

Radical and reactionary populism: Challenges to decline in Interwar  
Britain.

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## Introduction

The Interwar period in Britain was dominated by coalitions and moderate Conservative or Labour governments. It was also a period of profound economic challenges, the continuing erosion of Britain's economic primacy and the perception that the Empire would break up. These anxieties had developed through the Edwardian into the Interwar period and beyond, becoming somewhat of a motif in British culture. This thesis explores the generation and heritage, of both reactionary and radical forms of Conservative linked opposition to the political consensus, that arose in response to decline and their appeal to the British electorate. I will discuss how the Anti-Waste League and its collaborator Horatio Bottomley (1860-1933) developed as a classic early example of populism in the 1920s, which fitted neatly with a sometimes nihilist newspaper critique of politics and ideological opposition to the extension of government. An alternative solution to economic decline was provided in the Empire Free Trade policy. Based on populist criticism of political inaction it prophesied salvation for the nation's economic ills through trade, crucially with those most sympathetic to Britain, principally the Dominions, but also to India and the Colonies of the Empire. The extent of Britain's empathy and inclusion within her Empire Free Trade system might extend to this community but would not extend beyond to 'foreigners' whose motives were more suspect. The resulting empire wide autarchy would stave off American economic ingress, Soviet threat and the ill intentions of Japan and the European powers. Any threat to the Empire's existence was keenly felt by those of a Conservative mindset, the purpose of the upper classes had become entwined with its administration, and elements of the middle and working class admired its exotic allure, and the importance of Britain's role and power. It was an uncontested admiration that was beyond politics, and the insertion of it into political discourse did nothing to add to its appeal. If anything, the tarnishing of its pristine and distant image through consideration of the realities of trade tariffs, frozen Australian beef and Indian discontent, led to refuge into the second pillar of the Conservative mentality, the love of home and a traditional way of life and so of the nation over the Empire.

The history of early twentieth century Britain is rich in discussion of Liberal reforms prior to the Great War, the decisive intervention of David Lloyd George (1863-1945) during that War and then the tussle afterwards to determine whether the nation's blood debt to its soldiery would be repaid. Those opposing these developments have been dismissed as mere voices of reaction, reflexive opposition to change which can be seen teleologically as part of the steady expansion of government and birth of the modern state. The Anti-Waste League was the crystallisation of such movements who variously called for a smaller state, lower taxes, withdrawal from imperial ventures and posed an anti-politics stance, catalysed by the consensus forced over the country by the Coalition majority of 345.<sup>1</sup> Whilst they might occasionally find common cause with Herbert Asquith's (1852-1928) Liberals or even the Labour Party, their anti-political party stance was at their core and the justification for their existence. The opposition to state intervention was not merely an economic policy, but a belief that government itself was liable to be incompetent, self-indulgent and wasteful.<sup>2</sup> As might be encountered in any political movement there was a range of political perspectives encompassing politicians of Conservative and Liberal background, mixed with the incredulous tones of despairing professional journalists along with a notable charismatic fraudster. Whilst their platform was in many ways a negative one, that the government should not intervene, and whose voices were often raised in opposition, there were important strands of the Edwardian National Efficiency movement in the policies advocated, and their undoubted popular appeal and influence has rarely been considered by historians.

In contrast, the Empire Free Trade movement emerged in 1929 and provided a radical plan for the regeneration of Britain and the Empire. Driven by the charisma and resources of Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1964), Empire Free Trade proposed an economic restructuring of Britain's trade to her

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Wrigley. (1992). *Lloyd George*. Oxford: Blackwell, p.92.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1921, January 30). What the Anti-Waste League Means. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

advantage, as well as those most closely allied to or ruled by the Metropole. Viewed in the historiography as a scion of the Conservative Party, it abandoned the free trade beliefs held by the Party, and with more enthusiasm by the Liberals and Labour, that free trade most benefitted Britain's industry and people. Lord Beaverbrook was a member of the Conservative Party, which has often been described as a pragmatic party lacking ideology and so when an element of that Party espoused a belief in Empire Free Trade, protectionism against imports other than from the Empire, historians have been divided about how it should be understood. I argue that Beaverbrook devoutly believed in his cause, a belief founded on his business career and early life in Canada. Empire Free Trade was meant as a corrective to Britain's relative decline and the fragmentation of the Empire. The identification of the cause with the Empire drew in some of the same die-hard Conservatives who had previously championed the traditional calls for a smaller state, free markets and free trade.<sup>3</sup> It also encompassed those who opposed the leader of the Conservative Party Stanley Baldwin (1867-1947), who resisted Beaverbrook's call to adopt the policy. A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook's friend and biographer, sees his belief in Empire Free Trade as genuine and not a Trojan horse to cover his real purpose of displacing Baldwin.<sup>4</sup> The motives of Beaverbrook's ally in his endeavour to raise the issue, Viscount Rothermere (1868-1940), who had also established the Anti-Waste League in 1921, are more transparent. He fiercely opposed the leaders chosen by the Conservative Party, whether that was Andrew Bonar Law (1858-1923), Austen Chamberlain (1863-1937) or Stanley Baldwin.<sup>5</sup> All were viewed by Rothermere as weak and antithetical to the true Conservative cause, which was to adopt what might be described as Gladstonian economics and a hard line in Empire relations based on British self-interest.

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<sup>3</sup> Forest Capie. (2003). *Depression and protectionism: Britain between the wars*. Routledge, pp.72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor. (1972). *Beaverbrook*, p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup> S.J. Taylor. (1998). *The great outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail*. London: Phoenix Giant, pp.241, 271.

The Empire Free Trade movement can be treated in the historiography as somewhat esoteric populated by eccentrics, replete with colourful individualists, or ‘characters’, or even ‘mad swivel-eyed loons’.<sup>6</sup> The contemporary parallels and the lack of robust consideration of their cause, has undoubtedly drawn me to research this area, but the context is different. The British Empire was at its greatest extent and expressions of racial solidarity with the British race a commonplace.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the Empire was ever present I argue that Empire Free Trade is a reaction to economic forces pushing apart the familial bonds of Britain and her Dominions. That is the core of Beaverbrook’s message, not protection for the British, rather strengthening the links with Empire. He in particular feared that his own native Canada was increasingly being drawn into the economic and political orbit of the USA.<sup>8</sup> Just as Beaverbrook’s conception of the Empire was eroding, so some of the Anti-Waste League feared the slow unravelling of Britain’s economic strength in the aftermath of the Great War.<sup>9</sup> Decline was already perceived across the Edwardian period gave rise to nebulous calls for National Efficiency to reverse the trend, some of these calls were realised in a role for government to plan and invest.<sup>10</sup> The Anti-Waste League’s remedy to decline was different, to reduce the role and cost of government, freeing business from as much tax and regulation as possible. The Anti-Waste League and Empire Free Trade movements shared much, but they were marked apart by the Anti-Waste League’s view of politicians and politics as dismal in principle, whereas Empire Free Trade reached beyond such negativity to advocate policy solutions to the economic crisis facing Britain, a policy based on the value of protectionism and solidarity with the British race. Both movements were undoubtedly popular, and I argue that the Anti Waste cause presented a much greater challenge to Lloyd George than is presented in the historiography. The political grouping arising from Empire Free Trade, the Empire

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<sup>6</sup> David Cameron ally: Tory activists are mad, swivel-eyed loons. (2013, May 18). *The Guardian*.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew S. Thompson. (2008;). *The empire strikes back?: The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century* (1st ed.). Routledge, p.134.

<sup>8</sup> A. J. P. Taylor. (1972). *Beaverbrook*. London: Hamilton, p.274.

<sup>9</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1920, June 19). Master Spenders and Squandermania. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> G.R. Searle. (1971). *The quest for National Efficiency: A study in British politics and political thought, 1899-1914*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.57, 257-259. Robert J. Scally. (2015). *The origins of the Lloyd George coalition: The politics of social-imperialism, 1900-1918*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp.48-49.



Crusade, also came close to toppling Baldwin and transforming the Conservative Party.<sup>11</sup> Both movements represent strong counter currents to the prevailing moderation of Interwar government and demonstrate how reactionary and radical elements in the Conservative Party found common ground and successfully appealed across class and gender divides in the newly enfranchised electorate.

Declinism as an element of historiography arose in the late 1950s with the debate between F.R. Leavis and C.P. Snow, that ascribed British decline to the embrace of the arts over sciences.<sup>12</sup> It was continued with Perry Anderson's *Origins of the Present Crisis*, where Anderson identified the ossification which occurred following the growth of capitalism in concert with the British Class system.<sup>13</sup> Martin Weiner marked the embrace of nostalgia by the middle and upper classes and rejection of the importance of urban development and industrialisation after their early adoption.<sup>14</sup> Eric Hobsbawm too identified the conservative mindset that resisted revolution or collapse, but also modernisation.<sup>15</sup> The debate about the causes of relative British decline would go on and have even re-emerged in the Brexit debate. The type of decline that Rothermere and Beaverbrook felt was imperial and economic but was not completely divorced from the later narratives of the left. Underlying it was a critique of the inept ruling class and the eschewing of business methods by a tired and amateurish form of government. But their prosecution of their case was not an academic one, and their readiness to accept what can be seen as exploitative methods in industry and the colonies would put them firmly at odds with the later thinkers.

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Ball. (1988). *Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The crisis of 1929-1931*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.ix, xvi.)

<sup>12</sup> David Edgerton. (2021, October 5). Why the left must abandon the myth of British decline. *New Statesman*.

<sup>13</sup> Perry Anderson. (1964). *Origins of the present crisis*. *New Left Review*, (23), 26-53. Edgerton. (2021, October 5).

<sup>14</sup> Martin J. Wiener. (1981). *English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit, 1850-1980*. Cambridge University Press, p.ix.

<sup>15</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm. (1968). *Industry and empire: An economic history of Britain since 1750*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, pp.15-17, 19.

The Interwar Conservatives tacked towards the centre ground under the moderate leadership of Andrew Bonar Law, Austen Chamberlain, Stanley Baldwin, and Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940) but faced opposition on the right up to 1931 that might have dangerously split their vote.<sup>16</sup> The Conservatives entered electoral alliances with the Liberals in 1918 and some Labour and Liberal MPs in the National Government in 1931, requiring the adoption of compromise positions, but also sought to present a moderate appeal when it governed alone.<sup>17</sup> The adoption of these stances was not driven just by political compromises but also by a recognition of political reality. The advance of voting rights in 1918 and 1928 necessitated an appeal by the Conservative Party to women and working-class voters, for whom they judged a more moderate message was necessary. Both the League and Empire movements were outside of this broad consensus and supported candidates in by-elections against the official Conservative Party and threatened to deny a plurality of the votes to Conservative candidates and thus undermine the Party electorally.<sup>18</sup> The Anti-Waste League are recorded as part of the right-wing reaction against the Lloyd George Coalition. The pressure of the Anti-Waste League's candidates in by-elections in 1921, is read as resulting in the jettisoning of the Minister of Health, Christopher Addison (1869-1951) in March 1921, and David Lloyd George taking up the Geddes Axe, as a defensive weapon against their attack. This is Kenneth O. Morgan and Chris Wrigley's thesis, that the Conservatives defeated progressive social reform.<sup>19</sup> The Anti-Waste movement was a crystallisation of Tory fears that they had lost sight of true Conservative principles and that a party

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Blake. (1955). *The unknown Prime Minister: The life and times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1838-1923*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, p.412. Stuart Ball. (2013). *Portrait of a party: The conservative party in Britain 1918-1945*. Oxford: OUP, p.459. Keith Middlemas & John Barnes. (1969). *Baldwin: A biography*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, p.99. Thomas F. Lindsay & Michael Harrington. (1974). *The Conservative party, 1918-1970*. London: Macmillan, p.2. Philip Williamson. (1999). *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative leadership and national values*. Cambridge University Press, p.44.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey R. Searle. (1995). *Country before party: Coalition and the idea of 'national government' in modern Britain, 1885-1987*. London; New York: Longman, pp.127, 174-175.

<sup>18</sup> F.W.S. Craig. (1975). *Minor parties at British parliamentary elections 1885-1974*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited. doi:10.1007/978-1-349-02346-2, p.5. Koss. (1984), p.360. D. George Boyce. (2011). Harmsworth, Harold Sidney, first Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940), newspaper proprietor. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan. (1979). *Consensus and disunity: The Lloyd George coalition government 1918-1922*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp.96-98, 105-106. Kenneth O. Morgan & Jane Morgan. (1980). *Portrait of a Progressive: The political career of Christopher, Viscount Addison*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.131-132. Wrigley. (1992), p.113.

championing these might outflank them on the right.<sup>20</sup> The extent of their challenge is confined principally to London by Michael Kinnear.<sup>21</sup> However, they were also electorally successful in Dover and Thanet in Kent and stood at by-elections in the Midlands and North gaining substantial support. The Anti-Waste movement only had to fracture support somewhat, in any constituency, to prove damaging.<sup>22</sup> Ross McKibbin makes a strong case that they represent a middle class revolt against the Conservatives.<sup>23</sup> A revolt of the rentiers can certainly be substantiated in by-elections such as Thanet, where the modest property owning classes complained vigorously against rate rises and increased government regulation, whilst they experienced a slump in holiday traffic.<sup>24</sup> Chris Wrigley and Morgan agree with that position and David Thackeray too sees them in the context of existing movements such as the Middle-Class Union and that opposition grew more reactionary with Rothermere's involvement.<sup>25</sup>

Initially, Anti-Waste opposition was diffuse and nebulous in nature, but Rothermere sought to define and control it by establishing the official Anti-Waste League.<sup>26</sup> Morgan sees their fiscal Conservatism as being popular with newly enfranchised women voters.<sup>27</sup> They also called for a withdrawal from costly Imperial entanglements, this anti-imperial sentiment based in economic real politic is described by Maurice Cowling as part of a splintering of political allegiance in the post-Great War period.<sup>28</sup> The same phenomena, linked to the addition of some women to the electorate and all men, allowed Baldwin to try a protectionist approach in 1923, before moving to a broader, more moderate appeal

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<sup>20</sup> Morgan. (1979), p.168.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Kinnear. (1973). *The fall of Lloyd George: The political crisis of 1922*. London: Macmillan, p.84.

<sup>22</sup> Maurice Cowling. (1971). *The impact of Labour, 1920-1924: The beginning of modern British politics*. London: Cambridge University Press, pp.51,56.

<sup>23</sup> Ross McKibbin. (1998). *Classes and cultures: England 1918-1951*. Oxford University Press, pp.51,55.

<sup>24</sup> Stop waste fight in Thanet by-election. (1919, October 21). *Daily Mirror*, p.3. HC Orders of the Day — Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (Restrictions) Bill.: Clause 9. — (Limitation on rent of houses let furnished). (21 June 1920) (130) col.1921.

<sup>25</sup> David Thackeray. (2016). *Conservatism for the democratic age: Conservative cultures and the challenge of mass politics in early twentieth century England* (1st ed.). Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.155.

<sup>26</sup> Your duty to join Anti-Waste League. (1921, Jan 23). *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.3.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan. (1979), pp.154, 159.

<sup>28</sup> Cowling. (1971), pp.8, 49.

to the electorate, but which proved less popular to many of his local Party membership.<sup>29</sup> Whilst McKibbin's middle class revolt against rising taxes and prices, undoubtedly represents part of the appeal of the Anti Waste message and the threat to the Conservative Party, it fails to ascribe sufficient importance to the populist figure of Horatio Bottomley and his Independent Parliamentary Group which was part of the Anti-Waste campaign. A hugely popular figure, with the widely read *John Bull* magazine and an active Great War behind him, he appealed to working class electors and in particular former servicemen offering an alternative to Labour and proving peradventure that the Conservatives need not fear an expanded electorate and could appeal to working class voters. He was also successful in taking the Anti-Waste campaign out of the South of England, defeating Coalition Liberals and securing votes in the North of England. It was not just the Conservatives as Martin Pugh argues who feared the electoral consequences, Lloyd George's Liberals could also see their candidates defeated.<sup>30</sup> Bottomley's plain lack of seriousness and subsequent imprisonment for fraud has undermined his credibility to historians and tended to be the focus of his later biographical treatment.<sup>31</sup> However, whilst many were suspicious of his motives, his electoral appeal and that of his message were palpable.

In discussing the Anti-Waste movement and Empire Crusade, the intervention of the press lords is key to their interpretation in the historiography. In an era of true democracy, mass circulation newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* were viewed by politicians as of key importance. Lloyd George in particular, lavished extensive inducements on the press lords, 'squaring or squashing' them.<sup>32</sup> They also left extensive evidence of their daily published views which is bound to attract historians. It is a difficult question to resolve whether the press lords represented existing public opinion, rather than created it, historians like A.J.P. Taylor and Stuart Ball take the view that they gave

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<sup>29</sup> Ball. (1988), p.xviii-xix, 46. Williamson. (1999), p.46.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Pugh. (1988). *Lloyd George*. London: Longman, pp.129-130, 154.

<sup>31</sup> Julian Symons. (2014). *Horatio Bottomley*. Looe: House of Stratus. Alan Hyman. (1972). *The rise and fall of Horatio Bottomley*. Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services.

<sup>32</sup> Koss. (1984), p.309.

voice to existing concerns.<sup>33</sup> But by repeatedly returning to these matters of concern to the public, this emphasised their importance and maintained them in the public consciousness. In addition, the extent and character of the coverage, particularly by the 1930s, was unprecedented and unmistakably propagandist, rather than journalistic. The *Daily Express* in particular represented Beaverbrook's will, and he was closely involved in determining the content of the newspaper. The motivations of both these interventionist proprietors are therefore rightly picked over. The popular press gave a focus to public debate, which could at times be difficult for politicians to ignore and could shape public opinion such was its comprehensive and forceful coverage. But newspapers had to be responsive to what their readers wanted to read about, when Rothermere continued with campaigns beyond the patience of his readers, his newspaper sales declined.<sup>34</sup>

Much of the historiography adopts a high politics stance looking at the political actors and their motivations, treating the Anti-Waste League and Empire Free Trade as political chess pieces of the press barons, rather than as movements that excited public interest. Ball adopts a New Political History approach, seeking to understand the views of activists locally, the society that MPs moved in and were influenced by.<sup>35</sup> His account is however bound within the context of the Conservative Party and the implications for its leader, seeking to draw upon the feelings of grass roots party members to understand their views.<sup>36</sup> He considers the membership of the political party of Empire Free Trade, the Empire Crusade in Conservative constituencies, as well as looking in detail at the machinations of Beaverbrook to control the Conservatives, and for Rothermere and his United Empire Party to destroy them.<sup>37</sup> Roy Jenkins agrees with that characterisation, discounting the importance of the concept of Empire Free Trade other than as a totem, used to attack a poorly performing leader.<sup>38</sup> This is typical

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<sup>33</sup> Koss. (1984), p.346. Ball. (1988), p.xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Bourne. (1990). *Lords of Fleet Street: The Harmsworth dynasty*. London: Unwin Hyman, p.116.

<sup>35</sup> Ball. (1988), pp.xiv-xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Ball. (1988), pp.xiv-xv.

<sup>37</sup> Ball. (1988), pp.53, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Roy Jenkins. (1987). *Baldwin*. London: Collins, p.110

of the historiography, which also draws parallels with Baldwin's dealing with the extra-constitutional influence of the press lords, with that of Trade Union leaders.<sup>39</sup> A.J.P. Taylor differs in that he emphasises the deeply held, but to him erroneous, belief that Beaverbrook had in Empire Free Trade.<sup>40</sup> However, any consideration beyond that is left to economic historians.<sup>41</sup> Ball's consideration of the attraction of these issues to a section of the electorate can be built on, beyond its relevance to the Conservative Party, bringing in the developing field of the History of Emotion, to understand better their appeal to a section of the electorate.<sup>42</sup> Whilst the language of Empire Free Trade was utilitarian, the underlying, inherent British racial superiority was clear. Proponents summoned romantic stories of enterprising Elizabethans or resentment that investments had been made, progress bestowed, and the colonies now rejected Britain, their benevolent sovereign, unlike other less palatable overseas imperialists. But British decency had to be paid for in trade for British goods and if the colonials were ungrateful enough not to recognise the benefits of Empire, the United Empire Party called for repression of their independence movements. Both organisations felt that Britain's leaders were tired and lacked dynamism, calling on youth to lead the way, to what Beaverbrook ominously called a 'third Empire, an economic Empire'.<sup>43</sup> The Empire Crusade and United Empire Party were reaching for the Empire they imagined, whether of trade or authority, yet it was not clear that the Empire incited the same passion in the wider population, despite the lavish efforts to publicise it and to bring it into the households and in particular shopping baskets of Britons.

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<sup>39</sup> Ball. (1988), pp.90-91. Donald Southgate. (1974). *The Conservative leadership, 1832-1932*. London: Macmillan, pp.212-213. Williamson. (1999), p.41.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor. (1972), pp. ix, xiv, 228-229.

<sup>41</sup> Ian M. Drummond. (2005). *British economic policy and empire, 1919-1939*. London: Routledge, Forrest Capie. (2003). *Depression and protectionism: Britain between the wars*. London: Routledge.

<sup>42</sup> Rob Boddice. "The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future". *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, no. 62 (2017): 10-15. Emily Robinson. (2020). the authority of feeling in mid-twentieth century English conservatism. *The Historical Journal*, , 1-22. doi:10.1017/S0018246X19000682

<sup>43</sup> Young Crusaders meet to form a League. (1930, April 5). *Daily Express*, p.1.

Both the Anti-Waste League and Empire Crusade were tightly controlled by their press baron leader, and whilst there is some evidence of local activism, this was ruthlessly suppressed.<sup>44</sup> The ideology and approach of these movements has necessarily been summarised in the historiography, necessitating a degree of simplification. By looking at the election material held in the Conservative Party Archive, the Beaverbrook Papers, the extensive coverage in the *Daily Express* and the archive of an opponent of the Empire Crusade in North Norfolk in July 1930, Lady Noel Buxton, the nature of the case made for these movements is clear, as is the nature of its opposition. *John Bull* magazine and both the *Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* contain articles by Horatio Bottomley and Rothermere which identify in detail their writers' beliefs.<sup>45</sup> Philip Williamson rightly considers that a politician's speeches are particularly important, but insufficiently attended to sources of information about a politician's message and audience.<sup>46</sup> The national focus on the by-elections in which these organisations competed yielded comprehensive national and local newspaper coverage from a range of political perspectives, which can be relied upon to elucidate helpful and also unhelpful commentary on the League and Crusade.

The destruction of Rothermere's personal papers has made research into his private views more difficult, and to determine his part in the organisation of the League.<sup>47</sup> However, his extensive correspondence with Beaverbrook as well as that of Ernest Outhwaite (1875-1931), the Secretary of the Anti-Waste League, is helpful in setting out how Rothermere wanted to describe his approach. Much of these letters are quite candid, but are in the context that both Beaverbrook and Rothermere were rivals, more than true collaborators, their approach best surmised in the dictum 'Keep your friends close; keep your enemies closer.' Correspondence has also been reviewed between

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<sup>44</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, September 22). Telegram to Lord Beaverbrook. (BBK/c/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>45</sup> A.J.A. Morris. (2011). Bottomley, Horatio William (1860–1933), journalist and swindler. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Craig. (1975), p.5. Cowling. (1971), p.52. Koss. (1984), pp.354, 476, 488.

<sup>46</sup> Williamson. (1999), pp.13-15.

<sup>47</sup> Cameron Hazlehurst, Sally Whitehead & Christine Woodland. (1996). *A guide to the papers of British cabinet ministers, 1900-1964*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Beaverbrook and Sir Thomas Polson (1865-1946) who won the by-election in Dover in 1921, and Rothermere's son Esmond Harmsworth (1898-1978) elected as an 'Anti-Waste' candidate in 1919.<sup>48</sup> Beaverbrook's considerable archive and propensity to write and maintain copies of correspondence illustrates both his wide range of contacts, as well as his approach to running the Empire Crusade. In copious notes to Frederick Doidge (1884-1954), Secretary of the Empire Crusade, with directions from his secretary such as 'I enclose correspondence with Mr N. Cockshutt. Lord Beaverbrook says this man is no good to anybody.'<sup>49</sup> Or another to Doidge, 'Do not bother with Vivian Carter. He is a good enough fellow – but rather crazy at times.'<sup>50</sup> Most waspish of all:

Your note about Dinsdale who "canvassed for Lord Beaverbrook in Ashton, etc." Lord Beaverbrook comments – There were in the constituency 10,000 voters; 20,000 people helped him get in, 30,000 spoke for him; he owes his career to 40,000; and to 50,000 he owes everything.<sup>51</sup>

The detail of these records must not mislead the reader that they are comprehensive, they are a conscious attempt by Beaverbrook to curate his own legacy, and there are some gaps, for instance his correspondence with Sir Oswald Mosley (1896-1980) is not fully represented. They also cannot give anything but a flavour of his many personal meetings with Rothermere and a host of other politicians he engaged with over Empire Free Trade. They do unquestionably illustrate his connections with the Conservative Party and his belief in Empire Free Trade.<sup>52</sup> These archives have been drawn on by Ball

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<sup>48</sup> Collaborative Research Project on Working-Class Autobiography. (2020). *Kathleen Hilton-Foord (1903-1998): Politics, Protest & Class*. [www.writinglives.org](http://www.writinglives.org). Robert Blake. (2011). Harmsworth, Esmond Cecil, second Viscount Rothermere (1898–1978), newspaper proprietor. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>49</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, December 4). *Note to Frederick Doidge*. (BBK/B/248). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>50</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, December 21). *Note to Frederick Doidge on Vivian Carter*. (BBK/B/248). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>51</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, November 18). *Note to Frederick Doidge on Dinsdale help during election*. (BBK/B/248). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>52</sup> D. George Boyce. (2011). Aitken, William Maxwell, first Baron Beaverbrook (1879–1964), newspaper proprietor and politician. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.



and many other historians, however rather than the links to the Conservative Party I have looked at the organisation and operations of the Empire Crusade itself.

In order to consider the wider appreciation of the Empire, outside of party politics, the archive of the Royal Empire Society was consulted. The Royal Empire Society was established to promote understanding and interest in the Empire and in early 1930 it undertook a recruitment drive in the South and South-West of England. Extensive records of this activity and its response locally and in the press have been maintained, these give an insight both into the anxieties prevalent amongst good imperialists that the Empire was decaying and also into the non-party case having to be made to promote the Empire amongst the middle classes of England.

