

# The Phoenix Generation at Westminster

Great War Veterans Turned Tory MPs, Democratic Political Culture, and the path of British Conservatism from the Armistice to the Welfare State

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## **Abstract**

This analysis intertwines two narratives: the impact of the Great War upon British public life, and the history of the Conservative Party. It shows how the memory of 1914-18 influenced Westminster politics for decades after the conflict. Whereas previous accounts have placed the ex-serviceman at the periphery of events – in pressure groups like the British Legion or as single issue campaigners fighting for issues directly connected to soldierly causes (war pensions, memorials and such) – this analyses those soldiers who became Conservative MPs after 1918 as a distinct and philosophically inquisitive cohort, and places them within the key trends and issues of the day.

Using numerous archival sources, together with primary and secondary literature, it illustrates how the war formed a turning point in the lives of politicians later to assume prominence (including Harold Macmillan and Anthony Eden) together with lesser names. It places such figures within the Conservative Party structure – outlining bones of contention with the leadership, principally Stanley Baldwin, and at the same time shows where the ex-serviceman cohort was unable to reach consensus.

In its later sections, it shows why such a body did not rise up and rebel against parliamentary democracy in Great Britain, as they did in Germany and Italy. It also challenges popular perceptions of the political isolation of Oswald Mosley, the shape of anti-appeasement movements within Westminster, and the nature of the post-war consensus. Finally, it outlines how this cohort was eventually eclipsed by younger men, and how an understanding of this very eclipse can help explain the path British politics took in the second half of the twentieth century.

Partially jettisoned then, is the impression painted by literary works of a generation shell-shocked to the point of inertia, and condemned to wallow in despair. In its place emerges a tale of sustained political activism.

## **Word Count**

This thesis comprises a total of 96,449 words.

## **Thesis Content Statement**

The following represents only the candidate's work (i.e. nothing by way of collaboration), and has not been previously submitted for any degree, at UEA or elsewhere.

### List of Abbreviations

The following are acronyms and abbreviations used in the main body of text. Footnotes are also abbreviated, indicated in the bibliography.

B.U.F. – British Union of Fascists

D.S.O. – Distinguished Service Order

L.N.U. – League of Nation's Union

M.C. – Military Cross

N.U.X. – National Union of Ex-Servicemen

O.T.C. – Officer Training Corps

O.W.D. – Out of Work Donation Scheme, introduced in November 1918.

R.I.C. – Royal Irish Constabulary

T.R.C. – Tory Reform Committee

U.D.C. – Union of Democratic Control

Y.M.C.A. – the loose alignment of young Tory members that emerged in the mid-1920s.

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

### **.1 The Problem**

What follows is an attempt to reinterpret the meaning of the First World War in British public life by reference to what a sample of its survivors - those who became Tory Members of Parliament - did in its aftermath. It aims to reshape our views on a range of points, ranging from philosophical constructs such as conservatism (with small and large 'c') and the place of democracy in Great Britain, to more concrete matters of interwar politics, both domestic and foreign. Such claims, it is true, may elicit an initial scepticism from the reader. To begin with, what on earth can be added to a historiography that, through the work of Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes and others, has itself spawned a historiography?<sup>1</sup> Similarly, though the discovery of a trench in Northern France or Belgium occasionally belies such a notion, one might raise concerns that few new sources - of any kind - can be added to any Great War debate. To the curious researcher, some of the types of material that informs a study such as this - diaries, autobiographies, parliamentary debates - have long been available.<sup>2</sup> Given this, what more is there possibly to say about the place of the war in the British national story?

Actually, it seems, a significant amount. The historiographical problem this account intends to remedy is neither one of insufficient sources, nor the uncovering of some hitherto completely untouched academic territory. Whilst, as we will see, there remains room to indeed achieve both these points to varying degrees, what our understanding of the Great War requires is not always new tools to tell the story more completely, but the refocusing of old approaches in new directions. The way we conceptualise the war is exceptionally British. For all the

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<sup>1</sup> P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (London, 1975); S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, (London, 1990) and M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, (London, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of the longevity of sources on the war include E. Hilton Young, *By Sea and Land: Some Naval Doings*, (London, 1920) and J.M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen - And Others: An Autobiography*, (London, 1933). By 1933 Kenworthy had already conceded his generations defeat (3): 'we allowed the old men to continue muddling along in the old ways in finance, industry, and politics and acquiesced in their hopeless and useless methods. Youth returning from the Wars should have taken control.'



movements towards cross cultural and supra-national boundary ways of writing history in recent years, little of this has seemingly permeated our views on 1914-18.<sup>3</sup> To summarise, on the continent the war is seen as the great political dynamo, fuelling the fascism of Benito Mussolini, the National Socialism of Adolf Hitler, Italian *irredenta* and the mutilated victory, German anger at the Versailles *diktat* and a pervasive *dolschstoßlegende*.<sup>4</sup> In Britain the war is not viewed in the same causative light which, as Deborah Cohen has shown with relevance to the state's comparative (by the standards of the Weimar Republic) neglect of ex-servicemen, is somewhat surprising.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the conflict is often seen as the harbinger of great political upheaval - even the birth of a new form of capitalism.<sup>6</sup> The enfranchising of women and impoverished men, the increasing socio-parliamentary *Impact of Labour*, the ever more noticeable encroachment of state - begun in war but carried over into the peace - apparatus were all tangible.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately however the driving forces behind such trends are often insufficiently understood. Concurrent to the reactive, largely non-veteran, political

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<sup>3</sup> J.H. Bentley, 'Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History,' *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), 749-770. Even in victorious France, Adrian Gregory importantly notes, the defeats of 1870 and 1940 lend a different emphasis to 1914-18: a tragedy to be sure, but an ultimately victorious one. A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, 2008), 2.

<sup>4</sup> For the impact of World War One, see I.K. Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*, (London, 1998), *passim* and R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Dictatorship*, (London, 2005), *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> D. Cohen, *The War Came Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany 1914-1939*, (London, 2001), 3, 'At the heart of this study is an apparent paradox. Contrary to historians' expectations, the state's largesse did not secure, nor did its absence preclude, the loyalty of veterans... In contrast [to Weimar Germany], British ex-servicemen remained the Crown's loyal subjects though they received only meagre material compensation.'

<sup>6</sup> W.G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory, Volume Three: Applied Social Theory*, (Cambridge, 1997) and Idem, 'Has British Capitalism Changed Since the First World War?,' *British Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1993), 53-67.

<sup>7</sup> M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics*, (Cambridge, 1971) and R. Lowe, 'Government,' in S. Constantine, M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *The First World War in British History*, (London, 1995), 29-50. For the increased role of the state generally, see W.H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition: The Rise of Collectivism*, (London, 1983), 31-40. In 1910 public expenditure was 13% of GNP, half that of 1930. The percentage of the working population employed by the government also increased rapidly from 5.8% in 1911 to 9.7% by 1931. Lastly, the average number of statutes passed rose from 48.3 in the twentieth century's first decade to 57.9 by its third.

elite who acquiesced to these changes in Westminster, there was a significant body of former soldiers urging the need for proactive measures which deserve greater attention. Rather than looking at why the elites succumb to pressure (or not), it is surely equally important to understand said pressure – both in terms of its origins and forms - as much as possible. If war could lay the groundwork for fascism, as George Mosse has argued, could it not also have implications for the ultimate *preservation of democracy*?<sup>8</sup>

We need to make a basic reconnection. The problem is that, in essence, we have divorced the ex-serviceman from the party political process in Great Britain. The reasons for this are numerous. Firstly, no ex-serviceman's party entered the political arena in a serious way until Oswald Mosley went off the conventional rails after 1930. Previous efforts, including the anti-Semitic Silver Badge Party and the various candidates backed by MP turned fraudster Horatio Bottomley, were little beyond amateur. The subsequent failure of Mosleyite fascism rendered the notion essentially dead, it appears. Ex-servicemen's grievances had been funneled off into the world of the pressure group: the National Union of Ex-Servicemen (NUX) for leftists, the British Legion for the right.<sup>9</sup> By 1924 the Legion had over 150,000 members, and approaching four times this figure by the outbreak of hostilities 15 years later.<sup>10</sup> Unlike much of Europe, Britain had no experience of a mass civilian army prior to 1914, and that soldiers conformed to pre-1914 political patterns should not shock. Given the sometimes disgraceful reputation of those who took the ex-serviceman label into the Westminster arena - *Patriotism Perverted* to borrow Richard Griffith's phrase - it is perhaps not surprising Britons choose to

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<sup>8</sup> G.L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, (New York, 1990), 7.

<sup>9</sup> As Niall Barr has recently illustrated, the British Legion remained – by and large – stringently apolitical at a national level. N. Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921-1939*, (London, 2005). 10: 'The House of Commons Branch [of the Legion] contained over 150 members of Parliament, but was never able, or indeed designed, to marshal MPs in opposition to the party whips.' Local exceptions, like Jack Cohen, of course existed, and maybe fertile ground for future research outside of an overtly Westminster project such as this.

<sup>10</sup> G. Wooton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, (London, 1956), 305.

regard the military and politics as fundamentally diverged.<sup>11</sup> For all the sterling work surrounding single issues such as war pensions, there is room to explore the political process per se a little deeper.<sup>12</sup>

The classic accounts of the interwar epoch paid lip-service to the idea of a British war generation. A.J.P. Taylor and C.L. Mowat drew attention to a body of ex-servicemen in parliament before essentially dismissing it.<sup>13</sup> French historians have been similarly reticent to analyse *les anciens combattants et la politique anglaise*: Rene Remond comparing French ex-service movements to the American Legion and Mussolini, whilst Antoine Prost concentrated merely on the former.<sup>14</sup> *La generation du feu*, evidently, does not translate politically across the English Channel.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, British Conservative historians have been willing to highlight the actions of young Tory veterans during this period, but this has almost always been within a party, rather than a legacy of war, context.<sup>16</sup> In short, though Michael Paris's portrayal of a *Warrior Nation* and Dan Todman's account of the ambiguous lessons of war suggest the wheel may be turning, even prosaic historians can find it difficult to challenge ingrained assumptions about the

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<sup>11</sup> R. Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club and British Anti-Semitism*, (London, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Cohen and Barr aside, from the German perspective it would be remiss not to acknowledge R. Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939*, (Ithaca, 1984), on war pensions and the collapse of Weimar/rise of Nazism. On first glance, the European comparison really does do British democracy few favours with Weimar allocating over 20% of its 1931-2 expenditure on war pensions, whilst France mustered 15%. Britain lagged behind on 5.9%. Cohen, *War Came Home*, 194.

<sup>13</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-45* (Oxford, 1970), 176; C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940*, (London, 1966), 8.

<sup>14</sup> R. Remond, 'Les Anciens Combattants et la Politique,' *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 5 (1955), 267-290; A. Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants 1914-1940*, (Paris, 1977), passim.

<sup>15</sup> Though it does in terms of war memorials. See C. Jamet-Bellier de la Duboisiere, *Commemorating the Lost Generation: First World War Memorials in Cambridge, Oxford and Some English Public Schools*, Cambridge M. Litt Thesis, 1994, 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> For example, J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996*, (London, 1996); A. Clark, *The Tories: Conservatives and the Nation State, 1922-1997*, (London, 1998) and J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*, (London, 1978). Gary Sheffield, conversely, limited himself to the rather reserved comment that 'some politicians attempted to capitalise on their war service in an attempt to win veterans' votes.' G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War*, (London, 2000), 132.

separation of the political and military in Britain.<sup>17</sup>

Historians and social commentators have, it is true, skirted around the edge of telling the tale that is to follow. The decline of the aristocracy after 1918, and how they reconciled themselves to the new world - not always successfully - is a well trodden one this account implicitly explores, building upon the numerous "dinner table" interwar histories of gentrified figures.<sup>18</sup> The problem with such accounts however is that they are often extremely self-contained. D.J. Taylor's *Bright Young People* offers a good example when stating that

the cult of youth was one to which practically every inhabitant of the British Isles in the 1920s would have unhesitatingly subscribed. One can see this everywhere in post-war life - in the determination of political parties to repopulate their ranks with youthful, media-friendly war veterans (Eden, Macmillan, Mosley), in the vogue for twenty-something playwrights and entertainers (Noel Coward, Ivor Novello).<sup>19</sup>

Aside from the massive generalisation in the first sentence, histories such as these do not widely illuminate. To be sure, there was a matinee idol class of Briton between the wars whose story is worth telling. Yet if such a story is not fitted into the wider picture of interwar Britain, what use does it have? In our account then, Eden, Macmillan and Mosley are placed very much within the wider socio-political milieu, rather than the world of the country estate. Analysing how aristocrats adapted to the new electoral and societal order can provide more than a mere description of the desperate last throws of a decaying order. That is not to say that the decline of the aristocracy has not been woven into the wider political picture previously, but that this account proposes to alter the scale a little. If you accept the

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<sup>17</sup> M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture 1850-2000*, (Wiltshire, 2000) and D. Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, (London, 2005). Even if Todman in particular suggests an ambiguity in the lessons of war, the crucial point is that such questions were part of the general zeitgeist.

