It certainly did not disappear from political discourses, and was echoed in, although not synonymous with, the psychological notion of *personality*. On the latter, see M. Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in 20th-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 42–5, 71–2.

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., E. F. L. Brech, 'The management lessons of the war – industrial relationship', *British Management Review*, v (1945), 35. This was clearly the message of the work of Elton Mayo (E. Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York, 1960)).

<sup>43</sup> W. McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908).

<sup>44</sup> Cambridge University Library Archives, ADD. 8076/B.1, F. C. Bartlett, 'Social psychology', Lecture no. 1, pp. 1–2 (original emphasis). The lectures themselves are not dated, but their content suggests that they were written sometime in the late 1920s.

<sup>45</sup> For a different contemporary view by McDougall's student, who situated discussions of instincts firmly within British philosophical tradition, see J. Drever, *Instinct in Man: a Contribution to the Physiology of Education* (Cambridge, 1917).

was a deductive science, firmly rooted within a typically British biosocial tradition. As McDougall himself explained, his science owed its existence to Darwin. But if we accept Bartlett's premise that social psychology is the study of conduct 'determined by grouping', we will find that inter-war Britain saw a number of scientists who aspired to do just that. As Mathew Thomson has recently suggested, British psychology after McDougall was always to a certain extent 'social', and the idea that all psychology was social psychology has become somewhat of a cliché.<sup>46</sup>

The work of early British 'social psychologists' (if the term is used fluidly, for there was no such discipline during that time) William McDougall and Wilfred Trotter was premised on two assumptions.<sup>47</sup> The first of these was the belief that humans were not, after all, rational beings, and that this assumption must be taken into account in any discussion of political affairs. This was especially terrifying with the advent of the masses, as the conduct of humans, amassed together as a crowd, was altogether qualitatively different, and more dangerous.<sup>48</sup> Second, by insisting on the application of psychology to social life, these writers joined the turn-of-the-century effort to construct a New Psychology that was relevant to everyday life as a new science of conduct.<sup>49</sup> If crowds stood for all that was bad or dangerous in the Great Society, the *group*, a new concept in social sciences after the war, was offered as an important sort of collective amenable to management, which would emerge as both the foundation for, and an abstract unit of analysis of, the government of social life.

The care of the affective life and attitudes of groups was understood as a technology of management that was appropriate for an increasingly democratic

<sup>46</sup> Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> Both works originally appeared in 1908. Trotter's article, 'Herd instinct and its bearing on the psychology of civilized man', originally published in the first volume of the *Sociological Review*, was later republished in W. Trotter, *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (2nd edn., 1919), pp. 11–60. The very same year another book appeared, similar in its psychological approach to social problems, albeit radically different in its conclusions. This was Wallas, *Human Nature*.

<sup>48</sup> Soffer, *Ethics and Society*, pp. 222–8. For an argument about the 19th-century roots of crowd psychology, which can apply equally to Britain, see S. Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late 19th-Century France* (New Haven, Conn., 1981).

<sup>49</sup> On the new 20th-century psychology, see Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*. For a detailed analysis of the centrality of McDougall (often not recognized by later historians), see Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 55–63; D. Ussishkin, 'Morale: social citizenship and democracy in modern Britain' (unpublished University of California PhD thesis, 2007), pp. 219–20. Trotter, too, was an important figure. Thomas MacCurdy, an American psychologist who worked at Cambridge, accorded Trotter nearly equal status with Freud in the annals of science (J. T. MacCurdy, *The Psychology of War* (New York, 1918)).

society, if this is understood as a social rather than constitutional process.<sup>50</sup> The group, serving as what Nikolas Rose has pithily termed ‘an intermediary between the individual and the population’, would emerge as an important site to combat the social problems associated with modern civil society, namely, atomization, *anomie* and social disintegration (in this sense, the workplace was one sphere among several through which such problems could be targeted; others included the family or the local community). Rose has further argued that the group was ‘first discovered in the factory’.<sup>51</sup> It was less an object of discovery, however, than an ideal to be constructed and created.<sup>52</sup> McDougall discussed the idea of the *group* in his 1908 *Introduction* but his fullest articulation of the problem was in his *Group Mind*, published in 1920.<sup>53</sup> Groups, he explained, were distinguished from the amorphous, libidinal, unstable and dangerous crowds by a collective mind, which develops through the establishment of continuity, tradition and identification within the group. The quintessential group was the *military* group, and group spirit was the highest form of military discipline.<sup>54</sup> The role of science was to organize and manage group affect. The best organization would secure that ‘while the common end of collective action is willed by all, the choice of means is left to the best qualified and in the best position for deliberation and choice’.<sup>55</sup> Wilfred Trotter, who was more interested in articulating the nature of gregariousness, expressed similar sentiments. The war, he thought, was one of ‘Nature’s august experiments’, which demonstrated that ‘the domination of egoistic impulses by social impulses which we call satisfactory morale is capable of direct cultivation as such’, and indeed requires such cultivation.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion*, p. 50. For different explorations of the advent of democracy, and the processes by which society responded and adapted to it, see R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–51* (Oxford, 1998); D. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988); L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

<sup>51</sup> N. Rose, ‘Social psychology as a science for democracy’, in *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge, Studies in the History of Psychology, 1996), p. 136. This argument was central to Mayo, *Human Problems*.

<sup>52</sup> I develop this point more fully in my forthcoming *Morale: a History*.

<sup>53</sup> W. McDougall, *The Group Mind: a Sketch of the Principles of Collective Psychology with some Attempt to Apply them to the Interpretation of National Life and Character* (New York, 1920; 1973).

<sup>54</sup> In these views regarding the military model of subjective group feelings, McDougall was not far off from Freud and Durkheim, who differed from him in nearly everything else (McDougall, *Group Mind*, ch. 4).

<sup>55</sup> McDougall, *Group Mind*, p. 73.

<sup>56</sup> Trotter, *Instincts of the Herd*, p. 209.

The experience of war and the theoretical foundations explored above were translated into the spheres of industry in the war's aftermath: 'Psychology', explained Frank Watts from the University of Manchester, 'will deal with the *group-life* of men and the conditions of its existence and unity. The various schemes for the organization of industry as a *group-adventure* must, therefore, call for psychological study'.<sup>57</sup>

Scientific studies of work in the era after the First World War experienced several important transformations that would help to reorient the basic premises of work management towards the management of the collective mental life of the working group. Chief among these was the dissolution of the notion of *fatigue* as an organizing principle in the approach to the problem of workers' capacity. In his magisterial work on the nineteenth-century science of work, Anson Rabinbach has described its emergence and its intimate links to utopian programmes of social reform.<sup>58</sup> Initially these studies were mainly undertaken on the continent. In Britain, investigations of fatigue largely awaited the establishment of the Industrial Fatigue Research Board in 1917 as a joint effort of the Medical Research Council and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Later renamed the Industrial Health Research Board, its activities quickly positioned Britain at the forefront of scientific studies of work.

Fatigue studies abounded, but the result was that the very category of muscular fatigue increasingly seemed to lack theoretical coherence. There was no agreement as to how fatigue was to be measured other than some indicators that seemed suggestive of the individual worker's capacity to labour: output, sickness rates, accidents, absenteeism and labour turnover.<sup>59</sup> However, these measured not fatigue but its assumed effects. Fatigue was understood as a physiological phenomenon, but attempts to devise physiological measurements (such as levels of lactic acid) had produced results that were far from conclusive. Very quickly, then, the study of industrial fatigue turned into a broader examination of 'the conditions of work'. By 1928, E. P. Cathcart, a chemical physiologist from Glasgow, could write without any hesitation that fatigue 'cannot be defined as a single limited entity'.<sup>60</sup> Other psychologists sought to identify it in the mind

<sup>57</sup> F. Watts, *An Introduction to the Psychological Problems of Industry* (New York, 1921), p. 18. The military group too received attention from psychologists (see, for instance, F. C. Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier* (Cambridge, 1927)).

<sup>58</sup> A. Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, H. M. Vernon, *Industrial Fatigue and Efficiency* (1921); F. S. Lee, *The Human Machine and Industrial Efficiency* (1918).

<sup>60</sup> Cathcart, quoted in Mayo, *Human Problems*, p. 10.

rather than (only) in the body, understood as 'subjective' or 'mental' fatigue.<sup>61</sup> It proved no less of a troubled route. While it was agreed that mental fatigue was in some ways related to the nature of the work itself, it was primarily understood as a subjective problem, therefore largely a matter of perception and suggestion: 'If the worker is induced to believe that his task is very difficult he reacts to it as a difficult task, and the amount of work performed may in consequence be greatly reduced'.<sup>62</sup> Put differently, the worker was an untrustworthy informant regarding his own capacity to work.<sup>63</sup> In the final analysis, mental fatigue appeared to be dependent upon factors that were often outside the scope of the short-term conditions of work: 'to *maintain* the will to work at the optimum level depends upon *long-term* sources of human motivation'.<sup>64</sup> In 1929 Charles Myers, perhaps the most eminent of British industrial psychologists, concluded that fatigue normally resulted 'not directly from over-action, but from worry, resentment, suspicion, etc. Remove these, increase interest, improve the general mental "atmosphere" and complaints of over-strain will mostly vanish'.<sup>65</sup> Collective attitude was what really mattered.

The implication of these discussions was an entirely new conception of the worker.<sup>66</sup> At the shop-floor level, workers were no longer 'standard economic individuals, differing in productive capacity and the like, but quite uniform as regards to driving motives'.<sup>67</sup> Psychologists could therefore offer a scientific explanation for the failures of the various schemes of profit-sharing or piece-rate, which by the inter-war years were nearly universally recognized as counter-productive, although nobody seemed to comprehend why this was the case.<sup>68</sup> It was not profit-sharing that was needed, but team spirit.<sup>69</sup> Work, like war, was a group activity: 'When an individual is a member of a social group', the industrial psychologist James

<sup>61</sup> B. Muscio, 'Fluctuations in mental efficiency', *British Journal of Psychology*, x (1920), 327-44; T. H. Pear, 'The applications of psychology to industry', in *Industrial Administration: a Series of Lectures* (Manchester, 1920), p. 40. H. J. Welch and G. H. Miles, *Industrial Psychology in Practice* (1935), p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> J. Drever, *The Psychology of Industry* (1921), p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Pear, 'Applications of psychology', pp. 40-2.

<sup>64</sup> C. A. Mace, 'Satisfaction in work', *Occupational Psychology*, xxii (1948), 8.

<sup>65</sup> C. S. Myers, 'Introduction', in *Industrial Psychology*, ed. C. S. Myers (1929), p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> On the manager as psychologist, see C. S. Maier, 'Factory as society: ideologies of industrial management in the 20th century', in Bullen, von Strandmann and Polonsky, *Ideas into Politics*, pp. 152-5.

<sup>67</sup> J. Drever, 'The human factor in industrial relations', in Myers, *Industrial Psychology*, p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Profit-sharing schemes were usually seen as too complex for workers to understand (and therefore to serve as a real encouragement for hard work); piece-rate incentives were considered as individualizing techniques, aimed at alienating the worker from his fellows.

<sup>69</sup> Drever, 'Human factor', pp. 37-8.



Drever explained, 'his impulses, feelings, and behaviour may be modified in various ways and degrees, dependent on the nature of the group in question'. Drever suggested that industry must be constructed in ways that would allow it to acquire 'community-type' groups. This entailed securing continuity in its composition, cultivating 'definite group self-consciousness', and maintaining proper organization.<sup>70</sup> Collective attitudes were related to other factors but could not be reduced to them. 'The roots of bad factory morale', explained another, 'are not always economic'.<sup>71</sup> The task of the psychologist would be to engineer the correct social environment that would generate cohesive groups.<sup>72</sup>

The war and the ways in which it was remembered were instrumental to this new interest in the psychological management of group conduct. Shellshock, largely understood in terms of discipline and morale, created an unprecedented opportunity for psychologists to reorient their profession from treatment to management.<sup>73</sup> In the aftermath of the war, psychologists who worked with 'neurotic' soldiers now shifted their gaze to the management of workers. Myers, who had worked with soldiers in France (and who had coined the misnomer shellshock), went on to establish the National Institute of Industrial Psychology (NIIP). Elton Mayo, guided by his work in Australia with soldiers during the war, later emerged as the single most important figure associated with 'human relations'. Moreover, images of collective effort, evoked in relation to Britain's first mass citizen army that had just emerged out of war, nourished this new interest in the psychological management of group conduct. Whether or not the images of camaraderie in the trenches or at home offered a true representation of British collective war experience was less important than the cultural work that these images performed in the conflict's aftermath: 'During the war', Drever remembered, 'the spirit in many

<sup>70</sup> Drever, 'Human factor', pp. 36–7. With the term 'community-type' Drever referred to a group guided by rational ends and ideals. It was contrasted to the crowd, guided by impulse, and the club, guided by sentiment. The problem, of course, was that virtually all social relations were guided by 'deeper forces ... human impulses, emotions, and passions, arising out of fundamental human needs' (Drever, 'Human factor', pp. 18–19).

<sup>71</sup> H. Davies, 'Work and environment', in Myers, *Industrial Psychology*, p. 42.

<sup>72</sup> 'Co-operation between engineer and psychologist begins properly at the drawing-board, since good conditions are easy to secure before ideas have clothed themselves in brick and mortar' (see Hudson Davies, 'Work and environment', pp. 40–1). On the modern problem of social environment see P. Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). On aligning work-groups with other 'organic' groups such as locality or family, see O. Tead, *Instincts in Industry: a Study of Working-Class Psychology* (Boston, Mass., 1918), p. 175.

<sup>73</sup> For the most recent, and a justly cautious, assessment of the place of shellshock in the history of psychology, see Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 182–6.

factories was the spirit of the football field'.<sup>74</sup> Another industrial psychologist told his readers that the problem of 'fatigue of the human will' was known to any 'of those practical organizers whose work it has been to galvanize large masses of men into activity and enthusiasm and maintain it in this condition'. Every military general, he continued, insisted that 'a B2 army of men with an excellent *morale* will suit him better than an A1 army with a *morale* that is low and staled'.<sup>75</sup> Psychologists now showed initial interest in training and selection of the supervisory grades (explicitly influenced by selection procedures established by the American army during the war).<sup>76</sup> In both the military and the factory, capacity was recognized as a function of morale. The effects of its absence were clear enough. When the manufacturing process is not efficient, explained one psychologist, the worker is kept waiting for raw material; he becomes a grumbler, 'and as he in turn affects others the "morale" of the whole shop is ultimately lowered ... The general effect ... is not a sudden revolt, but rather a gradual lowering of the "tone" of the workshop'.<sup>77</sup> Watts was one of the first who actually attempted to define morale: morale, he thought, was 'the establishment of mental attitudes favourable to continued efforts along lines of activity which are not immediately connected with crude self-interests'. He also predicted that modern civilization would 'be confronted in the future with *morale* problems of growing complexity in all avenues of social progress'.<sup>78</sup>

### **Conclusions**

It took another total war to see such programmes of management implemented in any serious manner. During the inter-war years, the nascent 'management movement' was widely identified by its welfarist inflection, a legacy of its Edwardian origins, and industrial welfare itself emerged as a profession, with its own institutions, training courses, ethos and an expertise that focused on the technicalities of well-being.<sup>79</sup> The

<sup>74</sup> Drever, *Psychology of Industry*, p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> Watts, *Psychological Problems of Industry*, p. 41. 'That we are at present unable to study closely what we may call the fatigue of the will should be no bar to our admission of its existence'.

<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, A. G. Ikin, 'The qualities desirable in a foreman', *Journal of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology* (1924).

<sup>77</sup> A. Angles, 'Unproductive working time', in Myers, *Industrial Psychology*, pp. 112–13.

<sup>78</sup> Watts, *Psychological Problems of Industry*, pp. 42–3. Watts likened the work of the psychologist to that of the electrician, who learns to deal practically with a phenomenon he fails to understand.

<sup>79</sup> The chief organs of the profession were the Institute of Industrial Administration and the Institute of Industrial Welfare Workers (later rechristened the Institute of Labour Management). Membership of each was still limited, amounting to 517 and 760, respectively, in 1939 (T. Rose, *A History of the Institute of Industrial Administration* (1954), p. 166; Child, *British Management Thought*, p. 113).

actual application of industrial welfare across British industry was uneven and still in many ways a minority practice.<sup>80</sup> It was only during the Second World War that industrial welfare was put on a more permanent footing. By that time, however, it was hardly considered as an exercise in moulding character in the way it had been conceived by employers such as Cadbury or Rowntree.

In both theory and implementation, morale management in Britain remained in its infant stages. This was partly for the same reasons that limited the application of industrial welfarist practices, namely the lack of interest on the part of British employers in such matters, especially in the face of rising levels of unemployment and industrial and social unrest. This was true of industrial psychology more generally. As the history of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology demonstrates, there was a wide gap between intentions and actual work. This body relied heavily on services rendered to private industries to secure its income, and these were mostly interested in selection and vocational guidance (the only departments of the institute that were profitable throughout the inter-war years).<sup>81</sup> Moreover, it seems that the psychologists themselves were at a loss as to how to translate their interest in morale and group feelings into a concrete research agenda. Investigations carried out by the NIIP for private employers are indicative: they tell us about layout, movement, physical conditions of work, rest pauses, movements, and so forth.<sup>82</sup> These were *individual*-psychological versions of fatigue studies and scientific management (perhaps with a 'human face'). The report summaries of the investigations conducted by the NIIP during the years 1929–35 mention 'morale' only once, under 'Miscellaneous'.<sup>83</sup> This gap between what psychologists did and what they wanted to do was not lost on contemporaries. Winifred Raphael, the superintendent of the Personnel Department at the NIIP, who had conducted research on collective grievances, complained that industrial psychologists were still only paying lip-service to the problem of workers' morale, and the lack of

<sup>80</sup> For a conflicting view, one that argues that industrial welfare in the inter-war years was more prevalent than often assumed, see R. Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare, 1846–1939* (1988).

<sup>81</sup> London School of Economics, British Library of Political and Economic Science (hereafter BLPES), NIIP 8/1, 'Notes for Lord Percy's Speech at the 25th Annual General Meeting of the NIIP', Monday, 11 Feb. 1946. Similar conclusions may be reached by any cursory glance at the NIIP's financial books for those years.

<sup>82</sup> BLPES, NIIP 7/10, *Abstracts of Reports, 1929–35*.

<sup>83</sup> Balchin, who carried out an investigation at McColl, a chocolate manufacturer, found a slackness of organization that led to low morale and indifference (BLPES, NIIP 7/10, *Abstracts of Reports, 1929–35*, sect. 16, report 377 (1932)).

professional attention to it amounted to a professional embarrassment.<sup>84</sup> In 1939 Eric Farmer, a Cambridge industrial psychologist and a member of the Industrial Health Board, noted that social-psychological studies of industrial life were ‘largely neglected’, perhaps because they ‘would be politically suspect by both employers and employees’ organizations’.<sup>85</sup> Elton Mayo’s work in the Western Electric Company in Chicago was introduced to a British audience by his ardent pupil, T. North Whitehead, in 1935.<sup>86</sup> Yet, the impact of this work in Britain was so limited that in the aftermath of the Second World War, Urwick and Brech could write in the introduction to the third volume of their *Making of Scientific Management* that there was still a need to introduce Mayo’s work to the British reader.<sup>87</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, a wave of interest in the management of morale was manifested by private and public research organizations, and the British state, now with Labour in government, heavily invested in such matters.<sup>88</sup> These programmes, which were understood in terms of both industrial productivity and the production of social cohesion and national unity, were premised on ideas regarding the sources of the collective conduct of workers, and on attempts to mobilize these towards the production of a harmonious mass-democratic polity. Both of these, as we have seen, emerged gradually during the inter-war years. By the time human-relations management saw its zenith, welfare practices were much more widely applied, although these were understood more as technicalities of physical and moral well-being. The obsession with character, which had given rise to such practices, by now seemed to belong to a past epoch. These transformations could not be explained in the terms adopted by the protagonists themselves, that is, as linear developments internal to the story of management thought. Rather, they could only be understood as part of a larger and more complex story – of the myriad responses to the general problem of the management of the Great Society and the perceived pressures exerted by the advent of mass democracy.

<sup>84</sup> W. Raphael, ‘Grievances – their ascertainment and alleviation’, *Human Factor*, xxi (1937), 91.

<sup>85</sup> E. Farmer, ‘The study of social groups in industry’, in *The Study of Society: Methods and Problems*, ed. F. C. Bartlett, M. Ginsberg and E. J. Lindgren (1939), p. 418.

<sup>86</sup> T. North Whitehead, ‘Social relationships in the factory: a study of an industrial group’, *The Human Factor*, ix (1935), 381–94; T. North Whitehead, *The Industrial Worker: a Statistical Study of Human Relations in a Group of Manual Workers* (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1938).

<sup>87</sup> L. Urwick and E. F. L. Brech, *The Making of Scientific Management*, iii (1949), x.

<sup>88</sup> N. Tiratsoo and J. Tomlinson, *Industrial Efficiency and State Intervention: Labour 1939–51* (1993).

## 4. Representing the people? The *Daily Mirror*, class and political culture in inter-war Britain

*Adrian Bingham*

In the inter-war period British politics was transformed by the arrival of democracy and the rise of the mass media. The franchise extensions of 1918 and 1928 quadrupled the Edwardian electorate and, after nearly a century of incremental reform, finally enabled all men and women over twenty-one to participate fully in national politics.<sup>1</sup> Political parties and voluntary associations suddenly faced considerable new challenges in mobilizing support.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the possibilities for national political debate were significantly expanded by the increasing penetration of the media into the everyday life of all social classes. The circulation of daily newspapers doubled in the twenty years after 1918, and by 1939 some two-thirds of the population regularly read one.<sup>3</sup> In 1922, radio broadcasting began under the monopoly of the BBC, and by the outbreak of the Second World War over 70% of households possessed a licence.<sup>4</sup> Cinema-going became another hugely popular pastime in these decades, with an average of 18–19 million attendances a week; although the vast majority of films avoided overtly political content, newsreels offered the novelty of news presented in

<sup>1</sup> The Representation of the People Act of 1918 enfranchised all men over 21 and most women over 30, increasing the electorate from 7.7 million in 1910 to 21.4 million in 1918. The Equal Franchise Act of 1928 gave women the vote on the same terms as men, further increasing the electorate to 28.9 million (D. Butler and G. Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 234–5).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., D. Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and class politics in the 1920s', *English Historical Review*, cxi (1996), 59–84; L. Beers, 'Education or manipulation? Labour, democracy, and the popular press in interwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, xlvi (2009), 129–52; H. McCarthy, 'Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in interwar Britain', *Historical Journal*, l (2007), 891–912.

<sup>3</sup> Maj. G. Harrison, with F. C. Mitchell and M. A. Abrams, *The Home Market* (1939), ch. 21; A. P. Wadsworth, 'Newspaper circulations 1800–1954', *Manchester Statistical Society Transactions*, iv, session 1954–5; C. Seymour-Ure, 'The press and the party system between the wars', in *The Politics of Reappraisal*, ed. G. Peele and C. Cook (1975), pp. 233–9.

<sup>4</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of Broadcasting* (2nd edn., 2002), pp. 22–5.

moving images.<sup>5</sup> A relatively slow-moving, localized and socially fragmented political culture was challenged profoundly by the emergence of a mediated mass democracy.

In this changed environment much thought was given to the task of communicating effectively with working-class voters and integrating them into the political system. With the rise of the Labour party and the growing power of the trade unions, class had a new centrality in British politics, and political turbulence across Europe – particularly the October 1917 revolution in Russia – offered a stark warning about the consequences of failing to contain social tensions. Political parties developed new techniques of electoral persuasion, media producers searched for fresh ways of packaging politics for a mass audience and market researchers promised insights into the minds of ordinary members of the public.<sup>6</sup> Yet British society and culture remained highly stratified, and the middle-class domination of most British political organizations and media institutions ensured that many struggled to find the appropriate language to appeal to working-class citizens. The Conservative and Liberal parties inevitably found it difficult to shake off their image as defenders of the interests of the propertied classes, but even the Labour party often failed to find a message that resonated beyond its core trade union support: official literature frequently bemoaned the party's inability to reach the 'apathetic' masses.<sup>7</sup> The dominant media forms of the period, moreover, continued to be heavily shaped by middle-class values and expectations. The expansion of the popular daily press after the launch of the *Daily Mail* in 1896 had been based on targeting the expanding lower middle classes, and most inter-war dailies tended to give priority to middle-class perspectives and priorities. The main exception, the trade union-owned *Daily Herald*, shared many of the Labour party's difficulties in appealing beyond the organized labour movement. The BBC under Lord Reith was famously metropolitan and elitist in tone: as Ross McKibbin has observed, before 1939 it found it 'immensely difficult to approach working men and women without condescension' or to give them an 'authentic voice'.<sup>8</sup> The strict censorship regime imposed by the British Board of Film Censors

<sup>5</sup> R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–51* (Oxford, 1998), p. 419; on newsreels, see A. Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (1979).

<sup>6</sup> D. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988); L. Beers, 'Whose opinion? Changing attitudes towards opinion polling in British politics 1937–64', *Twentieth Century British History*, xvii (2006), 177–205.

<sup>7</sup> Beers, 'Education or manipulation?'; S. MacIntyre, 'British Labour, Marxism and working-class apathy in the 1920s', *Historical Journal*, xx (1977), 479–96.

<sup>8</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 460.

(BBFC) ensured that cinema enshrined middle-class notions of propriety and avoided political 'controversy'.<sup>9</sup> A 'culture for democracy' may have been gradually emerging in this period, but much of its form and content continued to be centred around, or mediated by, middle-class viewpoints.

It is in this context that the dramatic reinvention of the *Daily Mirror* in the mid 1930s is of interest. The *Mirror's* new editorial team transformed a right-wing picture paper read largely by middle-class women into what can be seen as the first modern tabloid, aimed at a mixed sex, working-class audience and adopting a distinctively left-of-centre political position. This was the most fundamental, and most successful, newspaper reinvention in modern Britain.<sup>10</sup> The paper's circulation rose by almost two-thirds between 1935 and 1939, at a time when all of its main rivals, other than the *Express*, were losing readers; it reached working-class men and women who had not previously acquired the daily newspaper reading habit.<sup>11</sup> This growth continued during the war, and the *Mirror* became the most popular paper among the forces.<sup>12</sup> In 1949 it overtook the *Daily Express* to become Britain's most popular daily with a circulation of well over four million; in 1967 it reached the unprecedented circulation peak of 5.25 million copies, when it was the best-selling paper in the world.<sup>13</sup> The *Mirror*, in short, became the most successful and influential expression of popular print culture in mid twentieth-century Britain.

A number of scholars have recognized the political and social importance of the paper during and after the Second World War. A. J. P. Taylor, with characteristic overstatement, claimed that during the 1940s the *Mirror* 'gave an indication as never before of what ordinary people in the most ordinary sense were thinking'.<sup>14</sup> A. C. H. Smith's detailed study of the *Mirror* offered qualified support for this assertion, suggesting that the paper was able to 'crystallize' a 'new mood of radical populism' among the electorate in 1945, while Colin Seymour-Ure agreed that 'In the war and in the later 1940s it was to capture the mood of the working class better than any other

<sup>9</sup> J. Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930–9* (1984); J. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain 1896–1950* (Beckenham, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> The only comparable example is *The Sun* after 1969, but its editorial transformation was not as far-reaching: the *Daily Herald/Sun* had long been a working-class paper, and the paper's shift to a right-wing line was relatively gradual.

<sup>11</sup> Seymour-Ure, 'Press and party system', p. 237.

<sup>12</sup> P. Kimble, *Newspaper Reading in the Third Year of the War* (1942).

<sup>13</sup> J. Tunstall, *Newspaper Power: the New National Press in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 43–5.

<sup>14</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914–45* (1965; Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 666.

paper'.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Martin Pugh has argued that the paper played a 'crucial role' in shifting popular opinion in favour of the Labour party before the 1945 election, because it 'reflected the political culture of many working class English people in a way that most of the leading Labour politicians were ill-equipped to do'.<sup>16</sup> James Thomas has developed a more nuanced interpretation, contending that while the *Mirror* continued to prioritize entertainment over politics, it 'articulated a popular yearning for a less party-dominated and adversarial politics that could appeal to the disengaged and disempowered younger generation'.<sup>17</sup> Although reaching different conclusions about the *Mirror's* political impact, all agree that the paper enjoyed an unusually close relationship with its readers, and that it provided an outlet for working-class opinions insufficiently represented elsewhere in mainstream culture.

Despite these suggestive analyses, there have been no detailed historical studies of the way the *Mirror* developed its new editorial appeal in the second half of the 1930s. Many scholars have assumed that it was the wartime crisis, coupled with the easing of commercial pressures due to newsprint rationing and the pegging of circulations, which encouraged the paper to develop a more radical voice. Pugh's thoughtful analysis is unusual in examining what he describes as the 'neglected pre-1939 period', but he focuses largely on foreign affairs and appeasement, and his contention that 'the paper showed few symptoms of change on domestic social and economic questions before 1939' obscures some significant shifts in the style and tone of its reporting.<sup>18</sup> This chapter seeks to address some of these gaps in the existing literature and, by providing a fresh perspective on the reinvention of the *Mirror* in the 1930s, it aims to shed light on aspects of the political culture of the period. In particular, it examines the process by which the paper's journalists tried to find a language and content that would appeal to the non-unionized working class, who provided the largest remaining gap in the newspaper market. Given the unprecedented success of these efforts, moreover, it is reasonable to assume that they resonated with their audience. This is certainly not to claim, with Taylor, that the *Mirror* somehow gave a 'voice' to 'ordinary people'; the relationship between a commercially driven mass circulation newspaper and its diverse and often sceptical readership

<sup>15</sup> A. C. H. Smith, with E. Immirizi and T. Blackwell, *Paper Voices: the Popular Press and Social Change 1935–65* (1975); Seymour-Ure, 'Press and party system', p. 250.

<sup>16</sup> M. Pugh, 'The *Daily Mirror* and the revival of Labour 1935–45', *Twentieth Century British History*, ix (1998), 431.

<sup>17</sup> J. Thomas, "A cloak of apathy": political disengagement, popular politics and the *Daily Mirror* 1940–5', *Journalism Studies*, v (2004), 480.

<sup>18</sup> Pugh, 'The *Daily Mirror*', pp. 421, 427.



is more complicated than that. Nevertheless, the repositioning of the *Mirror* does provide significant evidence about the political currents of the period; the evident plausibility of the paper's articulation of a class-based disillusionment with party politics, and more specifically with the policies of the National Government, lends credence to accounts detecting a leftward shift in opinion in the late 1930s and, as Pugh suggests, should inform accounts of the 1945 election victory.

After a brief outline of the *Mirror's* history, this chapter will examine how the paper packaged politics for its readers in the second half of the 1930s. It will demonstrate the editorial team's commercial pragmatism in prioritizing human interest and entertainment over political content, but will argue that this pragmatism coexisted with an underlying seriousness which manifested itself in powerful campaigning rhetoric and idealistic attempts to educate readers on certain issues. The chapter will show, in particular, how the *Mirror* expressed discontent with the political status quo and demanded a greater voice for its working-class constituency; at the same time it developed a distinctive critique of appeasement and offered a persuasive reworking of patriotism as the international situation deteriorated. The paper was able to update established populist traditions for a modern, mediated mass democracy.

### ***The early history of the Daily Mirror***

The *Daily Mirror* was launched in 1903 by Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) in the wake of his success seven years earlier with the *Daily Mail*.<sup>19</sup> Taking inspiration from the French publication *La Fronde*, it offered something new for the British market: a daily newspaper for women produced entirely by women.<sup>20</sup> Within a few months, though, it was clear that the paper was a spectacular failure in this format, and it was rescued only by Northcliffe's decision in January 1904 to turn the *Mirror* into an illustrated paper, taking advantage of recent technological developments which allowed cheap and efficient rotary printing of photographs.<sup>21</sup> This move was well judged: as an illustrated paper it became the first daily to rival the readership levels of the market leader, the *Daily Mail*, and it remained successful until the First World War, with a circulation of close to a million. Although the *Mirror* no longer advertised itself as paper for 'ladies' it had

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Harmsworth was ennobled as Lord Northcliffe in 1905: henceforth he will be called Northcliffe.

<sup>20</sup> K. Jones, *Fleet Street and Downing Street* (1920), p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004), ch. 1; B. Hagerty, *Read all about it! 100 Sensational Years of the Daily Mirror* (Lydney, 2003), p. 14.

a significantly higher percentage of female readers than its rivals. It had a similar world-view to the *Mail* – conservative and imperialistic – but much of its content was devoted to human interest stories and features about fashion and domesticity.

After 1918, however, the *Mirror* gradually fell behind its rivals in the popular market. As all dailies started integrating photographs into their pages, much of the *Mirror's* original appeal was lost, and it lacked a distinctive editorial personality to set it apart from the other popular papers on the right. By 1934, its circulation had slumped to 720,000, barely a third of the market leader, the *Daily Express*. Its core audience was now middle-class women in the south of England, and it lagged far behind all its main rivals in working-class households.<sup>22</sup> It was at this low point that personnel changes brought an infusion of new ideas and, eventually, a new direction for the *Mirror*. At the centre of the reinvention was Harry Guy Bartholomew, who became editorial director in 1934, having joined the paper as a cartoonist thirty years earlier. The son of a clerk, and with no more than an elementary education, Bartholomew relied on his visual flair and technical expertise to rise in journalism; self-conscious about his lack of articulacy, he harboured a deep-seated suspicion of social elites and detested pretension and snobbery.<sup>23</sup> He immediately sought to make significant shifts in the style and content of the *Mirror*, and in this process he was supported by Cecil King, Northcliffe's nephew and a key member of the paper's board of directors.<sup>24</sup> Bartholomew took the advice of the American advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, and drew up a new editorial template heavily influenced by successful American tabloids such as the New York *Daily News*.<sup>25</sup> The new format included the liberal use of heavy black type and bold block headlines; the writing became more colloquial, the pursuit of sensation more pronounced, and the sexual content more explicit.<sup>26</sup> Further momentum was given to these editorial changes by a raft of new appointments in 1935, including Basil Nicholson, who moved from a career in advertising, the young Welsh journalist Hugh Cudlipp,

<sup>22</sup> Of the popular dailies, the *Mirror* was second only to the *Mail* as the most widely read paper in the upper two social categories (W. Cogan, *The Readership of Newspapers and Periodicals in Great Britain, 1936* (1936), 1A).

<sup>23</sup> H. Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned! The Astonishing Story of the Daily Mirror* (1953), pp. 48–62; M. Edelman, *The Mirror: a Political History* (1966), pp. 38–41.

<sup>24</sup> On King, see R. Edwards, *Newspapermen: Hugh Cudlipp, Cecil Harmsworth and the Glory Days of Fleet Street* (2003).

<sup>25</sup> On this reinvention, see Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*; H. Cudlipp, *Walking on Water* (1976).

<sup>26</sup> On sexual content, see A. Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918–78* (Oxford, 2009).

who joined as Nicholson's assistant in the features department, and William Connor, a former copywriter for J. Walter Thompson, who became the star columnist 'Cassandra'.<sup>27</sup> The result was a new style of paper in the British daily market: a brash populist tabloid aimed squarely at a working-class audience, updating and refreshing Northcliffe's popular newspaper model with the insights of American commerce and the democratic instincts of a reform-minded editorial team. If papers like the *Mail* and the *Express* had aimed to be 'popular not vulgar', the *Mirror* now portrayed itself as 'vulgar but honest'.<sup>28</sup>

### ***The limits of political coverage***

How did these editorial transformations affect the *Mirror's* political coverage? As a picture paper largely aimed at women, politics had never been a priority and, in general, the routine business of the public sphere had received relatively little attention. Content analysis for the Royal Commission on the Press (1947–9) found that 16% of the *Mirror's* total news space in 1927 was devoted to 'political, social and economic news' (both domestic and foreign), compared to 20% of the *Daily Mail's* and 27% of *The Times's*.<sup>29</sup> On the main news page, 37% of the stories were public affairs news of this sort, the lowest proportion of the national market; the *Daily Graphic*, the other leading picture paper, had a similar figure at 39%, while the *Express*, *Herald*, *Mail* and *News Chronicle* varied between 46% and 52%.<sup>30</sup> After the editorial reinvention of the mid 1930s, however, these figures fell markedly as public affairs content was further marginalized, and the disparities with the *Mirror's* main rivals opened up significantly. In 1937, only 8% of the *Mirror's* total news space was devoted to 'political, social and economic news', half the amount of a decade earlier; over the same period, the *Mail's* coverage had declined by less than a sixth to 17% in total, and *The Times's* had fallen by just under a fifth to 22%. On the main news page, even greater reductions were evident: only 15% of the *Mirror's* stories were about public affairs. Across the rest of the popular press, by contrast, these proportions were relatively stable, ranging from 40% (the *Daily Mail*) to 56% (the *News Chronicle*).<sup>31</sup> The *Mirror* had conspicuously set itself apart

<sup>27</sup> On Nicholson, see Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*, pp. 78–81; on Cudlipp, see Edwards, *Newspapermen*; on Connor, see R. Connor, *Cassandra: Reflections in a Mirror* (1969).

<sup>28</sup> Cardiff University, Bute Library, Hugh Cudlipp papers (hereafter Cudlipp papers), HC/2/2, Hugh Cudlipp to Cecil King, 27 May 1960.

<sup>29</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Press 1947–9 (Parl. Papers 1949 [Cmd. 7700]) (hereafter RCP, *Report*), app. VII, table 4, p. 250.

<sup>30</sup> RCP, *Report*, app. VII, table 14, pp. 257–8.

<sup>31</sup> RCP, *Report*, app. VII, table 4, p. 250; table 14, pp. 257–8.

from its competitors, developing a tabloid template in which ‘serious’ news of the public sphere played only a small part in the editorial formula.<sup>32</sup>

This rebalancing of the paper’s content reflected the editorial team’s belief that its working-class target audience was largely disengaged from party politics. By the mid 1930s, Fleet Street had plenty of evidence to support this belief. The publications that had proved most popular with working-class readers were Sunday papers such as the *News of the World* and *The People* – papers whose appeal lay firmly in court reports, sports coverage and exclusives from the world of entertainment, rather than in any political coverage.<sup>33</sup> Among the dailies, the *Daily Herald* had built up an impressive working-class readership after its relaunch of 1930, but much of this was based on the huge amounts spent by Odhams Press on insurance offers, free gifts and intensive canvassing; its growth had clearly stagnated by the mid 1930s as its unwavering support for the labour movement and its relatively extensive political content put off many among the non-unionized working classes.<sup>34</sup> Market research surveys, first commissioned to investigate audience responses to newspaper content in the early 1930s, confirmed that human interest was the most popular category of news, and offered the best prospect of reaching the young, mixed-sex, working-class readership sought by the *Mirror*; interest in political content tended to be skewed to older, and more educated, men.<sup>35</sup> Key figures in the *Mirror*’s reinvention were adamant that the paper should pay close attention to this evidence and accept that political events were remote from the lives of most ordinary people. One of the strongest proponents of this policy was Basil Nicholson, who was features editor only for a few months in 1935, but whose legacy lived on through Hugh Cudlipp and others impressed by his ideas. Cudlipp remembered being challenged by Nicholson about the basic purposes of newspapers:

What was the use of worrying readers about obscure revolutions in Bolivia if they could not sleep at night through indigestion? Was a pregnant woman, whose husband could not possibly afford her fourth child, interested in a Parliamentary debate on foreign affairs which would obviously result in nothing at all? What was the point of publishing pompous articles by avaricious big-wigs when figures proved that nobody would read them?<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> This pattern is confirmed by the follow-up research conducted by J. Curran, A. Douglas and G. Whannel, ‘The political economy of the human interest story’, in *Newspapers and Democracy: International Essays on a Changing Medium*, ed. A. Smith (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. 288–316.

<sup>33</sup> C. Bainbridge and R. Stockdill, *The ‘News of the World’ Story: 150 Years of the World’s Bestselling Newspaper* (1993).

<sup>34</sup> H. Richards, *The Bloody Circus: the ‘Daily Herald’ and the Left* (1997), ch. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Curran and others, ‘Political economy’.

<sup>36</sup> Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*, p. 81.

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Popular journalism, from this perspective, should concern itself primarily with the everyday issues that preoccupied readers – their personal lives, health, domestic circumstances – or with sensational stories that would allow them to escape their worries; political content was worthy of inclusion only where it could be shown to intrude directly into their world. This pragmatism is the dominant thread running through the public statements and recollections of the leading editorial figures. Bartholomew argued to the Royal Commission on the Press in 1948, for example, that ‘heavy material’ had to be restricted if a ‘mass public’ was to be held, while for Cecil King the key criterion used to judge content was whether ‘it was of interest to, or intelligible by, a bus driver’s wife in Sheffield’.<sup>37</sup> Cudlipp, looking back over his newspaper career, was similarly clear that ‘Political opinion is a small proportion of a newspaper’s activities and is never the major factor in the success of the product’.<sup>38</sup> In private, the language was often more incautious. In 1943, King wrote to Cudlipp that while the population was gradually becoming more ‘seriously minded’, ‘formidable numbers’ of their target audience were ‘feather-brained’; ‘I am not arguing that instruction should not be given’, he continued, ‘but that our main function is, and is likely to remain, entertainment’.<sup>39</sup> The *Mirror* team were acutely aware of the commercial dangers of overestimating its audience.

For many observers, both at the time and subsequently, such policies cynically disregarded the public responsibilities of journalism in order to profit by pandering to the ‘lowest common denominator’. Political and Economic Planning’s *Report on the British Press* observed in 1938, for example, that a ‘rather dangerous tendency has recently been manifesting itself, by which entertainment ceases to be ancillary to news and either supersedes it or absorbs it’. This tendency was most evident in ‘the pictorial daily newspapers’ – the authors clearly had the *Mirror* in mind here – in which ‘features take up almost as much space as news, and much of what appears in the news columns is only thinly veiled entertainment material’. Such papers enabled readers ‘to escape from the grimness of actual events and the effort of thought by opening the backdoor of triviality and sex appeal. They thus keep up the illusion of following what is going on in the world without in fact being in a position to know what is significant’.<sup>40</sup> These criticisms – and many similar laments could be reproduced, from across the political

<sup>37</sup> RCP, *Minutes of Evidence* (1948), Cmd. 7398, day 22, p. 3; C. King, *Strictly Personal: some Memoirs of Cecil H. King* (1969), pp. 101–2.

<sup>38</sup> Cudlipp, *Walking on Water*, p. 401.

<sup>39</sup> Cudlipp papers, HC2/1, Cecil King to Cudlipp, 16 Dec. 1943.

<sup>40</sup> Political and Economic Planning (hereafter PEP), *Report on the British Press* (1938), pp. 33–4.

spectrum – had much force. The *Mirror* did not usually provide enough information about public events to enable readers to make independent judgements about the issues of the day; the privileging of the everyday, the personal and the concrete often had the effect of obscuring the underlying structural issues that shaped political, social and economic developments. Yet in many respects the *Mirror* was simply adapting its content to make it suitable for a poorly educated audience, many of whom understandably viewed politics as an elite activity conducted by ‘them’ rather than ‘us’. As McKibbin has observed, most working-class families had a taboo on talking politics at home, and most forms of sociability excluded overtly political debate; party political allegiances tended to be lukewarm, and in some areas even belonging to a political party was deemed unrespectable.<sup>41</sup> Many of the households the *Mirror* was targeting had never taken a national daily paper, and were poorly integrated into national political culture; and as Political and Economic Planning admitted:

even the more trivial newspapers compare favourably in many respects with much of the reading matter which they have in fact replaced. So far from the public taste having fallen from a once high level, there is good reason to suppose that it was even lower in the past, although the rise of mass-circulation newspapers has made its shortcomings much more generally conspicuous.<sup>42</sup>

Even if the *Mirror* only brought a limited amount of political content to the working-class home, it may still have been more than many readers had previously consumed. This content was not, moreover, designed to allow these readers to ‘escape from the grimness of actual events’, but was treated seriously. Pragmatically restricting political coverage was not incompatible with strong political views or even idealism: Cudlipp and King, in particular, combined their commercial realism with a desire to contribute to the political education of readers and to further the cause of political and social reform. Cudlipp, after all, left school at fourteen, and was well aware of the potential for individual self-improvement. He believed that readers attracted initially by entertainment and titillation could be tempted to try other types of material:

The general idea was to leave the reader gasping for breath, and then, leading him gently by the hand, to whisper in his ear: ‘Just a moment, friend. Before you take another look at that luscious Swedish blonde in the swimming pool on page 16, there’s a piece on page 27 by the Foreign Editor of the *New York Times* analyzing the sources of Hitler’s power’.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 202–5; K. Jefferys, *Politics and People: a History of British Democracy since 1918* (2007), ch. 2.

<sup>42</sup> PEP, *Report*, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> H. Cudlipp, *At your Peril* (1962), p. 51.

As we will see, the *Mirror* developed rhetoric critical of the National Government's failings and demanded action to solve pressing domestic and international problems. Left-of-centre political positions were conveyed in a simple, but powerful, populist rhetoric that played on working-class frustrations with the rigidities of party politics and the harshness of social inequality. As A. J. P. Taylor noted, the *Mirror* was a 'serious organ of political opinion'.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Domestic politics***

In domestic politics, the challenge facing the new editorial team was to move away from the right-wing conservatism that had characterized the *Mirror* under the proprietorship of Lord Rothermere between 1914 and 1931, while at the same time providing something distinctive from the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald*. As late as January 1934, indeed, the *Mirror* was still giving space to Rothermere to advocate the cause of Mosley's British Union of Fascists: 'Give the Blackshirts a Helping Hand' was the headline of one infamous article.<sup>45</sup> The dalliance with Mosley soon ended, but in the 1935 general election the paper remained broadly behind the National Government. 'They Have Done Much – They Can Do More – They Will' declared the paper.<sup>46</sup> It used conventional conservative arguments to claim that the government had encouraged the return of economic confidence; the election of the 'Socialists' with a 'revolutionary policy' would only lead to the 'flight of money' and the 'collapse of currency'.<sup>47</sup> Over the course of 1936, however, a different approach to politics became evident. At the heart of this were two individuals, the leader-writer Richard Jennings and the columnist William Connor. Jennings, an Oxford-educated son of a *Times* journalist, had actually been at the *Mirror* since 1904, but he now took the opportunity to follow his own left-of-centre leanings, and developed increasingly strident attacks on the National Government's domestic and foreign policy.<sup>48</sup> Connor, one of the new recruits, quickly developed a hard-hitting style that was a fresh departure for the paper: here was a journalist writing directly to his working-class audience as if he was talking to them in the local pub.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *English History*, p. 666.

<sup>45</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 22 Jan. 1934, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 1 Nov. 1935, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 12 Nov. 1935, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*, pp. 126–8; Edelman, *The Mirror*, pp. 27–8. He wrote editorials under the initials 'WM', apparently in honour of William Morris.

<sup>49</sup> Connor, *Cassandra*.

As a result of the *Mirror's* new approach the National Government was increasingly portrayed as a dithering, 'wobble-wobble' administration.<sup>50</sup> In an editorial in May 1936, for example, Jennings bluntly accused the cabinet of 'lacking brains' and demanded the inclusion of maverick Conservative MP Winston Churchill as minister of defence: he might provide 'new ideas, drive, modernisation'.<sup>51</sup> This attack on official incompetence and bureaucratic stagnation would become a persistent refrain in years to come. In developing political solutions that would appeal to its audience, the paper repeatedly focused on personalities: changing the bosses would reap rewards. Such calls became louder later in the year: when Baldwin suggested in November 1936 that it would have been politically imprudent to have fought the 1935 election on the promise of rearmament, the *Mirror* described it as 'the most ghastly admission in the history of British politics'.<sup>52</sup> A bold black headline, 'Baldwin Betrays His Convictions For Votes', introduced a sharp attack on 'muddled ministers' who had shown an 'unsavoury eagerness to keep their jobs at all costs'. The solution, characteristically, was better leaders: Churchill was highlighted as the man for the moment. There was, though, a touch of humour in the presentation, something that the new *Mirror* team believed was vital in packaging politics for working-class readers. Baldwin was 'The Face that Did NOT Launch a Thousand Planes'.<sup>53</sup>

The *Mirror's* populist rhetoric was sharpened during the abdication crisis in December 1936, when the paper suggested that the political class was conspiring against the wishes of the public to remove a popular king. The *Mirror* used its front page to try to represent the sentiments of the people, demanding that they be allowed to participate in the decision-making process: 'Tell Us The Facts, Mr Baldwin! ... The Country Will Give You the Verdict'.<sup>54</sup> The paper made a point of emphasizing its attentiveness to the opinions expressed by its own readers: 'Sympathy for the King facing the greatest crisis of his life is voiced in the hundreds of letters that have poured into the *Daily Mirror* office from all parts of the country ... Not one per cent of the letters received criticize the King in his choice of Mrs Simpson'.<sup>55</sup> (Recent research by Susan Williams lends credence to this statement and suggests that the *Mirror* – unlike other papers on the left

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 26 May 1936, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 26 May 1936, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 14 Nov. 1936, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 14 Nov. 1936, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 Dec. 1936, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 Dec. 1936, pp. 6–7.