My focus is on the interplay of reactionary and radical ideas to the right of the Conservative Party, where these movements emerged from and how they were corralled by newspaper proprietors to give voice to an important element of the electorate that was not just a middle class movement, but included working class and newly enfranchised female support. The relationship of these movements with the Conservative Party has been the focus of the historiography and is closely connected to the movements that preceded them. Geoffrey Searle has broken up the Edwardian Unionist Party into the traditional elements led by the leadership, then two caucuses of critics.<sup>53</sup> First those who associated themselves with National Efficiency and addressing Britain's decline through a managerial and technocratic elite, they believed in reforming Britain's institutions and in working through coalition to re-align the party. These could be characterised by the approach of Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) or Lord Milner (1854-1925).<sup>54</sup> The second he calls the Radical Right, this wide-ranging group accepted some of the changes proposed by Chamberlain, for example Tariff Reform, but not

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<sup>53</sup> G. R. Searle. (1979). Critics of the Edwardian Society: The case of the Radical Right. In Alan O'Day. *The Edwardian age: Conflict and stability, 1900-1914*. Macmillan: London, pp.82-83.

<sup>54</sup> Searle. (1979), pp.82-83.

any party re-alignment.<sup>55</sup> They consisted of people like Willoughby de Broke (1869-1923) and they relied on appeals to the patriotism of the working-class. There is perhaps another group of critics that certainly developed across the Lloyd George Coalition, those in the die-hard wing of the Conservatives who were not radical but rather were defiantly reactionary. These are described by Michael Kinnear and could be relied on to object to any extension of government.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps lacking the expansive convictions of their fellow critics, and more fundamentally conservative in nature, their lack of appetite for government activity can appear bland and less interesting in comparison.

However, the Anti-Waste League and pro-Empire movements in the Interwar period have not been considered in their own right, and by considering the papers of Beaverbrook, the detailed newspaper coverage that they enjoyed and the nature of the political opposition to them in the Conservative and Labour Parties, it substantiates the importance of the political stances which opposed the rise of the welfare state and rejected the inevitability of the decline of the Empire. These counter-prevalent views were unsuccessful but explain the nature of political developments in Britain. Consideration of the correspondence between Beaverbrook and Rothermere has highlighted important information about Rothermere's approach to the foundation of the Anti-Waste League. A consideration of the language used in the speeches of leading figures also highlights the appeal made to voters and the unease about Britain's decline. The Royal Empire Society's recruitment efforts in the South of England provide an insight that the organisation originally established in 1868 to promote the Empire in Britain, decided in 1930 that it was necessary to do so again in the heart of Middle Class England. The declinist fears were not just Beaverbrook's, they were widespread.

Chapter one considers the genesis of the Anti-Waste League and the important and somewhat neglected role of its partner Horatio Bottomley, who provided the cause with a charismatic leading

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<sup>55</sup> Searle. (1979), pp.83-84.

<sup>56</sup> Kinnear. (1973), pp.76-77, 79-82.

figure.. The chapter examines the Anti-Waste movement as an important populist insurgency deploying many of the characteristics that have come to be understood as modern populism. Its stances were distinct to the die-hards in the Unionist Party, being prepared to jettison the Tory adherence to tradition in order to fulfil their goal of low taxes and a smaller state. Chapter two looks at the movements that arose to preserve the Empire: The United Empire Party and the Empire Crusade's championing of Empire Free Trade, their approach and electoral success. Whilst the League and United Empire Party opposed the Coalition Government, the Empire Crusade worked to influence the Conservative Party, they were all strongly connected with the Conservative party but I argue that their beliefs were quite distinct . This chapter will consider the United Empire and Crusade's ideology beyond their attitude to Baldwin and the extent to which these movements were radical or reactionary responses to fears that the Empire was in decline. The Empire Crusade was reformist, pro-imperial and protectionist, proclaiming a panacea for the Country's economic ills. The United Empire Party peddled a range of shifting reactionary stances without the Anti-Waste League's example of an impactful populist approach or its more coherent message This examination provides an insight to the traditional view that the Conservative Party was non-ideological. . In the final Chapter I consider why people supported the Crusade and United Empire Party and to what extent this was in response to fears that the Empire was in decline and crucially the extent to which the people were interested in the Empire at all. This issue is examined through the expressions of views about the Empire in elite speeches, letters to newspapers, popular songs associated with the movements and the gendered political messaging designed to appeal to the newly enfranchised women voters. In addition, by considering the non-partisan Royal Empire Society's arguments for Empire and those most valued in the Society's yearly essay competition for children, provides a valuable insight into the perception of the Empire's decline.

## Chapter 1: Opposing the Coalition

### The influence of the 'Anti-Waste' message

Historians have used the Anti-Waste League label to embrace opponents to the Lloyd George Coalition who could not be immediately categorised as part of Labour or Liberal opposition. This classification is a wide net, drawing in different shades of political opinion both liberal, conservative and populist in tone, but all professing their antipathy toward government waste. As the name implies they tended to principally base their appeal on opposing, rather than advocating government action, but by looking at how they made their case to the electorate during by-elections, parliamentary debate and in newspaper articles, the development of the Anti-Waste argument can be considered and better understood. The formation of a 'league' by those pressing conservative causes was well established by the 1920s, although the cachet had perhaps been dented by the establishment of the League of Nations, which tended to find less affection amongst the right.<sup>57</sup> It became the vehicle of choice from the 1880s for nationalist proponents of protectionism, imperial federation, strong naval forces and conscription, as well as more traditionalist Conservative movements like the Primrose League.<sup>58</sup> Characterised as the 'revolt from the right' they gained traction in opposition to the Edwardian Liberal governments.<sup>59</sup> The Liberal's too were supported and guided by a range of its own leagues and pressure groups, but the relationship of the Unionists to leagues associated with their cause was different, with Fran Coetzee seeing them as opponents of the prevailing leadership of the Party.<sup>60</sup> The

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<sup>57</sup> Fran Coetzee. (1990). *For party or country: Nationalism and the dilemmas of popular conservatism in Edwardian England*. Oxford University Press, p.4.

<sup>58</sup> Coetzee. (1990), p.6-7, 11. David Cannadine. (1998). *Class in Britain*. Yale University Press, pp.122-123. Anne Summers. (1981) The Character of Edwardian Nationalism. In P. M. Kennedy, A. J. Nicholls. *Nationalist and racist movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*. Macmillan in association with St Antony's College, Oxford, p.68.

<sup>59</sup> G.R. Searle. (1981) The 'Revolt from the Right' in Edwardian Britain. In P. M. Kennedy, A. J. Nicholls. *Nationalist and racist movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*. Macmillan in association with St Antony's College, Oxford, pp. 22-24.

<sup>60</sup> Coetzee. (1990), pp.3, 5-6.

Conservatives' centralised power structures and exclusive handling of policy by the leadership, meant that such opposition was inevitably forced outside and sought means of amplification to press the Party Leader to change.

The adoption and eventual co-option of these forces by Lord Rothermere was a natural progression for his newspapers that constituted an outraged litany of governmental waste and ineptitude, underlined by an argument that the post-war settlement had moved Britain too far from the Gladstonian dictums of small government.<sup>61</sup> However, the Anti-Waste League was not formally constituted until January 1921 and at that point was only one element of opposition to increases in government expenditure. The antecedents of the League can be traced back to Rothermere's son, Esmond Harmsworth running in the Kent constituency of Thanet in November 1919, where he stood for Anti-Waste as the Unionist candidate.<sup>62</sup> However, whilst Rothermere has been identified with the pressure caused by the Anti-Waste cause, the next success of Rothermere's framing of Anti-Waste was the Dover by-election in January 1921. In the intervening period, the successful prosecution of the Anti-Waste message was in the hands of Horatio Bottomley, MP and leader of the Independent Parliamentary Group. Whilst these two forces would frequently combine, and their messages were in many ways compatible, their approach was very different. Bottomley's Independent candidates took the fight against the Coalition out of the South of England to the Midlands and the North, his group expanding with defections from Unionist and Liberal MPs. This represented a wider challenge than is recognised by those such as Michael Kinnear who sought to characterise the threat to the Coalition as a minor one confined to London and the South East.<sup>63</sup> Nor was their efflorescence purely a result of a middle class revolt against higher prices and inflation, as Ross McKibbin has suggested.<sup>64</sup> They

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<sup>61</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1920, June 13 ). Master-spenders and squander-mania. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> From our special correspondent. (1919, November 29). Mr. Harmsworth as first anti-waste MP. *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

<sup>63</sup> Kinnear. (1973), p.84.

<sup>64</sup> Ross McKibbin. (2011). *Parties and people: England 1914-1951*. Oxford University Press.

appealed to some of the newest and therefore least predictable elements of the electorate, women and also importantly, and often overlooked, ex-service men who had been given the vote at the age of 19, along with the rest of the male working class who gained the vote at 21.<sup>65</sup> The activity of a varied and colourful group of people, who would form the Independent Parliamentary Group, brought a savvy and popular styling to the traditional conservatism of the Anti-Waste League. These groups worked closely and profitably together and constituted the twin pillars of the opposition to a more expansive government. As the threat of the Anti-Waste movement grew and formalised itself as a non-party related campaigning group, the easy relationship between the official Unionist party and its 'Anti-Waste' MPs such as Esmond, fractured with party propaganda targeting their former members. Asquith's Liberals also sought to carry the Anti-Waste flag, but lacked the backing of the newspaper barons. Yet the ease with which the cause could be championed by anybody threatened to dilute Rothermere's control of the message and prompted the formal establishment of the Anti-Waste League. Inevitably the diversity of voices, personalities and causes could not be banded together successfully, and they divided, before returning to the mainstream of politics in the Unionist party following the end of the Coalition. Their success had helped to undermine the Coalition, not only as an insurgent party challenging for votes, but also demonstrating that a popular right-wing message to women and the working classes could defeat Labour and that a Liberal shield was unnecessary.

The Coalition victory in 1918 raised expectations of social reform, as well as being built on promises of punishing the Kaiser and making Germany pay for the Great War. The War led to unprecedented levels of debt being established and to a massive expansion of the state. Lloyd George continued the impetus of an expanded government in many areas, with the railways remaining under government control until 1923 and with ministers looking to expand state health, housing and education provision.<sup>66</sup> These ambitions had not been sufficiently presaged during the election and were

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<sup>65</sup> The Representation of the People Act 1918.

<sup>66</sup> Derek Aldcroft. (1968). *British railways in transition: The economic problems of Britain's railways since 1914*. Macmillan, p.41. Jane Morgan and Kenneth O. Morgan. (1980). *Portrait of a progressive : The political career of*

immediately opposed both in principle and on account of their cost at a time of national stringency, by conservative newspapers and Die-Hard members of the Unionist Party. The collective shock to the governing classes of all parties at the massive government deficit, led to immediate pressure to respond.<sup>67</sup> The National Debt increased fourteenfold over the Great War and debt interest amounted to 44% of government expenditure.<sup>68</sup> From a modest fiscal surplus in 1914, by 1919 the deficit reached £1,690 Million and through expenditure reductions and tax rises the Government finances returned to surplus in 1921.<sup>69</sup> The reduction of the deficit was undertaken during a profound national economic recession, with the economy shrinking by a quarter between the end of the War and 1921.<sup>70</sup> Opposition on the right had manifested itself during the war, with the formation of the National Party in 1917, opposing Bonar Law's acquiescence to an extension of Irish home rule, they pressed for a more vigorous pursuit of victory and enjoyed strong backing from the *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post*.<sup>71</sup> Whilst the National Party folded back into the Unionists in 1921 its two MPs joined the ranks of the die-hard group of MPs in the Party, some of whom had won their seats without the Coalition coupon and would oppose the Coalition across a range of traditionally Unionist stances, voting against expansions of government control in health or railways, and increases in taxation.<sup>72</sup> Right wing opposition to the Coalition, underpinned by a level of public support at the 1918 General Election was

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*Christopher, Viscount Addison*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.viii. Kenneth O. Morgan. (1971) *Lloyd George's Stage Army: The Coalition Liberals*. In A.J.P. Taylor. *Lloyd George: Twelve essays*. London: Hamilton, pp.230-231. Craig.(1975), p.32.

<sup>67</sup> Austen Chamberlain. (1919, July 18). *Memorandum to War Cabinet*. (G.T. 7729) (MS. Addison dep. c. 128, fols. 168-172). Archive of Christopher Addison, Bodleian Libraries Repository, fol.168. David Lloyd George. (1919, August 20). *Letter to Minister of Health*. (MS. Addison dep. c. 128, fols. 196-198). Archive of Christopher Addison, Bodleian Libraries Repository, fol.197.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor. (1965), pp.123-124. Jari Eloranta. (2014). *Armament and the economy*. In Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries, & Paul Johnson. *The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain: Volume II, 1870 to the present* (New ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.286.

<sup>69</sup> His Majesty's Exchequer. (1914-1922). *Public Income and Expenditure. Year ended 31 March 1914*. London: HMSO. His Majesty's Exchequer.

<sup>70</sup> Matthew Morys. (2014). *Cycles and depressions*. In Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries, & Paul Johnson. *The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain: Volume II, 1870 to the present* (New ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.240. Neil K. Buxton. (1979). *Introduction*. In N.K. Buxton, & D.H. Aldcroft. *British industry between the wars: Instability and industrial development, 1919-1939*. London: Scholar Press, p.11.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen E. Koss. (1984). *The rise and fall of the political press in Britain: Volume two : The twentieth century*. University of North Carolina Press, pp.318-319.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew S. Thompson. (2008) *Croft, Henry Page, first Baron Croft (1881–1947), politician*. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

therefore an ever-present feature of the political scene. Their opposition to the assumed consensus of the Coalition would blossom as a right-wing critique took form and was boosted and shaped by newspaper proprietors.

Lord Rothermere's political views are hard to characterise, but in the pre-War period and in the immediate post-War period he was a Liberal sympathiser, two of his brothers were Liberal MPs, a third stood for the Party, whereas his oldest brother Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922) supported the Unionists.<sup>73</sup> Rothermere remained an admirer of Lloyd George throughout the 1920s, whilst strongly opposing Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain branding them both as ineffective.<sup>74</sup> It was a stance echoed in his newspapers, up to 1922 his principle national newspaper interests were *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Pictorial* both serving a middle-class conservative readership.<sup>75</sup> He had acquired *The Daily Mirror* from Lord Northcliffe in 1910 following its failure as a newspaper written by a female editorial team for a female readership.<sup>76</sup> Rothermere re-launched it, as an illustrated paper with more general appeal, but it consistently sought to reach women readers and this was integral to its backing of the Anti-Waste movement. It outsold its competitor *The Daily Mail* from 1914-1922 and in 1915 Rothermere successfully launched *The Sunday Pictorial*, as the first picture-based Sunday newspaper, to the same market.<sup>77</sup> *The Sunday Pictorial* would be used heavily by Rothermere to expound his personal views directly, as well as to give Horatio Bottomley a weekly platform to attack waste and propound a series of populist causes. Both these national papers, as well as Rothermere's local

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Bourne. (1990). *Lords of Fleet Street: The Harmsworth dynasty*. London: Unwin Hyman, pp.42, 81.

<sup>74</sup> Bourne. (1990), p.88. Steve J. Taylor. (1999). *The reluctant press lord: Esmond Rothermere and the Daily Mail*. Phoenix: Giant, p.15. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1920, June 27 ). How long can the government last. *The Sunday Pictorial*, 5. Koss. (1984, pp.468-469, 481.

<sup>75</sup> Steve J. Taylor. (1998). *The great outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail*. Phoenix: Giant, p.227. Robert Blake. (1955). *The unknown prime minister. the life and times of Andrew Bonar law, 1858-1923*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, p.472.

<sup>76</sup> Adrian Bingham, & Martin Conboy. (2015). *Tabloid century: The popular press in Britain, 1896 to the present*. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp.2,9-10. Bourne. (1990), p.85.

<sup>77</sup> Bourne. (1990), p.85. Viscount Camrose. (1947). *British newspapers and their controllers*. London: Cassell, p.61.



papers, most potentially damaging to Bonar Law (a Glasgow MP), his Glasgow newspapers, lambasted the expansion of government and the waste that ensued.<sup>78</sup>

Rothermere escalated his opposition, following Coalition criticism of his assertion that the government could be run for £800 million, at a time when governmental expenditure was double that.<sup>79</sup> He prevailed on his only surviving son Esmond Harmsworth to stand in the Thanet by-election in November 1919.<sup>80</sup> Winning the backing of the local Unionist Party with his uncle Northcliffe's discreet support, he stood as a self-proclaimed 'Anti-Waste' candidate, and was referred to as such by the Rothermere and Northcliffe press, whilst officially the Unionist candidate.<sup>81</sup> Standing in a safe Unionist seat which had not even been thought worth contesting since 1910, his opponent was an Asquithian Liberal William J. West. Both criticised government waste, with Esmond criticising the governing parties he aimed to join, even at the same meeting where government ministers would laud their parsimony. The incongruity of this was highlighted in *The Manchester Guardian*.

So, waste must be denounced while the Government is exonerated, and we have a round dozen of its least repentant supporters advertised to come down and proclaim the virtues of the Government while the candidate himself bewails the fate to which it is bringing us with all the persistence of Casandra. It does not matter, by the new rule, what they say, provided they say everything between them.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Koss. (1984), p.362.

<sup>79</sup> Taylor. (1998), p.244. His Majesty's Exchequer. (1920). *Public Income and Expenditure. Year ended 31 March 1920*. London: HMSO.

<sup>80</sup> Taylor. (1998), pp.243-244.

<sup>81</sup> Richard ourne, R. (1990). *Lords of fleet street: The Harmsworth dynasty*. London: Unwin Hyman, p.64. Stop waste fight in Thanet by-election. (1919, October 21). *Daily Mirror*, p.3. Election fight to stop extravagance. (1919, October 22). *Daily Mirror*, p.3. From our special correspondent. (1919, October 25). Anti-waste fight in Thanet. *Daily Mirror*, p.3. From our special correspondent. (1919, November 14). Eve-of-poll push in Thanet. *Daily Mirror*, p.3. our Own Correspondent. (1919, November 15). Anti-Waste Poll To-Day. *Daily Mail*, p.5.

<sup>82</sup> Thanet inconsistencies: Mr. Harmsworth and his Coalition friends. (1919, Nov 08). *The Manchester Guardian*, p.6.

His majority of 3482 in a safe Unionist seat for the Unionist candidate, with strong newspaper backing, which even requested motor vehicles on his campaign's behalf to get voters to the polls, may not have affected the Government's resolve to continue with social reform.<sup>83</sup> He was regarded as a Unionist and had been backed by a range of Unionist MPs. However, it represented an escalation in Rothermere's campaign to pressure the Coalition into a harsh policy of fiscal retrenchment. The immediacy of the pressure confirms Chris Wrigley's view that the Coalition was opposed from the start in its plans to adopt social reform, as opposed to those like Kenneth O. Morgan who argued that the pressure for expenditure reduction arose late in 1920.<sup>84</sup>

Esmond's campaign in Thanet was assisted by a range of Coalition speakers, as well as Independent MP, Horatio Bottomley.<sup>85</sup> Attending eve of poll rallies, his role was a relatively minor one in a large cast of characters, but it would rapidly develop to represent a significant threat to the Coalition. He unreservedly backed Esmond's criticism of waste, as well as railing against German failure to pay reparations, particularly relevant to the people of Thanet who had been both shelled and bombed during the War, leading to the destruction of their local fish market and the departure of some of the population.<sup>86</sup> Bottomley was elected as the Liberal MP for South Hackney in 1906, appealing to Liberals, Radicals and organised labour.<sup>87</sup> But as his biographer sets out he was eventually identified by the Liberal Party as fundamentally a 'Bottomleyite' and in 1910 was opposed by an Independent Liberal and although Bottomley prevailed he resigned the whip, only to then resign as an MP after becoming bankrupt.<sup>88</sup> He then went on to become nationally known and influential during the Great War. His popular and influential magazine, *John Bull*, had championed the cause of the ordinary

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<sup>83</sup> Plymouth and Thanet. (1919, Nov 29). *The Manchester Guardian*, p.10. From our special correspondent. (1919, November 15). Thanet Polling To-Day. *Times*, p.12. From our special correspondent. (1919, November 7). Thanet women lead against waste. *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

<sup>84</sup> Morgan. (1979), p.96. Wrigley. (1992), p.102-103.

<sup>85</sup> From our special correspondent. (1919, November 15). Mr. Harmsworth's final anti-waste appeal. *The Daily Mirror*, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> From our special correspondent. (1919, November 4). New Men with new ideas needed. *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

<sup>87</sup> Symons. (2014). *Horatio Bottomley*. Looe: House of Stratus, pp.53,57.

<sup>88</sup> Symons. (2014), p.84.

soldier, purporting to reveal their stories and their concerns.<sup>89</sup> He toured the country contributing towards recruiting drives and began to write a weekly column in *The Sunday Pictorial*, returning to Parliament at the 1918 General Election.<sup>90</sup> He however freely enriched himself at the expense of his supporters and later in 1922 he was jailed for defrauding them, but up to that point he enjoyed a position of leadership in Parliament of a group of seven Independent MPs who opposed government waste, consisting of two Unionist and one Liberal defector, and three by-election winners against the Coalition, achieving more success than the Anti-Waste League.<sup>91</sup> It is testament to his importance that Maurice Cowling selected him as one of his fifty or so crucial figures who mattered most to the interpretation of the history of the period.<sup>92</sup> It is not a prominence that he has been given in the rest of the historiography, and his appeal to the working class and to ex-soldiers has been overlooked. Following the beginnings of the Anti-Waste calls in Thanet, the cries resounded across the by-elections in 1920, because of Bottomley and not Rothermere.

Bottomley sponsored independent candidates who supported the Anti-Waste cause, winning in two successive by-elections in the Wrekin, on 7 February and 20 November 1920 and he backed candidates in Stockport in March 1920. This took the Anti-Waste message out of the confines of the South of England. In the Wrekin he shattered the hold of Coalition Liberals in the constituency and defeated a Labour challenge.<sup>93</sup> Bottomley had a style that was his own, the Coalition Chief Whip, Freddie Guest (1875-1937) reported to Lloyd George on Bottomley's performance to admittedly large audiences, 'He is said to have failed largely through the vulgarity of his tone.'<sup>94</sup> But Bottomley did not fail and by the November by-election he entered the constituency with the candidate Major General Sir Charles

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<sup>89</sup> Symons. (2014), pp.142-143.

<sup>90</sup> Symons. (2014), pp.143, 150-151.

<sup>91</sup> Cowling. (1971), p.57.

<sup>92</sup> Cowling. (1971), p.45. Philip Williamson. (2010). Maurice Cowling and Modern British Political History. In R. Crowcroft, S. J. D. Green, & R. Whiting. *Philosophy, politics and religion of British democracy: Maurice Cowling and conservatism*. London: I. B. Tauris, p.132.

<sup>93</sup> Another Blow to The Coalition. (1920, February 21). *Times*, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Freddie Guest. (1920, January 27). *Secret Bye-Elections Report*. Lloyd George Papers, (F167/2). Parliamentary Archive.

Townshend (1861-1924), who in full dress uniform, paraded through the streets in a carriage, and was received by an honour guard of ex-servicemen.<sup>95</sup> Such behaviour was crucial to the recognition of Bottomley and Townshend's pro-servicemen approach. The 'circus' orchestrated by Bottomley was condemned by Labour MP, Jimmy Thomas (1874-1949), but they managed to distract from the florid speeches and lack of political convictions of the General who went on to win the by-election.<sup>96</sup> More accomplished was the February candidate Charles Palmer (1869-1920) whose premature death precipitated the second by-election. He was a political journalist and deputy editor of *John Bull*, but he proved an able performer and had a journalist's knack of highlighting a grievance and of puncturing hypocrisy, often being reported in supportive newspapers.<sup>97</sup> They both campaigned as critical friends of the Coalition, but firmly opposing its wastefulness. The seat had a strong Liberal tradition and Sir Charles Henry MP had been returned unopposed as a Coalition Liberal in 1918.<sup>98</sup> His hoped successor, John Bayley, was a friend of Lloyd George, Master of the local Wellington College and had been Liberal agent.<sup>99</sup> Believed to be a popular local man and good candidate, Palmer came through with a majority of 538 over Bayley as the Coalition Liberal, and the Labour candidate.<sup>100</sup> Although somewhat eclipsed at the time by the return of Asquith to Parliament in Paisley, it was a major defeat in a constituency with sizeable urban and industrial elements that could have been expected to back the Coalition or Labour, demonstrating that men who were essentially fiscally conservative and who opposed social reforms, could secure votes from across the spectrum to defeat Liberals and Labour in a three-way contest.<sup>101</sup> It enabled those supporting Anti-Waste to say that they were best placed to fend off the

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<sup>95</sup> From our special correspondent. (1920, November 9), Townshend's reception in the Wrekin. Birmingham Daily Gazette, p.1. The Lesson of the Wrekin Election. (1920, February 21). *Times*, 15.

<sup>96</sup> From our Correspondent.. (1920, November 18). Wrekin By-Election. *Times*, p.14. Nash, N. S. (2010). Chitral Charlie: The rise & fall of Major General Charles Townshend. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, pp.298-299. Moreman, T.R. (2008, May 24). Townshend, Sir Charles Vere Ferrers (1861–1924), army officer. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. From our special correspondent. (1920, November 20). Wrekin Polling To-Day. *Times*, p.12.

<sup>97</sup> Waste. (1920, May 6). *Daily Mail*, p.8. Brighter Uniforms. (1920, May 20). *Daily Mail*, p.3. Mr. Churchill. (1920, June 9). *Daily Mail*, p.7.

<sup>98</sup> Sir C. S. Henry Dead. (1919, December 29). *Daily Mail*, p.6.

<sup>99</sup> Rodney Edrich. (2005). Bayley's Children: A History of Wrekin College 1880-2005. Shrewsbury: Ellingham Press, pp.28-29. From our Correspondent.. (1920, February 7). Wrekin Polling To-Day. *Times*, p.14.

<sup>100</sup> Edrich. (2005), p.28.

<sup>101</sup> Another Blow to The Coalition. (1920, February 21). *Times*, p.14.

Labour threat in industrial areas where organised labour was stronger. Even the defeated Independent Bottomleyite candidates in Stockport secured 11,000 votes.<sup>102</sup> The combination of an assault on examples of waste, a populist cry against Germany and in favour of fair treatment for ex-servicemen, presented by a popular figure demonstrated the appetite for a populist conservative programme. There were elements of Bottomley's message that were undoubtedly idiosyncratic, for example allowing wives of men in prison to remarry, but the risk of his Independent Parliamentary Group eclipsing Rothermere's efforts prompted the latter's intervention to restate the Anti-Waste cause.<sup>103</sup>

To this end, the Anti-Waste League was established on 23 January 1921 by Lord Rothermere, installing himself as President and with his son Esmond Harmsworth as Chair.<sup>104</sup> Rothermere's appointments were essentially his creatures, dependent on him as his son or as a range of politically savvy operatives who were employed by him or had worked well with him during his wartime government appointment. Rothermere set out his reasoning for the League, as well as repeated advertisements for members, in *The Sunday Pictorial*.