<sup>18</sup> For example, A. De Courcy, *The Viceroy's Daughters: The Lives of the Curzon Sisters*, (London, 2003) and J. Mitford, *Hons and Rebels*, (London, 1960)

<sup>19</sup> D.J. Taylor, *Bright Young Things*, (London, 2007), 36.

premise that most soldiers came back from the Great War - as Jay Winter, Robert Wohl and others have worked hard to illustrate demographically - the image of the isolated, sparse aristocrat becomes less tenable.<sup>20</sup> It is almost Holocaust denial in reverse. Instead of David Irving trying to argue how millions of Jews presumably just disappeared between 1941 and 1945, historians have sometimes tended to impose an interwar Britain without the aristocrats who, in reality, manifestly *were* there.<sup>21</sup> Antoine Prost voiced similar doubts as regards *les Anciens Combattants* in France: as he pointed out, ex-soldiers came home, and could live exceedingly normal post-1918 lives, for all the well-documented (genuine and mythologised) sorrow.<sup>22</sup> We will turn to the various historiographies in greater depth at the beginning of each chapter.

## .2 The Pervasion of Trauma

As we will see at the beginning of the first section, since the late 1920s it has been near impossible for the Great War to be understood in all its complexity in the popular mindset. As Gary Sheffield commented, once the literary dam of 1929-30 burst, any hope of an alternative history of 1914-18 was essentially drowned in its midst.<sup>23</sup> Graves, Remarque, Hemingway, Blunden, Sherriff and many others drove an industry that even today impresses in its scale.<sup>24</sup> *Blackadder Goes Forth*, *Gallipoli*, and *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*, have provided something of a continuation onto screen, both big and small. Through such a prism the war, driven by the allegedly tame nature of the threat vis-à-vis that of Hitler two decades later,

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<sup>20</sup> J.M. Winter, 'Britain's "Lost Generation" of the First World War', *Population Studies*, 31 (1977), 449-466, passim; Idem, *The Great War and the British People*, (London, 1985), passim; R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, (Cambridge, Mass, 1979), passim.

<sup>21</sup> For the sake of acknowledging legal precedent, R.J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust and the Irving Trial*, (London, 2002). As Adrian Gregory notes, it would shock us far *more* if Billy Prior, the hero of Pat Barker's fictional *Regeneration* Trilogy, was allowed to live. Gregory, *Last Great War*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants*, passim.

<sup>23</sup> G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory. The First World War: Myths and Realities*, (London, 2000), 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, (London, 1960), E.M. Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, (London, 1929), E. Blunden, *Undertones of War*, (London, 1928), R.C. Sherriff, *Journey's End*, (London, 1928) and the various lower profile works in R.M. Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War*, (London, 1993).

by the staggeringly high death toll for such small territorial gain, and by the poignancy of the enthusiasm of 1914 being brought crashing down to earth, has become seen as 'something worse than a tragedy, nothing less than the greatest error of modern history.'<sup>25</sup> Given the failure of politicians (who had not fought) to justify their expansive claims of 1918, the ex-serviceman in British life was reduced to a position of great pathos, condemned to wallow in a world they had not fought for, nor could change. The myth of the war experience, shown by George Mosse to be so palpable across Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, contrasted sharply with this ugly, drab new age.<sup>26</sup> Reality or not, myths can stick.

The purpose of this study is to interrogate such phenomena. What will be outlined is that not only did former soldiers enter the nation's politics in a palpable manner after 1918, they did so with strongly held views - albeit occasionally expressed in a vague, allegorical form - that the world needed to change. Unlike the authors and poets, whom Jay Winter has noted failed - willingly or not - to offer solutions to the moral problems posed by the war, veteran politicians had - the occasionally vagaries of the Westminster game aside - to articulate what they had learned in the trenches, and impart the lessons it begat.<sup>27</sup> They were not merely voices crying in the wilderness, but an authentic, and to a degree influential, part of the mainstream political culture. War trauma in Great Britain was not the sole preserve of the middle or upper class author, it filtered into Westminster too. Men scarred by conflict, wearing their hearts on their sleeves and their medals on their chest, vocalised their horrific experiences in a whole number of ways, sometimes

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<sup>25</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, (London, 1999), 462. Gregory also points out that it prevents us asking more probing questions about 1939-45. Gregory, *Last Great War*, 4. He is adapting the argument in J. Grigg, 'Nobility and War: The Unselfish Commitment?,' *Encounter*, 74 (1990), 21-7.

<sup>26</sup> G.L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), 491-513. The myth of the war experience, Mosse shows, was decidedly ambiguous. There was clearly glory and sorrow in conflict, and how best to represent these was a continual problem over the correct symbolism. The middle class, rural, author of the war experience which he posits could well have been a member of the Phoenix Generation.

<sup>27</sup> J.M. Winter, 'Les poètes combattants de la Grande Guerre: Une Nouvelle Forme du Sacré' in J. Becker, J.M. Winter, G. Krumeich, A. Becker and S. Audoin-Rousseau (eds), *Guerre et Cultures 1914-1918*, (Paris, 1994), 28-35, 34.

subtle, sometimes not. They were both the slave to, and master of, such a phenomenon. Clearly there was a degree, as chapter two will outline, to which they used the respect associated with being an ex-serviceman for electoral gain. Yet at the same time, these were tortured souls battling with great ontological crises. Having seen what they had, what could possibly make their existence worthwhile? What would constitute redemption for the dead?<sup>28</sup>

*The Phoenix Generation* of our title is in some sense ironic, given its origins in fiction. It refers to a novel by Henry Williamson, part of his Phillip Maddison series spanning the first half of the twentieth century, which dealt with the post 1918 lives of a group of Britons who emerged like a collective phoenix from the flames of trench warfare.<sup>29</sup> Williamson was famously radicalised to a great degree by his own war service, joining the British Union of Fascists in 1937 and sharing Mosley's fate of incarceration in the summer of 1940. Though his politics were hardly typical, he represents a nice bridge between the cultural world which has hitherto shaped our comprehension of the effect of 1914-18, and the political arena in which we will focus. Our *Phoenix Generation* are neither fictitious nor could predicate themselves simply upon the written word. They were the one hundred, sometimes two hundred, plus veterans who, at one point or another, sat in the House of Commons under the Conservative banner between the wars. The much analysed literary picture is one part of the collective cultural consequence of war, our analysis of Conservative war veterans intends to show that Westminster politics forms another, equally if not more important, illustration.

Indeed, to ex-servicemen turned politicians the literary accounts of war service were inaccurate at best. Coming across a collection of Alec Waugh poems in the trenches, Alfred Duff Cooper found them 'miserable.' 'These new poets' - he wrote home to his lover Diana Manners - 'seem to me especially bad.' Whilst acknowledging the harm and destruction war could bring, Duff believed there was also 'romance in it. Nothing so big can be without it - and there is beauty too - I

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<sup>28</sup> A question, as we will see, on the minds of many. S. Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead*, (London, 1921) and P. Gibbs, *Realities of War*, (London, 1920).

<sup>29</sup> H. Williamson, *The Phoenix Generation*, (London, 1985)

have seen plenty from our parting at Waterloo until today. And those poets ought to see it and reproduce it instead of going on whining and jibing.’<sup>30</sup> Decades after the conflict Henry Page Croft provided a similar interpretation. Having ‘read many of the war books which were the rage about the years 1929 and 1930’ he ‘could only come to the conclusion that the writers were all shell-shock cases as indeed most of them confessed themselves to be.’ According to Croft, ‘they describe[d] the whole tone of the British Army in language so much at variance with the truth: there was nothing bestial or craven about the men I had the honour to serve with.’<sup>31</sup> This is thus a new cohort, and a new way of viewing the conflict.

### .3 Structure

There is much terrain to traverse, and many historiographies to navigate. Conservative ideology - unsurprisingly given a party that could embrace both Thatcher and Macmillan - can be interpreted numerous ways, as can the actions of its individual followers.<sup>32</sup> Remembrance and memory are likewise complex fields, which lead one into psychological and sociological questions of the collective mind and notions of truth.<sup>33</sup> Then there are the contemporary figures who have spawned, willingly or not, their own enduring schools of thought: Churchill on foreign policy and Keynes on the economic slump.<sup>34</sup> We will address these individually in detail at the beginning of each chapter, but the point should be made from the outset that this is an analysis plotting its way through many paths with varying levels of cohesion. If at times it stretches connections to breaking point, this is to be borne in mind. Ours is a story at once social, cultural, economic, political, military, and various shades of grey in between.

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<sup>30</sup> Duff Cooper to Diana Manners, 26 July 1918, A. Cooper (ed), *A Durable Fire: The Letters of Duff and Diana Cooper 1913-1950*, (London, 1983), 82.

<sup>31</sup> H. Page Croft, *My Life of Strife*, (London, 1972), 98-9.

<sup>32</sup> From the right of Clark, *The Tories*, to the Disraelian Centre of P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and national values*, (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> P. Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,’ *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24; Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*. More generally, M.R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> W.S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, (London, 1952); for an example of Keynesian work, see R. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931*, (London, 1970).



All this means it does not follow an exactly chronological structure. There are clearly pros and cons to this. Certainly it does not provide the kind of linear narrative seen in, for example, Simon Ball's *The Guardsmen*, nor does it go into the level of detail that book provides regarding the life of each individual MP – though with almost 450 Tory members elected between the wars having served, perhaps the reader will forgive this.<sup>35</sup> Whilst dipping in and out of men's lives may, on occasion, mean less attention is paid to the damascene conversions some undoubtedly experienced on various issues, it does allow for wider scope. This, after all, is a study of a collective *mentalité*, not a Carlylian take on great individuals or, like Maurice Cowling, merely concerning itself with the sixty or so politicians who 'really mattered.'<sup>36</sup> To take such an approach is unhelpful in the interwar period, as Philip Williamson noted, due to figures like Gandhi, the various Viceroy, and the nation's bankers all exerting pressure on the big Westminster fish.<sup>37</sup> In some sense then, though situated very much in Westminster 'high politics,' the House of Commons is almost a bystander in our story. What this study intends to uncover is not individual machinations, but a *zeitgeist*. Why Mosley and his cohort acted the way they did is of greater interest than every action they took along the way. We are covering decades of British history. If this investigation sheds some light on a range of issues which can then be followed up in greater depth, so much the better.

It might be suggested that this account concerns a rather monolithic group. This is a tale of almost exclusively middle and upper class men, set in a time when this cohort was beginning to lose its centuries old hold on social and political power. Whilst the attitudes of these men to the social ills of the day forms a key part of what follows, necessarily because of the story's aristocratic setting the social ills themselves are at times placed in the background - though by no means

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<sup>35</sup> S. Ball, *The Guardsmen: Harold Macmillan, Three Friends, and the World They Made*, (London, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> T. Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, (London, 1837); Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> P. Williamson, *Formation of the National Government. British Politics 1929-1931*, Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1987, 11.

to the degree outlined in previous accounts. Unemployment, industrial militancy, housing shortages and the slums have been amply covered by W.R. Garside, Ross McKibbin, Kevin Morgan and others.<sup>38</sup> They have been moulded into both a pessimistic account of the interwar *Condition of Britain* - "locust years" rife with poverty - and a more sympathetic explanation, where the nation's leaders strived, albeit in vain, against insurmountable odds of declining world conditions and the diminution of British power.<sup>39</sup> There is no need to go over old ground unnecessarily. The musings and posturing of ex-servicemen against this backdrop is what this investigation will uncover, building upon the previous historiographies where necessary.

To the charge that such an outwardly homogeneous sample cannot illuminate much beyond themselves, two defences may be forwarded. Firstly, for all this body seems a little 'clubby' - to borrow David Marquand's description of the civil service - the "club line" is not taken as gospel. Attempts are made to second guess and explain the motives behind the public discourse. Where war service is embellished this is pointed out. Where the nominally rebellious Phoenix Generation shied away from taking stands against their leaders, this is also highlighted. There is no preconceived pattern here. These were not men superior to their environment or independent of it, but political operators within a well established milieu. For all the sense we will glean that former soldiers believed themselves to be unique men on some kind of special mission, this is not to be accepted wholesale - as George Mosse has shown.<sup>40</sup> We will, to be sure, look outside the club.

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<sup>38</sup> W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A study in public policy*, (Cambridge, 1990); R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*, (Oxford, 1991), K. Morgan, 'The Conservative Party and Mass Housing, 1918-39,' in S. Ball and I. Holliday (eds), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s*, (London, 2002), 58-77. Issues raised in the review article J. Lawrence, 'State and Society in the Shadow of War,' *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 993-1001.

<sup>39</sup> From the pessimistic side G.D.H. and M.I. Cole, *The Condition of Britain*, (London, 1937). Offering more sympathetic approaches Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, and, in foreign policy terms, J. Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, (Chicago, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> G.L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), 491-513.

Secondly, by taking the black sheep of the club seriously, this account challenges the very assumptions upon which it is built. Oswald Mosley is usually seen as *Beyond the Pale*, anathema to reasonable men.<sup>41</sup> Yet for a significant period he was neither intellectually nor socially isolated from the group of men with whom he had arguably most in common, the Phoenix Generation presented here. Our fourth chapter will deal with his fate. More broadly, we must note that though these men may appear to be pillars of the establishment - emerging to lead respectable Conservatism in the 1940s and 1950s - this was not always the case. As the economy tumbled after 1929, they questioned the very foundations on which democracy was built. As Hitler threatened to conquer, they did not oppose him with any absolute consistency. By placing Mosley very much within his generation, you not only achieve a greater understanding of why he acted the way did, but gain a more balanced, less teleological, view of the contemporary picture. The black sheep, after all, was a sheep nonetheless.