– was in tune with public sentiment.<sup>56</sup>) This strategy of posing as both a platform for, and champion of, public opinion would become central to the paper's political and social commentary: the *Mirror* devoted more space to letters and reader contributions than its rivals, and frequently asked its audience to respond to questionnaires on key issues of the day.<sup>57</sup> Writing in 1953, for example, Cudlipp described the *Mirror* as an 'immense, permanent Gallup Poll Survey of changing mass opinion. Whatever nonsense might be purveyed by politicians in Westminster, the staff ... were guided by the mood of the public and by their own faith'.<sup>58</sup> Such claims were obviously designed to burnish the paper's populist credentials, but in these early years, as the *Mirror* worked hard to win over a new audience, much importance was indeed placed on the effort to understand public opinion; and as its circulation rose – it increased more than any of its competitors during the abdication crisis – the paper's claims about representing the public became more confident and plausible.<sup>59</sup> The editorial team may have been aware of the educational inadequacies of readers on an individual level, but they showed a striking respect for, and faith in, the combined political wisdom of 'the people'.

This populism was reinforced by a judicious use – initially in Cassandra's columns – of a language of class that focused insistently on the remoteness, selfishness and insensitivity of the political and social elites. Cassandra's analysis of the abdication crisis, dramatically headlined 'I Accuse!', was based on the view that those opposing the king's marriage were 'The Church, the West End of London and the aristocracy'. The attempt to remove Edward VIII was the 'biggest mistake of all time', with the church leading the way by 'putting our King in a position from which it was almost impossible to retreat'. The divorce laws supported by the church, he continued, were 'medieval and unjust': 'the attitude of the country is in fierce opposition to them and has been actively so for the last ten years'. He was even more scathing about the metropolitan and rural elites: 'There is more corruption, there is more spiritual rottenness in the West End of London than in any other place in the country. And the aristocracy? ... The sorry pageant of adultery and divorce is an unceasing spectacle from this elevated class'.<sup>60</sup> He insisted that 'The future of the Empire cannot be decided by the result

<sup>56</sup> S. Williams, *The People's King: the True Story of the Abdication* (2003).

<sup>57</sup> Smith, Immirizi and Blackwell, *Paper Voices*, pp. 63, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*, p. 236.

<sup>59</sup> Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*, p. 101. Cudlipp thought this circulation rise during the abdication 'curious' because he assumed that the paper had actually misread public opinion; in fact, Williams's evidence suggests that the paper's line was shared by the majority.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 Dec. 1936, p. 13.

of a few hasty telephone conversations among politicians ... the people themselves have to be consulted'.<sup>61</sup> As the crisis played itself out, the *Mirror* gradually moderated its criticism of Baldwin and fell in behind the preferred solution of the political class, namely abdication; its coverage, nevertheless, provided clear signs of the populist approach to come.

These critiques of the National Government did not mean that the *Mirror* automatically switched its support to the Labour opposition. Indeed, well into the 1940s the paper continued to view Labour with suspicion and sometimes hostility. The 'Parliamentary Labour Party continues to behave with a mild imbecility that reminds us of a gathering of elderly spinsters' observed Jennings in an editorial in October 1938.<sup>62</sup> Instead the *Mirror* developed its own line, attacking both parties for their inability to understand the needs of the 'people' and bring about real change. In March 1939, for example, Cassandra criticized the four ministers of labour, of both parties, who had served over the last decade for failing to make any impression on the problem of unemployment: 'Like glorified clerks, they have sat at their desks watching the figures rise and fall ... At no time have these ineffective public servants attempted to provide work on a measurable scale'.<sup>63</sup> He argued that the lack of investment in programmes of public works was nothing less than scandalous, especially because 'idle capital is available in quantities that make Croesus look as if he was on poor relief'. 'This country stinks of several things', he lamented; 'one of them is administrative incompetence – and another is money': 'we have the financial equipment to harness the minds and muscles of two million idle men. Whether we have the energy and conviction to smash our way through the appalling muddle, confusion, conceit, indifference and even official contempt is another matter'.<sup>64</sup>

The substance of its political commentary was not particularly original, but by framing it in this informal, conversational tone, laced with bitterness at social inequality and official inactivity, the *Mirror* offered something different from the other left-of-centre popular papers. By refusing to support any of the main parties, the *Mirror* was able, as James Thomas has observed, to tap into a widespread working-class disillusionment with party politics. Rather than offering specific solutions to the nation's problems, the paper suggested that it was only by paying closer attention to the views of ordinary working people that wide-ranging reform would be achieved. The *Mirror* was especially keen to offer a platform for the opinions of young people.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 Dec. 1936, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 25 Nov. 1938, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 1 March 1939, p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 1 March 1939, p. 14.

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In February 1939 it raised the issue of extending the vote to eighteen-year-olds, and the following month it established a 'Parliament of Youth' through which younger readers could express their views by returning coupons with their vote on a weekly motion.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, 93% voted in favour of the first motion 'That this House urges a stronger hearing for the Voice of Youth and recognizes that it can have an important effect on the lives of our people'.<sup>66</sup> By the summer of 1939, Jennings was using the leader column to rally support for a Popular Front in order to bypass existing party structures and enable the voices of freedom-loving people to be heard:

[the next] Election can only be won if democratic opinion is united against the Fifth Columnists who would compromise with Fascism. The object of the Popular or Democratic Front would be to rally all those who are often called 'silent voters' ... [to] a programme designed to save democracy at a time when, all over Europe, democracy is being stabbed to death.<sup>67</sup>

But this was not, Jennings noted wearily, a policy accepted by what he called the 'official leaders and wire-pullers of the Labour Front'. By the outbreak of the war, therefore, the *Mirror* had positioned itself as a voice of democratic reform and a champion of the excluded, while remaining distant from the Labour movement. It was also starting to ruffle the feathers of the social elites: the Marlborough Club in London so disliked the paper's combination of outspoken politics and brash entertainment that it banned the paper as a 'red and pornographic rag'.<sup>68</sup>

### *International affairs*

Similar shifts towards a more strident, class-based, left-of-centre politics were also evident in the coverage of foreign affairs, although this process was more gradual and uncertain than is sometimes suggested.<sup>69</sup> When Hitler's Germany remilitarized the Rhineland in March 1936, for example, the paper did little more than utter a cry of despair: 'The futile pacts and obsolete treaties may lie in pieces wherever Hitler or anybody else has thrown them. Better flimsy fragments of imbecile documents on the ground than millions of rotting bodies of young men'.<sup>70</sup> In the early stages of the Spanish Civil

<sup>65</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 25 Feb. 1939, p. 9; 1 Apr. 1939, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 1 Apr. 1939, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 2 June 1939, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics: the Journals of Collin Brooks 1932-40*, ed. N. J. Crowson (Cambridge, 1998), p. 250.

<sup>69</sup> Pugh, 'The *Daily Mirror*', for example, suggests that the *Mirror* was consistent in its criticism of appeasement from 1935.

<sup>70</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 9 March 1936, p. 13. For Edelman this was the 'nadir' of the paper's 'political sagacity' (Edelman, *The Mirror*, p. 35).

War, the *Mirror's* coverage was intermittent, superficial and focused almost exclusively on human interest stories – either tales of atrocities on either side, or British subjects who had become tangled up in the violence.<sup>71</sup> The paper presented the conflict as involving morally equivalent forces motivated by an irrational extremism that was supposedly alien to the English character: ‘the war is between two mysticisms, two creeds each backed by its frenzied supporters all across Europe’.<sup>72</sup> Such hatred and violence, the paper observed complacently, ‘are the negation and ruin of all that we value in England’.<sup>73</sup> The *Mirror* was therefore content to support the National Government’s policy of non-intervention.

But over the course of 1938 and 1939, the *Mirror* became increasingly critical of the government’s policy of appeasement and repeatedly warned its readers of the dangers posed by the fascist dictators. The paper consistently called for faster rearmament: ‘A greater national effort is essential if Britain is to keep pace with any possible aggressor or group of enemies’.<sup>74</sup> The coverage of the Spanish Civil War shifted considerably: no longer was it portrayed as an unfortunate local conflict, but rather as an international struggle with vital consequences for European stability. Franco was little more than a puppet of Hitler and Mussolini, and a victory for the rebels would seriously damage British interests. ‘It is incredible that the British Government will let this bloodstained country become a third totalitarian empire’, lamented Cassandra. ‘If they do, they have removed one cornerstone of our race.’<sup>75</sup> Although hoping for peace during the Sudetenland crisis of autumn 1938, the paper was opposed to offering too many concessions to Hitler; the Munich agreement was portrayed as a ‘tragedy’ stemming from British weakness.<sup>76</sup> As the paper’s hostility to appeasement intensified during 1939, the *Mirror* provided a platform for Churchill to outline his views on the international situation.<sup>77</sup> At a time when many of its rivals downplayed the extent of the crisis – the *Express* famously claimed in 1939 ‘There Will Be No War’, while even left-of-centre papers like *The Herald* and the *News Chronicle* were placed under pressure to maintain a certain level of optimism – the paper offered hard-hitting coverage designed to

<sup>71</sup> For more details on the coverage of the Spanish Civil War, see A. Bingham and M. Conboy, ‘The *Daily Mirror* and the creation of a commercial popular language: a people’s war, a people’s paper?’, *Journalism Studies*, x (2009), 639–54.

<sup>72</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 6 Jan. 1937, p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 6 Aug. 1936, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 4 Apr. 1938, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 14 Jan. 1939, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 26 Sept. 1938, p. 11; 12 Oct. 1938, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 11 Aug. 1939, p. 15.

shake any sense of complacency among its readers.<sup>78</sup> The *Mirror's* disdain for the usual practices of political journalism actually gave it an advantage in this case: as Richard Cockett has observed, 'only those papers which had absolutely no contact with the government, such as the *Daily Mirror*, were able to oppose appeasement'.<sup>79</sup>

During this period class came to inform both the *Mirror's* analysis of international affairs and its discussion of British policy. Cassandra explicitly presented events in Spain as a class conflict: 'It is largely a class struggle – there's no doubt about it. The peasant in Spain has for centuries lived in a state of unparalleled misery and poverty. This war has been an attempt to throw off the yoke ... And it has failed'.<sup>80</sup> The policy of appeasement, meanwhile, was repeatedly associated with decadent and out-of-touch social elites. It was, Cassandra proclaimed in September 1938, 'a rich clique, born and bred in the selfish cradle of the ruling classes' who were happy to sacrifice the Sudeten territories; similarly, in April 1939, it was the leisured classes, represented by *The Times*, the Cliveden Set and those who 'fish and play golf', who were celebrating Franco's victory in April 1939.<sup>81</sup> By contrast, the paper was confident that ordinary people were prepared to stand up to Hitler: in a poll of its readers shortly before the Munich Agreement, more than 70% declared themselves 'ready to fight if Germany insists on a warlike solution to the Sudeten crisis'.<sup>82</sup>

But perhaps the *Mirror's* most distinctive contribution was the way in which it updated and reworked the language of patriotism for its working-class audience. Cassandra was at the heart of this effort: during 1938 and 1939, he travelled to Italy, Germany and Spain, and sent back dispatches that were often turned into full-page features. Cassandra was a realist and pragmatist: foreign affairs were essentially matters of military and economic power. He was critical of the idealism of the organized left, ridiculing the 'long-haired, dirty-necked, semi-Bohemian gawd-help-Spain meetings'.<sup>83</sup> His was the voice of 'common-sense', sceptical of grand rhetoric but determined that Britain should act decisively to protect its own interests; in the *Mirror's* words he provided 'realistic writing unadulterated with

<sup>78</sup> M. Hicks, "'No war this year": Selkirk Pantom and the editorial policy of the *Daily Express* 1938–9', *Media History*, xiv (2008), 167–83; Richards, *Bloody Circus*, pp. 155–7; R. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (1989).

<sup>79</sup> Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 17 Feb. 1939, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 9 Sept. 1938, p. 15; 10 Apr. 1939, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 24 Sept. 1938, p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 17 Feb. 1939, p. 12.

sentiment or jingoism'.<sup>84</sup> During the Sudetenland crisis, for example, he was certain that war was not sought by working people themselves, but warned that it might become necessary to restrain the expansionism of Hitler's Germany:

the ordinary German has not the slightest desire to get behind a gun and put the sights on an Englishman. And I, for my part, know of nobody in this country who wants to blast hell out of Fritz. Yet here we are whooping along for a war that'll make the last scrap seem like a nursemaid's tiff ... I think we are on top of a volcano.<sup>85</sup>

Weakness, he insisted, was as undesirable in international relations as it was in everyday life; the National Government's craven policies meant that Britain was losing face: 'My God! The stuff we put up with! ... If you find a couple of thugs slugging each other in your front garden, the best thing to do is to grab a yard of lead piping and beat the stuffing out of them. It may not save the rose bushes, but they'll not be back in a hurry'.<sup>86</sup>

At the same time he had no desire to disguise the realities of war. As war approached in August 1939, he was determined that no one would be seduced by the elevated rhetoric of national glory, imperial manliness and Christian piety that had been so widely used in 1914. He drew instead on the language of the soldier poets and authors – from Owen and Sassoon to Graves and Remarque – who had exposed the brutality and inhumanity of modern conflict. War, he declared, 'may be lawful but it is also obscene, murderous, bestial, profoundly evil, and in general a thoroughly Satanic procedure. So if we are going to war let us remember that God is on neither side and to invoke his name is, in my view, blasphemy unbounded'.<sup>87</sup> Cassandra's justifications for supporting the war effort were unapologetically pragmatic. 'When the triggers start going off I'll do some shooting myself to save my skin', he noted with grim humour. More broadly, though, he was adamant that 'the rulers of Germany' – once again, he was careful not to demonize the ordinary German citizens – 'are the biggest bunch of gangsters that ever clubbed a man to death'. 'I'll not be in it for love, for money, for glory or for honour', he concluded, 'but because the most detestable regime since the days of Attila the Hun wants to carve up our way of life to fit its own evil purpose'.<sup>88</sup> Through columns like these, Cassandra was able to articulate for his working-class audience a persuasive form of the 'temperate

<sup>84</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 15 Sept. 1938, p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 8 Sept. 1938, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 4 Nov. 1938, p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 30 Aug. 1939, p. 16.

<sup>88</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 30 Aug. 1939, p. 16.

masculinity' – which combined elements of inter-war anti-heroism with traditional soldierly qualities – that Sonya Rose has argued was hegemonic during the Second World War.<sup>89</sup>

The reputation that the paper had built up by 1939 for its cynical humour, its plain-speaking and its patriotic criticism of appeasement enabled it to act during the war as an outlet for the frustrations of the forces and a platform for criticism of bureaucratic inefficiency.<sup>90</sup> In so doing it provoked severe displeasure from Churchill's government and, in 1942, a threat of closure from home secretary Herbert Morrison.<sup>91</sup> Mass-Observation found that this warning from above served only to 'increase the proportion of people who feel favourably towards the *Daily Mirror*'; it suggested, moreover, that the paper was 'probably the biggest source of opinion forming' for men in the forces.<sup>92</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The reinvention of the *Daily Mirror* was a significant moment in British political culture. By targeting a broad working-class readership the paper helped to spread the habit of daily newspaper reading: the rapid increase in the *Mirror's* circulation was one of the main reasons behind the steady growth of newspaper sales to its peak in the early 1950s.<sup>93</sup> The *Mirror's* shift to the left did much to rectify the striking imbalance in Fleet Street's political sympathies, an imbalance which had caused great anxiety in the Labour movement for much of the inter-war period: from the 1940s until the late 1970s, when *The Sun* moved decisively to the right, the total circulations of Labour and Conservative papers remained relatively close. It is notoriously difficult to measure the 'impact' of newspapers, but there is a strong argument for concluding that the *Mirror* made a significant contribution to the leftwards shift of opinion in the years leading up to the 1945 general election. In its own way, the paper crystallized disillusionment with the National Government just as surely as the Left Book Club or local campaigns against fascism. The substance of the *Mirror's* political analysis was not particularly original – indeed, it was often superficial and frustratingly vague – but the paper did develop a distinctive style

<sup>89</sup> S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939–45* (Oxford, 2003), ch. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Paper Voices*, ch. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned!*, pp. 142–98.

<sup>92</sup> Mass-Observation File Report, 1197, 'Further report on *Daily Mirror* warning', Apr. 1942, p. 2; 1173, 'Warning the *Daily Mirror*', March 1942, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> C. Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1996), ch. 3.

that was carefully tailored to its working-class audience. The other left-of-centre popular papers were all closely linked to particular party machines and addressed relatively politicized readerships associated with parties or unions. The *Mirror*, by contrast, developed a different editorial appeal, an independent populist rhetoric which attempted to speak to – and for – a non-politically aligned audience of ordinary working-class people. It did not trouble readers with the detail of day-to-day political business, and was more likely to splash on a sensational court case than the latest parliamentary crisis; in that sense it was a harbinger of the aggressive tabloid culture of the future. The editorial team's pragmatism was combined, however, with a social democratic reformism that frequently bubbled to the surface. The political coverage it did contain played skilfully on some of the most resonant discourses of working-class culture – such as cynicism towards politicians and bosses, and frustration with the rigidities and pomposities of British society. In its own idiosyncratic manner, the *Mirror* helped to integrate its readership into the developing 'culture for democracy'. By the time of the 1945 election, over ten years after its reinvention had begun, the paper's political journey was almost complete: for the first time, the paper threw its support behind Labour, and it would remain a critical friend of the party for decades to come.<sup>94</sup> Its outspoken, irreverent and opportunistic left-of-centre journalism would provide an important counterweight to the conservatism and respectability that dominated much of British popular culture until the 1960s.

<sup>94</sup> Although it refused to compromise its independence by explicitly instructing readers to back Labour (see Pugh, 'The *Daily Mirror*'; Thomas, "A cloak of apathy").



## 5. 'A timid disbelief in the equality to which lip-service is constantly paid': gender, politics and the press between the wars

*Laura Beers*

In 1936, Ray Strachey, the author and former suffragist and secretary to Nancy Astor, MP, published an edited collection titled *Our Freedom and its Results*. In it, five women, including two politicians, the independent Liberal MP Eleanor Rathbone and the Labour MP Mary Agnes 'Molly' Hamilton, reflected on how British women's social and political position had changed – or failed to change – since the First World War. Despite the technical political equality with men that women had enjoyed since 1928, both Rathbone and Hamilton were quick to emphasize the limits of reform. According to Rathbone, 'Progress has been rapid when it depended on political action and slow when it depended on changes in hearts and habits'. Hamilton contended that 'a timid disbelief in the equality to which lip-service is constantly paid' persisted in Britain, and 'the assumption that women are all the same, and that they are all really rather silly and helpless, still continually betrays itself'.<sup>1</sup>

The two MPs' cynicism about society's willingness to accept women as men's political equals is substantiated by an investigation of party propaganda directed towards women; and by press representations of women voters and female politicians in the inter-war period. For, while women were granted the franchise on limited terms in 1918 and on equal terms with men in 1928, and while women were admitted to sit in the House of Commons in 1918, the removal of barriers against women's entrance into the political sphere did not reflect a wholehearted acceptance of their equal capacity for political participation. Prejudices against women as silly and frivolous were not universally held within inter-war society, and certainly many felt that women were as capable of rational political behaviour as their male counterparts. Indeed, there were many who believed that class and

<sup>1</sup> E. Rathbone, 'Changes in political life', in *Our Freedom: and its Results*, ed. R. Strachey (1936), pp. 15–76, at p. 16; M. A. Hamilton, 'Changes in social life', in Strachey, *Our Freedom*, pp. 231–85, at pp. 256, 258.

education were more important determinants of political capacity than sex. Nonetheless, inter-war British political culture remained heavily influenced by gender stereotypes dating back at least to the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Alison Light has shown how popular literature reinforced a conservative gender order in inter-war Britain through its privileging of domesticity and dissociation of women from the political sphere.<sup>3</sup> The values and assumptions that informed inter-war literature are equally evident in other spheres. Lucy Delap's chapter in this volume illustrates the extent to which deeply held assumptions about sexual difference – both physical and psychological – buttressed men and women's hostility towards the ordination of women by the Church of England. Such assumptions were equally evident in the political sphere. Party propaganda and political reporting in particular reinforced perceived differences between men and women through their representation of and appeal to women as emotional and irrational. Such representations and appeals reified existing prejudices against women and arguably retarded their further political and social emancipation.

The chapters in this volume each explore how the British nation was redefined in the wake of the First World War, and many engage with the question of how the new media of communication that emerged in the early twentieth century helped to shape how the government, political parties, social reformers and intellectuals understood and appealed to this new nation, and how the nation in turn responded to those appeals. Other chapters consider the extent to which the media acted as both an inclusive force in British political life, and as a medium for reinforcing existing prejudices and narrowing the scope of political debate. This chapter argues that, even as political media evolved to communicate with a new mass democracy, the style and content of political communication continued to be informed by conventional gender stereotypes. While women were now technically included as members of the political nation, the media represented and appealed to them as unequal citizens.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first queries existing understandings of the franchise debates of the 1920s. It suggests that, while the majority had reconciled themselves to the inevitability of equal

<sup>2</sup> On the creation of a gendered political language among the working-classes in the 19th century, see A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the English Working Class* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997). The existence of such stereotypes in the 18th century is highlighted in Arianne Chernock's recent study of men who dared to question women's exclusion from the political sphere (*Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* (Stanford, Calif., 2009)).

<sup>3</sup> A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (1991).

suffrage by the 1920s, many remained less than convinced of women's civic capacities. The next two sections look at party propaganda directed at women in the inter-war period, and at representations of women voters in the popular press. Finally, the last section examines representations of female politicians. The popular press, it argues, took for granted that women were less interested in political issues than men, and, consequently, focused on 'human interest' and fashion in reporting on female politicians in a bid to attract a female readership. While such coverage meant that female backbenchers were afforded more media attention than their male counterparts, they struggled to get their political message heard above the clamour for information on their domestic lives and fashion choices.

In 1929, the first election in which women held the franchise on equal terms with men, women formed a majority in over 80% of parliamentary constituencies. Statistics on the gender breakdown of voter turnout in inter-war Britain are not available; however anecdotal evidence suggests that women voters were exceptional in their commitment to exercising their newly earned rights as citizens. Whereas in continental European countries recorded gaps between male and female participation tended to range between 5 and 12%, in British elections in the 1920s women were reported to have turned out in larger numbers than men.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite their demonstrated commitment to exercising their rights as citizens, the view persisted in many quarters that women were less interested in politics than men, and that they lacked the political rationality of their male counterparts.

For feminist historians writing in the 1980s and 1990s, the persistent hostility towards women's political participation in inter-war Britain was more or less taken as read. Billie Melman argued that anxieties about the alleged army of 'superfluous women' created by the First World War combined with fears about the impact of feminine sexual and economic emancipation on the traditional balance of power between the sexes to produce a rhetoric within popular fiction and journalism that was peculiarly

<sup>4</sup> On turnout differentials in continental Europe and the Antipodes, see H. Tingsten, *Political Behavior: Studies in Election Statistics* (1937). The highest differentials occurred in municipal elections in Scandinavian countries, and the lowest in New Zealand, where notably women had held the franchise since 1893. For anecdotal reports on British turnout, see, e.g., 'Keen Women: 80 percent expected to vote', *Daily Mail*, 2 Nov. 1922; *Daily Express*, 30 Oct. 1924. H. Gosnell, *Why Europe Votes* (Chicago, Ill., 1930) cites an analysis of voter turnout in constituencies pre- and post-1928 to conclude that young women's participation more or less equalled that of men. However, he also cites tickers' sheets from three 'typical' polling districts in the 1924 election as evidence that '10 percent less of the women electors than of the men electors voted in 1924'.

hostile to young women's political and career ambitions. She identified the *Daily Mail's* prolonged campaign against 'The Flapper Vote Folly' in 1927–8 as the acme of this sexualized hostility in the popular press.<sup>5</sup> In her study of the suffrage movement after 1918, Cheryl Law argued that Stanley Baldwin's government only equalized the franchise because the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship forced his hand: 'while many politicians paid lip-service to the concept of women's equality, they had no intention of giving it practical expression, especially where the balance of power [between the sexes] might be concerned'.<sup>6</sup>

Recent scholarship, however, has sought to downplay, if not entirely to dismiss, opposition to full female enfranchisement in the 1920s. Adrian Bingham explicitly challenged Melman's analysis of inter-war popular culture, emphasizing the mass circulation newspapers' qualified support for women's continued employment after the First World War, and the fact that much press commentary in the 1920s supported female enfranchisement at twenty-one, notwithstanding the *Mail's* anti-flapper vote campaign.<sup>7</sup> He noted that the *Daily Express* took an optimistic view of women's electoral impact in its leader columns. On 23 May 1929, the paper argued that 'The new women voters, in every other respect more mature than their male contemporaries, are not in the least likely to register a snap judgment on the supreme question of politics they are now called upon to assist in deciding ... The leaders of the parties need not fear the frivolity of the new voters'.<sup>8</sup> Nicoletta Gullace has sought to revise Martin Pugh's depiction of the Representation of the People Act (1918) as an incremental reform that 'by no means reflected a coherent philosophy of political citizenship. But instead, in the long tradition of English parliamentary reform, derived its strength from a certain political coherence'.<sup>9</sup> Pugh had warned against swallowing too easily 'the assumption that there exists a direct relationship between the level of mass participation in the war effort and the extension of political and social privileges', and argued that women were enfranchised

<sup>5</sup> B. Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (1988). See also S. K. Kent, *Making Peace: the Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, NJ, 1993). While Alison Light emphasizes the encouragement of domestic tradition, as opposed to the hostility towards female emancipation, she similarly underscores the conservatism of inter-war popular culture in her *Forever England*.

<sup>6</sup> C. Law, *Suffrage and Power: the Women's Movement 1918–28* (1997; 2000), p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bingham, "'Stop the flapper vote folly': Lord Rothermere, the *Daily Mail*, and the equalization of the franchise 1927–8", *Twentieth Century British History* xiii (2002), 17–37; and A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 2004), chs. 2, 4.

<sup>8</sup> 'Straight Facts About the Flapper Vote', *Daily Express*, 23 May 1929.

<sup>9</sup> M. Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace, 1906–18* (1978), p. 85.

principally because it ceased to be expedient to resist their demands.<sup>10</sup> Gullace, in contrast, contended that the war witnessed a transformation of attitudes towards women as they proved their fitness for citizenship via their war work. Thus

Asquith attributed his 'conversion' to women's suffrage to the heroic actions of women like Edith Cavell, who had 'taught the bravest man amongst us a supreme lesson of courage,' and Haldane battled a last ditch effort by Lord Loreburn to derail women's suffrage in the House of Lords by pointing out that 'Women are taking a tremendous part in this war. They are sacrificing their health, their lungs ... A good many have died. There have been women, like Edith Cavell, whose names will not be forgotten, women who have died under shell fire, died under bombardment, died by bullet wounds just the same as men have died'.<sup>11</sup>

Further, '[a] feminized representation of the conscientious objector also facilitated the substitution of "conshies" for women in the discourse of unworthiness that undergirded discussion of the vote'.<sup>12</sup> The fact that it was older women, and not the young women actively engaged in war work, who were granted the vote in 1918 does not, she argued, undermine her analysis. Rather, in the long tradition of virtual representation, these older women were seen as representing the voices of their heroic young sisters. The logical conclusion of Gullace's work is that it was only a matter of time before parliament extended the franchise from these virtual representatives to young women themselves.

The majority of inter-war parliamentarians similarly accepted this logic. One of the principal arguments of the Edwardian anti-suffragists against enfranchising even a small portion of the female population had been that 'the grant of votes to women cannot possibly stop short at a restricted franchise on the basis of property or other qualification ... [Any extension] would pave the way to Adult Suffrage. There is no permanent or practicable halting point before'.<sup>13</sup> Yet, although they conceded the inevitability of an equal adult franchise, many remained less than enthusiastic about the possibility. In fact, after the wartime patriotism had died down, several politicians expressed regret that the 1918 reform had gone as far as it had. Rather than the enduring redefinition of citizenship depicted by Gullace, they looked on the 1918 act as both ill-thought through and unfortunate. As Stanley Baldwin wrote to the king in March 1928: 'At that time the whole

<sup>10</sup> Pugh, *Electoral Reform*, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> N. Gullace, *The Blood of our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, 2002), p. 158.

<sup>12</sup> Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*, p. 182.

<sup>13</sup> Manchester, Labour Party Archive, National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, *Lord Curzon's Fifteen Good Reasons against the Grant of Female Suffrage* (n.d. [1912?]).

nation was under the shadow of the war and various pieces of legislation were passed more from sentiment than from the point of view of practicability. The wider a democracy the more difficult it becomes to repeal laws which directly affect the community'.<sup>14</sup>

The belief that, while women could not be denied the vote, they were not likely to wield it with the maximum of intelligence and discernment is evident not only in openly hostile comments, but also in several backhanded endorsements of an equal franchise uttered by inter-war politicians. At a women's meeting in Oxford in 1928, Lord Birkenhead expressed his support for franchise reform on the dubious grounds that, while 'he was not well acquainted with the political equipment of the average young lady of 21 ... he believed it would be stating the case moderately if he supposed that the average young woman or man of 21 today was not less fitted to exercise the franchise than the class of agricultural labourer whom Disraeli enfranchised'.<sup>15</sup> The previous year, Conservative politician Duff Cooper noted: 'that argument which embodied the idea that younger women would often vote for the man they had pinned their faith on as the better man, without considering his views too closely, might after all, even were it proved, work for a healthy re-adjustment in some cases'.<sup>16</sup> Ramsay MacDonald's limited views of women's intellectual capacity are repeatedly evident. His party was officially affiliated with the Women's Labour League, yet he did not trust the political judgement of its members. As he wrote to Katherine Bruce Glasier in 1914: 'If we had but one member of each branch who thought critically we should be perfectly safe. But our people feel and do not think'. The suggestion that women were ruled by emotion was luridly reiterated in 1918, when he blamed his election loss in Leicester, not on male voters, but on 'the women – bloodthirsty, cursing their hate, issuing from the courts and alleys crowded with children, reeking with humanity – the sad flotsam and jetsam of wild emotion'.<sup>17</sup> Even Arthur Henderson, the longtime suffragist sympathizer, gave his view that the franchise expansion would probably not affect the political balance of power very much, as young women would simply vote the same way as

<sup>14</sup> Cambridge University Library, Baldwin papers 63, king's letters, carbon copies of daily reports to the sovereign on proceedings in the Commons, vol. for 8 Feb. 1928–11 May 1929, Baldwin to George V, 30 March 1928.

<sup>15</sup> 'Lord Birkenhead at Oxford: Women's Fitness to Vote', *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1928.

<sup>16</sup> 'Miss Twenty-One and the Vote', *Kensington News*, 3 Dec. 1927.

<sup>17</sup> S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900–18* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 55–6; L. Beers, 'Education or manipulation: Labour, democracy and the popular press in interwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, xlviii (2009), 129–52, at p. 133.

their parents.<sup>18</sup> Henderson may well have been writing to placate a public nervous about the revolutionary implications of women's franchise (and psephological studies have shown that both young women and young men do usually simply vote the same way as their parents).<sup>19</sup> However, from the leader of a party whose sole hope for power lay in political education and conversion, his comments were not a ringing endorsement of young women as the vanguard of the new enlightened democracy.

The belief on the part of politicians and political organizers that women were less rational and more impressionable than men is further visible in the changes to party propaganda after female enfranchisement. Other scholars have written about changes to political culture after 1918 – from the shift to a quieter, more mediated style of politics, to a greater emphasis on non-party political organization.<sup>20</sup> Another development that historians need to reconsider in light of gendered political assumptions is the increased prominence given to politicians' physical appearance and personal attributes in campaign literature after 1918. During the debates leading up to the 1928 Representation of the People Act, opponents of female enfranchisement had argued that women, if given the vote, would simply vote for the best-looking candidate. The Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson had jestingly sought to dispel her male colleagues' anxieties on this count, disclaiming: 'Looking round this House, I cannot see that there is any need for honourable members to be worried'.<sup>21</sup> While most male politicians would not own up to holding the views mocked by Wilkinson, the shift in the style and content of campaign literature does suggest that they believed that women were more interested than men in *seeing* who they were going to vote for.

Before the First World War, constituency election leaflets did not normally include photographs of the candidate, who was principally

<sup>18</sup> 'Women and the General Election: A Socialist View', *Daily Express*, 5 Apr. 1929.

<sup>19</sup> H. Hyman, *Political Socialization: a Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior* (Glencoe, Ill., 1959) was one of the first to document this. The importance of a generational *break* in voting preferences for the fortunes of the Labour party has been emphasized in M. Franklin and M. Lander, 'The undoing of Winston Churchill: mobilization and conversion in the 1945 realignment of British voters', *British Journal of Political Science*, xxv (1995), 429–52.

<sup>20</sup> J. Lawrence, 'The transformation of British public politics after the First World War', *Past & Present*, cxc (2006), 185–216; H. McCarthy, 'Parties, voluntary associations and democratic politics in interwar Britain', *Historical Journal*, l (2007), 891–912. For a US comparison, see K. Anderson, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics before the New Deal* (Chicago, Ill., 1996).

<sup>21</sup> 'M.P.s' Good Looks: Woman Member Reassures Them', *Liverpool Courier*, 20 Feb. 1925; 'Women and the Franchise', *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1925.

identified by his membership in his national party.<sup>22</sup> From 1918 onwards, in contrast, candidates consistently issued a photograph on the front page of their election addresses, with the consequence that, by 1929, of the 207 candidates' election addresses that I have reviewed, only seven did not include photographs.<sup>23</sup> This transformation cannot be attributed solely to the enfranchisement of women. Of the nearly 450 election leaflets from the two 1910 elections that are held in the Liberal Party Archives at Bristol, half contain photographs of the candidate.<sup>24</sup> Clearly the change owed much to the evolution of printing technologies in the last years of the nineteenth century that allowed publishers to reproduce photographs as halftones using rotary printing presses; as well as to parties' efforts to appeal to less educated voters in the wake of the 1884 franchise reform. Yet, although such technology existed from the turn of the century, photographs only became ubiquitous in election leaflets after 1918.

The link between this shift towards a more personal visual appeal and the women's vote is underscored by several candidates' inclusion, not only of their own head shots, but also of photographs of their wives and families. Of the 1910 leaflets in the Liberal party's collection, only one included a photograph of a candidate's family member: George Baxter, Unionist candidate for Dundee, printed a photograph of his (very attractive) wife on the back of his leaflet. In contrast, after 1918, several candidates included photographs of their wives and families in their election literature, occasionally accompanied by a special appeal to women voters written by the candidate's wife.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to ignore the implied assumption that women were more inclined to judge a man's political capacity on the basis of his physical appearance or his family life.

The Labour party pretended to a more enlightened approach towards women voters, emphasizing its long-held support for Votes for Women – yet Labour

<sup>22</sup> Of the 216 addresses from the Jan. 1910 general election held at the Liberal Party Archive at Bristol University, only 122 featured a photograph of the candidate: 54 of the 96 Liberal or Lib-Lab addresses featured photographs; 38 of the 85 Unionist addresses; 28 of the 32 Labour and SDF addresses; and two of the four independent addresses. Photographs are even less prevalent among the archive's collection of election addresses from by-election campaigns held between 1913 and 1917 – only 25 out of 70.

<sup>23</sup> This sample, from the collection held at the Conservative Party Archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford, included 70 Conservative addresses, 72 Labour, 60 Liberal and five independent.

<sup>24</sup> Of the 231 leaflets from the December 1910 election, 123 included candidates' photographs.

<sup>25</sup> M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914–59* (2nd edn., New York, 1993), p. 120. In 1929, John Greenwood, the bachelor Liberal candidate for East Fulham, sought to assert his family credentials by including an endorsement from his mother in his election address!



was no less cynical than its Conservative and Liberal counterparts in seeking to adjust its political practice to court the supposedly more impressionistic and superficial female electorate. During the 1929 election, the party produced a campaign poster that suggested that the young ladies would deem MacDonald the most attractive candidate – literally and figuratively.<sup>26</sup> The Labour candidate and later MP for Coventry, Philip Noel-Baker, was notable for his exploitation of his ‘sex appeal’ in his election campaigns. Noel-Baker had been an Olympic runner before taking up a political career, and was rather better looking than the average politician. In his general propaganda, he played down his youthful athleticism, posing with a jacket and tie and a serious, closed-mouth smile. In his women’s literature, in contrast, he appeared tie-less and with the top button of his shirt undone, and sported a rakishly toothy grin. While Wilkinson fought hard to dispel her male colleagues’ fears ‘that if the younger women are given the vote, they will vote for the best-looking candidate’, Noel-Baker was clearly not taking any chances.<sup>27</sup>

Press coverage of women and politics similarly took for granted that women were more superficial than men, and that their political preferences would reflect this superficiality. One way in which this superficiality was allegedly manifested was in women’s supposed unwillingness, out of sexual jealousy, to vote for their fellow women. Another was women’s apparent inability to appreciate the gravity of their civic responsibility. One particularly comic article on women voters suggested that young women’s reasons for voting for one party over the other were at best arbitrary. A *Daily Express* reporter wrote of a conversation she had had with three young women in South Tottenham:

I first tackled three girls who for the first time would be qualified to vote. They threw back their heads and laughed deliciously, ‘Oh! I expect I’ll vote,’ said one. ‘You’ve only to sign your name on a paper haven’t you?’

‘Who’ll I vote for? Well, the Conservatives, I think, because they employ people, don’t they? I’m a working girl, so I’d better keep in with them.’

She turned to one of her companions: ‘You’d better be Socialist, your young man is, isn’t he?’

‘All right, I’ll be the same as him,’ was the reply.

The third girl, not to leave the Liberals out in the cold, decided for them.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cambridge University Library, uncatalogued poster collection, ‘The New Voter: “Poor Old Dears! – Isn’t It Pathetic?”’, Labour party poster, no. 23 (1929).

<sup>27</sup> ‘M.P.s’ Good Looks’.

<sup>28</sup> M. Harrison, ‘How Will Women Vote in the Election’, *Daily Express*, 29 Apr. 1929.

The article in which the above vignette featured was an otherwise serious piece of political journalism in a paper with a circulation of over 1.5 million, nearly half of whom were women. While the episode is intentionally comic, the female author was playing to serious prejudices about young women voters. Such prejudices were not specific to British society. The *New York Times's* London correspondent, reporting on the 'high-heeled army' of 'stenographers and shopgirls' marching to the polling stations in May 1929 to cast their ballots, included a story of three young women in Chelsea who had asked a policeman not where to vote, but for whom to vote, and that of another young woman who, lacking a pencil, had sought to mark her ballot with lipstick. There was no suggestion that these women were anomalous in their foolishness.<sup>29</sup>

The assumed frivolity and naivety of the flapper voter was visibly caricatured in the political cartoons of the period. Peter Mandler has highlighted the social significance of the replacement, in such cartoons, of the traditional character of John Bull by Sidney Strube's 'Little Man', the domesticated suburban figure in bowler hat and whiskered moustache. Unlike John Bull or the stereotyped 'English gentleman', the Little Man was a new specimen of post-war democratic Britain. He 'was not cold, aloof, imposing and arrogant at all, but kindly, a bit shy, very human'.<sup>30</sup> As the author, diarist and National Labour politician Harold Nicolson wrote in 1935, the modern Briton was 'patient and good-humoured and very modest, and the least jealous race on earth ... [he was] muddle-headed and decent, just like Strube's little man'.<sup>31</sup> But in one respect, the Little Man could not serve as the emblem of post-First World War British citizenry – for, unlike the majority of Britons, the Little Man was a man. Thus, in 1928 Strube introduced a new character into his cartoon repertoire – The Flapper. The Flapper became a frequent sidekick of the Little Man, as in one of her first appearances, when the two judged a political hat-making contest on 3 August 1928. In a feature on women voters run during the 1929 election campaign, Strube confessed that while he 'used to dislike drawing women ... now he enjoys it'. And the paper proclaimed: 'His "flapper" is almost—but not quite—a rival to his Little Man'.<sup>32</sup>

The 'almost—but not quite' is a telling comment on the Flapper's status as second-class citizen – the Little Man's lesser partner. Her appearance, furthermore, says volumes about popular stereotypes of young women

<sup>29</sup> 'New Women Voters Brighten Election', *New York Times*, 31 May 1929.

<sup>30</sup> P. Mandler, *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), p. 165.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Mandler, *English National Character*, p. 182.

<sup>32</sup> 'Next Week: The Woman's Daily Express', *Daily Express*, 11 May 1929.

voters. The Flapper shared many of the traits of the Little Man, including a scepticism of political rhetoric and promises. But where the Little Man is earnest and attentive, if wary of politicians, the Flapper often seems bored by the political process – as in the hat-judging cartoon, where her eyes are closed and she is yawning. Further, Strube's Flapper is vain, fashion-conscious and self-absorbed. Unlike the Little Man, who is always clad in the same suit, bow tie and bowler hat, the Flapper is impeccably dressed for each occasion in an ever-changing stream of outfits. In 'Song O' the Sea', for example, she appears clad in a bathing costume and spread out on a beach towel, and seems startled and confused when her sun-bathing is interrupted by three fiddling politicians attempting to court her favour.<sup>33</sup>

The theme of courtship in this and other cartoons played on the supposition that women approached politics like affairs of the heart. As a self-proclaimed 'Truthful Man' put it in a 1925 article in the *Newcastle Chronicle*: "Affairs" do not intrigue her – unless they are *affaires de coeur*, which is another matter altogether'.<sup>34</sup> David Low's depictions of the new young woman voter in Beaverbrook's other London paper, the *Evening Standard*, played on many of these same stereotypes. His doe-eyed Joan Bull was characterized by her naivety about politics. Like many of Strube's cartoons, Low's 'Joan Bull's Valentines, 1928' presents Joan being wooed by the leaders of the three political parties.<sup>35</sup>

Political cartoons are a form of satire, and in poking fun at the idea of the flapper voter as naive and politically disengaged, Strube and Low exposed the foolishness of such characterizations of the new electors. At the same time, the resonance of such cartoons depended on the existence within the late 1920s population of a belief – however lightly held – that women were less informed about and less engaged with politics than men, and that their interest in male politicians was tinged by the romantic.<sup>36</sup> These stereotypes about women's attitude towards politics reinforced existing male assumptions about their political capacities, and likely also worked to persuade many women that they were not expected to pay the same attention to political issues as their male counterparts.

While such coverage strikes a modern feminist reader as insulting to women, there is only limited evidence that inter-war women took offence at such depictions. As with women who opposed female ordination and other liberalizing moves within the Church of England, gender conservatism

<sup>33</sup> S. Strube, 'Song O' the Sea. Their wits-end-tide', *Daily Express*, 18 May 1929.

<sup>34</sup> 'Woman has failed! Why she is an outsider in public life', *Newcastle Chronicle*, 8 Dec. 1925.

<sup>35</sup> D. Low, 'Joan Bull's Valentines, 1928', *Evening Standard*, 13 Feb. 1928.

<sup>36</sup> For a contemporary, and still widely cited, assessment of the central role of stereotypes in journalism, see W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922; repr., Mineola, NY, 2004), p. 188.

remained key to many women's understandings of their relationship with the political sphere. Inter-war feminists took seriously the threat to social change posed by such press treatments, and denounced the reports and cartoons as retarding women's political advancement. Rathbone believed that the press 'canard' that women did not vote for other women was inhibiting women's selection as parliamentary candidates: 'Women having come only recently into the field, the party organizations are officered mainly by men, who share men's prejudices and, wanting to win, are afraid of experimenting with the unknown. They probably believe the press nonsense about women being jealous of women'.<sup>37</sup> Wilkinson was generally hostile towards the representation of women in political cartoons, although she claimed for Low an exceptional place among the pantheon of political cartoonists, asserting that he was 'the only real feminist among men. His attitude of unromantic appreciation of the matter-of-fact sex is a subtle flattery not to be resisted ... For his cartoon on "the saner sex" bored with chivalry and indicating that the dustbin was the proper place for swords, Low has received the silent gratitude of all intelligent women'.<sup>38</sup> Wilkinson references Low's cartoon of 9 May 1929, in which a 'matter-of-fact' woman yawns in the face of a 'romantic' man's attempts to woo her with chivalrous shows of force. But while this cartoon may have evoked the gratitude of Wilkinson and others like her for presenting women as practical-minded and peace-loving (in themselves stereotypes of female political behaviour), it, like most others from that era, nonetheless played on the theme of male politicians courting young women voters.<sup>39</sup>

While cartoons and news stories portrayed women voters as frivolous and emotional, press reporting on women MPs reflected a poor opinion of both female voters and female politicians. Historians have remarked on the interest of the inter-war press in women MPs' personal lives and fashion choices, but the link between such press coverage, contemporary attitudes towards women voters and long-term trends in political culture has not been properly explored.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Rathbone, 'Changes in political life', pp. 29, 31.

<sup>38</sup> E. Wilkinson, 'Low's Little Man', *Time and Tide*, 6 Dec. 1930, p. 1538.

<sup>39</sup> The argument that women were inherently more practical-minded and pacific than men was actually used to disqualify them from political participation, on the grounds that society would be better served if women deployed their superior virtues outside the political sphere (B. Harrison, *Separate Spheres: the Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (1978); J. Bush, *Women against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (Oxford, 2007)).

<sup>40</sup> Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p. 192; Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, pp. 117, 127; B. Harrison, 'Women in a men's House: the women MPs, 1918-45', *Historical Journal*, xxix (1986), 623-54.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a revolution in the style and content of the popular press that was closely tied to the growth of the female readership. Between 1900 and 1945, women's share of the national newspaper market rose rapidly, until by 1939 nearly as many women read a national paper as men. In an industry increasingly reliant on advertising revenue, these women readers were even more important than their growing proportion of total readership suggests, as 80% of household purchases were made by women.<sup>41</sup> The competition for coveted female readers meant that editors devoted considerable attention to the question of what women wanted. In the 1930s, the large newspaper conglomerates began hiring research agencies such as the Institute of Practitioners of Advertising and Mass-Observation to study how men and women of different age groups and different social classes consumed the news – which papers they read, which sections of the paper they preferred and even in what order they read those sections.<sup>42</sup> The conclusions of such studies would not have inspired optimism among those who believed that women held the key to revitalizing the British political process. Readers – both male and female – were found to prefer human interest stories and celebrity gossip over any other sections of the paper, but women were even less interested in domestic and foreign news than men, and more interested in fashion and celebrity. Even before such 'scientific' studies confirmed women's preferences, editors had already developed an ingrained belief in the connection between fashion, celebrity and 'human interest' and a large female readership.

In the 1920s, the ultimate example of a paper that sought to attract a female audience through 'woman-friendly' features was the *Daily Express*. The *Express*, according to one content analysis, carried more fashion coverage on its Women's Page than any other broadsheet.<sup>43</sup> It also gave heavy prominence to human interest stories and celebrity coverage in its general news columns and interspersed its columns on parliamentary and other events with pictures of fashionable ladies' hats.<sup>44</sup> The paper's play for women readers was underscored by its promotional strategy. In the early 1920s, it ran an occasional notice in its upper-right-hand corner proclaiming

<sup>41</sup> J. Curran, A. Douglas and G. Whannel, 'The political economy of the human-interest story', in *Newspapers and Democracy: International Essays on a Changing Medium*, ed. A. Smith (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. 288–316, at p. 291.

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., International Institute of Practitioners of Advertising (IIPA), *Survey of Press Readership* (1939); University of Sussex, Mass-Observation Archive, 'File Report A11, Newspaper Reading Motives and Methods' (Dec. 1938).

<sup>43</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, pp. 250–1.

<sup>44</sup> In 1936, the *Express* carried more human interest and women's coverage than any other popular broadsheet (Curran and others, 'Political economy', Table 13.6).

itself as ‘The paper that women prefer’<sup>45</sup> – despite the fact that, at this stage, it did not have access to market research to back up its claim.