I and others have tried propaganda through the Press. I have published many articles during the last two years, all devoted to various aspects of Waste and Squandermania. My newspapers have given these articles the widest possible circulation, but, when I look at the figures of current expenditure and taxation, when I think of the Budget which is even now being prepared, I feel that my efforts have not sufficed to overthrow the citadel of the master-spenders.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> F. W. S. Craig. (1977). *British parliamentary election results, 1918-1949* (Revis ed.). Macmillan, pp.248-249.

<sup>103</sup> Symons. (2014), p.61.

<sup>104</sup> Your duty to join Anti-Waste League. (1921, Jan 23). *The Sunday Pictorial*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1921, January 30).What the Anti-Waste League Means. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

The establishment of a formal League structure enabled Rothermere to mark those who truly believed in the League's watchwords of, "Economy Without Exception!", a possible deliberate adoption of the usual Liberal call for Economy with Efficiency.<sup>106</sup> In his usual direct style Rothermere criticised sham Anti-Waste candidates writing, 'No candidate will be approved by the League who does not undertake to vote for economy regardless of the Party Whips.'<sup>107</sup> The League he continued, 'stands aloof from party entanglements.' His initial formulation allowed for independent minded members of other parties to maintain both allegiances, a stance he hardened subsequently, saying that candidates on a party ticket, could not be trusted.<sup>108</sup> He was clear that he was not seeking to replace the established parties, part of his critique and that of Bottomley, was that there was something inherently wrong with the lack of free thinking of the established parties. He was aiming to pressure them through competition at by elections, demonstrating the greater General Election threat, should they not adopt a policy of fiscal conservatism.<sup>109</sup> In this way he sidestepped any questions of other policy stances and established the League as essentially a single-issue pressure group, as the Edwardian League's had been.

The establishment of the Anti-Waste League gave Rothermere and his newspapers the means to differentiate between candidates who claimed to support the Anti-Waste cause. At the same time as the victory of Anti-Waste candidate Sir Thomas Polson (1865–1946) in Dover, in January 1921, a Liberal Anti-Waste candidate challenged the Coalition in Hereford but lost.<sup>110</sup> His candidacy was barely covered by the Northcliffe and Rothermere press but the Unionist candidate's majority reduced by over 5,000 votes. Even in Esmond's own battle in Thanet, the Liberal West, had claimed he was Anti-Waste and the differences between the stance of the Coalition and Anti-Waste candidates in Dover

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<sup>106</sup> Your duty to join Anti-Waste League. (1921, Jan 23). *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.3.

<sup>107</sup> Your duty to join Anti-Waste League. (1921, Jan 23), p.3.

<sup>108</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1921, January 30).What the Anti-Waste League Means. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

<sup>109</sup> Harmsworth. (1921, January 30), p.5.

<sup>110</sup> Hereford Poll Result. (1921, January 13). *Times*, p.10. A LIBERAL DIFFERENCE IN HEREFORD. (1921, January 1). *The Manchester Guardian*.

were more rhetorical than real.<sup>111</sup> The same would happen at the St Georges by election in July 1921 where the Anti-Waste League won its only victory under its own banner, Charles Erskine (1863-1944) defeating the Chair of the London Unionist Party Sir Herbert Jessel (1866-1950) in a safe Unionist seat. A narrowly defeated Jessel privately blamed poor party organisation, but also the growing unpopularity of the Coalition.<sup>112</sup> In general Jessel remained sanguine about the successes of Anti-Waste candidates, as he saw them as victories for Conservatism, or at least Independent Conservative ones.<sup>113</sup> Yet his relaxed stance was not shared by the party more generally who began to see the threat posed by the line of attack. Conservative Party Central Office election material suggests that in 1920 the main opponent was seen as Labour, with attacks on their policies and the risk of a drift to bolshevism.<sup>114</sup> In 1921 there is more of a split between anti-Labour attacks and also defending the government against charges of extravagance.<sup>115</sup> Leaflets were introduced specifically attacking the three MPs who had joined the Anti-Waste League, Esmond Harmsworth, Sir Thomas Polson and Charles Erskine, suggesting they rarely contributed in Parliament.<sup>116</sup> Esmond missed 410 votes and was present for only 50 in 1920, 'What a waste to send these to Parliament', was the message. However, by the 1922 General Election, with the Coalition over and the Unionist Party competing independently, the Labour and Asquithian Liberals returned as the principal opponents.<sup>117</sup> Waste was

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<sup>111</sup> From our special correspondent. (1919, November 3). Battle of Thanet starts to-day. Daily Mirror, p.3. From our special correspondent. (1919, October 27). No woman candidate. Daily Mirror, p.2.

<sup>112</sup> Sir Herbert Jessel. (1921, July 7). *Report from the London Area Unionist Party to Sir George Younger*. London Area Reports 1921-1926 (ARE1/29/2), Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>113</sup> Sir Herbert Jessel. (1922, January 1). *Report from the London Area Unionist Party to Sir George Younger*. London Area Reports 1921-1926 (ARE1/29/2), Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>114</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party. (1920). *Bolshevism is not democracy*. [Leaflet] (1920/4 PUB 37/2 1920). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1920). *The Bolshevist war against Christianity*. [Leaflet] (1920/6 PUB 37/2 1920). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1920). *What the "Labour" Party has done*. [Leaflet] (1920/7 PUB 37/2 1920). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1920). *Women! Don't touch Bolshevism..* [Leaflet] (1920/35 PUB 37/2 1920). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>115</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party. (1921). *What is waste? The woman's view*. [Leaflet] (1921/10 PUB 37/3 1921). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>116</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party. (1921). *What a waste? Anti-Waste League M.P.'s Division Record*. [Leaflet] (1921/34 PUB 37/3 1921). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>117</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party. (1922). *Wee Frees almost Socialists*. [Leaflet] (1922/10 PUB 38/1 1921). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1922). *Compare the records, Liberal Government – Coalition Government*. [Leaflet] (1922/16 PUB 38/1 1921). Conservative Party

barely mentioned, save to say that the Unionists had pressed Lloyd George to do more.<sup>118</sup> The 1922 election saw some Anti-Waste League candidates appear, but their MPs drifted quietly back into the Unionist party proper, whether immediately like Sir Murray Sueter (1872-1960, or like Erskine transitioning through being an Independent Conservative first before returning to Conservative colours by the 1923 General Election.<sup>119</sup> Anti-Waste League backing continued to be announced although it had become almost exclusively a concern of the capital and South. Liberal, F.J. Lavarack lost in Lambeth in 1922 with backing whilst Conservative F.C. Harrison won in Kennington.<sup>120</sup> A curious internecine conflict fought its way out in Lewisham West with an official League candidate facing Sir Philip Dawson who also claimed Anti-Waste League support.<sup>121</sup> Others in 1922 claimed the backing of the Anti-Waste League but were not on the sanctioned party lists.<sup>122</sup> By the 1923 election League support was not recorded for any candidate.

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Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1922). *This shows what socialism means in Russia*. [Leaflet] (1922/101 PUB 38/1 1921). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>118</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party. (1922). *Why you should vote Unionist*. [Leaflet] (1922/54 PUB 38/1 1921). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>119</sup> F. W. S. Craig. (1977). *British Parliamentary election results, 1918-1949* (Revis ed.). Macmillan. pp.61. 375

<sup>120</sup> Craig. (1977), pp.33,34.

<sup>121</sup> Craig. (1977), p.38.

<sup>122</sup> Craig. (1977), pp.103-104, 386.



## 'Anti Waste' as Populism and Conservatism

The post- Great War period experienced a growth in democracy and in the reach and scale of mass media communications. These enabled strong challenges to party orthodoxy to be made by those outside the mainstream of the principal political parties. Sponsored by newspaper proprietors, whose papers were necessarily established on predicting and reflecting public opinion which equalled sales, these challenges to the mainstream were inevitably both more extreme in viewpoint and developed a distinct populist voice. Populism as a political creed has been first identified in nineteenth century developments in the United States and Europe.<sup>123</sup> It describes the responsiveness and links of political leadership to their supporters and on some level is part of any democratic political party. However, populism builds aggressively on the concept of the people being sovereign, into a movement that rails against the traditional governing classes. Anti-Waste populism attracted working class support, as well as reflecting middle class disenchantment and was an important check on the broad coalition of Lloyd George, and the more consensual approach of Baldwin. Whilst the Anti-Waste League and its ally Horatio Bottomley's ideology might in many ways be situated on the right of politics, it could be clearly distinguished from the mainstream of Unionist opinion, in some ways more libertarian and even radical, providing a reflection of the class politics of the Left in its anti-elitism and evidencing the lingering appeal of the National Efficiency movement of the pre-War period. These movements exhibit the classic attributes of a populist movement and may be accounted an early British example of its development.

The enfranchisement of the working class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain led to the scaling of political attempts to win that vote. Whilst the Labour Party is judged to have been well placed as the party of the working class to make such an appeal rhetorically, the political Right

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<sup>123</sup> Cristobal R. Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, & Paul Ostiguy. (2019). Populism: An overview of the concept and the state of the art. In C . R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Populism* (pp. 1-26). Oxford University Press, p.2.

had to temper its traditional electoral focus on property owners, then to the middle class to build a more broadly based appeal. Jon Lawrence's analysis of late Victorian and Edwardian popular Conservative appeal in industrial areas sets out their methods and political stance, which was distinct from their appeal to middle class and agricultural constituencies.<sup>124</sup> It was based on gender, and social identities with an anti-party politics rhetoric that would also be core to post-Great War developments. They made a gendered appeal to male voters based around associating themselves with sport, the relaxation of licencing laws, and with that an attack on their Liberal non-conformist opponents and their attempts to morally improve the masses.<sup>125</sup> It amounted to a libertarian argument, characterised as championing the rights of freeborn Englishmen.<sup>126</sup> The attack on the non-conformist background of their Liberal opponents, could also be built into an argument against the political class who the Unionists neatly side-stepped from being included within locally. This creation of an interfering, morally superior elite, could be contrasted to a more down to earth hard working, plain individual. It imperfectly reflects a class-based appeal, but one that the Unionist were able to make with some credibility. This positioning was supported by Unionist journals which could be tailored to local circumstances such as *England*, *The Conservative*, *The Tory* and *Primrose League Gazette*.<sup>127</sup> The approach is more encompassing than the methods the Unionists adopted which are described by Pugh.<sup>128</sup> It stretches beyond the skilled and respectable working class, who would really only be an embellishment of their middle-class appeal. The victories in major city constituencies in the late nineteenth century suggest that Lawrence is right and the Conservatives were able to mount successful campaigns based on positioning themselves alongside the common man, opposing the Liberal elite.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Jon Lawrence. (1993). Class and gender in the making of urban Toryism, 1880–1914. *The English Historical Review*, CVIII(428), 629-652, p.634.

<sup>125</sup> Lawrence. (1993), p.635.

<sup>126</sup> Lawrence. (1993), p.636.

<sup>127</sup> Lawrence. (1993), p.639.

<sup>128</sup> Lawrence. (1993), p.641.

<sup>129</sup> Lawrence. (1993), p.629.

The study of populism in Political Science has been fuelled by contemporary resonances in political movements, but it has considered the political precedents in Boulangism in France and the American US Peoples Party.<sup>130</sup> The characteristics identifiable through the application of the definition of populism is useful and it suggests thematic resonances between these developments and can be used to identify and highlight the importance of populism in the Inter-War period. There are three broad schools of thought that are used to define populism. These approaches are ideational, political strategic and the socio-cultural.<sup>131</sup> Kas Mudde aims to draw out common policy stances based on a review of modern political parties, setting aside the contested starting point for such analysis that you must first define the scope of your examination before you examine the policy stance. She identifies at their core demands to restrict immigration on the Right and for financial redistribution on the Left.<sup>132</sup> In addition populist parties of either political pole, are anti-establishment.<sup>133</sup> Pierre Ostiguy uses a socio-cultural approach to analyse populism by considering the relationships that exist between the leaders, their supporters and crucially the 'nefarious other'.<sup>134</sup> Populists can characterise people into High and Low groupings, these are not class based but in some ways coincide. The High grouping could include the well-mannered, or serious; with the Low, the casual, more demonstrative or joyful.<sup>135</sup> There is a gradation of people between these two extremes which also includes the societal mix desired, i.e. cosmopolitan or nativist and in terms of governing style relying on the procedural as against the personal.<sup>136</sup> It is that relationship between the in-group of supporters and those extra to their popular vibrancy that defines a movement as populist. This definition is more useful to this discussion as ideational analysis depends on the political situation prevailing, with Mudde basing her approach on more contemporary policy. Although it is possible to look at some similarities, for

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<sup>130</sup> Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo, & Ostiguy. (2019), pp.3-4.

<sup>131</sup> Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo, & Ostiguy. (2019), p.14.

<sup>132</sup> Kirk A. Hawkins, & Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. (2017). What the (ideational) study of populism can teach us, and what it can't. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 526-542, p.530.

<sup>133</sup> Hawkins, & Rovira Kaltwasser. (2017), p.531.

<sup>134</sup> Pierre Ostiguy. (2019). Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach. In C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Populism* (pp. 73-100). Oxford University Press, p.74.

<sup>135</sup> Ostiguy. (2019), p.78.

<sup>136</sup> Ostiguy. (2019), p.80.

example, Bottomley called for restrictions on employing Belgians who had fled the Great War and were taking jobs from British people, which can be compared to a policy to restrict immigration.<sup>137</sup> Horatio Bottomley personally embodies the Ostiguy approach. He emphasised his lack of sophistication dressing down into a simple grey suit with black boots when addressing a working class audience, calling for an end to controls on the sale of alcohol during the War, his womanising, extravagance and indulgence in terms of food and drink were well known and confirmed his affinity with the visceral, the immediate, the gratifying.<sup>138</sup> His biographer identifies this as the chief source of his charisma to his many devoted supporters, many of whom continued in their love for him even after he had stolen from them.<sup>139</sup> It can be more difficult to discern the socio-cultural differences between some of those aligned with Bottomley, such as the reserved Colonel Sir Thomas Polson, formerly Director of RAF clothing and Managing Director of a car company with his dry criticism against the establishment of which he was palpably a part.<sup>140</sup> Polson's argument is more an intellectual one of the conventional right and would therefore be part of an ideational appraisal. However other parliamentary candidates were firmly anti-establishment figures, such as naval innovator Rear Admiral Sir Murray Sueter who ran for the Independent Parliamentary Group in Hertford in June 1921.<sup>141</sup> The outspoken anti-bureaucrat Admiral was an early advocate of the submarine and then naval aviation.<sup>142</sup> Or Major General Charles Townshend he had descended from being a poster boy of the Victorian Empire as 'Chitral Charlie', who held out against rebels in India for 46 days, but surrendered his command to the Turks at the siege of Kut in Mesopotamia during the Great War.<sup>143</sup> The General was

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<sup>137</sup> Our 300,000 aliens. (1919, October 23). *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

<sup>138</sup> Hyman. (1972), p.72, 172. Symons. (2014), p.38.

<sup>139</sup> Symons. (2014), pp.38, 218.

<sup>140</sup> Anti-Waste Candidate. (1920, December 4). *Daily Mail*, p.7. The Anti-Wasters Meeting. (1920, December 24). *Dover Express*, p.3.

<sup>141</sup> P. Kemp. (2004, September 23). Sueter, Sir Murray Frazer (1872–1960), naval officer. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Anti-Waste Rivals. (1921, May 30). *Daily Mail*, 8.

<sup>142</sup> Kemp. (2004).

<sup>143</sup> T. Moreman. (2008, May 24). Townshend, Sir Charles Vere Ferrers (1861–1924), army officer. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

then infuriated by his treatment by the high command of the Army and in particular the Minister of War, Winston Churchill (1874-1965).<sup>144</sup>

Kurt Weyland set out the third approach which defines populism as the means to win power and exercise it, rather than by what one does with that power.<sup>145</sup> It relies on continual appeals to mass support, and a personalised style of leadership.<sup>146</sup> There is not necessarily an appeal to any ideology, rather there is a celebration of the mass as against the elite. It describes Populism therefore by the means of achieving and maintaining power, a political style rather than an ideology. With the early development of radio and later television in the Interwar period it is a classification of populism that perhaps has not yet come of age. It is true that Bottomley thrived in front of an audience, throughout the by-election campaigns and before, in addressing his supporters when he began a new political venture or most effectively during his Great War recruitment rallies. He was able to connect to a crowd, but every political leader had to make their case in a similar way, with varying degrees of success, so it is therefore more difficult to distinguish populism from conventional political behaviour. Anti-establishment calls were also a feature of his message, despite his constant efforts to ingratiate himself into the establishment where he could, even claiming he was offered a Cabinet position by Lloyd George.<sup>147</sup>

Bottomley would also join calls for more technocratic government to displace the amateur and self-serving political class, in doing so he was adopting the credo of National Efficiency, which rose to prominence in the Edwardian period. Following the costly victory of the Boer War, and the growth of industrial competitors the British ruling classes experienced a period of introspection, whereby the treatment of the problems of the nation was identified by a series of measures that were described

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<sup>144</sup> Moreman. (2008, May 24).

<sup>145</sup> Kurt Weyland. (2019). Populism: A Political Strategic Approach. In C . R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Populism* (pp. 48-72). Oxford University Press, p.56.

<sup>146</sup> Weyland. (2019), pp.57,60.

<sup>147</sup> Symons. (2014), p.172.

as National Efficiency. It became a popular buzzword in newspapers and amongst the elite. One of the strands of National Efficiency was the need to professionalise British governmental institutions, the training of civil servants in technical subjects rather than Classics, the establishment of a military chief of staff's committee to run the armed forces and the adoption of scientific business methods to run business and businessmen to run government. Throughout 1909 Horatio Bottomley used his column in *John Bull* to call for a Business Government, in July he opined:

How the idea of a "Business Government" is catching on! The Man-with-the -Vote is heartily sick of the Party Politician – the Lawyer, the Bookworm, the Theorist. He wants men of affairs – soldiers for the Army, sailors for the Navy, financiers for the Exchequer, commercial men for the Board of Trade.<sup>148</sup>

In August he cemented the importance of his call, in typical Bottomley fashion, linking the selection of ideal candidates for government in his not yet realised Business Government, with a £1000 prize draw, which there was an inevitable wrinkle in paying out.<sup>149</sup> The readers of *John Bull* duly selected the millionaire grocer Sir Thomas Lipton as Minister of Commerce and Admiral Beresford who was in the news for clashing publicly with Asquith, as Minister of Naval Affairs. Bottomley's call for a Business Government of expert leadership rather than amateur politicians, suggests that the concept was a matter of debate in a wider public sphere than Searle, National Efficiency's principal chronicler has considered.<sup>150</sup> Readers of *John Bull* are usually determined to be working class or lower middle class in origin.<sup>151</sup> Bottomley relied on his understanding of his readers to expand *John Bull* to a highly successful weekly magazine, with over one million readers by 1915, and one may take from his

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<sup>148</sup> The World the Flesh and the Devil (1909, July 17), *John Bull*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Formation by our readers of a "Business Government." (1909, August 7), *John Bull*, 8. A business government – the next cabinet. (1909, October 2), *John Bull*, 22.

<sup>150</sup> Searle. (1971), p.1,3.

<sup>151</sup> Howard Cox, & Simon Mowatt. (2019). Horatio Bottomley and the rise of *John Bull* magazine: Mobilizing a mass audience in late Edwardian Britain. *Media History*, 25(1), 100-125, pp100, 102.

continual referencing of the concept and establishment of the John Bull League, whose purpose was 'To oppose Cant and Self-Righteousness, to promote a robust Public Opinion, and to bring about a Business Government for a Business People', that he considered the matter of interest to those readers.<sup>152</sup>

Whilst the concept may have been understood by his readers, as Bottomley dolefully admitted the other people on the proto-Ministerial list where conventional politicians, (apart from his readers unironically selecting him to be in charge of Finance), 'Summing up the result, it would appear that the Man in the Street is still disposed to fall back upon members of the existing Government'<sup>153</sup> This may indicate the depth of his readers perception of who else could conceivably oversee India or the colonies. Bottomley would maintain his adherence to a Business Government into the Post-War period, commonly raising it in speeches, suggesting he believed it still had currency.<sup>154</sup> It was a concept also championed by Rothermere across the period and promoted between them across the Rothermere press.<sup>155</sup>

The links between populism and technocracy have been identified by Christopher Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti.<sup>156</sup> Whilst appearing antithetical based on the language used by populists to criticise bureaucracy and government, in the 1920s British context, principally around waste, they share a common antipathy to political deal making, which subverts the will of the people.<sup>157</sup> This kind of

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<sup>152</sup> Cox & Mowatt, (2019), p.101. The John Bull League. (1909, October 30), John Bull, p.10.

<sup>153</sup> H.B. Grimsditch, H., & Gareth Shaw. Lipton, Sir Thomas Johnstone, baronet (1850–1931), grocer and yachtsman. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. V.W. Baddeley, & Paul Halpern. Beresford, Charles William de la Poer, Baron Beresford (1846–1919), naval officer. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. A business government – the next cabinet. (1909, October 2), John Bull, 22.

<sup>154</sup> From our Special Correspondent. (1919, November 15). Thanet Polling To-Day. *Times*, p.12. Spen Valley Result. (1920, January 5). *Mirror*, 2. Another Blow To The Coalition. (1920, February 21). *Times*, p.14.

<sup>155</sup> Harold Harmsworth, H., Viscount Rothermere. (1930, February 19). All Hail the United Empire Party. *Daily Mail*, 10. The lesson of Wrekin. (1920, February 22), *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.4.

<sup>156</sup> Christopher Bickerton, Carlo Invernizzi Accetti. (2019). Populism and Technocracy. In C . R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Populism* (pp. 326-341). Oxford University Press, p.327.

<sup>157</sup> Bickerton, Invernizzi Accetti. (2019), pp.328-329.

rhetoric was a keystone of the Anti-Waste and Bottomley critique of the Coalition, which by its very nature and through the personification of its sometime unprincipled negotiator supreme Lloyd George, represented a compromise of party positions so that both Unionists and Liberals were capable of being disappointed. Populism and technocracy's objection to Party too can be seen in the trumpeting of Bottomley's Independent Parliamentary group, Esmond Harmsworth whilst standing as a Unionist in Thanet, was careful to emphasise that he was above all independent in his approach.<sup>158</sup> His stance was that he would apply objectivity, weigh decisions and follow that judgement. Bickerton and Accetti make the case that the rise of populism lifted technocracy on the same tide and so whilst populism was not part of the creeds that made up National Efficiency, it was a bauble that Bottomley and Rothermere picked, Magpie like, from its offerings.<sup>159</sup>

The development of populism as the franchise was extended can hardly be a coincidence. Similarly, it was facilitated by the growth of mass means of communications. The linkages are typically drawn to the marketisation of media in the 1990s, but the growth of Britain's principal popular newspapers was a key part of the fostering of the populist voice in British politics in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>160</sup> Across the 1920s there was a consolidation of newspaper ownership. Up until the post-war period national newspapers were not profitable concerns, particularly as production costs increased in wartime, requiring subsidy by a political party or grandee anxious to fund a viewpoint.<sup>161</sup> This perpetuated a varied and partisan political press, but one closely aligned with the orthodoxy of the main political parties, which began to change as reforms from the USA spread into Britain, of style and attractiveness by Northcliffe and of mass-produced printing and sales techniques by Rothermere.<sup>162</sup> Rothermere ran his newspapers as profit making businesses, a concept never quite accepted by Beaverbrook who sought circulation as a notional link to future solvency, he was primarily and unashamedly concerned

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<sup>158</sup> On Thanet fight. (1919, October 23). Daily Mirror, p.3.

<sup>159</sup> Bickerton, Invernizzi Accetti. (2019), p.336.

<sup>160</sup> Bickerton, Invernizzi Accetti. (2019), p.470.

<sup>161</sup> Koss. (1984), p.354. Bourne. (1990), p.79.

<sup>162</sup> Bingham & Conboy. (2015), pp.1-2, 7. Bourne. (1990), p.19, 23-24,



with the *Express* as a tool of propaganda.<sup>163</sup> The *Daily Mail* was the main vehicle for Northcliffe's formula of entertainment, creating news and appealing to women readers, it was challenged by his brother's *Daily Mirror* which with greater use of photographs and even more of an inclination towards women readers, outsold the *Mail* until after the Great War, when it was inherited by Rothermere.<sup>164</sup> Both papers together with the *Daily Express* were aimed at the lower middle-class, imperialist, Conservatives, expanding their readership into the working class through the 1930s.<sup>165</sup> As the *Daily Mail* began to eclipse the sales of the *Mirror*, which Rothermere ceased to control in 1935, its main competitor came to be the *Daily Express*.<sup>166</sup> The *Express* grew from a circulation of 272,000 in 1913, up to 517,000 in 1920 rising again to 793,000 in 1922.<sup>167</sup> By 1929 the *Express* had a circulation of 1,590,000 and the *Mail* 1,954,000, with it overtaking the *Mail* in 1933.<sup>168</sup> The only other newspaper that Beaverbrook and Rothermere were concerned about as a business competitor was the trade union owned *Daily Herald*.<sup>169</sup> Both Rothermere and Beaverbrook's newspaper interests were much wider than these national newspapers, Beaverbrook owned the *Evening Standard* in London and Rothermere acquired a considerable regional press.<sup>170</sup> At the root of their growth in sales was the maintenance of a low cover price and an expansion in the quantity of advertisements. Revenue from advertisers was linked to circulation and so as they gained readership they increased income, this led to the search for charismatic voices, media personalities to attract wider readership such as Bottomley in the *Sunday Pictorial*. The adoption of campaigns of public interest therefore not only served the needs of the proprietors but became an important element of their business model. The more successfully they interpreted public opinion the greater their sales, and consequent financial independence, and also political independence from the country's political leadership. Beaverbrook's

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<sup>163</sup> Taylor. (1972), p.213. Peter Howard. (1964). *Beaverbrook: A study of Max the unknown*. Hutchinson, p.64.

<sup>164</sup> Bingham & Conboy. (2015), pp.7,10,13.

<sup>165</sup> Bingham & Conboy. (2015), pp.12,69.

<sup>166</sup> Bourne. (1990), p.117.

<sup>167</sup> Camrose. (1947), pp.39-40.

<sup>168</sup> Camrose. (1947), p.40.

<sup>169</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1933, July 14). *Letter to Lord Beaverbrook on Daily Herald's growth*. (BBK/C/285b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>170</sup> Bourne. (1990), pp.97-98.

view of this power was plain, writing in *Politicians and the Press* in 1925 he said, 'Whilst it is clear that the *Daily Express* correctly interprets public opinion, it is true no doubt, that it also does a great deal to form that opinion.'<sup>171</sup> Readers would no doubt have noted his self-awareness and politicians his assertion of power.