Indeed, for all these men purported to be, and are often presented here as, decent, honest and brave, this was only one side of a very Janus faced collective. The Phoenix Generation are sketched out rather benignly in what follows, but this is not to suggest that all ex-servicemen followed this pattern. In challenging the interwar myth of the powerless and numerically tiny former soldier, the intention is certainly not to substitute this for a cohort of a uniquely angelic and tolerant disposition. The anti-Semitism of Archibald Ramsay and the eugenicist leanings of numerous Tory veterans serve as notice of this - many of whom, as our appendix notes, having formerly attended Eton alongside two principle movers and shakers in the bizarre (often pseudo) scientific circles that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, George Pitt-Rivers and C.P. Blacker.<sup>42</sup> When Commander Robert Bower

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<sup>41</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules of the Game / Beyond the Pale*, (Illinois, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> See B.W. Hart, *British and German Eugenists in Transnational Context, 1900-1950*, (forthcoming Cambridge PhD thesis, 2011), on the more bizarre leanings of Tory Party MPs during this period. One might note that in 1931 21 (15%) Phoenix Generation MPs (including Anthony Eden, Osbert Peake and Euan Wallace) voted that a bill regarding the sterilization of the 'mentally defective' should be brought to the floor of the Commons, compared to 7 (5%) opposing discussion. Most (110 members or 80% of the total PG) abstained. The House voted 89 (14%) yes-167 (27%) no (with 358 abstentions) therefore

goaded the (London born) Labour MP Manny Shinwell that he should 'go back to Poland' during a parliamentary debate, he was hardly suggestive of a particularly kind generation (if unparliamentary, Shinwell's response of crossing the floor and punching him in the face was perhaps understandable).<sup>43</sup> Mosley himself is arguably sketched out in an overly kind fashion for some, but this is merely in response to a historiography that writes him as National Socialist in the making rather than a product of his circumstances. Robert Skidelsky attempted, largely successfully, to do this in the late 1970s, yet the wheel has again turned. Stephen Dorril, for instance, was prepared to highlight any and every arguably proto-fascistic statement in Mosley's early career.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, men such as Harold Macmillan have their careers viewed from the opposite perspective: as figures constantly reminiscing about the war, whose every move bears the stamp of the trenches.<sup>45</sup> It is surely a little unfair to write the history of two men from such strikingly similar backgrounds in such a dissimilar manner. If the veterans presented here do not represent an absolutely comprehensive sample of the total ex-servicemen body, this is because 'the crackpot' has been well outlined elsewhere.

Though this study deals with ex-servicemen, this is not to suggest that this was the only profound experience one could take from this, or any, war. Men opposed the conflict for serious, understandable and justifiable reasons. An analysis, for example, of former members of the Union of Democratic Control turned Labour MPs, or those Liberals who opposed conscription, might prove equally fruitful, and certainly seems fertile ground for future research. The following does not consider such notions in length - it is, after all, a study of Conservatism - but does not ignore them entirely. Ramsay MacDonald, for example, is held up as an interesting counter to the sample under consideration. The Morel

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taking the matter no further. Our control voted 3 yes, 4 no, 14 with 14 abstaining. Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 21 July 1931, Volume 255, Column 1249-57.

<sup>43</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 4 April 1938, Volume 334, Column 6.

<sup>44</sup> S. Dorril, *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism*, (London, 2007), passim.

<sup>45</sup> D. Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles*, (London, 2005), 67-71. The most recent large-scale biography, for instance, skirts over the vitally important 1929-31 period: C. Williams, *Harold Macmillan*, (London, 2009).

Papers at LSE and those of Arthur Ponsonby at the Bodleian Library in Oxford are also used at points. We likewise include limited UDC related data. Further investigation here would be most welcome.

#### **.4 Methodology**

In terms of methodology, this analysis represents a partial return to Lewis Namier and prosopography. There is indeed something of an intellectual pedigree here. Following in the footsteps of Namier himself, historians have not been afraid to plunder the biographies of the nation's politicians - however obscure. Ian Christie's *British Non-Elite MPs* sought to show how the rise of the businessman to respectability was achieved by merchants and bankers becoming politicians in ever increasing numbers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>46</sup> More recently, John Stewart's *The Battle for Health* illustrated how the medical background of Somerville Hastings contributed to an intellectual climate which made the NHS possible.<sup>47</sup> Finally, as our fifth chapter will show, Lynne Olson has provided an even more contemporary example of this phenomenon - illustrating how *Troublesome Young Men* helped topple Neville Chamberlain in 1940. The devil, it seems, can well and truly be in the detail.<sup>48</sup>

In such a spirit, and whilst not forgetting the issues inherent in any discussion of political culture - language, discourse, and the manipulation thereof - statistical analysis will not be eschewed, and at times will be prominent. In order to outline just how sizeable a phenomenon this study concerns itself with, raw numbers of MPs are required. Furthermore, to ascertain how these men think as a body, it is worth looking at how they vote in parliament. These are perhaps simplistic points, but worth making. In a subject - the British memory of the Great War - dominated by rumour, hyperbole, and misconception, facts that can be empirically verified matter more than ever; thus the attention paid in the second and fifth chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> I.R. Christie, *British Non-Elite Mps, 1715-1820*, (London, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> J. Stewart, *The Battle for Health: A Political History of the Socialist Medical Association, 1930-1951*, (Aldershot, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> L. Olson, *Troublesome Young Men: The Rebels Who Brought Churchill to Power in 1940 and Helped to Save Britain*, (New York, 2007).

This remains however a study of political culture. It intertwines two narratives - the history of the Conservative Party with the effect of war - and seeks to explain not only how men acted, but why. In doing so it weaves a path between high politics and memory. This is not only true of its conclusions, but the methods it uses to achieve them. Thus, unlike those who doubt the utility of high politics - Ross McKibbin for one - this does not dismiss the private channels of communication between politicians as just gossip.<sup>49</sup> Letters between figures both inside and outside our sample are used liberally. Equally however, our study clearly does not concern itself merely, or even primarily, with the conversation of those who govern. In this sense we part with Namier, who once famously enquired of a student during a PhD viva concerning the French Revolution, 'why do you bother with these *bandits*?'<sup>50</sup> MPs such as Albert Braithwaite, Michael Falcon and Arthur Hope are essentially unrecognisable to us, yet are woven into a narrative alongside familiar faces like Harold Macmillan. This is achieved through the mining of local newspapers and election material outside the established archival collections. The British Newspaper Library at Colindale is a treasure trove to those studying electioneering and political culture. The following makes full use of it: to study a generation, one must look outside the big names.

Thus in terms of originality this offers three distinct prongs of attack. Firstly, whilst paying attention to the archival collections of the big-hitters such as Churchill, Keynes and Lloyd George, this study makes use of material relatively neglected by historians. As with use of local newspapers, the collections cited here include smaller fry like John Loder and Robert Bower. Charles Loseby in particular represents a man, previously rather written off as an eccentric, whose papers are taken seriously here. We also include material only recently made available to the general public, such as Quintin Hogg's papers on the Oxford By-Election of 1938 - which essentially served as a referendum on the Munich Agreement. Even prominent figures - let it be noted - can be ignored by historians: some of Louis Spears's military papers at Kings College London had not been viewed in the

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<sup>49</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, (Oxford, 1974), 112.

<sup>50</sup> R.J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, (New York, 1999), 140.

current author's lifetime.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, our Mannheimian methodological approach that war could filter through to a political war generation is something quite new in British political history.<sup>52</sup> To be sure, historians have picked up on Westminster cliques which numbered many veterans - the 'YMCA' within 1920s Conservatism for one - but the idea that it extended beyond a few idealists has rarely been taken seriously. Yet the numbers do not lie: ex-servicemen entered politics, particularly the Conservative Party, in a big way after 1918. This, as we will see, was felt in every interwar parliament. One cannot approach issues like the Irish struggle for independence, the General Strike, the economic slump, and appeasement, without such an understanding. If all this study accomplishes is joining the dots between national culture and national politics, it will have served its purpose.

Lastly, in terms of the wider cultural milieu, this posits a collective in British life who did not take 1914 as the be all and end all. Clearly the beginning of the war - for all the continuities identified by Winter, Braybon and others - was a significant point of change in many regards.<sup>53</sup> For one, it took a generation of British public schoolboys and threw them out into the carnage of warfare. Thus the warm reminiscences of Graves and his fellow authors for the good old days seen before the conflict, when the only concern before joining up was not missing out on the start of the Oxford term.<sup>54</sup> Yet this view, together with the fact that the men under analysis here were members of the Conservative Party, has obscured the meaning they derived from the war. The figures of this study viewed (or at least described) 1914 as imperfect, and something to be moved beyond, not as something to be

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<sup>51</sup> According to the archivist at King's College London, the last viewing of material related to the erection of the Mons Memorial was in 1984.

<sup>52</sup> See below for Mannheim.

<sup>53</sup> J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European cultural history*, (Cambridge, 1998), 54 on the continuities in European remembrance of the dead and G. Braybon, 'Women and the War,' in S. Constantine, M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *The First World War in British History*, (London, 1995), 141-167, on women. In perhaps more light hearted terms, though perhaps not, John Greenaway also illustrates how the conflict made Britain a more sober nation. J.R. Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics Since 1830: A Study in Policy Making*, (Basingstoke, 2003), 111.

<sup>54</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 60.

brought back into being as soon as possible.<sup>55</sup> War is never a good thing, yet one cannot deny its power. The experience of the Great War made a group of men want to change the world. For all the tendency to view politicians, particularly in this media age, as opportunists, this is a notion we should take seriously. To be sure, their success rate in the coming years would rather mixed. If however we wish to understand not only what came to pass, but what could have done, these men deserve attention. Whilst it may be tempting to view interwar Britain as a *Morbid Age* – certainly there were those who saw the world gloomily – the cohort of this study form a powerful corrective; even a traditionally cautious body like the Conservative Party containing those arguing that positive, constructive action could correct any perceived national decline.<sup>56</sup>

## .5 War Memories and Conservatism

What should be noted from the outset is that for the Phoenix Generation of politicians the defining moment of their lives was indeed the First World War - the exact nature of which we will address in our first chapter.<sup>57</sup> This, let it also be observed, was a phenomenon most obviously seen amongst Conservatives. It is clearly something of an imprecise measure, but Labour veterans turned parliamentarians tended to devote less attention in their memoirs to the Great War than their Tory counterparts: Attlee gave over just 7 pages in his *As It Happened*, compared to the 27 in Mosley's *My Life* and 81 in Oliver Lytellton's *Memoirs of Lord Chandos*.<sup>58</sup> The sheer volume of Tory reminiscences, as with the more cultural accounts, augurs its own problems. It is difficult not to be moved by the various autobiographies, and overwhelmed by their common narrative. Harold Macmillan's *Winds of Change* was probably the most archetypal, and well suited his reputation

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<sup>55</sup> See the reactions to Armistice Night chronicled in Chapter One.

<sup>56</sup> R.J. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*, (London, 2009), passim.

<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, despite his book's title, Simon Ball slightly distances himself from this view. Ball, *Guardsmen*, 395-7. 'It is hard to see how [war] guilt shaped Macmillan's career...' '[Macmillan] and his friends were exactly the...types who, war or no war, became Conservative MPs.' Perhaps so – but did they act like traditional Conservatives once in Westminster?

<sup>58</sup> C.R. Attlee, *As It Happened*, (Surrey, 1954), 38-44; O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 44-71; O. Lytellton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, (London, 1962), 31-112.



as old man shuffling around 10 Downing Street as its last Edwardian occupant. His description of ‘watch[ing] from my bedroom windows overlooking Horse Guards the rehearsals for the Birthday Parade..., [which] brought back, year by year, many memories,’ strikes one more as script for BBC Drama (cue flashback to the trenches here), than strictly accurate act of remembrance.<sup>59</sup> Henry Willink’s addressing of his unpublished autobiography to his grandchildren is possibly but the open articulation of a tacit “writing for posterity” streak that runs through such tomes.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the parallels within such books do invite some scepticism, particularly given the voluminous correspondence between the Phoenix Generation in old age.<sup>61</sup> The tale of a spiritual awakening in 1914, followed by gallantly “mucking in” with the average Tommy whilst serving, and concluding with - again rather cinematically - a revelation that everything must change is an often peddled tale by the aged ex-serviceman turned politician.<sup>62</sup> Though what follows largely substantiates it, we must be careful of a collective hindsight clouding the contemporary picture, particularly given the fact that some of the Phoenix Generation - like Willink - survived to take in the 1960s *Lions Led by Donkeys* interpretation of the conflict.<sup>63</sup> As the family of C.P. Blacker (an Etonian contemporary of many future politicians) warned him when the eugenicist/scientist was writing his war memoirs, there was a real danger of simply parroting the Graves-Sassoon line.<sup>64</sup> This was true of many.