In 1932, the *Express*’s editor, Beverley Baxter, wrote to Beaverbrook: ‘the most important thing about the *Daily Express* is its political policy and particularly its empire policy ... [But] it is essential that we maintain our hold upon the general public, and we would be foolish if we failed to realise that not one woman in a hundred reads political, financial or industrial news’. Writing fifteen years later, the journalist R. C. K. Ensor concluded that ‘women (in the mass that is) have no day-to-day interest in politics. They will not patronise a paper that obtrudes much serious politics upon them ... Women’s concern is not with ideas or principles, but with persons and things’.<sup>46</sup> Instead of questioning their own complicity in fostering a gendered reading culture in which women chose to consume more trivial news than their male counterparts, editors and publishers simply concluded that women’s demonstrable lack of interest made it economically risky to run too much ‘serious politics’. Their apparent taste for human interest, celebrity and fashion stories, on the other hand, meant that women politicians, if covered appropriately, might well prove to be of interest to women readers. Consequently, throughout the 1920s, newspapers set out to turn female MPs into political celebrities, whose personal lives were treated as just as newsworthy as their public achievements. The incursion of ‘human interest’ into political journalism has a long pedigree, dating back to W. T. Stead’s signed interview with General Gordon in the 9 January 1884 issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>47</sup> However, the treatment of women MPs by the inter-war press represented both a quantitative and an undeniable qualitative shift in the boundaries between the public and private in political journalism.

Women MPs’ fashion decisions filled countless column inches in the daily and evening press. When Lady Astor was first elected to parliament in 1919, milliners sent her so many free samples in a bid to become the outfitter of the first woman MP that she decided to sidestep the whole issue by confining herself to a ‘uniform’ of black and white costumes.<sup>48</sup> Even then, her fashion sense did not escape press attention. When she did once, exceptionally, deviate from her political uniform in December 1928, appearing in the House in a red frock after coming straight from a private engagement, the *Evening Standard* ran two days of coverage on the story.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., *Daily Express*, 8 Nov. 1922.

<sup>46</sup> Both quoted in Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> R. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln, Neb., 1972).

<sup>48</sup> Pugh, *Women’s Movement*, p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Lady Astor’s Red’, *Evening Standard*, 4, 5 Dec. 1928.

The previous year, the *Daily Express* had been taken to court by Lady Vera Terrington, who sued the paper for libel after granting a reporter what she believed would be an interview about politics, only for the paper to publish a story headlined 'The Best-Dressed Woman MP: Lady Terrington's Aim if Elected: Furs and Pearls'. The article made no mention of her politics other than to identify her as the Liberal candidate for High Wycombe, but quoted her (alleged) statement that: 'If I am returned to Westminster, I intend to wear my best clothes when I go there. I shall put on my ospreys and my fur coats and my pearls'.<sup>50</sup> Terrington sued the paper on the grounds both that she was misquoted and that the article was intentionally defamatory. In deciding for the defendant, the presiding judge issued a summing up which concluded:

The jury must have thought, while Lady Terrington was giving her evidence, of the speech which Polonius made to his son when he was about to go to France:

'Costly thy habit as they purse can buy,  
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man.'

Therefore it was a matter of public interest what ladies who went to Parliament should put on.<sup>51</sup>

In the months and years that followed, the *Daily Express* (and other papers) proceeded to report on women MPs' fashions with the same cheeky insouciance as previously. In the 1920s, a principal object of this press reporting was the Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson. Wilkinson is now one of the best known inter-war women MPs, remembered particularly for her leadership of the 1936 Jarrow Crusade. When she arrived at parliament in 1924, however, she was a comparative stranger, possessing neither an established career in public service, like her mentor Susan Lawrence, nor personal renown for her social standing, like her colleague Nancy Astor. Nonetheless, she soon became a regular feature in the columns of the daily and provincial press. When, in February 1925, Wilkinson decided to shingle her long red hair, the 'story' received coverage not only in the national press but in provincial papers such as the *Liverpool Echo*, the *Sheffield Telegraph* and the *Manchester Dispatch* – several of which ran photographs of 'Wee Ellen's' new do. When, the following year, she cut her hair even shorter – sporting an 'Eton crop' – a similar bevy of press coverage followed. The interest in Wilkinson's hair was equalled by the interest in her clothes, and

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Express*, 3 Dec. 1923.

<sup>51</sup> Reported in 'High Court of Justice: King's Bench Division: Lady Terrington's Libel Action', *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1924.

over the course of the 1920s her fashion choices filled numerous column inches in the London and provincial press.

In her 1931 novel, *The Division Bell Mystery*, Wilkinson had joked that ‘most young politicians (male) ... giv[e] as much thought to the rôle [they] should assume when [they] ente[r] Parliament as a newly elected woman M.P. gives to the costume to be worn on her first appearance’.<sup>52</sup> The quip simultaneously poked fun at the pretences of young male parliamentarians and the press’s penchant for treating women MPs’ fashion choices as the most important aspect of their political career. But it also reflected the sad truth that a female MP could expect to warrant more press inches for her maiden outfit than for her maiden speech.

To this interest in female MPs’ fashion choices was added a degree of coverage of their personal lives unprecedented among male politicians. Thus Wilkinson was repeatedly asked about her ‘decision’ to remain single. Her skills as a cook were well known among readers of the popular press. When she bought an Austin Seven motor car, her frequent accidents and less harrowing adventures behind the wheel became a new topic of press coverage. Her diary was scrutinized by gossip and society columnists who were quick to pick up on any such potentially scandalous items as the socialist firebrand and defender of the miners’ decision to attend a garden party held by her fellow feminist Lady Rhondda, despite the older woman’s being a prominent coal owner.<sup>53</sup> Finally, reporters jumped on any minor anecdote that allegedly betrayed the young MP’s femininity. In March 1928, for example, in a debate on extending the franchise, Wilkinson took exception to William Joynson-Hicks’s comment that ‘A woman over thirty is in no sense a young woman’. The next day, the *Newcastle Chronicle* declared that:

Woman is rapidly becoming the rival of man in every sphere. He may congratulate himself, however, that one weak spot has been found in her armour. He at least does not care whether he is described as old or young. In thickness of skin at least he still retains a superiority. Moreover Miss Wilkinson’s many admirers may also be reassured. Dazzled by her perfections, they may have feared that she might lose the softer charms of her sex. The present controversy has shown that despite all glamour and appearances she is at heart sweetly and irrationally feminine.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> E. Wilkinson, *The Division Bell Mystery* (1931), p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> The political fallout that Ellen took for this and other similar social engagements is mentioned in the catty contemporary study *At the Feet of the Young Men*, published under the pen name ‘The Janitor’ (1928), p. 72. In her 1929 novel, *Clash*, Ellen movingly depicts the emotional and ethical crises which her heroine Joan faces when confronted with similarly conflicting social loyalties.

<sup>54</sup> ‘As Old as She Looks’, *Newcastle Chronicle*, 30 March 1928.



The exceptional degree of attention devoted to Wilkinson, compared to other women MPs, doubtless owed something to her status as the sole young unmarried woman in the House, at least until the arrival of Jennie Lee and Megan Lloyd George in 1929. Despite the fact that she was already thirty-three when she entered parliament, her diminutive physique made her appear younger, and in the context of the rather moribund House of Commons, she was, in fact, relatively young. She was quickly branded the House's token 'modern girl' and, to the delight of the press, she looked and acted the part. Her working-class background likely further encouraged reporters' tendency to view the MP as a 'girl', and perhaps invited a degree of intimacy that journalists would have been more hesitant to bestow on a woman from a different social background. This last point, however, should be raised cautiously, as gender, not class, appears to have been the key determinant of whether MPs would be subjected to such a high level of personal scrutiny. Notably, Ellen's middle- and upper-class colleagues such as Lady Astor and Megan Lloyd George did not escape intensive media scrutiny simply by merit of their social position.

Women MPs, including Wilkinson, professed to resent this uninvited press attention. In a 1932 article, Molly Hamilton derided the press's tendency to treat female MPs like Hollywood starlets:

For the papers, women are 'news', as such. Women MPs get an immense publicity, not for their work, but for their clothes, their hobbies, their husbands, any and every extraneous thing they do. They are 'featured', incessantly, and the more incessantly the more irrelevant their activities. They could spend half their time in being photographed. If only one of them could have what the papers call a 'romance', it would be head-lined over two continents.<sup>55</sup>

In 1928, Wilkinson told a reporter for the *Evening Standard*: 'Unfortunate politicians who have a message they want to get across find the public interested in their clothes and not their ideas. I am always being asked how I spend my £400 a year, how I do my cooking, and what I eat. It is much more difficult for a woman MP to retain any privacy than for a man'.<sup>56</sup>

Other MPs actively shunned press publicity. Astor and Lee both adopted an inconspicuous uniform while in parliament.<sup>57</sup> When asked about her fashion sense by an *Evening Standard* reporter, Susan Lawrence tersely

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton, 'Women in politics'.

<sup>56</sup> "It Pays to Advertise" – what MPs say', *Evening Standard*, 11 March 1927.

<sup>57</sup> Lee generally sought to diffuse press interest in her clothes by dressing in sober brown. However, she occasionally bucked her uniform and appeared in the House in a red cape, or clinging emerald evening dress, sending the lobby correspondents into journalistic paroxysms (see P. Hollis, *Jennie Lee: a Life* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 41–2).

replied 'that the clothes an MP wore were entirely his or her own affair'.<sup>58</sup> Wilkinson, in contrast, played along with reporters' seemingly insatiable interest in her sartorial decision-making. She smiled for photographers who snapped photos of her sporting a new hairstyle or a new hat, and gave interviews on her inability to pull off wearing the colour red.<sup>59</sup> She welcomed reporters into her home, answered questions about her domestic routines (she named her tea kettle Agatha after Agatha Christie) and coyly parried questions about her marriage prospects ('Nothing in the future is definite. One never knows').<sup>60</sup> When she went to the US on a fundraising mission for the miners in August 1926, she consented to answer questions about her personal life from a reporter from the *New York Tribune*, although she protested that 'she wanted any space in the newspaper she might claim to be devoted to the relief of the families of the miners'. The result was a profile that combined a good deal of human interest on the 'little spirited woman' with a rather thorough-going discussion of her views on industry and suffrage.<sup>61</sup>

Talking about her personal life and fashion choices was the price it was necessary to pay for the column space Wilkinson was determined to achieve for discussion of her politics. Further, by allowing herself to be presented as the House's resident flapper, she made herself into the parliamentary authority on young women, despite the fact that she was in her thirties when she entered parliament. In this capacity, she repeatedly spoke out in defence of a young woman's right to spend her new disposable income on more and more attractive consumer goods. Later, Wilkinson recognized that her high media profile could be used to secure coverage for the Jarrow Crusade in October 1936. Her status as the only female marcher gave the march a 'human interest' angle (beyond the obvious, if unsexy, human interest of impoverished shipworkers in a last ditch effort to save their livelihoods). Newspapers photographed Wilkinson, cigarette in mouth, being taught to play the drums by a group of her fellow crusaders, and newsreels played up the anomaly of a 4' 11" woman surrounded by burly shipbuilders. Although the march was organized by local leaders of all

<sup>58</sup> 'Lady Astor's Red', *Evening Standard*, 5 Dec. 1928.

<sup>59</sup> On her hair, see, e.g., 'The Shingled M.P.', *Evening Standard*, 11 Feb. 1925; 'Ellen, M.P., has had an "Eton"', *Daily Herald*, 22 May 1926. On her hat, see, e.g., 'Miss Wilkinson's New Hat', *Evening Standard*, 6 May 1925; 'Miss Wilkinson's Borrowed Hat', *Morning Post*, 3 July 1925; on her colour preferences, see 'Too Red for Ellen', *Sketch*, 20 June 1925.

<sup>60</sup> 'Diligent Girl', *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 3 June 1929; 'Why I Am Not Married', interview with Miss Stein, *Liverpool Echo*, 13 Jan. 1927.

<sup>61</sup> 'Ellen Wilkinson, Labour M.P. Finds American Women Indifferent to Suffrage', *New York Tribune*, 29 Aug. 1926.

political parties, and remained ostensibly non-party political, Wilkinson proved remarkably successful in identifying the march both with her own personality and with her party's campaign for relief of the distressed areas; and both newsreel footage and press coverage identified her as the political face of the marchers.<sup>62</sup>

Wilkinson's success in parlaying uninvited press attention into political power is only one illustration of the ways in which female politicians succeeded in turning patronizing media attention to their advantage. Their personal renown gave them a public platform that would not have been available to the average backbench MP. As with other marginalized groups within imperial society, women MPs were occasionally able to subvert practices intended to reinforce their subordinate status, and use them to further their own advantage.<sup>63</sup> That said, it would be a mistake to discount the gendered stereotypes that propelled journalists and editors to showcase women MPs not only in news stories, but also in their fashion, gossip and feature columns, to a degree unprecedented among their male counterparts. Such practices helped to uphold gender divisions in modern political culture. Further, while the move towards a more personalized treatment of politics may have been most obvious in the case of women's journalism and reports on female politicians in the inter-war period, such changes to political culture ultimately had a broader reach. One of the most obvious changes in modern political culture has been the revolution in the practice and performance of politics. Advertisement, packaging and personality – never absent from politics – have been increasingly brought to the fore in the past century.<sup>64</sup> These changes to political culture cannot be entirely put down to the enfranchisement of women.<sup>65</sup> Yet stereotypes and assumptions

<sup>62</sup> 'Photonews' page, *Daily Express*, 29 Oct. 1936; 'Jarrow Unemployed', *Pathé Gazette* <<http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=68851>> [accessed 26 Sept. 2011], in which Ellen is the only politician to appear. For Conservative frustration at the press's fixation with Jarrow as Wilkinson's crusade, see letter from the chairman of the Jarrow Conservative Association to *The Times*, 4 Nov. 1936.

<sup>63</sup> Two recent studies have emphasized the ability of colonial subjects to subvert power hierarchies and reinterpret intended meanings within inter-war imperial politics. See M. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: the Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC, 2006); M. Wiener, *An Empire on Trial: Race, Murder, and Justice under British Rule, 1870–1935* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945* (1997).

<sup>65</sup> James Thompson ("Pictorial lies?" – Posters and politics in Britain, c.1880–1914', *Past & Present*, cxlvii (2007), 177–210) has highlighted the shift to visual political culture following the Third Reform Act.

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about women's relationship to politics (however superficial, or downright false) encouraged a greater reliance on personality and appearance in political campaigns and reporting in the inter-war period that contributed to a broader restructuring of the relationship between politicians and the democratic nation.

## 6. Conservative values, Anglicans and the gender order in inter-war Britain

*Lucy Delap*

This chapter sets out to explore the contested ‘conservative’ nature of the inter-war period in Britain, in relation to gender norms and attitudes to feminism. The historiography of the inter-war period is deeply divided. One interpretation highlights the impact of the war and the slumps in creating a backlash against feminism and working women. Martin Pugh, Harold Smith and Susan Kingsley Kent, for example, stress the inter-war press vilification of feminists and flappers, and portray the period as one of conservative domesticity, with women increasingly isolated in the home and marginalized in the labour market.<sup>1</sup> It seems a period in which conservative values effortlessly displaced other more progressive traditions, and traditional versions of gender relationships were used to stabilize a nation that was renegotiating its boundaries and forms of citizenship. Most of the evidence supporting the apparent inter-war gender ‘backlash’ is taken from the popular press, or from parliament. Historians ritually invoke extreme anti-feminist figures, such as Arabella Kenealy or Antoni Ludovici. It has been hard for researchers to assess how representative the extremist voices were. The characterization of the period as backward-looking in its conservatism has recently been challenged by historians such as Adrian Bingham, whose study of the inter-war popular press suggests that this period was far less dominated by misogyny and anti-feminism than previously thought. Pat Thane has also sought to re-evaluate the inter-war years, stressing the vitality of women’s activism, feminist in orientation if not in name, in organizations such as the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Institutes.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most influentially, Alison Light termed the period one of ‘conservative modernity’ as a means of capturing the paradoxical nature of inter-war British culture and society, with

<sup>1</sup> M. Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain 1914–59* (Basingstoke, 1992). Susan Kingsley Kent and Harold Smith, in H. L. Smith, *British Feminism in the 20th Century* (Aldershot, 1990), pp. 47, 81, 74.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford, 2004); P. Thane, ‘What difference did the vote make?’, in *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present*, ed. A. Vickery (Stanford, Calif., 2001), pp. 253–88.

its attempts to combine domesticity, modernism and new forms of hedonistic individualism. She describes inter-war conservatism as ‘in revolt against the past’, making cultural compromises with the new.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter revisits the debates about the inter-war period and its gender order, and offers a new assessment of the extent and nature of gender conservatism, through looking at three controversies of the Anglican Church. First, drawing on well-established traditions of ‘denominational feminism’, and spurred by the signs of greater openness to women’s spiritual participation during the war, the church was subject to feminist activism during the 1920s and 1930s over the long-running issue of women preachers.<sup>4</sup> Second, in a context of debates over the ‘flapper vote’, the nature of marriage and its assumptions of female obedience were also widely debated. Though the Anglican matrimonial order of service was revised in 1928, the issue of gender difference in marital vows has continued to be controversial to the present day. Finally, the ordination of women was also a major area of controversy. It was discussed from the Edwardian period onwards, and evoked as a threatening spectre by church conservatives when faced with any form of equality claim from women. The *Church Times* had stated in 1914 that ‘the monstrous regiment of women in politics would be bad enough, but the monstrous regiment of priestesses would be a thousandfold worse’, and this extreme tone from the Anglo-Catholic wing of the church has been taken to set the terms of the ordination debate.<sup>5</sup> These three areas of controversy seem to offer a clear ground on which a suffrage-like struggle continued beyond the 1918 victory, and even beyond 1928. Indeed, the gaining of the vote and other civic rights for women, alongside the expansion of secondary and higher education for young women and their entry into the professions, encouraged feminists also to campaign for entry to religious realms. ‘Church feminism’ thrived in the ‘democratizing’ inter-war years, through having a clearly defined set of demands, and a charismatic leader in the suffragist and evangelical preacher Maude Royden.<sup>6</sup>

This dimension of feminist history clearly supports claims that the women’s movement continued to be active after the First World War,

<sup>3</sup> A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (1991), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> B. Heeney, *The Women’s Movement in the Church of England, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1988); S. Gill, *Women and the Church of England: from the 18th Century to the Present* (1994); J. De Vries, ‘Challenging traditions: denominational feminism in Britain, 1910–20’, in *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789–1945*, ed. K. Offen (Abingdon, 2010), pp. 122–31; P. J. Walker, ‘“With fear and trembling”: women, preaching and spiritual authority’, in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940*, ed. S. Morgan and J. De Vries (2010), pp. 94–116.

<sup>5</sup> *Church Times*, 24 July 1914.

<sup>6</sup> H. Hanson, *Ministrations of Women in the Church, Extracts from Lambeth Conference* (1920); S. Fletcher, *Maude Royden: a Life* (Oxford, 1989), p. 197.

though not always named as 'feminism'. Its significance goes beyond this, however, in also providing a window which allows for a gauging of the extent of gender conservatism in broad circles of public opinion. By drawing on the thriving Anglican Church press as well as the secular popular press, this chapter ventures beyond the voices of the (mostly London-based) highly partisan historical actors who have dominated accounts of inter-war feminism and anti-feminism. The Anglican Church, I argue, was a major site at which gender was being interrogated in the inter-war years. As an institution invested in tradition, service and obedience, it was clearly associated with conservative public opinion, though it also hosted some very radical thinkers. The church press reflected the views of an articulate subset of Anglicans. It was the domain of educated churchgoers, and suggested little about working-class opinion; nor were Scottish, Welsh or Irish voices particularly well represented. With these caveats, it can nonetheless shed light on the sentiments of those outside metropolitan elites and the higher levels of the clergy; this allows for the incorporation of a diversity of opinion, including the lay voices of women.

As the work of Cordelia Moyses has recently suggested, exploring the investments that Anglican women made in an institution which marginalized them highlights the significant presence of female gender conservatism. In what follows, I draw on the work of Deniz Kandiyoti in exploring the 'patriarchal bargains' Anglican churchwomen negotiated, though I also suggest the limitations of this approach. I also examine the operation of taboos and discourses of pollution in relation to gender, using insights from anthropologist Mary Douglas.<sup>7</sup>

Tracing the Anglican gender debates allows for a rethinking of the adequacy of 'conservative modernity' as a label for the inter-war period, and an assessment of the continuities of gender conservatism in Britain. Modern historians of gender have recently been challenged by the medieval historian Judith Bennett to think more deeply about continuity, and to trace out the longer histories of gender norms.<sup>8</sup> This chapter engages with Bennett's call for *longue durée* gender history, by identifying both change and continuity in gender norms. Gender emerges as constitutionally complex, and uneven in its pace of change. While I do not find Bennett's 'patriarchal equilibrium' a useful tool for thinking about Anglican engagements with

<sup>7</sup> C. Moyses, *A History of the Mothers' Union: Women, Anglicanism and Globalisation, 1876–2008* (Woodbridge, 2009); D. Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with patriarchy', *Gender and Society*, ii (1988), 274–90; M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (2002).

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Manchester, 2006). Her chapter 'Patriarchal equilibrium' makes her case particularly cogently.

gender, I nonetheless attempt to set the inter-war period within a broader history, and assess the endurance of gender conservatism within the church over a substantial time period.

Edwardian anti-suffragists were convinced that women's domestic realm included a powerful moral and religious role, which precluded other kinds of public influence. The positivist and anti-feminist writer Ethel Harrison, for example, claimed: 'woman cannot ask for power when she cannot share responsibility. Her empire lies in ways other than man's, of a more spiritual nature'.<sup>9</sup> But such claims were received with irony by women involved in the Anglican Church, for in this spiritual realm, Edwardian women found themselves frustrated in their attempts to gain responsibility and influence. Before the First World War, the exclusion of women from most roles in Anglican parishes and the discrimination against them in the parochial franchise led to small rebellions among churchwomen, some of whom were also deeply involved in the suffrage agitation through the Church League for Women's Suffrage (CLWS). Most suffragists were well aware of the contempt they inspired in the church. One suffrage newspaper seller reported in 1911: 'Oh I'm wicked, but do take a fiendish delight in offering "Votes for Women" to the clergy. My! But the looks of some are blacker than their clothes. However they are not all alike and I nearly swooned today when one very pleasantly said he would like one of my papers'.<sup>10</sup> Suffragists had taken to interrupting church services with prayers for imprisoned suffragettes or protests against forcible feeding. A number of churches of various denominations were destroyed by the arson campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1913–14, leaving many clergymen highly antagonistic to feminist claims.

The First World War years highlighted the specific discriminations faced by women within the Anglican Church. Vacillation over whether women might be speakers within the National Mission of Repentance and Hope, which was intended to revive spiritualism during the war, infuriated both progressives and conservatives. Athelstan Riley, a high churchman who clashed publically with the archbishop of Canterbury on women's role in the church, talked ominously of a feminist conspiracy to capture the priesthood.<sup>11</sup> Few were willing to contemplate or campaign for female

<sup>9</sup> E. Harrison, 'Abdication', *Nineteenth Century* (Dec. 1913), p. 1335.

<sup>10</sup> San Marino, California, Huntington Library, AF2, unpublished MS., Miss J. Anthony, 'Diary of a Newswy: on selling suffrage papers on a London street corner', 7 July–15 Aug. 1911, 21 July 1911.

<sup>11</sup> *Church Times*, 28 July 1916, p. 80.



clergy, and even the CLWS (renamed the League of the Church Militant in 1919) split on this issue. The progressive theologian Canon Streeter argued in 1917 that this question should be 'indefinitely postponed' because public opinion was so largely against it.<sup>12</sup> Despite the expansion of the idea of female citizenship in the 1920s, many opponents still believed that a democratized version of citizenship was compatible with gender hierarchy. Bishop Hensley Henson noted that 'the perverted notion of sexual equality ... implies the disintegration of the female, and the withdrawal from society of the principle of discipline under which citizenship is ... ordained to develop'.<sup>13</sup>

To many suffragists and feminists, the church seemed a backwater of resistance to changing ideas about women, whether a parish took an evangelical, Anglo-Catholic or liberal stance. Radicals in the church during the First World War had characterized it as cautious, conservative and respectable. The Church of England had itself become so concerned at the loss of young women from congregations that it commissioned a report, whose results were summarized by Miss E. K. Sanders in 1918. She confirmed that young women 'of the leisured class' were frustrated by the orthodoxy and inaction of the church, and those who were active faced 'indifference, and often ... scarcely veiled hostility, from parish priests'.<sup>14</sup> Laywomen were forbidden to address congregations from the pulpit. Where they were allowed to speak from some other site in a church, ruses such as separating women's addresses from the main service by an organ recital were used to dispel any suspicions that they might be giving sermons. There was a powerful sense that the traditions of the Church of England represented the stability of the nation as a whole. The bishop of Southwark claimed in 1918 that 'amid the break-up of the old Continental system, there was just one old country left – England – which preserved its institutions and had a sense of unbroken traditions for centuries. We stood before Europe as an old nation, like some wise old mother, who, by her guidance and influence might teach the lessons of stability and self-respect'.<sup>15</sup> There was therefore a strong emotional investment in the gender status quo within the church.

Signs of change were, however, evident from shortly after the First World War; the radical clergyman Hudson Shaw sponsored Maude Royden's preaching in his London church of St. Botolph's Bishopsgate on several occasions in the late 1910s. Shaw had written to his bishop complaining

<sup>12</sup> B. H. Streeter and E. Picton Turbervill, *Woman and the Church* (1917), p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> Henson, reported in *Public Opinion*, 30 March 1928, p. 312.

<sup>14</sup> Miss E. K. Sanders, 'Younger women and the church', in H. L. Goudge, *The Place of Women in the Church* (1917), p. 184.

<sup>15</sup> 'England The Mother Of Nations. Women's Work In The Church', *The Times*, 6 Nov. 1918, p. 4.

of the 'lack of bold, courageous leadership' in the church on the question of women's involvement. '[We are] rapidly losing our *best* thoughtful educated Women', he claimed, through the 'shameful divisions' over women preachers.<sup>16</sup> He claimed to have taken a poll of his congregation one weekday, and found that the great majority of his mostly male city audience were ready to approve of women speaking in church. But his was a church well known for its radicalism; Winnington-Ingram, the bishop of London, was unconvinced by Shaw's arguments, and declared: 'I still believe that the great mass of the women of England are opposed to other women haranguing mixed congregations in church'.<sup>17</sup>

The English Church Union (ECU), a conservative Anglo-Catholic pressure group, raised a petition in 1921 in response to Maude Royden's attempts to take the Good Friday service (a non-statutory service) at St. Botolph's. It gained 54,000 signatures, in contrast to the 1,000 or so that Royden's supporters raised.<sup>18</sup> Royden claimed gloomily in 1921 that the Church of England was 'the last ditch of the anti-feminist'.<sup>19</sup> Among both clergy and lay people, there seemed to be a deep reluctance to see women taking a greater role in the church, and intense support for tradition. An informal poll of prominent churchwomen in 1916 conducted by Ursula Roberts showed only thirty to forty out of some 150 women canvassed supported women's ordination.<sup>20</sup> However, the Anglican Church should not be read as a monolithic social body, and the church leadership in the early twentieth century sometimes emerged as more progressive than the laity and lower clergy. When asked to vote whether women should sit on church bodies higher than the parochial church council in 1914, the bishops were in favour, while the clergy narrowly rejected the idea. It was the lay representatives, however, who were profoundly against the move.<sup>21</sup> The League of the Church Militant (LCM) secretary noted in 1921 that 'from the opposition displayed in some of the Church papers we realize once more that as regards the position of women the Bishops have proved themselves far ahead of the clergy and the ecclesiastically minded layman'.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, in 1935, the Archbishops' Conference again considered the idea of women's ordination, and again rejected it. The Anglican leadership

<sup>16</sup> Shaw to Winnington-Ingram, 23 Sept. 1918, quoted in Heeney, *Women's Movement*, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> *The Guardian*, 27 May 1921, p. 386.

<sup>18</sup> See *Church Times*, 18 March 1921, p. 263, and 24 March 1921, p. 292. Hudson Shaw in *Evening Standard*, 24 March 1921.

<sup>19</sup> *Church Militant*, Sept. 1921, also quoted in Fletcher, *Maude Royden*, p. 197.

<sup>20</sup> *Church Militant*, Sept. 1921, also quoted in Fletcher, *Maude Royden*, p. 143.

<sup>21</sup> 'Women And The Priesthood', *The Times*, 20 July 1914, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Hanson, *Ministrations of Women*.

were relatively unsympathetic to the conservative, male-dominated Anglo-Catholic movement, but remained cautious and conservative in relation to gender.

The LCM advocated the ordination of women from 1919 until its demise in 1928. Its members felt themselves to be politically and socially isolated within the church. An editorial in its monthly paper, the *Church Militant*, commented in 1925: 'our society is a small one, we have a scattered membership and the tenets we hold are not usual amongst orthodox churchpeople. If we testify ever so mildly to this part of the faith that is in us, we are liable to be looked at askance, to be considered rebellious, eccentric, *odd*'.<sup>23</sup> In part, this opposition to a widening of women's role in the church was a legacy of the suffrage agitation. In 1918, when women's suffrage was finally legislated in the House of Commons, suffragists attempted to organize a series of church services across Britain to celebrate. Dean Inge, described by one suffragist as a 'great woman-hater', had refused permission for St. Paul's to host a service of thanksgiving, because of what he termed the 'atrocious crimes and acts of sacrilege which disgraced the agitation for this reform, a time which we at St Paul's have melancholy reasons to remember, and which we shall never be able to wholly erase from our memories'.<sup>24</sup> The bitterness felt against suffrage militancy, which had included an attempt to bomb St. Paul's in 1913, had not diminished for Inge and his staff. The language of less senior clerics was much less guarded. A rural vicar wrote:

Holding as I do a firm conviction that a nation which is so emasculated that it lets its destinies shift into the hands of its women is *doomed*, I should, if I observed the occasion at all, make it a day of Fasting and Humiliation, certainly not thanksgiving. The political jobbery by which the nation has been betrayed into this tomfoolery *behind the backs of our fighting men* is the culminating disgrace of a disgraceful period in our political history.<sup>25</sup>

There were also theological objections that accompanied these memories of suffrage-feminism and misogynous sentiments. Bishop Winnington-Ingram wrote to Hudson Shaw claiming that opposition to women's ordination was widely held without any antagonism to women. He insisted that 'it was not merely "spikes" and the ECU but moderate men' who could not accept women as Anglican clergy because this would prevent any possible reunion with the Roman and Orthodox churches.<sup>26</sup> Reunion

<sup>23</sup> 'Courage', *Church Militant*, 15 July 1925, p. 116 (original emphasis).

<sup>24</sup> London, Women's Library, Autograph Letter Collection: Women in the Church (hereafter ALC), Frances Balfour to Millicent Fawcett, 7 Feb. 1918; W. R. Inge to Balfour, 19 Jan. 1918.

<sup>25</sup> ALC, V. Holt, 11 Feb. 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Winnington-Ingram to Shaw, 1 March 1921, quoted in Heeney, *Women's Movement*, p. 194.

seemed a realistic possibility at this point, and many believed that the Anglicans could not ordain women without forever cutting themselves off from the wider Catholic Church. However, this objection faded over time, as the possibility of reunion became remote in the face of a theological impasse between Anglicans and Rome. Winnington-Ingram's claim for the moderate nature of anti-feminism does not really account for the intensely bitter gender debates within the church, nor even for his own revealing use of the word 'harangue' in describing female preachers.

The conservative high church weekly the *Church Times* hosted much debate over women's ordination, and its editorial comments reveal long-standing misogynistic stereotypes; a 1921 editorial talked of the 'rector's or curate's clever wife' with acute distaste.<sup>27</sup> Women preachers would be hampered by glibness, superficiality and ignorance, it was argued. Clergymen wrote of their fears of the radicalism of 'ecclesiastical Bolsheviks' such as Maude Royden.<sup>28</sup> A few correspondents explicitly framed this as a concern with feminism: 'women priests would most certainly come to teaching feminism rather than the Gospel, since this sex can never avoid the personal for long', declared one priest's wife.<sup>29</sup> Others talked of the clergy's need for 'virility' and 'masculine staying-power and balance which are plainly attributes of the other sex'.<sup>30</sup> There were few conceptual resources for imagining female authority among clergy and laity, and it was often regarded as comic or unpleasant. A 1932 memorandum by the female staff of the London Diocesan Board of Women's Work expressed their belief that 'positions of almost unchecked authority do not, as a rule, bring out the best in women, but rather the reverse'. Nonetheless, though they had concluded against the ordination of women, they could not agree with the carefully worded statement that had been put to them – that 'there is a certain priority (not superiority) of man over woman which fits him to take that lead, to represent humanity as a whole, in a way not possible with a woman'. Male 'priority' and leadership were being questioned even by this group of relatively conservative women.<sup>31</sup>

In 1923, several royal weddings prompted reflections on the nature of authority and obedience among men and women both within the church and beyond, through scrutiny of the royal brides' promises of obedience.

<sup>27</sup> 'Women in the pulpit', *Church Times*, 4 March 1921, p. 213.

<sup>28</sup> F. J. Edmund, vicar of Netherfield, Notts., *Church Times*, 24 March 1921, p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> M. Baillie-Saunders, *Church Times*, 6 May 1921, p. 248.

<sup>30</sup> Letters from Mrs. L. Robinson and G. M. Dawson, *Church Times*, 1 Apr. 1921, p. 316 and 13 May 1921, p. 454.

<sup>31</sup> London, Women's Library, Anglican Group for the Ordination of Women Papers, teaching staff of the London Diocesan Board of Women's Work, unpublished memorandum requested by the Archbishops' Committee on the Ministry of Women.

Maude Royden proposed to the House of Laity that the vows of obedience be removed from the marriage service.<sup>32</sup> Senior clergy, however, were unequivocal about female obedience. Canon Douglas Maclean of Salisbury feared ‘the weakening of obedience as the foundation of Christian ethics and Christian society’; Canon Goudge argued that ‘subordination of one kind or another exists in all forms of human society, and is necessary to their existence. It does not imply inferiority’. For Goudge, ‘within the family life, the husband is “the head of the wife”; ... where there is ultimate difference of opinion on matters morally and religiously indifferent, his judgement must prevail’.<sup>33</sup> He was forced, however, to fall back on the relatively weak argument of this being traditional not just in Anglican churches, but across human society. This prompted an acid reply from a feminist, noting that appeals to customary beliefs ‘might equally well be employed to prove that the earth is flat’.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the confines of the Anglican Church, the challenge to male leadership was clear. The liberal *Daily News* launched an enquiry into ‘The Bride’s Promise to Obey’ in 1923, and over the course of several weeks published large numbers of readers’ letters (a selection of the ‘many hundreds’ they received). Despite the editors’ valiant attempts to provoke controversy, the large majority of letter-writers felt that female marital obedience was anachronistic. Their numbers included many Christian ministers, one of whom wrote that ‘were it not for the numbing and deadening influence of the establishment of the Anglican Church, with its cast-iron formularies and traditions, the growing intelligence of both men and women would long ago have led to the indignant repudiation of this word [obey]’.<sup>35</sup> Most ministers claimed that they left obedience vows out of the marriage services they conducted, though some bishops (where consulted) apparently insisted on its inclusion.<sup>36</sup> Only very occasionally did readers make the gender-conservative argument that, as one male Essex-based reader put it, ‘No wife who loves and honours her husband will desire the word “obey” to be omitted or qualified. There can be only one head; and, as the weaker and less-experienced of the partners, is a woman to lead?’<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See T. Jones, ‘Sex and gender in the Church of England, 1857–1957’ (unpublished University of Melbourne PhD thesis, 2007), pp. 54–5, cited in Morgan and De Vries, *Women, Gender*.

<sup>33</sup> Can. Douglas Maclean, *Church Times*, 5 Dec. 1924, p. 64; H. L. Goudge, *Church Times*, 24 Dec. 1924, p. 737.

<sup>34</sup> C. M. Duncan Jones, *Church Times*, 2 Jan. 1925, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> ‘M.A.’, *Daily News*, 8 Nov. 1923, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> On a bishop’s insistence on ‘obey’, and her own sentiments of repugnance, see letter from ‘An old widow and grandmother’, *Daily News*, 13 Nov. 1923, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Essex’, *Daily News*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 2.

The appeal of biological statements of sexual difference was apparently diminishing, alongside concepts of female obedience and subordination. Sexual difference was frequently presented to inter-war readers using a tentative new language of 'personality' and 'colour', rather than the more polarizing and direct language of biological difference that earlier conservatives had adopted. Many gender conservatives seemed to lack intellectual resources to express or illustrate their beliefs. The successful medical doctor Mary Scharlieb had been active in progressive campaigns for sexual education, but still asserted her belief in sexual difference in religious settings. She argued in 1917 that women could intuitively sense

the unseemliness and undesirableness of women sharing in the public services in church. It is not lack of intellectual ability, nor deficiency of zeal ... it is not a question of inferiority, but ... it is a question of unlikeness of natures. To our minds it appears that women may be, and are, wise counsellors, efficient teachers, capable organizers and administrators in the Church, but we shrink from the idea that she should 'seek the Priesthood also'.<sup>38</sup>

The grounds for this intuition, however, were hard to convey to her readers and there seemed no very coherent conservative language available to rationalize this emotional response of 'shrinking'.

A *Church Times* editorial in 1924 offered a similarly guarded statement of opposition to female clergy. The usual claims were made concerning the motives of sex rivalry and revolution among feminists, but the nub of the argument about femininity being imbued with sex was outlined in vague psychological rather than physical terms: 'the quality and colour of the personality which is peculiar to sex, which constitutes much both of our glory and our shame as human beings, is more prominent in the female than the male. Masculine nature can be more sexless than the feminine'.<sup>39</sup> In the 1930s, opponents of women's ordination continued to make their case using ideas about sexual difference, even if they were no longer willing to state clear biological and scientific justifications for this. In a chatty and sometimes tentative address to women, the Anglo-Catholic religious scholar and journalist Evelyn Underhill floated the idea that 'most of us [women], I think, are definitely at our best in a limited environment' that would utilize women's 'home-making talents and our instinct for nurture'.<sup>40</sup> In a similar friendly, personal tone, Dorothy Spens commented in the *Church Times* in 1936, 'Most women are, I fancy, extremely personal in their thinking ... even the most strong-minded women

<sup>38</sup> Mary Scharlieb, in Goudge, *Place of Women*, pp. 163–4.

<sup>39</sup> Editorial, *Church Times*, 14 Nov. 1924, p. 549.

<sup>40</sup> E. Underhill, 'The ideals of the ministry of women', *Theology* (Jan. 1933), p. 40. This paper was read at a Central Council for Women's Church Work conference in Oct. 1932.

tend to personify the abstract and to translate the “case” into personal terms ... Women’s best work is done as the outcome of their maternal instinct’. Like that of Canon Goudge, her argument rested on customary practices: ‘I think there is an argument to be drawn from the organisation of society as we know it. It has always been the case that the woman has tended to be supreme in all matters that concern the family and the ordering of the household, while in the world outside, and towards society at large, the man has been the dominant authority’.<sup>41</sup> Inter-war conservative women often struggled to find an acceptable rationale for why female leadership and authority were so suspect. Nonetheless, church debates show a continuing conviction in divergent sexual qualities and suspicion of female authority figures, though this was now presented as a customary and commonsensical rather than scientifically backed belief.

Ambiguity over the significance of sexual difference was perhaps partly a response to the very same issues being debated among feminists – there was no straightforward feminist orthodoxy against which to position anti-feminism. Prominent inter-war feminists such as Eleanor Rathbone, the president of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, foregrounded the idea of women’s special qualities of sympathy, kindness and sensitivity to human suffering.<sup>42</sup> Apparently politically opposed figures often drew on similar intellectual traditions. Conservatives among both feminists and anti-feminists, for example, tended to argue in virtually indistinguishable terms that women and men brought something different to spiritual or public life, and that this sexual difference should be supported and noted by public institutions. This allowed some conservative women to appropriate a feminist identity despite their opposition to reform within the church. Dorothy Spens, an opponent of ordination, identified mid 1930s feminism as newly compatible with her cause: ‘The feminism which asks for identity of function is being replaced by the feminism which takes pride in the fact that the functions of women are in part different, and asks instead for adequate opportunity for the exercise of their distinctive capacities’. As in the Edwardian years, feminism could not function as a clear dividing line between the two sides. This does not indicate that feminism was incoherent or ideologically confused in the inter-war period, but simply reminds us that the divide between conservative and progressive positions was blurred, and did not map straightforwardly onto anti-feminist and feminist positions.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> D. Spens, ‘The ministry of women’, *Church Times*, 20 March 1936, p. 346.

<sup>42</sup> Rathbone, in R. Strachey, *Our Freedom and its Results* (1936), pp. 36, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Spens, ‘Ministry of women’, p. 346. L. Delap, ‘Feminist and anti-feminist encounters in Edwardian Britain’, *Historical Research*, lxxviii (2005), 377–99.

By 1939, one commentator noted that ‘nowadays [the argument from the inferiority of women] appears either not at all, or restated in a much more cautious form’.<sup>44</sup> The changing tenor of debate and lack of consensus over gender conservatism across the inter-war years was clearly demonstrated in the church press. In 1924 the *Church Times* had argued that claims about women’s ordination were ‘warmly resented by all Christian professional women’. But the following issue retracted this, noting ‘we have been surprised and disconcerted by the receipt of a very large number of letters [of protest] ... Our statement, made on what we believed was good authority, was obviously unjustified’.<sup>45</sup> Though this was accompanied by letters from churchwomen restating their sentiments of ‘horror’ and ‘utter repugnance’ at the thought of women priests, such opinions were beginning to sound old-fashioned.<sup>46</sup> The ‘honest surprise’ of the conservative *Church Times* can be seen as a turning point of sorts, as women’s claims began to be taken more seriously and politely. There was also a new confidence among progressive women; in response to the *Church Times*’s comments about ‘the colour’ of feminine personality, one Newnham College scholar wrote: ‘attack here is so easy that I feel ungenerous’.<sup>47</sup> There was an atmosphere of expectation that change in Anglican women’s position was to come in the near future. The *English Churchman* noted in 1928 that ‘talk on women’s service in the Church has advanced so rapidly that it is felt that ordination to the priesthood must inevitably follow in due time’.<sup>48</sup> As women took on public and professional offices in the 1920s, it seemed that their authority must gradually become acceptable even in the spiritual realm.

Nonetheless, those advocating change were still adopting a language of prudence and caution. One group of Oxford female undergraduates commented in 1931 that despite their ambitions within the church, ‘to clamour loudly for the priesthood now ... is the wrong course of action ... It is essential to work from what is already here, quietly and prepared for sacrifice’. They advocated women’s work as missionaries, as a means of slowly gaining more responsibility in church functions.<sup>49</sup> Those with less patience found themselves isolated. Maude Royden had resigned as president of the League of the Church Militant in 1924, claiming that she

<sup>44</sup> P. Smythe, *The Ordination of Women* (1939), p. 209.

<sup>45</sup> *Church Times*, 31 Oct. 1924, p. 479, 7 Nov. 1924, p. 512.

<sup>46</sup> Editorial, and letters from I. Cauldwell and G. Livesey, *Church Times*, 14 Nov. 1924, pp. 549, 545.

<sup>47</sup> E. Seymour Bennett, *Church Times*, 21 Nov. 1924, p. 577.

<sup>48</sup> *English Churchman*, 9 Aug. 1928, p. 114.

<sup>49</sup> London, Women’s Library, Anglican Group for the Ordination of Women Papers, unpublished notes, by L. Barry in 1931, recording the views of her fellow female Oxford undergraduates.



was too unorthodox and out of touch with 'the main body of opinion' to be helpful to the cause of women's ministry in the Anglican Church.<sup>50</sup> If anti-feminism became less openly propounded in the church, Royden still feared that it was the private belief of many Anglicans. She noted in 1929, 'to-day, few Christians will openly say that women are spiritually inferior to men. Many, however, still act on that assumption'.<sup>51</sup>

Royden and other feminist commentators accounted for the persistent power of the sometimes tongue-tied statements of conservative belief by pointing to a deeply felt, though often submerged fear of women's bodies in the church's opposition to women's preaching and ministry. Royden argued that 'the whole process of reproduction has been surrounded from primeval ages with various forms of *tabu* ... [which implied] that women were both mysterious and dangerous and certainly at some times, if not always, ceremonially unclean'.<sup>52</sup> Despite the surface reverence towards women, she perceived a deep disgust at women's reproductive powers, particularly menstruation.

Menstruation and its 'defilement' had long been controversial and central to debates about gender, both in the early church and in modern Britain.<sup>53</sup> The physician Henry Maudsley had argued in 1874 that the menstrual cycle made women unfit for any kind of intellectual activity.<sup>54</sup> Late Victorian feminists fiercely challenged this; some even believed that while ovulation was natural, menstruation itself was an acquired condition, linked to male sexual abuse, and that it would cease once society was more sexually egalitarian.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, menstruation arguments continued to be used by anti-suffragists, and were relevant to the disqualification of women from professional and sacred functions within the Anglican Church well into the twentieth century. Pollution beliefs were highlighted in the majority of the pleas for women's ordination, often citing examples of the survival of superstitious beliefs about gender in contemporary Britain, and

<sup>50</sup> Fletcher, *Maude Royden*, p. 239

<sup>51</sup> Royden preface to D. Northcroft, *Women Free Church Ministers* (1929), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> A. M. Royden and C. M. Coltman, *The Church and Woman ... With a Chapter on the Evangelical and Free Churches by Constance M. Coltman* (1924), pp. 204–5.

<sup>53</sup> W. E. Phipps, 'The menstrual taboo in the Judeo-Christian tradition', *Journal of Religion and Health*, xix (1980), 298–303. R. Radford Ruether, in J. Becher, *Women, Religion and Sexuality: Studies on the Impact of Religious Teachings on Women* (1990).

<sup>54</sup> H. Maudsley, 'Sex in mind and education', *Fortnightly Review*, xv (1874), quoted in S. Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage, 1860–1914* (Princeton, NJ, 1987), p. 136.

<sup>55</sup> See E. Wolstenholme-Elmy, *Life to Women* (1896), quoted in Kent, *Sex and Suffrage*, p. 110.

more specifically in the church.<sup>56</sup> In his plea for women's ordination, Canon Raven noted in 1928 that 'the belief that menstruation involves ceremonial uncleanness is not uncommon in the Canons, and this barbaric survival has been openly urged on at least one occasion in the past ten years and, alas, by a rather prominent Anglican priest'.<sup>57</sup> Ursula Roberts, a feminist poet and church activist, speculated that the taboo against women priests was comparable to that against incest, though she admitted that such a belief might seem 'fantastic and obscure' to most readers of her 1930 article in the *Nineteenth Century*.<sup>58</sup>

To some degree, this was a polemical strategy, aiming to tar opponents with accusations of 'primitive savagery' and 'barbarism'. But there *is* evidence in the church press of high levels of anxiety over female sexuality and bodies, often allied to sins of luxury and excessive consumption. There were long running controversies, for example, over the celibacy or otherwise of the order of deaconesses in the inter-war church. One clergyman's wife feared an end to the deaconesses' celibacy vow: 'we may live to meet deaconesses in velvet and diamonds, at dances and dinners, brought there by their duty to husbands and children'.<sup>59</sup> Women's experiences in the nonconformist churches also suggest a deep antagonism towards their reproductive functions. The first ordained female minister in Scotland, Vera Kenmure, found herself obliged to leave her congregation in Partick, Glasgow, and start a new church, after she had a child in 1934. She cited the hostility and opposition she had encountered when pregnant, despite her six years of service within this church.<sup>60</sup> Her resignation was deeply controversial, and many of the younger members of this Congregationalist church followed her to a new ministry.<sup>61</sup>

Beliefs about female pollution seemed extraordinarily persistent. In 1938, Canon Robinson of Birstall discussed women's ministry in the York Convocation and declared 'the very thought that the chalice should be administered by a woman made him shudder'.<sup>62</sup> In 1939, the author of a book-length survey of the debates about 'church feminism' commented that 'arguments drawn from [menstruation] have an important share in the formation of opinion'. He personally believed that science had rendered such

<sup>56</sup> Revd. J. R. Wilkinson, for example, wrote of the superstitious belief that only men should set the 'first foot' of the new year in houses in the north of England (Wilkinson, 'Women and the priesthood', *The Modern Churchman* (Nov. 1923), pp. 390–2).

<sup>57</sup> C. Raven, *Women and Holy Orders: a Plea to the Church of England* (1928).

<sup>58</sup> U. Roberts, 'Women and the priesthood', *Nineteenth Century* (Aug. 1930), p. 241.

<sup>59</sup> Mrs. L. Robinson, *Church Times*, 1 Apr. 1921, p. 316.