By considering the speeches made at the by-elections and subsequently in Parliament it is possible to discern the different stances of the Anti-Waste League, Independent Parliamentary Group and Unionist MPs and determine their different ideologies. The Anti-Waste League and Independent Parliamentary Group shared common policy stances in many areas, both being essentially libertarian in many respects. Both had a Gladstonian conception of economics, at least rhetorically, objecting to a government that cost more than was collected in tax, but then that was also Snowden's Labour policy.<sup>172</sup> Austen Chamberlain was criticised by Rothermere for his failure to stop increases in spending and suggested that Lloyd George was being let down by him as well as the other spenders, Addison, Geddes and Fisher.<sup>173</sup> It was an argument made from within the Coalition by die-hard MPs and also the Asquith's Liberals in Opposition.<sup>174</sup> Attacking wasteful spending is an easy attack to make when not in government, attaching the personal culpability to the Minister concerned, forced to defend his government or departmental responsibility. This could lead to the familiar contortion facing a politician locally when applying national rhetoric, when Esmond's constant criticism of government spending was interceded with an argument about the wartime port of Richborough, which was built in the Thanet constituency, and then not used.<sup>175</sup> At first this was yet another example

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<sup>171</sup> Max Aitken. Baron Beaverbrook. (1925). *Politicians and the press*. Hutchinson, p.53.

<sup>172</sup> Keith Laybourn. (1988). *Philip Snowden: A biography : 1864-1937*. Temple Smith, p.35.

<sup>173</sup> Harmsworth, H., Viscount Rothermere. (1920, June 13 ). Master-spenders and squander-mania. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5. Horatio Bottomley. (1920, Feb 1). Give us a lead. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.4.

<sup>174</sup> HC Mr Chamberlain's Statement. Review Of National Prospects. (29 October 1919) (120) col.758-765, 837-846.

<sup>175</sup> From our special correspondent. (1919, November 4). New Men with new ideas needed. *Daily Mirror*, p.3

of waste, until he had to scramble to address local concerns that the port might be closed to save money and reversed his position.<sup>176</sup>

Stuart Ball in his peerless review of the Conservative Party identifies that it is not ideology but rather a common outlook and temperament that unites the Conservative Party and this allows a considerable breadth of opinion to persist.<sup>177</sup> The formation of the Coalition forced some of these elements to find a voice outside of the Party as its centre of gravity shifted towards Lloyd George's Liberals. He identifies three central themes to Party policy as defined by first Disraeli in 1872 and affirmed by the Party Central Committee in 1937, these were the maintenance of the constitution, improvement of the condition of the people and preservation of the Empire.<sup>178</sup> These formed the mainstream of Party opinion. But the Empire too was subject to the same calculation of affordability by the Anti-Waste League as were other extensions of the state. The particular areas of the Empire that were contentious were the mandates granted after the Great War in the Middle East, Mesopotamia, and Palestine, as well as the continued occupation of Egypt which were proving costly to garrison against rebellious internal elements.<sup>179</sup> The relatively recent acquisitions could also be criticised as the work of Coalition, without undermining the value of the more longstanding parts of the Empire. The Government's approach was based on an analysis of imperial and world politics, with the Great War terminating the prospect of friendly Turkish control over the Middle East, the root to India through Egypt must be protected through British control of Palestine and Mesopotamia.<sup>180</sup> These policies were

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<sup>176</sup> From our special correspondent. (1919, November 11). Nomination day in Thanet contest. *Daily Mirror*, p.3. Plymouth and Thanet. (1919, Nov 29). *The Manchester Guardian*, p.10.

<sup>177</sup> Stuart Ball. (2013). *Portrait of a party: The Conservative party in Britain 1918-1945*. Oxford: OUP, pp.10-11.

<sup>178</sup> Ball. (2013), p.34.

<sup>179</sup> Martin Pugh. (2012). *State and society: A social and political history of Britain since 1870* (4th ed.). Bloomsbury Academic, pp.242-243. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1920, June 27 ). How long can the government last. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

<sup>180</sup> John Darwin. (1981). *Britain, Egypt and the Middle east: Imperial policy in the aftermath of war 1918-1922*. Macmillan, p.144.

pursued whilst there was increasing civil disobedience in India and the ongoing Irish revolt which necessitated significant military forces and concomitant heavy financial burden.<sup>181</sup>

General Townshend the successful Independent Parliamentary Group candidate in the Wrekin had served in Mesopotamia during the Great War, where he and his command surrendered at Kut.<sup>182</sup> He was however held in high regard for his military victories up to that point, and applying his knowledge of the region and of war he advocated a withdrawal to the coastal regions, to allow the people to fight it out amongst themselves.<sup>183</sup> In regards to Palestine there was a strong anti-Semitic element objecting to the cost of protecting the Jewish population, which was in evidence in the campaign against Jewish Conservative candidate Sir Herbert Jessel in St Georges.<sup>184</sup> A withdrawal from costly interventions in other peoples' problems was the solution advocated and reductions in the size of the Army and Navy.<sup>185</sup> Pragmatism would be Lloyd-George's guiding force in such decision making, and the pressing forces of domestic political realities overtook his preferences in imperial and foreign policy.<sup>186</sup> Nor did they support the professed paternalism of leaders like Baldwin who saw a responsibility to the people of the Empire, often in terms of racial superiority, but couched in terms of a moral obligation to less civilised nations.<sup>187</sup> The Geddes Axe would not just threaten social programmes but also the armed forces, and whilst the cuts were not fully implemented they recognised the increased pressure on Britain's military spending and marked the limit of British power over its increasingly restive possessions.<sup>188</sup> The nationalist priorities championed by the Anti-Waste

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<sup>181</sup> Darwin. (1981), p.xiii.

<sup>182</sup> T.R. Moreman. (2008, May 24). Townshend, Sir Charles Vere Ferrers (1861–1924), army officer. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>183</sup> From our Special Correspondent. (1920, November 20). Wrekin Polling To-Day. *Times*, p.12.

<sup>184</sup> Anti-waste fight scares cabinet. (1921, June 3). *Daily Mirror*, p.2. Jewish 'National Home.' (1921, June 1). *Daily Mirror*, p.2.

<sup>185</sup> Harmsworth, H., Viscount Rothermere. (1920, June 27 ). How long can the government last. *The Sunday Pictorial*, p.5.

<sup>186</sup> Darwin. (1981), p.123.

<sup>187</sup> Williamson. (1999),pp.261-265.

<sup>188</sup> Morgan (1979), p.286. Wrigley (1992), p.102, Darwin. (1981), pp.266-267.

League and Independent Parliamentary Group, rather than imperialist ones of the Coalition were therefore adopted.

The Anti-Waste League not only opposed costly overseas intervention, but also aspects of the ceremonial functions of the armed forces, discarding the Conservative adherence to tradition and display. An elevation of the fiscal above the patriotic marked them as distinct to many of the Die-Hard opponents of the Coalition and as having an ideology beyond mere reactionary opposition. During mid-May to late June 1920 there was a minor political crisis that illustrates the distinction. Churchill as Secretary of State for War proposed to provide traditional red dress uniforms for the army, the Financial Secretary to the War Office's unvarnished parliamentary answer was that this would cost £3,000,000 over five years.<sup>189</sup> At first modestly reported until the *Daily Mail* thundered on 4 June against the 'Scarlet Folly'.<sup>190</sup> Despite Churchill's argument that the scarlet uniforms were an important element of the British Army's tradition, boosting recruitment and esprit de Corp, Esmond Harmsworth and Charles Palmer of the Independent Parliamentary Group, spoke out strongly against the expenditure, Esmond connected it to a wider point against maintaining a large armed force.<sup>191</sup>

The fact that the sum is only £3,000,000 and refers only to scarlet uniforms is not a very important point, but I regard this Debate as a symbol and a guide as to whether or not the House and the country wish to keep up a large army and to spend money extravagantly for that purpose.<sup>192</sup>

The government was forced to bow under a fierce barrage of attacks from across the press, not just those of Rothermere and Northcliffe, and reduced the provision of ceremonial uniform to only the

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<sup>189</sup> House Of Commons. (1920, May 20). *Times*, 8. Brighter Uniforms. (1920, May 20). *Daily Mail*, 3.

<sup>190</sup> M. P. s and £3,000,000 Waste Scheme. (1920, June 4). *Daily Mail*, 5.

<sup>191</sup> Mr. Churchill. (1920, June 9). *Daily Mail*, 7

<sup>192</sup> HC Deb Orders of the Day — British Army.: Re-Clothing. (23 Jun 1920),(130) col.2320.

Guards Division at a cost of £130,000.<sup>193</sup> And yet even that was rejected by the Anti-Waste and Independent Parliamentary Group MPs, who found themselves voting against die hard MPs like perennial government thorn-in-the-side, Sir Frederick Banbury.<sup>194</sup> In doing so they rejected the Tory cry of maintaining tradition and even the sacrosanct display uniforms of the King's elite Guards and sided with the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Herald*.<sup>195</sup>

Bottomley took his libertarian approach one stage further than his colleagues in the Anti-Waste League in his stance on relaxing the licencing laws. From his first time in Parliament he had argued to relax the restrictions on drinking and he supported legislation to that effect. In the Wrekin by-election Townshend's campaign forced his Labour opponent Charles Duncan into the awkward position of denying he was a fanatical opponent of the licencing trade, despite being a lifelong abstainer.<sup>196</sup> Townshend who was known, like Bottomley, to enjoy riotous living, also spoke against prohibition and the local veto on Sunday closing, implicitly making the point that the abstemious Duncan would take a different stance.<sup>197</sup> Such an appeal to the simple pleasures available for working class men was a repeat of earlier Tory tactics against non-conformist Liberals, calling them 'faddists', highlighting their link to non-conformity, and attitudes to alcohol.<sup>198</sup>

Perhaps like any opposition political party the Anti-Waste League or Independent Parliamentary Group were not going to allow the incongruity of standing for the simple pleasures of working men, to stop them also appealing for the votes of newly enfranchised women voters. That approach was

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<sup>193</sup> They Search our Pockets. (1920, June 1). *Daily Mail*, p.6. Scarlet Folly. (1920, June 24). *Daily Mail*, p.5. Editorial. (1920, May 18). *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, p.6. Editorial. (1920, June 23). *Hull Daily Mail*, p.4. Troops and Trimmings. (1920, May 20). *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, p.6. The symbol of khaki. (1920, Jun 13). *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, p.12. The Red Ramp. (1920, June 9) *Daily Herald*, p.4.

<sup>194</sup> HC Deb Orders of the Day — British Army.: Re-Clothing. (23 Jun 1920),(130) col.2335.

<sup>195</sup> *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, p.6. The symbol of khaki. (1920, Jun 13). *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, p.12. The Red Ramp. (1920, June 9) *Daily Herald*, p.4.

<sup>196</sup> From our own Correspondent. (1920, November 16). Gen. Townshend and The Coalition. *Times*, p.14.

<sup>197</sup> From our Special Correspondent. (1920, November 19). Sanity Or Bolshevism. *Times*, p 14.

<sup>198</sup> Lawrence. (1993), p.635.

evident in the by-election campaigns in Dover where Polson suggested that women in particular understood his argument to reduce government waste and keep prices down, and the *Daily Mail* reported that consequently he was, 'almost overwhelmed with offers of help from women who realise the importance of economy.'<sup>199</sup> Whether strictly accurate or not it indicated a common view, that the *Daily Mail* regularly returned to, that wasted money was a particular concern for women voters to whom household thrift was well understood and domestic goods price inflation would prove particularly worrisome.<sup>200</sup> This was a tactic also adopted by the Conservative Party in their election leaflets, although as David Jarvis relates they would begin to more confidently extend their appeal from such conventional topics or addressing women as an influence on their husband, to develop arguments to women in their own right as the decade progressed, although as early as 1920 the Party produced a leaflet which reminded women that the Coalition had given women the right to vote, stand for office, be admitted to study for a degree and work in professions otherwise reserved for men.<sup>201</sup> Jarvis points out that the Conservatives also thought that women would be a guard against political extremism, having a practical attitude that would defeat the ideological stance of socialism.<sup>202</sup> This too can be seen in the 1919 by-election in Thanet where Esmond Harmsworth made such an appeal, whilst also being careful to both defend the right of women to go out to work, but appealing to them to keep their husbands in work.<sup>203</sup> With approaching half the potential voters in a constituency being women, a candidate could not afford to ignore or to alienate such a large number of people.

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<sup>199</sup> Anti-Waste Candidate. (1920, December 7). *Daily Mail*, p.7. Anxious to Help Sir Thomas Polson. (1920, December 14). *Daily Mail*, p.8.

<sup>200</sup> Our Own Correspondent. (1920, December 24). Women & Squanderers. *Daily Mail*, p.6. Our Own Correspondent. (1920, December 28). Economy By-Elections. *Daily Mail*, p.6.

<sup>201</sup> David Jarvis. (1994). Mrs Maggs and Betty: The conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s. *20th Century British History*, 5(2), 129-152, pp. 131-2, 140-141. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1920). *Appeal of Coalition to women voters*. [Leaflet] (1920/14 PUB 37/2 1920). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>202</sup> Jarvis. (1994), pp.145-146.

<sup>203</sup> From our own correspondent. (1919, November 6). "Wake-up" call by Hon. E Harmsworth. *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

The Anti-Waste cause was distinctive from the Conservative mainstream. As an opposition voice it could be more absolutist in its expression of ideas and in a by-election it would mould its platform to be most attractive locally. Its starting point of the condemnation of government waste was rooted in the Gladstonian belief that expenditure should not exceed income and that readily identified more expansive government as unnecessary and therefore inherently wasteful. They pursued this argument even when it clashed with the Tory belief in Empire or the necessity for traditional display. Their distrust of government extended to the political class and to an advocacy of technocracy and business methods, rather than an adherence to the traditional pattern of government embraced by a more conservative mindset. It suggests a more radical than reactionary label. They delivered this message building upon Unionist methods to address working-class and women voters, but would go much further in their populist attack against the failures of the established parties, backed by the mass readership newspapers which blossomed over the 1920s. They made use of the charismatic opponents of the political mainstream to boost their own sales and became the influential voice of opposition to the dominance of the Coalition. The application of the analysis of modern political science to this movement reveals it as being distinctly Populist, not merely in style and methods but in persona of Horatio Bottomley an embodiment of bluff and hedonistic mischief, able to champion the cause of those who longed to be able to join him in a rejection of the conventional and hierarchical.

These different formulations of Conservatism were developing in the context of a perceived national decline with a sharp post-war depression, and therefore the palpable failure of the prevalent methods of government. This ground proved fertile for the cultivation of favoured strands of existing thinking. To die hard Conservatives or those of the Anti-Waste League the failures of government was its expansiveness, which allowed the incompetence of its ministers to bloom. The development of social policy which it was argued would modernise Britain, instead was the cause of decline. In this way national poverty was ushered in by an expansion of education or healthcare, rather than proving to be its counter. Historical precedents of governmental action matched a smaller state with a



competitive economy, and the worldwide pre-eminence that it underpinned, was used in a hard edged, self-interested way to benefit Britain, rather than from any professed obligation to civilise less fortunate people and maintain the peace. Therefore, the military involvement in Palestine or Mesopotamia was rejected, as were the moves to recognise the legitimacy of self-government in Egypt. Rothermere's formulation implied a moral laxity creeping into the nation through governments increased societal intervention, which undermined the British character. It was a sort of shadow of the debates of the turn of the century prompted by the poor physical character of the British soldier sent to war in South Africa. The poor physical condition of the working-class men, who toiled in industry, which was faring less well, led to the creation of the National Efficiency prescription. In many ways the apparent opposite of the die-hard argument it assumed that government intervention, if based on technocratic or business methods would benefit the nation. Rothermere could pick out the advantages of business methods championed by National Efficiency and so could find common cause with Bottomley. But Bottomley's rhetoric did embrace the wider benefits of expertise and of government. In appealing to former soldiers, he could recount the failure of government programmes to house them and to hang the Kaiser or accommodate the Belgians, whilst British workers were unemployed. The die hard and populist opposition could find enough common cause in their rhetorical objection to waste to sustain their partnership, but the Coalition proved the chief catalyst for their opposition and as that ended and with Bottomley in prison for fraud, party politics would resume. The Conservatives focused on their traditional opponents in the Labour and the Liberal Parties, as they fought the elections of 1922 to 1924 and then governed until Baldwin's defeat in 1929.

## Chapter 2: In support of the Empire

### The Empire Crusade, United Empire Party and the Press Lords

The 1929 launch of the Empire Crusade by Lord Beaverbrook elevated the economic policy of protectionism, as the cure-all of Britain's economic ills. It was thrust into public discourse and maintained there by prolonged newspaper coverage and support from the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* as well as their stablemates. These newspapers were generally Conservatively orientated, and it was at the Conservative Party that the campaign was aimed by their proprietors. Its methods were in many ways a repeat of the Anti-Waste League of the early 1920s, and for Rothermere's contribution the policy advocated was much the same. Beaverbrook though, took personal leadership of the cause of Empire Free Trade, nakedly involving himself in political campaigning for a cause he profoundly believed in. The steady propagandist coverage of the success of the campaign, continually butted against its reverses until the crisis facing the Second Labour Government forced it from the forefront of political life. It represented a co-ordinated attempt by newspaper magnates to influence party policy and to stand candidates advocating their beliefs. It can be considered a high point of such direct intervention and also marks its limitation, culminating in Baldwin's speech where he declared, 'What the proprietorship of these papers is aiming at is power, and power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages.'<sup>204</sup> The campaigning drive of their policies and the aim to remove Baldwin, were insufficient alone and their direct intervention in electoral politics placed them on a plane mastered by their opponents. Occasional forays into elections were often successful, but the reality of inserting a new political force into the British electoral system could only yield destruction.

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<sup>204</sup> Williamson (1999), p.234.

The end of the Conservative government of 1924-1929 resulted in a rise of criticism towards the party leader Stanley Baldwin. Whilst the view that Conservatives fought a poor campaign and had lost their way politically, has been rejected by Williamson, the campaign was based around Baldwin's personal style and so the defeat could be directly attributable to him.<sup>205</sup> The campaign was focused on Baldwin as he was felt to be an electoral asset, its failure enlivened the attacks of those in the Party like Leo Amery (1873-1955), and Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* and Rothermere's *Daily Mail*, who felt that the government was not sufficiently protectionist.<sup>206</sup> Baldwin endured the initial disappointment of defeat, but the intensity of opposition grew, a mixture of an alternative economic policy prescription, Imperialist calls for 'a firm hand' in restive provinces, fiscal retrenchment and culminated in demands for Baldwin's resignation. Historians have disagreed over the extent to which these were purely about the leadership of the party, but Baldwin was so personally intertwined with these policy stances that whether or not it was the declared intention, success would inevitably lead to his diminishment and departure. Beaverbrook and Rothermere were the leaders of explicit campaigns, which as much as the two sought to march in lockstep, were distinctive, although both did draw on earlier Conservative campaigns. Beaverbrook re-animated the campaign of Joseph Chamberlain for Tariff Reform of which he had always been supportive of, calling it Empire Free Trade.<sup>207</sup> Rothermere re-ran his Anti-Waste Campaign of 1919-1922, branding it as the United Empire Party. Beaverbrook's was a single-minded and politically adept effort, marked by manipulation and political alliances. It was that thing so seemingly rare for the Conservative Party, a cause and not a pragmatic and conservative reaction. Shorn of the social reform of Joseph Chamberlain it amounted to an alternative economic approach, an answer to economic depression and crucially and implicitly, a new imperial adhesive to bind the Empire together. Rothermere too was motivated by Imperial disintegration, disgusted by a lack of resolution in the face of demands for local autonomy in Egypt and India. Whilst neither man rated

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<sup>205</sup> Philip Williamson. (1982). 'Safety first': Baldwin, the conservative party, and the 1929 general election. *The Historical Journal*, 25(2), 385-409, pp.385-386, 408-409.

<sup>206</sup> Williamson. (1982), p.409. Keith Middlemas, & John Barnes. (1969). *Baldwin: A biography*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pp.222, 532-533.

<sup>207</sup> Howard (1964), pp.33-34, 89,97. Taylor (1972), pp.55, 262.

Baldwin as leader, Beaverbrook was prepared to try to work with him, Rothermere could not contain his hostility and abhorred the direction of politics that Baldwin had ushered in. This meant that Beaverbrook adapted his campaign in response to Baldwin's statements and was mindful of the input of those in the Conservative Party who supported his cause. Rothermere's approach was less nuanced, more direct and depended less on allies within the Party. Their critiques were not new, nor were their latent declinist fears, what was different was the fulsome and daily backing of modern newspapers which were read by so many traditionally Conservative voters.

Stuart Ball has produced the most authoritative assessment of the crisis facing the Conservative Party in 1929-31. He contends that the period was akin to the pre-Great War period where the Conservatives risked a split, but instead finally resolved the struggle over tariff reform and decided to put domestic imperatives ahead of imperial ones.<sup>208</sup> The historiography is built around a series of set piece by-election battles, almost all in the South of England, where alternative Conservative candidates stood against the official Conservatives. This places the combat as a purely Tory one, which is to simplify it somewhat, as Beaverbrook made genuine efforts to reach out to prominent Liberals and their supporters, as the Liberals themselves dealt with their own divisions and the movement of John Simon (1873-1954) closer to the Conservatives. However, in exploring the Conservative Party infighting Ball's detailed examination of local party records has discerned two crises for Baldwin, the first and most important culminating in September and October 1930.<sup>209</sup> The second is the continuation of the campaign resulting in the St George's by-election of March 1931, but he rejects the traditional primacy of the St George's by-election as the greatest threat to Baldwin's leadership. His dichotomy reflects the rise and fall of Beaverbrook's and then Rothermere's campaign; or a policy-based argument and then a direct assault on Baldwin's leadership. The focus of his analysis of internal party records is inevitably one of Conservative civil war, but this is to omit the attractiveness of the

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<sup>208</sup> Stuart Ball. (1988). *Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The crisis of 1929-1931*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. ix, xii.

<sup>209</sup> Ball. (1988), pp, xvi-xvii.

propositions of Beaverbrook and Rothermere to the public who bought their newspapers and voted in by-elections. The crisis in Baldwin's leadership is usually adduced by the historiography as an example of Baldwin's bouts of inactivity, even indolence. Stemming from his authorised biographer G.M. Young and Robert Blake this view endures even through the more sympathetic accounts of John Barnes and Keith Middlemass, and Roy Jenkins.<sup>210</sup> Beyond the policy disagreements, A.J.P. Taylor considers that there was a basic human dislike between Baldwin and Beaverbrook, with a magnitude greater antipathy between Rothermere and Baldwin.<sup>211</sup> The lack of personal papers has limited the potential for a good biography of Rothermere and most of the writing is based on his correspondence with Beaverbrook. The affectionate biography of Beaverbrook by A.J.P. Taylor affirms his genuine, longstanding belief in Empire Free Trade.<sup>212</sup> Richard Bourne and S.J. Taylor are more focused on the newspaper developments as well as attempting some doubtful psychological assessments and deciding that Rothermere essentially despised Baldwin and felt himself to be a business guardian of Beaverbrook.<sup>213</sup> Taylor is right that Beaverbrook believed in Empire Free Trade and it was not an anti-Baldwin crusade, Rothermere's position was also much more nuanced than that, and although the two men co-operated, an examination of their correspondence as well as their newspaper manoeuvrings suggests that each had their own agenda and it was largely convenience, rather than co-operation, that can define their relationship.

Beaverbrook's support for tariff reform was long standing, dating back to the campaign of Joseph Chamberlain in the 1900s when he was a young man in Canada. A.J.P. Taylor identifies concerns over the growth of the US-Canadian relationship as a motivating factor, with Beaverbrook favouring links

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<sup>210</sup> Middlemas, & Barnes. (1969), p.xiii. Robert Blake. (1998). *The Conservative party from Peel to Major*. London: Arrow Books, p.215. Roy Jenkins. (1987). *Baldwin*. London: Collins, pp.63-64. G.M. Young. (1952). *Stanley Baldwin*. London: Hart-Davis, p.57.

<sup>211</sup> Taylor. (1972), p.213.

<sup>212</sup> Taylor. (1972), pp.x, xvi.

<sup>213</sup> S J. Taylor. (1998). *The great outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail*. Phoenix: Giant. pp.239, 270-271.

with the Mother country.<sup>214</sup> Baldwin too was a follower of the Chamberlain prescription of a protectionist tariff around the Empire and growing imperial economic unity. Following his inheritance of a government on Bonar Law's death he sought to unite the party behind protectionism and secure an electoral mandate for those views in December 1923.<sup>215</sup> Despite this early indication of his beliefs, Beaverbrook was unimpressed, writing to Rothermere that he thought that Baldwin's move was ill conceived and rushed, he rejected imperial preference and so it would fail.<sup>216</sup> Empire Free Trade was built on an internal free market in the Empire, and was not just protectionism. This speaks to the underlying argument for Beaverbrook, who wanted to use trade to pull the Empire together. This was an important goal in itself and evidences his concern for the Empire's disintegration. Equally he did not wish to be associated with a losing campaign that would discredit his idea by association and so both Rothermere and Beaverbrook resolved to make no commitment to the 1923 policy in their newspapers.<sup>217</sup> The failure at the subsequent election had a profound impact on the Party's view of protectionism. The views of the London District Party candidates were canvassed by Sir Herbert Jessel and summarised for Central Office. As well as a dislike of a sudden election the other concern amongst voters was, 'A fear of dear food and a rise in the cost of living, especially among working women, pensioners and people with fixed income.'<sup>218</sup> These points were made by MPs and candidates across London who professed that they supported the policy, but that the voters did not.<sup>219</sup> They also tellingly suggested their cause would be helped if they had a major newspaper behind them.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Taylor. (1972), pp.269, 274.

<sup>215</sup> Middlemas, & Barnes. (1969), pp.212-213.

<sup>216</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1923, November 1). *Personal telegram to Lord Rothermere on 1923 election*. (BBK/C/283a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1923, November 3). *Personal telegram to Lord Rothermere on 1923 election*. (BBK/C/283a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>217</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1923, October c.30). *Personal telegram to Lord Beaverbrook on 1923 election*. (BBK/C/283a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1923, November 1). Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1923, November 5). *Personal telegram to Lord Rothermere on 1923 election*. (BBK/C/283a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>218</sup> Sir Herbert Jessel. (1923, December). *General Election December 6th, 1923*. (ARE 1/29/1). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository, p.1.

<sup>219</sup> Jessel. (1923, December), Appendix 1.

<sup>220</sup> Jessel. (1923, December), p.2.