The Conservative Party generally is an equally slippery customer. Since John

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<sup>59</sup> H. Macmillan, *Winds of Change 1914-1939*, (London, 1966), 66.

<sup>60</sup> ‘As I Remember’ Unpublished Autobiography, 1968, ii., CAC, WILL box 1.

<sup>61</sup> To list all would probably fill a thesis in itself. However, Spears to Davidson, 1930s-1950s, CAC, SPRS 1/102 and Macmillan to Balfour, 1984, CAC, BLFR 1/1 may be taken as broadly representative. Such correspondence only increased in number, as veteran friend of MPs Monty Belgium noted, when old age rendered face to face encounters rarer and rarer. Belgium to Pickthorn, 16 November 1969, CAC, BLGN 7/33.

<sup>62</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 61-105; A. Eden, *Another World 1897-1917*, (London, 1976), passim; John Buchan, *Memory Hold-The-Door*, (London, 1940), 164-220; H. Page Croft, *My Life of Strife*, (London, 1972), 84-140.

<sup>63</sup> ‘As I Remember,’ 35, WILL box 1. Perhaps this cuts both ways however. For example, the ‘In Memoriam’ Booklet, 4, produced by Magdalene College, Cambridge where Willink was Master in later life suggests his war was much braver than he let on. My thanks to Ms Phillippa Grimstone for alerting me to this.

<sup>64</sup> C.P. Blacker, *Have You Forgotten Yet?* (Barnsley, 2000), vii.

Stuart Mill's comment that it constituted 'the stupidest party' - devoid of intellectual fibre and, quite simply, ideas - both its members and critics have proved reluctant to articulate its doctrine with any degree of precision. And if one cannot do that, how do you prove a sample of its members deviated from this supposedly normal path? To begin with, academics have been a little too keen to seize upon Mill's mantle. Disraeli's plea for 'above all - no programme' should not be taken as the definitive representation of a party of such diverse interests and lobby groups.<sup>65</sup> The implication seems to be that a party of the land, industry, Church of England and working class Tories - to name but a few of its ideological strands - would be a house ideologically divided, and prone to settle upon pure pragmatism. The Phoenix Generation themselves adopted this line on occasion. Describing why he could never join the Labour Party, Walter Elliot stated that 'for most of us it is not the obscurities but the cast-iron cocksureness of Socialism which decides us against it.'<sup>66</sup> John Buchan too placed great stock in a 'sincere respect for facts' over the 'vague dogmas...regarded by their supporters with an almost religious veneration.'<sup>67</sup> Yet this was not indicative of the trend. How could it be? In a world so turbulent - where so many European monarchies had been removed, where Lenin had provided an alternative to liberal democracy from the left and Mussolini from the right - conservatism could hardly remain impassive, as Philip Williamson has shown.<sup>68</sup> Its case needed to be reasserted. As we will see, through cooperation with elements outside traditional conservative circles, visits to those nations which had jettisoned democracy, and the open articulation of policies running counter in both spirit and content to their leaders, the Phoenix Generation certainly imbued Conservatism with ideas. Whether Baldwin, Chamberlain or Churchill were prepared to adopt them would be another matter.

In this light, one must be wary lest we accept the Correlli Barnett thesis of

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<sup>65</sup> A.J. Davies, *We, The Nation: The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power*, (London, 1995), 198.

<sup>66</sup> W. Elliot, *Toryism and the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1927), 95.

<sup>67</sup> J. Buchan, 'Introduction,' in D. Crisp (ed), *The Rebirth of Conservatism*, (London, 1931), ix-xi, ix.

<sup>68</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 17.

continuities between pre-1914 public school, the Great War, and widespread, if tacit, pre-1945 Conservative acceptance of the coming welfare state. To Barnett, Labour's 'New Jerusalem' held intellectual roots in 'an idealistic response to the reality that, although Britain at the end of the nineteenth century was still the richest country in the world, her industrial masses were living out their lives in dreadful squalor and surpassing misery.' After 1918 'even the Conservative Party had succumbed to the spirit of secularised religious idealism, for Stanley Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain and their closest colleagues (all public-school and Oxbridge men) were true Victorian moralists seeking to do good at home and abroad by the exercise of the Christian values.' Finally this atmosphere produced 'the younger generation of Conservative reformers in the 1930s and 1940s, men such as Quintin Hogg and R.A. Butler,' who helped take the project forth.<sup>69</sup> Our analysis paints a rather different picture to Barnett however. Whilst sympathies for the poor engendered by the war are repeatedly highlighted, it is the war's centrality in this process that is continually stressed. Men such as Baldwin and Butler no doubt also cared, but they expressed themselves in rather different manners, and had different solutions, to those who had seen active service. It is important to tease out such nuances - perspective, and generational experience, mattered.

## **.6 Mannheim and the Concept of Generations**

Generations can be described in many ways. Clearly there is the simple numerical approach - those born with a twenty-five, thirty or forty year bracket are a singular "generation." This account clearly eschews this definition however. Instead, we posit a grouping joined together by a common experience: uniformed service in the

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<sup>69</sup> C. Barnett, *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945-1950*, (Basingstoke, 1995), 123-5. Barnett's target is more the Oxbridge educated Whitehall mandarins than Conservative politicians, but the charge of foolishly acquiescing to the language and norms of the 'New Jerusalem' covers both. J.D. Hoffman, *The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51*, (London, 1964), 41 is in basic agreement when discussing developments in the 1940s - 'the central notion linking members of the Tory Reform Committee was the rejection of the values and policies of business Conservatism, of doctrinaire *laissez-faire*.' This analysis, as chapter six will attest, disagrees.

First World War.<sup>70</sup> Simon Ball has recently subjected this cohort, through the prism of Mosley's New Party, to the rigours of Karl Mannheim's theories.<sup>71</sup> Mannheim, like this account, placed importance not only on chronological but experiential homogeneity. Aside from the superficial age comparisons, he posited three criteria. Firstly, a shared 'actual' experience - such as war service. Secondly, an ideological unity achieved through some common interpretation - such as political radicalisation by war. Lastly, a generation would be solidified by the formation of concrete association - from social mixing to the formation of a political party - where the shared experience could be vocalised and shaped, one might suggest homogenised, accordingly. Many historians have stressed the failure of the Phoenix Generation to be in this final stage: though there was some form of common narrative engendered by the war - seen in later life with the various autobiographies - this did not translate into a common contemporary block. This is true in part - certainly Mosley's New Party and BUF did not attract the bulk of the Conservative Phoenix Generation. But, the following suggests, he may have been closer than we think.

Mannheim is worth briefly dwelling upon. Born in 1893 in Budapest, and educated across Germany and Hungary, he settled in London upon exile from Nazi Germany in 1933. Though he did not see service in either Habsburg or German armies during the First World War, he took an active part in the Hungarian revolution that followed. His philosophical and sociological output was thus chronologically similar to the Phoenix Generation, and likewise profoundly influenced by the transitive experience of violence. Though devoting much time to

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<sup>70</sup> 'Uniformed Service' is a deliberately open-ended description. Given the tendency to play on any involvement in the war, I have made the decision to widen my sample to encompass this - essentially therefore we consider those donning a military uniform, or having served overseas in some cognate field. One of our cohort, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, MP for North Hammersmith 1924-6 and - as we will see - clear eccentric, was an official journalist on the frontline. In his case, he saw active service against the Communists in Hungary in 1919. Francis Fremantle, whom we will later encounter, would probably have agreed with this broad definition given he included his 58 year old self as evidence that the war generation in 1930 could be anything from 30 to 58 years old. *Times*, 29 November 1930.

<sup>71</sup> S. Ball, 'Mosley and the Tories in 1930: The Problem of Generations,' *Journal of Contemporary British History*, 23/4 (2009), 445-459.

analyses of Conservatism, his reluctance to enter debates regarding contemporary politics (at least before the early 1940s) lent his output in this area a more historical leaning than his overtly sociological tomes - thereby leaving interpretations of his politics to others.<sup>72</sup> In this light, given his own theory that 'early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural* view of the world,' the comments of his friend and translator Paul Kecskemeti should not go unnoticed:

Mannheim...spent his formative years in Hungary and Germany during a period of extraordinary social and intellectual ferment. It is somewhat difficult for the present generation [1953], accustomed to living in turmoil and amidst constant outbursts of violence, to recapture the impression of elemental upheaval and total collapse which seared itself into the soul of the 'front generation' of the First World War...What nobody would have thought possible suddenly turned out to be real...A complete reorientation was felt to be necessary: a re-examination of all traditional ideas about reality, all values, all principles.<sup>73</sup>

Simon Ball described such rhetoric as almost Mosleyite.<sup>74</sup> There is something in that. Yet as important is the indication that Mannheim and others were grasping after a vehicle for political and social change.

Though involved through his friend Gyorgy Lukacs in the short-lived Communist takeover, Mannheim did not join the Hungarian Communists, nor was he ever inclined to do so. Rather, he saw one's generation playing as important a role as class.<sup>75</sup> Quite aside from his evaluation of 'the Problem of Generations,' he

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<sup>72</sup> Mannheim is regarded as something of a guru of modern conservatism, though his work focussed primarily on the early nineteenth century. See D. Kettler, V. Meja and N. Stehr (eds), *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*, (London, 1986), 3 on how Mannheim linked the rise of political conservatism to generational theory.

<sup>73</sup> K. Mannheim, P. Kecskemeti (ed), *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, (London, 1953), 298; Idem, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works Volume Five*, (London, 1997), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Ball, 'Mosley and The Tories,' 446.

<sup>75</sup> Seen throughout Wohl, *Generation of 1914*. Also C. Loader, *The Intellectual Development of Karl Mannheim: Culture, Politics and Planning*, (Cambridge, 1985), 83 shows that, whilst

placed great emphasis on 'the problem of youth in a modern society.' 'Youth,' he argued, 'is neither progressive nor conservative by nature, but is a potentiality which is ready for any new start.'<sup>76</sup> With implications for young Conservative MPs adopting – either for tactical reasons or out of genuine concern - causes previously the sole preserve of the left, he went on to claim that

the adolescent is not only biologically in a state of fermentation, but sociologically he penetrates into a new world where the habits, customs and value systems are different from what he has known so far...This penetration from without into society makes Youth especially apt to sympathize with dynamic social movements which, for reasons mostly different from his, are dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs.<sup>77</sup>

Though, as psephologists have noted, the Conservative Party is and was a relatively 'sticky' body – the sons of Tory fathers growing up to become politically Conservative in 89% of the cases Butler and Stokes observed in the 1960s – the shock of war combined with the adventurous, experimental nature of youth imbued within Mannheim the belief that such a generation could be a transitive body.<sup>78</sup>

Our analysis includes data relating to both the Phoenix Generation, and a control sample of Conservative MPs born between 1875 and 1900 who did not see active service in the conflict. Other than academic rigour, the explanation for this control effectively lies in the following statement in Mannheim's 'Problem of Generations':

The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide, does not in itself involve similarity of

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class did not supersede generation in Mannheim's eyes, nor was the reverse true. Both mattered.

<sup>76</sup> K. Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist*, (Edinburgh, 1943), 35

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>78</sup> D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice*, (Basingstoke, 1970), 47.

location; what does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and date etc., and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly stratified consciousness.<sup>79</sup>

The degree then, to which a generation justifies the term depends on both cause and effect. The cause of its being is neither solely chronological, nor can the effect be merely self-description. As Mentré observed however, where one attributes the term 'generation' to some form of likeminded collective, loose or otherwise, is open to debate – something of particular relevance to interpretations of Mosley circa 1930-1, but also to this project per se.<sup>80</sup> Statistical deviations, from both the control sample and Conservative MP generally, will be delineated throughout.

Generational theory, as Mentré illustrated, is not uncontested – with problems assessing both intra-generational dialogue, and transmission of cultural norms between generations. Ball saw the reticence of Tory MPs to coalesce as evidence of its failure, whilst several analyses of the 1960s student movements have pointed to their own self-constructed, semi-artificial nature.<sup>81</sup> The following both vindicates and challenges Mannheimian theory. Whilst pointing to areas of substantial agreement over social policy – and that derived from a common source, war – appeals to the wider public, both at the ballot box and over issues such as foreign policy, are shown to be rather more ambiguous. Certainly such oratory was based in wartime bravery and no little conviction, but its collective moralism, as we will see, was not without an element of playing to the gallery. As the years went by a common narrative of what was politically acceptable arguably rather replaced accurate remembrance of the generation's spiritual birthplace, the First World War. To be sure, this analysis sets out to interrogate the positive and negative sides of generational theory, and of generations per se.

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<sup>79</sup> Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, 297.

<sup>80</sup> F. Mentré, *Les Générations Sociales*, (Paris, 1920), 278. A contemporary of Mannheim's, Mentré differentiated between 'institutions' and '*séries libres*' – free groupings such as salons.

<sup>81</sup> On movements of the 1960s in Canada, see D. Clément, 'Generations and the Transformation of Social Movements in Postwar Canada,' *Social History*, 84 (2009), 361-387.