<sup>60</sup> Royden and Coltman, *The Church and Woman*, p. 116.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, 6 March 1934, p. 16, and 26 March 1934, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in R. Howard, *Should Women be Priests? Three Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1949), p. 33.

concerns meaningfully: 'To the primitive mind, menstrual blood had all the horror of the unintelligible, but now that the mechanism of the monthly period is understood, all that need survive is a mild distaste'.<sup>63</sup> But the fact that this argument still needed to be made suggests that menstruation was a persistent concern across the inter-war years, and there is no evidence that it diminished after the Second World War. The religious commentator F. D. Bacon stated in 1946 that 'tabu' held 'unconscious sway' among 'the ordinary lay folk' and also 'lingers in the official mind of the Church, perhaps, for how else may we account for the *tabu* which is still attached to women?'<sup>64</sup>

This 'tabu' explanation does help to explain the extreme bitterness and rancour of the debates on the ministry of women, noted at the time by the moderates and undecided. Female clergy apparently represented a threat to the deep psychic functions of pollution beliefs, beliefs which Mary Douglas has argued are used 'as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order ... Patterns of sexual danger [and bodily pollution] can be used to express symmetry or hierarchy ... as symbols of the relations between parts of society'.<sup>65</sup> Pollution beliefs help to systematize and order the untidiness of lived experience, through exaggerated boundary setting and purity rituals, particularly at times of social change. At this deep level, there seems to be a persistent set of gendered taboos operating among Victorians and successive generations, that were no longer particularly visible in the inter-war debates about women's political and citizenship roles, but which were still very much at play in church controversies. To attribute this to misogyny does not seem to explain much; in particular, misogyny sheds little light on the gender conservatism of women. It is also too static and monolithic as a category, and largely fails to place antagonism towards women in historical context. As David Cressy's work on churching rituals usefully reminds us, we need to think about the *reception* of beliefs or rituals that suggest pollution taboos, and bear in mind the possibility of their being interpreted in highly discrepant ways. The 'churching' of women after childbirth seems in keeping with the polluted nature of female reproductive functions, but was often interpreted as an empowering or entertaining social occasion by the women who undertook it.<sup>66</sup> Simply to describe it as a form of taboo tells

<sup>63</sup> Smythe, *Ordination of Women*, p. 216.

<sup>64</sup> F. D. Bacon, *Women in the Church* (Cambridge, 1946), p. 127. A 1948 report for the first World Council of Churches noted the widespread nature of the belief that women were ceremonially unclean (World Council of Churches, *Life and Work of Women in the Church* (1948)).

<sup>65</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> D. Cressy, 'Purification, thanksgiving and the churching of women in post-Reformation England', *Past & Present*, cxli (1993), 106–46.

us little about the investments made by women in institutions that seem to marginalize them.

It might be expected that men and women would respond quite differently to pollution beliefs, and that they would hold less sway with women. Nonetheless, it had been an argument of the 'antis' that it was women themselves who most disliked the idea of female ministry. Was this because women might also find female bodies to be disgusting or unclean? Many clearly did not; a deputation of churchwomen protested angrily to the bishop of London after the ministry of women had been described as 'revolting' and 'repulsive' at a Convocation in 1921.<sup>67</sup> Others commented on their surprise and shock at the overt hostility to women that they had never suspected would be found within the church. The religious writer Caroline Duncan-Jones claimed in 1924 that 'The debate in the house of Clergy [on the marriage service] came as something of a shock since it revealed how large a proportion of our spiritual fathers are – to put it crudely – male first and Christian afterwards'.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, women's voices featured on both sides of the debate, and a remarkable number of wives of clergymen weighed in to the sometimes vitriolic exchanges in the *Church Times*. There seemed to be no significant divergence between the views of men and women on the ministry of women; conservatives of both sexes found the idea repulsive. 'A Vicar's Wife' wrote of the 'widespread and deep-seated ... aversion to such a dangerous innovation [as female clergy]' among Anglican women.<sup>69</sup> Some women wrote of their horror and repugnance at the idea of female ordination. The physically tabooed nature of female bodies, menstruation and sexuality seems to have been shared by the sexes. Hera Cook comments on the unwillingness among women in the inter-war years to touch their own genitals, and notes that this persisted for some women well past the Second World War. Disposable sanitary towels had become available to the affluent by the 1930s, but for many women the experience of menstruation was one of discomfort, 'dirt' and 'contamination'. The conflicting or scaremongering advice offered by the medical profession concerning vaginas and menstruation suggests a broad social anxiety about female physiognomy. As Cook notes, 'accepting the advice of the majority of the medical profession, even in the late 1950s, would often not have helped women to understand and interpret their own physical experience more positively'.<sup>70</sup> Female gender conservatives were thus as likely as their male counterparts to find female bodies and reproductive capacities disgusting or challenging.

<sup>67</sup> *Church Times*, 8 July 1921, p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> C. M. Duncan Jones, *Church Times*, 12 Dec. 1924, p. 676.

<sup>69</sup> *Church Times*, 24 March 1921, p. 293.

<sup>70</sup> H. Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 151, 53.

The investment that some Anglican women had in the exclusion of female bodies from sacred spaces can also be helpfully framed using Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of patriarchal bargains. Kandiyoti argued that women make strategic choices when faced with patriarchal institutions at specific historical moments, and seek to optimize their 'life options' within a specific socio-cultural milieu. This may lead some to internalize forms of oppression and 'collude in the reproduction of their own subordination', though this rarely forms a stable bargain and is continually renegotiated.<sup>71</sup> Grace Davie and Tony Walter have suggested of a later twentieth-century context that women continued to feel 'at home' within religious institutions that relegated them to a secondary role because the Christian church assuaged some of their social, material and physical vulnerabilities, though ironically it also 'fosters the very deprivation that it then compensates for'.<sup>72</sup> Churches provided women with community and fellowship, and resources for dealing with the closer relationship that many of them sustained with birth, death and sickness compared to men. Conservative Anglican women active within the inter-war church gained informal power despite the limitations on their parochial work, and many regarded their position as secure and respected. Their responses to church feminism suggest a deep and comparatively stable internalization of a particular set of beliefs about female bodies.<sup>73</sup> There is evidence in Britain of the continuing influence of some older understandings of female bodies as 'unclean', often taken to be characteristic of the nineteenth century. These beliefs offered 'dividends' to both men and women in supporting, at a deep level, a relatively stable conservative gender order which was only very slowly affected by the 'permissive' social changes witnessed after the Second World War.<sup>74</sup> Though historian Callum Brown has argued that the more permissive context of the mid 1960s promoted a sharp turn towards secularization among women, the commitment of many Anglican churchwomen was not dramatically

<sup>71</sup> Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with patriarchy', p. 280.

<sup>72</sup> G. Davie and T. Walter, 'The religiosity of women in the modern West', *British Journal of Sociology*, xlix (1998), 647.

<sup>73</sup> The relatively stable British context contrasts with the more obviously strategic 'patriarchal bargains' described by Helen Ebaugh among Catholic women in the United States (H. Ebaugh, 'Patriarchal bargains and latent avenues of social mobility: nuns in the Roman Catholic Church', *Gender and Society*, vii (1993)).

<sup>74</sup> I am deliberately avoiding tracing a longer history of menstrual taboos, which some have argued to be continuously in operation from the early church through to contemporary times. These kinds of *longue durée* arguments suggest a static, patriarchal oppression of women without offering sufficient historical context to do justice to the very diverse ways in which taboos might be understood and might influence practices, offering women very distinct means of interacting with or belonging to religious institutions.

transformed, and continued to produce sentiments of disgust or discomfort at female bodies into the 1990s.<sup>75</sup>

The insights offered by the concept of patriarchal bargains help to raise the concept of taboo beyond the idea of an unresolved psychosexual conflict or a universal feature of the human psyche. It locates the gendered rituals of status and respectability that are often played out in religious terms in specific historical and cultural contexts, rather than implying that taboos arise only from the psychic dramas of infancy and early childhood, or are somehow intrinsic to the (patriarchal) operations of the Christian church. Taboos are not peculiar to the religious realm, and their operation suggests the ways in which conservative men *and* women might establish a sense of belonging within Anglican institutions and rituals. However, I suspect that the idea of a patriarchal bargain has its limitations, and specifically, it fails to capture the role of faith in the investments made by Anglican women. It is clear that many lay women felt that their role in the church was shaped by a vocation or encounter with the divine, and Kandiyoti's work does not give us many ways of acknowledging this.

The inter-war years have been seen as uniquely marked by a clash of different epochs, as 'Victorian' mentalities met more 'modern' world-views. In 1936, the writer and former MP Mary Agnes Hamilton held that:

the present denizens of the earth contain a very large number of persons born in the nineteenth century, with minds coloured by its very different outlook ... Hard as it is to recall and realize it now, there were, even a quarter of a century ago, very large numbers of otherwise intelligent persons who did sincerely endorse the view that members of the female sex were not human ... [These beliefs] still haunt many minds and live on there with the baseless potency of instincts.<sup>76</sup>

With a Whiggish optimism, she felt that as older generations passed away, the gender order would transform. In the years shortly after the First World War,

<sup>75</sup> C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (2000). Ian Jones's study of the first 10 years of women's ordination within the Church of England suggests the continuing resonance of taboos around female bodies among churchwomen in the late 20th century: 'one lay woman admitted she was unsettled by the sight of a female body in clerical robes' (I. Jones, *Women and Priesthood in the Church of England: Ten Years On* (2004), p. 64). However, the evidence is not clear-cut; a recent study of a Welsh parish has suggested that female churchgoers 'saw both their bodies and childbirth in a very positive light' (J. Bjonness, 'In the Name of the Father: religion and hierarchy in a parish in Swansea', Swansea University, unpublished paper, cited in Davie and Walter, 'Religiosity of women').

<sup>76</sup> M. A. Hamilton, 'Changes in social life', in Strachey, *Freedom and its Results*, pp. 240–2.

it was still possible to express anti-feminism in public, vitriolic terms, and proposals for women's preaching and ordination elicited powerful responses of disgust and ridicule. However, apparently in keeping with Hamilton's expectations, the inter-war years saw a transformation in the public acceptability of such beliefs. Public opinion seemed to swing against women's vows of marital obedience. Many churchgoers became antagonized and offended by misogynous statements, though these continued to be aired. The reiteration of sexual difference that had been a mainstay of Edwardian anti-feminism became a less effective strategy and commanded less consensus. The qualities on which men and women diverged were outlined with difficulty, deploying quite nebulous concepts of personality rather than biology.

Nonetheless, the change in gender norms was slower than many had expected. The inability to imagine women as authority figures was a persistent theme throughout inter-war debates about gender. Many marriages still began with an unreciprocated promise to obey on the part of the bride. The taboos on women's physical presence in sacred rituals were clearly still felt, and had to some extent been forced into more open expression between the wars by the existence within the church of radicals such as Maude Royden. Faced with direct challenges from confident and educated women, sexual pollution sentiments were deployed to bolster the continuing belief of inter-war and post-war conservatives in traditional gender hierarchies and the exclusion of women from some sacred roles. Such taboos represent a deep form of conservatism, apparently persistently felt across much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The persistence of pollution taboos helps to account for why so many opponents to women's ordination openly acknowledged that their sentiments were emotional rather than rational or theological and were therefore very hard to shift.<sup>77</sup>

The forms of progress and change in the Anglican Church discussed above are in keeping with the changes that Alison Light identified as a shift towards a 'conservative modernity' after the First World War. Light is right to identify a paradoxical, troubled, indecisive conservatism in this period. Gender controversies genuinely polarized Anglican opinion, and debate was persistent and widely aired. There was no easy acceptance of the central tenets of gender conservatism – that women could not exercise authority, were 'subtly sexual' and physically constrained in ways that men were not, and were unable to tolerate each other – though these beliefs continued to be restated. There appeared to be little agreed ground on which anti-feminism could rest. A hostile but not very cohesive campaign against

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., Revd. E. C. Roberts, *The Guardian*, 8 Apr. 1910; and U. Roberts, 'Women and the priesthood', p. 240.

women's involvement in church offices resulted. No clear ideological or theological principle emerged, and arguments from custom, expediency and principle were all used without any seeming to clinch the issue.

It is crucial to set this sense of a transitional, fluid gender order against the wider context of the lack of movement towards women's incorporation into the Anglican Church, and the evident continuities in gender conservatism. As noted above, Judith Bennett has recently challenged historians of gender to take a longer time frame that can account for continuities in what she terms the 'patriarchal equilibrium' that persistently marginalizes women.<sup>78</sup> The Anglican Church seems a case in point; despite women being ordained in Anglican churches outside Great Britain from 1944, they were excluded from holy orders in the Church of Scotland until 1969 and in the Church of England until 1992. Persistent emotional and psychological obstacles, as well as the dividends that some Anglican women gained from their secondary position in the church, meant that reformist and feminist arguments lacked traction within it. The debates of the inter-war years continued to be unresolved into the late twentieth century, and persist in the contemporary church. There was still a deep emotional association between women and the profanement of sacred spaces, though this met fierce opposition from an articulate minority. This chapter charts the double effect of change at some levels of public pronouncements and practice, yet continuity in the gender order at a deep psychological and embodied level across the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, I conclude with a methodological word of caution: the *longue durée* of this gender order does not reach back, as Judith Bennett had envisaged and as some feminists have argued, across many centuries.<sup>79</sup> Despite the historical recurrence of menstrual taboos in numerous societies and religions, the ways in which these taboos operate is determined by historically specific formations of medical knowledge, sexual cultures, theological and religious debates, and broader gender norms. This chapter points to continuities in gender conservatism that can help to contextualize the typically short periods that modern historians deploy, such as the inter-war 'conservative modernity' or post-war 'permissiveness'. But this is no 'patriarchal equilibrium', and it is the nineteenth century rather than the ancient world to which we must look to understand the origins of such beliefs.

<sup>78</sup> Bennett, *History Matters*, p. 54.

<sup>79</sup> See, e.g., R. Radford Ruether, 'Women's body and blood: the sacred and the impure', in *Through the Devil's Gateway: Women, Religion and Taboo*, ed. A. Joseph (1990), pp. 7–21.



## 7. Cultivating internationalism: Save the Children Fund, public opinion and the meaning of child relief, 1919–24

*Ellen Boucher*

Reading a daily newspaper has never been for the faint of heart, but in Britain in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, the act required a particular courage. The terrors of the war lingered on in the headlines. There were stories of shellshocked veterans assaulting their wives and neighbours, of violent ‘anti-alien’ riots in cities and towns throughout the nation, of imperial soldiers slaughtering civilians in India and Ireland, and steady coverage of the funerals and memorials that commemorated the million British souls lost in the fighting and influenza pandemic. Surveying these reports, many Britons concluded that their nation had been at once utterly changed and deeply disturbed by the preceding four years of total war.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not this press coverage was exaggerated – a question that remains a point of debate – it did have significant effects on inter-war political culture.<sup>2</sup> As Jon Lawrence has argued, the fitful media discussion over the war’s impact on modern civilization helped to provoke a widespread ‘fear of brutalization’ among the British public, which led many to disavow militarism in favour of an alternative view of the nation as a uniquely ‘peaceable kingdom’.<sup>3</sup> Where Britons had once styled themselves as rowdy and raucous political actors, now they came to redefine the public as ‘an essentially passive, reflective, and above all individualized entity’.<sup>4</sup> Gone was the jingoistic swagger of the Victorian and Edwardian John Bull, whose confident stride had crossed the globe. In his stead there arose a kindlier, more retiring and more domesticated ‘Little Man’ figure to symbolize the

<sup>1</sup> J. Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain’, *Journal of Modern History*, lxxv (2003), 557–89.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *contra* Lawrence, has argued that these increased accounts of political violence indicate a widespread experience of collective trauma in the aftermath of the war (S. K. Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918–31* (Basingstoke, 2009)).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, p. 561; see also J. Lawrence, ‘The transformation of British public politics after the First World War’, *Past & Present*, cxc (2006), 185–216.

national character. The new icon offered a more fitting emblem for an inter-war British people who appeared altogether less eager to intervene in world affairs and whose aversion to war would prove so consequential in the international political arena of the later 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt that when viewed through the lens of conventional party politics or state action, inter-war Britons can appear isolationist almost to the point of navel gazing. And yet, when historians look past these realms to examine the vibrant array of clubs, voluntary societies and civic organizations that took root after the Great War, a different, and markedly more ‘internationalist’ picture begins to emerge. Although it is true that many of these groups focused on local and domestic issues, a significant proportion aimed to engage the public with the concerns of the wider world.<sup>6</sup> For these reformers, forging the nation’s identity as a peaceable kingdom depended not on a drawing back from the international arena, but rather on active humanitarian interventions that crossed national lines.

In what follows, I analyse the development of one of these societies, the child welfare organization Save the Children Fund (SCF), to illustrate the important role it played in articulating a new and explicitly internationalist social consciousness during the inter-war period. My intent, though, is not simply to use the example of SCF to demonstrate that popular forms of internationalism survived the anxieties of the early 1920s, however important that point may be. We should not, after all, allow our desire to understand appeasement and the failures of collective security in the later 1930s to obscure the wider spectrum of political action that flared to life at the start of the period. Rather, my objective is to explore how the cultural fears of brutalization that dominated the media in the years after the war shaped the content and character of internationalism as it simultaneously emerged. In this respect, the chapter contributes to recent scholarship that has explored how the transformation of the press in the inter-war period – a time in which the circulation of the top five national dailies grew to over 10 million, and some two-thirds of the population became regular newspaper readers – defined all manner of public life in Britain, shaping everything from attitudes toward gender roles to the platforms of the major political

<sup>5</sup> P. Mandler, *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), pp. 143–95. See also A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (1991).

<sup>6</sup> H. McCarthy, ‘Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in interwar Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 1 (2007), 891–912; G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain, 1830–1990* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 201–86; M. Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: the British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford, 2000).

parties.<sup>7</sup> Less attention has been paid to the media's influence on British public opinion regarding international relations, although as the example of SCF suggests, its impact was significant and long lasting.

Explicitly populist and avowedly apolitical, SCF formulated one of the most potent arguments for international humanitarianism of its time. From inauspicious beginnings in the summer of 1919, when the organization occupied a single office in central London and had an operating budget of some £30,000, the fund quickly expanded to become the leading voice in inter-war activism concerning children.<sup>8</sup> Only two years after its establishment, the London branch was receiving donations from over a dozen local committees throughout the United Kingdom, Ireland and Europe, and had distributed close to £1 million in food, medical supplies and clothing to refugees and struggling European families.<sup>9</sup> SCF activists had also forged close ties to the international political scene in Geneva, centred on the League of Nations. In 1924, their skilful advocacy prompted the General Assembly to ratify its landmark Declaration on the Rights of the Child, a major public relations boon that cemented the fund's international reputation and guaranteed it a spot on the league's newly established Child Welfare Committee.<sup>10</sup>

Much of this rapid rise to prominence was the result of SCF's innovative use of the press. The society was one of the first British charities to harness the new power of the inter-war mass media. By 1921, it had commissioned a publicity officer, started filming documentaries of its work, and was spending upwards of 16% of donations on newspaper advertisements.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> D. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988); A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004); L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, 2010); S. Nicholas, 'Stanley Baldwin, "Englishness" and the mass media', in *The Conservatives and British Society*, ed. M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 127–46.

<sup>8</sup> A narrative of these early years can be found in the institutional history written by a prominent SCF activist (K. Freeman, *If any Man Build: the History of Save the Children Fund* (1965)).

<sup>9</sup> 'Save the Children Fund General Council', *The Record of Save the Children Fund* (hereafter *The Record*), i (Aug. 1921), 301, 303.

<sup>10</sup> D. Marshall, 'The construction of children as an object of international relations: the Declaration of Children's Rights and the Child Welfare Committee of the League of Nations, 1900–24', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, vii (1999), 103–47; P. Rooke and R. Schnell "'Uncramping child life": international children's organizations, 1914–39', in *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918–39*, ed. P. Weindling (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 176–202.

<sup>11</sup> For an explanation of SCF's publicity policy, see Jebb to *Daily Express* (14 Feb. 1922), in the microfilm collection, 'Western aid and the global economy: the Save the Children Fund archive, London' (Detroit, Mich., 2006) (hereafter SCF archive), EJ 197.

Nevertheless, while previous scholars have demonstrated how the fund's use of modern publicity techniques helped to awaken new sections of the population to the cause of internationalism, few have acknowledged the transformative effect of this relationship on the content and conduct of its work.<sup>12</sup> As this chapter illustrates, the rise of the mass media did indeed broaden the opportunities for non-state actors like SCF to involve the public in the project of pan-European humanitarianism, yet it also imposed new constraints and limitations that ultimately narrowed the ideology and scope of inter-war international activism.

To understand the character and philosophy of SCF in its early years, it is helpful to start by examining the backgrounds of the two sisters who founded the organization: Eglantyne Jebb and Dorothy Buxton. Born into an elite Shropshire family, Jebb and Buxton were wealthy, religious and well educated (Jebb attended Oxford while Buxton attended Cambridge). Like many turn-of-the-century reformers of similar backgrounds, they ascribed to a Liberal philanthropic tradition that emphasized cross-class sympathy and self-help.<sup>13</sup> Both women's social activism started well before the war. In the early 1900s, Jebb joined the Charity Organisation Society (COS), and in keeping with that association's commitment to efficient, 'scientific' reform, published a detailed survey of the economic and social problems confronting the city of Cambridge.<sup>14</sup> In 1913, at the instigation of her brother-in-law, the Liberal and later Labour MP Charles Buxton, she began raising money for the Macedonian Relief Fund and took part in a two-week mission to the region following the Second Balkan War.<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Buxton, meanwhile, focused on settlement work in London. When the First World War broke out, she began publishing translated excerpts of over 100 foreign papers in the *Cambridge Magazine*. The goal of the project, which she continued until 1920, and on which Jebb assisted, was to publicize the destructive consequences of the conflict on all sides.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> L. Mahood and V. Satzewich, 'The Save the Children Fund and the Russian famine of 1921-3: claims and counter-claims about feeding "Bolshevik" children', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, xxii (2009), 55-83; L. Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children Fund* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 175-83; Freeman, *If any Man Build*, pp. 19-28.

<sup>13</sup> Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action*, pp. 34-55; F. Wilson, *Rebel Daughter of a Country House: the Life of Eglantyne Jebb* (1967).

<sup>14</sup> E. Jebb, *Cambridge: a Brief Study in Social Questions* (Cambridge, 1906).

<sup>15</sup> Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action*, pp. 148-9; Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>16</sup> Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action*, pp. 157-9. There is no biography of Buxton, but a useful background can be found in the biography of her husband, written by SCF activist V. A. B. de Bunsen, *Charles Roden Buxton: a Memoir* (1948).

It is important to note that Jebb's and Buxton's wartime endeavours already demonstrated a strong international focus and an awareness of the power of the media. Yet what is particularly striking about their early advocacy is how little of it focused on children. Neither woman espoused the Romantic, sentimentalized view of the young that was common among late Victorian and Edwardian child savers.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Jebb privately made it clear to her family and friends that she held little personal affection for the young.<sup>18</sup> Rather, their concern was with the impact of unjust economic and political structures on poor and marginalized communities. Take, for instance, Jebb's study of Cambridge. While she included chapters describing the need for better opportunities for girls and boys, the majority of the book charted the disruptive effects of urbanization and unemployment on the traditions of working-class life in the city.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the sisters' wartime initiative to publish excerpts of the foreign press reflected an ardent pacifism. They opposed war not because it affected children *per se*, but because it destroyed all manner of society, separating men from their families, spreading famine and disease, and causing the breakdown of moral and economic patterns.

This broad-based humanitarianism, which promoted pacifism and prioritized economic analysis, continued to guide Jebb's and Buxton's activism after the armistice. Both women had adamantly opposed the British government's wartime strategy of blockading the Central Powers, and were well aware from their daily translations of foreign newspapers that it was causing starvation levels of hunger in cities like Vienna and Berlin.<sup>20</sup> They were horrified when the government announced that it would continue the blockade until the peace treaty had been finalized. In response, they helped to found a left-leaning pressure group, Fight the Famine Council (FFC), to raise public awareness about the extent of the suffering in central Europe. Much like the League of Nations Union (LNU), which got its start around the same time, the council's objective was to democratize foreign policy by involving the newly expanded electorate in decision-making over

<sup>17</sup> S. Swain, 'Sweet childhood lost: idealized images of childhood in the British child rescue literature', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, ii (2009), 198–214; H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the 17th Century* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 133–63.

<sup>18</sup> Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action*, pp. 101, 159.

<sup>19</sup> See especially her discussion of the wider effects of demoralization among unemployed men (Jebb, *Cambridge*, pp. 64–81).

<sup>20</sup> Two excellent studies of the crisis in these capitals are M. Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004); and B. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000).

international affairs.<sup>21</sup> It thus took the form of a lobbying rather than relief association, and concentrated its efforts on mobilizing public pressure for a change in the government's international policy.<sup>22</sup>

Problematic for the council, however, was the fact that many Britons at the time were less concerned with reconciliation and international co-operation than with fixing blame for the war. Hostility towards Germany and Austria dominated the national press through the early months of 1919, and the public anger was quickly capitalized on by politicians looking for an easy way of gaining popularity.<sup>23</sup> The 'coupon' election of 1918, which famously featured the slogan 'hang the Kaiser', witnessed all sides stoking the fires of anti-German sentiment. Soon after, parliament added its endorsement of these hatreds by renewing the blatantly xenophobic Aliens Restriction Act, which expanded provisions first enacted during the war and enabled the state to refuse admission to refugees and to deport foreign nationals without appeal.<sup>24</sup> This wider context of anger and resentment dogged FFC's public meetings throughout its short, two-year existence. Press accounts routinely noted that the council experienced 'considerable interruption' from the crowd; at one forum several women were ejected for repeatedly shouting, 'We don't want Germans here!'<sup>25</sup> Such coverage greatly weakened FFC's authority with the government, given how closely its argument depended on a demonstration of public support for an end to the blockade.

In tracing how Jebb and Buxton dealt with these problems, we can begin to see how proponents of internationalism adapted their appeals to the immediate cultural context of post-war Britain. Because any attempt to solicit assistance for the German and Austrian people as a whole was open to the critique that good British money should not be spent on those who had supported belligerent powers, Jebb and Buxton redirected attention to an undeniably more innocent subset of the population: children. In May of

<sup>21</sup> H. McCarthy, 'Democratizing British foreign policy: rethinking the peace ballot, 1934–5', *Journal of British Studies*, xlix (2010), 358–87.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Parmoor and others, *The Famine in Europe: the Facts and Suggested Remedies, Being a Report of the International Economic Conference called by the Fight the Famine Council* (1920), p. 7. See also Fight the Famine Council, *Why Europe is Hungry* (1919) and *The Policy and Work of Fight the Famine Council* (1920).

<sup>23</sup> This hostility was, of course, a holdover from the war. On the press's role in promoting anti-German sentiment, see L. Teinermann, 'Fleet Street and the Kaiser: British public opinion and Wilhelm II', *German History*, xxvi (2008), 469–85; N. Gullace, *The Blood of our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (New York, 2002), pp. 17–35.

<sup>24</sup> Kent, pp. 40–5.

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, 6 Nov. 1919, p. 14, col. E.

1919, Jebb took the lead in forming Save the Children Fund, which split from the council in order to pursue a more active relief agenda. The mission of the new association was to solicit donations from Britain that could then be funnelled into the coffers of local children's charities across central Europe. From the start, Jebb took pains to present SCF in ways that would appeal to the widest possible audience. While its directors tended to come from the ranks of the elite – the fund counted the Conservatives Lord Curzon and Lord Robert Cecil among its patrons and the Liberal Lord Weardale as chair – the organization itself was not elitist. One of its first major donations, for instance, came from trade unionist Robert Smillie, a founder of the Independent Labour Party, who contributed £10,000 on behalf of the British Miners' Federation.<sup>26</sup> As these examples further indicate, the early SCF was a centrist organization, open to men and women of all political persuasions and party alignments.<sup>27</sup> It was also non-denominational. The Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, the Catholic archbishop of Westminster and the chief rabbi rounded out its circle of patrons. Moreover, the fund's desire to attract supporters from across the social spectrum helps to explain why an organization that was predominantly made up of women volunteers and which concerned itself with the 'maternal' issue of child welfare always steered clear of the feminist label. As Caitriona Beaumont has argued, inter-war feminism remained closely associated in the public mind with political radicalism, a stigma that led many service organizations to embrace a more gender-neutral conception of 'active citizenship'.<sup>28</sup> SCF was no exception to this trend. Indeed two of its leading patrons, Curzon and Weardale, were the former co-presidents of the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage.

While crafting this broadly inclusive, conservative public image, Jebb also pursued an aggressive publicity campaign that aimed to draw potential donors' attention away from the divisions of the war and towards the realities of the post-war European crisis. She began by saturating SCF's fundraising literature with the claim that the organization's focus on children alleviated the question of war guilt that had so dogged the Fight the Famine Council. One of the fund's first leading articles in its bi-weekly

<sup>26</sup> Freeman, *If any Man Build*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> On the appeal of political centrism within inter-war associational life, see McCarthy, 'Parties' and H. McCarthy, 'Leading from the centre: the League of Nations Union, foreign policy and "political agreement" in the 1930s', *Contemporary British History*, xxiii (2009), 527–42.

<sup>28</sup> C. Beaumont, 'Citizens not feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organizations in England, 1928–39', *Women's History Review*, ix (2000), 411–29.

magazine *The Record* featured Ethel Snowden, wife of former Labour MP Philip Snowden, reminding readers that most of the boys and girls they assisted 'were not born when the war broke out' and so 'could not in any sense of the term be held responsible for the evil thing'.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, other SCF members sought to differentiate between the potential culpability of German and Austrian adults and the blamelessness of their children. At a public meeting in Richmond, the Conservative politician Viscount Cave stated that while Britons were 'right to be very angry with those who made the war', it was only fair to 'show pity for those who were innocent of that offence'. Illustrating that international appeals were not immune to the pull of popular nationalism, Cave went on to assure his audience that 'whatever we might think of the parents', a moral obligation remained to help their young. After all, children 'could not choose their parents, or they might have chosen to be English'.<sup>30</sup> Jebb's and Buxton's decision to use the neutral symbol of a suffering, dependent child to serve as the public face of their organization thus helped to mediate the still simmering tensions of wartime hostility.<sup>31</sup> While many Britons found it difficult to imagine themselves in the shoes of German nationals, they could more easily sympathize with the plight of a young child who might grow up to look and act just like their own.

Jebb's second objective was to steer the public debate away from the question of whether Britons should aid their former enemies to the precise effect their donations would have on young lives. From the winter of 1919 through to 1921, the organization flooded the mainstream and religious press with emotional full-page advertisements that quantified the cost of saving a child's life in terms of everyday goods and luxuries. 'The Price of a Bottle of Wine will Feed and Clothe a Naked, Starving Child', SCF told readers of *The Times* in 1920. If a generous benefactor contributed the equivalent of a fur coat, 1,000 children would eat for a week.<sup>32</sup> This novel approach accomplished two goals simultaneously: it led donors to think about the individual impact of their contribution, and it pointed out their own comparative wealth and prosperity. Even more powerfully, SCF began an 'adoption' scheme in 1920 by which members who contributed two shillings a week would receive the name and address of a child with

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. P. Snowden, 'The cry of the children', *The Record*, i (Feb. 1921), 68.

<sup>30</sup> *The Record*, i (Feb. 1921), 80.

<sup>31</sup> On the broader use of child imagery to solicit humanitarian sentiment in periods of intense political and cultural conflict, see D. Marshall, 'Humanitarian sympathy for children in times of war and the history of children's rights, 1919–59', in *Children and War: a Historical Anthology*, ed. J. Marten (New York, 2002), pp. 184–200.

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 12 March 1920, p. 12, col. E.



whom they could exchange letters.<sup>33</sup> By fostering this personal connection, the programme encouraged donors to feel a sense of responsibility for the children of central Europe, while making it emotionally difficult for them to stop their contributions if the first flush of pity waned.

Through these and other publicity methods, SCF crafted a powerful rationale for Britons to look beyond the boundaries of the United Kingdom at a time when the retreat into domesticity appeared not just tempting but fully justified. The post-war challenges of xenophobia and public distrust of internationalism, it should be stressed, did indeed constrain the nascent organization. These forces pushed Jebb and Buxton to retreat from Fight the Famine's broader mission to inspire democratic forms of political co-operation to a less controversial focus on child relief. Yet their championing of the apolitical figure of a child-in-need helped the society to create an effective international appeal that largely managed to avoid the thorns of nationalism that so ensnared other aid organizations of the era.<sup>34</sup>

SCF's concern with children should not, therefore, be taken as a reflection of the most pressing humanitarian need after the First World War, but rather as a calculated choice that allowed Jebb and Buxton to continue advocating for British engagement with Europe into the 1920s. Yet the analysis should not end there, for SCF's focus did still more. It allowed the organization to expand the notion of British humanitarian responsibility to encompass not just relief but reconstruction. The figure of the needy child formed the centrepiece of a larger conception of nationhood that placed Britain at the forefront of inter-war efforts to promote lasting peace through constructive nation-building.

Although Jebb and Buxton first styled SCF as a temporary, crisis-oriented organization, the fund soon extended its mandate to include a number of social problems that required a deeper investment of time and money. The inaugural issue of *The Record*, for instance, drew attention to issues of overcrowding and inadequate sanitation in parts of Slovakia and Ruthenia,

<sup>33</sup> See the description of the scheme in *The Record*, i (Nov. 1920), 45. SCF was not the first organization to use this type of personalized fundraising technique – Barnardo's, for instance, had developed a similar 'godparents' scheme in the early 1900s, although it did not, to my knowledge, provide contact details for individual children.

<sup>34</sup> As John Hutchinson and Heather Jones have shown, hostile forms of wartime nationalism severely limited the effectiveness of pre-existing relief organizations like the Red Cross (J. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, Colo., 1996); H. Jones, 'International or transnational? Humanitarian action during the First World War', *European Review of History*, xvi (2009), 697–713).

where whole families ‘herded together in one-room shanties, in the utmost promiscuity, with pigs, rabbits and fowls’. These degraded conditions, ‘both symptomatic and productive of a low state of mentality and a fatal lack of initiative’, ran deeper than the war, and if not corrected would continue to hold the region in a suspended, backward state. The magazine prepared its readers for a long-term commitment in central and eastern Europe, arguing that Britons, as citizens of a more ‘enlightened’ and prosperous country, were well equipped to tackle these deficiencies. The ultimate goal of SCF was not only to save children but to revive communities as well, a task that it would accomplish by funding local education and employment initiatives.<sup>35</sup> As Jebb noted, without this larger vision the organization’s relief efforts were bound to fail, for they would ‘only have kept children alive one year to die the next’.<sup>36</sup>

In this focus on collective uplift through community-based projects and ‘professional interference’, SCF was tapping into a well-established philanthropic discourse that can be traced back to the late Victorian period.<sup>37</sup> Following on the heels of Charles Booth’s and Seebohm Rowntree’s landmark structural analyses of urban poverty, early twentieth-century British philanthropists increasingly viewed destitution as the product of breakdowns in the economic or political fabric of society rather than the fruit of individual moral failings.<sup>38</sup> Armed with the new expertise being generated within the emerging fields of sociology and social work, reformers strove to classify and correct the structures that trapped successive generations of families in poverty. This novel science of charity supported both an expanded ethic of collective responsibility and a greater optimism about charitable intervention. It was up to those who had succeeded among the pressures of modern life to help the less fortunate to develop the qualities and skills they needed to attain prosperity.

SCF’s call for all Britons to dedicate themselves to easing the burdens of the poor was, therefore, in line with the philanthropic currents of the period. The organization went further, however, than others of its ilk by proposing that this ethic was not confined to the nation or empire. Charity might begin at home, it argued, but it should not end there. In this respect, SCF was combining the principles of domestic reform with the broader,

<sup>35</sup> ‘The outlook’, *The Record*, i (Oct. 1920), 2–3.

<sup>36</sup> E. Jebb, ‘The Plight of Austria’, *The Times*, 8 Jan. 1921, p. 6, col. B.

<sup>37</sup> L. Lees, *The Solidarity of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700–1948* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 318.

<sup>38</sup> Lees, *Solidarity of Strangers*, pp. 231–93; J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1993); G. Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? The Historical Debate* (New York, 2004), pp. 199–224.

Wilsonian ideal – popular throughout western Europe in the years after the war – of creating peace and security through nation-building.<sup>39</sup> Yet while Woodrow Wilson's vision took a top-down approach that relied on co-ordinated state action through institutions like the League of Nations, SCF's was more populist, contending that Europe's rebirth depended to an equal or even greater extent on the initiative of private citizens.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, Jebb and other leading members of the fund acknowledged the importance of a strong government presence, but they were always careful to stress that the preferred method was to rely on the collective responsibility of individuals.<sup>41</sup> It was for that reason that SCF channelled money not through state agencies but to existing philanthropic associations on the ground, like the *Kinderfreund* Workers' Union in Germany and Austria, or the League of the Czech Red Heart.<sup>42</sup> The intent was to connect the commitment of British donors to the actions of European reformers already engaged in their own national renewal.

Within this mission to inspire ordinary Britons to dedicate themselves to the project of pan-European reconstruction, the vestiges of Fight the Famine Council's democratizing agenda lived on. Yet whereas the council had failed to strike a chord with the British public, SCF proved vastly more popular. By the summer of 1921, the London branch alone had grown to encompass over 170,000 direct subscribers – not including one-time donors – a figure that ranked it among the largest and most prominent British humanitarian organizations of the period.<sup>43</sup> Once again, the society's success in persuading the public to become involved in 'constructive as well as palliative' efforts across Europe can be attributed to its focus on the young.<sup>44</sup> Children had been at the heart of nation-building projects since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and there already existed a

<sup>39</sup> On the global appeal of Wilson's message, see E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> P. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain, and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–32* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Here again, the parallels to the objectives of the League of Nations Union are striking. On this emphasis within the LNU, see McCarthy, 'Democratizing British foreign policy'. The two organizations shared a direct connection through the figure of Lord Cecil, a patron of SCF and the driving force behind the LNU, yet the societies do not appear to have pursued any direct collaboration.

<sup>42</sup> For descriptions of these organizations, see *The Record*, i (Nov. 1920), 29.

<sup>43</sup> 'Save the Children Fund General Council', *The Record*, i (Aug. 1921), 301, 303. The largest international organization in Britain during the inter-war period was the League of Nations Union, which had 250,000 members by the mid 1920s, and which peaked in 1931 with 400,000 subscribers.

<sup>44</sup> Lord Weardale, 'The to-morrow of society', *The Record*, i (Dec. 1920), 33.

close association in the public mind between the strength of a people and the health of its children.<sup>45</sup> In part, this link had been forged through the rapid rise of maternalist and child rescue movements throughout Europe at the turn of the century, when reformers had sought to quell anxiety about depopulation and national decline by reclaiming sick or neglected children.<sup>46</sup> Trickier for the society, however, was the close connection between these pre-war maternalist initiatives and jingoistic forms of nationalism. Most Britons viewed child welfare as a domestic prerogative, and although there had been some attempts at holding pan-European child welfare congresses in the decades before the war, these meetings were designed mainly to exchange information that participants could then take back home to improve their national programmes.<sup>47</sup> SCF, in contrast, was seeking to shift the responsibility for child welfare more deeply into the international arena. Its claim was that Britons were personally obliged to promote the healthy development of children from other nations as much as they were their own.

To cultivate this internationalist ethic, SCF began by tapping into popular fears about the uncertain future of Europe following the destabilization of the war. Key supporters emphasized that the fund's focus on the young would give the British people greater control over the continent's fate. As Lord Weardale put it in December of 1920, children were the 'to-morrow of society', the 'raw material of the League of Nations'. SCF members should certainly care about the immediate needs of boys and girls, Weardale argued, but they should equally assist children in their journey towards becoming a 'father of the race, a citizen of the future'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, for the popular commentator Jerome K. Jerome, the fund's work was a clear matter of national security. As he reminded readers of *The Record* in early 1921: 'If we leave the children to starve – if we leave them to grow up stunted and

<sup>45</sup> H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate* (Bristol, 2003), pp. 19–86.

<sup>46</sup> *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. S. Koven and S. Michel (New York, 1993); J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900–39* (1980); D. Dwork, *War is Good for Babies and other Young Children: a History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898–1918* (New York, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> The one major exception was the 1913 International Congress for the Promotion of Child Welfare, which resolved to create an independent, international child welfare office in Brussels. The outbreak of the war delayed the initiative, however, and issues of national sovereignty led the British Foreign and Home Offices to oppose the plan throughout the early 1920s. The Brussels project thus never got off the ground. For a full discussion, see Marshall, 'The construction of children', pp. 110–20.

<sup>48</sup> Weardale, 'The to-morrow of society'.

diseased in mind and body, Europe will perish. And let us not in these islands hug to ourselves the consolation that to us it will not matter ... If Europe perishes we also perish'.<sup>49</sup> Through comments like these, Weardale, Jerome and other SCF advocates invoked the notion – common among backers of the league – that the war had tied the fortunes of Europeans more closely together. Isolation was not only futile but dangerous. Britons should thus consider international activism directed at children as a 'privilege', one that would enable them to steer the creation of the new world order.<sup>50</sup>

In a similar vein, SCF's early newspaper advertisements were careful to connect the needs of starving children to the plight of their families, communities and nations. Their adverts featured stark line drawings that focused on the icon of the 'stricken mother' – another figure closely associated with the nation – who appeared clutching a bundled infant or who was surrounded by her hungry young.<sup>51</sup> While the faces of the children in these illustrations tended to be obscured, the mothers were often depicted looking straight at the reader with expressions that ranged from beseeching to quiet judgement. Wordlessly, they pleaded with Britons to invest in their family's destiny.<sup>52</sup> Accompanying these images were excerpts of reports from SCF workers in the field that served to place the needs of children within a wider context of national destruction. In the first advertisements, these dispatches highlighted the refugee crisis created by Turkish attacks against Armenians in Asia Minor, where correspondents described a hunger so acute that some were forced into cannibalism.<sup>53</sup> By the end of 1920, the appeal shifted to the more familiar case of Austria, with a particular focus on its capital city of Vienna. There, the reports implied, inflation and continued scarcity had caused an even more poignant type of devastation in that it had reduced previously well-off families to utter ruin. 'Austria is dying', wrote the former war correspondent Philip Gibbs. Unless Britons joined SCF in stemming the 'national decay', the Austrian people were 'doomed beyond any hope of life' to become 'a morbid poison in the heart of Europe'.<sup>54</sup>

These evocative descriptions of ruined homes and families were all the more powerful because they echoed familiar themes that were concurrently coming to dominate the national media at home. In his study of the gendered

<sup>49</sup> J. K. Jerome, 'Lest we perish', *The Record*, i (Feb. 1921), 83.

<sup>50</sup> 'The outlook', p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> On the close connection between motherhood and nationalism across inter-war Europe, see M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's 20th Century* (New York, 1998), pp. 81–4.

<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, the advertisements in *The Times*, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 19, col. E; 5 May 1920, p. 6, col. C; as well as in *The Quiver*, Dec. 1921, advertising section.

<sup>53</sup> *The Times*, 1 Apr. 1920, p. 10, col. A.

<sup>54</sup> P. Gibbs, 'By Austria's deathbed: an impression of Vienna', *The Record*, i (May 1921), 200–1.

dimensions of the inter-war press, Adrian Bingham has demonstrated how popular papers like the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Herald* responded to the admission of women into the electorate by feminizing their political discourse. Editors began to employ an array of gendered images, such as a 'prudent housewife' or 'caring mother', that were designed to appeal to women voters who were, it was assumed, primarily concerned with issues of hearth and home.<sup>55</sup> The same iconography also influenced the publicity of the major political parties. As Laura Beers has argued, Labour's adept use of press advertisements invoking the plight of working-class families helped to legitimate the 1919 railway strike and broaden cross-class support for trade unionism in the early 1920s.<sup>56</sup> In its own press campaigns, SCF was thus invoking an established media language that presented national security and political progress as dependent upon the stability of home and family. The crucial difference was that the fund used these emotive appeals to steer readers' attention not to issues of metropolitan politics but to the international realm. Such representations helped the organization to forge new connections between the domestic concerns of the average British newspaper reader and those of their less well-off European counterparts.

Through the symbol of the child Jebb and other SCF leaders were able to retain an emphasis on constructive philanthropy and reparative nation-building even as they separated their work from the tense issue of war guilt. For advocates of internationalism, the figure of the child served a dual purpose. It transcended the political divisions of the war by highlighting the innocence and vulnerability of all young people, and it simultaneously evoked the struggles that confronted embattled European nations. SCF could thus pursue initiatives that aimed to sustain young lives regardless of social or ethnic background, alongside more broad-based programmes that used child welfare as a means to uplift national communities. Accordingly, in its early years, the fund supplied emergency rations and medical aid to children in nine European countries as well as in China in the wake of a devastating 1920 earthquake, but it also funded nation-building projects like domestic science centres, hospitals, teenage work apprenticeship programmes, and medical campaigns against tuberculosis and typhus.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, Jebb's and Buxton's decision to restrict their focus to children – a strategy first used to combat the British public's emotional retreat from Europe in the aftermath of the war – resulted in an expanded philanthropic

<sup>55</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, pp. 111–44.

<sup>56</sup> L. Beers, "'Is this man an anarchist?'" Industrial action and the battle for public opinion in interwar Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, lxxxii (2010), 30–60, esp. pp. 45–7.

<sup>57</sup> The various issues of *The Record* offer a comprehensive overview of these projects; see also Jebb's description in *Save the Child! A Posthumous Essay by Eglantyne Jebb* (1929), pp. 1–16.

mandate that encompassed both relief and reconstruction across Europe and farther afield.

By the end of its second year, SCF seemed successfully to have adapted its message to the cultural climate of post-war Britain. Nevertheless, while the fund's ideological focus on children helped to sway a significant portion of the public to adopt international engagement over isolation, the society was never able to escape completely the constraints of xenophobia and national antagonism. Indeed, as it embarked on its next major effort, the relief of the victims of the Russian famine, the organization encountered its strongest opposition yet. At the centre of the debate was SCF's dedication to using child welfare as a means of fortifying the wider community, for while the society's previous work had aimed to heal nations that lacked a strong state, the Bolshevik government appeared to be an active and coherent threat. These wider political concerns encroached on the public representation of SCF's work, and ultimately impelled its leadership to reconceptualize their mission once again. The result was a progressive shift away from nation-building as a core aim, and toward a more myopic vision that focused on the child to the exclusion of its larger community.

When the directors of the fund, working in conjunction with the American Relief Administration, the Red Cross and the Society of Friends, started sending food and medical supplies to Russia in the summer of 1921, the backlash began almost immediately.<sup>58</sup> The first wave of opposition was internal, coming from donors who worried that the new cause would distract from the organization's existing European programming. By October, the dissent was loud enough that the correspondent covering the annual meeting of the fund's Geneva branch for *The Record* was forced to admit sheepishly that 'on questions affecting Russia the atmosphere was – dare I say it? – a little electrical'.<sup>59</sup> Far more damaging, however, was the crusade waged against the fund by the *Daily Express*. From the winter of 1921 to the spring of 1922, the Beaverbrook paper argued that the society was going against Britain's national interest by strengthening a belligerent power. 'Every pound sent to Russia', it contended, freed the Bolshevik government of its duties and increased its 'ability to spread anarchy and ruin'.<sup>60</sup> Calling the fund's prioritization of Russian children over those of unemployed British families 'monstrous', it pleaded with readers to turn

<sup>58</sup> On this wider relief effort, see C. Williams, 'The 1921 Russian famine: centre and periphery responses', *Revolutionary Russia*, vi (1993), 277–314.

<sup>59</sup> H. Watson, 'The Stockholm conference', *The Record*, ii (Oct. 1921), p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> SCF archive, EJ 197, *Daily Express*, 18 March 1922.

their gaze back to the domestic realm.<sup>61</sup> ‘Let the Russians work out their own salvation’, the paper concluded bluntly.<sup>62</sup>

In a recent examination of SCF’s management of these critiques, Linda Mahood and Vic Satzewich have emphasized how the fund used inventive rhetorical strategies to maintain control of the public debate. From simple measures like limiting the use of the term ‘Bolshevik’ to more abstract techniques like presenting the famine as a natural disaster rather than the product of communist policies, the society’s publicity successfully persuaded Britons to keep giving. By the end of its first year in Russia, SCF had raised close to £500,000 for famine relief, which it was using to feed 300,000 children a day in 1,450 kitchens throughout Saratov, one of the hardest hit provinces.<sup>63</sup> Undoubtedly, this continued fundraising in the face of such concerted opposition was a considerable achievement. Yet SCF’s ability to meet the immediate relief crisis should not obscure the significant effects that this episode had on its ideology and practice in the longer run. The Russian campaign proved to be a turning point in the organization’s emerging ethic of internationalism, and in its aftermath, SCF took new steps to free its work from the contentious realm of politics. Throughout the 1920s, the fund retreated from its earlier nation-building mission in both its publicity and programming, a shift that ultimately served to disassociate the figure of the disadvantaged child from its larger social and cultural context.