When next in power from 1924 to 1929 Baldwin did not advance a comprehensive protectionist policy, resisting the pressure from his Colonial Secretary, Leo Amery to revive a version of tariff reform.<sup>221</sup> Tokenistic, small scale attempts were made by the Colonial Office to encourage capital investment in the Empire and emigration throughout the twenties, including by the Labour government.<sup>222</sup> Modest Conservative government and wartime schemes provided a discount on existing tariffs to a small range of imperial products.<sup>223</sup> When the Second Labour Government was to sweep even these away, with ineffective opposition from Baldwin, Beaverbrook on 10 December 1929 launched the Empire Crusade.<sup>224</sup> As well as lavish coverage in the *Daily Express* he commissioned advertisements across the British Press, these set out the case for a non-party aligned movement to advocate and pass legislation for Empire Free Trade. The cardinal principles of this were that the Empire would enact an internal customs union and erect a tariff barrier against foreign imports of all kinds. This would create a market for British industry in that protected space, give the nations of the Empire preference in exporting raw materials and agricultural produce to Britain and would at the same time protect British farmers from foreign competition, hinting at 'special assistance' for them.<sup>225</sup> He advocated an economic reorganisation, that would address the ailing British economy and rejuvenate the Empire.

We believe that the potential resources of the Empire in men and money, in food and raw materials of every kind if organised and developed with faith, energy and resolution, would enable us with a few years effort to get rid of unemployment and materially raise the standard of living at home and greatly to increase the wealth of every part of the Empire.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Ian M. Drummond. (2006). *British economic policy and empire, 1919-1939*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.40-42

<sup>222</sup> Drummond. (2006), pp.44-50.

<sup>223</sup> Drummond. (2006), p.52.

<sup>224</sup> Join the Empire Crusade Today! (1929, December 1). *Daily Express*, pp.1, 10

<sup>225</sup> New Organisation for Empire Prosperity. (1929, December 10). *Daily Express*, p.10.

<sup>226</sup> Join the Empire Crusade Today! (1929, December 1). p.10.

It unashamedly took up the banner of taxing foreign food and brandished it in the face of the received wisdom that this was unpopular. Beaverbrook had honed his political outlook for some time, and he would remain steadfast in advocating these principles, as important in their description of policy as in their exuberant expression. The tone of his popular journalism in print and in person, would stand out markedly against the relaxed moderation of Baldwin, and the Labour Government stymied by its lack of a majority.

Rothermere's newspapers were supportive of the Empire Crusade and did not criticise its policy platform. Beaverbrook made strenuous unsuccessful efforts to draw Rothermere into the Empire Crusade, offering to make him Chairman, playing on his hostility to Conservative Central Office by relating reports of its strong opposition to its foundation.<sup>227</sup> Despite Rothermere's reflexive opposition to the leadership of the Conservatives, he was not tempted to join, and he told Beaverbrook that he would not commit himself or his papers, but Beaverbrook would benefit from their coverage of his campaign.<sup>228</sup> Rothermere and Beaverbrook's relationship is a complex one to assess. From their letters Beaverbrook could appear the junior, a supplicant to Rothermere. This is especially the case in business matters after Rothermere had taken a major stake in Express Newspapers. Beaverbrook is solicitous of Rothermere's guidance in the business of running a newspaper firm, with Rothermere somewhat dismissive and even incredulous at some of Beaverbrook's business proposals.<sup>229</sup> Rothermere's reputation as a newspaper businessman par excellence and the undoubted profitability of his papers, as against the growing circulation but financial struggles of the *Daily Express* is reflected, but Beaverbrook was not short of self-confidence, even ego and so it is difficult to read the correspondence as anything other than his attempts to

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<sup>227</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, December 2). *Personal telegram to Lord Rothermere establishment of the Empire Crusade*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>228</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1929, December 3). *Personal telegram to Lord Beaverbrook on the establishment of the Empire Crusade*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>229</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1931, September 14). *Letter to Lord Beaverbrook on the management of the Daily Express*. (BBK/C/285a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.



manipulate Rothermere, particularly when set against his brutal correspondence to his employees, and grandness to Members of Parliament who backed his cause. Rothermere is sometimes described as a lonely figure by this point in his life, the guiding hand of his brother gone, two of his three sons killed in the Great War and whilst his maintenance of an independent stance may have suited his personality, it also suited his political calculation.<sup>230</sup> Shortly before the launch of the Crusade he wrote to Beaverbrook calling forth his experience with forming the Anti-Waste League, which was followed by an analysis from party organiser, Ernest Outhwaite.<sup>231</sup> In this and a subsequent telegram Beaverbrook is advised to keep close personal hold on the decision making of the Crusade and to take care to keep MPs out, fearing external influence.<sup>232</sup> Involvement with Beaverbrook would not have given Rothermere the control he craved and whilst his subsequent moves were in concert, he did not accept Beaverbrook's control.

In his strongest directive, Rothermere telegraphed:

Feel you must definitely go forward run by-election candidate and complete organisation such as I did with Anti Waste. Will make your by-election candidates star news feature. That in Anti Waste days I did with Mirror and Sunday Pictorial you with your newspapers can trebly do.<sup>233</sup>

The running of by-election candidates was to become a contentious issue between the two and whilst Beaverbrook sought to win support for the Empire Free Trade from all political parties, he principally worked within the Conservative Party of which he was a member. Baldwin's rejection of food taxes forced a response from Beaverbrook in a speech to National Farmers' Union members at Preston

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<sup>230</sup> Bourne. (1990), p.99. Taylor. (1999), pp.14-15. Taylor. (1998), p.247, 271.

<sup>231</sup> Ernest Outhwaite. (1929, December 3). *Short History of the Anti-Waste League*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive, Houses of Parliament, London.

<sup>232</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1929, December 12). *Personal telegram to Lord Beaverbrook on the establishment of the Empire Crusade*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>233</sup> Harmsworth. (1929, December 3).

where he rejected Baldwin's caution, urging bravery for the best results.<sup>234</sup> Shortly after in February 1930 the United Empire Party was founded and a fighting fund opened.<sup>235</sup> Rothermere did join the United Empire Party Executive and his newspapers fully committed to the new party, but each press lord took a subtly different approach with the *Daily Mail* printing application for membership forms and the *Daily Express* appealing for subscriptions for a fighting fund.<sup>236</sup> Beaverbrook did not appeal for further members, seemingly morphing the Empire Crusade into the United Empire Party, but he did ask for £100,000 to be donated and for that money to be sent to him at Stornaway House, Cleveland Row St James, or to the Editor of the *Daily Express* at 8 Shoe Lane.<sup>237</sup> Alternatively Rothermere's papers offered the opportunity to join the United Empire Party – Daily Mail branch at Dorland Building, 14 Regent Street.<sup>238</sup> A distinction in administration that handily represented the different driving forces of the Party. Each newspaper empire backed their owner's perspective on the Party. Following Beaverbrook's rapprochement with Baldwin in March 1930, he returned the fighting fund he had received and stepped back from the United Empire Party.<sup>239</sup> Rothermere however, had the membership details of 250,000 people and his own independent policy stances beyond Empire Free Trade, which were not being satisfied by Baldwin and so the United Empire Party continued, now under his sole direction.<sup>240</sup>

The coverage of the Empire Crusade and United Empire Party in the newspapers of Beaverbrook and Rothermere was both comprehensive and propagandist, important for what it covered and what it did not. In doing so they went beyond reporting and even commentary on events to cover their

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<sup>234</sup> Empire Crusade Speech at Preston. (1930, February 10). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>235</sup> United Empire Party Fighting Fund. (1930, February 21). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>236</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, February 19). Fresh Life for Industry and Agriculture. *Daily Mail*, p.11. New Party Formed. (1930, December 18). *Daily Express*, p.1. £100,000 Fighting fund opened. (1930, December 20), *Daily Express* p.1.

<sup>237</sup> £100,000 Fighting fund opened. (1930, February 20), *Daily Express* p.1.

<sup>238</sup> United Empire Party Enrolment Form – Daily Mail Branch. (1930, February 19). *Daily Mail*, p.11.

<sup>239</sup> Donations to Be Returned. (1930, March 8). *Daily Mail*, p.9.

<sup>240</sup> The next Task of the United Empire Party. (1930, March 8). *Daily Mail*, 9. Heavy blow to trade and taxpayers. (1930, March 2). *Sunday Pictorial*, p.3.

progress in such a way as to shape the world view of their readers to such an extent it was difficult for them to reconcile contrary information and any reverse seemed unexpected. Following the initial launch of the Empire Crusade it led as the *Daily Express's* headline for five days, with reports of mass enrolments supported by individual stories, a Liberal councillor from Essex, a stock broker and former Conservative candidate from Lambeth as well as, 'Two "Nippies" employed at Lyons' Corner House brought their enrolment forms on the way to their work.'<sup>241</sup> Frederick Doidge, an Express newspaper executive and Secretary of the Empire Crusade, combed daily correspondence for prominent supporters, who, with Beaverbrook's agreement were approached to write an exhalatory comment explaining their step on the road to Damascus, published with due prominence in the *Daily Express*.<sup>242</sup> The message of prominent people flocking to join was often repeated as were the speeches of Beaverbrook.<sup>243</sup> Liberals, women, people in the North, each of the perceived deficits in support for the Empire Crusade was neatly addressed and rebutted.<sup>244</sup> Whereas the coverage of the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* for the Anti-Waste League was considerable, and mirrored in Northcliffe's papers sometimes using very similar copy, the *Daily Express* developed their coverage from giving prominence to reporting events happening in a by-election, to more internally generated stories.<sup>245</sup> The membership application form remained on the front page for much of December, with articles added on the backing of the National Union of Manufacturers, then reports of supporters from Canada, Australia and South Africa were reported.<sup>246</sup> The hand of Beaverbrook in his newspapers was identified by contemporaries such as Express journalist, Peter Howard, selecting and creating news

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<sup>241</sup> No Shirkers-you must work!. (1929, December 12). *Daily Express*, p.1. Incidents of "the push". (1929, December 12). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>242</sup> Frederick Doidge. (1929, December 18). *Enrolment today list – prominent people*. (BBK/C/247). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. A Liberal's Letter. (1929, December 19). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>243</sup> Well done the Crusaders. Crusaders Welcomed (1929, December 13). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>244</sup> Beverley Baxter. (1930, January 8). *Splendid progress made on Empire Crusade*. *Daily Express*, p.1. Beverley Baxter. (1930, January 13). *Empire manifesto by five Liberals*. *Daily Express*, p.1. The Empire Crusade Carried to the North. (1929, December 20). *Daily Express*, pp.1-2.

<sup>245</sup> Lord Rothermere Addresses his Editors. (1930, January 6). *Daily Express*, p.1. Lord Beaverbrook's letter to the "Morning Post". (1930, January 11). *Daily Express*, p.1. Australian Crusaders. (1930, January 20). *Daily Express*, p.2.

<sup>246</sup> The Crusade in South Africa. (1930, February 7), *Daily Express*, p.9. Australian Crusaders. (1930, January 20), *Daily Express*, p.2. Empire Manifesto by Five Liberals. (1930, January 14), *Daily Express*, p.1.

stories from what the Empire Crusade was doing, each day's coverage advancing to the drumbeat of Beaverbrook's will.<sup>247</sup> The same guiding hand is not present in the *Daily Mail*, which would occasionally print Rothermere's voice directly but he did not have the same level of personal involvement in the journalism, preferring to concentrate on the business side of newspapers, he relied on his editors, removing those who failed to represent his opinions.<sup>248</sup>

Despite ostensibly backing the same cause the papers did diverge. The *Daily Express* never wavered from its line supporting Empire Free Trade, Beaverbrook illuminated his tactics to journalist and author Samuel Levy Bensusan with whom he was on friendly terms.<sup>249</sup> When Bensusan pressed him on the strategic importance of home food production in wartime, Beaverbrook conceded the strength of the argument saying, 'But our side is trying to score a goal. There is no use in our going for a touch-down – it is the goal we are after, and we must all help in getting it.' He further elaborated, 'a man with a single purpose sometimes achieves the end. The man with many purposes seldom or never does so.'<sup>250</sup> It could be argued that he was artfully avoiding a different wider debate in his letter, that British farmers wanted protection from Empire producers, but that in itself is a signifier of his single mindedness. Indeed, A.J.P. Taylor remarks on his consistency of purpose, continuing his belief in links with the Empire over those with the European Community into the 1960s.<sup>251</sup>

The same disciplined message was not evident with Rothermere. Not a convinced protectionist for agriculture, when the United Empire Party fell under his direct control it reverted to the Die Hard

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<sup>247</sup> Howard. (1964), pp.18, 64. Anne Chisholm, & Michael Davie. (1992). *Beaverbrook: A life*. Hutchinson, p.229.

<sup>248</sup> Bourne (1990), pp.19, 78-79. Koss. (1984), pp. 340-341.

<sup>249</sup> Lawrence Peters. Bensusan, Samuel Levy (1872–1958), journalist and author. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>250</sup> Samuel Levy Bensusan. (1929, November 11). *Personal letter and briefing paper to Lord Beaverbrook on home production* (BBK/C/247a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive,.. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, November 12). *Personal letter to Samuel Levy Bensusan on home production*. (BBK/C/247). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>251</sup> Bensusan. (1929, November 11).

stances of the Anti-Waste League.<sup>252</sup> The Party subtitled itself the 'Party of Prosperity' and following its launch on 18 February 1930, by 19 February Rothermere was speaking of a business government, by the 20 February replying in the *Daily Mail* letters column Rothermere said, 'The United Empire Party stands for a policy of no more surrenders in India, and a policy of ruthless economy in Government expenditure.'<sup>253</sup> By 22 February these were solidified into five pledges: subsidies for farming, duties on foreign manufactured imports, preference on trade within the Empire, ruthless economy and defence of British interests in the Empire, which meant India and Egypt.<sup>254</sup> On 1 March pledges were added that there would be no extension of doles or pensions and that there would be no diplomatic relations with Moscow.<sup>255</sup> Beaverbrook wrote to Outhwaite protesting that the United Empire Party's purpose was to establish Empire Free Trade only and that he could not support an extension to other issues.<sup>256</sup> He asserted that he would however remain Rothermere's friend and support the United Empire Party insofar as it put Empire Free Trade to the electorate.

The split was crystallised with the Bromley Byelection in September 1930. Beaverbrook secured the backing of the Conservative candidate Edward Campbell for Empire Free Trade, but Rothermere doubted Campbell's fidelity and when the United Empire Party constituency association put forward their own candidate, Vernon Redwood, Rothermere backed him.<sup>257</sup> Beaverbrook resolved to withdraw from the contest which was barely covered in the *Daily Express*, much to Rothermere's frustration who told Beaverbrook it was damaging Redwood's chances.<sup>258</sup> Campbell was victorious

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<sup>252</sup> The next Task of the United Empire Party. (1930, March 8). *Daily Mail*, p.9.

<sup>253</sup> First Day's Rush to Join and to Help. (1930, February 20). *Daily Mail*, p.9. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, February 19). All Hail the United Empire Party. *Daily Mail*, 10. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, February 20). Lord Rothermere's Replies to Correspondents. *Daily Mail*, 9.

<sup>254</sup> The Swift Effective Remedy. (1930, February 22). *Daily Mail*, 10.

<sup>255</sup> The United Empire Party and Moscow. (1930, March 1). *Daily Mail*, 8.

<sup>256</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1930, March 7). *Personal Letter to Ernest Outhwaite on the policies of the UEP*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers.

<sup>257</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, August 18). *Personal telegram to Lord Beaverbrook on UEP support for V.C. Redwood*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Ball (1988), pp.94-95.

<sup>258</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, August 19). *Personal telegram to Lord Beaverbrook on damage to Redwood*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

with Redwood in third place, and Beaverbrook apparently unironically, hailed his performance as a tribute to Rothermere's 'prestige and power' suggesting 'I think you have killed Baldwin.'<sup>259</sup> The flattery complete, the two continued wary collaboration.

Baldwin was not 'killed' but did face two immense crises in his leadership. The first and most dangerous according to Ball was the threat posed by Beaverbrook and his Empire Crusade. It was partly based around his opposition to the adoption of Empire Free Trade which was becoming popular amongst MPs as well as with many constituency parties.<sup>260</sup> The second was linked with his India policy, which was opposed by a group of his MPs, including Churchill and was linked to the campaign of Rothermere and the United Empire Party. The challenge of the Empire Crusade was defeated when Beaverbrook stood a candidate of his own at Islington in February 1931. It split the anti-Labour vote of an unpopular Labour Government resulting in victory for the Labour candidate. Baldwin's trimming towards Empire Free Trade and the dire prospects of the Empire Crusade in outright opposition to the Conservatives weakened Conservative Party support and Beaverbrook's party activity came to an end. Rothermere forced the point further at the St George's by-election in March backing an independent Conservative who opposed Baldwin's India policy and specifically attacked Baldwin as leader of the Party. The Conservative Party abhorred the prospect of a split and rallied behind Baldwin as the Labour Government collapsed. The ensuing National Government did adopt a protectionist tariff with a preference for Imperial imports as did parts of the Empire, ensuring, albeit in a relatively modest form, that Beaverbrook's approach was enacted. His single-minded drive for the policy was able to be treated on its own merits, separated from any clash with the leadership.

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<sup>259</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1930, September 3). *Personal telegram to Lord Rothermere on UEP Result.* (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken., Baron Beaverbrook. (1930, September 8). *Personal telegram to Lord Rothermere on effect on Conservatives of Bromley result.* (BBK/ B/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>260</sup> Ball (1988), pp.47, 54, 86.

The campaigns of the Empire Crusade and United Empire Party adopted and honed the approach of the Anti-Waste League. All were built on existing political themes within the Conservative Party, a Die-Hard appreciation of low taxes and a small state, or a more interventionist project for Britain to revive her Empire. Both flourished with ample newspaper backing, the United Empire Party adopting a more oppositional and reactionary approach, it lacked a populist leadership to expand its appeal and provide a public face to its campaign and whilst the Anti-Waste League could defeat the Coalition with no risk of Labour benefitting, opposing the opposition to Labour was a different matter. The Empire Crusade was definitely led by Beaverbrook, he spoke for it and curated its coverage in his newspapers, it appealed to a section of the electorate and to his readers. His more positive message and personal charisma locked in those in the Conservative Party disappointed by the inactivity of the leader and the absence of a counter to the high unemployment of the 1920s and the depression of the 1930s, who now looked to protectionism to secure failing manufacturers and farmers from unfair foreign competition. The nation would look to its own interests, but fraternal Imperial relations were also encompassed and entrenched. As the Anti-Waste League led to the Geddes Axe, the Empire Crusade opened the way to the Ottawa import tariffs. Neither response as wholehearted as the campaigners desired but they were all ultimately defeated by the compulsion of the Conservatives to remain united rather than to risk dividing their support at a General Election.

## The Empire Crusade and the United Empire Party: radicalism and reaction in Conservative thinking

The Conservatives proved dominant in the Interwar period, adopting a relatively moderate political stance. When subject to electoral defeat those in the party who favoured more radical or reactionary positions were energised and the Empire Free Trade movement represented a dangerous co-mingling of these elements – although it largely failed to influence the Party’s core stance. The Conservatives were not an ideological party, representing those of like temperament in Britain. Ball discusses their belief in property rights, the Church of England, family life, all of which underpinned a stable society.<sup>261</sup> Society they thought, will develop but is not susceptible to design and may only be adjusted, rather than be subject to radical change.<sup>262</sup> The Conservatives were not therefore laissez faire in their approach, but saw a modest role for the state in ameliorating the effect of economic and social forces, but not to shape them. This contrasts with the tenets of Empire Free Trade, which sought to radically alter Britain and the Empire’s economic prospects. Shorn of Tariff Reform’s interventionist funding of social programmes, its rhetoric prescribed the guiding hand of government in economic development across the Empire, achieving a reorganisation of agricultural, mineral and industrial development to realign the prospects of the Empire. It is noteworthy that the arguments for economic intervention were screened by arguments for Empire, a uniting Conservative value from the 1870s.<sup>263</sup> They also situated the foreigner as the opponent to Britain’s recovery and cause of her decline. Beaverbrook and Rothermere’s calls for radical or reactionary action, contrasted with Baldwin’s perceived inaction and would at times severely threaten his leadership. Baldwin accepted modest protectionism but rejected revanchist Imperial proposals. The Empire did align economically, shaped by the Empire Crusade proposals as well as wider economic factors, but the inevitable longer term political drift apart of a widespread Empire with diverging economic interests continued.

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<sup>261</sup> Ball. (2013), pp16-17.

<sup>262</sup> Ball. (2013), pp.14-17.

<sup>263</sup> Ball. (2013), pp.32, 34.



The Conservative Party had debated the merits of free trade and protectionism since the Corn Law's of the 1840s.<sup>264</sup> It was given fresh impetus by Joseph Chamberlain in the 1900s who advocated Tariff Reform. His campaign resulted in the active presentation of protectionism to the British electorate up until the Great War. The Coalition in 1918 and Conservatives in 1922 did not back protectionism, and after Baldwin's flirtation in 1923, it was not until the defeat of 1929 and Beaverbrook's campaign that it again became a lively debate within the Conservative Party. At the turn of the twentieth century there were concerns over the economic performance of Britain against her competitors.<sup>265</sup> German and US steel manufacturers were out competing British manufacturers, benefitting from a large, protected home market. Inter-Empire trade was threatened, with 57.1% of imports to Canada for consumption in 1870 coming from Britain, but by 1900 60.1% were sourced from the USA.<sup>266</sup> Joseph Chamberlain in 1896 as Colonial Secretary promoted the concept of a customs union and common currency, alike to the Zollverein of Bismarck, which had promoted internal trade and drawn the states of Germany together.<sup>267</sup> In doing so he was backing earlier proposals put forward by the Fair Trade League of the early 1880s.<sup>268</sup> The more radical Tariff Reform consisted of a revenue tariff for manufactured goods and food with the constituent parts of the Empire receiving a preferential lower rate. This would be instituted on a mutual basis and boost Imperial trade, whilst raising funds for social reforms such as pensions.<sup>269</sup> The priority was social reform, and Thackeray argues its enduring legacy was due to the popularity of Imperialism.<sup>270</sup> The economic impact was not a principle plank of the programme, and the lack of detailed economic analysis was regarded as something of a weakness, something which Beaverbrook sought to address in his campaign.<sup>271</sup> A tax on food imports was feared

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<sup>264</sup> Ian Drummond. (2006). *British economic policy and empire, 1919-1939*. Abingdon: Routledge, p.36.

<sup>265</sup> Peter Cain. (1979). *Political Economy in Edwardian England: The Tariff Reform Controversy*. In Alan O'Day. *The Edwardian age: Conflict and stability, 1900-1914*. Macmillan: London, p.36.

<sup>266</sup> Cain. (1979), p.40.

<sup>267</sup> Denis Judd. (1977). *Radical Joe: A life of Joseph Chamberlain*. Hamilton, p.235.

<sup>268</sup> Richard Jay. (1981). *Joseph Chamberlain: A political study*. Clarendon, p.209.

<sup>269</sup> Cain. (1979), p.43.

<sup>270</sup> Judd. (1977), p.242. David Thackeray. (2003). *Chamberlain day and the popular meaning of tariff reform*. *Historian* (London), (78), 22-24, p.22.

<sup>271</sup> Cain. (1979), p.42. A.P.L. Gordon. (1929, November 20). *Letter to Frederick Doidge to write economic case for EFT*. (BBK/B/245). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Frederick Doidge. (1929, November 22). *Letter to Beaverbrook on need for economic case for EFT*. (BBK/B/245). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

by the Conservative leadership, which was also cautious on social reform, and Balfour's failure to embrace the plan led to Chamberlain's withdrawal from the government and threatened to split the Party.<sup>272</sup> With a feuding party the voters rejected the prospect of "dear food" offered by increasing numbers of Conservative MPs from 1906 onwards, but the movement lacked Chamberlain's leadership following his severe stroke in 1906.<sup>273</sup> Growing internal party support led it to being partially adopted as a formal party policy in 1914, but without a commitment to tariffs on food.<sup>274</sup>

Beaverbrook supported Tariff Reform in Canada where he saw the increasing impact of US economic dominance on its Northern neighbour.<sup>275</sup> He continued to support the policy once he arrived in Britain before the Great War and its importance to him beyond a conventional political career was signalled in August 1918 when the *Daily Express*, which he then owned, called for Lloyd George to adopt Tariff Reform, whilst Beaverbrook was a Minister inside Lloyd George's Coalition government, resulting in his dismissal.<sup>276</sup> In 1921, despite his close friendship with Conservative Leader Bonar Law, he chose to successfully oppose the election in Dudley of Conservative Arthur Griffith-Boscowan (1865-1946) who as Minister of Agriculture had embargoed Canadian cattle imports.<sup>277</sup> Although Bonar Law came to forgive him, the Carlton Club did not and proceeded to exclude him.<sup>278</sup> Following the Conservative defeat in 1929, Beaverbrook wrote on 30 June calling for Imperial economic unity.<sup>279</sup> A.J.P. Taylor speculates whether it was boredom that prompted Beaverbrook's intervention.<sup>280</sup> Beaverbrook assessed the situation to Rothermere and indicated that since the Labour government were treating them as 'untouchables' he would have nothing to do with them, whilst Rothermere asserted that,

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<sup>272</sup> Judd. (1977), p.246.

<sup>273</sup> Cain. (1979), pp.54-56. Judd. (1977), p.263.

<sup>274</sup> Cain. (1979), p.59.

<sup>275</sup> Taylor (1972), p.274

<sup>276</sup> Taylor (1972), pp.159, 163.

<sup>277</sup> Taylor (1972), pp.180-181.

<sup>278</sup> Max Aitken., Baron Beaverbrook. (1920, March). *Personal letter to Lord Rothermere on Dudley by-election.* (BBK/ B/283a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>279</sup> Taylor (1972), p.262.

<sup>280</sup> Taylor (1972), p.262.

‘Without our active support, there is not the remotest chance of the ex-Premier and his group of intimates returning to office.’<sup>281</sup> There was therefore a period of susceptibility for Baldwin to listen to them both, as an early election was expected. Whilst Beaverbrook recognised the harm to Baldwin from such a campaign, that was not the main purpose.<sup>282</sup> Beaverbrook had a profound belief in the value of Empire Free Trade, he would make the same case for decades and he went to great lengths to make it based on detailed economic assessments and from mastering details of the flow of trade.<sup>283</sup> He would punctuate his speeches with his trade based justifications, interlaced with xenophobic jabs at foreign producers, as well as middle men importers who exploited Empire farmers.<sup>284</sup> In a speech in Gloucester on 28 February 1930 launching the United Empire Party, he began, ‘Our plan is to set up between Great Britain and the non-self-governing colonies absolutely unrestricted Free Trade with a barrier against the foreigner.’<sup>285</sup> The Daily Express duly reported him:

Here is a sheltered market for the wheat grown in Canada under conditions similar to those that exist in England. The Old Country prefers Canadian wheat grown with honest labour to Argentine wheat grown by gipsy labour under conditions which would not be tolerated here. Britain is in a position to give that sheltered market.<sup>286</sup>

He repeated his detailed critique of Argentinian working conditions in a speech to farmers in Norwich on 10 March, giving further detailed descriptions of how difficult it is to compete with imported cured

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<sup>281</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1930, September 3). *Personal letter to Lord Rothermere on Labour Government*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1929, July 5). *Personal letter to Lord Beaverbrook on Conservative Party*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>282</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1930, September 3). *Personal letter to Lord Rothermere on Labour Government*. (BBK/C/284a). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>283</sup> Taylor. (1972), pp.325-326. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, August 4). *Personal letter to Express Journalist Basil Murray*. (BBK/B/224). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1929, November 3). *Personal letter to Frederick Doidge requesting facts and figures*. (BBK/B/245). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>284</sup> Lord Beaverbrook’s speech to Farmers. (1930, July 4). *Daily Express*, pp.1-2.