## .7 Who Were the Phoenix Generation?

Who then, were these politicians? Macmillan, Eden and Mosley are well known, but our study covers more than the notorious. Though our analysis outlines their activities once in Parliament, it may help to paint a general impression here. All in all, there were 448 MPs who sat on the Tory benches between the wars having served during the Great War. The (mean) average Phoenix Generation member was born in 1882, entered the Commons in 1922 (aged 31-2 at the start of the war therefore), and left politics for good in 1937.<sup>82</sup> Bonar Law and his successors achieved a net profit of ex-servicemen - 11 joining the party having been formerly elected as Liberals, whilst 4 MPs resigned the whip never to return it – testament, as we will see, to Baldwin’s liberal conservatism.<sup>83</sup> Amongst their chronological cohort ex-servicemen were in the majority: 72% (345) of Tory members who sat between 1918 and 1939 having been born between 1875 and 1900 were members of the Phoenix Generation delineated here.

As mentioned, the 133 non-combatant members born during this period will, at times, form a control sample for our cohort. This control MP was overwhelmingly (though unlike the Phoenix Generation not exclusively) male. They most often missed active service through business commitments (36), or having continued to practice law (22). Their Commons career was likely to have been a little shorter (mean average 1926-1939) than that of the ex-servicemen, and they were less likely to have been an MP after 1945 (11.2% compared to the Phoenix Generation’s 13.8%).<sup>84</sup> Approximately 4.5% of them would make Cabinet rank, again less than the 7% mustered by veterans. By contrast however, they lost, on average, less elections (37% compared to 41.5%) having become an MP – presumably because fewer of them fought in 1923 or 1929, and were, modally,

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<sup>82</sup> The modal averages were an 1880 birth, 1918 entry to the Commons, and 1945 exit. See Appendix B.

<sup>83</sup> Macmillan and Nall resigned the whip, but subsequently returned to the party.

<sup>84</sup> The modal averages were an 1879 birth, 1931 entry to the Commons, and 1945 exit. See Appendix C.



more a parliamentary product of the 1930s landslides than the 1920s electoral back and forth.<sup>85</sup>

In general then, the Phoenix Generation offer a greater span of low and high level parliamentary politics than their chronological contemporaries. Their 26 Cabinet Members who served in pre-1939 governments, 8 in wartime/caretaker administrations, and 8 after 1951 give a glimpse of life at the top. Yet the 93% who did not reach such an exalted rank almost provide an interesting case study of both intra-Conservative power politics, and the party's appeal to the wider public. The control sample, as noted, will augment this.

## **.8 Chapter by Chapter**

To illustrate the intentions, actions and movements of our titular cohort, this study will comprise six main chapters and a brief conclusion. Firstly, given British politicians later propensity to play upon their war records, and with the notion that their experiences shaped who they became in the coming years, it seems sensible to first outline what the war meant in terms of their early lives. Clearly, if our politicians were not all men of the Rupert Brooke punting down the River Cam type, they were not far from it - war was as big a shock to them as anyone else. We will thus outline the average childhood of such a future statesman, showing how a schooling that often hovered between the masculine and the feminine produced a slightly befuddled youth. Within such a context we may better understand the sometimes 'unquestionably heartfelt, intense enthusiasm for war.'<sup>86</sup> That war could mobilise the English politically is a notion that has been somewhat ignored in the general mindset, that it could mobilise in a *positive* sense even more so. In this first section we will show not only how war could scar both those who had and had not served, but how it could provide meaning and purpose to lives otherwise in danger of drifting in mediocrity. How Macmillan and Baldwin were differently affected by 1914-18, and the extent to which a psychological gap

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<sup>85</sup> 62 of the 448 Phoenix Generation lost, compared to 15 of the 133 control sample. See Appendix B and C.

<sup>86</sup> E.J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, (Cambridge, 1979), 4.

could already be perceived between young and old, will form the basis of the first chapter. Duff Cooper's comment that 'we seem to be winning the war this week, and not on this front - which is all one can desire' - may indicate that the lessons learned from the war were not always rooted in *Boy's Own* heroism.<sup>87</sup>

We will then turn to the effect of veteran's war records upon interwar elections. Eric Hobsbawm once wrote that 'western democracies have not, on the whole, denied themselves the publicity value of military glory.'<sup>88</sup> This was certainly the case in Great Britain where candidates took to the stage at election time knowing the war was a guaranteed point of reference, something arguably not true after 1945.<sup>89</sup> At an individual level, our second chapter will show, a war record was a potential trump card at the ballot box. Nationally the consequences were even more important. With Lloyd George potentially able to exploit his own dynamic war, and Labour benefiting enormously from the expansion of the electorate in 1918, the Conservatives needed to find something to bring to the table.<sup>90</sup> A general softening of policy was clearly one thing Stanley Baldwin achieved after becoming leader in 1923, yet this was hardly likely to be enough against the parties of the left. This chapter will outline how, by getting war veterans into parliament in surprisingly high numbers, the Tories achieved an ephemeral appeal which helped counteract these seemingly disadvantageous conditions. If, as Jurgen Habermas suggests, most elections are decided by the apolitical this could be a crucial development indeed.<sup>91</sup>

National discourse then, was clearly one thing, yet our veterans also had to operate within a Conservative structure. Our third chapter will thus deal with the Tory Party and, more specifically, its leader Stanley Baldwin. Baldwin is

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<sup>87</sup> Duff Cooper to Lady Desborough, 30 July 1918, DES, D/ERV/C579/11.

<sup>88</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, (London, 2007), 242.

<sup>89</sup> One Second World War veteran, Enoch Powell, dropped the Brigadier from his title as early as 1949. S. Heffer, *Like The Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell*, (London, 1998), 129.

<sup>90</sup> Particularly, as John Turner notes, given the fundamentally counter-revolutionary nature of the coalition after 1917. J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War, Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918*, (London, 1992), passim.

<sup>91</sup> J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, 2008), 213-5.

surprisingly difficult to get a grip on; inert in terms of policy yet fluent and sympathetic in rhetoric; a leader unwilling to lead, yet one with an undeniably popular appeal. Baldwin has often been dubbed - particularly with the rise of David Cameron - a Disraelian Tory *par excellence*.<sup>92</sup> Whilst not ignoring his caring side however, it is necessary to probe what he actually achieved. We will therefore analyse how far his own leftist pretensions matched the ambitious plans of the Phoenix Generation. Veteran Tories, as we will see, were advocating a governmental structure that, even after 1945, appeared expansive indeed. Though not wishing to tear down the structures of the existing order in their entirety, they were increasingly at odds with Baldwin's predilection to make little more than faltering steps in that direction. How the Phoenix Generation espoused a new doctrine, how this doctrine fitted in with leading leftist Tory thought, and how Baldwin somewhat played them, are notions our third chapter will consider. The historiographical shift towards acknowledging the constructive power of political centrism is, in this author's opinion, probably a good thing - but there are nuances to explore.<sup>93</sup>

Though Baldwin will be portrayed as a man who, in part, ex-servicemen Tories could work with - certainly there were many worse alternatives - doubts will be cast as to his ideological, and experiential, similarity to them. A further question thus presents itself: if Baldwin could not lead a vanguard of activist right wing progressivism, then who could? Our fourth chapter will analyse one vocal pretender to the throne, Oswald Mosley. It is time, as noted, to take Mosley seriously. This was a man of, not somehow separate from, his generation. He learnt similar lessons from the war to others - the powers of the state needed to change to account for modern conditions, solutions needed to come from the left as well as the right, action was the key to success - and was, as we will see, regarded

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<sup>92</sup> For example, David Marquand in the *Guardian*, 29 August 2008. Also, Andrew Tyrie in *Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Williamson's work is clearly key here, but also G.R. Searle, *Country Before Party: Coalition and the Idea of "National Government" in Modern Britain 1885-1987*, (London, 1995), *passim*. Presumably this has arisen in part due to the destructive elements of Thatcherism.

ambiguously by his contemporaries. Though they recognised his arrogance, they also were attracted by his abilities. Whilst he entered the political wilderness after 1930, this says as much about young Conservatives, as it does Oswald Mosley. How and why will be sketched out here.

If Mosley divided opinion, this was as true about the topic of our fifth section, foreign and imperial policy. Here there are so many myths and legends it is hard to know where to begin. The historiography on appeasement has wandered this way and that, from Churchill's *Gathering Storm* decimation of anything remotely positive or even ambiguous about Chamberlain's policy, through the Cowling and Charmley led revisionism of the 1970s and 80s, back to a condemnation of the appeasers by the turn of the millennium. By analysing how veterans of one war approached the possible onset of a second, we may see a more complex picture than previously thought. Attitudes to imperial questions - particularly Ireland and India - begat a muddled legacy of thought which Chamberlain and Halifax (a veteran himself of course) had to operate in. How ex-servicemen Conservative MPs voted in the key questions of the day may surprise. How their public discourse matched later anti-appeasement legends even more so. There remains a certain moralistic dimension to foreign and imperial policy during this period - one predicated, essentially, on attitudes to Hitler; this possibly needs to be stripped away all together; at best, it requires extensive probing. Our fifth chapter will attempt to do just that.

Lastly, we will take our story into and beyond the century's second cataclysmic conflict. All stories must end somewhere and would it seem a little remiss, having outlined the type of socially progressive, greatly (by pre-1914 standards) expanded governmental structure the Phoenix Generation were arguing in favour of, not to sketch out the arrival of seemingly just a vehicle: Attlee's 1945 Labour Government, and its consequences.<sup>94</sup> The effects of wartime coalition, we

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<sup>94</sup> As even Rab Butler noted – as we will see, a different sort of progressive to many Great War veterans - 'Until the progressive features of our thought had been fully exposed to public view, no one (to adapt Charles II's epigrammatic cynicism) was going to kill Attlee in order to make Churchill king.' R.A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible. The Memoirs of Lord Butler*, (London, 1971), 132. As a mildly amusing corrective, Davies, *We, The Nation*, 374

are told by Addison and others, produced an acceptance of high, stable levels of employment, government investment, and greater intervention in economic matters amongst all parties.<sup>95</sup> There is little doubt this view holds at least some validity – *The Economist* famously speaking of a “Mr Butskell”. Yet whilst it appears to be the vindication of everything the Phoenix Generation had fought for between the wars, this may not be so. To be sure, the post 1945 world was probably preferable to that of Baldwin and Chamberlain, but the extent to which it fulfilled the dreams and ambitions of the young Conservatives deserves attention. Our sixth chapter, prior to a brief concluding section, will thus re-examine Butskellism - both its origins and its postwar meaning.

Though paths would diverge from 1914 it seems apt, like the literary accounts, to begin in that most gentrified of settings: the British public school. Where more emblematic of the Phoenix Generation’s pre-war lives, indeed, than Eton?<sup>96</sup>

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points out that Bob Boothby was the only Tory MP to sing the Red Flag in the first session after the 1945 election.

<sup>95</sup> See the corrective in Chapter Six.

<sup>96</sup> As our appendix shows, 105 of the 448 total – 23% - had attended Eton.

## **1: 1914 and All That**

*Have we not one single politician who is really out to do his best, holiday or no holiday, or are they all an unscrupulous set of narrow-minded, self satisfied crassly ignorant notaries!*

- Anthony Eden, writing to his mother from the front, December 1917<sup>1</sup>

*The Unionist Party - a flabby, jelly-like material containing of a number of nodules of soldier substance.*

- Leo Amery to George Lloyd, February 1916<sup>2</sup>

### **1.1 A Vision of Pre-War Eton**

The early July weather could scarcely have been finer as the future Prime Minister surveyed the scene around him. The sun's rays illuminated the already splendid John Shaw designed school buildings. Pupils mingled happily if deferentially with masters, quoting Robert Peel at one moment, Benjamin Disraeli the next. Amidst the tranquillity of Eton College, it is true, Anthony Eden's mind briefly mused on the recent happenings in Sarajevo, but like Agadir, he assumed, it would probably all blow over. It was such a terrible shame about Franz Ferdinand, but the great minds of Europe would surely not allow such an incident to destroy the longest period of peace the continent had ever known. Even had he been familiar with the term, it is unlikely he would written off pre-1914 diplomacy, in the words of the war weary Edmund Blackadder, as 'bollocks.'<sup>3</sup> As the sun began to dip, he considered his brother Timothy's predicament – living as he was in Germany – but it was best not to dwell on such ominous matters.

Anyway, there was so much to distract one. The excursions up the river to

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony to Lady Eden, 23 December 1917, UBSC, AP 22/1/255.

<sup>2</sup> Amery to Lloyd, 26 February 1916, CAC, GLLD 9/2.