The redirection of SCF’s public image began soon after the organization entered Russia. Reviving strategies first used to tackle the issue of German and Austrian war guilt, the fund assured its donors that direct assistance would go only to the most vulnerable and politically innocent members of society. As *The Record* stated in the autumn of 1921, the fund’s ‘first, last and only task can and must be the saving of children’, a claim its Council backed with a solemn pledge to leave Russia the ‘moment one farthing’s worth of food was diverted’ from the boys and girls for whom it was intended.<sup>64</sup> SCF also revised its accounting methods so that every contributing committee could ‘know exactly ... the number of children it is supporting, who they are and where they are – their very names and addresses if it so pleases’.<sup>65</sup> Although certain leaders of the fund, Jebb prominent among them, continued to insist that broader projects like agricultural development and disease prevention remained necessary, they now deflected the responsibility for these efforts

<sup>61</sup> SCF archive, EJ 197, *Daily Express*, 26 Nov. 1921.

<sup>62</sup> SCF archive, EJ 197, *Daily Express*, 15 Dec. 1921.

<sup>63</sup> Mahood and Satzewich, ‘Save the Children Fund’, p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> ‘On giving way to others: a word to workers and friends’, *The Record*, ii (Nov. 1921), 52; ‘Politics and charity’, *The Record*, ii (Oct. 1921), 20.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Cooperation true and false’, *The Record*, ii (Oct. 1921), 36.



to the European states and the League of Nations.<sup>66</sup> The result was to limit the moral obligation of the British public to the immediate relief of those who were politically neutral. As *The Record* repeatedly pointed out, children – like the fund – were not political actors.

At the same time, the organization began to drop its prior focus on parents and families. Whereas earlier feature articles in *The Record* had frequently included vignettes recounting the shame felt by needy parents at their inability to help their young, from 1921 onward these appeals were more likely to portray the beneficiaries of SCF care as orphans. This change in representation, although subtle, helped to remove the children's links to the messier and politically sensitive realm of the wider community.<sup>67</sup> It literally wrote parental claims out of the picture, leaving donors with a more comforting image of the child as a universal figure, one who lacked a clear national context and thus could belong to anyone.<sup>68</sup>

Another tactic that had similar results was to concentrate more overtly on children's physical pain. SCF had never been shy about using vivid descriptions of anguish to shock the public into sympathy. Yet from the period of the Russian campaign onward, its publicity grew increasingly graphic in its depiction of bodily suffering. A full-page advertisement in *The Saturday Review*, for instance, included a cable from Saratov that described children 'clothed in vile rags, full of vermin, and totally inadequate in this bitter weather, their bodies shrunken and distorted almost beyond recognition, their hands like the claws of some grotesque bird, their arms and legs like the limbs of skeletons and their faces wrinkled and wizened'. Another section called attention to the 'terrible and gruesome' consequences of the famine, citing that 'one tiny girl, four years old, HAD ONLY HALF HER FACE LEFT, the other half having fallen away'.<sup>69</sup> Misery this extensive, the accounts stressed, not only destroyed the spirit of childhood – making

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, 'On giving way to others'.

<sup>67</sup> The origin of this tendency within late Victorian child rescue iconography is explored in L. Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Compare, for instance, two articles on China that are representative of this shift. The first, written on the eve of the Russian campaign, emphasized the dire situation of 'Mrs. L', a destitute but loving mother who had lost five of her children to starvation. The second, published in the midst of the *Daily Express* controversy, focused on the figure of 'Kim', a 'dirty, ragged unkempt little beggar boy', whose parents' death left him at the mercy of a neglectful and abusive Chinese woman. While 'Mrs. L' received assistance that allowed her to continue caring for her child, 'Kim' was taken in by a Christian missionary who, the article reported, was 'already calling him Papa' (B. Y. Wong, 'Waiting for death', *The Record*, i (May 1921), 179–80; W. P. Pailing, 'Kim: a picture of famine relief in China', *The Record*, ii (Dec. 1921), 91–2).

<sup>69</sup> *Saturday Review*, 26 Nov. 1921, p. 623.

these boys and girls ‘wrinkled and wizened’, old before their time – it also ravaged their developing bodies, producing a misshapen, inhuman form. Although this advertisement was one of the last also to include a picture of a mother holding her wasted child, the ideological focus of the publicity had changed, for the effect of such descriptions was to define the consequences of starvation in terms that applied only to children. While a parent might feel the pangs of hunger, these adverts implied, only their son or daughter would lose the core elements of their humanity.

In one respect, there was nothing particularly original about SCF’s growing focus on what *The Record* called ‘the lure of the suffering child’.<sup>70</sup> As Thomas Lacqueur has argued, exacting, almost scientific descriptions of physical pain had been a fundamental part of the ‘humanitarian narrative’ since the eighteenth century, largely because they helped to expose the social causes of distress, making ameliorative action seem possible.<sup>71</sup> For SCF, this focus on the devastation that starvation wrought on children’s bodies opened a space for discussing the practical steps that could be taken to make young Europeans whole again. It is no surprise, then, that the fund simultaneously began to stress its connection to the emerging ‘science of childhood’, which tended to define relief in terms of targeted nutritional and medical interventions, such as calorie supplements and immunizations, that would guide a malnourished child back to health.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, SCF’s use of this graphic, child-centric publicity *was* unprecedented in that it was deployed through the channels of an expanding mass media, which ensured that this imagery had a larger audience and greater impact than ever before. Technological advances, such as the growing use of photography by the press during the early 1920s, also increased the fund’s ability to drive home its message. Following the Russian campaign, SCF began to replace the drawings of sorrowing mothers that had featured so prominently in its publicity with stark photographs of emaciated, solitary, and sometimes nude boys and girls.<sup>73</sup> While the hand-drawn sketches had allowed donors to project themselves or their families onto the image, the photographs were more immediate. They instantly directed the viewer’s

<sup>70</sup> A. Leggatt, ‘The lure of the suffering child’, *The Record*, iii (Third Quarter, 1922), 57–8.

<sup>71</sup> T. Lacqueur, ‘Bodies, details, and the humanitarian narrative’, in *The New Cultural History*, ed. L. Hunt (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), pp. 176–204.

<sup>72</sup> M. E. Sadler, ‘The science of childhood’, *The Record*, iii (Apr. 1923), 134–7. On this larger trend, see P. Weindling, ‘From sentiment to science: children’s relief organizations and the problem of malnutrition in inter-war Europe’, *Disasters*, xviii (1994), 203–12; Rooke and Schnell, “‘Uncramping child life’”.

<sup>73</sup> See especially the examples in *The Record*, ii (Nov. 1921), 52, 73; (Dec. 1921), 83, 94, 107, 108; (June 1922), 280, 296, among many others.

attention to the precise physical ailments of the victim, and prompted an exclusive identification with the child in the photo. The consequence of this turn to photography was to restrict the possible meanings that donors could glean from a fundraising campaign. Increasingly, the fund was calling on Britons to sympathize with a specific, archetypal child, rather than with a larger community or nation as a whole.<sup>74</sup>

The greatest expression, however, of this new tendency to isolate the needs of the young from their cultural and national contexts was the development of the concept of children's rights. Jebb first began envisioning the document that would become the Declaration on the Rights of the Child in the summer of 1922, when the attacks against SCF still raged in the press, and when some within the organization were pushing for an exclusive focus on domestic initiatives. She viewed it primarily as a propaganda move, hoping that the act of defining a number of universal principles for child welfare would reaffirm the public's commitment to internationalism.<sup>75</sup> The resulting declaration, ratified by the League of Nations in 1924, was purposefully broad. It consisted of just five points that outlined the child's right to food, shelter and medical attention, to education, and to freedom from exploitation. Crucially, as Murray Last has noted, it also defined the 'principle of first call', which stated that the young should receive priority in relief over adults.<sup>76</sup> As other historians have noted, the document that thus enshrined a 'new status for childhood' as an object of international responsibility<sup>77</sup> simultaneously set children 'apart as both a special and a separate moral category'.<sup>78</sup> The young no longer appeared as social beings whose healthy development was intimately connected to that of their community. Rather, they were culturally isolated figures, whose salvation could come at the expense of their nation as a whole.

Charting these twists and turns in the emerging ideology of SCF in the aftermath of the war helps to illustrate a number of larger issues. First, this case study demonstrates the important but often overlooked point that popular internationalism remained a vibrant part of British cultural life during the early 1920s. Non-state actors like SCF provided

<sup>74</sup> For a stimulating discussion of the role of photographs in crafting the meaning of child welfare, see S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 88–139.

<sup>75</sup> Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action*, p. 194.

<sup>76</sup> M. Last, 'Putting children first', *Disasters*, xviii (1994), 192–202.

<sup>77</sup> Marshall, 'Construction of children', p. 104.

<sup>78</sup> Last, 'Putting children first', p. 193.

an opportunity for ordinary Britons to engage personally in the broader cause of international humanitarianism, and offered a salient, alternative image of British nationhood that prioritized empathetic collaboration over xenophobia and isolationism.<sup>79</sup> Yet the example also sheds light on the instrumental role of the mass media in determining the character and content of internationalism as it emerged in the aftermath of the First World War. In seeking to cultivate an outward-looking sentiment among the British public, the leaders of SCF were forced to grapple with both the promise and restrictions of the popular press. While the inter-war media provided a powerful tool to reach new audiences, it also served as a font for inflamed public passions, whether in the guise of lingering anger over war guilt or fears of Bolshevism. These feelings took their toll, delimiting the boundaries of the possible, and forcing the organization to narrow its mission from one of constructive nation-building to a more singular focus on child relief.

Finally, understanding the impact of this inter-war dynamic on the early work of SCF is important because the society's method of promoting international child-centred humanitarianism proved so long lasting. The fund's status as the recognized leader in the field ensured the survival of its most prominent techniques. Charities today still routinely quantify the value of a child's life in terms of 'the price of a cup of coffee', and all too frequently use graphic, dehumanizing pictures of suffering children to jolt viewers into sympathy.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the trend toward focusing donors' attention on individual children rather than their communities has been taken to a new level by the internet. Online contributors to influential organizations like World Vision can now specify the exact child they want to assist by using a drop-down menu to specify their gender, age, birth date, nationality and HIV status. Such techniques may be effective at stimulating sentiment, yet their effect is both to isolate the needs of children from the complex realities underlying their situation and to value one segment of the population over humanity as a whole. They remain a trenchant reminder that although the antagonisms of the First World War have long since run their course, their legacy remains.

<sup>79</sup> In this respect, SCF played a similar role in the inter-war period to that of NGOs in the post-1945 era, shaping 'the way society perceives itself, conceptualizes its problems, and selects the solutions with which to address them' (*NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945*, ed. J. McKay and M. Hilton (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 3).

<sup>80</sup> This latter practice was abandoned by SCF in the 1980s, but remains prominent among other child welfare societies. For a comparison of the late 20th-century image policies of SCF and Barnardo's, see Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 134–9.

## 8. ‘Mending a broken world’: the universities and the nation, 1918–36

*Tamson Pietsch*

On 4 July 1921, the chancellors and rectors of the universities of the United Kingdom, together with delegates from their sister institutions across the British empire, sat down to lunch at the Savoy Hotel. They were gathered in London to attend the second Congress of the Universities of the British Empire, scheduled to begin the following day in Oxford. Proposing the toast on behalf of the government, the former Conservative prime minister and foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, reflected on the dramatic events that had elapsed since the previous congress in 1912. In those nine years, he suggested,

had been crowded and compressed changes the magnitude of which no man living – none even of the learned thinkers whom it is my privilege to address – can as yet estimate. Nobody can tell how great is the change which this deflection of civilized development has produced in the social elements of the world; nobody can tell whether it has hurried changes which were in any case inevitable, or whether it has modified in any profound sense the character of those changes. The work of estimating its magnitude falls, and must fall inevitably, to the historian, and to him alone. But we can see quite plainly each one of us, within our own experience, how the world has been shaken by the vast catastrophe of the Great War.<sup>1</sup>

Though not yet sure of its meaning, Balfour and his contemporaries nonetheless sensed that the world that had emerged from the war of 1914–18 was very different to that which had existed before it.

And for those at the 1921 congress, it was the universities that seemed especially changed. In his opening address, Lord Curzon – then foreign secretary and chancellor at Oxford – had gone so far as to assert that no institutions had been ‘more profoundly affected [by the war] than the older universities’. During the conflict they had been emptied; Oxford had become a ‘quasi-military camp’ and a hospital for the wounded; the pens

<sup>1</sup> Balfour, in *Second Congress of the Universities of the Empire 1921: Report of Proceedings*, ed. A. Hill (1921), p. xviii.

of its writers were turned to 'informing the public mind'; the brains of its 'men of science' directed to research that had a material effect upon the conduct of the war. 'Can it be imagined', asked Curzon, 'that four years of this experience did not leave an enduring impression both upon the life of the University and upon the mind of the State?'<sup>2</sup> In the years after the peace, compulsory Greek was abolished and women were admitted into full membership of the university; the principle of state aid was accepted, and for a time student numbers nearly doubled.<sup>3</sup> For dons unused to change, this indeed was a brave new world.

It was a new world in which Curzon believed the universities had a vital role. For it was 'not so much on paper conventions or signed documents, or even on political combinations' that he thought the future peace would depend, but rather on the 'growing commerce of knowledge and ideas ... the drawing together of the minds and consciences of educated and thoughtful men'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this notion of the universities' central role in building the post-war world infused discussion at the 1921 congress. Delegates from universities across Britain and the empire struggled to come to terms with the impact of its immense social and cultural transformations wrought upon their own institutions, and at the same time they strove to find ways to heal the ruptures created by the conflict. As J. C. Irvine, professor of chemistry and principal of the University of St. Andrew's, put it, 'we came here not to carry back cut-and-dried curricula, but to measure and appreciate the forces which are operating around us, to find means to satisfy the highest aspirations of our fellow men, and to strive to mend a broken world'.<sup>5</sup>

But the organization to which the universities turned to lead them in this task was one shaped by the methods and mindset of the old world. Founded at the first Congress of the Universities of the British Empire in 1912, the Universities' Bureau of the British Empire had been designed to act as 'an organ for the purpose of continuing [the] communication of knowledge and comparison of varied experience' between the universities of the British empire begun at that meeting.<sup>6</sup> Governed by a committee consisting of seven 'Home' and seven 'overseas' (British Dominion) university representatives, for its first six years the bureau was funded entirely by the subscriptions of its member institutions. Its early life had been promising: it rented a

<sup>2</sup> Curzon, in *Second Congress*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Curzon, in *Second Congress*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Curzon, in *Second Congress*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Irvine, in *Second Congress*, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> MacAlister (principal of the University of Glasgow) at the first congress in 1912, quoted in E. Ashby, *Community of Universities: an Informal Portrait of the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth, 1913-63* (1963), p. 10.

room in the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, published the first edition of the *Yearbook* (which provided in one volume information about the courses, entrance requirements and staff of all the universities of the British empire) and began planning a second congress. The war seriously curtailed its growth, but it limped through, sustained largely by the efforts of its honorary secretary, Alex Hill – also principal of the University College of Southampton – and emerged in 1918 as the only formal association of universities in the country.<sup>7</sup> Transfused by a one-off grant of £5,000 from the Board of Education, in the aftermath of the war the bureau sprang to new life. It incorporated under the Companies Act and gained a constitution, established and then administered the UK Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and looked to its members – both in Britain and overseas – to fund its operational costs. By 1919 Alex Hill could write, ‘In a very much larger sense than heretofore the Bureau is now recognized by the Board of Education, the Treasury, the Foreign Office, and the other Government Departments as their medium of communication with the Universities’.<sup>8</sup> But despite this new role at home, its aims and objects remained firmly imperial in scope.<sup>9</sup> For, as far as the bureau was concerned, these domestic activities were part of its broader imperial mission. When, therefore, the British university representatives at the congress in 1921 turned to the bureau to help them meet the post-war challenge, they turned to an organization concerned with a very expansive definition of the British nation; one imbued with Edwardian notions of closer imperial union.

For scholars of inter-war Britain the story of the bureau and the congresses is therefore an important one. In the midst of social and economic upheaval, the universities looked back to the certainties of an earlier period. They asserted their continuing role as institutions that trained the nation’s political leaders, and in taking up the mantra of efficiency and turning to the bureau as their collective voice, they invoked an older articulation of the nation that reached out to include the universities of the British empire as well as those of the United Kingdom. This was an expansive nation for which the Universities’ Bureau served both as expression and vehicle, and the ways that it found to deal with the new challenges of the period – mass democracy and the role of the state, science, centralization and the new internationalism – reflected its own expansive constitution. Fundamentally

<sup>7</sup> Ashby, *Community of Universities*, pp. 10–16.

<sup>8</sup> University of Melbourne Archives (hereafter UMA), Registrar’s Correspondence, UM312/1920/444, Hill to the Melbourne registrar, 22 Nov. 1919.

<sup>9</sup> University of Sydney Archives (hereafter USA), Registrar’s General Subject Files, G3/13/723, ‘The Universities of the British Empire Memorandum and Articles of Association, 1921’.

it was in improving access horizontally, across space, rather than vertically, among the people, that the bureau and the universities believed their unique contribution to nation-building lay in the years after the Great War.

Yet the activities of the Universities' Bureau and the deliberations of its congresses have received little historical attention, and the expansive vision of the nation that they articulated between the wars has been lost to view.<sup>10</sup> Despite a vigorous interest in the social and cultural history of British academia, historians since the Second World War have been slower to take up questions associated with its imperial and global dimensions.<sup>11</sup> This has reflected a wider historiographical shift in which, from the 1960s on, historians in Britain and its former colonies turned away from older accounts of a connected imperial story and instead emphasized the national dimensions of the empire's various cultures and communities.<sup>12</sup> With its records destroyed during Second World War bombing, the bureau – itself rebranded in 1963 as the Association of Commonwealth Universities – dropped off the radar of British and imperial historians alike. But in the context of recent historiography, which sees transnational forces and trans-border connections as crucial to the construction of the nation, the time is surely ripe for historians to reconsider the bureau's story.<sup>13</sup> By turning to the correspondence held in the archives of universities across the Commonwealth and by examining the printed *Records of Proceedings* of the four inter-war congresses this chapter seeks to reconstruct its archive in order to bring to light the nature of the world that it tried to bring about in the period between the wars.

### ***Democracy and the state***

For the delegates at the 1921 congress, chief among the most urgent issues facing the universities were the new claims of mass democracy. The 'tide of democracy [is] ... flowing in', declared R. B. Haldane opening the session

<sup>10</sup> The only real examination of the bureau is Eric Ashby's 1963 'memoir', *Community of Universities*.

<sup>11</sup> See A. H. Halsey and M. A. Trow, *The British Academics* (1971); A. H. Halsey, *Decline of Donnish Dominion* (Oxford, 1995); R. Anderson, *Universities and Elites in Britain since 1800* (Cambridge, 1992) and *British Universities Past and Present* (2006); L. Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., A. P. Newton, *The Universities and Educational Systems of the Empire* (1924) or R. A. Dallen, *The University of Sydney: its History and Progress* (Sydney, 1925), as compared to S. Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons: Cambridge and Society in Victorian England* (1963) or R. J. W. Selleck, *The Shop: the University of Melbourne 1850–1939* (Melbourne, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., I. R. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (Basingstoke, 2007); C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004); *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. A. M. Burton (Durham, NC, 2003).



on ‘adult education’; ‘it is lapping round the bases of our institutions, and to-day it is lapping round the foundations of our Universities’:

All over the world those who work with their hands are calling for the higher education. Without that knowledge they feel that they cannot be free, that they are held back by fetters of ignorance from liberty to solve their own social problems ... There is a class division in knowledge which goes deeper down than any other class division I know, and it is that sense of class division that is producing most of the unrest in the industrial world that we see to-day. It is knowledge that will solve your problems far better than the thrusting of ramrods into delicate works, and I think that that is the feeling which is beginning to take hold of the democracy itself just as strongly as it has taken hold of the intellectuals. Well, ladies and gentlemen, if that be so, we have to recognize this craving for spiritual freedom.<sup>14</sup>

Haldane’s words betrayed an anxiety that lurked just beneath the surface of much congress discussion. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 had tripled the size of the electorate by dramatically widening the suffrage and Haldane’s talk of ramrods reflected a wider concern among the delegates about what this would mean for British society. ‘We have become aware’, said the University of Bristol’s professor of history, George H. Leonard, speaking after Haldane, ‘of a thirsty world of men and women ... newly conscious of their powers’.<sup>15</sup>

But despite these pronouncements, the universities saw their role in the new world as less about answering the demands of the newly enfranchised electorate and more about shaping the character of those who would lead them.<sup>16</sup> Though moulding the nation’s leaders had long been the task of the universities in Britain, in the aftermath of the war it seemed to take on a new importance. In the face of the destructive capacities of technology and mechanization made evident by the conflict, Arthur Smithells, professor of chemistry at the University of Leeds, argued that university ‘teachers should stand shoulder to shoulder against all the forces that tend to the vitiation of the atmosphere of education and the desecration of our temples of learning’.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the chancellor of the University of St Andrew’s, asserted that ‘all young men standing on the threshold of their careers in life’, and especially those who would specialize – in science or in business – needed the ‘humanizing life of a University with its variety of individuals and interests and its broadening influence on the

<sup>14</sup> Haldane, in *Second Congress*, p. 126.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard (professor of history at the University of Bristol), in *Second Congress*, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> This approach echoes the response of some cultivated elites to the rise of the mass media as discussed by D. L. LeMahieu in *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Smithells, in *Second Congress*, p. 198.

formation of character'; for only at a university would these members of the rising elite 'acquire the breadth of mind which [would] enable [them] better to understand the problems of life, and to acquire the power of applying the principles of liberal culture to the subjects of [their] every-day occupation'.<sup>18</sup> The universities thus saw education in character as a vital corrective to the newly formalized workplace, not just for industrial workers, as Ussishkin points out elsewhere in this volume, but also for those in the professions, business and science. It was thus not as educators of the newly enfranchised masses, but rather as institutions extending old world values to Britain's new economic and social elites, that the universities initially saw themselves.

For although the government made attempts to close the 'class division in knowledge' at a secondary school level with the 1918 Education Acts, the universities in Britain were largely unwilling to open their doors to 'the democracy'. Their efforts in this direction were for the most part restricted to the field of adult education, and even then they did not see the work of adult and working-class education as best being done within their own walls. 'We cannot bring the democracy into the Universities because the Universities would be swamped' portended Haldane in 1921; 'They cannot come to us', argued Leonard, 'they are too shy'.<sup>19</sup> Instead what was advocated was the 'sending forth' of 'more trained teachers into the highways and byways and into the central places ... where the population has congregated and where the University atmosphere needs to be provided'.<sup>20</sup> This was the 'missionary' pattern of adult education established before the war, when University Extension Committees – mostly from Oxford, Cambridge and London – provided lecturers and teaching at Workers' Educational Associations (WEAs) and other centres across the country. After the war this earlier pattern of adult education was extended rather than reformed, with universities across the country significantly expanding their 'extra-mural' activity and working in concert with the WEA and other centres. Therefore, despite the lofty pronouncements of congress delegates in 1921, it was not the universities or the bureau that took up advocacy on the question of educating 'the democracy' in this period, but rather a variety of other extra-university organizations, including the WEA, the Department of Adult Education, the Young Men's Christian Association and other voluntary and working men's colleges.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Lord Balfour of Burleigh, in *Second Congress*, p. 239.

<sup>19</sup> Haldane, in *Second Congress*, p. 128; Leonard, in *Second Congress*, p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Haldane, in *Second Congress*, p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the history of adult education, see T. Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (Liverpool, 1970); Goldman, *Dons and Workers*; H. McCarthy, 'Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in interwar Britain', *Historical Journal*, 1 (2007), 891–912.

However, though the universities sidestepped the issue of widening admission, the ‘advent of democracy’ did foreshadow a new relationship for them with the state. For, in the wake of the war, the universities found themselves under real financial strain. Large numbers of returned soldiers had flooded in, demanding accommodation, teaching and new approaches to both. With nowhere else to turn the exhausted universities looked to government to assist them, making new sorts of arguments about their contribution, not just to the war effort, but also to what professor of engineering and principal of the University of Edinburgh, J.A. Ewing, began to call Britain’s ‘system of national education’.<sup>22</sup> As Ewing also pointed out, accepting the government’s money would entail new forms of accountability: ‘if they make a claim on the State’, the universities must also admit ‘that they have a duty to the State’.<sup>23</sup>

What this duty might mean, however, was less clear, and universities feared the surrender of their independence. They were worried that money from the government might carry unacceptable conditions and compromise their autonomy, and some congress delegates suggested that the bureau might serve as a collective association to protect them from state intrusion.<sup>24</sup> Yet in reality the receipt of government grants was something that, like adult education, was stimulated though not created by the war.<sup>25</sup> The newer universities had been receiving ad hoc government grants since the end of the nineteenth century and various committees had been instituted during this period to negotiate and agitate for their continuation. Indeed, the need to improve radically the pre-war system of state aid lay behind the meeting in 1918 in which, rallied by a letter from Alan Kidd (an officer at the Board of Education) to Sir William McCormick (the chair of the board’s pre-war Advisory Committee on University Grants), representatives from thirty-two British universities and colleges made a deputation that led to the establishment of the University Grants Committee (UGC).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ewing, in *Second Congress*, p. 305.

<sup>23</sup> Ewing, in *Second Congress*, p. 305.

<sup>24</sup> See J. G. Adami (vice-chancellor of the University of Liverpool), in *Second Congress*, pp. 308–14; M. E. Sadler (vice-chancellor of the University of Leeds), in *Second Congress*, p. 330; University of Toronto Archives (hereafter UTA), Office of the President, A1967-0007/Box 58/68, ‘Report of Committee submitted to the Universities Conference, London, March 26, 1920’.

<sup>25</sup> K. Vernon, *Universities and the State in England, 1850–1939* (Abingdon, 2004), p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> Haldane, in *Second Congress*, p. 126. These grants had been made on a case by case basis, and the considerable tensions between the Treasury, the Board of Education and the Department of Agriculture – all of which took responsibility for distributing monies – had made this a complicated and messy process. Emergency arrangements during the war had only added to the confusion and further highlighted the need for some national system (see C. H. Shinn, *Paying the Piper: the Development of the University Grants Committee 1919–46* (1986), pp. 27–54).

Designed as a body that would advise the government on the provision of grants, and populated by individuals who, though not permitted to hold university appointments, nonetheless knew them well, the UGC emerged as a mechanism that allayed the universities' fears about interference. Chaired by the genial McCormick, throughout the inter-war period it issued block grants to institutions to spend as they wished, just as the committee itself received annually a block grant from the government.<sup>27</sup> The UGC thus allowed state support to be given to the universities while permitting them the autonomy they prized. In doing so it obviated the need for the bureau to take on any formal lobbying or representational role.

Yet the question of universities and their 'relations with the State' was nevertheless one that seriously occupied the bureau, not least because it was – as Haldane himself acknowledged – an issue in which the British settler universities were considerably experienced. They had, after all, as the University of Toronto's principal, Robert Falconer, was keen to point out in 1921, long drawn large financial support from their governments. The bureau dedicated sessions at congresses throughout the period to discussion of the topic, highlighting the experience of settler universities in order to allay the fears that some English delegates – especially in the early years – still felt about state intervention.<sup>28</sup> In 1921, the bureau chose Robert Stout – chancellor of the University of New Zealand – to chair the session on university finance, and for the 1926 congress it asked the Australian universities to present papers based on their experience of 'the effect upon university work of State control, or co-operation'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, at this last meeting, in response to Balfour's expression of his fear of the 'natural and pardonable instinct on the part of the State to control and supervise the working of an institution which it is doing so much to support', representatives from universities across the Commonwealth rallied in defence of government funding.<sup>30</sup> By the 1930s the nature of congress discussion had shifted significantly and debates over funding were characterized not so much by fear of state interference as by frustration at state frugality. For at the 1931 and 1936 congresses, pressed by the Great Depression and perhaps soothed by the representations of the settler institutions, the universities in England found that they had good reason to support the bureau's efforts to promote a language that legitimated state funding.

<sup>27</sup> Shinn, *Paying the Piper*, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> See T. Morison (vice-chancellor of the University of Durham and principal of Armstrong College), in *Third Congress of the Universities of the Empire 1926: Report of Proceedings*, ed. A. Hill (1926), p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Stout, in *Second Congress*, p. 290; UMA, Registrar's Correspondence, UM312/1926/147, Hill to the Melbourne registrar, 25 Jan. 1926.

<sup>30</sup> Balfour, in *Second Congress*, p. 5; Ashby, *Community of Universities*, p. 44.

### ***Science and specialization***

As well as highlighting their role as training grounds of the nation’s new elites, the universities also justified their receipt of these government grants by pointing to the particular contributions they made to practical science. As the Liberal politician and chancellor of the University of Sheffield, Lord Crewe, argued in 1921, the ‘Universities, old and new, exist because they satisfy the needs of the country, moral, intellectual, and practical; and the nature of the teaching they supply is conditioned by those needs’.<sup>31</sup> In the brave new world it was not just the leaders of the new democracy but also its economy that the universities must serve. For by the time of the second congress, the pre-war debate about the place of science in the university had been sidelined and discussion turned instead on the extent to which it should be balanced by other ‘humane’ subjects.<sup>32</sup> The Oxford classicist and rector of Exeter College, L. R. Farnell, wanted only to award first-class degrees to students who took Latin or Greek, while numerous others, as we have seen, argued for the importance of maintaining a balance between scientific and humanistic studies in order to counter the ‘materialistic bent of the present age’.<sup>33</sup> But the Great War had been, as the president of the Board of Education, H. A. L. Fisher, observed in 1919, ‘in a sense [as] never before equalled, a war of science’, and it was widely recognized that the new world would be one built by science as well.

Indeed, a significant number of the delegates at the 1921 meeting had themselves been involved in scientific war work. Among them, R. W. Brock had served as a geologist in the Palestine campaign, the physicist Ernest Rutherford had led the British programme in submarine detection and, at St. Andrew’s, J. C. Irvine and his Department of Chemistry had produced bacteriological sugars for the army medical services and undertaken research for the chemical warfare department. Looking over the list of those delegates with war service, the colonial backgrounds of many of them is striking: Brock was from British Columbia, and Rutherford had trained in New Zealand; from McGill, H. S. Birkett raised, equipped and staffed the No. 3 Canadian General Military Hospital which served in France for the duration of the war; and A. J. Clark – who had been the professor of pharmacology in Cape Town – worked in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

<sup>31</sup> Crewe-Milnes, in *Second Congress*, p. 186. The marquess of Crewe was the chancellor of the University of Sheffield and chairman of the governing body of the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

<sup>32</sup> For an example of the pre-war discussion, see R. B. Haldane in ‘Official Report of the Allied Colonial Universities Conference’, ed. C. Kinloch Cooke, *Empire Review*, vi (1903), 119; Crewe-Milnes, in *Second Congress*, p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> Farnell, Cecil. H. Desch, Principal Herambachandra Maitra, Professor Pramathanath Banerjea and Professor F. W. Burstall, in *Second Congress*, pp. 230, 15, 26, 47, 95.

Theirs were just some of the significant contributions that Roy Macleod has argued colonial scientists made to the war effort.<sup>34</sup> Seen during the war as evidence of the close ties that bound the British empire together, in 1921 Toronto's Principal Falconer also seemed to imply that there might have been another reason for the strength of the colonial contribution to wartime science. For, reliant on government grants voted to them by local parliaments which were elected by a franchise much wider than that in Britain, from the 1880s the colonial universities had been forced, as Falconer put it, to '[adjust] themselves to the emergent needs of their own localities', developing the schools of engineering, applied science, medicine and commerce demanded by rapidly growing colonial communities. In the process these universities had 'learned new methods of instruction and added new departments which may seem strange to this country [England]' where, despite some developments in the Edwardian period, applied science remained something viewed sceptically by the universities.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, when the war came it was in the colonial and Scottish universities as well as British industry that a good deal of the relevant scientific and technological expertise was to be found.

With the inadequacies of university science in England highlighted by the war, the period following the conflict was one characterized by much discussion about how best to rectify the situation. The government led the way, establishing in 1915 the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and encouraging the rapid development – as at Oxford – of provision in the universities for science and research.<sup>36</sup> But at the bureau and at the congresses anxiety about what this might mean for institutions still attached to the notion of a liberal education translated into a concern over how it all was to be afforded. The answer proposed was articulated clearly by Robert Stout, vice-chancellor of the University of New Zealand: 'if you desire economy you must specialize in education. You cannot expect each University to undertake to teach all the subjects required for professional and industrial training'.<sup>37</sup> Public money and post-war austerity, so the argument went, meant that the universities needed to maximize their 'efficiency' – a word that rebounded in discussions throughout the period

<sup>34</sup> R. MacLeod, *Leverhulme Lectures*, Oxford, 2007, in preparation as *'The Scientist Goes to War': the Mobilisation and Direction of Allied Scientific Operations in Europe, 1914–19*. See also R. MacLeod, "'The arsenal in the Strand': Australian chemists and the British munitions effort, 1916–19", *Annals of Science*, xlv (1989), 45–67 and *Archibald Liversidge, FRS: Imperial Science under the Southern Cross* (Sydney, 2010), pp. 398–411.

<sup>35</sup> Falconer, in *Second Congress*, p. xxiii.

<sup>36</sup> J. Prest, 'The Asquith Commission', in *The History of the University of Oxford: viii, the 20th Century*, ed. B. Harrison (Oxford, 1994), pp. 27–44.

<sup>37</sup> Stout, in *Second Congress*, p. 292.

– by each institution specializing in a particular set of subjects which built upon what Lord Crewe called ‘its local advantages’; the natural, industrial or professional character of the region in which it was located.<sup>38</sup> As H. A. L. Fisher argued in 1922, ‘The expense of University education has become so great and the development of applied science ... has now reached such a point that I feel it is quite impossible for the nation, as a whole, to advance unless there is a much higher degree of co-operation between Universities in respect to the distribution of studies’.<sup>39</sup> These arguments were not just taken up by scientists. They also proved a boon to those like Farnell who wanted to protect the classical curriculum and privileges of Oxford and Cambridge. ‘Must there not be some distribution of functions’, he asked, ‘not only as between the old Universities and the new, but between the one or two old Universities and many of the new?’<sup>40</sup>

But as far as the bureau was concerned, the ‘nation, as a whole’ included the British settler colonies, and therefore the ‘distribution of studies’ should encompass colonial universities as well. ‘[T]he overseas Universities’, wrote Alex Hill to bureau members in 1922, quoting the Liberal politician and historian James Bryce’s comments at the 1912 congress, ‘offer special opportunities of studying certain branches of applied science, such, for example, as mining and forestry’.<sup>41</sup> Repeatedly placing the issue on the agendas of the newly instituted annual conferences of the universities of Great Britain and Ireland, as well as on the programmes of the congress meetings, the bureau also attempted to push the issue of specialization via an empire-wide information campaign. Beginning in 1922 it prepared annually a detailed report on the ‘Distribution of Subjects of Study to which exceptional attention is given in certain of the Universities and University Colleges of the United Kingdom’ and sent these to universities in Britain and the empire.<sup>42</sup> From 1926 this summary was expanded to include the specialist studies of the ‘Universities in the Dominions Overseas’ as well.<sup>43</sup> Thus, central to the universities’ sense of their role in building the new world after the war, was an older, expansive understanding of the nation that included within its borders the settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New

<sup>38</sup> Crewe, in *Second Congress*, p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> Fisher, quoted in USA, Registrar’s General Subject Files, G3/13/723, ‘Annual Conference of the Universities of Great Britain & Ireland 1922 Abridged Report of Proceedings’.

<sup>40</sup> Farnell, in *Second Congress*, p. 329.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, in USA, Registrar’s General Subject Files, G3/13/723, ‘Minutes of a Meeting of the Interchange Committee of the Bureau held May 12, 1922’.

<sup>42</sup> USA, Registrar’s General Subject Files, G3/13/723, ‘Copy of Draft report listing the Distribution of Groups of Subjects in the Universities and University Colleges of the United Kingdom’.

<sup>43</sup> UMA, Registrar’s Correspondence, UM312/1927/556, Hill to the Melbourne registrar, 5 March 1926.

Zealand and South Africa as well as England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. For it was by utilizing the dispersed educational resources of the British universities abroad as well as those at home that the Universities' Bureau thought the nation might most efficiently be served.

Yet for all its seeming virtues, this idea of institutional specialization raised two major stumbling blocks. The first had been identified long before the war when the issue had initially been brought up at the 1903 Allied Colonial Universities Conference – the progenitor of the later congresses. It concerned the problems of co-ordination between autonomous universities. Despite Bryce's protestations at that meeting that 'there is no idea present to the mind of any one of us of attempting in any way to circumscribe or to override the independence of each university', the erosion of autonomy implied by a rationalized system of institutional specialization was exactly what the universities were not prepared to countenance.<sup>44</sup> The second problem involved the mutual recognition of matriculation examinations – something needed to facilitate the movement of undergraduates from one institution to another. While a limited and complex system of bilateral agreements had developed before the war, the colonial universities in particular wanted an empire-wide standard. This, however, was something resisted by the ancient universities.<sup>45</sup> In the face of variable standards across the empire, they were unwilling to sacrifice their individual autonomy and – as they saw it – diminish their prestige and preferred to maintain an older system of bilateral accreditation.

However, and perhaps in part because of this, as the 1920s progressed and the newly instituted British PhD (established in 1918) began to take hold, the issue of student interchange increasingly came to be seen in terms of graduate rather than undergraduate study. Sir Thomas Holland, principal of the University of Edinburgh, gave expression to this at the 1931 congress:

I feel sure that undergraduates ought not come [to Britain] at all except from those areas in which there are no existing native Universities. The position of the post-graduate student creates a wholly different picture. His movement from one University to another, whether within or without Great Britain, is an advantage to him and an advantage to us, and that has nothing to do with the University but with the individual specialist of repute under whom he goes to study.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Bryce, in 'Official Report', p. 77.

<sup>45</sup> J. W. Gregory, who in 1921 was the professor of geology at the University of Glasgow, had previously held the chair of geology and mineralogy at the University of Melbourne (UMA, Registrar's Correspondence, UM312/1921/113, 'Report of Professor J. W. Gregory of the 1921 Congress, 12 July, 1921').

<sup>46</sup> Holland, in *Fourth Congress of the Universities of the Empire 1931: Report of Proceedings* (1931), p. 181.



Therefore, while ‘specialization’ never dropped off the congresses’ programmes or the bureau’s radar and continued to be seen as crucial to the universities’ role in building the nation, the meaning of the term changed significantly. By the late 1920s it had come less to refer to the ‘distribution of studies’, and more to the newly valued specialized knowledge of individual researchers.

### *Centralization*

Therefore, constrained by its inability to act officially on behalf of the universities who were highly sceptical of anything that seemed to threaten their independence, the bureau sought better to incorporate the resources of the ‘overseas universities’ through a more efficient distribution of information. This, indeed, had been a crucial aspect of its original constitution. With attempts to establish centralized control of curricula and teacher training meeting a very poor reception at the 1907 Imperial Education Conference, the leaders of the 1912 Universities’ Congress made it clear that the bureau would ‘not be an organ of government’.<sup>47</sup> It would not, promised George Parkin, the organizing secretary of the Rhodes Trust, impinge on the ‘individuality and independence [which] rather than uniformity constitute the characteristic note of British Universities’. Rather, the bureau would be a ‘clearing house’: ‘a connecting link between all our world-wide experiences’ whose ‘first duty’ was the collection and distribution of information.<sup>48</sup> Distributing information was something that the bureau did very well. From 1912 onwards, and in increasing quantities, it produced a steady flow of reports, booklets, surveys, programmes and circulars. In addition to the material on specialization, cited above, these included ‘lists of Students from abroad studying in the Home Universities’, statements of the bureau’s accounts and minutes of its meetings, titles of theses approved for research degrees, proposals for graduate tours, and various agitations about ways to foster student exchange.<sup>49</sup> A large amount of information was procured for the *Yearbooks*, published annually, and a flurry of consultative correspondence took place in the lead up to any congress.

But despite its best efforts, during the 1920s the bureau struggled to win the confidence of many of its members. It seemed to face two obstacles.

<sup>47</sup> J. Greenlee, ‘The ABCs of imperial unity’, *Canadian Journal of History*, xiv (1979), 49–64.

<sup>48</sup> Parkin, in *Congress of the Universities of the Empire, 1912: Report of Proceedings*, ed. A. Hill (1912), pp. 311, 323.

<sup>49</sup> UMA, Registrar’s Correspondence, UM312/1921/482, Hill to the Melbourne registrar, 19 July 1921; UMA, Registrar’s Correspondence, UM312/1927/557, Hill to the Melbourne registrar, 11 Nov. 1926; UMA, Registrar’s Correspondence, UM312/1927/557, ‘Secretary’s report of a meeting of the Standing Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals held at Russell Square, Sat 24<sup>th</sup> 1927’.

First, it found it difficult to find a role for itself in the changing post-war world. As we have seen, a number of the responsibilities that had seemed in 1921 to have been within its remit were instead assumed by other organizations, and the bureau found itself struggling to define its identity. But at the same time, it was administered by Alex Hill whose proprietorial ways meant that it struggled to manage the one task that was clearly its own: the dissemination of information.

All this was made evident when, following the death of Hill in 1929, Frank Heath, formerly secretary of the (British) Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), was appointed to review the bureau's workings. He found a body labouring with too few employees, in a dilapidated building and without an adequate constitution.<sup>50</sup> Increasing the staff and doubling the annual expenditure, Heath also proposed constitutional changes that gave it more purchase with member universities.<sup>51</sup> By then too its role in higher educational organization had become clearer and it had found its place alongside institutions such as the UGC, the WEA and the DSIR. These reforms revived the bureau and from the early 1930s onwards universities and colleges from various parts of the Commonwealth began increasingly to use its employment services. By 1933 it could report that 'Universities overseas are enlisting the services of the Bureau more and more in filling vacant appointments'.<sup>52</sup> This was no unfounded boast. The universities for whom it acted in that year included: Auckland College, Bombay, Hong Kong, Adelaide, Canterbury College, Andra and the Egyptian University in Cairo.<sup>53</sup> This led the Australians – who had long been in the practice of convening London selection committees of their own – to try a change in policy.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, from the mid 1930s the bureau offered a more professional – and cheaper – service than could committees of selection constituted through individual university networks.<sup>55</sup> Better run, better resourced and working with universities who were more interested in its success, under Heath the organization came to function much more effectively as the centralized 'clearing house' it had always aspired to be.

<sup>50</sup> Ashby, *Community of Universities*, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Ashby, *Community of Universities*, pp. 34–5.

<sup>52</sup> UMA, Registrar's Correspondence, UM312/1933/403, 'Report of the Executive Council and Accounts of the Bureau for the year 1 August 1932–31', July 1933.

<sup>53</sup> UMA, Registrar's Correspondence, UM312/1933/403, 'Report of the Executive Council and Accounts of the Bureau for the year 1 August 1932–31', July 1933.

<sup>54</sup> UMA, Registrar's Correspondence, UM312/1933/403, Melbourne registrar to the bureau, 15 Nov. 1933.

<sup>55</sup> See T. Pietsch, *Universities and Empire: Academic Networks in the British World, 1850–1940* (Manchester, forthcoming).

This was reflected in its expanding activities, the most important of which was its management of the Carnegie Travelling Grants. At the end of 1930 the Carnegie Corporation of New York had made a grant of \$40,000 to the bureau, ‘to be expended for the benefit of Empire Universities Overseas’.<sup>56</sup> After spending some of this money on the transport costs of delegates attending the 1931 congress, it determined that the balance should be used to enable ‘selected members of the teaching and administrative staffs of overseas universities’ to visit the United Kingdom for the purpose of advanced study or research work. Bringing such individuals ‘into personal contact with each other’, the bureau felt, would help to ‘promote closer cooperation between the overseas and the home universities’.<sup>57</sup> Leaving universities to choose their own candidates, and regional conferences to put forward their nominees, the Executive Committee of the bureau selected a final three from the total they received. The scheme was repeated annually between 1932 and 1936 and proved hugely attractive to academics working in the Dominions. Indeed, the Australian conference found having to make a selection from among their own number ‘a very awkward and invidious task’, and sought to divest themselves of this responsibility: ‘it is rather like throwing a bone amongst a lot of hungry dogs’ wrote the University of Western Australia’s Hubert Whitfeld to the Melbourne registrar in 1933.<sup>58</sup> They wished instead for a system of *greater* centralization – proposing that each university should forward its first choice to the bureau, which would then choose among them. Together with Heath’s reforms, the management of the Carnegie Grants helped to raise the bureau’s profile in the eyes of its member institutions. In offering the possibility of tangible benefits it provided an incentive for universities abroad to begin to utilize its other services too. But the flurry around the Carnegie Grants points also to the large extent to which it was not until the 1930s that the bureau began effectively to fill the centralizing and professionalizing functions that had been imputed to it in the aftermath of the war.

### ***Internationalism and the expansive nation***

The purpose to which the bureau put its Carnegie Grants in the 1930s reflected aspirations it had held since its inception. ‘The Exchange of Professors’ and the ‘Exchange of Students’ had been two of the functions projected for it by Parkin in 1912.<sup>59</sup> Fostering the movement of staff and

<sup>56</sup> ‘Empire Universities Carnegie Research Grants’, *The Times*, 6 June 1932.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Empire Universities Carnegie Research Grants’, *The Times*, 6 June 1932.

<sup>58</sup> UMA, Registrar’s Correspondence, UM312/1933/403, registrar, University of Western Australia, to Melbourne registrar, 1 Dec. 1933.

<sup>59</sup> *Congress of the Universities of the Empire, 1912*, pp. 313–14.

students would, Parkin had thought, both enable the best use to be made of the various strengths of universities across the empire, and help to strengthen the bonds of a community he saw as stretching between them. It was a policy that, as Bryce had pointed out at the 1903 conference, was both educational and imperial.<sup>60</sup> This logic of efficiency became even more important in the context of the universities' assertion of their national role in the aftermath of the war. The subject of 'interchange' was discussed at all the congresses between 1921 and 1936. The Rhodes and 1851 Exhibition Scholarship programmes were cited as examples of the kind of system that needed to be implemented to foster the movement of students, while for staff the issue was seen as more complicated. In 1921 the institution of a system of sabbatical leave was proposed as something that would foster the movement of professors: in 1926 energy focused on establishing an empire-wide Federated Superannuation Scheme; and in 1936 a special committee was established 'to inquire into the possibility of effecting the exchange of members of University Teaching Staffs'.<sup>61</sup> Nor was the bureau inactive between the congresses: in 1922 it appointed 'interchange correspondents' in each university; by 1927 it could report that it had 'arranged for the temporary exchange of junior posts between teachers in Great Britain and teachers in the Dominions'; and in 1931 it made its decision about how to spend the Carnegie money.<sup>62</sup>

The importance the bureau placed upon interchange reflected the expansive definition of the British nation that underpinned all its activities. This was a vision of the nation that had been present from the beginnings of the congress movement. At the first meeting of colonial universities in 1903 Haldane had spoken of the 'nation in its widest sense', the 'great British nation in its different parts, with its great common constitution, co-operating for a common end'; and Bryce had referred to the 'the national life of the whole British world'.<sup>63</sup> As far as the pre-war delegates were concerned, this was a nation whose borders stretched out to include people and places beyond the British Isles; a nation that reflected the imperial careers of the delegates themselves.<sup>64</sup> But it was a nation that – despite

<sup>60</sup> 'Official Report', p. 77.

<sup>61</sup> *Second Congress*, pp. 388–92; W. M. Gibbons (University of Sheffield, secretary to the Federated Superannuation Scheme for Universities), in *Third Congress*, p. 244; *Fifth Congress of the Universities of the Empire 1936: Report of Proceedings* (1936), p. 230.

<sup>62</sup> UMA, Registrar's Correspondence, UM312/1927/558, 'Bureau Committee's Report to the recent Congress'.

<sup>63</sup> Haldane, in 'Official Report', p. 118; Bryce, in 'Official Report', p. 77.