<sup>285</sup> Lord Beaverbrook opens the campaign. (1930, February 28). *Daily Express*, p.13.

<sup>286</sup> Lord Beaverbrook opens the campaign. (1930, February 28). *Daily Express*, p.13.

bacon and the subsidised French loaf.<sup>287</sup> Whilst the detail presumably impressed the farming audience, it might not have inspired the general reader, but it served the purpose of proving his credentials as an expert, giving greater authority to the words of the newspaper mogul.

In addition to the populist tone of speeches and articles and even BBC Radio appearances, Beaverbrook made the intellectual case including in a rare outing in Parliament speaking in the House of Lords on 19 November 1929.<sup>288</sup> He differentiated his proposal from that of Joseph Chamberlain, in that he envisaged a pan imperial system, with a tariff barrier for the Empire. Chamberlain proposed one for Britain that could be lowered for the Dominions and Colonies. It was an approach grander in its apprehension and represented a systemising of imperial trade policy, where the Dominions and India had become used to adopting their own approach. His case relied on a comparison to the size and relative uniformity of the US market, which allowed for manufacturing to be undertaken at a greater scale than just the British market could sustain. He avoided the rhetorical attack that he will increase the price of food by the argument that Empire food will not be taxed, and since the Empire can now feed itself there will be no shortage. His argument relied on market forces responding to the opportunities of edging out foreign food, Australia would develop its beef sector, Canada would sell its grain and so therefore these supplies would become cheaper than existing imports. He found substantial opposition to his proposals in the House of Lords and did not make his case there again, preferring direct contact with the people.

His attempt to distinguish between his plan and that of Chamberlain can be seen as a political move to not wish to be identified with a policy that the Party saw as a failure. His case is a much more imperial one, aimed at not just Britain's growth but at positively affecting the Empire. Making the case in Britain was always likely to be somewhat of a handicap in gaining wider adherence around the

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<sup>287</sup> Lord Beaverbrook puts the Farmers' case. (1930, March 1). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>288</sup> Kenneth Young. (1966). *Churchill and Beaverbrook: A study in friendship and politics*. Eyre and Spottiswoode. HC Deb. Empire Free Trade. (19 November 1929), (75) col.547. Ball. (1988), p.51.

Empire, but it suggests that he felt that the Imperial angle was part of a winning strategy. Benefitting Canadians, Australians etc. was an acceptable reach of empathy for the British electorate. It also allowed him to present a coherent argument that might logically lead to the beneficial results he imagined. Other than fraternal feelings, a common language, existing trade and communication routes, a common postal system, familiarity with the market and cheaper freight rates all already tended to support the growth of inter-Empire trade, which despite Beaverbrook's rhetoric was already growing.<sup>289</sup>

Rothermere's protectionism was more straightforward and built around protecting British industry. He came to accept agricultural protection, although he was wary about the increase in food prices, and therefore insisted on subsidies for British farmers.<sup>290</sup> His newspapers mirrored his view and whilst they continued to pay lip service to Empire Free Trade, wrapped it around with other policies, which indicated a basic lack of belief in its transformative nature.<sup>291</sup> Rothermere's contribution was to shift the United Empire Party to a more reactionary position, mirroring the stances of the Anti-Waste League. When the prime articulated concern was over the Labour Government's stance on India, an editorial in the *Daily Mail* applauded the UEP stance, 'It will no longer tolerate Gandhi's seditious agitation, and will deal vigorously with the tribe of revolutionaries and plotters who at the last all-India Congress advocated the repudiation of the Indian debt and the stoppage of pensions to British subjects.'<sup>292</sup> The newspaper prominently reported civil disturbances and deaths of soldiers and police.<sup>293</sup> It criticised the Conservatives as surrendering to Indian agitators, calling enigmatically for a 'firm hand'.<sup>294</sup> The United Empire Party candidate in Bromley went further and called for, 'The ruthless

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<sup>289</sup> Capie.(2003), p.25.

<sup>290</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, June 23). *Personal letter to Lord Beaverbrook on UEP.* (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>291</sup> The Battle for Empire Trade. (1930, August 18). *Daily Mail*, p.8.

<sup>292</sup> The Swift Effective Remedy. (1930, February 22). *Daily Mail*, 10.

<sup>293</sup> Our own Correspondent. (1930, May 9). 33 Dead in India Riots. *Daily Mail*, p.13. Grave New Outbreaks. (1930, May 22). *Daily Mail*, p.11.

<sup>294</sup> No-Surrender Party. (1930, February 24). *Daily Mail*, 12. The Firm-Hand Candidate. (1930, August 20). *Daily Mail*, 8.

eradication of every element designed to create disloyalty.<sup>295</sup> Meanwhile 400 Communist agents with false identities were reported in the *Daily Mail* to have infiltrated the nation.<sup>296</sup> Rothermere and Beaverbrook worked with hard right Conservative MPs like John Gretton (1867-1947) and Patrick Hannon (1874-1963), who have been associated with the National Union of Fascists.<sup>297</sup> Both press lords held positive views of Sir Oswald Mosley, the backing of the *Daily Mail* in 1934 for his Blackshirts is well known.<sup>298</sup> Rothermere wrote to Beaverbrook in May 1934, 'I am off to Scotland to-day. When I come back I want to have a good talk with you about the Mosley movement. I think you and I can shape it exactly in the direction we wish. It is spreading like a prairie fire.'<sup>299</sup> Beaverbrook was less convinced, at one point asking Rothermere, 'If you take up a candidate who has nothing to do with Fascism, I will give him all the support possible in the *Express* and *Evening Standard*', but then advocating Mosley to stand in the Twickenham by-election.<sup>300</sup> His advocacy in this respect seems a little confused as he also supported Alfred C. Critchley (1890-1963) to stand, who eventually did so on behalf of the Conservatives in the National Government.<sup>301</sup> However, Beaverbrook was clearly impressed by Mosley, describing him in 1928 as 'A coming figure in Socialist politics' and promising to give the manifesto of the New Party as much publicity as possible in February 1931.<sup>302</sup> Despite Mosley disavowing democracy and asserting a belief in Fascism to Beaverbrook, the two continued an occasional correspondence which lasted into the 1960s.<sup>303</sup> Given Beaverbrook's penchant for mixing

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<sup>295</sup> Mr. Redwood's Address. (1930, August 20). *Daily Mail*, 11.

<sup>296</sup> Aliens on the Dole. (1930, August 21). *Daily Mail*, 8.

<sup>297</sup> Martin Pugh. (2006). *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!: Fascists and fascism in Britain between the wars*. Pimlico, pp.5, 61.

<sup>298</sup> Harold Harmsworth., Viscount Rothermere. (1934, January 15). Hurrah for the Blackshirts! *Daily Mail*, p.10.

<sup>299</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1934, May 25). *Personal letter to Lord Beaverbrook on Mosley*. (BBK/C/285b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>300</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1933, September 29). *Personal letter to Lord Rothermere on East Fulham byelection*. (BBK/C/285b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1934, May 31). *Personal letter to Lord Rothermere on Twickenham byelection*. (BBK/C/285b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>301</sup> Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1934, May 31). *Personal letter to Lord Rothermere on Twickenham byelection*. (BBK/C/285b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>302</sup> Max Aitken., Baron Beaverbrook. (1928, December 7). *Personal letter to Oswald Mosley*. (BBK/C/254). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken., Baron Beaverbrook. (1931, February 28). *Personal letter to Oswald Mosley on publicity for his manifesto*. (BBK/C/254). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>303</sup> Max Aitken, M., Baron Beaverbrook. (1936, August 4). *Personal letter to Oswald Mosley on his recovery from an operation*. (BBK/C/254). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Sir Oswald Mosley. (1963

and engaging with the ruling elite, of any party that would engage with him, it would be appropriate to view his correspondence with Mosley in this light. His newspapers did not back the National Union of Fascists and at one point Mosley publicly attacked Beaverbrook, such that Rothermere had to reign him in.<sup>304</sup>

Both admired Mosley as a man of action, someone who rejected the inertia of mainstream politics and the blithe acceptance of Britain's decline.<sup>305</sup> In doing so he represented a transformative figure, with a far-seeing vision and the will to act. A description which both Rothermere and Beaverbrook aspired to. Martin Pugh believes that Rothermere was not just a hard-line imperialist, he had underlying Fascist views and rejected parliamentary democracy.<sup>306</sup> That view was espoused by Communist writer and journalist, Rajani Palme Dutt in the *Daily Worker* in March 1930, when he linked the promotion of a Business Government as a rejection of democracy and the establishment of a capitalist dictatorship.<sup>307</sup> He also included Beaverbrook in his critique, saying of Empire Free Trade, 'despite its seeming hopelessly confused and contradictory outlines, a very important expression of the final stage of imperialist decay and parasitism.'<sup>308</sup> He alleged that the policy relied on mandating the dependent Empire to service Britain with its material needs. Whilst naturally falling neatly into Dutt's worldview it does bring to the forefront the exploitative nature of the move to Empire Free Trade, which the colonies would have no choice over.<sup>309</sup> It also aligns the beliefs about the Empire of the Rothermere and Beaverbrook rather more.

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November 27). *Personal letter to Beaverbrook on Mosley's birthday and EEC.* (BBK/C/254). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>304</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1934, May 7). *Personal letter to Beaverbrook on Mosley.* (BBK/C/285b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive, Houses of Parliament, London.

<sup>305</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley. (1930 November 25). *Personal letter to Beaverbrook on Mosley Memorandum.* (BBK/C/254). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Sir Oswald Mosley. (1932 September 9). *Personal letter to Beaverbrook on Mosley's politics.* (BBK/C/254). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>306</sup> Pugh. (2006), pp.48-49.

<sup>307</sup> R. Palme Dutt. (1930, March 1). *The National Fascist Party of Beaverbrook and Rothermere.* Daily Worker, p.4. 4. Callaghan, J. Dutt, (Rajani) Palme (1896–1974), political leader. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

<sup>308</sup> Palme Dutt. (1930, March 1).

<sup>309</sup> Palme Dutt. (1930, March 1).

The leadership of the press lords and involvement of their newspapers to back a political cause was not new, both Rothermere and Beaverbrook had directly intervened in by-elections before. What was new was the scale of the newspaper empires by 1930 and the persistence of their propaganda. Whilst a direct effect of the daily reporting cannot be proven, its attempt to influence public opinion was plain and was felt by the political class. Whilst enjoying more massive backing, the United Empire Party lacked the focus and appeal of the Anti-Waste League, it seemed to represent whatever enraged Rothermere at that time. When it did talk about the Empire it was about India, but it would often call for a strong line from government in other foreign policy dealings and the encapsulation of its stance in the *Daily Mail* would fluctuate in its bullet point simplicity. They lacked a public leader, with Esmond Harmsworth stepping back from standing again and with no Horatio Bottomley or Beaverbrook to capture the public's imagination it had to rely on its by-election candidates to make the argument for austerity and a nakedly imperialist policy. The Empire Crusade focused exclusively on Empire Free Trade and this policy was seriously contended by Beaverbrook as an unashamed cure-all. With Baldwin and Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) failing to offer a radical policy to tackle the growing crises of the early 30s, Beaverbrook did. In doing so he revitalised the radicalism of Tariff Reform, but failed to convince the Party that it should take such a risk, particularly when it would undermine their leader and when the impact of splitting the Conservative vote was apparent. Whilst both Parties fed off the fears of imperial decline, and were comfortable with economically exploiting the colonies, they did operate distinctly, with different policies and tactics, although both were associated with the die-hard members of the Party in Parliament and both press lords admired at least the leadership, if not always the anti-democratic prejudices of Mosley.

Whilst the declinist fears of the post Great War period were implicit in the critique of the die hard and populist opposition on the right, by the start of the next decade they were much more explicitly expressed. Chiefly these were articulated by Beaverbrook whose focus was imperial decline and the fracture of the bonds between Britain and her Dominions. Of chief import to him was the advance of



the United States which he had observed in Canada, but their influence was just as apparent in the Pacific region affecting Australia and New Zealand. His rhetoric invoked the Elizabethan period, but his prescription was late Victorian, evidence that the economic realities of the growth of Britain's competitors and their geographic proximity to scattered imperial dominions was a threat long envisaged, but little countered. Presented in a period of economic turmoil, his plan was presented as cure-all for the nation's ills, chiefly unemployment, and hinted at an accompanying policy of economic restructuring, which would be led by government. His radical interventionist intentions captured the imaginations of some Conservatives, tired of Baldwin's approach. The appeal of his programme allowed him to make common cause with Baldwin's opponents in the Party, and outside in Rothermere's United Empire Party. Rothermere's ideology had remained consistent since the Anti-Waste League, he campaigned for smaller government, but he also responded to growing imperial unrest, principally in India where he did not call for retreat as he had in the Middle East following the Great War, rather he called for retrenchment and a firm hand. His calculation of British interests dismissed the legitimacy of growing calls for self-government in India and he and his partisans talked of the debt to Britain for her investment of blood and treasure. Beaverbrook too called for openly exploitative treatment of the colonies, without joining Rothermere in the priority he gave to government of India. As in the immediate post-Great War period it is noteworthy that these movements gained traction in a time of economic crisis, that gave palpable expression to a weakening of the nation's strength at a time when her dominance within the Empire was challenged. Baldwin gave neither opponent hope that he would be radical or reactionary. His moves in response to their opposition and the world economic crisis were modest and moderate and focused on Britain.

## Chapter 3: The Appeal of the Empire

### The Empire and the Conservative Mentality

One mainstream expression of Conservatism is that it is rooted in common sense, the accessible everyday experience of a British man and increasingly, a British woman. It therefore eschews the intellectual premises of socialist theory or liberal economic understanding, preferring to rely on sensation appreciated by the stalwart and perhaps stolid. Emily Robinson isolates the sensory drivers for Conservative *types*: reverence, majesty and awe of the hierarchical to them, but also a deep satisfaction being derived from the beauty of the everyday and wholesome experience.<sup>310</sup> The deep atavistic appeal of the senses underlying these factors can be constructed through considering the importance of the emotional draw of these factors and the acknowledged feelings as expressed in aural and written sources.<sup>311</sup> A consideration of the language used in newspapers, or in speeches in Parliament, or letters from members of the public can help layer our understanding of why the totem of the Empire came into mainstream political discourse in a way that it had not previously. Chief amongst the emotional affects underlying the appeal of Imperial revanchism was anxiety over Britain's relative status. No longer was she looking over her shoulder at possible competitors and challengers she was now, it was felt, falling behind and doing so because of a failure of the traditional British values that were so important to the Conservative mindset. This risked undermining the belief in Britain's pre-eminent moral purpose, economic strength and naval potency. The Royal Empire Society felt this slipping of belief as did the newspapers of Beaverbrook and Rothermere. It was evident in the Society's missionary work not in preaching the value of the Empire to the colonised, but in Southern England, that they were unsettled by the lack of interest in the Empire. Their economic case for Empire

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<sup>310</sup> Emily Robinson. (2020). The authority of feeling in mid-twentieth-century English Conservatism. *The Historical Journal*, 63(5), 1303-1324, pp.1303-6..

<sup>311</sup> Katie Barclay. (2020). *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources*. Red Globe Press, pp.2-4.

was not dissimilar from Beaverbrook's but they were determined to avoid any connection as his campaign became seen as a proxy for control of the Conservative Party. The Empire was something above political debate, part of the institutional make up of Britain. Whilst there were those that would respond to robust calls for its reformation to reverse its decline, the prospect of increased prices to advantage Dominion production was a difficult argument to win when feelings about the Empire were not that strong. Its passive presence in architecture, literature and public debate lacked the more widespread jingoistic engagement of earlier decades. The general intellectual case for Empire was well rehearsed and can also be seen in the Royal Empire Society's yearly essay competition for Imperial school children. Racial and moral superiority abound as do the self-evident benefits of Empire, but there is none of the jingoistic appeals that tinged Beaverbrook's case and constituted Rothermere's. Rothermere, his newspapers and his United Empire Party, were unabashed in their declarations of Britain's weakness in its handling of the colonies. A lack of resolve and character amongst the establishment was at the root of Britain's decline. Ultimately despite the attempted promulgation of the majesty and awe of Imperial achievements and even its contribution to the more mundane in a household shopping bag, those supporting the Conservative cause would choose Britain, over its Empire; Baldwin and his rhetoric of ruralism and industrial harmony, rather than Beaverbrook and his plan for economic union with faraway peoples, or Rothermere's call for British power to be asserted more forcefully over unwilling subjects.<sup>312</sup> It marked a victory for the local, the national and the everyday over the novel and the overseas.

In 1912 Lord Robert Cecil described the natural Conservative, rooted in the love of the familiar, the respect of the Crown, Church of England and also the Empire.<sup>313</sup> Robinson sets out the fundamental tension that fuelled anxiety over nationhood, 'a mutually sustaining relationship between imperial power and domestic comfort, which the everyday and the awesome continually reinforce one

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<sup>312</sup> Williamson (1999) pp.179,246. Ball (1988), p.xii.

<sup>313</sup> Robinson p.21.

another'.<sup>314</sup> As the Empire is perceived to decline and then post Second World War Britain decolonised, Kit Kowol highlights the trauma felt by Conservatives.<sup>315</sup> The language of reverence, awe and respect also links into the deeply hierarchical nature of Conservatives. David Cannadine links the importance of the structures of hierarchy to Conservative fortunes.<sup>316</sup> An understanding of class was not problematic for Conservatives, it was rather the basis of the proper ordering of society and was inbuilt into initiatives such as the Primrose League, which drew in new support.<sup>317</sup> Class was therefore not a determining factor in Conservative support and so the lower middle-class readers of the *Daily Mail*, working class and middle class readers of the *Daily Express* could equally assert their Conservative values.<sup>318</sup> Perry Anderson contends that wider British adherence to tradition and to an archaic class based society is also a function of the self-supporting feedback between the Empire and the ruling class.<sup>319</sup> The Empire gave the aristocracy a playground which reinforced their position and attitudes:

The aristocrat is defined not by acts which denote skills but by gestures which reveal quintessence: a specific training or aptitude would be a derogation of the impalpable essence of nobility, a finite qualification of the infinite. The famous amateurism of the English *upper class* had its direct source in this ideal.<sup>320</sup>

All classes of those with a Conservative mentality therefore made use of the Empire as an expression of their identity. Those constituting Conservative support can therefore be considered as what Barbara Rosenwein views as an emotional community or being part of William Reddy's common

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<sup>314</sup> Robinson pp.3, 5.

<sup>315</sup> Robinson, p.14.

<sup>316</sup> David Cannadine. (1998). *Class in Britain*. Yale University Press, p.127.

<sup>317</sup> Cannadine. (1998), p.122.

<sup>318</sup> Bingham & Conboy. (2015), pp.12,69.

<sup>319</sup> Perry Anderson. (1964). Origins of the present crisis. *New Left Review*, (23), 27-53, p.34.

<sup>320</sup> Anderson. (1964), p.41.

emotional regime.<sup>321</sup> That regime may be a prevalent one amongst the powerful, but it can also be counter cultural, as the Empire Crusade and United Empire Party were.<sup>322</sup> Such counter-cultural expressions can also be linked in with a populist style of politics and one based on instinctive beliefs rather than ideological understanding. Emotional communities then, use similar language and have similar inherent beliefs, a group nicely aggregated for newspaper proprietors and called – the readership. A consideration of these emotional communities can help form an understanding of the mentality that gave rise to the apparent importance attached to trade flows in the Empire, or wasteful expenditure, which can be difficult to empathise with in retrospect and to comprehend the public interest these causes developed. Without that understanding they can be dismissed as personal animus of prickly millionaire proprietors. It is therefore important to consider both the ideological arguments that Beaverbrook or Rothermere made, but also the underpinning emotional impact that drew thousands of people to join, become actively involved attending public meetings and to campaign in Parliamentary by-elections. Whilst a relatively recent facet of historical study, it was in some ways preceded in Modern British Political History by Maurice Cowling and his emphasis on personal perceptions of advantage as the guiding force for the elite.<sup>323</sup> A study of emotion though can be something more than political calculation, drawing on more an instinctual reaction, that can underpin the political calculations open to a leader. A fear of decline had already fuelled the National Efficiency movement; post war political and economic developments that led to a larger state; and a growing recognition that there would be a change in Imperial relations between the Metropole and the Dominions and Colonies, fuelled a further fear of national decline. Economic and imperial strength were matters of chief concern to those on the right who held these matters to be an important part of their identity and who on principle objected to change in the economic and social sphere. When

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<sup>321</sup> Katie Barclay. (2021). State of the field: The history of emotions. *History (London)*, 106(371), 456-466. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13171>, p.459. Katie Barclay. (2020). *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources*. Red Globe Press, pp.75-76.

<sup>322</sup> Barclay. (2020), p.78..

<sup>323</sup> Cowling. (1971), p.10. Philip Williamson (2010). Maurice Cowling and modern British political history. In *Philosophy, Politics and Religion in British Democracy: Maurice Cowling and Conservatism*. Robert Crowcroft, S.J.D. Green & Richard Whiting London: I.B. Tauris. 108-152, pp.111-113.

Britain's pre-eminence was assured the Empire was not an issue, whilst debated in Parliament it was viewed by many as an apolitical issue. The Empire was a background to most people's lives, in their literature, or films, with representations in architecture around them, not a predominant political matter. However, the growing concern that Britain's place in the world and the relationship to her empire was changing, created anxiety in a section of the electorate and an interest in alternate policy prescriptions.

The response to these shifts from a believer in economic liberalism were to use the free market to develop economic relations, rebuilding a reality of Imperial co-operation, weakening nationalism across the Empire. It would also address Britain's economic performance as it fared less well against the USA, Japan or European competitors. A more repressive approach was advocated on the grounds that Britain was entitled to exact its will on those who owed her a debt for what had been done for them, or as a reward for the historic English entrepreneurial expansion of the Elizabethan period and beyond. The anger at colonial ingratitude and damaged British hubris drove the argument for a swift and sure response or even abandonment of parts of the Empire in Palestine or Mesopotamia. Considering that the august Royal Empire Society was concerned about public feeling towards the Empire indicates how extensive those fears were becoming. The Royal Empire Society had been established as the Colonial Society in 1868 arising out of concerns from its members of a lack of interest in the colonies of the Empire and of any coherent expression of an imperial mission.<sup>324</sup> They contributed to the interest in the Empire as it grew in the late nineteenth century and now undertook an internal mission to England to explain the value of the Empire. Government too recognised the need for such promotion with the Empire Marketing Board and British Empire Exhibitions. An examination of the language in speeches of leaders, columns of journalists and letter writing members of the public has been used to discern the underlying emotional draw in the arguments being made.

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<sup>324</sup> Edward Beasley. (2005). Empire as the triumph of theory: Imperialism, information, and the colonial society of 1868. Routledge, pp.1-2.

These were movements at odds with the Conservative Party in Coalition and under Baldwin where more centrist positions were deemed necessary to win the support of a wider electorate or to adjust in response to wider social change. It is the place of the reactionary to respond negatively to change, to argue for the status quo and for measures to ensure it, but opponents may also propose radical measures to achieve their aims, there was extensive interplay between these two forces on the Right in the twenties and thirties.

### The Language of Empire

Examining the language of Parliamentary debate about Empire Free Trade can elucidate the elite view of Empire. Much of the argument for Imperial unity is coldly utilitarian and openly exploitative. MPs debated Empire Free Trade on 29 January 1930, the fact the debate was held on a Wednesday afternoon, not as official government business, but as a Private Members debate suggests that it was a topic that neither the Labour Government nor Conservative Opposition wanted to initiate a debate upon. The debate was opened by Conservative MP John Remer and followed the debate in the Lords where Beaverbrook had set out his case for Empire Free Trade.<sup>325</sup> Remer made the case that the British Empire was territorially vast, had a large population and bountiful resources:

These territories are being developed by our brains, our resources, our initiative and our capital, and they have been established by British pioneers. What are we doing it for? Apparently, at the present time we are developing those territories solely in order to find trade for our foreign competitors,<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> HC Deb. Empire Free Trade. (29 January 1930) (234) col.1029.

<sup>326</sup> HC Deb. Empire Free Trade. (29 January 1930) (234) col.1029.

The Imperialist core of his argument is one of ownership and of an earned dividend following the labour of Britons. It is superior British brains, investments and entrepreneurship that got the Empire to its state in 1930 and that the Empire owed Britain a return on the investment. The language of Beaverbrook both in his Parliamentary debate, and in his speeches to the public, was also almost always economic in nature, with the promise of increased employment and an answer to Britain's turgid economic performance.<sup>327</sup> His speech on 25 March 1930 at the Savoy is typical, where he said of Empire Free Trade to his supporters:

Believing in that cause as the sole remedy for the economic ills from which we are now suffering, I call on every Crusader to join in the great task which lies before us of educating public opinion in this country.<sup>328</sup>

He opined in Hertford on 3 April that, "If we fail, the British Empire breaks up. It is inconceivable that we can go on much longer as we are."<sup>329</sup> It is an argument delivered without an emotional charge or evocation of the Empire as something more than an economic arrangement. It may also be linked to Beaverbrook's speaking style as he asserted he was not a natural speaker and it may be that it was his reputation rather than his oratory that packed meetings to listen to his credo.<sup>330</sup> It is also worth considering that this type of message was the appeal, that the case was beyond sentiment and was instead a sense that the case should be supported because it was rational, the Empire should be sustained because it was self-evidently justified. The view set out by Remer colours that appreciation somewhat, there is a definite normative expectation that Britain will receive an economic return from its Empire.

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<sup>327</sup> HC Deb. Empire Free Trade. (29 January 1930) (234) col.1029.

<sup>328</sup> The Empire Crusade to go on. (1930, March 26). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>329</sup> Lord Beaverbrook speaks out. (1930, April 4). *Daily Express*, p.1.

<sup>330</sup> Boyce. (2011).