<sup>3</sup> An argument forwarded in J. Mueller, 'Changing Attitudes towards War: The Impact of the First World War,' *British Journal of Political Science*, 21, (1991), 1-28, 3-4.

the club at Queen's Eyot were always fun; it all seemed 'gaiety, sunshine and good food.' And who could forget the recent match at Lord's against Harrow – the opening batsman Vane-Tempest had made a quick fire 37, and thus secured himself the admiration of his entire House, particularly one younger boy named Boothby. It had been a glittering scene: the ladies in the latest fashions, the gentlemen (including the boys) in top hats, and wearing carnations. Strawberries and cream, Pimm's for the masters, fresh lemonade for the boys. "Eden," bellowed his house master Churchill, awakening him from his daydream, "how is the rowing coming along?" Amidst all this finery, Gavrilo Princip was but a name.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Back to Reality

The above account is a fabrication: a collage of four memories of July 1914, distilled through the single personality of Anthony Eden. Individual facts – such as Eden worrying about his brother and the cricket match at Lord's – are historically accurate, but have been twisted, lost both in the proverbial sands of time of the subject, and the (possibly mis)interpretation of the present author. As far as memory goes, one might point out, it was ever thus. 'Memory instils remembrance with the sacred,' noted Pierre Nora, 'history, always prosaic, releases it again.'<sup>5</sup> Yet - as our introduction noted - where the dividing line between dry, academic 'history' and the more literary, allegorical, 'memory' actually falls is a particular problem when one comes to analysing the Great War and its aftermath. 'The First World War was the great military and political event of its time,' states Hynes, 'but it was also the great imaginative event.'<sup>6</sup> In his seminal work on *The Great War and Modern Memory* Fussell goes even further, pointing out that his book could easily have been subtitled 'An Inquiry into the Curious Literariness of Real Life,' and that the memoirs which form the basis of his study constitute, essentially, 'a kind of

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<sup>4</sup> A composite of A. Eden, *Another World 1897-1917*, (London, 1976) 50, 51; R.A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible. The Memoirs of Lord Butler*, (London, 1971), 29; H. Macmillan, *The Past Masters: Politics and Politicians, 1906-1939*, (London, 1975), 28; R. Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, (London, 1978), 15.

<sup>5</sup> P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24, 9.

<sup>6</sup> S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, (London, 1990), ix.

fiction.<sup>7</sup> Amen. Though by analysing the lives and actions of a group of men less likely to talk in metaphor, half truth, and irony – politicians – this account intends to circumvent such an approach, it would be foolish to lay claim to absolute fact in this most hazy period of modern British history. Hopefully however, we may avoid as much as possible the at once muddling and jarring dichotomy between Robert Graves's pre-1914 world of 'cucumber sandwiches' and 'chrysanthemums in bowls,' and his life in the trenches, where he so poignantly described the process of trying to get shot on patrol, constituting as it did 'my best way of lasting through to the end of the war.'<sup>8</sup> Put simply, the Great War presents us with a paradox. Those who might best help us understand its destructive meaning are buried in the fields of Flanders, or on the beaches at Gallipoli, and are thus unable to inform the living of either the lessons they learned, or the world vision they were fighting for.

In lieu of such testimony, we are thus reliant on the accounts of the living. To pick through such sources is however rather tricky. As Bogacz points out, 'the European war became an occasion for a crusade that saw the mobilisation of an extraordinary language filled with abstract, euphemistic, spiritualised words and phrases under which were buried the realities of modern mechanised warfare.'<sup>9</sup> Just as importantly, in its aftermath, the more famous works of Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen were 'accompanied by a host of minor literature which attempted to rescue war from futility not through the defunct rhetoric of glory and honour, but by describing for its readers the link between the suffering and the lessons of the war.'<sup>10</sup> 'The cessation of hostilities did not mean the end of the war experience but rather the beginning of a process in which that experience was framed, institutionalised, given ideological context, and relived in political action as well as fiction.'<sup>11</sup> Few veterans considered their lives the same after the horrors they had witnessed. Though the deluge of fiction only began in the late 1920s with *Goodbye*

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<sup>7</sup> P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (London, 1975), ix, 310.

<sup>8</sup> R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, (London, 1960), 10, 111.

<sup>9</sup> T. Bogacz, "'A Tyranny of Words": Language, Poetry, and Anti-Modernism in England in the First World War,' *Journal of Modern History*, 58, (1986), 643-668, 643.

<sup>10</sup> R.M. Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939*, (London, 1993), 1.

<sup>11</sup> E.J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, (London, 1979), xi.



to *All That* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the war began to be memorialised – thus, in part, fictionalised – almost from the moment the last gun sounded. Whether because of the pressure to “make sense” of their experiences, a desire to augur social change, or genuine trauma, such authors would not allow Britons to forget the war years.

All this was curiously “un-British,” or at least “un-English.” Memorials had, it is true, been erected to the fallen at Mafeking and Spion Kop, yet the volume of Boer War commemoration in no way compared to the aftermath of 1918. Why this was the case has been the source of much debate. To Bob Bushaway, the proliferation of memory – such as the 1920 unveiling of the Cenotaph and burial of the Unknown Warrior – and the blinding spectacle of the pageantry in which it was conducted, essentially constituted a conjuring trick on behalf of the political establishment. With the introduction of Remembrance Sunday, he argues, ‘British society witnessed an annual event in which social and political unity was reaffirmed. Other views and criticisms of the Great War were regarded as doing dishonour to the dead.’ At the same time, ‘the emergence of a language of remembrance had the effect of enhancing and enshrining the experience of the war, thereby removing it from the sphere of normal social and political debate.’<sup>12</sup> Though it has gained its adherents such as Adrian Gregory, this view has been challenged on a number of levels.<sup>13</sup> Alex King has interpreted mass commemoration as a ‘collective creative activity’ – that is to say the public were ‘creators,’ not simply ‘consumers,’ of the feeling of national mourning.<sup>14</sup> Jay Winter has argued that the manner in which the trenches were remembered essentially constituted a continuation of, rather than some pre-meditated break from, European tradition. Europeans came together to mourn the dead as they had always done, only scale and technology rendered any meaningful difference. The

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<sup>12</sup> B. Bushaway, ‘Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance,’ in R. Porter (ed), *Myths of the English*, (London, 1992), 136-167, 160.

<sup>13</sup> A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946*, (Oxford, 1994), 11: if, albeit derived from continued contestation and reinterpretation, ‘commemoration would, in practice, be a defence of the existing order.’

<sup>14</sup> A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance*, (Oxford, 1998), 246.

grief they experienced, thus, was organic.<sup>15</sup>

The rights and wrongs of this overarching argument – the manipulation of war from on high – need not concern us overly. What however we must acknowledge is that such a process was possible, and that the memory of 1914-18 could be bent, twisted and fashioned to meet the needs of whoever took it upon themselves to attempt such a feat. This was as true for an up and coming politician such as Harold Macmillan, as it was for a high flyer like David Lloyd George, or wordsmith in the mould of Graves. The only difference being – as we will investigate in chapter two – that unlike those two figures, a Macmillan was unable either to hide behind high office, or escape *Count of Monte Cristo* like to a Mallorcan paradise when the going got tough. Our sample of politicians had to face their memories head on.

### 1.3 Sheltered Beginnings

To prove that the First World War was indeed the turning point in the lives of Britain's finest that this study hypothesises, we must first look at the pre-war lives of the future Conservative statesmen. Aside from the obvious exposure to bloodshed and death – not exactly the average pre-1914 experience, though statesmen with combat experience (such as Churchill) provided something of an exception – what triggered the emergence of an empathetic mentality hitherto unseen in nominally Conservative circles? In what way was the war the bolt from the blue it appears in political memoirs? These are complex questions which cannot, as Robert Wohl somewhat sarcastically argues, simply be put down to the 'strong, brave and beautiful' *Generation of 1914* being 'sacrificed, decimated, [and] destroyed' on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the actual source of both the unrelenting drive and profound sense of guilt the war veteran felt – most especially amongst those who would become politicians in the 1920s – may take us to rather murkier parts of the human mind than the understandable sense of grief these men experienced. We will however get to that in due course.

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<sup>15</sup> J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European cultural history*, (Cambridge, 1998), 5, 227-8.

<sup>16</sup> R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, (Cambridge, Mass, 1979), 1.

If human beings make up merely the product of their experiences, then Harold Macmillan and his future cohort would seemingly present rather mundane figures prior to the Great War. Winston Churchill re-enacting the battles of his great ancestor Marlborough with his toys at Blenheim Palace represents something of an atypical sense of childhood comfort, but it broadly conforms to the general pattern. If Freud is correct in assuming all adult neuroses can be traced back to a traumatic childhood, the great Viennese doctor would have to delve very deep into the psyches of Oswald Mosley or Harry Crookshank to find it. In Charles Masterman's 1909 *The Condition of England* the problem this created was well surmised:

In all cases prosperity has brought some especial dangers: a weakening of the willingness to work, a rejection of earlier simplicities, a too eager absorption in pleasure...[this in turn begat] the tyranny of the present upon the imagination [which] is perhaps the greatest of all obstacles to reform.<sup>17</sup>

No wonder Keynes urged the need in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* to look post-war, not to 'the comforts of 1914, but to an immense broadening and intensification of them.' However, he sagely warned, 'it is only in England (and America) that it is possible to be so unconscious.'<sup>18</sup> The struggle to change the static nature of British society, even after a catastrophe such as the First World War, forms the basis of this work's later chapters. For now, let us explore its roots.

As Masterman bemoaned, in certain quarters of Victorian and Edwardian England comfort had created lethargy. When the interwar politicians were in their infancy, the great British deeds – the colonisation of India, The Battle of Trafalgar, and even, in the case of the younger men, the scramble for Africa – were more part of the national folklore, than actually tangible - something Henry Willink described

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<sup>17</sup> C. Masterman, *The Condition of England*, (London, 1960), 215, 217.

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, (London, 1924), 2.

well in his unpublished memoirs.<sup>19</sup> Such men grew up amidst a very strange atmosphere – ultra-masculine in tone, yet rather feminine in practice.<sup>20</sup> Actual suffering was rare, certainly compared to the Dickensian childhood of a man the great and the good would flock to in the 1920s, the auteur Charlie Chaplin, whose mother was sent to an insane asylum whilst he and his brother toiled in the workhouse.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, Anthony Eden's most disturbing childhood incident seems to have been given a pony whose tail 'had been cruelly docked.'<sup>22</sup> Not perhaps quite the same level of emotional scarring.

Where the nation's future soldiers turned leaders may have suffered was in a mental, rather than physical, regard. Continually when reading the memoirs of such men one sees a division, mostly starkly expressed in the testimony of Philip Lloyd-Greame (later President of the Board of Trade), between a childhood and adolescence that was 'happy' yet 'undistinguished.'<sup>23</sup> Why was this case? Why did these men who were essentially being groomed to follow the footsteps of their forefathers – into the bar, civil service, possibly becoming non-descript yet loyal Tory backbenchers – feel so ill at ease with the world around them? The answer is, quite simply, that they did not.<sup>24</sup> The neophilia the war veteran exuded after 1918 was purely post-facto, they may well have latterly rejected '1914...with its little

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<sup>19</sup> 'As I Remember' Unpublished Autobiography, 22, 1968, CAC, WILL box 1. K. Boyd, 'Knowing Your Place: The Tensions of manliness in boys' story papers, 1918-39,' 145-167 in M. Roper and J. Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*, (New York, 1991), is an interesting illustration of how literature aimed at boys became more democratised after 1918, with working class characters beginning to embody the characteristics of chivalry previously only portrayed in upper class heroes.

<sup>20</sup> Duff Cooper's socialising with Lady Desborough, who has 'mastered one of the most important departments in the whole art of life...the art of entertaining' was not atypical. Duff Cooper to Lady Desborough, 15 January 1913, HALS, DES, D/ERV/C/579/2.

<sup>21</sup> C. Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, (London, 2003), passim. One student of Jesus College, Cambridge described the South London slums of Chaplin's youth as 'the most unpleasant sight I had ever looked upon.' *Chanticleire*, 49, Lent 1909, JCA.

<sup>22</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 28. Future Wee-Free Liberal war veterans too mostly lived a sheltered life, John Tudor Rees's most dramatic childhood incident constituting a stern telling off from a police constable for stealing apples: J. Tudor Rees, *Reserved Judgment: Some Reflections and Recollections*, (London, 1956), 9.

<sup>23</sup> P. Lloyd-Greame, *I Remember*, (London, 1946), 12.

<sup>24</sup> In his pre-war student days James Reid, later MP for Stirling, seemed to have had college rowing more on the brain than any break with tradition. *Chanticleire*, 52, Lent 1910, also mentioned in P. Gardner-Smith diaries 1908-11, JCA, PGS passim.

artificial life [and] its stupendous selfishness,' but this was only in retrospect.<sup>25</sup> In reality such men emanated from the same sources and were happy with their lot. Harold Macmillan, Harry Crookshank, Bobbety Cranborne, Oliver Lyttelton, Anthony Eden, Bob Boothby – the list of old Etonians who would assume influential positions in the Tory Party over the following decades is legion (and, in Phoenix Generation terms, included in our appendix).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the overwhelming majority (81%) of Conservative MPs elected in 1918 had attended public school, a five percent increase from the December 1910 election.<sup>27</sup> Predictably enough Oxbridge would house many such men once they reached university age – Cuthbert Headlam noting that the Conservative Parliamentary Party in 1932 contained 18 members from Magdalen College (Oxford) alone.<sup>28</sup> There is little evidence that this path was in any way unsatisfactory to these young men. To be sure, aspects of their lives irked them – Oswald Mosley barely spoke to his philandering father, Lloyd-Greame eschewed reading law at Cambridge like his father and grandfather to take it at Oxford, Macmillan joined the Fabian Society whilst at that same university – yet these acts of rebellion were carried out within the ever so genteel surroundings of upper class England.<sup>29</sup> The notion that Mosley could join the Labour Party, as he did in 1924, or that Macmillan could reject Conservatism wholesale, as he essentially did by resigning the whip in 1936, would have appeared unlikely in 1914. One can scarcely overestimate the static nature of gentrified England in the Edwardian epoch – Roman Catholicism, with which Macmillan flirted under his mentor Ronald Knox but ultimately rejected for fear of upsetting his mother, was but one of many aspects of polite society which were to be seen but not heard.<sup>30</sup>

Looking at the lives of these men, there is scant evidence that this world in

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<sup>25</sup> Oswald Mosley in *Harrow Gazette*, 24 October 1919.