<sup>64</sup> T. Pietsch, 'Wandering scholars? Academic mobility and the British world: 1850–1940', *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxxvi (2010), 377–87.

frequent references to ‘empire’ and the presence of Indian delegates at all the congresses – was nonetheless racially constructed. Delegates worried about Indian educational standards and spoke at congresses throughout the period of the ‘British race’.<sup>65</sup> And although, as Marc Matera’s chapter attests, numerous students from India, the Caribbean and Africa were by this time coming to study in Britain’s universities, their chances of gaining appointment as faculty members in Britain or the Dominions were virtually non-existent. When delegates at the congresses spoke of the imperial academic community it was overwhelmingly to the universities in the Dominions that they referred. It was this older and expansive vision of the British nation that was so central to the way the bureau framed the universities’ role in post-war reconstruction, for it was by better integrating its resources that the bureau hoped to rebuild the broken world.

However, in the wake of the conflict, educational fellowship and scholarly exchange also seemed to take on a new, international importance. As well as ‘drawing closer the bonds of the British Empire’, in 1921 Curzon thought that the bureau might also ‘aspire to a wider and more cosmopolitan range of influence, and that as it [drew] within its orbit the educated intelligence of other countries, and notably of America, it [might] exercise an appreciable influence on the peace of the world’.<sup>66</sup> Or as Lord Robert Cecil, the chancellor of the University of Birmingham and one of the architects of the League of Nations, declared at the same meeting, ‘Learning has no territorial boundaries ... Learning is one of the great unifying forces of the world, and we have now, more than at any other time in our lives, a further opportunity to demonstrate this’.<sup>67</sup> Delegates discussed the need to extend interchange programmes to France and the United States as well as the Dominions (though notably not to Germany), and throughout the 1920s the bureau rented rooms in its premises in 50 Russell Square to the American University Union in Europe, the Harkness Foundation, the Office National des Universités et Ecoles Françaises, and the British Bureau of the Danish Student’s International Committee.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, despite this new orientation – and the presence at all the inter-war congresses of American as well as French representatives – the logic of internationalism remained underpinned by the notion of an imperial community. This was something about which the congress delegates were

<sup>65</sup> L. S. Amery, in *Third Congress*, p. xii; W. Sherwood Fox (president of the University of Western Ontario), in *Fourth Congress*, p. 160.

<sup>66</sup> Curzon, in *Second Congress*, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Cecil, in *Second Congress*, p. 336.

<sup>68</sup> Ashby, *Community of Universities*, p. 33.

clear. 'I have never known two nations to love one another', said Ira McKay of McGill University in 1926, but

The only exception to that on a grand scale is the British Empire, because, after all, there is a great mass weight of friendship between the people of the overseas Dominions and the people of the Motherland, and between the people of the Motherland and those of the Dominions ... Here, then, is a great mass weight of human material out of which we may carve a new contribution to human history if only we have the courage, the knowledge, and the skill to do it.<sup>69</sup>

As far as the bureau and the congresses were concerned, it was as an embodiment of this unique kind of political and educational community – one that stretched between Britain and the Dominions – that the universities' contribution to the new international world order would be made. For them, the new internationalism of the inter-war period grew out of the expansive British community that had preceded it.

And this remained the case well into the 1930s. According to Sir Donald MacAlister, speaking in 1931 just a few months before the passing of the Statute of Westminster which established legislative equality for the self-governing Dominions, maintaining 'their essential unity of purpose' and 'cherish[ing] the links that bind them together' would only become more desirable 'As the nations of the British Commonwealth become more and more politically autonomous'.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in the university sphere, by the end of the 1930s national autonomy was becoming a growing reality. Committees of the British vice-chancellors and principals were meeting with increasing frequency and in the Dominions national conferences were assuming more active roles. Yet according to Sir Edwin Deller, the principal of the University of London, in 1936 the universities of what was now called the British Commonwealth still shared 'ties of kinship, of culture and of ideas'; they still constituted what the former Labour prime minister Ramsay MacDonald, at the same meeting, called a 'body of unity in culture, unity in common traditions, unity in common inheritance'.<sup>71</sup> Although such language had for the most part dropped out of the inter-war congress discussions, in 1936 W. J. Adey, director of the Board of Education in South Australia, could still speak of a 'British nation' that included the Dominions.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, for some of the delegates at the 1936 congress, the unity that this expansive nation represented seemed of renewed importance.

<sup>69</sup> McKay, in *Third Congress*, p. 36.

<sup>70</sup> MacAlister, in *Fourth Congress*, p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> Deller (principal of the University of London and treasurer of the Universities' Bureau of the British Empire), in *Fifth Congress*, p. 252; MacDonald, in *Fifth Congress*, p. 251.

<sup>72</sup> Adey, in *Fifth Congress*, p. 74.

‘In these days of peril, the co-operation of various parts of the Empire is more than ever essential’ contended the University of Sydney’s Percival Halse Rogers: ‘Dangers threaten on every hand, and unity is our only safeguard’.<sup>73</sup> In the shadow of another war, it was still the expansive nature of the British academic community that its members thought was its most important contribution to what now seemed a breaking world.

### ***Conclusion***

As Balfour and Curzon observed at the congress in 1921, the Great War brought immense changes to the universities in Britain. During the four years of its duration they turned their resources, both human and material, over to the nation: staff and students had lent their bodies and brains to the war effort, buildings had been requisitioned and teaching halted or curtailed. In the aftermath of the war the universities continued to draw upon this language of national service. In a mass democracy they saw their traditional role as organizations that shaped what Curzon called ‘the government, the character and the healthy manhood of the nation’ as all the more important. But, now funded by the state, they adapted themselves to act also ‘as instruments of intellectual progress [and] national efficiency’, fostering the scientific and technological knowledge seen as crucial to the new world.<sup>74</sup> As they did so they developed closer connections with each other, initially in order better to negotiate their relationship with their new patron, but increasingly also as a form of professionalized efficiency; a way of pooling and making the most of their collective resources.

But the organization the universities chose to give expression to their new collective voice was one whose foundations were rooted indelibly in the pre-war period. The Universities’ Bureau of the British Empire had been born of Edwardian attempts to foster closer imperial union and its mission and scope reflected these origins. As the only existing association of universities in Britain at the end of the war, both the government and the universities turned to it, almost by default, when they came together to plan for the peace. The bureau’s vision of the universities’ role in ‘mending a broken world’ was deliberate and clear, and central to it was an expansive understanding of the nation carried over from an older era. For according to the bureau the brave new post-war world would best be built by efficiently marshalling the intellectual resources of the whole nation, and this included the British universities ‘overseas’ as well as those at home. It would be about

<sup>73</sup> Halse Rogers (judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and chancellor of the University of Sydney), in *Fifth Congress*, p. 255.

<sup>74</sup> Curzon, in *Second Congress*, p. 3.

the distribution of studies, and the circulation of information, students and staff in order to make the most of their various strengths and talents.

This, indeed, was an approach that suited the older English universities for it enabled them to maintain their privileged positions not just as homes for the humanities, but also as institutions that had long cultivated their own relationships with Whitehall.<sup>75</sup> It is, however, an approach that has hitherto been largely hidden from view and one that cannot be divorced from the more familiar story of the universities between the wars; a story which includes the development of research, the growth of new disciplines, and what might be described as the universities' imperviousness to the claims of 'the democracy', with student numbers rising by only 0.2% between 1919 and 1939.<sup>76</sup> The Second World War would bring many more radical changes to the universities in Britain. But the bombs that destroyed the bureau's archives in 1940 must not also blind historians to the expansive articulation of the nation which shaped the thinking of university delegates at congresses throughout the inter-war period and framed the way they thought about their role in building the nation. The importance of the British 'universities overseas' has been erased from the history of Britain between the wars, but only by returning them to it can the historian begin to take up the task, so clearly outlined by Balfour in 1921, of estimating the magnitude of 'the changes ... in the social elements of the world' brought about by the century's first global conflict.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Cambridge's proficiency in physics is mentioned by McKibbin among others, but it is perhaps relevant to note that it was led in the inter-war period by Ernest Rutherford, a graduate of the University of New Zealand (R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-51* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 249-50).

<sup>76</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 248; see also A. H. Halsey, 'Oxford and the British universities', in Harrison, *History of the University of Oxford*, pp. 577-606.

<sup>77</sup> Balfour, in *Second Congress*, p. xviii.



## 9. Inter-war agnotology: empire, democracy and the production of ignorance

*Priya Satia*

Inter-war Britain was, for the first time, a mass democratic polity. This political reality, together with the new international institutions established to regulate foreign relations, suggests that the inter-war period was one in which decades of political idealism found some kind of fulfilment. Great men of such diverse political persuasions as Leonard Woolf and Robert Cecil had long expressed their faith that the right education might make the masses reliable participants in the making of foreign policy, and the convergence of the League of Nations with the arrival of mass democracy seemed to suggest that the time for democratically forged international relations had come.

As we know, however, the Union for Democratic Control (UDC), founded in 1914, simultaneously expressed a fundamental lack of faith in government's ability to formulate sensible foreign policies on its own, policies that would not land the nation in the kind of tragic disaster it experienced from 1914 to 1918. Its continued post-war calls to democratize Britain's international relations were, in other words, grounded in cynicism about any paternalistic attempt to 'educate' public opinion; besides an idealistic faith in the value of democracy, it also expressed a feeling that the common sense of even the most primitively educated English person could yield better insight into foreign relations than the inevitably corrupt and interested 'expert'.

The cynics were right: despite the new institutions and the push for accountability to them, a new diplomacy never fully displaced the old. And this was in fact largely due to the rise, at the very moment of mass democracy, of the foreign policy expert – discussing grave questions at Chatham House or closeted with ministers in the proliferating government committees of the inter-war empire. What we find in the aftermath of the First World War is the hiving off of an exalted, elite realm of foreign policy-making in precisely the era that modern democracy came into its own; the expert, engaged in discreet diplomatic exchanges and collaboration with other unaccountable elites, was part and parcel of the history of mass

democracy. And those anxious for democratic control saw this happening – they were as concerned with the quality of public opinion as they were with its actual purchase on the state. Certainly, foreign policy had always been an elite affair, but post-war ideals of greater democratic control of that sphere, together with the increasing unpopularity of expansionist imperial policy, forced the state to go to greater lengths to keep foreign policy aloof from public opinion. Official secrecy is an integral feature of the modern liberal democratic state, and the inter-war period was a crucial moment in the evolution of the ‘secret state’ of modern Britain.

The word ‘agnotology’ in my title is a neologism coined by Robert Proctor, a historian of science, who found it useful as a means of describing the tobacco industry’s systematic cultivation of ignorance about the harmful effects of cigarettes. He and Londa Schiebinger have edited a volume examining the production of ignorance about a range of politically and culturally sensitive scientific topics, from global climate change to female orgasm.<sup>1</sup> I invoke this concept here as a useful means of describing the strategy behind official secrecy about empire in an age of mass democracy. Indeed, I would even posit agnotology as a central feature of the modern liberal democratic state: ironically, modern democracy, simply by virtue of its insistent demand for openness, tends to foster paranoid official secrecy. Agnotology also opens a new window onto the passionate debate among British historians about the importance of empire in British domestic culture, as we shall see.

The expert was central to the work of agnotology; he was one of the mechanisms that the state evolved to adapt to institutions and movements for democratic control of government – alongside propaganda, censorship and reliance on more discreet technologies of policing, such as air control in the Middle East. These institutional mechanisms were designed to counter demands for openness and evade the audit of public opinion about colonial activity. Meanwhile, wartime scepticism about ‘official speak’ only intensified as some segments of the public grew wise to these tactics of evasion. Those anxious for democratic control of foreign policy were not only concerned with the quality of public opinion but also how public opinion could actually exert any influence over state activity.

Of course, cynicism about state secrecy and dishonesty is an old political tradition in Britain. E. P. Thompson gave us the eighteenth-century chapter of this older, radical libertarian tradition. But he arrived at it while puzzling through the features of the post-Second World War ‘secret state’.

<sup>1</sup> *Agnotology: the Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. R. Proctor and L. Schiebinger (Stanford, Calif., 2008).

His critique of that state explicitly invoked the libertarian tradition but it also built upon the lessons of the inter-war period, when the imperial state devised new mechanisms for the exercise of secret state power in an age of mass democracy, and those who became aware of these new mechanisms became captive to a more malevolent view of the state than ever before.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I will first briefly describe the making of inter-war agnotology, specifically with regard to the new empire in the Middle East, and then focus primarily on the effort of some inter-war Britons to identify and combat the state's efforts to evade democratic accountability. As it happens, the new empire in the Middle East – the British mandates of Palestine, Transjordan and Mesopotamia – became one of the central controversies in the state's and the public's contest for control of foreign policy because it was there that many of those new mechanisms were most obviously discernible – partly because the region's oriental qualities were alleged to have inspired them. It was not for nothing that E. D. Morel proclaimed Labour's insistence on 'full democratic control over foreign affairs' in the midst of Labour questions about the secret diplomacy with Turkey at Lausanne in 1922–3. It was Middle East policy that inspired his conviction that foreign and domestic affairs were 'inextricably intertwined'.<sup>3</sup>

I use the term 'covert empire' to describe the mechanisms devised for British rule in the Middle East, and particularly Iraq – to distinguish it from indirect and informal empire. Iraq's status as a League of Nations mandate was not its only novelty as a British colony: British imperial power in Iraq was located in a kind of parallel and informal state in the hands of unaccountable types of experts, an informal community of intelligence and security officials for whom bureaucratic procedures were merely something to be manipulated for the accomplishment of autocratically decided ends. Emerging technologies supported this covert rule. With aerial control, which was formally launched in 1922, the British developed a new form of policing in Iraq, whereby aircraft discreetly patrolled the country, using bombardment as necessary to crush any form of subversive activity. Military action by this regime was so covert that no decorations could be publicly awarded. No statistics on Iraqi casualties were gathered. Travel to the region was severely restricted.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); 'The secret state', *Race and Class*, xx (1979), 219–42.

<sup>3</sup> Morel in the Commons, reported in *The Times*, 25 Nov. 1922, p. 16. See also A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies: a Study in British Power* (1959; Basingstoke, 1985), p. 273; S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: the Left and the End of Empire, 1918–64* (New York, 1993), pp. 47–8.

<sup>4</sup> P. Satia, *Spies in Arabia: the Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (New York, 2008), pp. 292–3, and ch. 8.

At the same time, British administrators and politicians directed a feverish public relations campaign: spectacular air demonstrations and recruitment tours romanticizing aerial policing in Iraq; public lectures, officially inspired books and press articles, press statements, painting exhibitions, film and photography, all designed to cast the British presence in the region in the most favourable possible light.<sup>5</sup> Much of this was the work of agent-bureaucrats like Gertrude Bell, oriental secretary in Iraq, and Colonial Office officials who wrote for *Round Table* and *Blackwood's* despite regulations prohibiting officials from publishing even anonymously on such issues – after all, they protested, they were the only ‘experts’ on the region.<sup>6</sup> They also strove to persuade the public of what was at stake in the British presence. Official memos were disclosed to the press, with their origins tactfully suppressed, in order to persuade the public that ‘Mesopotamia was to receive the full brunt of bolshevik Turkish nationalist and Arab nationalist intrigue’ and would become ‘the nucleus and focus of all the evil forces in the world’.<sup>7</sup> Popular conspiracy thinking was deliberately generated by the government to win over public opinion on the mandates. This was the political culture that inspired Leonard Woolf’s unusually pessimistic 1925 essay ‘Fear and politics’, which described a human species so savagely consumed by fear that only individual confinement, rather than any scheme of international governance, could promise real global security.<sup>8</sup>

These two sides of the covert state – secrecy and propaganda – were designed to cope with anti-colonial sentiment in Iraq, in other parts of the empire, in the US and, most urgently, at home, but also to cope with the new political fact of mass democracy in Britain. I am not arguing here that newly enfranchised men and women challenged the state’s authority, but rather that the opinion-makers of the old, middle-class public, whose influence seemed threatened by new kinds of official experts, challenged it

<sup>5</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 305–10.

<sup>6</sup> The National Archives of the UK: Public Record Office, CO 730/46: 54223, Hall and Shuckburgh, minutes, 9 Nov. 1923. At times, these were articles written on their own initiative; at other times, at official instigation.

<sup>7</sup> TNA: PRO, FO 371/5232, E16278, Norman Bray, appendix I of memo, 30 Dec. 1920; TNA: PRO, WO 32/5728, Montagu to S/S WO, 24 June 1921; British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/10/866 pt. 2, Bray to Wakely, 22 Feb. 1921; TNA: PRO, FO 371/5232, E15068, IO to FO, 1 Dec. 1920, and minutes thereon; IO, statement for press release, in IO to FO, 1 Dec. 1920; Reuters, “England the Enemy”, *The Times*, 22 Dec. 1920, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> See also M. Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of the State in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 11–15; and, on a later period, S. L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counterinsurgency, 1944–60* (1995).

in the name of mass democracy.<sup>9</sup> The more that they, claiming to speak on behalf of the public, asserted their right to control foreign policy in Britain after the Great War, the more the state developed strategies to evade that public audit. Secrecy and propaganda together strove to undermine democratic control by cultivating public ignorance about affairs in the British Middle East. Those behind this activity felt justified by their own conviction that the public, with their critical stance, were merely playing into the hands of the global conspirators against Britain's empire. Indeed, political paranoia was an important feature of this history; in the inter-war period, the intuitive epistemology through which British officials had become resigned to understanding a region they deemed beyond empirical knowledge evolved into a conspiracy-theorist outlook in which all events in the Middle East were signs of a unified plot to overthrow the British empire. To those responsible for official advertisement about those, for the most part, imagined conspiracies, their work was merely *counter-propaganda*.<sup>10</sup>

The state's dismal view of mass democratic control of foreign policy was buttressed by contemporary scholarly studies of public opinion, which mostly delivered a pessimistic verdict on its capacity for wisdom.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the press was exerting itself to redeem its wartime image as entirely submissive to government prerogatives – J. A. Hobson's 1902 critique of jingoism really got legs in this moment, finding an echo in UDC founder Norman Angell's *The Press and the Organisation of Society* (1922). After the war, we see the emergence of a new vision of the press as defender of the public's interests, intertwined with politics and feeding parliamentary debate in a new way, even if it could not fully shake off the government's hand.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, despite the government's best efforts to suppress the subject, Iraq emerged as 'the burning political issue of the time', to quote Lord Peel, secretary of state for India; it was the point of which Churchill, as colonial

<sup>9</sup> As the following makes clear, much, but not all, of the concern about official secrecy emanated from elite newspapers like *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. It is certainly likely that in this they were not only expressing anxiety about state secrecy truncating their authority but also concern about the way in which mass democracy threatened to reduce their own voice in government (on which, see S. Koss, *Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, ii: *the 20th Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984)). But there was certainly enough of an echo of their sentiments in parliament and elsewhere to suggest that more was at work in their criticism than simply two elite papers' concern for self-preservation.

<sup>10</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 311, 317–25 and ch. 6.

<sup>11</sup> See, especially, Walter Lippman's *Public Opinion* (1922).

<sup>12</sup> Thornton, *Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, pp. 303–4. On the press, see, for instance, M. Walsh, *The News from Ireland: Foreign Correspondents and the Irish Revolution* (2008).

secretary, felt the press made most 'effective use to injure the Government'.<sup>13</sup> People frequently remarked on the press's 'minute scrutiny' of the issue, and indeed, everyone from the *Morning Post* to the *Empire Review*, *The Times*, the *Liberal Daily Chronicle*, the *Labour Daily Herald* and the *Daily Mail* attacked the government's 'insane policy in the Middle East'. The discrepancies between the government propaganda and the glimmerings of reality fuelled furious demands that they leave Iraq 'bag and baggage'. The press wanted to know why Britons were paying through the nose for the upkeep of a country 'advertised since our conquest ... as an Eldorado'.<sup>14</sup>

It has usually been assumed that these critics were primarily concerned about rising costs in the Middle East and that air control, by substituting bombers for expensive troop garrisons, was designed to address this problem.<sup>15</sup> But criticism of Middle East policy did not cease after the establishment of air control in 1922; public opinion remained recalcitrant enough to force continual reformulation of the mandate arrangement,<sup>16</sup> even if this was mostly semantic play, because it was never only about cost but *secrecy*. It was autocratic decision-making about the Middle East that troubled the eager democracy. In Whitehall, one of air control's most saleable points was that its economy and speed would free Middle East policy from the check of British public opinion by making the 'taxpayer question' disappear altogether.<sup>17</sup> But many British commentators *knew* that the scheme freed the government from fiscally imposed accountability to the public; they were on to the tools of covert empire.<sup>18</sup> Concerns over cost were merely the starting point of a critique of government secrecy about Iraq. When the government requested military spending for the new colony, a Liberal member of parliament asked, 'If £137,000 had been spent on a residency in Mesopotamia without any home department knowing anything about the

<sup>13</sup> Lord Peel, comment on A. Haldane, 'The Arab Rising in Mesopotamia, 1920', 29 Nov. 1922, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, lxxviii (1923), 80; Churchill to Lloyd George, 31 Aug. 1920.

<sup>14</sup> J. de V. Loder, *The Truth about Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria* (1923), p. 5; L. Fraser, 'The War-Mongers. "Sack the Lot!"', *Daily Mail*, 12 July 1920; 'Outlook in the Middle East', *Round Table*, xxxvii (Dec. 1919), 82; Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 291–2.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: the Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York, 2003), p. 144; A. Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919–39* (1986), p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Mandate, then a constitutional monarchy under mandate, then a Treaty of Alliance, the 1923 protocol replacing mandate with advisory relationship, the 1927 treaty promising early support for league admission, the 1930 treaty promising admission by 1932, nominal independence in 1932, war and reoccupation in 1941, full British departure in 1958.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: PRO, AIR 23/542, J. M. Salmond, report, [c. Apr. 1924].

<sup>18</sup> Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 23–4; TNA: PRO, AIR 23/542, J. M. Salmond, report, [c. Apr. 1924]. Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, ch. 7 and p. 288.

project till the work was well advanced, how was the House to feel assured that this £800,000 would not be spent in the same manner?<sup>19</sup>

The Iraq issue was integral to the larger conversation about democratic control of foreign policy, as framed by an elite press cautioning the nation against the folly of continued paternalism in the wake of the recent global trauma. As *The Times* put it, ‘the time is past when *any Government* could commit the nation to the acquisition of a considerable new Empire ... without first making an exhaustive public statement of their intentions’.<sup>20</sup> Whether ordinary Britons knew or cared about their empire, a certain class of opinion-makers were intensely exercised about ignorance about the Middle East and went to great lengths to inform them that their ignorance had been deliberately contrived by the government. It is difficult to gauge what purchase this critique had at the level of either popular or elite opinion, but my point, for the purposes of this chapter, is that a new conversation unfolded between the wars about what people knew, should know or could know about foreign policy, particularly in Iraq. That the mass dailies appear to have been less exercised by this issue suggests that this conversation grew partly out of the old elite’s fears of its foreign policy influence being eclipsed by a new establishment of official experts.

Besides financial extravagance, the government’s commitment to military action at a time when the nation hungered for peace incensed those speaking in the name of democratic control of foreign policy. *The Times* revealed how ‘straightaway, without the knowledge of the public at home, tiny punitive columns were mobilized’ whenever the authorities in Iraq desired. While the British government worried about secret Russian or Turkish incursions in its Middle Eastern empire, this paper spoke of public concern about its own government’s covert operations in the region. *The Times* suspected that operations there had been ‘far more considerable than the public have been allowed to know’, warning, along with the *Manchester Guardian*, that ‘the concealment of unfavourable news will no longer be tolerated. There has been far too much secrecy about the military operations in Mesopotamia’. ‘The nation’ had to have information to judge for itself the wisdom of the Mesopotamian venture.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Colonel Hodge (Preston, L.), quoted in report on House of Commons, 1 March 1923, in *The Times*, 2 March 1923, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Editorial, ‘The Problem of Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 8 Nov. 1919, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> ‘The Problem of Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 8 Nov. 1919, p. 13; ‘Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 31 Dec. 1919, p. 11; ‘More Trouble in Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 12 June 1920, p. 17; ‘The Risings in Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1920, p. 11; ‘Mesopotamia’, *The Guardian*, 24 June 1920, p. 6, and report on the Lords, 26 June 1920, p. 13. On fears about the brutalization of the state, see also J. Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain’, *Journal of Modern History*, lxxv (2003), 557–89.

This segment of the press criticized the government's constant 'evasions, concealments, and half-truths' about Middle East affairs, affirming a general 'mistrust [of] all official figures from Mesopotamia'. *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Spectator* agreed that the big mystery about the Iraqi insurrection of 1920 was not its origins, as the government would have it, but the government's reluctance to submit to the public the actual extent of the problem and what it intended to do about it. They accused the War Office and the India Office of conspiring to conceal the gravity of the situation, even seeing in the official renaming of the mandate as 'Iraq' a mere ploy to divert taxpayers from 'a name of evil omen'.<sup>22</sup>

The government was as imperial at home as abroad, they discovered. Like Iraqis, Britons were victims of an arrogant, unaccountable system of government that imposed oppressive taxation. *The Times* likened unchecked ministerial power at home to civil commissioner Arnold Wilson's 'uncontrolled power' in Baghdad (which, the editors noted, had triggered insurgency there).<sup>23</sup> Anti-imperial sentiment was grounded in a sense of shared misery under an autocratic state, a piquant measure of how low British democracy had been brought – low enough to create common experience with a people famous for their familiarity with despotism. It was less the state's imperialism than its imperiousness that stung; many critics protested their enduring faith in the justice and decency of the empire as they complained of the government's recent 'subterfuges'.<sup>24</sup>

The concern with accountability homed in on the shadowy figure of the expert. What made the government unaccountable in this burgeoning critique was the concentration of power in the hands of 'experts from outside'.<sup>25</sup> Lloyd George's rival for Liberal party leadership, Herbert Asquith, railed against experts who could 'embark ... at their own whim, upon every kind of costly adventure' in Mesopotamia.<sup>26</sup> *The Times* and

<sup>22</sup> Fraser, 'The War-Mongers. "Sack the Lot!"; 'A Case for Frankness', *The Times*, 15 June 1920, p. 17; Editorial, 'The war in Mesopotamia', *The Times*, 21 Aug. 1920, p. 11; Editorial, 'Mesopotamia', *The Times*, 18 July 1921, p. 11. See also 'Mesopotamia and Anatolia', *The Times*, 23 June 1920, p. 17; 'Policy in the Middle East', *The Guardian*, 30 Sept. 1920, p. 6; 'Risings in Mesopotamia'; 'Mesopotamia and Economy', *The Guardian*, 12 March 1921, p. 8; 'Conspiracies and Common Sense' and 'Publicity the True Remedy', *The Spectator*, 4 Dec. 1920, pp. 728–30; 'The Burden of Mesopotamia', *The Times*, 31 Aug. 1922, p. 13; *The Spectator*, 21 Oct. 1922, p. 543.

<sup>23</sup> 'A Case for Frankness'; see also Editorial, 'An Imperial Secretary of State', *The Times*, 20 Jan. 1921, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> E. A. Powell, *The Struggle for Power in Moslem Asia* (New York, 1923), pp. xi, 5–6. A similar line can be traced in criticism of paramilitary activity in Ireland (see Walsh, *News from Ireland*).

<sup>25</sup> 'Reckless Waste. Mr. Asquith's Charge and Challenge', *The Times*, 21 June 1920, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Asquith, speaking in support of a Liberal candidate, reported in 'Reckless Waste. Mr. Asquith's Charge and Challenge'.



the *Manchester Guardian* inveighed against the ‘enthusiastic experts ... scattered’ among government departments.<sup>27</sup> Just before he was co-opted into the government himself, T. E. Lawrence affirmed in the *Sunday Times* that the Mesopotamian insurrection was the result of the British civil authorities being ‘controlled from no Department of State, but from the empty space which divides the Foreign Office from the India Office’.<sup>28</sup> Ordinary Britons felt that as ‘the glamour’ of Iraq dissipated, they began to see their own government with ‘very different eyes’ too.<sup>29</sup> Churchill’s new Middle East Department in the Colonial Office was looked upon with intense suspicion.<sup>30</sup>

Lawrence eventually emerged as the poster-boy for government treachery in the eyes of this old establishment, despite his heroic image. The war’s apparent demonstration of the heroic powers of a single British agent in the Middle East raised the possibility that the government might at any time resort to such an interloper to accomplish its goals in secrecy. Thus, in 1929, rumours of Lawrence’s presence in the RAF on the north-west frontier of India under a false name fed suspicions of illicit imperial activity in the region. Parliamentary questions were regularly posed about Lawrence’s complicity in various imperialistic plots, including a plan to overthrow the Soviet government.<sup>31</sup> Concern about such figures clearly reached beyond the old elite, building on other strands of popular political paranoia. Lawrence was the ‘most mysterious man in the empire’, the ‘ultimate pro-consul of Britain in the East’, ‘arch spy of the world’. Socialists burned him in effigy

<sup>27</sup> ‘The Air Ministry’, *The Guardian*, 18 Feb. 1921, p. 6; ‘The Change in Arabia’, *The Guardian*, 5 Nov. 1924, p. 8; ‘The Middle Eastern Department’, *The Guardian*, 16 Feb. 1921, p. 6; ‘The Risings in Mesopotamia. Most of Mesopotamia Insurgent’, *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1920, p. 11; ‘What Is Our Mesopotamian Policy’, *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1920, p. 11. See also Frank Swettenham to the editor, *The Times*, 24 June 1920, p. 12; ‘Mesopotamian Trouble’, *The Times*, 19 Aug. 1920, p. 10; ‘Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 19 Aug. 1920, p. 11; ‘War in Mesopotamia’; ‘British Policy in Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 24 Aug. 1920, p. 11; ‘What Is Happening in Mesopotamia?’, *The Times*, 8 Sept. 1920, p. 11; ‘The Government and the Middle East’, *The Times*, 21 Sept. 1920, p. 11; ‘Our Military Expenditure Overseas’, *The Times*, 29 Oct. 1920, p. 13; ‘India and the Middle East’, *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1920, p. 13; ‘The Army Estimates and Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 15 and 17 Dec. 1920, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence to the *Sunday Times*, 22 Aug. 1920, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, ed. D. Garnett (1938), p. 315.

<sup>29</sup> Z. Buchanan, *In the Hands of the Arabs* (1921), pp. 4, 229, 233; ‘Captured Englishwoman’, letter to her sister, *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1920, p. 9; ‘In the Hands of the Arabs’, *The Times*, 25 May 1921, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> ‘The Middle Eastern Department’, *The Guardian*, 16 Feb. 1921, p. 6; ‘The Air Ministry’, *The Guardian*, 18 Feb. 1921, p. 6; Wilson to the editor, *The Times*, 17 Oct. 1924, p. 15; ‘The Change in Arabia’, *The Guardian*, 5 Nov. 1924, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 317, 324.

at Tower Hill.<sup>32</sup> Even exiled to technical work on speedboats for the RAF, he remained dogged by suspicion as the man ‘to whose steely brain the most abstruse problems of speed, in air or water, are referred ... the ultimate government testing shop’.<sup>33</sup> Gertrude Bell’s fame worked in a similar way. The press asked: ‘Why do we stay in Mesopotamia—Cherchez la femme ... Miss Gertrude Bell’. She was ‘the Mystery Woman of the East, the uncrowned Queen, the Diana of the Desert’.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, when another of their cohort of agent-bureaucrats, St. John Philby, went to Najd to mediate between Abdul Aziz ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein as a private individual after leaving government service in 1924, the press insisted that he was going as a government agent. Official denials of these accusations were taken with a large pinch of salt; after all, before the war, such unofficial envoys had been the mainstay of British diplomatic ties with the region. Moreover, the denials were presumed to be the agents’ handiwork – and they often were.<sup>35</sup>

Such concerns were crucial to post-war demands to clean up the wartime explosion of the state, which had made covert empire possible by camouflaging dark corners of government in thickets of untamed bureaucracy. Anxiety about Middle East policy was bound up with concern about the mystery of *who* was framing it, about the distortions that the war had wrought on the state just when the notion of a democratic check on foreign policy had begun to gain traction.

The elite press made these demands for accountability not as a radical break with the past but as an effort to uphold constitutional tradition. *The Times* was indignant about the news of the government’s decision to assume a mandate for Mesopotamia ‘without ... even ... going through the pretence of seeking Parliamentary approval’.<sup>36</sup> It was a ‘mockery’ of representative government. Transgressions of parliamentary procedure in the name of the new League of Nations invariably triggered allegations of ‘despotism by the Executive’. With its watchdog institutions like the International Labour Organization, the league may have facilitated greater international scrutiny of abuses in European colonies, but to some Britons at home, it

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Herald*, 5 Jan. 1929, quoted in *T. E. Lawrence: the Selected Letters*, ed. M. Brown (New York, 1992), p. 311; ‘Great Britain and Afghan Rising’, *The Times*, 7 Jan. 1929, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, quoted in J. Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia: the Authorised Biography of T. E. Lawrence* (1989), pp. 894–5.

<sup>34</sup> Headlines from Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers, quoted in E. Monroe, *Britain’s Moment in the Middle East, 1914–56* (1963), p. 142; Lady Bell, ‘Conclusion’, in her *The Letters of Gertrude Bell* (2 vols., 1927), ii, 776; Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, pp. 706, 875.

<sup>35</sup> TNA: PRO, FO 371/10017, E9603, E8869/8869/91/1924, Shuckburgh to Osborne, 4 Nov. 1924, and other correspondence in this file; *Sunday Chronicle*, quoted in Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, pp. 894–5. On the pre-war era, see Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, ch. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, ‘Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 1 June 1920, p. 17.

also seemed likely to cloak them. International governance was a novelty; it seemed, to some at least, to reduce democratic oversight at the expense of yet more aloof expert administration (a fear certainly echoed today in sceptical views of the United Nations). In short, the league fuelled cynicism as much as it fulfilled idealism. Radicals in parliament protested that it was not that the nation did not want to hold on to the Mesopotamian ‘grave of empires’, but that the methods by which it was being administered were the greatest departure from parliamentary oversight ‘since the days of the Stuart Kings’. The old ‘Crown vs. Parliament’ conflict had revived in the guise of the ‘executive vs. the nation’, noted *The Times* – echoed by many supportive readers. Through the 1920s, the elite press criticized the drift ‘towards government by individual Ministers’ who merely reported faits accomplis to the Commons – a reversion to ‘bad old ways’ that would again risk ‘catastrophe’.<sup>37</sup>

Diplomacy was, to such critics, the ‘last redoubt’ of the aristocracy, and this made diminishing sense in an era of total war in which the masses suffered the consequences of diplomatic activity.<sup>38</sup> Worse, the state seemed to have become captive to even narrower private interests, oligarchy adding insult to the injury of autocracy. In considering the government’s actions in Iraq, *The Times* discerned ‘in the background, and very audible though only dimly visible ... gentlemen representing various conflicting oil interests, all hammering on the doors of Ministerial offices’.<sup>39</sup> In a campaign speech, Asquith’s rhetorical questions about the meaning of British Middle Eastern policy elicited spontaneous heckles of ‘oil’.<sup>40</sup> The informally organized world of covert empire had created shadowy spaces in which private interests could corrupt the government. The continual reappearance of a handful of experts in ever new guises, now as officials, now as oilmen, now as spies, seemed to confirm the sinister abuse of power.

<sup>37</sup> ‘The Mandates’, *The Spectator*, 2 Apr. 1921, p. 419; ‘The Iraq Raids’, *The Times*, 27 Sept. 1924, p. 12; ‘The Mandate for Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1921, p. 11; ‘Mesopotamia and Mr. Churchill’, *The Times*, 23 Feb. 1921, p. 11; ‘Parliament and Mandates’, *The Guardian*, 24 Feb. 1921, p. 6 and 15 March 1921, p. 6; ‘Iraq’, *The Guardian*, 4 May 1923, p. 8; J. R. Clynes in the Commons, 2 Feb. 1926, reported in *The Times*, 3 Feb. 1926, p. 8; ‘The Arab and Oil’, *The Guardian*, 5 Feb. 1921, p. 6; ‘Mesopotamia’, *The Guardian*, 26 June 1920, p. 10; ‘The League and Mosul’, *The Guardian*, 16 Dec. 1925, p. 10. On concerns about the league and secret diplomacy, see also J. Hinton, *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in 20th-Century Britain* (1989), pp. 77–80; Thornton, *Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, p. 283.

<sup>38</sup> Thornton, *Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, pp. 279–81.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 1 June 1920, p. 17; ‘The Risings in Mesopotamia. Most of Mesopotamia Insurgent’, *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1920, p. 11. See also ‘A Case for Frankness’, *The Times*, 15 June 1920, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Reckless Waste. Mr. Asquith’s Charge and Challenge’, *The Times*, 21 June 1920, p. 5.

Thus, when Arnold Wilson, who as civil commissioner of Iraq had insisted on including the oil-rich, mostly Kurdish province of Mosul in the colony, turned up after retirement as 'General Manager of the [Anglo-Persian Oil Company] for the Persia and Mesopotamia area', a public outcry ensued.<sup>41</sup> *The Times* accused the government of distracting 'innocent imperialists' with talk about the civilizing mission, the defence of India and so on, while it fraternized with oilmen 'behind the scenes' on the assumption that British taxpayers thus 'inoculated with imperial enthusiasm' would be duped into paying for a permanent garrison to protect their interests.<sup>42</sup> The promotion of popular imperialism, in other words, helped the government to generate ignorance about its own corruption. Certainly, oil was a commercial and geopolitical concern but it was just one among a range of British interests in Iraq, and Wilson's reappearance on the scene probably had more to do with his perceived expertise as an old Middle East hand than a premeditated conspiracy of oilmen and the state. But the concerns about such plots reveal how covert empire, itself grounded in political paranoia, necessarily (and often rightly) produced limitless suspicion, as observers, at home and in Iraq, deduced that the tranquil facade of mandatory government concealed a hidden reality but did not know how far to let their imaginations run. The covert empire was found out but was, after all, covert enough that no one could build an *accurate* case against it.

Like cost, brutality became a 'question of the Press vs the Administration'.<sup>43</sup> Why, asked the *Manchester Guardian*, did they need to send 'all this machinery, all these forces ... if we were establishing a political system on the basis of popular consent'?<sup>44</sup> In the *Sunday Times* Lawrence revealed that 'The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap ... tricked into it by a steady withholding of information ... Our administration [has been] more bloody and inefficient than the public knows',<sup>45</sup> Many remained sceptical about official abjurations of cruel uses of airpower for purposes like tax collection, fearing that without public oversight operations

<sup>41</sup> Editorial, 'A Recent Retirement', *The Times*, 5 March 1921, p. 11; Editorial, 'The Case of Sir Arnold Wilson', *The Times*, 26 March 1921, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Position in Mesopotamia', *The Times*, 6 Sept. 1920, p. 11. See also Ramsay MacDonald and Andrew Bonar Law in the Commons, reported in *The Times*, 24 Nov. 1922, p. 7; 'Mesopotamia', *The Guardian*, 24 June 1920, p. 6; 'Mesopotamia', *The Guardian*, 26 June 1920, p. 10; 'Mesopotamia', *The Times*, 18 July 1921, p. 11; 'Mesopotamia', *The Guardian*, 21 Feb. 1923, p. 6; 'Iraq', *The Guardian*, 31 July 1924, p. 8; Commons debate, reported in *The Times*, 6 July 1926, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Commons debate, 20 Feb. 1923, reported in *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1923, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> 'Mesopotamia', *The Guardian*, 24 June 1920, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence, quoted in P. Knightley and C. Simpson, *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia* (1969), p. 138. See also Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 302.

were certain to be extraordinarily violent and frightfully un-British. The government's sanitized language was not lost on the *Manchester Guardian*; it knew that 'what the Colonial Office describes temperately as "air action"' was 'commonly known as bombing', and surmised that had two British airmen not been killed in the incident at hand, the public would have heard nothing of it. This segment of the British press knew that it shared not only Iraqis' fiscal enslavement but also their ignorance about the violence done there.<sup>46</sup>

In parliament, too, the focus of the secrecy debate shifted from economy to humanity. Questions about Iraqi casualties invariably met with bald assertions that no numbers were available because of the elusiveness of all information in Arabia and that air operations had certainly caused fewer deaths than would have been produced by ground operations – usually eliciting outraged allegations of Hunnish behaviour (whether Labour or the Conservatives were in power).<sup>47</sup> Eventually, endless obfuscations triggered demands for 'a White Paper giving particulars of where and why these bombardments have taken place ... together with the fact that no one but the airmen concerned is ever present to know whether inhabitants have been killed'. The Air Ministry's 1924 White Paper subsequently laid out the defence of air control's humanity – mainly that it saved lives through its 'moral effect', a crudely airbrushed version of reality.<sup>48</sup> Two decades later, George Orwell would famously unmask this sort of political speech as 'the defence of the indefensible': 'Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*'.<sup>49</sup>

The state did at times try to answer this critique of 'official secrecy' about Iraq. Special correspondents were deputed to write up favourable accounts of

<sup>46</sup> 'The Problem of Mesopotamia', *The Guardian*, 24 July 1920, p. 8; 'Iraq's "Little War"', *The Times*, 6 Apr. 1932, p. 16; 'Bombing in Iraq', *The Guardian*, 21 Apr. 1925, p. 8; 'Outlook in the Middle East', p. 85; *The Spectator*, 11 Nov. 1922, p. 682; 'Aeroplanes as Tax Collectors', *The Guardian*, 17 Jan. 1923, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, the House of Commons debate on 'Punitive bombing attacks', 12 Apr. 1923, reported in *The Times*, 13 Apr. 1924, p. 7; House of Commons debate on 'Disturbances in Iraq', 30 June 1924, reported in *The Times*, 1 July 1924, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Commons debate, reported in *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1923, p. 6; debate, reported 21 March 1923, p. 7; debate, reported 23 Feb. 1923, p. 6; debate, reported 13 Apr. 1924, p. 7; debate, reported 1 July 1924, p. 9; paraphrase of debate, reported 4 July 1924, p. 8; debate, reported 11 July 1924, p. 8; White Paper, excerpted in 'Iraq Bombing Operations', *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1924, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> G. Orwell, 'Politics and the English language' (1946), available at <<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>> [accessed 21 June 2011]. On the reality of air control, see Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, ch. 7.

the ‘open’ government there.<sup>50</sup> The experts also made a case for government management of information in a region where news was merely ‘a fairy tale ... passed rapidly from mouth to mouth’.<sup>51</sup> In scholarly societies, they asserted their special role, railing against the ‘unfortunate pressure exerted on military policy by an ill-informed Press, backed by ignorant public opinion’ – ‘one of the penalties we have to pay for “democratic control”’, in the words of General Barrow, former military secretary for India, who then launched into a frightening description of the mayhem that would follow evacuation from Mesopotamia.<sup>52</sup>

But the more the state protested its openness, the more critics suspected that it protested too much. In 1928, responding to censure of the policy of detaining press telegrams in Baghdad, colonial secretary Leo Amery explained that telegrams appearing to give ‘exaggerated or misleading’ news were merely delayed so that the high commissioner’s office could provide the journalist with the ‘true facts’. But to critical members of parliament and the press, the system amounted to ‘government “dope”’. And, ‘Propaganda’, they knew, was ‘the executive arm of the invisible government’.<sup>53</sup>

The state’s censorship and public relations efforts were sufficiently successful to stave off enough criticism both to keep the aerial regime in place and to keep the British in Iraq. But they could not silence criticism and, thus, as I mentioned above, the state was forced continually to reshape the British-Iraqi relationship and make the British presence ever more covert. The elite newspapers’ assertion of ‘knowingness’ about the

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Arthur Moore, special correspondent, ‘State-making in Eden’, *The Times*, 16 Dec. 1919, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Commons debate, reported in *The Times*, 13 March 1928, pp. 8–9; ‘Wahabis and Iraq’, *The Times*, 13 March 1928, p. 15. See also ‘Order in Iraq’, 14 Apr. 1928, p. 10; Philby to the editor, *The Times*, 24 June 1932, p. 8; correspondent in Arabia, ‘Arab Border Raids’, *The Times*, 27 Apr. 1932, p. 13; British Library, Additional MSS., Sir A. T. Wilson papers, 52459A, Pennington to Wilson, 2 June 1920.

<sup>52</sup> Barrow and Peel, comments on Haldane, ‘Arab Rising’, pp. 79–80. See also R. M. Ruck, comment on H. R. Brooke-Popham, lecture on the uses of airpower in the war, 3 Dec. 1919, in *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, lxxv (1920), 69; TNA: PRO, FO 371/13736, E3490, Lord Monteaigle, minute, 8 July 1929; Capt. Eden, ‘The annual dinner of the Central Asian Society’, *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, xiii (1926), 320; A. T. Wilson, ‘Mesopotamia, 1914–21’, *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, viii (1921), 155; Peel, comment on Eden, ‘Annual dinner’, pp. 320, 325; Capt. Acland, comment on Col. H. Burchall, ‘The air route to India’, 20 Oct. 1926, *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, xiv (1927), 17; St. Antony’s College, Oxford, Middle East Centre Archive, H. R. P. Dickson papers, box 2, file 4, Thomas to Violet Dickson, 2 Feb. 1925.

<sup>53</sup> Commons debate, reported in *The Times*, 3 Apr. 1928, p. 8; ‘What Is Our Mesopotamian Policy’, *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1920, p. 11; E. Bernays, *Propaganda* (1928), quoted in Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of the State*, pp. 16–17.

state's secret activities and agenda were part of the new self-consciousness (and scepticism) about democratic politics after the war revealed, and considerably swelled, the leviathan power of that state. Mass democracy and covert empire went hand in hand.

And so, in the inter-war period, we get a more malevolent vision of the state than ever before, rooted in suspicions of its unspeakable activities in the cradle of civilization. The new Middle East empire was crucial to the practice of mass democracy immediately after the war, not least because the place itself seemed corruptive. Commenting on the violence of air control, the *Round Table* warned that in Iraq British rule had 'become Oriental and its end will be near'.<sup>54</sup> Official production of ignorance and its criticism were anchored in cultural perceptions of a region in which secrecy and brutality were expected.

From the early speculations about Iraq, exposing hidden imperial brutalities became the obsession of liberal critics who came shrewdly to equate empire with militarism – assuming, as A. P. Thornton puts it, 'that virtue was only paraded in order to conceal vice'.<sup>55</sup> Among them was Edward J. Thompson, father of E. P. Thompson. The son of Methodist missionaries in India, he taught literature there, and during the war served as an army chaplain with the 2nd Royal Leicestershires in Iraq. In 1918, he was posted to Jerusalem where he met and married his wife, the daughter of an American missionary in Syria. He earned a military cross for his war service and published several books on his experiences, from 1919 to 1933, including a volume of verse, two memoirs and a novel, which were part of the wider public discussion about the ethics of British activity in Iraq.

It was not only the Amritsar massacre but the unending outcry over Mesopotamia that inspired Thompson to interrupt his decade-long effort to recount his Middle Eastern experiences with a revisionist account of the Indian 'mutiny', *The Other Side of the Medal* (1925). The *New Statesman* praised him for uncovering 'the policy of terrorisation' behind that event.<sup>56</sup> Raised by a father so profoundly shaped by his experiences in Iraq, E. P. Thompson grew up, as he said in an interview, 'expecting governments to be mendacious and imperialist and expecting that one's stance ought to be hostile to government'.<sup>57</sup> His father's search for redemption from disillusionment with the state went hand in hand with his passionate faith

<sup>54</sup> 'The Outlook in the Middle East', *Round Table*, xxxvii (Dec. 1919), 85. See also 'Aeroplanes as Tax Collectors'.

<sup>55</sup> Thornton, *Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, pp. 303–4.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in M. Lago, *India's Prisoner: a Biography of Edward John Thompson* (Columbia, Mo., 2001), pp. 205–27.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in D. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain* (Durham, NC, 1997), p. 17.

in the historian's craft as the most effective means of truth-telling against the government, and that, too, his son absorbed. During the revived campaign for nuclear disarmament of 1979–81, E. P. Thompson invoked the historic libertarian tradition of working-class people as the only force capable of checking the excesses of the 'secret state' that had emerged in twentieth-century Britain; and he also recognized that that tradition was the ironic inspiration of the state's peculiar invisibility – the very unpopularity of the security and police agencies had pushed them into the 'lowest possible visibility' and encouraged them to develop 'techniques of invisible influence and control'. These techniques had largely been learned, he explained, through the intense 'inter-recruitment, cross-postings and exchange' between the realms of imperial and domestic policing.<sup>58</sup>

Inter-war British debates about Iraq thus suggest a new way of thinking about the controversial question of whether Britain was an 'imperial society'. The proper measure of an 'imperial society' is perhaps not, as Bernard Porter would have it, the extent of British employment in the empire or the precision of cultural knowledge about empire.<sup>59</sup> Ignorance, as public debate in the US today confirms, can coexist quite peacefully with active and expansionist imperialism, and even with daily inundations of imperial imagery that bear little connection to the most urgent aspects of policy. This is what *The Times* picked up on when it accused the government of 'inoculating' Britons with 'imperial enthusiasm', as noted above. It could even be that the essence of the truly 'imperial society' lies in the comfortable combination of ignorance with popular imperial culture – and not only in times of covert empire when the cultivation of ignorance is an important government activity. Ignorance is not only bliss; it is the luxury of those above the fray.