Remer's tone very much reflected Rothermere's and the *Daily Mail*. On 4 March 1930 Rothermere railed against the 'blunders of successive British Governments' risking the collapse of the Empire in India.<sup>331</sup> His argument:

If the British had not gone to India, she would still be in a state of semi-barbaric anarchy, unable to buy the products of civilisation from anyone – unless she had meanwhile been conquered by some other Power, which would have reduced her to a state of economic subjection such as we have never attempted to establish.<sup>332</sup>

Dominion status for India would lead to the 'destruction of the splendid work which five generations of Britons have done in India.'<sup>333</sup> He even managed to highlight the perennial Imperialist argument of the value of railways and their plight without British control. In the different context of policy towards Russia, previous enterprising rulers were called upon to contrast the current incumbents:

It was not perhaps to be expected that our middle-aged Ministers should show the high spirit of an Elizabeth or a Cromwell. Those great rulers were not afraid to make their voices heard and they were able to cow tyrants and persecutors.<sup>334</sup>

The language evokes the sense of the smallness of Britain, its timid bureaucratic leadership, unable to take the bold steps of historic leaders. 'Lack of leadership, not lack of assets is our handicap.', declared Rothermere.<sup>335</sup> The contemporary decline of Britain is implied as is a want of dynamism and character that could arrest this slide. It is the same trajectory that led Rothermere to champion fascist

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<sup>331</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, March 4). The United Empire Party and India. *Daily Mail*, p.10.

<sup>332</sup> Harmsworth. (1930, March 4), p.10.

<sup>333</sup> Harmsworth. (1930, March 4), p.10.

<sup>334</sup> For Shame! (1930, March 18). *Daily Mail*, 10.

<sup>335</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, February 21). Bring Back Prosperity to Britain! *Daily Mail*, p.10.

leadership in Europe, 'Italy is an example of what virile leadership and national enthusiasm in combination can achieve.'<sup>336</sup> Gendered terminology is sharply deployed, Ramsey MacDonald is described as ineffective and unmanly in comparison and Britain too lacks belief in itself.

The vigour and truth of youth is often called upon to answer Britain's decline and whilst Beaverbrook's argument did not depend on replacing a failing ruling class, hence why he would work with Baldwin, he did employ Mosley like appeals to youth. He did this most notably at a meeting of the 'Young Crusaders' at the Hotel Cecil on 4 April 1930, where he too called on historic precedents in a rare emotional appeal, that still managed to revert to his favoured linguistic territory:

The Empire was built by young men. The first Empire by men such as Drake and Wolfe. The second Empire we are told is breaking up. There is going to be a third Empire, an economic Empire, and that Empire is going to be built up by youth! This is why this is the most splendid night I have spent on my campaign. Your voices ring true.<sup>337</sup>

There is likely an element of Beaverbrook speechifying to the audience in front of him, but at another Young Crusaders meeting, the *Daily Express* reported to its readers:

They had come to hear their leader, Lord Beaverbrook, who in his foundation of the Empire Crusade looked forward and saw that its realisation must depend on the vigour and enthusiasm of the young men and women of to-day.

The predominantly family-based readership of the *Daily Express* would have taken the lauding of young people as symbolic of change with an emphasis on the future of the nation. In doing so this

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<sup>336</sup> Harmsworth. (1930, February 21).

<sup>337</sup> Young Crusaders meet to form a League. (1930, April 5). *Daily Express*, p.1.

was consistent with Beaverbrook's conception of Empire Free Trade, it was a radical, forward-looking hopeful plan for Britain, whereas Rothermere's was dominated by disappointment, failure and recrimination.

When considering the ardent Imperialist appeals of Beaverbrook and Rothermere, it is worth reflecting on the regretful words of Samuel Perry, Labour MP for Kettering in the debate on 4 March, 'I, for one, am indebted to the two Noble Lords who have raised it and who have at any rate revived interest in Empire and Dominion questions.'<sup>338</sup> A supporter of the Empire but not of Empire Free Trade, his reflection supposes that the Empire has not been at the forefront of political debate. A review of the debates and phrases recorded in Hansard in the early twentieth century does not support his observation. Below is a graphical representation of data analysed from the [hansard.hud.ac.uk](http://hansard.hud.ac.uk) website looking at the debates on imperial matters and how many speakers took part. There were few standing occasions when matters relating to the Empire were raised in parliament and those that existed were not well attended.<sup>339</sup> From this analysis there was a great deal of debate in 1911 to 1913, again in 1919 after the Great War, during 1924 at the time of the First Labour government and British Empire Exhibition, and with an increase again up to the Ottawa Conference in 1932.

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<sup>338</sup> HC Deb. Empire Free Trade. (29 January 1930) (234) col.1029, at col.1064.

<sup>339</sup> Andrew S. Thompson. (2008;). *The empire strikes back?: The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century* (1st ed.). Routledge, p.127.

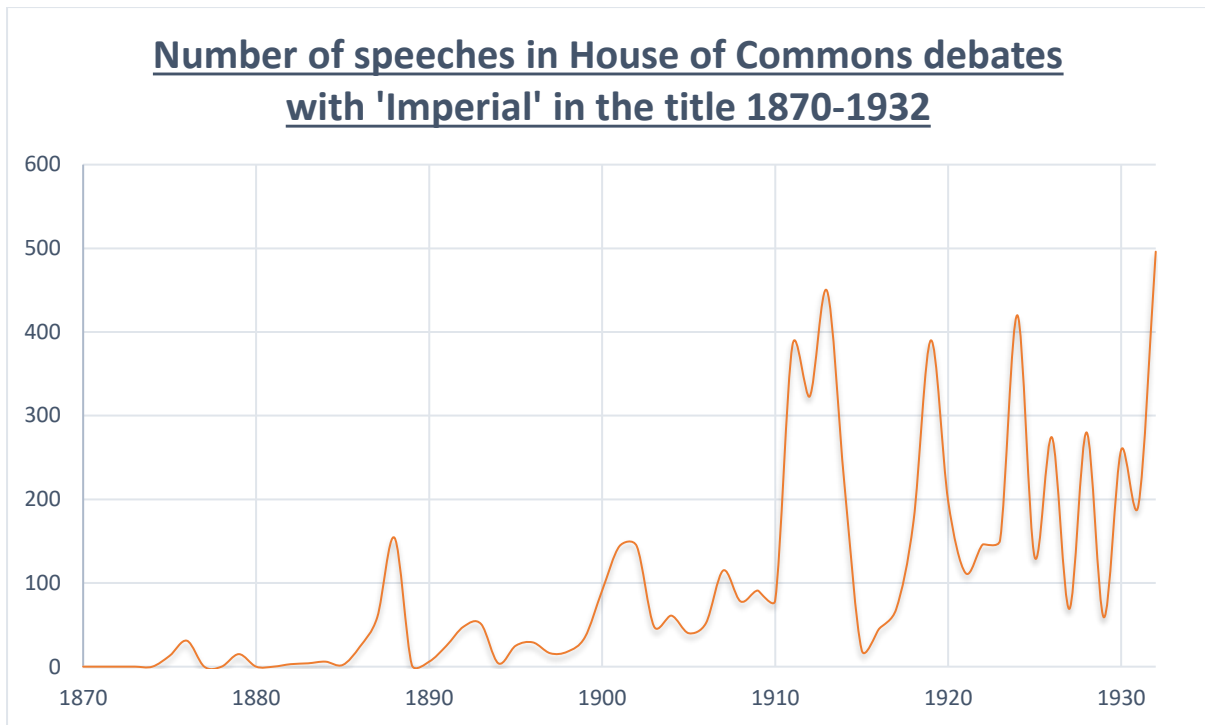


Figure 1

Looking specifically at the focus of any debate about the wider Empire over the same period below, the data suggests that by 1932 debates mentioned 'Empire' more than the preceding period, this was accompanied by an increased discussion of 'Dominions', which were very much the focus of Beaverbrook's campaign.

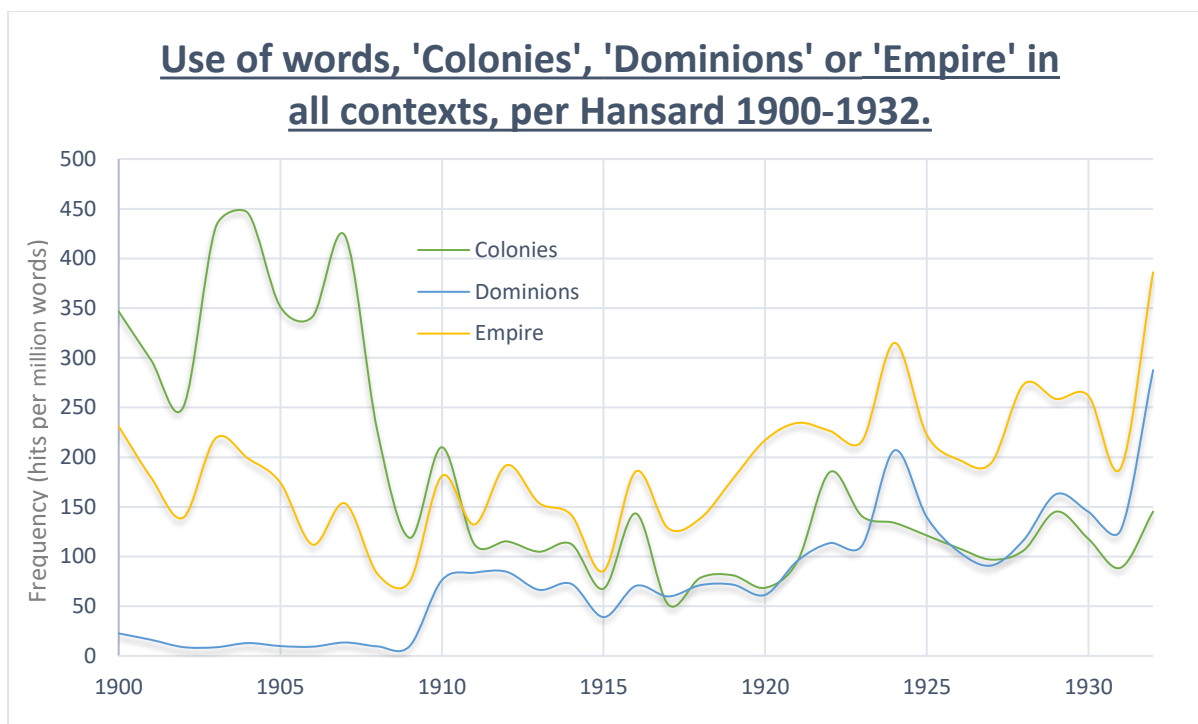


Figure 2

Discussion of 'colonies' had diminished over the period, as parts of the Empire began to be referred to as Dominions, even before that formal status was granted. The colonies were an assumed part of Empire Free Trade, where they had little choice in the matter and so were not a central part of the debate. By way of comparison over the same period the word 'taxation' was used with an average frequency of 238, 'navy' 175 and 'army' 443 suggesting that these important matters were mentioned with a similar frequency to imperial phrases. On its own such analysis is merely suggestive, but it does not appear that the Empire was being neglected as a subject of debate, it was rather perhaps the nature of debate that was at issue. Perry was raising the fact that discussions about the future of the Empire have not engaged the political classes, until now.

Whilst the Boer War and the First World War are said to have enhanced nationalistic feeling in Britain, Andrew Thompson counters the view that it led to a reduction in imperial sentiment.<sup>340</sup> He

<sup>340</sup> Andrew S. Thompson. (2000). *Imperial Britain: The empire in British politics, c. 1880-1932*. Longman, p.14.

perceptively points to the large proportion of the British forces that served overseas, alongside soldiers from the constituent parts of the Empire, with whom they were depicted in wartime propaganda.<sup>341</sup> Notwithstanding this intermingling, the continuing pressure of economic forces led the constituent parts of the Empire to focus on their own economic development or to seek to break free entirely giving rise to civil unrest and increasing garrisoning costs in some parts of the Empire.<sup>342</sup> In Britain too as has been discussed, Stuart Ball contends that Britons would choose domestic priorities over Imperial ones. The concept of Empire Free Trade was reliant on the analysis that there were foreign imports which were undesirable and that goods made in Britain were on a par with those made in the Empire. It was not a contention that found universal acceptance, some British industries competed against their Empire counterparts, for example Indian produced Jute challenged that produced in Dundee, and the taxation of European imports might lead to increased prices for some goods, Rothermere believed that subsidies would be necessary for dairy products to ensure that they continued to be affordable.<sup>343</sup>

Whilst not a nation state, one can apply the formulations that create one to the Empire to weigh the level of mutual solidarity that might arise. Benedict Anderson talks about common 'imagined communities' being a necessary underpinning of other factors such as language, religion and geography to create national feeling.<sup>344</sup> Michael Billig argues that social reality is what is first required to then build the psychological affinity of a national community.<sup>345</sup> Seeking to apply this analysis to what was arguably a multi-national entity, is it possible to say that there were the factors to generate such a construction for the British Empire? Billig's analysis is built around the concept of banal nationalism, that there are everyday representations of the nation in a person's daily life, and that

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<sup>341</sup> Thompson. (2000), pp.157-158.

<sup>342</sup> Thompson. (2000), pp.90-92, 161-162

<sup>343</sup> Thompson. (2000), p.81. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, February 19). All Hail the United Empire Party. *Daily Mail*, p.10.

<sup>344</sup> Anderson ref. Michael Billig. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. Sage, p.24.

<sup>345</sup> Billig. (1995), p.24.

these are so common that they are not even noticed anymore.<sup>346</sup> Government made concerted efforts in the post-war period to achieve this sort of cultural penetration. Some like the Empire Marketing Board were recommended by the Imperial Economic Committee, to promote Empire products in Britain.<sup>347</sup> The Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924-5 displayed aspects of the Empire for 27 million attendees, the British Empire Film Institute was established in 1926 to develop British film making and interest in the Empire.<sup>348</sup> At their core these initiatives were intended to boost trade or expand British business, but they could also build recognition for the what the Empire was and how it touched people's lives. The efforts by government were accompanied by bodies such as the Royal Colonial Institute, Royal Asiatic Society and the Imperial Institute who promoted imperial unity, business opportunities and cultural understanding.<sup>349</sup> The fact that the Government took a hand in promoting the Empire following the Great War would suggest that Imperial awareness or common feeling needed to be rekindled, in order for the Empire to flourish. Andrew Thompson concurs, offering that the scale of imperial propaganda from the start of the twentieth century suggests an attempt to combat disenchantment with the Empire, despite the affinity created by the Great War.<sup>350</sup>

Thompson considers whether the Empire was the subject of the reading material of the British public and concludes that the working-class read little Imperial literature.<sup>351</sup> The typical books owned in working-class households in a 1904 study were the Bible, Pilgrims Progress, A Guide for Young Disciples.<sup>352</sup> The newspapers with a middle-class readership ensured they had plenty to read about the Empire and a search of texts in English, digitised by Google, and published between the start of the century and 1932 as set out below, suggests that there had been a marked increase in the use of

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<sup>346</sup> Billig. (1995), pp.37-38.

<sup>347</sup> Imperial Economic Committee. (1924). *Marketing and Preparing for Market of Foodstuffs Produced in the Overseas Parts of the Empire*. (799). His Majesty's Stationery Office, p.23.

<sup>348</sup> John M. MacKenzie. (1984). *Propaganda and empire: The manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960*. Manchester University Press, pp.77, 98, 102.

<sup>349</sup> MacKenzie. (1984), pp.129, 148-149.

<sup>350</sup> Thompson. (2008), p.30.

<sup>351</sup> Thompson. (2008), p.52.

<sup>352</sup> Thompson. (2008), p.53.

the phrase 'British Empire' in printed literature generally, albeit that this analysis gives no indication of the level of sales or readership.

Use of the term 'British Empire' in books published between 1900 and 1932 in English per Google ngram

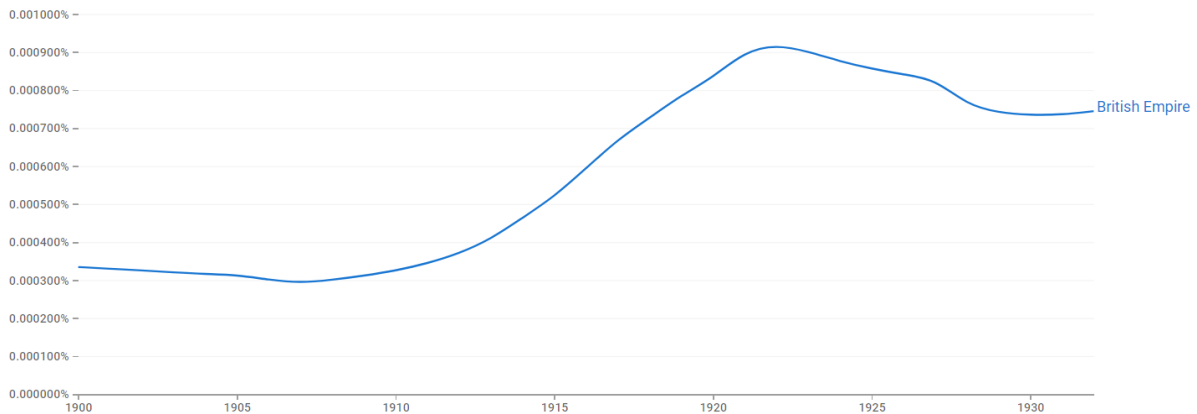


Figure 3

It is possible to identify concerns of a dearth of interest in the Empire through the actions of one of the organisations set up to promote understanding in it, the Royal Empire Society. Established as the Colonial Society its existence was formally ratified by Royal Charter as the Royal Colonial Institute in 1882, its Charter stated that it was to increase understanding of the Empire in Britain, encourage emigration and 'the preservation of a permanent union between the Mother Country and the various parts of the British Empire'.<sup>353</sup> In 1928 it became the Royal Empire Society, expanding its remit, 'To draw together in the bond of comradeship British Subjects the world over.'<sup>354</sup> It was a member organisation, its patron was the King, its senior members were drawn from the aristocracy, Parliament and the Church, but its membership ranged beyond that.<sup>355</sup> Following its foundation it had countered

<sup>353</sup> The Royal Colonial Institute. (1920). *Supplemental Charter – Copy Draft*. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/6/7). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge, p.1.

<sup>354</sup> The Royal Colonial Institute. (1920), p.5.

<sup>355</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Fellows of the Royal Empire Society*. (Wiltshire, Isle of Wight, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Cornwall, Hampshire, Devonshire.) (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/6/7). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge. Beasley. (2005), pp.2, 25,29.



the argument that the colonies acquired in the 1870s and 1880s were an economic encumbrance.<sup>356</sup> It had sought to express what the Empire stood for in a coherent and laudable way, in doing so fashioning the image of Britain as contributing to the development of democracy across the world, as well as expanding business opportunities.<sup>357</sup> By 1930 the Society wanted its membership to grow and was determined to address this by a trial drive for membership, something it had not undertaken to do before.<sup>358</sup> The intention to widen its membership was entrusted to Dr L. Haden Guest (1877-1960), former Labour MP and a prominent supporter of the Empire in the Labour ranks.<sup>359</sup> He was seen as sufficiently non-partisan for the campaign, which Guest was to focus on discussing trade opportunities within the Empire and thereby inciting interest, and adding new members.<sup>360</sup> He scouted for membership in the traditional habitat of the county establishment, such as rotary clubs of the South and South-West of England and so it was a determinedly middle class effort, but with membership fees of £2 2s. it proved too pricey an entrée.<sup>361</sup> In itself the failure may have been the fault of Dr Guest, his correspondence with former Conservative MP George Pilcher, Secretary of the Royal Empire Society, suggests mounting frustration with Guest's efforts.<sup>362</sup> But if the Royal Empire Society was failing to attract members to join this elite organisation, with the benefits it offered of a magazine and access to its exclusive library and collections, a lack of interest in things Imperial may be deduced.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Sir John Sandeman Allen. (1930, January 17). *When colonies were an encumbrance*. Bournemouth Visitors' Directory. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>357</sup> Beasley. (2005), pp.2-4.

<sup>358</sup> George Pilcher. (1930, January 15). *Letter introducing Dr Haden Guest*. Tour of West of England. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>359</sup> Notes and topics. (1930, January 23). *Dorset County Chronicle*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library

<sup>360</sup> L. Haden Guest. (1930, c.May). *Report on lecturing and organizing work for the Royal Empire Society*. Tour of West of England. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library, p.2.

<sup>361</sup> Guest. (1930, c.May), p.3.

<sup>362</sup> George Pilcher. (1930, March 14). *Letter to Haden Guest on disappointing progress*. Tour of West of England. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>363</sup> Guest. (1930, c.May), pp.4-5.

Of further note was the press coverage of the mission of Guest, which was considerable. Clearly the activity of the Royal Empire Society was of great interest to the newspapers across the country. Consequently, Guest's talks were reported in some detail as was the mission's context. Guest is reported in the *Yorkshire Evening Press* (the tour was of the South and South-West England) on 21 January 1930, he said, "The present is a difficult time in the history of the Empire. The Empire is made up to-day of delicately balanced units, many of them to all intents and purposes independent, held together by the most intangible bonds."<sup>364</sup> The *Portsmouth Evening News* reported his trip as a missionary to the town.<sup>365</sup> The content of his talks was mainly a review of the component parts of the Empire, in Bristol he talked about Australia, its strong trade unions, high wages and export subsidies, he talked about Canada in Clifton and the possibilities of emigration.<sup>366</sup> He also remarked that the French speakers of Quebec were:

One of the greatest bulwarks against American annexation or absorption or against the infiltration of American ideas, as any literature or papers from America conveying them would be printed in English, which would not be generally read in the French speaking areas.<sup>367</sup>

To pose the USA as a force to be defended against, suggests an embattled mentality in those speaking for the Empire. Speaking in Plymouth he voiced the concern it would be 'a calamity to the mankind of the world if the Empire were broken up, and he believed they should do all they could for the integrity, prosperity, greatness, and glory of the Empire.'<sup>368</sup> Guest conjured the prospect of failure,

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<sup>364</sup> Dr Haden Guest on his mission. (1930, January 1). *Yorkshire Evening Press*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>365</sup> Ex-M.P. on his travels. (1930, January 28). *Portsmouth Evening News*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>366</sup> The British Empire Today. (1930, January 18). *Western Daily Press*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library., Canadian Aspects Outline. (1930, February 1). *Western Daily Press*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>367</sup> Canadian Aspects Outline. (1930, February 1).

<sup>368</sup> Empire Society Growing. (1930, March). *Western Morning News & Mercury*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

but there was, 'no need for despondency in the outlook of the relationship between this country and the Empire', with the *Western Morning News & Mercury* headlining their coverage of his talk, 'No Decline, But Wrong Methods.'<sup>369</sup> Guest was not invoking decline purely as a rhetorical device, his speeches and the coverage of them suggest that amongst those who sought to promote the Empire as something important and economically valuable, there was fear that the Empire was in decline, or at least that this belief was abroad in Britain at the time.

The belief that the Empire was threatened was a deeply embedded one, whether it sprang from competition with the USA, an indifferent public or weak leadership it represented an anxiety amongst a section of society for whom the Empire was particularly important, the Conservatives. It was this that propelled it into political debate, and fuelled Beaverbrook and Rothermere's campaign, but the Empire was not otherwise a party-political matter, and the intrusion of the press lords was in danger of politicising something which was seen as part of the established order of Britain, to be educated about and impressed by, happy it was there, and not the subject of political speech. The Royal Empire Society were desperate to maintain a cross party approach, with supporters from any party, although as Guest wrote to Pilcher about the overzealous exclusion of a Liberal newspaper from one talk by Mr Ross, a local Tory official, 'I suppose that Mr Ross is so used to thinking of Empire in terms of the Conservative Party that he forgot to send an invitation.'<sup>370</sup> It was true the Conservatives held the Empire close to their hearts, but elements of Labour did too, Jimmy Thomas the Labour Secretary of State for the Colonies in the 1920s wrote, 'A proud boast of the British is that they have no equals as colonisers: I think it is true.'<sup>371</sup> He felt there was trustee responsibility to the native people of the

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<sup>369</sup> Empire Trade. (1930, March 21). *The Bristol Times & Mirror*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge. No Decline, but wrong methods. (1930, March 15). *Western Morning News & Mercury*. Durrants Press Cuttings. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>370</sup> Haden Guest. (1930, February 27). *Letter to George Pilcher regarding Exeter meeting*. Tour of West of England. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>371</sup> J. H. Thomas. (1937). *My story*. Hutchinson, p.81.

Empire and this was a view generally held in the party, including by Lord Passfield (1859-1947) the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Second Labour Government.<sup>372</sup> Passfield maintained the principle of European leadership in the Colonies, ostensibly on the basis of their technical expertise, albeit that Africans were encouraged to form co-operatives to drive farming production, as an alternative to traditional capitalist landlord and tenant arrangements.<sup>373</sup> An approach blending his Fabian ideology with maintaining the same imperial framework. Nor was it any part of Labour's ambition to end imperialism.<sup>374</sup>

Most revealing of all was the aversion of the Royal Empire Society to any association to Beaverbrook's ostensibly aligned campaign. In February 1930, George Davies MP and his Conservative Association cancelled Guest's meeting in Yeovil writing,

The matter was very fully discussed, and it was unanimously decided that, in the view of recent political happenings and the fact that, for the moment, the British Empire was becoming a party, or rather a personal, slogan, it was not desirable at this moment for my Association publicly to identify themselves with what might so easily be misconstrued by the ignorant as in some way connected with the United Empire Party.<sup>375</sup>

Guest himself reported to Pilcher on 26 March, that Beaverbrook's speech in Gloucester 'will create some difficulties for the work in that area'.<sup>376</sup> With the Empire now associated with the increasingly

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<sup>372</sup> Aaron Windel. (2012). *Co-operatives and the technocrats, or 'the Fabian agony' revisited*. In Laura Beers., Geraint Thomas(Eds.), *Brave new world: Imperial and democratic nation-building in Britain between the wars*. Institute of Historical Research, p.250.

<sup>373</sup> Windel. (2012), pp.251-252.

<sup>374</sup> Windel. (2012), p.249.

<sup>375</sup> George Davies. (1930, February 25). *Letter to Haden Guest about visit to his constituency*. Tour of West of England. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>376</sup> Haden Guest. (1930, March 3). *Letter to George Pilcher regarding Beaverbrook in Gloucester*. Tour of West of England. (GBR/0115/RCS/ARCS/17/4). Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

bitter attacks of Rothermere and Beaverbrook on the Conservative Opposition and the running of candidates based on an Empire policy. The quiet acceptance of the Empire as a force for good was being upset by the forceful injection of party-political calls about the way the Empire was being run and the need for repressive measures or a new trade policy.