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix E.

<sup>27</sup> D. and G. Butler, *Twentieth-Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, (London, 2000), 190.

<sup>28</sup> S. Ball (ed), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries, 1923-1935*, (London, 1992), 233, [9 March 1932].

<sup>29</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules of the Game / Beyond the Pale*, (Illinois, 1991), 1; J.A. Cross, *Lord Swinton*, (Oxford, 1982), 3; F. Beckett, *Macmillan*, (London, 2006), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Beckett, *Macmillan*, 8.

any way upset them. Their perspective may have been narrow, but it seems they were content in this environment. In this regard then, one must have some sympathy with Robert Wohl's attempts to denounce the notion that 'all might have been different if only the splendid young men of 1914 had not given up their lives on the fields of Flanders.'<sup>31</sup> This idea is highly questionable – all may well have been exactly the same, the ranks of the upper classes would have been a little fuller, but the status quo would most probably have been retained. As Siegfried Sassoon opined in 1915, 'war is our scourge, yet war has made us wise. And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.'<sup>32</sup> The *freedom* however was not that of preventing Prussian tyranny, but was rather more internal. The *wisdom* was not only that the world held bloodier realities than Henley or Lord's, but that, quite simply, a world existed outside these places.

Of course, one must be careful lest we suggest that all the politicians in this study went straight from school or university to the battlefield. The war veteran was – in age terms – a diverse entity. George Llewellyn Palmer, first elected as a Conservative for Westbury in 1918 after having commanded a brigade in the war was, having been born in 1857, a full 39 years older than Oswald Mosley, Lieutenant with the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers, who entered the Commons that same year as member for Harrow. The notion that all ex-soldiers had embarked for Flanders fresh from Eton or Oxbridge is thus something of a fallacy, not helped by the fact that two of the wars most famous chroniclers – Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon – essentially did just that. In fact, as data in our appendix shows, Etonian future ex-servicemen were more likely to have left the school in 1890s than 1900s or 1910s.<sup>33</sup> In reality then, many veterans later to become politicians had had a life before 1914, just one which was conducted within very narrow parameters. Some, like the former director of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce Frederick Astbury, had risen high in the business world, others such as Gerald Berkeley Hurst

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<sup>31</sup> Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> S. Sassoon, *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon*, (London, 1983), 15 ["Absolution"].

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix E.

had achieved literary notoriety, more still choosing the legal profession.<sup>34</sup> Doubtless had the war not occurred, those of the Graves generation – such as Mosley, Macmillan and Eden – would have followed a similar path. After all, these were men who could, had they truly desired, have rebelled against the country houses, public schools and staid nature of their upbringing. In many cases – the publishing heir Macmillan, and favourite of his John Bull-esque grandfather Mosley in particular – they possessed the ability to achieve financial independence from their parents once they came of age, yet evidently they had no wish to do so.

Here is where the befuddling dichotomy of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain lies: a generation of boys were brought up, as the headmaster of Leo Amery noted, in ‘wholesome severity.’<sup>35</sup> Through public school emphasis on sport and vigour, as Bourke observes, ‘manly virtues were instilled.’<sup>36</sup> Fencing, shooting, and rugby undoubtedly reinforced senses of masculinity, the latter whose very ‘goal was to train young men to be leaders of the Empire, to demonstrate the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race in peace and war.’<sup>37</sup> ‘Sportsmen,’ as one French historian succinctly put it, were but little ‘warriors,’ and Anthony Fletcher’s analysis of Reggie Trench is probably not atypical in this regard.<sup>38</sup> Even if, as Pound notes, English youth ‘was not in thrall to the associative oppressiveness of such symbols’ as Napoleon’s tomb or the German memorials of 1871, they were raised to regard physicality in positive terms.<sup>39</sup> There was, as Samuel Hynes has noted, an *Edwardian Turn of Mind* – even Malcolm MacDonald, son of Ramsay, was not

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<sup>34</sup> See G. B. Hertz, *British Imperialism in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1908). Michael Falcon, MP for Norfolk East from 1918, was but one of many barristers later to become Conservative politicians having served in the Great War.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Heel to Leo Amery’s mother, 22 December 1886, CAC, AMEL 6/1/3.

<sup>36</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male. Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (London, 1996), 13.

<sup>37</sup> T. Collins, ‘English Rugby Union and the First World War,’ *Historical Journal*, 45, (2002), 797-817, 798. See also M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture 1850-2000*, (Wiltshire, 2000), 52-4 for the type of literature set in the colonies targeted at English youth.

<sup>38</sup> C. Jamet-Bellier de la Duboisiere, *Commemorating the Lost Generation: First World War Memorials in Cambridge, Oxford and Some English Public Schools*, Cambridge M. Litt Thesis, 1994, 4. A. Fletcher, ‘Patriotism, Identity and Commemoration: New Light on the Great War from the Papers of Reggie Chenevix Trench,’ *History*, 300 (2005), 532-549.

<sup>39</sup> R. Pound, *The Lost Generation*, (London, 1964), 17.

immune from such a schooling.<sup>40</sup>

The various Officer Training Corps were an interesting manifestation of the type of issues surrounding masculinity which DeGroot, Neddham and Tosh have explored.<sup>41</sup> Following Eton's example in 1860, and the steady trickle of schools to introduce cadet training in the 1870s and 1880s, the Boer War - and the fears of degeneration it had exposed - produced a groundswell in favour of the OTCs.<sup>42</sup> Those pupils enrolled were - for ten days to two weeks a year whilst at camp - 'removed altogether from the influences of everyday life, uniformed...under strict discipline,' and imbued with the 'understanding that the first requirements of the moment are always military ones.'<sup>43</sup> At the outbreak of war almost 10,000 boys were in this position. Included in the appendix of Captain Haig-Brown's 1915 *O.T.C. and the Great War* are also the thousands of graduates gazetted between August 1914 and the following March. With regards to names that will litter our story, one might note John Loder, Harold Macmillan, Oliver Stanley and Henry Willink from Eton, Oswald Mosley and Philip Lloyd-Greame from Winchester, Euan Wallace and Leonard Ropner from Harrow, as well as Clement Attlee and Walter Elliot from their respective universities.<sup>44</sup>

Yet concurrent to this hyper-masculine trend was a similar national urge to create a race of little Byrons. The very fact that such literary accounts of the Great War could be written, serving as evidence that Graves and his cohort were raised in atmosphere where tackling Ancient Greek philosophy was deemed as important as tackling an advancing prop forward. Despite the well documented second class status afforded to women before and after the Great War in British society, the

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<sup>40</sup> S. Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, (London, 1968), 23-4; Malcolm MacDonald, Unpublished Autobiography 'Constant Surprise - A Twentieth Century Life,' 15, CUL, RCS/RCMS 41.

<sup>41</sup> G. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, (London, 1996), J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (London, 1999) and F. Neddham, 'Constructing Masculinities under Thomas Arnold of Rugby (1828-1842): Gender, Educational Policy and School Life in an Early-Victorian Public School,' *Gender and Education*, 16 (2004), 303-26.

<sup>42</sup> A.R. Haig-Brown, *The O.T.C. and the Great War*, (London, 1915), 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 110, 142, 176, 181, 188, 204, 213, 224 and 229.



realm of the upper class youth was paradoxically much more feminine than in contemporary times.<sup>45</sup> Though tales of 'rugger' increasingly made up a public school boy's reading in the early 1900s, this was more than offset by other aspects of their childhood. Anthony Eden, for example, recalled the rather effete nature of his home:

The formal Victorian garden was submerged in schemes of colour, with the pervading scent of lavender and rosemary and sweet briar. My father built the terraces which set off Bonomi's architecture and, above all, thinned and planted at every angle from the house until the trees were Windlestone's chief glory. It was the same within the house. Apart from the pictures and furniture, the decoration, the curtains, the library kept up to date, all these taught, beguiled, even inspired any visitor in the least sensitive to beauty.<sup>46</sup>

If Britain's young bourgeoisie and aristocrats were raised with a sword in one hand, they were taught to wield a pen in the other. The classics were devoured, holidays taken abroad, and foreign languages mastered – even that most quintessential Englishman, Stanley Baldwin, acquainting himself with French, German and Italian.<sup>47</sup> If there was a source of resentment amongst such figures before 1914, it was at the state of uncertainty this contradiction produced. With the advent of that 'tragic and unnecessary conflict,' the First World War, this was to be all too decisively resolved.<sup>48</sup>

#### 1.4 The Meaning of 1914

What happened across Europe in August 1914 remains contentious. Like the war

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<sup>45</sup> For the inert nature of the female lot in life in the first half of the twentieth century, see G. Braybon, 'Women and the War,' in S. Constantine, M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *The First World War in British History*, (London, 1995), 141-167.

<sup>46</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> P. Williamson and E. Baldwin (eds), *Baldwin Papers: A Conservative Statesman, 1908-1947*, (Cambridge, 2004), 19-20.

<sup>48</sup> J. Keegan, *The First World War*, (London, 1998), 3.

itself, much is shrouded in aesthetic mystery. To the immediate onlooker, the various declarations of war seemed to produce a collective outpouring of emotion seldom seen before, or indeed since.<sup>49</sup> To one impoverished man, standing in Munich's Odeonplatz, this was a time to thank 'Heaven...for granting me the good fortune of being permitted to live at this time.'<sup>50</sup> Although as one of the chief critics of 'the myth of war enthusiasm,' Niall Ferguson, points out, 'it is hard to believe that any sentiment felt by Adolf Hitler was...universal,' one cannot argue with the numbers – particularly in the British case.<sup>51</sup> No fewer than 300,000 men enlisted in the first month of the war, 100,000 more than called for. In a single week (30 August-5 September 1914) 174,901 men joined up, forcing the army to raise its minimum height restrictions.<sup>52</sup> Truly astonishing.

Of greater interest than "what" happened however, is "why." Ferguson has postulated five possible reasons for mass war enthusiasm, so far as it existed: successful recruiting techniques; female pressure; peer-group (i.e. male) pressure; economic motives, and simple impulse.<sup>53</sup> We will turn to a few of these, in so far as they relate to future Conservative politicians, later. It is first necessary to acknowledge that the upper class "toff" enlisting found himself in a very different position to the average Tommy. To begin with – and possibly with an eye to posterity – such men picked the division they joined up with a great deal of care. Harold Macmillan's story is possibly the most indicative, using his mother's connections to secure himself a place in the prestigious Grenadier Guards, after passing out of Kitchener's New Army.<sup>54</sup> At Eton there was much talk 'as to which regiment we should try to join,' remembered Eden. 'The Coldstream were at Windsor and an easy contact. The Grenadier Guards had a firm and loyal following,

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<sup>49</sup> However, challenged in J.J. Becker, *1914: Comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre*, (Paris, 1977) and J. Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany*, (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> A. Hitler, trans R. Manheim, *Mein Kampf*, (London, 1922), 148.

<sup>51</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, (London, 1999), 174.

<sup>52</sup> J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, (London, 1985), 30.

<sup>53</sup> Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 205-7.

<sup>54</sup> H. Macmillan, *Winds of Change 1914-1939*, (London, 1966), 61-4.

and there were always Greenjackets around.<sup>55</sup> Given the bloody rights of passage they were to receive, such petty matters seem almost tragicomic in their irrelevance – Robert Graves emphasising the pointlessness of it in all in *Goodbye to All That*:

I used to congratulate myself on having quite blindly chosen the Royal Welsh Fusiliers of all regiments in the army. “Good God! I used to think. “Suppose that when war broke out I had been living in Cheshire, and had applied for a commission in the Cheshire Regiment.”<sup>56</sup>

Such childish concerns would be challenged all too quickly.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, the importance of such matters indicate that for Britain’s upper class war was a choice not an imperative. Until conscription was introduced in 1916 it was perfectly possible to avoid service, whether by choice or governmental decree. Alfred Duff Cooper, later member for Oldham and prominent critic of Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement, did not become a soldier until the spring of 1917 – his job in the foreign office rendering him ineligible for combat, and chomping at the bit.<sup>58</sup> This is indeed what makes the notion of a “Lost Generation” more plausible than has been acknowledged by some historians. Demographically of course, it is doubtful – as Wohl notes, ‘British losses were proportionately less than those of the other major European countries that went to war in 1914...[L]osses...had been terrible. But not sufficient to destroy a generation.’<sup>59</sup> The oft repeated statement – which wartime schoolboy turned Tory rebel Bob Boothby recounted – that the First World War ‘wiped out a whole

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<sup>55</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 62.