Most critically, the question of Britain's cultural absorption in empire must be historicized. The substantive question is not *whether* Britain was an 'imperial society', but how and when it was – culturally, economically, politically or socially. Porter is essentially arguing against a straw man; few historians on the other side of the debate would claim that press coverage alone indicates total cultural enthrallment to empire, that all Britons were consumed equally by the Mutiny and the Boer War, and with equal political and cultural impact. We know that the press and popular opinion functioned very differently in 1857 and 1900; and ignorance functioned

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, 'Secret state'; 'An alternative to doomsday', *New Statesman*, 21 Dec. 1979, repr. in *Britain and the Bomb: the 'New Statesman' Papers on Destruction and Disarmament* (Manchester, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004).



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differently too. The questions we need to ask are: how and when do culture and popular opinion matter in imperial history? How much did it matter, at different times, what anyone thought? And how was their opinion shaped in the first place?

In this story of the struggle against imperial agnotology, we learn something about how inter-war imperial democracy worked. Domestic politics weighed heavily in the design of the Iraqi state; and the design of the Iraqi state, and the secrecy around it, weighed heavily in domestic debates about the meaning of democracy. It is a useful lesson for the US today as we think about the role of experts, secrecy, propaganda and aerial control in our ongoing wars in the Middle East.



## 10. Black intellectuals in the imperial metropolis and the debate over race and empire in *Sanders of the River*

*Marc Matera*

Released in Britain in 1935, the film *Sanders of the River* is a hymn to the figure of the colonial district commissioner and the necessity for and beneficence of British governance in Africa. Set in Nigeria, the film is based on Edgar Wallace's book with the same title. The protagonist, Commissioner Sanders, played by Leslie Banks, is the archetype of the colonial administrator who rules by force of his personality over his childlike charges. The film's prologue neatly encapsulates its central message: 'Sailors, soldiers and merchant adventurers were the pioneers who laid the foundations for the British Empire. Today their work is carried on by the civil servants – the Keepers of the King's Peace'. Then, superimposed on a map of Africa, it continues: 'Africa – tens of millions of natives, each tribe under its own chieftain, guarded and protected by a handful of white men, whose work is an unsung saga of courage and efficiency'. Throughout, the subdued but decidedly authoritarian Sanders maintains order through personal charisma and an intuitive capacity to know – to distinguish, see through and manipulate – the teeming thousands of Africans within his territory. The incident that leads to the film's central drama occurs when, after five years of uninterrupted peace, Sanders travels to England to get married. Upon his departure from the scene, the European gunrunners, Farini and Smith, spread a rumour that 'Lord Sandi' is dead, inciting the malevolent King Mofalaba to revolt. Commissioner Ferguson, Sanders's junior officer, confronts the old king alone and is murdered as a consequence. Following Ferguson's disappearance, the missionary Father O'Leary cables the Colonial Office: 'Send four battalions or Sanders'. Cutting his honeymoon short, Sanders hastily returns and once again imposes his authority, which, for the first time, appears to be fundamentally dependent on European technology; he is recalled over the telephone, returns by aeroplane, travels by paddle steamer to the Old King's country, and subdues the latter's army with machine guns.

Though undoubtedly racist, the plot of *Sanders of the River* is rather unremarkable within the annals of British imperialist fiction. Indeed, the

film is less outrageous than its source, and its protagonist more benevolent than in Wallace's fiction. Rather than the content of *Sanders of the River*, this chapter focuses on the circumstances surrounding the film's production and its reception by black intellectuals in the imperial metropolis. Like the empire itself, the production of the film depended upon the active participation of those colonial subjects it claimed to represent, including the involvement of many West Indians and Africans resident in London. The release of *Sanders of the River*, in turn, fuelled far-reaching discussions about race and racism among commentators on both sides of the Atlantic. The storm of criticism that greeted the film revealed the heightened stakes of representing the colonial relationship on the screen. As Prem Chowdhry observes in her study of representations of colonial India in film, 'empire cinema had emerged in the 1930s as an arena for debate and discussion on matters of imperialist concern and thus as a new site for the formation of public opinion'. If the cinema became a powerful new propaganda tool, it was also capable of generating alternative – unforeseen and unintended – consequences in public opinion. Imperial films were susceptible to anti-colonial critiques, 'a subversion of symbols and meanings', which potentially undermined their pro-British effects and 'made them counter-productive'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, interactions on the set and discussion of the film also exposed differences of context, interests, identity and authority among black intellectuals and activists.<sup>2</sup> *Sanders of the River* and, particularly, the presence of recognizable black faces in the film incited debate over the meaning of race and competing performances of blackness in the imperial metropolis.<sup>3</sup>

Before the late twentieth century, Britain was, as Frederick Cooper puts it, 'not a nation-state, but an empire-state', and 'both the way the leaders of empire-states thought about their polity and the forms in which political contestation took place reflect "thinking like an empire"'.<sup>4</sup> During the last three decades, a concerted effort to integrate the domestic and imperial

<sup>1</sup> P. Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology, and Identity* (Manchester, 2000), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> On the inescapable role of difference in articulations of diaspora and black internationalist discourse, see B. Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> On people of African descent in the imperial metropolis, see J. Schneer, *London 1900: the Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, Conn., 2001), pp. 3–14, 203–26; B. Schwarz, 'Black metropolis/white England', in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, ed. M. Nava and A. O'Shea (1996), pp. 176–207.

<sup>4</sup> F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005), pp. 153–4. See also G. Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago, Ill., 2005); and J. D. Kelly and M. Kaplan, *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization* (Chicago, Ill., 2001).

components of British history has drawn attention to the ways in which the empire came 'home' to and shaped the development of the British Isles.<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite greater recognition of the imperial aspects of British society and culture, much of the scholarship associated with the so-called new imperial history has continued to focus predominately on metropolitan Britain and/or white Britons. Moreover, while it has become common for historians to note the interconnection or 'mutual constitution' of the histories of domestic Britain and its empire, of metropolitan and colonial cultures, it is often unclear how this took place in practice. To upset the traditional focus on the metropole and its relations with the colonies, the vertical ties linking centre and periphery, Tony Ballantyne, Alison Games, Alan Lester, Thomas Metcalf and others have stressed the importance of connections between colonies and urged a re-conceptualization of empire in terms of overlapping 'networks' and 'webs of trade, knowledge, migration, military power and political intervention'.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, there has been a related effort to resituate the history of the British empire within a global context. Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy, for example, maintain that 'the processes unleashed by the spread of British imperialism had an impact beyond the territories and peoples of the British Empire, generating a global exchange that both buttressed imperial authority and contested it'. To map the extent and complexity of the overlapping networks set in motion by the 'imperial social formation', Mrinalini Sinha calls for 'a mode of analysis that is simultaneously global in its reach and conjunctural in its focus'.<sup>7</sup> The everyday lives and political struggles of sojourners and migrants from

<sup>5</sup> For useful overviews of the recent literature, see especially C. Hall and S. O. Rose, 'Introduction: being at home with the empire', *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. C. Hall and S. O. Rose (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 1–31; and R. Price, 'One big thing: Britain, its empire, and their imperial culture', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv (2006), 602–27.

<sup>6</sup> T. Ballantyne and A. Burton, 'Introduction: bodies, empires, and world histories', in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. T. Ballantyne and A. Burton (Durham, NC, 2005), p. 3. See also T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2002); A. Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in 19th-Century South Africa and Britain* (2001); T. R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Calif., 2007); A. Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> D. Ghosh and D. Kennedy, 'Introduction', in *Decentering Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World*, ed. D. Ghosh and D. Kennedy (New Delhi, 2006), p. 2; M. Sinha, 'Mapping the imperial social formation: a modest proposal for feminist history', *Signs*, xxv (2000), 1077–82. See also M. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: the Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC, 2006); and S. Ward, 'Transcending the nation: a global imperial history?', *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. A. Burton (Durham, NC, 2003), pp. 44–56.

Africa and the Caribbean who are the focus here provide a concrete example of a web of networks which were, at once, imperial and trans-imperial and transcended not only the divide between metropole and colony but the boundaries of the British empire as well.

The circuitry of empire and the technologies undergirding colonial rule, which came to include cinema in the early twentieth century, helped to produce alternative forms of identity and association, new political imaginaries, and transnational pathways of thought and action. Empire-building required the consolidation and reproduction of both incorporative and differentiating institutions, practices and discourses, which produced highly unequal power relations but also struggles over the degree of inclusion within the imperial polity. These insights have significant implications for how we think about agency and resistance within the context of empire as well as the structures and terms in which contests over the nature of citizenship and sovereignty emerged. As Cooper suggests, we should ‘recognize the instability and contested nature of colonizing ideologies’, as well as how colonial subjects ‘sought to reinterpret, appropriate, deflect, and resist the political ideas they gleaned from colonial rulers, their own experiences, and their connections across colonial boundaries’. As Ghosh and Kennedy point out, ‘in spite of the transformative and damaging effects of colonialism, some colonised subjects showed that they grasped strategies of wielding power very well and capitalised on the liberal promises of colonialism as a way of contesting British rule’. Like Cooper, they maintain that ‘it should be possible to retain analytic space for the strategic agency of colonial subjects while recognising the context of coloniality and without resorting to crude notions of collaboration’. African and West Indian intellectuals in London between the wars exposed the discrepancy between the rhetoric and practice of empire-building and appropriated the terms of their colonizers to make material demands on the state and assert their right to substantive citizenship. At the same time, they formed alliances and articulated visions of community based on consanguinity with people of African descent elsewhere from their outpost at the heart of the British empire. As Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine and Frank Trentmann note, empires not only produced struggles for racial equality and, ultimately, independence from colonial rule; they were also ‘sites of social and political movements that developed critiques of national sovereignty and explored transnational identities of citizenship and belonging’.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, pp. 26, 32; Ghosh and Kennedy, *Decentering Empire*, pp. 6–7; K. Grant, P. Levine and F. Trentmann, ‘Introduction’, in *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c.1880–1950*, ed. K. Grant, P. Levine and F. Trentmann (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 2–3. See also S. Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, NC, 2010).

The production of *Sanders of the River* brought different groups and individuals into dialogue with one another, demonstrating how the various webs of empire contributed to the construction of a larger intellectual milieu and community of address – an alternative black public sphere. The reasoned, public discussions among Africans and West Indians in London on the representation of Africa in various experiments in empire-building during the inter-war period led to broader critiques of racism and colonial rule.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, black intellectuals in London demonstrated their fluency in the practice of democratic citizenship and, thus, their suitability for a more supple and colourblind form of political association within the empire.

### *The projection of empire*

More than mere popular entertainment, *Sanders of the River* was the product of a particular set of concerns that surfaced in the early 1930s and an unabashed defence of an increasingly beleaguered system of colonial governance. In the face of mounting criticism, the film makers and colonial officials in Britain, together with multiple African colonies who assisted them, sought to present a positive image of colonial rule as currently practised. The film offered a view of the indirect rule system in Africa similar to those of apologists like Margery Perham, who appeared with growing frequency in British newspapers and other forums justifying it as, if not perfect, a necessity.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the position of officials in the Foreign Office and Department of Overseas Trade, that government propaganda as a form of 'national self-advertisement ... was a necessary instrument of the modern state', gradually became the dominant view amid the global economic depression.<sup>11</sup> As the secretary of the Empire Marketing Board, Stephen

<sup>9</sup> The British Empire Exhibition, which opened at Wembley in 1924, became the occasion for a renewed attempt at organizing west Africans in London on a broader basis, which culminated in the creation of the West African Students Union (D. M. Stephen, "The white man's grave": British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–5', *Journal of British Studies*, xlviii (2009), 102–28). On the Wembley Exhibition, see also D. Judd, *Empire: the British Imperial Experience, from 1765 to the Present* (1996), pp. 273–86; K. McClelland and S. O. Rose, 'Citizenship and empire, 1867–1928', in Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, pp. 294–6; D. L. Hughes, 'Kenya, India and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924', *Race and Class*, xlvii (2006), 66–85. On 'empire strengthening' and Africa after the First World War, see B. Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919–45* (1999).

<sup>10</sup> On Perham and other defenders of 'trusteeship' and indirect rule in the inter-war period, see Bush, *Imperialism*.

<sup>11</sup> P. M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919–39* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 103.

Tallents emerged as the most well-known advocate of expanded public relations efforts to advance British diplomatic interests and promote commerce, including imperial produce. Although reluctant to use the term 'propaganda', in his influential pamphlet, *The Projection of England* (1932), Tallents argued that 'we must master the art of national projection and must set ourselves to throw a fitting projection of England upon the world's screen'.<sup>12</sup> It was within this context that the Colonial Office and the pro-imperial lobby in Britain began to take greater interest in the power of film to shape public opinion.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, many believed it could be applied more fruitfully as a propaganda tool among metropolitan and colonial populations as well as in foreign markets, and there were repeated calls for films promoting the empire at imperial conferences in the 1920s and 1930s. On the other hand, the popularity of American films *vis-à-vis* homegrown productions both in Britain and the colonies represented a growing source of concern, particularly with regards to the maintenance of British prestige in the latter. Interest in the cinema as a technology of civic education mixed with concerns over the fate of British films in both imperial and foreign markets.<sup>14</sup> As Sir James Parr explained in an address to the Empire Film Institute, 'It is horrible to think that the British Empire is receiving its education from a place called Hollywood ... Trade follows the film, not the flag'.<sup>15</sup> To make matters worse, at a time when the diplomatic and economic support of the United States became increasingly vital, British inroads into the American market remained comparatively limited. Among British releases, colonial epics were consistently the biggest box office draws in the United States throughout the inter-war years and well into the post-war period. For film makers in both Britain and the United States, as Barbara Bush states, quoting a journalist from the *Daily Express*, 'the empire was "good business" and ... films like *Sanders of the River* were "far more successful at the box office than any equal amount of sophisticated sex nonsense"'.<sup>16</sup> For all of these reasons, writing in *Sight and Sound* in 1936, Winifred Holmes argued, 'It is essential for the continued unity and good will of the Empire that more and better British films should be distributed everywhere and that these films should add to England's prestige and show

<sup>12</sup> S. G. Tallents, *The Projection of England* (1932), pp. 39–40.

<sup>13</sup> Bush, *Imperialism*, pp. 24–5.

<sup>14</sup> M. Kale, 'Screening empire from itself: imperial preference, represented communities, and the decent burial of the Indian Cinematograph Committee Report (1927–8)', in Grant, Levine and Trentmann, *Beyond Sovereignty*, pp. 191–213.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in P. Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926–46* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> Bush, *Imperialism*, p. 25.



more of her ideals and epic qualities than before'.<sup>17</sup> In a memorandum on propaganda to Neville Chamberlain from April 1934, the deputy director of the government's National Publicity Bureau, Joseph Ball, suggested that 'It should be possible to ensure the adoption by some of the more enlightened producers of scenarios dealing with ... historical or imperial subjects in such a way as to enlist the sympathies of audiences on the side of the present government'. By 1938, Ball could assure Chamberlain that 'I have cultivated close links with the "leaders" of the British film industry, and I am satisfied that I can count upon most of them for their full support'.<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, the Hungarian film maker Alexander Korda fitted the bill perfectly, and he was probably one of the 'leaders' of the British film industry of whom Ball wrote. In 1933, Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* became one of the first films produced in Britain to enjoy box office success on an international level. Korda was eager to make a film that displayed the virtues of British rule in the colonies for his next project and dispatched two film crews under the direction of his brother, Zoltan, to shoot ethnographic footage in the Congo, Uganda and Sudan. Upon his return from the six-month trip, during which he enjoyed the full support of the local colonial administration, Zoltan Korda showed the African-American actor and singer Paul Robeson excerpts from the nearly 60,000 feet of film, in the hope of persuading him to accept the lead role in the project. Impressed by the footage of African landscapes and native African dances and rituals, Robeson enthusiastically agreed to participate, 'certain', as his biographers put it, 'that the film would offer blacks, in particular American blacks, a picture of the "Dark Continent" in which they could take pride'.<sup>19</sup>

### ***A black star and pan-Africa in London***

By the inter-war period, the capital of the British empire had also become, as C. L. Innes observes, 'the heart of resistance to empire'.<sup>20</sup> As a global city and hub of the overlapping networks of empire, the city facilitated the circulation of individuals and ideas, and, as Elleke Boehmer explains, 'thus formed an important meeting ground for Indian, Irish, African, and Caribbean freedom movements'. In the imperial metropolis, 'elites from

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in A. Aldgate and J. Richards, *Best of British Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* (1999), p. 30; *Sight and Sound*, v (1936), 74.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Aldgate and Richards, *Best of British Cinema*, pp. 30–1; The National Archives of the UK: Public Record Office, NC 8/21/9 (14 Apr. 1934 and June 1938).

<sup>19</sup> S. Tully Boyle and A. Bunie, *Paul Robeson: the Years of Promise and Achievement* (Amherst, Mass., 2001), pp. 292–3.

<sup>20</sup> C. L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700–2000* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 167.

different colonial contexts were able to mingle and exchange opinions in clubs, salons, and debating halls – in effect to experience different forms of cultural and political self-representation'.<sup>21</sup> As British power in Africa reached its apex after the First World War, many Caribbean and African students, intellectuals and activists embraced the goal of emancipation through transnational co-operation between communities of African descent around the world, or black internationalism, for the first time in the city. My use of black internationalism as an organizing concept, instead of 'pan-Africanism', situates the political imagination and activities of those under consideration here within their particular historical context, a period which many commentators recognized as one of increasing global integration. It more accurately reflects their language and ideas, which drew heavily upon the various tributaries of internationalist thought during the period.<sup>22</sup> If black intellectuals' growing impatience with British rule and the lack of colonial reform contributed to new alliances around race, the context of empire and the changing rationales for it in the wake of the First World War informed their political goals and conceptions of what black sovereignty might entail in an increasingly interdependent world. African and West Indian men and women in London engaged in dialogue with movements and individuals from elsewhere in the empire and African-American intellectuals across the Atlantic, established black pressure groups and publications, and exercised political dissent and imagination in envisioning the formation of regional federations in west Africa and the West Indies within a radically reconfigured British empire. Unlike the previous generation of west African intellectuals who were influenced by Edward W. Blyden's emphasis on racial purity, as Zachernuk notes, the 'new ideas for ... development' espoused by those in Britain during the 1930s 'eschewed the idea of racial peculiarity, proposing instead modern global standards'. Increasingly, 'Indirect rule was rejected in favor of development along British Commonwealth lines'. At the same time, their demands went beyond those of their predecessors in 'denying the need for gradual trusteeship on the road to self-government'. A Nigerian

<sup>21</sup> E. Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 20, 153.

<sup>22</sup> On changing conceptions of citizenship and the 'new internationalism' of the inter-war period, see F. Trentmann, 'After the nation-state: citizenship, empire and global coordination in the new internationalism, 1914–30', in Grant, Levine and Trentmann, *Beyond Sovereignty*, pp. 34–53; *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*, ed. D. Long and B. C. Schmidt (Albany, NY, 2005); C. Sylvest, 'Continuity and change in British liberal internationalism, c.1900–1930', *Review of International Studies*, xxxi (2005), 263–83; J. Stapleton, 'Citizenship versus patriotism in 20th-century England', *Historical Journal*, xlviii (2005), 151–78; and H. McCarthy, 'The League of Nations, public ritual and national identity in Britain, c.1919–56', *History Workshop Journal*, lxx (2010), 108–32.

student and member of the West African Students Union, H. O. Davies, articulated the sentiments of many of his contemporaries when he insisted that the 'British Empire deserves nothing but extinction as complete as that of the Dodo', while arguing that Nigeria could 'live and flourish' within the Commonwealth.<sup>23</sup> From the West African Students Union's hostel in Camden Town to cramped apartments in Euston and Hampstead, from the university seminar to Soho's nightclubs, London played a central role in the development of black internationalist thought and activity through the conversations, alliances and boundary crossings which only the city made possible. In the mid 1930s, the set of the imperialist epic *Sanders of the River* became for a brief time another such pan-African space.

Shooting for the film in Britain began in the early summer of 1934 at Shepperton Studios in Middlesex. Not only did the film feature two prominent African-American actors – Robeson in the part of Bosambo and the twenty-year-old Nina Mae McKinney as his wife, Lilongo – but the film makers recruited nearly 250 extras from the ranks of black dockworkers and labourers in the port cities of Bristol, Liverpool, Cardiff and London, as well as a number of African and Caribbean students, actors and musicians, whom the film maker and critic Paul Rotha somewhat dismissively described as 'Negroes dug from agents' files and cafe bars'.<sup>24</sup> At least twenty different African languages could be heard on the set. The Kenyan Jomo Kenyatta, then known as Johnstone, played one of the African chiefs in Sanders's district; the Nigerian actor Orlando Martins appeared in the minor role of K'Lova; and a number of African students like H. O. Davies, who was beginning his studies at the London School of Economics, were cast as extras. The Sierra Leonean Ernest Marke, who formed the Colonial Workers' Association and operated a nightclub in Soho during the 1940s, recalled first meeting Kenyatta on the set. Both Marke and Kenyatta later participated in the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester.<sup>25</sup> The composition of the motley cast crossed not only ethnic and linguistic divides but also class differences. Most students and other members of the literati from the British Caribbean and Africa rarely interacted with black and mixed-race workers in the metropole, but, for several weeks, they mingled with one another on a soundstage on the outskirts of London for the same daily pittance.

<sup>23</sup> P. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: an African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville, Va., 2000), p. 112; H. O. Davies, 'Our Secretary's Bag', *Daily Service* (13 Oct. 1938).

<sup>24</sup> P. Rotha, 'Sanders of the River', in *Rotha on the Film: a Selection of Writings about the Cinema* (Fair Lawn, NJ, 1958), p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> E. Marke, *In Troubled Waters: Memoirs of 70 Years in England* (1986), p. 136.

The interaction with Africans encouraged a growing interest in the history of African cultures within Paul Robeson and his wife, Eslanda Goode Robeson, who was studying anthropology at the London School of Economics. As Bill Schwarz explains, Robeson ‘brought Harlem to London and ... it was in London that, in his own words, he “discovered Africa”’.<sup>26</sup> His son, Paul Jr., recalled, ‘He found his own African roots ... and became radicalized by the African anti-colonial fighters of that time like Jomo Kenyatta’.<sup>27</sup> While life on the set helped to initiate a dramatic alteration in Robeson’s self-conception and politics, it also increased his zeal for the project and his hopes for the final product. As Marie Seton notes in her biography, Robeson believed ‘that if he could portray an African chief on the screen with cultural accuracy, then he was making a contribution to the understanding of the tribal culture which he considered was a part of his own heritage’.<sup>28</sup> Despite clear signs within the script that the end result would reproduce a plethora of stereotypes of Africans, not least of which being his character’s name (Bosambo), Robeson remained confident that the film would portray Africa ‘in a really magnificent way’.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, if the experience helped to foster a personal attachment to Africa within Robeson, it also revealed the limits of his own knowledge and experience, and exposed him to the differences and tensions among people of African descent in London. Robeson’s costume, which consisted of a Tarzan-esque leopard skin and little else, drew criticism from some Africans who visited the set. Dame Flora Robson, Robeson’s co-star in the 1933 stage production of Eugene O’Neill’s *All God’s Chillin, Got Wings*, recalled: ‘He ... was ticked off by a Prince of the Ashanti who was up at Oxford and said “What do you wear a leopard skin for?” So Paul said, “Well, what do *you* wear in Africa? Tweeds?” And the Prince said “Yes. We do.” They didn’t like him. They thought as an educated man he shouldn’t play these primitive parts’.<sup>30</sup> Such encounters were humbling for the Robesons. Eslanda later reflected on how, in their naivety, they inadvertently perpetuated a bigoted image of Africans.

These Africans, these ‘primitives’, make me feel humble and respectful. I blush with shame for the mental picture my fellow Negroes in America have of our African brothers: wild black savages in leopard skins, waving spears and eating

<sup>26</sup> Schwarz, ‘Black metropolis/white England’, p. 180; *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews, 1918–74*, ed. P. S. Foner (1978), p. 351.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Robeson Jr., interviewed in *Songs of Freedom: Paul Robeson and the Black American Struggle*, Channel Four Television (30 June 1986).

<sup>28</sup> M. Seton, *Paul Robeson* (1958), p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Seton, *Paul Robeson*, p. 300.

<sup>30</sup> Flora Robson, interviewed in *Paul Robeson*, BBC Television (26 Nov. 1978).

raw meat. And we, with films like *Sanders of the River*, are unwittingly helping to perpetuate this misconception.<sup>31</sup>

Robeson's long-time assistant, Joe Andrews, remembered an incident that demonstrated how little the couple understood the regional differences and prejudices among Africans. Eslanda drove Paul to the set each morning and often picked up African cast members on the way. 'More than once', Andrews recalled, 'she had the East African Kenyatta and the West African Orlando Martins jammed with others into the car. Neither Kenyatta nor Martins was happy about the situation. When Paul realized there was a problem, he asked Essie simply to not pick up anyone'. Andrews added: 'It never occurred to her whether they were East or West Africans before she let them in the car, which shows really how little she understood them and their prejudices'.<sup>32</sup> These experiences led the Robesons to take a more direct interest in the diversity of, and complex relations between, African cultures, and Eslanda embarked on her own journey to Africa in 1936, where she and her son travelled to South Africa, Basutoland, Kenya, Uganda and Egypt, and visited several of the friends that the couple met in London.

By the end of 1934, Paul had also become more sensitive to the prevalence of racism in British society. In addition to the Africans, West Indians and black Britons whom he encountered during the production of *Sanders of the River*, his interactions with black organizations like the West African Students Union (WASU) and the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) contributed greatly to this process. Despite his own brush with the colour bar when he was denied service at London's fashionable Savoy Grill in 1929, Reginald Bridgeman of the League Against Imperialism reported that Robeson 'startled many of those who heard him [at a LCP meeting in 1933] by denying that there was any discrimination against coloured persons in Britain. Any prejudice, he said, that may exist is due to the presence of Americans in this country'.<sup>33</sup> By December 1934, when he delivered a speech entitled 'The Negro in the Modern World' during a league meeting at Memorial Hall, his thinking had altered considerably. Here, he focused on themes that had begun to preoccupy him – the cultural wealth of Africa and the importance of identifying with this cultural heritage for people of African descent around the world. He surprised the audience by declaring that he was 'unquestionably leaving' Britain. Part of the reason for this decision, he explained, was his inability to ignore the extent to which his own position as a celebrity diverged from that of others of African descent

<sup>31</sup> E. Goode Robeson, *African Journey* (1946), p. 49.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Boyle and Bunie, *Paul Robeson*, p. 298.

<sup>33</sup> TNA: PRO, KV 2/1829, Reginald Bridgeman to Arnold Ward, 15 Sept. 1933.

in the country: 'I want to be where I can be African and not have to be Mr. Paul Robeson every hour of the day'. While he admitted that he enjoyed 'perfect freedom and peace' in Britain, he added, 'it has not been so with my friends – companions of my own race. Where I am welcome they are not ... I am tired of the burden of my race, which will be with me so long as I remain here'.<sup>34</sup> Just months before *Sanders of the River* hit big screens across Britain and, soon thereafter, the United States and elsewhere, its star had made a dramatic volte-face in his public stance and personal politics as a result of his experiences in Britain.

### **Sanders of the River and the black public sphere**

Even before its cinematic release, the film proved to be a huge commercial success. For weeks before it opened on 29 March 1935, a publicity campaign promised viewers both high adventure and a rare glimpse into an exotic Africa. *Sanders* shattered existing records for advanced ticket sales, and *Harper's Bazaar* proclaimed that 'all the world is going' in the run up to the premiere.<sup>35</sup> James Agate of *Tatler* noted 'the breathless interest it aroused' in a theatre 'packed from floor to ceiling by an audience of every height of brow'. The aerial and panoramic footage of African landscapes and cultural practices in the film were novel in the history of British cinema and lent a certain truth-value to it. As one reviewer explained, it combined 'a dramatic film with a "documentary" authority' in 'an illuminating study of a primitive civilization with full-blooded adventure to provide the maximum emotional thrill'. Similarly, the *Daily Sketch* observed, 'Sanders and his story are occasionally in danger of being ousted by something closely akin to a travelogue', but it is 'a grand travelogue ... full of movement and primitive passion'.<sup>36</sup>

However, not everyone in Britain held the film in such high regard, nor was the criticism of it limited to London's black residents. In a scathing review for *Cinema Quarterly*, Paul Rotha observed sardonically, 'So this is Africa, ladies and gentlemen, wild, untamed Africa before your very eyes, where the White Man rules by kindness and the Union Jack means peace!' While excoriating the director, Alexander Korda, Rotha expressed sympathy for the film's star:

You may, like me, feel embarrassed for Robeson. To portray on the public screen one of your own people as a smiling but cunning rogue, as clay in a woman's hands (especially when she is of the sophisticated American brand),

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *Manchester Guardian* (14 Dec. 1934); see also 'The 21<sup>st</sup> general meeting', *The Keys*, ii (1935), 52.

<sup>35</sup> *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1935; *The Observer* and *Daily Mail*, 25 May 1935.

<sup>36</sup> *Film World*, 13 Apr. 1935; *Daily Sketch*, 10 Apr. 1935; J. Agate, 'The cinema: lighted Africa', *Tatler*, mdccxliv (17 Apr. 1935).

as toady to the White Man, is no small feat. With Wimperis's lyrics of stabbing and killing, with a little son to hoist around, with a hearth-rug round his loins, a medallion on his navel, and a plaster forest through which to stalk, what more could Robeson do, save not appear at all?

Rotha anticipated a hostile reception from those ostensibly represented in the film, who, he rightly surmised, would interpret it as an insult to Africa and Africans in general:

It is important to remember that the multitudes of *this* country who see Africa in this film are being encouraged to believe this fudge is real ... To exploit the past is the historian's loss. To exploit the present means, in this case, the disgrace of a Continent. What reception will it get in Africa? ... Who cares? It is only entertainment, after all! Sursum Korda!<sup>37</sup>

After the film's release, black commentators on both sides of the Atlantic debated the significance and impact of Robeson's involvement in the film, repeatedly questioning his judgement for participating in such a project. Many, though not all, concluded that, whatever the personal cost, he should have passed on *Sanders*. However, though often critical, the diverse reactions of black intellectuals demonstrated the role of multiple, overlapping and, at times, conflicting identifications and interests in shaping their attitudes to the film and its star. Against the portrayal of colonial Africa presented in *Sanders of the River*, Africans and West Indians in London deployed a countervailing performance of blackness in the form of the activist-intellectual engaged in public discourse and worthy of the full fruits of imperial citizenship. Their responses were neither the same nor unequivocal, but were linked by a sense of common cause and universally entailed a call for greater unity among people of African descent across regional and cultural differences. While directed in part towards a wider British audience, the often heated debates between black intellectuals contributed to and assumed the existence of an alternative black public sphere.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of his international fame, Paul Robeson's presence alone ensured that the debate over the film would be a transatlantic affair. If the alluring images of Africa, including, as Rotha put it, the usual 'snatched chances for black nudity', accounted for much of the film's popularity, the appearance of Robeson in his first British film was equally important.<sup>39</sup> Asked near the

<sup>37</sup> Rotha, 'Sanders of the River', pp. 139–40.

<sup>38</sup> On the difference between the public in general, dominant publics, alternative public spheres and counterpublics, see M. Warner, 'Public and counterpublics', *Public Culture*, xiv (2002), 49–90. For a similar usage of the notion of an alternative black public sphere, see Wilder, *French Imperial Nation-State*, pp. 192–8.

<sup>39</sup> Rotha, 'Sanders of the River', p. 139.

end of his life to contribute a short piece on 'black intellectuals in Britain', the Trinidadian writer and activist C. L. R. James remarked, 'I doubt if there are many black men who have made the impact on England that Paul Robeson has made. He ... was one of the best-known and best-loved black men who ever was looked upon by British people as one of the blacks who had made it'.<sup>40</sup> An African-American celebrity who had become the most famous black man in Britain after his triumphant debut on the London stage in the musical *Show Boat* in 1928, his participation in *Sanders of the River* became the source of considerable controversy among black intellectuals around the Atlantic. Released amid the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the major European powers' acquiescence to the move, James recalled that the film 'caused one hell of a row' among West Indians and Africans in London.<sup>41</sup> During a brief stop in London on his way back to west Africa from the United States, the nationalist and future president of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe, published an explicit condemnation of it. 'Whoever sees this picture', he declared, 'will be shocked at the exaggeration of African mentality, so far as superstitious beliefs are concerned, not to speak of the knavery and chicanery of some African chiefs. I feel what is being paraded in the world today as art or literature is nothing short of propaganda'.<sup>42</sup> After a screening of the film in Cape Town, South Africa, the local correspondent for the *Chicago Defender* wondered: 'Has Paul Robeson been tricked in his role of "Bosambo" ... ?' 'This', he noted, 'is the all-engrossing subject of debate here'.<sup>43</sup> Robeson also faced an onslaught of criticism when he returned to New York, where, he recalled in 1938, 'I was met by a deputation who wanted to know how the hell I had come to play in a film which stood for everything they rightly thought I opposed'.<sup>44</sup> During an interview in 1936 for the *Sunday Worker*, an African-American journalist lambasted Robeson:

This picture ... was a slanderous attack on African natives who were pictured as being satisfied with the 'benevolent' oppression of English imperialism. You yourself played the role of selling the natives out to the imperialists ... You became the tool of British imperialism and must be attacked and exposed whenever you act in such pictures or plays.

In response, Robeson claimed that 'the twist in the picture which was favourable to English imperialism was accomplished during the cutting of

<sup>40</sup> C. L. R. James, 'Black intellectuals in Britain', in *Colour, Culture and Consciousness*, ed. B. Parekh (1974), p. 154.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Boyle and Bunie, *Paul Robeson*, p. 324.

<sup>42</sup> N. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (Lagos, 1968), pp. 153–5.

<sup>43</sup> 'Africans Believe Paul Robeson Was Tricked in British Film', *Chicago Defender* (5 Oct. 1935), p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> P. Robeson, *The Cine-Technician* (Sept.–Oct. 1938), pp. 74–5.



the picture after it was shot. I had no idea that it would have such a turn *after* I had acted in it'. Ultimately, he conceded, 'You're right, and I think all the attacks against me and the film were correct'.<sup>45</sup> These reactions indicate both the sense of betrayal provoked by Robeson's participation in the project and the extent to which the public debate on race and imperialism had become a transatlantic one.

Yet, more immediate concerns and differences in material and cultural power between the African-American celebrity and them mitigated the responses of black organizations and individual West Indians and Africans in London. Some, like Kenyatta, remained silent on their involvement in the film, offering neither explanation nor justification. For individuals like H. O. Davies, working as an extra on the film was a source of much-needed income for a cash-strapped student and a fun experience, but of little more significance. As a member of the WASU in the late 1930s and 1940s, Davies, who became a major influence on the black internationalism espoused by the group, largely dismissed the criticism of his old friend, Azikiwe. 'None of us', he recalled, 'worried about the article [by Azikiwe] because the fellows we met from day to day were decent and affectionate, and the crowd wage of two pounds a day was a little fortune in the pocket of overseas students in London. We all took the whole film, and acting in it, as great fun'.<sup>46</sup>

For black organizations like the WASU and LCP, the publicity and financial resources that someone of Robeson's stature might provide attenuated their willingness publicly to condemn the actor, leading, at times, to awkward apologetics. In a review of the film in its journal, *The Keys*, the LCP's 'Special Film Correspondent' offered a critical appraisal of the film's plot, while praising Robeson's gifts as an artist:

*Sanders of the River* ... is just the kind of film which will appeal to the average English audience in a Jubilee year. It portrays the good old myth of the strong, silent, white man quelling hordes of angry savages with his scowl, and peacefully and altruistically ruling his thousands of ignorant black children by the sheer strength of his personality.

Although 'Mr. Robeson's glorious voice is well recorded', the author asserted, 'As Bosambo he is completely wasted. In fact the whole cast – many of whom you will recognize – has been sacrificed to make room for some news-reel pictures of Africa, and some fine opportunities for real Negro acting have been withheld'. The league's unnamed correspondent

<sup>45</sup> Ben Davis Jr., 'U.S.S.R. – The Land for Me', *Sunday Worker*, 10 May 1936, in Foner, *Paul Robeson Speaks*, pp. 107–8.

<sup>46</sup> H. O. Davies, *Memoirs* (Ibadan, 1989), pp. 61–2.

dismissed the film as a work of propaganda and a missed opportunity for furthering black achievement as well as mutual recognition and understanding between black and white. 'Still', the review concluded, 'if only to hear Paul Robeson sing, and to see some good Negro dancing, you should see this film'.<sup>47</sup>

In 1935, the WASU honoured Robeson as 'Babásale' or patron in recognition of his financial contribution to the organization, and the union's journal featured a group photograph of members seated around the Robesons taken during the reception at its hostel.<sup>48</sup> In the subsequent issue, the editors defended Robeson against the mounting criticism directed towards him for *Sanders of the River*. They responded, in particular, to the recent accusations of the Jamaican writer Una Marson, an outspoken feminist and an active member of the LCP, who had joined the growing ranks of his critics. Marson first met Robeson when she visited the set of *Sanders of the River* in 1934. 'He told me', she recalled, 'that he found it difficult to get suitable coloured plays' and introduced her to the work of the black Russian author, Alexander Pushkin.<sup>49</sup> In the months after this initial meeting, however, Marson became increasingly embittered towards the famous African-American artist as she read the numerous articles in British papers in which he celebrated 'the real but unknown glories of African culture'. One of the most important of these pieces, 'I Want Negro Culture', appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation* and was reprinted in the WASU's journal with glowing commentary. Soon thereafter, Marson published a response in the former. 'The cry for negro culture is putting the cart before the horse', she argued, 'and the first task of the negro who has achieved is to teach his people the value of unity. The negro worries too much about what the white man thinks of him and too little about what he is himself in the eyes of people of his own race'. Marson implied that Robeson had placed his personal success and popularity before the collective interests of people of African descent, adding: 'There is nothing the negro needs more than sound, wise leadership by men and women able and willing to sacrifice for the good of their own people'.<sup>50</sup> His recent calls for the development of a distinct black culture, she suggested, represented little more than veiled attempts at further self-aggrandizement. Worse still, these efforts had seduced many in London, like the members of the

<sup>47</sup> G. M., *The Keys*, ii (1935), 83.

<sup>48</sup> 'Installation of Mr. Paul Robeson as Babásale (patron) of W.A.S.U.', *Wásù*, iv (1935), 6–8.

<sup>49</sup> U. Marson, 'Coloured contributions', *Public Opinion* (3 July 1937), p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> *News Chronicle* (8 June 1935).

WASU.<sup>51</sup> The leaders of the union expressed agreement with Marson's call for greater unity among people of African descent but dismissed her accusations: 'If Miss Marson is insinuating that Mr. Robeson belongs to that class of successful Negroes who are "boosting" the race in order to focus attention on themselves, we may tell her gently but firmly that she is mistaken'.<sup>52</sup> While Robeson's substantial celebrity and resources led groups like the WASU to defend the star in the public realm, these same qualities also fuelled suspicion among others.

Marcus Garvey emerged as the most vociferous critic of Robeson in London. Once again, the WASU rushed to respond to the charges that Garvey levelled against him, a move that reflected both the political differences between them and the group's tenuous financial position in the mid 1930s. Garvey had been an important source of inspiration and ally to the WASU in its early years. He helped to finance its journal and transferred the lease on his residence in West Kensington to the union when he left London in 1928.<sup>53</sup> Yet, by the time Garvey returned to Britain in the early 1930s, his credibility greatly diminished, he had little influence on and few ties to the centres of black activism in the city, while the WASU had become one of the most significant of the latter. Against the backdrop of the rising threat of fascism and a renewed bout of imperialist expansion by the fascist powers, the organization had begun to articulate a black internationalist perspective, which they explicitly distinguished from Garveyite black nationalism. In 1937, an editorial in *Wàsù* declared: 'our nationalism is with a difference. It is not of the Mussolini-Hitler-Franco or the "Ethiopian" type which may be termed rabid nationalism. Ours is based on justice ... We do not believe in the parrot-cry, "Africa for the Africans", but rather Africans for Africa – a great difference'.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Marson's biographer, Delia Jarrett-Macauley, attributes her attack to envy. Although she had enjoyed considerable success, staging her play *At What Price?* in the West End, publishing two volumes of poetry, and managing the LCP's social activities and journal, Marson undoubtedly felt upstaged by Robeson, who appeared to be usurping some of her central concerns, such as the creation of a theatre for plays by black authors in London, and receiving all the credit for advancing them. Indeed, she tried (unsuccessfully) to establish a London-based black theatre group that, as she told the *Daily Gleaner* in 1936, could 'produce Empire plays by native people' without success. Yet, if the motivation for Marson's intervention was in part personal, she also articulated concerns shared by other West Indians and Africans in London ('Racial Prejudice in London Not Improving Says Miss Marson', *Daily Gleaner*, 28 Sept. 1936, p. 5; D. Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson, 1905–65* (Manchester, 1998)).

<sup>52</sup> 'Race enemy no. 1', *Wàsù*, iv (1935), 18.

<sup>53</sup> *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, ed. R. A. Hill (12 vols., Los Angeles, Calif., 1990), vii. 734.

<sup>54</sup> 'Nationalism in Africa', *Wàsù*, vi (1937), 22.

The union had also moved into a more permanent home, which served as a social centre and hostel offering short-term lodgings to Africans and others of African descent. The WASU House became an important site of black sociability in London, but its future remained in doubt for much of the decade. The group first engaged in a public campaign against the Colonial Office and the opening of a government-sponsored hostel named Aggrey House, decrying the move as an attempt to undercut their independent initiative and extend the practice of indirect rule to management of colonial students in the metropole. Ladipo Solanke eventually secured limited financial support from the colonial governments of west Africa for the maintenance of the WASU hostel, but these funds were renewable on an annual basis and never fully covered the cost of maintaining the house. Thus, the group remained dependent upon outside sources of funding as well as positive publicity. Within this context, Robeson's ability to provide the necessary financial and cultural capital for the WASU to continue its activities in London was of no small importance. Indeed, the same issue of *Wàsù* that featured the response to Robeson's critics like Garvey also contained a photograph of the Robesons amid members and their friends during the WASU Day festivities held at the African Hostel on 31 October 1936.<sup>55</sup>

Writing in the *Black Man*, Garvey harangued readers: 'Anyone who has seen "Sanders of the River" can readily grasp the significance of the surrender of the Negro to all that is cultural, civilized, lofty and high, which mark him as being unworthy for a competent place at the present time in the civilisation of the world'. In identifying 'the danger of Paul Robeson as an actor', he linked such representations of Africans to the growing prevalence of racial prejudice in Britain. 'A picture like this', he added, 'shown to the majority of people of ordinary intelligence, can only tend to inflame them against the black man. There is no wonder ... that cultured blacks and respectable people of colour find it difficult to secure courteous reception and accommodation in England'.<sup>56</sup> The WASU countered by questioning the motives of critics like Garvey and took the rather disingenuous position that *Sanders of the River* was a work of historical fiction. 'Such critics', the editors of *Wàsù* asserted, 'show a lack of a sense of proportion or historical perspective ... Was there not a time when the African went about in skins and sometimes in nothing at all? Why should the African to-day be ashamed of such incident?' At the same time, they dismissed the notion that the film reflected anything approaching reality in contemporary Africa, stating: 'If

<sup>55</sup> 'Ogboni and Iyafin Paul Robeson and W.A.S.U. members and their friends at the W.A.S.U. Day Celebrations at the African Hostel in London, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 1936', *Wàsù*, vi (1937), 60.

<sup>56</sup> Marcus Garvey, 'Paul Robeson as actor', *Black Man*, i (1935), 8–9.

the white man is so foolish as to think that the African to-day is like his ancestor of, say, fifty years ago, he will have a rude awakening when he meet[s] him'. The union's co-founder and general secretary, Ladipo Solanke, had gained renown for his repeated public denunciations of the portrayal of west Africans at the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley, but, in this dispute, the WASU allied with Robeson against Garvey, stressing the need for racial unity and accusing the latter of 'pointless criticism' motivated by petty jealousy. 'It is not what our ancestors wore nor the "propaganda films" of the white man that is retarding our progress', they argued, 'but such pointless criticism with which we have had to deal. It is not love of the race that has prompted its authors, but, we venture to think, it is a case of the Fox and the Sour Grapes'.<sup>57</sup> Infighting among people of African descent was the most pressing problem, not the representation of Africans in imperialist films.

Garvey dismissed the union's defence of Robeson as youthful ignorance and restated his position, citing the more critical views of other Africans in London:

In the wave of opinion he [Robeson] has visited a small African students' Organization in London called Wasu ... The picture of this social gathering has been published widely. Probably it leaves the impression that a certain number of African students support Robeson in the continuation of his performances in such pictures ... We know of Africans who feel just to the opposite ...

He continued:

The few Africans who sat with him were young men who have not yet started to think in the highest sense of the racial integrity and pride. Probably Paul Robeson is a patron of the student body. If so, it would be expected that the students who are appreciative of his assistance would rally around him, but that surely will not leave the inference that he is endorsed to continue appearing in such pictures that do not do us as a race any good. Paul Robeson ought to realize that the growing prejudice against Negroes in England, or Great Britain for that matter, is due largely to the peculiar impression moving picture fans obtain from seeing such pictures ...<sup>58</sup>

Garvey's insistence on the role of popular culture in warping Britons' perception of Africans generally accorded with views expressed by the WASU in other circumstances. But those in the WASU who came to Robeson's defence were not simply star-struck or naive, as Garvey suggested. Indeed, as even he recognized, other factors were at work. As the group developed a more ambitious agenda, its position became both more

<sup>57</sup> 'Mr. Paul Robeson and his critics', *Wāsi*, v, Christmas Number (1936), 49–51.

<sup>58</sup> M. Garvey, 'Paul Robeson and his mission', *Black Man*, ii (1937), 2–3.

established and more tenuous. Like the individuals whose participation in the film was guided mainly by personal considerations, the union's response to the criticism levelled at Robeson for *Sanders of the River* represented a tactical move reflecting pragmatic concerns as well as its commitment to black unity.

Robeson himself ultimately disavowed *Sanders of the River*, acknowledging the validity of the criticisms of the film and later citing the experience as an important turning point in his career, but exactly when (and the related question of why) remains unclear. He subsequently claimed that, 'when it was shown at its premiere in London and I saw what it was, I was called to the stage and in protest refused to perform. Since that time I have refused to play in three films offered me by that same producer'.<sup>59</sup> However, in their recent biography, Boyle and Bunie observe: 'By virtually all accounts (excepting Seton's) Robeson expressed no dissatisfaction with the film until faced with a storm of protest from ... West Indians, Africans, native members of the India League, and white anti-imperialists'.<sup>60</sup> Robeson became more politically active in the late 1930s and 1940s, but his turn to communism rather than a more direct engagement with black internationalism disappointed many, a failure which some linked to differences in background and experience.<sup>61</sup> C. L. R. James later attributed this to his being an American rather than a colonial subject in the British empire. As he recalled:

Paul showed such intense interest in Africa during the early 1930s, I was sure he would eventually join us in the fight against British colonialism. He was such a giant, and we expected and hoped for so much from him. But, in truth, he was not a colonial and never really understood British imperialism. In fact, it

<sup>59</sup> Davis Jr., 'U.S.S.R.', pp. 107–8.