The Royal Empire Society also ran an essay competition for school children of the Empire. It had begun in 1883 and the 1930 entries highlight how comfortable children felt to describe their racial superiority, their belief in what the Empire did, and that primarily the Empire was about trade. Empire Free Trade is even specifically referenced suggesting the societal penetration of Beaverbrook's campaign. But even within these peons of praise for the work of their forefathers there is evidence of unease about past atrocities and about the future direction of Empire. The essays should not be considered exceptional, rather they set out the underlying beliefs of children educated in Britain and the Dominions which were in accord with the beliefs of the Royal Empire Society. The competition essay titles provided by the Royal Empire Society in 1930 were 'Veni, Vidi, Vici. Britain in the Pacific: Past, Present, Future', 'Open Sesame. Seaports of the Empire' and 'The Story of the Canadian Railways', each available to different age categories of applicant.<sup>377</sup> The first title is illustrative of the plain credo of imperialism, linked to that of the Romans and providing an account of Britain's exploits in the Pacific. The first placed essay provides a sweeping account of the adventurous Elizabethans giving way to ineffectual Stuarts who stalled Britain's progress until explorers like James Cook in the eighteenth century.<sup>378</sup> It describes the settlement and formation of Australia and New Zealand, and the punitive campaigns of Governor Sir George Grey which 'cast a shadow on the career of one of our greatest Empire builders.'<sup>379</sup> The author comments on the present day lack of racism as the native populations have been 'practically exterminated' by European 'vices and diseases'.<sup>380</sup> The writer urges

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<sup>377</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Children's Essay Competition*. (GBR/0115/ RCS/ARCS/20/1/9.) Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>378</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Children's Essay Competition*, essay A winner

<sup>379</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Children's Essay Competition*, essay A winner.

<sup>380</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Children's Essay Competition*, essay A winner..

Empire Free Trade as the means to bind the Pacific into a federation, but based around Australia and New Zealand rather than Britain. Whilst there is the beginnings of a critique of earlier imperialist means, overall it rests on the acceptance that regrettable actions have resulted in current harmony, it also indicates the currency of the proposal for inter-empire trade and the recognition that parts of the Empire may have a divergent future from the Mother Country. The winner of the Section B essay competition waxes on the importance of trade in holding together the British Empire, an Empire built on commerce rather than conquest. It describes the dominions being populated by 'backward native races', with British settlers building up towns and trade.<sup>381</sup> The racial superiority felt by the writer is unremarkable as is the belief that the British Empire is purely a commercial one, somehow free of the military repression of others (the French are referenced). The winner of section C of the contest puts into context the development of empires and the massive transport feats required from the Roman road to Elizabethan shipping and to the Canadian railway. The writer highlights the importance in binding together the Canadian Federation and incorporating British Columbia whose natural links were with the United States.<sup>382</sup> It again links the British Empire of 1930 to the valorised Roman Empire and much fetishized Elizabethans, of particular note too is the remarked importance of the railways in thwarting the ingress of the United States, confirming underlying concerns in the Empire about the dominance of America. Whilst in no way critical of colonialism, even in the essays of well-educated children, selected as being excellent by the Royal Empire Society, it is possible to pick out elements of unease and introspection as well as backing for the contention that the Empire was all about trade. And if it is not about trade anymore, what is left?

As children were looking to the future imperial management of the Pacific, newspapers dealt with more current matters and through a review of the letters published in those newspapers it is possible to identify in a similar way, the concerns of readers that coincided with those of their publisher.

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<sup>381</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Children's Essay Competition*, essay B winner.

<sup>382</sup> Royal Empire Society. (1930). *Children's Essay Competition*, essay C winner.

Newspaper reports are intended to engage their readers and must reflect their interests, one might expect an even clearer expression of the reader's viewpoint from the letters sent into that newspaper. Looking at letters to *The Times* for example the viewpoint expressed is that of the ruling classes, the prevailing view reflects that of Baldwin, of whom *The Times* was generally supportive. Regarding India and the prospect of Dominion status in early 1930, they were generally supportive of the establishment position and were in favour of the legitimacy of Indian desires for self-government within the Empire, whilst urging the Government to take care and time, and involve the loyalist princely leaders.<sup>383</sup> The tone and language is measured and patrician, indicative of their feelings and how they wish their views to be perceived about Imperial topics. The arguments are intellectual, taking a stand against Labour cuts in the cruisers necessary to protect Imperial trade routes, but dismissing the practical value of Empire Free Trade.<sup>384</sup> The *Express* letters column scarcely mentions the Empire or Empire Free Trade, typically the concerns raised are somewhat a caricature of middle-class opinion. They proposed measures to control unruly youth; object to local noise pollution or to criticism of the military or to ill treatment of animals by foreigners; the tinkering with history in popular culture; and to half-hearted preaching of religion leading to empty pews.<sup>385</sup> The readers of the *Daily Mail* show no such reticence in commenting on Imperial matters. The USA is implicitly characterised as a challenger to British industry and achievements. One correspondent highlighted the need for protection for the British Car Industry from US imports.<sup>386</sup> Another opined about the need to promote British explorers to counter the reporting of their US counterparts.<sup>387</sup> One letter writer commented

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<sup>383</sup> Geoffrey Peto. (1930, January 10). The Future Of India. *Times*, 8. George MacMunn. (1930, January 15). Indian Aspirations. *Times*, 15.

<sup>384</sup> J. Latta. (1930, January 8). A New Year Wish For Industry. *Times*, 8. Stanhope. (1930, January 13). Reduction Of Cruisers. *Times*, 13. G. Drage. (1930, January 14). Naval Conference. *Times*, 10.

<sup>385</sup> Compulsory night schools. (1930, January 14). *Daily Express*, p.8. Belittling the soldier. (1930, February 7). *Daily Express*, p.8. Need for action. (1930, March 3). *Daily Express*, p.8. Tinkering with history. (1930, March 3). *Daily Express*, p.8.

<sup>386</sup> T. Murray. (1930, February 25). The Way to Prosperity. *Daily Mail*, 8.

<sup>387</sup> R. T. Thistlethwaite. (1930, January 8). Let the Empire See It. *Daily Mail*, 10.

on the situation in India and invokes General Dyer, 'Would that we had some more like him to cope with the present situation!'<sup>388</sup> Most starkly someone calling himself a 'working man' wrote on tariffs:

Between 1914 and 1918 many among us gave much. We still live. Others we shall for ever reverently honour used their last drop of blood defending our King and Empire. Is their sacrifice worth nothing? Will 1930 see a new loyal party, a body of men who will be British, think British and study first the interest of the great British Empire?<sup>389</sup>

The juxtaposition of the cause of trade war with the real war might appear startling as is the reference to blood being spilled, but the writer is echoing some of the despairing language of Rothermere that the Empire that Britain fought a war for is being lost.

One might question how representative one letter is of the movement, but a similar exposition of the cause is set out in the 'The Empire Parade' the official song of the United Empire Party, first performed to a massed gathering in Hyde Park in June 1930.<sup>390</sup> Calling on citizens in its chorus:

Join the big parade  
Let all unite  
To save our Empire.  
Not with gun or blade,  
But thro' our trade  
We all can aid it,  
We've been called before  
In time of war  
To save our Empire.  
She calls us now in peacetime

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<sup>388</sup> J. W. Brown. (1930, May 13). Case of General Dyer. *Daily Mail*, 10.

<sup>389</sup> A. Smirthwaite. (1930, January 6). Lesson from U. S. *Daily Mail*, 12.

<sup>390</sup> 10,000 Workers in the Park. (1930, June 28). *Daily Mail*, 11.



To join the Empire Parade.

Later going on sale for 1s 1d it is not registered as a particularly popular song, performed by the Empire Military Band, at a time when upbeat Swing music was becoming popular.<sup>391</sup> It reinforces the message that the Empire was maintained through war, but may be lost in peace. The much lighter and more satirical 'Empire Party Song' by well known big band leader Leslie Sarony came out in 1930.<sup>392</sup> The upbeat dance tune mocks garlic eating foreign strong men as well as Baldwin's pipe smoking, ending, 'If you'll only join the Empire Party they'll make you feel at home, and if they can't get you all inside the Empire they'll put you in the Hippodrome!'<sup>393</sup> The fact that popular entertainment was picking up on the cultural phenomena of the United Empire Party and its ilk, is hardly surprising, and it was treated with the same level of gentle mockery as the established political parties. Whilst such treatment would indicate that these movements had entered mainstream consciousness it did not make Rothermere any less comfortable with being in the public eye. Proving highly sensitive to such treatment he asked Beaverbrook to keep caricatures out of his newspapers, Beaverbrook complied whilst proving more relaxed about his satirical appearances, often appearing characterised in David Low's *Daily Express* cartoons.<sup>394</sup>

### Supporters of the Cause

Despite the *Daily Express's* best efforts to suggest otherwise, the most telling argument of opponents of Empire Free Trade, was to the housewife, concerned at the growing cost of food. When Baldwin

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<sup>391</sup> "Empire Parade" Record. (1930, July 5). *Daily Mail*, 5.

<sup>392</sup> Leslie Sarony. (1930). Empire Party Song. HMV. (BDB/A4/169). Heritage Quay, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield. Roy Hudd. Sarony, Leslie [real name Leslie Legge Frye] (1897–1985), songwriter and entertainer. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>393</sup> Sarony. (1930).

<sup>394</sup> Ernest Outhwaite. (1930, July 12). *Personal Letter to Beaverbrook asking that Rothermere should not appear in Evening Standard cartoons*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. Max Aitken, Baron Beaverbrook. (1930, July 14). *Personal Letter to Ernest Outhwaite on Rothermere appearing in Evening Standard cartoon*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive. David Low. (1930, March 5) *A marriage of prosperity*. *Daily Express*, p.8.

ran on a protectionist policy in 1923 and was unsuccessful, the London Area Conservative Party, which backed the policy, concluded that women were influenced by the prospect of dear food.<sup>395</sup> This argument which had been made against the policy in the pre-war period, would be prosecuted effectively by the Labour Party in the North Norfolk by-election in 1930. The Labour candidate Lady Noel Buxton prepared notes with a number of attack lines for speeches that she made across the constituency, these successfully railed against rule by the press, but also for cheap food for all, and against favouring farmers as prejudicial to shop keepers, hoteliers or caterers, reflective of the makeup of the constituency.<sup>396</sup> Arguments for cheap food were made in gendered terms to women as those responsible for the household budget, and those for protectionism targeted the industrial worker to protect their industry from unfair foreign competition and to boost employment.<sup>397</sup> Election material to that effect was a mainstay of Conservative anti-Labour propaganda and formed part of Baldwin's appeal to the working class. Attempts to persuade of the value of Empire goods and to raise women's awareness were made by the Empire Marketing Board, providing recipes including the Christmas pudding made from goods from across the Empire.<sup>398</sup>

Keenly aware of the injection of this new class of voters, the Anti-Waste League appeal to women was also based on their estimation of the issues women were most motivated by, linking their interest in the household budget to the national budget.<sup>399</sup> In Thanet in 1919 with women forming almost half the electorate they were reckoned to be particularly interested in the League's calls on the government to 'stop their spendthrift habits', reflecting concern at the cost to the household of

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<sup>395</sup> Sir Herbert Jessel. (1923, December 21). *Memorandum to FS Jackson on London MPs*. (ARE 1/29/1). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>396</sup> Lady Lucy Noel-Buxton. (1931, c.July). *By-election speech notes*. Speeches and Congratulations. (MC2331/1/1/1 – 958x9). Papers of Lady Lucy Noel-Buxton, Norfolk Records Office.

<sup>397</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party. (1930, February). *Free trade means "reduction of wages"*. Conservative Party Election Leaflets 1930-1931. (1930/34, PUB/52/1). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository. Conservative and Unionist Party. (1930). *Sauce for the goose*. Conservative Party Election Leaflets 1930-1931. (1930/75, PUB/52/1). Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Libraries Repository.

<sup>398</sup> Matthew C. Hendley. (2018). *Conservative women and the Primrose League's struggle for survival, 1914–32*. In Clarisse Berthezène, Julie V. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Rethinking right-wing women: Gender and the Conservative party, 1880s to the present*. Manchester University Press, pp.74-75.

<sup>399</sup> Stop waste fight in Thanet by-election. (1919, October 21). *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

increased Government taxation.<sup>400</sup> The case to women was made often by the *Daily Mirror*, a newspaper which already sought to appeal to a female readership, as a successful newspaper needed to understand and appeal to its readers, the importance of these issues to women may be assumed. At the Dover by-election a year later the British Women's Patriotic League, the National Council of Women, the Women's Advisory Committee of the National Savings Committee, the Duty and Discipline Movement, the British Federation of University Women and the Mothers Union, were all reported to be backing the Anti-Waste cause.<sup>401</sup> With such august middle class female support, news of the candidate's behaviour that led to a divorce was undoubtedly unhelpful, leading to prompt suppressive legal action against *The People*.<sup>402</sup> In the wake of the victory of the Anti-Waste candidate, *The Observer* commented that whilst women had proven largely apathetic at the general election, if parties could find something to excite them, the 'unpolled residue' could change the party system.<sup>403</sup> The Unionist appeal to women would make much of them as 'Chancellor of the Exchequer' of the household, as someone who would back a small government, low tax policy without necessarily making arguments of economic policy, rather relying on women's presumed instinctive reaction to domestic matters. This would be built upon with a general anti-socialist message in Party publications produced throughout the 1920s such as *Home and Politics* and *The Conservative Woman*.<sup>404</sup> The characterisation of the Tory women voter in the Maggs and Betty short stories in *Home and Politics* is revealing of the basis of the party's message. Mrs Maggs is depicted as a quintessential Conservative woman full of common sense, propriety and with a sense of fair play, who tries to save her feckless friend Betty from herself.<sup>405</sup> The characters also exemplify the changing stance to protectionism as

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<sup>400</sup> From Our Special Correspondent. (1919, October 23). What women demand. *Daily Mirror*, p.3. From our special correspondent. (1919, November 5). Housewives part in battle of Thanet. *Daily Mirror*, p.3.

<sup>401</sup> Women's war on waste. (1920, December 14). *Times*, 12.

<sup>402</sup> Our own Correspondent. (1921, January 3). Dover By-Election. *Daily Mail*, 2. The Dover Election Sensation. (1921, January 7). *Dover Express*, 5.

<sup>403</sup> The government and the political situation. (1921, Jan 16). *The Observer (1901- 2003)*.

<sup>404</sup> David Thackeray. (2010). Home and politics: Women and conservative activism in early twentieth century Britain. *The Journal of British Studies*, 49(4), 826-848, pp.839-841.

<sup>405</sup> David Jarvis. (1994). Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s. *20th Century British History*, 5(2), 129-152, p.133.

Maggs makes the case for it, in a domestic context to persuade her friend of the dangers of free trade.<sup>406</sup>

Whilst it would be illuminating to understand the views of the membership of the Anti-Waste League, Empire Crusade and United Empire Party, their actual involvement in determining Party policy was non-existent and little evidence has remained of local party organisation. In addition, there were no membership fees and therefore no requirement to commit to the Party beyond sending in a completed slip from the newspaper. This low barrier to entry would have inflated membership figures and might in any case dilute commitment and knowledge of policy. A distinction to the Conservative Party was that in the 1920s it had started requiring local members to contribute to their party in order to join.<sup>407</sup> The lack of extant individual party membership records means it is difficult to talk about the type of people that joined and to speculate on their motivation and the parties' reach. Ball's analysis of the membership of the remaining records of the Empire Crusade identify that the Crusade was strongest in Southern England and suburbs of London, as well as in farming areas in the East, but with few records of support in the North of England.<sup>408</sup> The concentration on the South of England was similar to the Anti-Waste League and based on the Secretary's account of the way the League operated, it deliberately lacked any discernible local party structure.<sup>409</sup> Members were asked which constituencies they were based in, this will have helped Rothermere to determine where to run a candidate and give a base of local people who could be drawn upon to assist in campaigning.<sup>410</sup> Nor did the local party have any say in the direction of the League. A similar approach was developed for the United Empire Party and Empire Crusade, however locally organised groups were established and in the case of the United Empire Party did attempt to assert some independence. The South

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<sup>406</sup> Jarvis. (1994), p.133.

<sup>407</sup> John Ramsden, J. (1978). *A history of the Conservative party: [vol.3], the age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*. Longman, p.245.

<sup>408</sup> Ball. (1988), pp.222-223.

<sup>409</sup> Outhwaite. (1929, December 3).

<sup>410</sup> Your duty to join Anti-Waste League. (1921, Jan 23).

Paddington by-election in October 1930 saw both the independence of the local United Empire Party and its impotence when working alone. Against Rothermere's express wishes, they decided to run Mrs Stewart Richardson and he telegraphed Beaverbrook, 'Don't believe a woman has any chance South Paddington so will not support her.'<sup>411</sup> Beaverbrook in turn was concerned she was a member of the Conservative Party intent on splitting the anti-Conservative vote, as he ran an Empire Crusade candidate Admiral Taylor.<sup>412</sup> Rothermere's response to the local United Empire Party's defiance was not to cover her campaign and to only acknowledge her when reporting the final count whilst not applying any party label after her name.<sup>413</sup> Other than this example, both the Empire Crusade and United Empire Party were compliant with their patron's wishes, which indicates a relationship to authority that was common in the Conservative Party. Whilst the supporters were consciously going against the leadership of their former home in the Conservatives, they largely retained their basic respect for those in positions of leadership.<sup>414</sup>

The household budget, the price of food and the growing domestic crisis ultimately outweighed fears over Imperial decline. The Empire was important to the Conservative minded person, but seemingly the pragmatic immediate demands of everyday living were more pressing than anger over giving in to Gandhi or the poor working conditions of Argentinian gauchos. The appeal to women voters was therefore ultimately double edged, they could understand the concept of rising costs for European food imports, but their affinity for the people of the Empire was not such that they would bear such a sacrifice. As something ephemeral and magnificent, it was not truly present in British people's lives and the emotional draw engendered by exhibitions, references in novels and newspapers were not

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<sup>411</sup> Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, September 20). *Letter to Lord Beaverbrook on Mrs Richardson and South Paddington*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>412</sup> The Prosperity Candidate. (1930, October 25). *Daily Mail*, 10. Women Flock to Prosperity Banner. (1930, October 28). *Daily Mail*, 11.

<sup>413</sup> ADM. Taylor's Victory. (1930, November 1). *Daily Mail*, 11. Harold Harmsworth, Viscount Rothermere. (1930, September 22). *Letter to Lord Beaverbrook on press coverage of Mrs Richardson at South Paddington*. (BBK/C/284b). Beaverbrook Papers, Parliamentary Archive.

<sup>414</sup> Ball. (2013), p.461. Steve Ball. (2005) *Democracy and the rise of Labour*. In Steve Ball, & Anthony Seldon. *Recovering power: The conservatives in opposition since 1867*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.160-161.

enough to realise an imagined community. For the Empire to remain as a Conservative issue it was enough for it to remain in public consciousness as a source of pride, destination for emigration and a theatre for upper-class adventure. It's resources could be exploited and its people civilised and the Motherland would benefit, but would not re-order its economy for an imagined future benefit for all.

## Conclusion

Decline and the means to arrest it has been a recurrent theme in twentieth century British history. It can generate anxiety, anger or even fear in those who expect strength and when warfare or economic performance, the touchstones of power, threatens their imagined reality it can create uncertainty and prompt calls for change. The form of that change as I have discussed here may be radical or reactionary in nature, and in many ways these movements shared commonalities in their approach. Whether it was the embrace of modern media, populist methods and rhetoric, or an overlap of personnel and consequent close working relationships between those involved. The radical change proposed by the National Efficiency movement at the start of the century, included the Late Victorian Tariff Reform programme and elements of these prospectuses would reappear in the post-war period up to the start of the 1930s. The considerations of these ideas, particularly when they can be linked to modern day developments, has engaged historiographical discussion, whilst the rejection or reversal of change does not tend to excite the same level of study. Elements of the arguments to address decline can be seen in the two cultures debate in the 1950s, which echoes the arguments for increased scientific and technical specialism of National Efficiency, a thesis then heavily criticised by Anderson who proposed a Marxist based explanation. The purpose of the discussion in this thesis is not to identify the causes of decline but to highlight the duration of the debate and the perspective of right-wing critics in the 1920s and 1930s.

The declinist fears of the 1920s and 1930s were not new, I have discussed how in the 1880s there were the first stirrings of concern at the development of Germany and the USA, how the costly victories of the South African War added to the self-doubt of the clerisy and the National Efficiency movement crystallised this analysis, identifying the need for a greater focus on scientific and business methods and an objection to the amateurism that had become a feature of the upper-class approach to government and Empire. The rise of nationalism during and following the Great War, would

unsettle the bonds of blood that held the Dominions and Britain together and force the embattled British Government to consider the military and financial cost of holding its colonies against their will. The financial threat to the Exchequer and potential unravelling of British Imperial prestige, presaged the question of British decline and popular newspapers translated it to the wider middle and more prosperous working-class readership. Unconvinced by the primacy of social reform following the Great War, they sought the essence of earlier British development, a small non-interventionist state, a minimal army and a balanced budget, releasing the capitalist potential of British society.

Whilst the concerns articulated by Rothermere, Beaverbrook and Bottomley were generally economic in nature, they were generally positive about the character of the British people, whilst criticising that of the ruling elite. They can therefore be distinguished somewhat from concerns about general racial decline which accompanied the opening of the century. The South African War highlighted the poor physical condition of the working classes, there was also concern that the population was not growing as much as the nation's competitors. This was both a racial and economic question as Sydney Webb opined in the Times in 1906, 'What will be its results upon the economic and social relationships – what upon the future of the race?'<sup>415</sup> Concerns about the future of the race were not part of the rhetoric of the populist right, it certainly did not fit into their discourse to discuss the potential fault of, and weakness amongst the mass of their supporters. Rather these were the concerns of the patrician class who they opposed, and as a consequence their appeals had none of the moralistic basis of those who were concerned with the declining birth rate or the sexual habits of the people. Both the populist and patrician critique were borne of a concern of decline, whilst each evidenced that decline differently, and advocated different policy solutions that were sympathetic to their existing political persuasions.

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<sup>415</sup> Sidney Webb. (1906, October 11). Physical Degeneracy or Race Suicide? *The Times*, p. 10



Whilst Perry Anderson propounded a class based explanation for decline later in the century, in the 1920s and 1930s there was also a sense that the ruling classes had failed Britain. The argument was partially an intellectual one borrowing the business government idea from National Efficiency, but it was mainly populist, the leaders were weak and wrong-headed, petty and self-interested. They lacked the vision and daring of a Queen Elizabeth or the single-mindedness of a Cecil Rhodes. By appealing to the self-interest of Britain they described new economic relationships to revivify the Empire, to cast off well-meaning attempts at self-determination and instead to impose the Empire's will by force if required. These attempts to grant new purpose to the Empire implicitly acknowledged that the British people's faith and interest in the Empire was not deeply ingrained. The Empire was ever-present but not all important and the answer to British decline meant that Britain should come first over any conception of responsibility to more distant members of the British race, or less civilised people and so attempts to bring the Empire into the centre of political debate failed. The Empire was an ornament of British life, like the Monarchy or Church of England which were important to the Conservative mindset. It gave a sheen to the hierarchical structures of British society. It would remain important to trade and a destination for emigration, but no mainstream government dreamt of the disruption or refashioning the economic structure of Britain with the Empire. The acceptance of the free market was not challenged by any of the main parties and whilst an element of protection was adopted, as well as schemes of resource development in the Empire these were modest and not impactful.

The declinist argument, rooted in Conservative opposition to their leadership, arose when the country experienced an economic crisis, coupled with the perception that the leadership was insufficiently right wing. In the early 1920s and 1930s the party was led by more agreeable, moderate elements of their Party who sought closer relations with other Parties, seeking to co-opt their membership into the Conservative Party. The combination of tangible hardship and a policy prescription they were uncomfortable with, forced out the opponents of the broad consensus that the Conservatives were

generally effective in holding together. The die-hard caucus could then release their fears about the direction of the Party and the country. Whilst the economically liberal strand in Conservative thinking judged that wasteful governmental expansion was the cause of economic decline, they linked this to a spiralling moral decline in the robustness of the nation, which the moderate attitudes of their elderly and weak leadership would only further exacerbate.

The mix of populism into the opposition to the consensus was also an important part of its appeal. It was not entirely new for the Conservatives to set themselves up in opposition to the governing classes. The objection to Liberal government measures to improve the lives of the working class, whether through controlling alcohol consumption, or gambling, gave the Conservatives the rhetorical opportunity to stand with the working man against the high-minded Liberals who sought to interfere with their visceral enjoyment of life. The *John Bull* magazine of Horatio Bottomley prosecuted the populist case in very much the same terms, and his electoral successes combined a sometime dry anti-waste message and the more ebullient anti-politics that he frequently espoused. Not only did these successes prove to the Conservatives that they need not fear an expanded male electorate, they enabled opponents on the right a means of attacking their own government made up of mere party politicians, rather than men of worldly experience and understanding of business, the military or of financial matters. They could also mobilise a jingoistic appeal against Britain's enemies in the Great War and champion the cause of the veterans disenchanted with the post war settlement. Whilst populism reached an apogee with Bottomley it was also employed by Beaverbrook and Rothermere and their acolytes, but rarely as authentically and convincingly. Beaverbrook's case could be both intellectual and xenophobic, but his repeated attempts to influence the Conservatives rather than displace them meant that his attacks tended to be intermittent and came to be seen as personal. Whilst Rothermere lacked a proponent of his more reactionary message that would capture the attention of the electorate and when Mosley did not prove as controllable as he anticipated, his second incursion with the United Empire Party failed, unlike the Anti-Waste movement.

Whilst in many ways the victory in the Great War enhanced the prestige of Britain, by 1930 the strength of the USA was apparent as was her appeal to the Dominions, who economically gravitated towards her. This was the chief fear of Beaverbrook who observed the movement first hand, and such concerns were widely felt, particularly by those of a Conservative mindset to whom the Empire was an important part of their outlook. Beaverbrook's conception of the Empire did not set to the forefront the majesty and lofty mission to civilise, his case was primarily an economic one but his radical economic reorganisation was more than a Conservative could contemplate, and it would stretch the loyalty of the real life counterparts of Maggs and Betty to pay more for their groceries from the Empire, no matter how many cake recipes they learned about or promotions for Imperial goods the Empire Marketing Board undertook.

The political importance of trade policy can baffle in retrospect but may also bear dangerously attractive parallels with contemporary political events. The currently unrealised, discussion of the benefits of the Anglosphere and CANZUK cooperation can also look like Beaverbrook's calls for Imperial economic unity updated in the twenty-first century.<sup>416</sup> In order to combine one's markets freely with others, it is necessary for there to be an unreserved commitment of the British people to a wider imagined community. They simply lacked that imagination towards the Dominions then, as the British people rejected European integration today. In a competition between the transcendent and earthly aspects of the Conservative mind, the understood, immediate, traditional and experienced triumphed over the theoretical, ideological and imagined. Contradictory as they may be, both can exist and interact in the broad Conservative understanding of the political world.

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<sup>416</sup> Matt Kilcoyne. (2020). *CANZUK is a bold, imaginative, and popular blueprint for a global Britain*. Conservative Home.

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