<sup>60</sup> In 1938, he explained, "Sanders of the River" ... attracted me because the material that London Films brought back from Africa seemed to me good honest pictures of African folk ways ... But in the complete version, "Sanders of the River" resolved itself into a piece of flag-waving, in which I wasn't interested. As far as I was concerned it was a total loss'. When asked the same year why he 'cut himself off' from the British and American commercial film industry soon thereafter, he said, 'because I am no longer willing to identify myself with an organization that has no regard for reality – an organization that attempts to nullify public intelligence, falsify life and entirely ignores the many dynamic forces at work in the world today'. Boyle and Bunie, *Paul Robeson*, p. 324; Robeson, *The Cine-Technician* (Sept.–Oct. 1938), pp. 74–5; P. Robeson, 'Why Robeson rebelled', *Film Weekly*, 8 Oct. 1938.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Robeson was criticized at an LCP meeting for joining the communist-supported Unity Theatre, and 'it was agreed that steps should be taken to persuade him not to identify himself so closely with the Communist Party' (TNA: PRO, KV 2/1829 (26 Oct. 1937)). On Robeson and the Unity Theatre, see C. Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (New York, 1989).

took him a long time to grasp the damage done by a movie like *Sanders of the River* ... As an American I don't think he understood what the British had done in the colonies and how wrong it all was, even though it was so like his own situation in America.<sup>62</sup>

James pointed to the different perspectives of African Americans and Africans (and presumably West Indians) under British colonial rule only to deny that there were in fact substantive differences between racialized structures operating in their respective contexts. Whatever disagreements emerged between them, Robeson's interactions with members of the LCP and WASU, as well as individuals like C. L. R. James and Jomo Kenyatta, played no small role in awakening his interest in Africa and spurring his turn to communist internationalism. These encounters laid the foundation for the Robesons' later involvement in the anti-imperialist Council on African Affairs in the United States.<sup>63</sup> The encounter with the African-American star also led many black intellectuals in London, as with James above, to think in more complex and global terms about the consistency of racial subordination across the varying circumstances of people of African descent in a world shaped by empire. The networks of empire that brought the Robesons, James and the African and West Indian members of the WASU and LCP together in London helped to foster a sense of belonging to a larger black world, a source of identification and a community of address, that underpinned the debate over and various reactions to *Sanders of the River*.

### **Conclusion**

Both the intent behind *Sanders of the River* and the responses that it solicited from West Indian and African commentators in London reflected a growing struggle over the form of the British empire and the nature of citizenship within it. The film emerged at a moment when indirect rule seemed increasingly untenable as a means of securing Britain's ties to its African colonies into the future. Its appearance was part of a larger attempt to market the empire at home, in the colonies and abroad in the inter-war period. Yet, the production process itself, dependent as it was on the participation of an internationally recognized African-American star and scores of other black actors and extras, created a space for interaction, alliance-building and even conflict among individuals of African descent

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Boyle and Bunie, *Paul Robeson*, pp. 365–6.

<sup>63</sup> On what Schwarz terms Robeson's 'folk internationalism', see Schwarz, 'Black metropolis/white England'. On Eslanda Robeson's important role in the Council on African Affairs and other anti-imperialist activities, see J. Castledine, '... Without battle ships, atom bombs, and lynch ropes' (unpublished Rutgers University PhD thesis, 2007).

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in Britain. Moreover, the intrusion of black intellectuals into the debates surrounding *Sanders of the River* revealed the contours of a self-conscious and, in terms of perspective and perceived interests, relatively distinct black public sphere in the imperial metropolis as well as a trans-Atlantic dialogue on race and empire. Pressed into service as a new technology of 'empire-strengthening', the cinema also provided an opportunity for Africans and West Indians to critique empire and articulate their own visions of racial community.



## II. Co-operatives and the technocrats, or 'the Fabian agony' revisited

*Aaron Windel*

### ***Introduction***

In 1963, *New Left Review* published a scathing assessment of the Labour party's record on colonial issues.<sup>1</sup> Ioan Davies's claim in 'The Labour Commonwealth' was that Labour had been inept at contemplating, much less acting upon, the problem of empire. Labour leaders since the 1920s had been too concerned with supporting national living standards and had failed to find a plan of political development toward independence for the colonies. The Fabians, especially Sidney and Beatrice Webb, were 'social imperialists'.<sup>2</sup> Labour stalled or hid behind procedural excuses when confronted by nationalists in India in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> All the talk of a multi-racial Commonwealth went nowhere since ultimately Labour, like the Conservatives, was motivated first by concerns for economic growth at home. In Davies's view, British politics from the inter-war years onwards had suffered 'the Fabian agony', which prevented the British left from meeting the emergent Third World left on common ground.<sup>4</sup> 'Throughout the interwar years', Davies wrote, 'Labour had little to offer most of these [its colonies and dependencies] ... But for most of Africa, Arabia and the Caribbean there was no policy that was not derivative from Britain's own

<sup>1</sup> I. Davies, 'The Labour Commonwealth', *New Left Review*, xxii (Dec. 1963), 75–94. Davies's attack was resented by Fabian leaders in Labour. Anthony Wedgwood Benn's letter to the *NLR* editorial board, in which he listed the many contacts among important socialists in independent Africa, was published the following year (T. Benn, 'Fabianism and colonialism', *New Left Review*, xxv (May–June 1964), 84–6).

<sup>2</sup> Davies, 'Labour Commonwealth', p. 76. Since this chapter focuses on 1929–31, it is worth noting that Ramsay MacDonald, for his part, had long been suspicious of Chamberlain's vision of a closely knit empire with inter-imperial trade strengthening its civic bonds. He wrote in *Labour and the Empire* in 1907 that 'placing such advantage in the forefront of the *raison d'être* of Empire makes the imperial fabric a gross erection of the commercial spirit – a kind of United States sky-scraper valued because of its utility in raking rents – and such erections do not stand the test of time' (R. MacDonald, *Labour and Empire* (1907), p. 92).

<sup>3</sup> Davies, 'Labour Commonwealth', p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Davies, 'Labour Commonwealth', p. 89.

economic interests. Trusteeship was a concept now accepted by all parties, yet it involved no theory of political development and rested substantially on the ability of local governors and the static nature of tribal rule'.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, historians have also painted a picture of Labour pulled towards inaction by its conflicting internal energies. Partha Gupta claimed that the Labour party on the whole was anti-imperialist, but that it suffered from a strain of racism in its rank and file and among its theorists, Fabians especially, that prevented the party from pursuing a policy of national independence.<sup>6</sup> Few have researched the question of the place of empire in British politics more thoroughly than Ronald Hyam, and his account of Labour's attempt at policy for Africa from 1945 to 1951 is similarly one of feet dragging while the party tried to balance its moral commitment to independence throughout the empire with its Cold War geopolitical concern for fighting the spread of communism.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter takes a somewhat different angle on the question of Labour's programme of economic and political development in the empire and how the second Labour government administered inter-war trusteeship for Africa. Instead of looking for a critical mass of party MPs calling for decolonization and national elections, I take the economic and political model that the Fabians regarded as their domestic ideal – a 'Socialist Commonwealth' with neighbourhood co-operatives as political and economic centres of community life – and explore how it fared in the empire during the brief Labour government, 1929–31. The spread of a state-endorsed and closely supervised co-operative movement from India and Ceylon to Palestine and Africa received an important boost from

<sup>5</sup> Davies, 'Labour Commonwealth', p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Gupta acknowledged that Labour's greatest difficulty was in fact staying in office long enough to make headway in any direction, having spent only 9 years of 40 (1924–64) at the head of government and only a handful of those enjoying a majority of Labour MPs (P. S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–64* (New York, 1975), p. 391). Richard Toye in the *Historical Journal* several years ago argued that Labour's inability to move forward on its goal of international economic co-operation was similarly the result of a 'planning paradox' that placed the needs of Labour's domestic agenda, which party leaders insisted required market controls, at odds with American hopes for liberal trade arrangements in the Atlantic sphere (R. Toye, 'The Labour party's external economic policy in the 1940s', *Historical Journal*, xliii (2000), 189–215).

<sup>7</sup> There also was serious concern that quitting Africa would lead to race war as white settlers seized control of some new states and black nationalists took control of others. The apartheidist Union of South Africa was at once a continual threat to multi-racialism while at the same time it was perceived as an indispensable ally against Soviet incursions on the continent (R. Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2010); see esp. Hyam's chapter, 'Africa and the Labour government, 1945–51', which originally appeared in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xvi (1988), 148–72).

Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield) when he took office as secretary of state for the colonies in 1929. The Webbs' own pronouncements on political community and Commonwealth were objections to liberal parliaments, which they viewed as imperfect institutions for a true democracy and as heirs of capitalistic subversions of the community ideal in English history.<sup>8</sup> I propose that it is better to think about how Sidney Webb pursued the implementation of the political institutions in which he believed. Taken alongside his and Beatrice Webb's writings for the Fabian Society on the coming of a co-operative socialist Commonwealth, Sidney Webb's efforts to create a viable co-operative movement throughout the empire suggest that he in fact rather quickly steered Colonial Office policy on land use and labour toward Fabian goals.

The initiative in the Colonial Office to promote 'native co-operatives' as a programme for rural development in Africa seems to have been Webb's. His main collaborator, and ambassador for the project to the various colonial governments of the African territories targeted, was the career India civil servant Charles Francis Strickland. This chapter seeks to reconstruct the political philosophies of co-operation that Webb and Strickland espoused and to suggest some of the consequences of their collaboration for the history of rural development in Africa.

Webb believed that co-operatives – from marketing co-operatives to Rochdale grocery co-ops and co-operative credit societies – could do great good for the condition of the peasant and labourer in the colonial world. While it is certainly true that Webb accepted a racial hierarchy as a determinant of colonial subjects' capacity for self-rule, he was also a man of humanitarian principles. He was among the early critics of debt as a scourge on populations brought too quickly into the machinery of global capital. He was bothered especially by the conditions of the fellahin (agricultural labourers and peasants) in Palestine, and his collaboration with Strickland began when he asked the latter to go to Palestine 'to study the economic position of the fellahin' and to instruct district officers and the fellahin on the principle and practice of co-operative credit societies. In September 1930, the two men met at Whitehall and discussed Strickland's report on Palestine. Webb had meanwhile read Strickland's essay 'Co-operation in tropical dependencies', which had been printed and circulated in the

<sup>8</sup> Of the extant institutions that might provide a basis for effective community democracy, the Webbs held up municipal government, trade unions and co-operatives as organic institutions that might truly represent the people. Parliament, on the other hand, was 'hypertrophied in its function' and its popularly elected Commons constantly hampered by 'its hereditary and arbitrarily selected House of Lords' (S. Webb and B. Webb, *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain* (1920), pp. 104–5).

Colonial Office in advance of the upcoming Colonial Office Conference.<sup>9</sup> During their meeting, Webb urged a follow-up mission for Strickland to tour Zanzibar and Tanganyika Territory and other east African territories. Webb then wrote to the various colonial governors and asked for their co-operation with Strickland's study trips. His mission was to study the feasibility of a co-operative movement but also to advise on the drafting of laws that could determine its course.<sup>10</sup>

Strickland was expert on several important imperial subjects: rural debt, rural unrest and co-operative economics. These were interrelated themes for him, as they were for many colonial civil servants, missionaries and anthropologists in inter-war Africa who believed that development and improved welfare for colonial subjects was the only insurance against revolution. Strickland spoke and wrote on co-operation with authority and an almost evangelical zeal. He argued that a vibrant, global co-operative system would alleviate economic burdens on peasant producers and prevent the migration of populations into wage labour. He was relentless in his insistence that co-operation could only work if societies were overseen by European experts and safeguarded by laws that enabled a high degree of state control over African co-operative ventures.

As a result of his tours of Africa, Strickland went on to assist in drafting the Tanganyika Territory's Co-operatives Ordinance, which became law in 1932, and he was consulted by the Colonial Office on similar legislation throughout British Africa from 1931 to 1938.<sup>11</sup> His handiwork can be seen in co-operatives legislation from the Gold Coast to Zanzibar, and its legacy carried over into the post-independence period as state-managed co-operatives became central to the development of socialism in states like Tanzania and Zambia. The requirement for a high degree of state scrutiny of co-operative bookkeeping was often present in co-operative planning after independence, and this was partly the result of Strickland's influence as he wrote the original laws.<sup>12</sup>

Strickland argued that colonial governments had much to gain by making co-operative economics the cornerstone of rural development in Africa. First, African economic practice would over time become tied to Western

<sup>9</sup> The National Archives of the UK: Public Record Office, CO 323/1071/14, 'Report on co-operative methods by C. F. Strickland'.

<sup>10</sup> TNA: PRO, CO 323/1071/14, 'Report on co-operative methods by C. F. Strickland'.

<sup>11</sup> TNA: PRO, CO 691/118/10, 'Co-operative marketing'. See also J. C. DeGraft-Johnson, *African Experiment: Cooperative Agriculture and Banking in British West Africa* (1958), pp. 61–3.

<sup>12</sup> S. A. Quick, *Humanism or Technocracy? Zambia's Farming Co-operatives, 1965–72* (Manchester, 1978).

consumers, providing a steady source of consumer goods for export and consequently an infusion of cash, and escape from usurious debt, among a struggling global peasantry. Second, the problem of social change and its potential for conjuring new and unpredictable political alliances – for example African nationalism – would be met with a new institution that could forge non-ethnic community ties in locations throughout the empire. Strickland would insist throughout the inter-war period that co-operatives could provide a valuable political education for Africans. Webb and the Fabians had long been convinced of this for Britons.

### ***The Fabian co-operative Commonwealth***

Co-operatives were central to Labour's inter-war vision of democratic renewal and constitutional reform at home, and the co-operative movement of the nineteenth century, along with the trade union movement, held a sacred place in the Fabian mythology of working-class struggle. In 1920, the Fabian Society published Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *A Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*. The work surveyed the situation of socialist recruitment on the ground and elaborated the Fabian socialist vision for a 'Co-operative Commonwealth of Tomorrow', which, the Webbs claimed, was no Utopia but merely the likely endpoint of current 'development towards a fully democratized community'.<sup>13</sup> With the coming 'Socialist Commonwealth', Britons would witness the restoration of community-centred politics that the liberal parliamentary system had sacrificed and failed to improve upon with its national institutions. For the Webbs, the 'neighbourhood' presented the smallest unit of community. They argued that, in the early twentieth century, capitalism sought further to atomize the urban neighbourhoods that had grown up around industry and services during capital's advance. In Durkheimian fashion they proposed that solidarity at the neighbourhood level had broken down. The lamentable result was the 'Decay of Civic Patriotism'.<sup>14</sup> For the Webbs, trade union and co-operative socialism promised to restore that lost community.

Despite the nostalgia for an older form of community politics, the Webbs' vision of the future embraced the industrial machinery of modernity. Modern systems of conveyance and communication were linchpins in the movement towards co-operation if it were ever to be global in scale. The Webbs were optimistic, since marketing and consumer co-operatives had developed to the point that they had their own ships for importing goods. Co-operation, which in its ideal was supposed to encourage

<sup>13</sup> Webb and Webb, *A Constitution*, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> Webb and Webb, *A Constitution*, p. 203.

consumer-producer exchanges that restored the proximity between the two and the personal knowledge of seller and buyer, could instead be global. In the future, the Webbs believed, much industry and trade would be conducted by combinations of co-operatives that had all the trappings of modern industry – minus the intense profit motive. They wrote: ‘Recent developments have, however, discovered that Democracies of Consumers, far from being limited to the supply of their own members, may be found to be the one and only solution of international trade on Socialist principles, independent either of the capitalist importer or exporter, or both of them’.<sup>15</sup>

The co-operative movement already in force in Britain was seen by the Webbs as a beachhead in the campaign for a new socialist community.<sup>16</sup> Throughout her life, Beatrice explored institutions of custom or even recent social practice that provided material support networks between members. Voluntary, community-based assurances for material necessities dominated her political philosophy. In her 1910 study of the co-operative movement, she had placed the nucleus of ‘the Co-operative idea’ squarely in the context of English working-class history. She explained that the co-operative movement had its historic roots in Owenite socialism and the Rochdale weavers (many of whom were Chartists).<sup>17</sup>

By 1920, the Webbs claimed in their *Constitution*, the movement had brought 5–6% of the aggregate of British industry and services into co-operative administration. Beatrice Webb had earlier pointed out the ‘state within a state’ that was emerging as a consequence of the federation of co-operatives. The Co-operative Union, which included 1,300 hundred societies and more than a million members, better represented the will of the people than any of the extant machinery of national politics.<sup>18</sup> The coming socialist community would be one in which its constituent members were patriotic and active in local, municipal and national politics. Co-operatives and neighbourhood organizations were not a rejection of mass politics but a vehicle for what Fabians saw as a more authentic and egalitarian expression of the political will of the nation.<sup>19</sup> The co-operative initiative was grassroots and democratic.

In the empire, though, a different vision of co-operation prevailed. The co-operative ideal that the Webbs promoted in England did not

<sup>15</sup> Webb and Webb, *A Constitution*, pp. 252–4.

<sup>16</sup> B. Webb, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (4th edn., 1910). The original publication date was 1891.

<sup>17</sup> R. G. Gregory, *Sidney Webb and East Africa: Labour’s Experiment with the Doctrine of Native Paramountcy* (Berkeley, Calif., 1962), p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> B. Webb, *Co-operative Movement*, pp. 173–4.

<sup>19</sup> Webb and Webb, *A Constitution*, pp. 247–55.

unproblematically apply to the African question of self-rule – an ideal Sidney espoused but believed should be deferred until the crash course in modern life had been completed by the empire's 'child' subjects. Webb was far too paternalistic to view African co-operatives on the same scale and with the same optimism as a path toward the development of organic socialism among the 'non-adult races'. If anything worthwhile were to develop from the co-operative movement in Africa, it would have to come through strict supervision by Europeans trained in co-operative methods and versed in the particular dilemmas of peasant production and consumption in Africa.<sup>20</sup> The role of the empire in the thought of Fabian socialists, and in their views as to the future of socialism on a national and global scale, was fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, empire was recognized as the result of a rapacious capitalism that sought the incorporation of the globe at all costs. On this count empire stood to be criticized. But travel throughout the empire had revealed to the Webbs the deficiencies of non-Western practices of government and administration. When they perceived a lack of technocratic skill outside the West, they saw the colonial state and the potential for development in a way that fused high modernism with older paternalist assumptions about other races that underlay late Victorian and Edwardian ideas about empire as well as the theory of trusteeship.<sup>21</sup> With the exception of the Japanese, whom the Webbs admired for their administrative acumen as the singular exception in the Eastern world, non-Western and non-white races struggled to attain civilization and required the tutelage of the West.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Strickland's political philosophy of co-operation***

One thing that Strickland and Webb held in common in their ideal of co-operation was that the co-operative would be a site of instruction, a place to shape the character. For the Webbs, always pushing for adult working men's education, the co-operative would be a place for the daily instruction

<sup>20</sup> S. Webb and B. Webb, 'What is socialism part XVIII: the guardianship of the non-adult races', *New Statesman*, i (2 Aug. 1913), 525–6.

<sup>21</sup> The example of Kenya shows how Webb saw the mandate to govern as trustee, as well as his approach to political radicalism in the empire. In his correspondence with Edward Grigg, governor of Kenya, he acknowledged the conflict between settlers and Africans, the dilemmas of welfare provision and the troubling lack of African representation in Kenyan politics, but he also agreed that the influence of the Kikuyu Central Association under popular leaders like Harry Thuku created problems by stirring up anti-government opinion (though Webb stopped short of calling the KCA seditious) (London School of Economics, Passfield papers, 4/22 fo. 53, 'Lord Passfield's correspondence with colonial governors').

<sup>22</sup> J. M. Winter, 'The Webbs and the non-white world: a case of socialist racialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, ix (1974), 181–92.

of practical socialism. For Strickland, the co-operative would teach politics, geography and economics to a global peasantry that, as a result of this tutelage, would safely navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of benighted traditionalism and exploitative capitalism. For both the Webbs and Strickland, the political philosophy of co-operation was suited for populations in a condition of mobility and migration. The Webbs narrated the history of co-operation as an innovation of displaced people. Early modern enclosures had forced people into conditions where daily life required co-operative association. Strickland saw population growth and the reduction of non-enclosed land as the twin engines driving the social transformation common in India and east and central Africa. The causal relationship between displacement from land and radical social effects was an important concern for Strickland and the subject of several of his essays on the rural problem in India.<sup>23</sup> He was very aware of the potential for rural unrest to disrupt government. He had witnessed the rise of Gandhi's popularity in India and the movements to resist land and salt taxes. These, he feared, could 'paralyze the government', and he believed government to be the only thing preventing the Indian peasant's complete exploitation by the moneylender and landlord.<sup>24</sup>

Strickland viewed co-operation as a mode of economic participation that was relevant in nearly all conditions, including 'Tropical Africa'. He wrote in 1933 that 'Co-operation is capable of assuming a great variety of forms, there is no rigidity in its mechanism, and it is *prima facie* improbable that a method and a set of principles, which have been found to correspond to human needs, not only among white races, but also among the yellow, should be entirely irrelevant to the nature and needs of the black'.<sup>25</sup> While co-operation was potentially applicable everywhere, the system could not simply emerge organically in every location. The guiding hand of European supervisors would be needed to ensure that co-operative principles were followed, since all too often in Africa, he suggested, the 'native' producers and consumer co-operatives strayed from the ethos of co-operation.

Co-operation, for Strickland, necessarily included an element of coercion. He rejected societies that had compulsory membership, but mutual coercion *between* members was the basis of a healthy co-operative.

<sup>23</sup> C. F. Strickland, 'Cooperation and the rural problem of India', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, xliii (1929), 500–31; see also C. F. Strickland, 'The Indian village and Indian unrest', *Foreign Affairs*, x (1931), 70–80.

<sup>24</sup> Strickland, 'Indian village', p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> C. F. Strickland, 'Co-operation for Africa', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vi (1933), 17.



Interlocking obligations and privileges constituted the co-operative ideal. In terms of reforming the character, there was no better mechanism than the weight of a neighbour's opinion. What was more, every co-operative would operate only with the explicit permission of government in the form of registration. Once the registrar approved a co-operative by reviewing its constitution and by-laws, he reserved the right to revoke any licence that stepped out of line with its own by-law.<sup>26</sup>

While the Webbs saw the political potential to cure national institutional ills impeding democracy for Britain, for Strickland, co-operation held the promise of slowly introducing a new form of community rule that could potentially transcend the institutions, techniques and personnel of indirect rule in Africa. The hereditary systems of tribal rule through chiefs, he believed, suffered not only a problem of legitimacy but a severe limitation in their ability to meet the modern welfare needs of growing populations. In his most comprehensive work, *Co-operation for Africa*, Strickland summarized the British mode of rule, as opposed to that of other powers. As a consequence of social change in Africa, indirect rule faced its own crisis. Native institutions, he argued, had never been static and had always adapted to changing circumstances. However, before the introduction of European modes and scales of production, market economies and, especially, white settlement, change had always been gradual. The danger of the present situation was the pace of change – a conclusion that social anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and Lucy Mair had reached through fieldwork and had been pressing on colonial officials since the mid 1920s.<sup>27</sup> Co-operatives, as a hybrid between ancient community values and modern economics, could provide a smoother transition. As for the looming demands of colonial populations for welfare support from the trustee state, Strickland envisioned an expanding colonial bureaucracy that would enable even a small core of European administrators effectively to oversee the field. In his book, Strickland enumerated the likely demands on government, including sanitation, hospitals, roads and the administration of justice. He wrote: 'There will be propaganda in support of the health department, in favour of vaccination or inoculation, sanitary measures, curative measure ... and in favour of the education department, for more schools or better schools, or different schools, for adult classes, technical classes, travelling

<sup>26</sup> Strickland, 'Co-operation for Africa', p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> See B. Malinowski, 'Practical anthropology', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, ii (1929), 22–38. See also, Lucy Mair's review, and ringing endorsement, of Strickland's *Co-Operation for Africa* in the same journal (L. P. Mair, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vi (1933), 342–4).

shows, radio communication and rural vernacular libraries'.<sup>28</sup> Strickland concluded that native councils and chiefs were simply not up to the task. The solution to the sheer burden of new needs and government responsibility could only be addressed by 'the presentation of the co-operative movement as the "core" of a welfare policy'.

Strickland's advocacy helped to put the co-operative movement at the front of debates on the administration of native affairs. Lord Lugard, the authority on indirect rule, was a supporter of Strickland's arguments. In a preface to Strickland's *Co-operation for Africa*, he praised the author's revisions of indirect rule and encouraged all colonial governors to embrace them. Lugard maintained that there was no way, and indeed no reason, to restore pre-colonial systems. The object for the administration became, instead, 'Adaptation', whereby the administrator 'bring[s] the New into harmony with the Old'. Lugard's administrative model held that there was more to native administration than devolving all responsibility onto chiefs and elders. Rather, the skilful administrator now had to be expert in making things seem as though they originated in the community, even when they were novel experiments from the outside. Strickland's co-operative system fitted this standard, and Lugard wrote in support that 'The fundamental principle of the system is identical with that of Indirect Rule – which could be better named "Co-operative Rule"'.<sup>29</sup>

Strickland's arguments on co-operatives went beyond the question of economic uplift and welfare provision. Like the Webbs, he placed the co-operative movement in the vanguard of future political development in Africa. In 1934, Strickland delivered a lecture on co-operation in Africa to a joint meeting of the Royal African Society and the Royal Society of the Arts. There he sought to convince the audience, which included former colonial governors, veteran administrators and African students in London, that co-operation would be a welcome aid in 'native administration'. Under indirect rule, he reminded the audience, the locus of native authority should have been in the chiefs and native councils. However, it remained to be seen whether one day the councils would be true sovereign powers in Africa. It was certainly not the case at the moment everywhere. Sometimes, too, the native council was an invention of colonial rule and had secured little popular support. He told the academic audience that 'Wherever a Council, in the shape of a judicial court or an executive organ, is effectively functioning and really does meet a popular demand,

<sup>28</sup> Mair, review of *Co-operation for Africa*, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Lord Lugard, 'Introduction', in C. F. Strickland, *Co-operation for Africa* (Oxford, 1933), pp. vii–viii.

I should not for a moment wish to weaken it or trespass on its proper province'.<sup>30</sup> The voluntary nature of the co-operative, however, would mean popular acceptance of the forms of arbitration that it provided. Soon, the co-operative society could shoulder some of the burden of administration and jurisprudence. Members would pledge in all cases 'of a civil nature' to seek arbitration in the co-operative before recourse to the native council or European court.<sup>31</sup> Where native councils failed because people did not respect them in 'sensitive questions of personal conduct, economic advantage, or social propriety', the co-operative could work by being 'a less mandatory and more voluntary system ... for regulating and amending human conduct in such a sphere'.<sup>32</sup> On working through the tribal structures, Strickland argued that the difference between tribal rule and co-operative rule was simple: people were members of a tribe by compulsion and members of a co-operative by choice. But such associations could not stand on their own without the help of expert guidance and legal protections that favoured African co-operators. The registrar could not be a local man, since his function was not local. He should be a European with a whole staff of African supervisors rooted in their local communities and serving as the interface between government and the societies themselves.<sup>33</sup>

### *Co-operation in practice*

The imperial field was not a blank page on which Strickland and the Webbs could write a new history of the co-operative movement. Co-operatives could co-exist with plantation land tenure systems throughout the empire, and under settler control they could be used as a collective bloc to prevent peasant cash crops from reaching markets. 'Native co-operatives' had been embraced by the state in India as an important pathway towards rural development and the alleviation of rural welfare needs. Social unrest was cited among the pressing problems in India in the late nineteenth century for which a programme of rural development was needed. This provided the background for Strickland's position on co-operation as a political solution to rural unrest. One of the recommendations that came out of an 1895 commission of enquiry established by the British government at Madras to explore continental European solutions to rural poverty and unrest was to 'find an Indian Raiffeisen', the earliest German version of an agricultural

<sup>30</sup> C. F. Strickland, 'Supplement: the co-operative movement in Africa', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, xxxiv (1935), 1–18, at p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Strickland, 'Supplement', p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Strickland, 'Supplement', p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Strickland, 'Supplement', pp. 17–18.

producers' co-operative.<sup>34</sup> By the 1920s, the state structure of co-operative registration – whereby co-operatives would at once be widely promoted and heavily controlled – was in legal force in India. By the time of Labour's victory in 1929, Strickland was already helping to guide the transplantation of the Punjab's law to the Federated Malay States.

Much of the cash crop agriculture of British Africa between the wars was processed through white settler marketing co-operatives. These would maintain godowns where members could bring their cash crops for grading, storage and sale. In settler areas of the African empire, co-operatives were sometimes used as an economic weapon against Africans. Africans could not be members of the marketing co-operatives, and yet laws sometimes forced Africans to sell to them. Before Strickland's tours, there was no mechanism for registering 'native co-operatives'. Settlers also enjoyed the advantages of co-operative credit. Moreover, laws preserved white monopolies on the farming of tea and some grades of coffee.

In Kenya, African farmers were not permitted by law to market their surplus through their own co-operative societies until 1945. The settlers' legislative council would not pass Strickland's law unless the Colonial Office redrafted it and exempted whites from some of the supervisory regulations. Sir Alan Pim's 1935 report on the financial position of and taxation in Kenya Colony had recommended co-operation for its ability to inspire 'the Natives with the idea of progress and the advantages to be obtained from more scientific methods of working'. As a follow up to Strickland's tours, the Colonial Office had sponsored a trip by W. K. H. Campbell again to study the feasibility of co-operation, and he recommended 'the establishment of a separate Co-operative Department for Kenya', with a European registrar and African 'field inspectors'.

<sup>34</sup> H. H. Münkner, 'One hundred years: Co-operative Credit Societies Act in India – a unique experience of legal social engineering', paper presented at the 34th International Symposium of the European Faculty of Land Use and Development, Strasbourg, 28–29 Oct. 2004, p. 3. Immediately after the Great War, the India government sent Strickland and two other civilian administrators on a tour of Europe to study co-operation. They produced three volumes (see C. F. Strickland, *Studies in European Co-Operation* (Lahore, 1922); O. Rothfield, *Impressions of the Co-operative Movement in France and Italy* (Bombay, 1920); and M. L. Darling, *Some Aspects of Co-operation in Germany, Italy, and Ireland* (Lahore, 1922)). The Punjabi administration was extraordinary in the empire and an exemplar of the trustee state. According to Clive Dewey, 'The government of the Punjab presided over the most interventionist regime in India. In Bengal, Civilians [in Indian administration] were restricted to collecting revenue and trying lawsuits; the "nightwatchman state". In the Punjab, they reached out into villages – encouraging cultivators, rescuing debtors, enlisting soldiers, and settling millions of migrants on the largest irrigation schemes in the world' (C. Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: the Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (1993), p. 201).

In northern Rhodesia, white settlers took early advantage of co-operative marketing in an effort to corner the internal and external maize markets. Africans were not permitted to join the settler co-op. As early as 1930, the settlers' co-operative had secured exclusive contracts with two of the major mining companies to be grain suppliers to the Copper Belt, where mine managers rationed the grain to workers.<sup>35</sup> The Plateau Tonga were sometimes able to circumvent the white co-op's monopoly by selling their grain to traders who, in the midst of a global downturn in prices, would undercut the white farmers. The whites retaliated first by passing market control laws that brought the traders into their fold, and then they passed a law that formalized a subordinate position for Africans in the grain market. All African maize after 1935 would have to be surrendered to the Marketing Control Board, an innovation in state-managed production that would soon be the British standard for the Second World War. In turn, the Marketing Control Board would sell the grain and then return a maximum of a quarter of total profits (from the sale of settler and African maize combined) to the Tonga producers. Members of the legislative council – one European represented the African population's interests during committee meetings – argued that the unrestrained Tonga production of maize threatened permanently to degrade the soil.<sup>36</sup> The settlers' scheme raised little protest in the Colonial Office, and there is no telling for certain how many settler farms were saved by the elimination of African competition from the market. After colonialism, independent Zambia, led by president Kenneth Kaunda, embraced state-managed co-operative production and marketing as the path towards rapid rural development, and co-operatives were key political institutions for the independent Zambian state.

Likewise, in Uganda during the late colonial period, co-operatives became closely connected to anti-colonial struggles, and during the fight for independence they became popular political institutions, functioning as local government in the countryside. Throughout Uganda, co-operative cotton marketing societies, and the unions that brought them together at the district level, had large memberships, and their political role was especially strong in Bugisu. A survey of Ugandan farmers in 1966 showed the continued importance of co-operative societies to the Gisu. Nearly 95% of farmers in Bugisu could identify the name of their district co-operative union, and an equal number could name at least one officer at the district level. A total of 64% saw co-operatives as something separate from

<sup>35</sup> K. P. Vickery, 'Saving settlers: maize control in northern Rhodesia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, xi (1985), 212–34.

<sup>36</sup> Vickery, 'Saving settlers', pp. 224–8.

government, and 75% believed that they influenced it. The perception that real political power flowed through the co-operatives clearly had an effect on popular involvement in the societies. In Bugisu, 87% of farmers claimed regularly to attend local co-operative meetings, and of those more than half claimed that they always did so.<sup>37</sup>

Strickland's African tours coincided with an explosion of 'native co-operatives' in Britain's League of Nations mandated territory, Tanganyika Territory, where a large number of mostly Chagga farmers co-operatively farmed and marketed coffee. In 1926 the Kilimanjaro Native Coffee Planters' Association (KNPA) claimed 7,000 members, who co-operatively farmed around 2,800 acres of coffee trees, yielding eighty tons of coffee beans for market. The number of Kilimanjaro coffee farmers grew every year to the end of the Second World War, and the trend generally continued to the end of British rule and independence. In 1967, 65,000 farmers cultivated 35,000 acres and produced almost 13,000 tons of coffee beans for market.<sup>38</sup>

Co-operatives were succeeding in Tanganyika Territory, but for whom? John Iliffe has argued that the Tanganyika government used state-controlled co-operatives as part of a strategy to destroy 'the emerging African farmer-traders in the coffee growing areas'.<sup>39</sup> The KNPA was already marketing coffee a full five years before Strickland's tours of Zanzibar and Tanganyika Territory and his drafting of co-operatives law for both, which shows that co-operation was already growing in popularity before the state's involvement and that the state responded to this form of African self-help in an effort to control it. But the association was controversial in the politics of Kilimanjaro. One chief reportedly told the provincial officer, 'These people's influence is over the whole tribe whereas our influence is only in our own sections of the mountain'.<sup>40</sup> The Tanganyikan governor Donald Cameron, a defender of the principle of indirect rule, asked his agricultural officers to discourage African cultivation of coffee, and the leader of the association, Joseph Merinyo, was jailed on (probably false) charges of fraud

<sup>37</sup> The 1958 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Affairs of the Bugisu Co-operative Union Limited* is quoted, alongside their 1966 survey findings, in Young, Sherman and Rose, *Cooperatives and Development*, pp. 76–8.

<sup>38</sup> The source for the figures is a table produced by the Kilimanjaro Native Co-operative Union and printed in S. F. Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications: 'Customary Law' on Kilimanjaro, 1880–1980* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 120–1. The year 1967 was a significant one for the co-operative model as a programme of rural development. It was then that President Julius Nyerere declared *ujamaa*, with its focus on co-operative farms, as the Tanzanian path to socialism.

<sup>39</sup> J. Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1983), p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> D. M. P. McCarthy, *Colonial Bureaucracy and Creating Underdevelopment, 1919–40* (Ames, Iowa, 1982), p. 97.

in 1931.<sup>41</sup> The government moved quickly with formal legislation, though, and in 1932 passed its first co-operatives law. The law, which Strickland helped to draft, mandated that all co-operatives had to be registered, and it reorganized coffee co-operation on Kilimanjaro into a central union connecting the numerous smaller societies.

The drafting of this law had been an important part of Strickland's African mission. His orders from Sidney Webb were to advise colonial governments on legislation to provide for 'the constitution and control' of co-operatives.<sup>42</sup> The control part was essential. The co-operatives legislation was intended to license extant co-operatives, and the law also set up a structure of registration and audit which required co-operators to pay fees in order to stay on a firm legal footing. A society could no longer exist purely as an association, since the co-operatives law required a fixed address and building for every co-operative venture, and it was also mandated that the Co-operatives Bill be posted on the premises.<sup>43</sup> Every year membership lists, subscription rates, dividends and society investments would be opened up to the registrar or his agents for inspection. The law created the position of co-operatives registrar, whose incumbent had to be part promoter and part overseer of all forms of co-operative enterprise. The registrar could, by decree, constitute or terminate any society. Native courts were also explicitly written out of the law as arbiters in any conflict among members, between societies or between societies and people with financial claims against them. Depending on one's circumstances, this could turn out badly, since Strickland argued to the Colonial Office that debt imprisonment was a necessary enforcement tool for the state in dealing with co-operative societies or individuals. He sketched a scenario in which a co-operative lending society might lend to a co-operative member who, because of a village quarrel, might quit the society and default on his debt. Strickland's co-operatives would have legal grounds to sue for the villager's imprisonment 'to deter other members from likewise breaking their promises'.<sup>44</sup> Coercion, after all, was an important part of the civic bond forged in co-operatives.

<sup>41</sup> A. Coulson, *Tanzania: a Political Economy* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 61–2.

<sup>42</sup> TNA: PRO, CO 691/118/10, 'Co-operative marketing'. The subject of the Colonial Office discussion here was Strickland's report on co-operation in Tanganyika Territory and draft legislation sent to the Colonial Office by the Tanganyika Territory governor. The legislation was mostly copied from the laws governing co-operatives in Ceylon and the Punjab.

<sup>43</sup> TNA: PRO, CO 691/118/10, 'Co-operative marketing'.

<sup>44</sup> TNA: PRO, CO 323/1151/6, 'Reports etc. by Mr. C.F. Strickland in regard to co-operation and economic conditions in Palestine, Malaya, Zanzibar, and T.T.' In ch. 3, 'Co-operation' (para. 9), in his report on Zanzibar and the clove industry, Strickland cautions the Colonial Office to ignore recent protests against the use of imprisonment for debt. The scenario of village debt collection appears in his report on Palestine (para. 60).

While membership increased every year, many Chagga small farmers thought they could do better selling locally outside the union, which additionally required a 2% cut of the sale of coffee. In 1934, an additional law, which became known as the 'Chagga Rule', was passed that effectively gave the Kilimanjaro Native Co-operative Union (KNCU) a monopoly on coffee marketing on the mountain, forcing all farmers to work under its auspices. Protests increased as people began to rally behind several lawsuits filed by Africans in the British courts to have the Chagga Rule dismissed. Chagga chiefs lent their political support to the rule and tried to reduce the impact of the protests by arresting the ringleaders. Finally, in 1937 the Tanganyikan high court dismissed the lawsuits, taking the path of least resistance with the chiefs and claiming that the individual plaintiffs did not have the right to file the lawsuits because of the principle of indirect rule. While the drafters of co-operatives law had been at pains to attach legal jurisdiction over African economic life in emerging co-operatives – as in the rules on arbitration and debt settlement that would be handled outside the native authority by a registrar – now the old call for the power of native courts over native affairs resurfaced. Indirect rule required that they work through the court of the Chagga council, which was obviously hostile as the council had just tried and jailed several protesters against the Chagga Rule.<sup>45</sup> The protests, which the Fabian Colonial Bureau would later downplay in its assessments of the co-operative movement, were taken very seriously by the British authorities who flew Royal Air Force planes over the Moshi district and increased the police presence.<sup>46</sup> In the end, at least thirteen Chagga protesters were exiled – which was the preferred method of the British colonial authority in dealing with political agitators – for 'inciting members of the Chagga tribe to hold secret meetings in defiance of the Chiefs' orders'.<sup>47</sup>

The story of the 'coffee riots' shows that the political aims of reformers to see co-operation emerge in African economic life could sometimes be subverted when people embraced them in large numbers. The Tanganyikan state was able to use co-operatives legislation to reaffirm the authority of the chiefs against what many feared had quickly become a dangerous political movement.

### **Conclusion**

Strickland only said of his meeting with Sidney Webb in 1930 that the latter had promised that 'There will be more co-operation for Africa'.<sup>48</sup> But

<sup>45</sup> McCarthy, *Colonial Bureaucracy*, pp. 100–1.

<sup>46</sup> McCarthy, *Colonial Bureaucracy*, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> McCarthy, *Colonial Bureaucracy*, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Cooperation in the Colonies: a Report from a Special Committee to the Fabian Colonial Bureau* (1945). The quotation appears in Strickland's preface to the 1945 Fabian report.



Webb left office abruptly in 1931 with the collapse of the short-lived Labour government, following on the heels of a Joint Commission of Parliament review of his White Paper on East African Native Policy that prevented it from ever becoming policy.<sup>49</sup> For the future of the co-operative idea of empire, though, one of the most immediate necessities of the colonial state had been taken care of by 1931, as yet another stream of revenue for the state in fees and taxes had been created by the co-operatives laws. While in 1932 east African governors had stalled the implementation of the Indian co-operative model, they agreed on the principles and throughout the 1930s co-operative laws came into force and African co-operatives continued to grow. But with the coming of the Second World War, the marketing infrastructures established by co-operatives law were replaced by war-time marketing boards. Indeed, the small incursions into rationalizing co-operative production and marketing could be seen as a trial run in the implementation of this much vaster and more sophisticated scheme of market control for the war and its immediate aftermath.<sup>50</sup>

In 1945, with the coming of Labour to power again – this time with a broad agenda for welfare at home but also operating under the 1940 Colonial Welfare and Development Act – the issue of co-operation was once again taken up by the Fabians through their newly constituted policy group, the Fabian Colonial Bureau. The bureau, more than any other policy study group in the Fabian Society, had direct influence on the colonial policy of the Labour party after the Second World War.<sup>51</sup> A special committee was assembled to allow the bureau to tackle the issue of co-operation for colonial development, proclaiming that the 'planned development of cooperative association and enterprise ... [should be] a fundamental part of colonial economic and social policy'.<sup>52</sup> The committee brought together experts on co-operation, including Strickland, who also provided a preface when the society published its report. Most notable on the committee were Arthur Creech Jones, who within a year would be secretary of state for the colonies, and Leonard Woolf, the renowned socialist author and publisher who had by that point already published on *Socialism and Co-operation* and

<sup>49</sup> In 1930 Webb submitted a White Paper on Native Policy in East Africa in which he re-affirmed the earl of Devonshire's 1923 statement on trusteeship and defined it as native paramountcy, rejecting the dual policy of the colonial secretary who preceded Webb in office – Leopold Amery.

<sup>50</sup> For a west African example, see R. Alence, 'Colonial government, social conflict and state involvement in Africa's open economies: the origins of the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board, 1939–46', *Journal of African History*, xlii (2001), 397–416.

<sup>51</sup> J. F. Milburn, 'The Fabian Society and the British Labour party', *Western Political Quarterly*, xi (1958), 336.

<sup>52</sup> Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Co-Operation in the Colonies*, p. 14.

*Co-operation and the Future of Industry*. The Fabian bureau's starting principles for development after the war demonstrated similar views of co-operation to those long preached by Strickland since his days as a civil servant in the Punjab. Once again, co-operation promised to yield economic results in the self-support of communities and to teach better living and better citizenship; and the economics of co-operation were connected to the political and social work that the permeation of the movement would allow to be performed. 'Co-operation is adult education in the business of life', Strickland averred in his preface to the Fabian report. The committee embraced Strickland's vision of co-operatives as providing a venue for a politics of the village community increasingly detached from tribal authority. The co-operative movement, if given real support by government, could even be the source of the political transition to self-rule that had been announced (and indefinitely deferred) in the theory of trusteeship. If a colony could sufficiently develop its 'co-operative economy', the Fabian bureau argued, it would have taken 'a long step forward ... in its capacity for democratic self government'.<sup>53</sup> Self-rule, though, meant deeply connected political and economic relationships that required the development of most African-held land into cash crops. Meanwhile the settler state in Kenya made it illegal for Africans to grow coffee.

The Fabian Colonial Bureau assessed the African co-operative movement and administration as a development strategy and measured it by the tons of bulk foodstuffs that co-operatives brought to market and by the intangible political effects that Strickland, and the Webbs, had predicted. The post-war Fabian Colonial Bureau affirmed Strickland's arguments about co-operation and the need for paternalist intervention by the state. If co-operation was going to be a success in the post-war period, it must be undertaken with laws for registration designed to provide European oversight because the African co-operator, unlike the European, lacked the organizational skill and the capacity for efficient management because he did not have the same 'education, standing, and wealth'.<sup>54</sup>

By 1945, when the Fabian Colonial Bureau took up the question of using co-operatives as a central aspect of development and welfare in the colonies, the lines separating national citizen from imperial subject were already being smoothed over by the emergent universal subject embodied in the consumer. Co-operatives were necessary for the colonies, the Fabians argued, because in the post-war system of international control of production, marketing and commodity pricing, the small producer and the consumer were left to fend for themselves, little fish in a pool of sharks. 'In the general objective of

<sup>53</sup> Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Co-Operation in the Colonies*, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Co-Operation in the Colonies*, p. 76.

raising consumption levels and nutritional standards the need for adequate representation of consumers cannot be overstressed', they wrote, adding that the development of co-operative consumer societies would be 'of the utmost value' to meet those ends.<sup>55</sup>

The Chagga embrace of co-operation seemed to reap the political rewards that the Fabians found encouraging. The Tanganyikan experiment reflected at least some of the aspirations of Strickland. The bureau noted that the introduction of co-operatives disturbed some chiefs, 'who were afraid of the growth of a rival power calling for loyalty among their followers', and that Lord Hailey's *African Survey* found that the KNCU tried to undermine the power of at least one 'unpopular chief'. Beyond these incidents, co-operatives were proving to be a vital force for introducing modern political sensibilities. The report praised the political contributions:

It provides an excellent means of political education for the progressive young Chagga, teaching him how to conduct himself and to express his thoughts in a constitutional manner. To attend the meetings of its primary societies is illuminating. They are conducted on the basis of free speech, delivered with proper decorum, and enable the peasant to express himself on a variety of subjects concerned with his welfare, as, for example, crops and prices and the proper use of land. There can be little doubt that these meetings are largely responsible for the growth of a healthy public opinion on such matters. The Union is run by comparatively young and well-educated men and affords plenty of scope for the younger generation in the tribe to display their energies and abilities in an orderly and progressive manner.<sup>56</sup>

The Fabians were too narrowly focused on the political effects of increased involvement in what was, for them, the privileged institution in the coming socialist Commonwealth. They failed to understand the tensions of imperial rule, and the African and settler interests that intersected with the co-operative movement in east Africa. They missed that in Tanganyika Territory the co-operative had at times been a decidedly unpopular venture for many small farmers, especially as the government increased registration and audit measures and imposed mandatory co-operative marketing. While the Fabians noted the 'riots' on Kilimanjaro, they failed to understand the political motivations or economic considerations of the more than 2,000 Chagga farmers who were involved in the protests. Instead, they attributed the unrest, in part, to German government machinations in propaganda intended artificially to raise the market price for coffee coming from German settler plantations.

<sup>55</sup> Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Co-Operation in the Colonies*, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Co-Operation in the Colonies*, pp. 79–80.

The Indian co-operative model transplanted to Africa was encouraged by the Colonial Office under Sidney Webb not only as a mechanism to assist African cultivators in the cash market and to ease rural debt but as a form of political supervision. This was fully in line with the tenets of trusteeship, which as a theory of statecraft seemed to turn every structural problem into a question of education. The instruction that co-operatives could provide was of the order, for instance, of translating the meaning of food disconnected from its place of origin. Co-operatives could speak the language of empire, in this case that of produce grading for retail. They required a training of attention on the aggregate desires of distant consumers as these were shaped by consumer tastes and calculations of price and quality. In this way they took part in the particular early twentieth-century forms of commodity movement that had developed global infrastructures for moving produce on wartime scales and schedules. Modern co-operation relied on the fantasy, promoted by the Fabians but also by many others then and since, that the neighbourhood could be reproduced on a global scale. It was usually the structural barriers to land and resources for Africans that got lost in translation, causing co-operative enthusiasts in government to read impediments to co-operation in the 'African mind' or in the resilience of superstition rather than in an imperial order based on the enclosure of available resources.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Webb's White Paper on Native Policy, while never ratified, had at least attempted to bring land rights into a clear policy of trusteeship. He wrote in his White Paper that 'the first essential is to remove finally from the native mind any feeling of insecurity in regard to his tribal lands; and to keep available for all the tribes land of such extent and character as will fully suffice for their actual and future needs' (see Gregory, *Sidney Webb and East Africa*, pp. 108–13, for discussion of the White Paper on Native Policy). The joint commission blocked Webb's statement from becoming law, and in east Africa settler land grabs increased throughout the 1940s and early 1950s to disastrous effect (see T. Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–63* (Athens, Ohio, 1987)).

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After the First World War, Britain faced a number of challenges as it sought to adapt to domestic conditions of mass democracy while maintaining its position in the empire in the face of national independence movements. As politicians at home and abroad sought to legitimize their position, new efforts were made to conceptualize nationality and citizenship, with attempts to engage the public using mass media and greater emphasis on governing in the public interest.

*Brave New World* reappraises the domestic and imperial history of Britain in the inter-war period, investigating how 'nation building' was given renewed impetus by the upheavals of the First World War. The essays in this collection address how new technologies and approaches to governance were used to forge new national identities both at home and in the empire, covering a wide range of issues from the representation of empire on film to the convergence of politics and 'star culture'.

The book is an invaluable resource for scholars of British social, political and imperial history, as well as being of interest to the general reader.

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