<sup>56</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Challenged, but not knocked out of them. Macmillan’s studied watching of army drills outside his window in 10 Downing Street attests to that, for all the possible dramatic license he employed (see our introduction). As Simon Ball noted, it remained a badge of honour to have been a *Guardsmen*.

<sup>58</sup> J.J. Norwich (ed), *The Duff Cooper Diaries 1915-1951*, (London, 2005), 53 [17 May 1917].

<sup>59</sup> Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 113.

generation' does not bear close scrutiny.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, as mischief maker *par excellence* A.J.P. Taylor pointed out, if one takes into account decreased emigration rates from the British Isles during the conflict, 1914-18 marked a net increase in the British population – even amongst those of fighting age.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, as Mueller has shown with reference to the Taiping rebellion in mid-nineteenth century China (where 30,000,000 people lost their lives), and the total destruction of Carthage by Rome in 146BC, the Great War was hardly unique in terms of mass slaughter.<sup>62</sup> This however, is only half the story.<sup>63</sup>

The men of the “Lost Generation” – those found pre-war ‘at Oxford and Cambridge, and...at the better public schools,’ who ‘volunteered for service in the fighting forces and did whatever they could to...secure their transfer to the field of battle’- certainly do deserve credit, whatever their later tendency to mythologise their deeds, and the extent of their losses.<sup>64</sup> Their mistake was to over emphasise the dysgenic nature of the conflict, which as Winter argues can largely be blamed upon post 1918 ideas of European malaise; of the strength and vitality of British society being undermined; of, as Spengler famously put it, *The Decline of the West*.<sup>65</sup> The need, as Spengler declared, to see the war as a ‘historical change of phase’ imbued the upper strata of European society to look for answers that were not there – auguring, as Croce argued, the emergence of fascism in Italy.<sup>66</sup> In Britain the aristocracy essentially invented a legend – not admittedly without some factual

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<sup>60</sup> Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, 17.

<sup>61</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, (Oxford, 1970), 165. Adrian Gregory corroborates with reference to the nation’s capital: A. Gregory, ‘Lost Generations: the impact of military casualties on Paris, London, and Berlin,’ in J.M. Winter and J.L. Robert (eds), *Capital Cities at War, Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, (Cambridge, 1997), 57-103.

<sup>62</sup> Mueller, ‘Changing Attitudes,’ 4-5.

<sup>63</sup> Myths of a lost generation of aristocrats aside, G. Clark, *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World*, (Princeton, 2007), passim showed how Britain escaped mankind’s Malthusian Trap first by downward social mobility. The children of the wealthy survived at much greater rates than those of the poor, and thus, over numerous generations, began to usurp them as the poor – and, Clark places great importance upon, their genes – died out. The war did not reverse matters.

<sup>64</sup> Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 85-86.

<sup>65</sup> J.M. Winter, ‘Britain’s “Lost Generation” of the First World War,’ *Population Studies*, 31, (1977), 449-466, 465-6; O. Spengler, C.F. Atkinson trans, *The Decline of the West*, (London, 1959).

<sup>66</sup> F.F. Rizzi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism*, (Toronto, 2003), passim.

accuracy, as casualty rates at Eton illustrated – that they had been exterminated.<sup>67</sup> This obscures the real truth – that whilst the upper class milieu of which future politicians were a part did not shoulder all, or even most, of the burden of war, theirs was almost certainly the most altruistic effort in British society. As Ferguson points out, economics was perhaps *the* determining factor in people’s decision to enlist. The peak of British unemployment caused by financial panic at the outbreak of war was also the peak level of enlistment. Nine out of ten of the working men laid off in Bristol in the first month of the war joined up, indicating that ‘men were not wholly irrational.’<sup>68</sup> Soldiers joined for their pockets, as much as their hearts – in a war rumoured to be “over by Christmas,” it may well have seemed easy money. As Adrian Gregory has recently concurred, for a working class often living in conditions akin to a modern day third world slum, the trenches could be a route *out* of hell.<sup>69</sup> If nothing else, to the average worker eating meat on a daily basis – even the dreaded Machonochie stew – was a real treat.<sup>70</sup> To a group of men raised at public school, educated at Oxbridge, and with prominent societal connections, such concerns were hardly paramount.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, a high proportion of the population – principally the working class – were simply unfit for combat duty, or were unable to leave their current jobs (pre-conscription) with the horrific spectre of unemployment awaiting them should they return. The National Service Medical Board, which examined two and a half million men during the last year of the war, deemed 41.4 percent of them either ‘not able to undergo physical exertion’ or ‘totally...unfit for

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<sup>67</sup> The story was a mythology to be sure, but statistically Eton College was indeed hit hard. Of its 5650 pupils who went on to be veterans, 1,157 (20%) died in the conflict, with 1,467 (26%) suffering wounds – a 46% casualty rate. E.L. Vaughan (ed), *List of Etonians Who Fought in the Great War 1914-1919*, (Windsor, 1921), 280.

<sup>68</sup> Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 206.

<sup>69</sup> A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, 2008), 258. An exaggeration? Perhaps. G. Clark, *A Farewell to Alms*, 46 shows how per capita incomes of 1800 Britons were already above modern Third World conditions.

<sup>70</sup> I. Bet-El, *Conscripts: The Lost Legacies of the Great War*, (Stroud, 1990), passim, rather underplays this.

<sup>71</sup> So long as, like Duff Cooper, they could continue to receive ‘a bottle of port wine’ every now and then, all was well. Duff Cooper to Desborough, 30 July 1918, HALS, DES, D/ERV/C579/11.

any military service.<sup>72</sup> Two years earlier, governmental papers indicated that whereas fewer than 1 in 4 pre-war workers in mines and quarries had volunteered by April 1916, over 40% of finance and commercial employees had joined up, which would increase to 58% by July 1917.<sup>73</sup> This then was not an even war, but one which was a greater danger to white rather than blue collar workers. It is difficult to imagine an Edward Wood (later Foreign Secretary as Lord Halifax), born with only one hand, serving in the trenches had he been born in the workhouse – for he would possibly have lacked both the ability to leave behind any employment he had mustered (even with presumably pitiful pay), and the connections to “pass” any medical examination. It was to him, perhaps more than any other, a *choice* to serve.

Yet if these men were not coerced into conflict, we must acknowledge one profoundly important point with particular relevance to their later understanding of the meaning of war. That if their upbringing had hovered between the femininity of the written word and the masculinity of the public school, they, like the entire nation, were about to become immersed in a world where masculinity was elevated to ever increasing heights.<sup>74</sup> In light of the grim acceptance which greeted the war in 1939, the atmosphere in 1914 seems almost incomprehensible. In a large part this took the form of women bestowing upon men either honour or disgrace, depending on the man’s military credentials. On the one hand, encouraged by propagandists such as Arthur Conan Doyle, groups of women took it upon themselves to show contempt for the unenlisted, and even hand out white feathers to those wearing mufti. One personal advertisement in *The Times* even tauntingly announced: ‘Englishwoman undertakes to Form and Equip a Regiment

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<sup>72</sup> Winter, ‘Lost Generation,’ 455.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 454.

<sup>74</sup> Masculinity is, to be sure, a contested issue. E. Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*, (London, 1987) argues that pre-war middle-class masculinity utterly unable to cope with trench warfare. On the other hand, C. Tylee, ‘Maleness Run Riot’ – the Great War and Women’s Response to Militarism, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 11/3, 203-4, argues that war remained attractive, and the repression of this attraction produced the postwar neuroses.

of Women for the Firing Line if lawn tennis and cricketing young men will agree to act as Red Cross nurses in such a Regiment.’<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Angela Woollacott has argued that ‘in late 1914 an epidemic of khaki fever broke out across Britain. Young women, it seemed, were so attracted to men in military uniform that they behaved in immodest and even dangerous ways.’ Denied the patriotic fulfilment that only enlistment could bring, girls as young as thirteen congregated vicariously with uniformed men, delivering the kind of ego boost that no amount of rugby or academic success could bring.<sup>76</sup> These efforts were only amateur however.

More important was the concertedly aggressive cultural environment whipped up by the establishment. A nation bellicosely going to war – *plus ça change*, one might reply. Yet the Great War was certainly a little different. Recruiting techniques were highly polished – the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) sent out 8 million recruiting letters and distributed 54 million posters, leaflets and other publications.<sup>77</sup> In an age of mass media, something of a war psychosis was whipped up. Kitchener’s jabbing finger, militaristic newspaper editorials, all were designed to appeal to masculine tendencies. Leaders such as that in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* on 1 September 1914 served to fuel the fire: ‘We must have more men from Britain – our allies have already given the full extent of their manhood.’<sup>78</sup> The biggest offender would be Lord Northcliffe, whose input into British policy through *The Times* did much to drive the nation into war, and reduce any chance of a quick peace: ‘nationhood has its responsibilities as well as its privileges...each must sacrifice himself for all’; ‘the time has come for defending all we hold dear, by force of arms and with all the manhood we possess’, the rhetoric of those crucial weeks scarcely paused for breath.<sup>79</sup> To be fair to

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<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 31 August 1914.

<sup>76</sup> A. Woollacott, ‘“Khaki Fever” and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2, (1994), 325-347, 325.

<sup>77</sup> Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 205.

<sup>78</sup> *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 1 September 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *Times*, 16 August 1914, 5 September 1914,

Northcliffe, all this was but the tip of the iceberg.<sup>80</sup> During the Boer War conflict had been presented in redemptive, rather than apocalyptic terms. 'Out of the present strife and conflict,' declared *The Daily Mail* in 1900, 'shall emerge an Empire stronger, more fully prepared, amply equipped against the worst our foes can do against us.'<sup>81</sup> Four years later, even *The Daily Mirror* praised British military intervention in Tibet, Nigeria and Somaliland: 'That England is at war shows an amount of energy and superabundant spirits that go a long way to demonstrate that we are not a decaying race.'<sup>82</sup>

There was clearly a strange contradiction in fin-de-siècle and Edwardian Britain. Unlike Germany they possessed numerous "places in the sun," London was the financial capital of the world, and the upstart contenders to their supremacy – Japan, Germany, the United States – lagged behind them. Even if the economic gap was closing, as illustrated by the increasingly dominant levels of American and German steel production, Britannia still ruled the waves. Yet amongst the intelligentsia – the press, commentators such as Booth, Rowntree and Masterman – was the notion that the nation was in decay. Working class lives could often be, as Masterman noted, 'laborious and disappointing,' and the slums were still far from being cleared.<sup>83</sup> That this had contemporary political ramifications has been well documented – redistribution of wealth finally becoming accepted practice with the progressive Liberal reforms (Old Age Pensions for the elderly from 1908, Labour exchanges for the unemployed from 1909, and National Insurance from 1911) standing as some of the hallmarks of British social legislation. Yet the very necessity of such measures produced within the national conscience feelings of

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<sup>80</sup> Views on Northcliffe could be mixed, but not by no means universally negative. British prisoners at the Somme were wary about *The Times*, *Daily Mail* ('Daily Liar') and Bottomley's *John Bull*. Officers however (not an uncommon rank amongst the Phoenix Generation) 'gave the Northcliffe press the credit for urging on the public to ever greater efforts.' C. Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916*, (London, 2006), 91.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Mail*, 21 January 1900.

<sup>82</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 April 1904. More generally, see G. Wilkinson, "'The Blessings of War': The Depiction of Military Force in Edwardian Newspapers,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998), 97-115.

<sup>83</sup> Masterman, *Condition of England*, 72.



extreme tension and under confidence. The bellicosity of the press and rush of so-called “war enthusiasm” – both before and during the First World War – was but collective over compensation. As Stromberg has illustrated, simply because after 1918 the world came to view war as horrific we should not be blinded to its perceived redemptive qualities in the early 1900s.<sup>84</sup> War, as Arno Mayer points out, could serve as the release of pent up pressure in a society.<sup>85</sup> This need not take the conspiratorial form proposed by Fritz Fischer – whereby German leaders attempted their 1914 *Griff Nach der Weltmacht* to allay domestic strife – but could, as in the British case before the Great War, take a more cultural dimension.<sup>86</sup> Perceived malaise, if not necessitating drastic action, made it more amenable.<sup>87</sup>

This is how we must view the interwar generation of politicians during this period. Nervous no doubt, but excited at the prospect “to do something” which would release the shackles of their rather listless youth. *Noblesse oblige*, the chance to participate in the great event of their time, and patriotism informed their decision to fight, much more to be enthused about doing so, than other, socially and economically less fortunate, contemporaries. The femininity and inertia of their upbringing was about to be replaced with that most manly of endeavours: war. Or so they thought.

### 1.5 Different Types of Wars

There is a tendency to think of the First World War as a homogeneous experience. Doubtless, individual campaigns have had their differences exposed – Lawrence of Arabia, ANZACs at Gallipoli, Sassoon and Graves in France – but we still tend to think of these experiences as variations upon a collective theme of perpetual horror. The First World War was a total war, no doubt. Few would have

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<sup>84</sup> R.N. Stromber, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914*, (Kansas, 1982), 178.

<sup>85</sup> A.J. Mayer, ‘Internal Causes and Purposes of War in Europe, 1870-1956: A Research Assignment,’ *Journal of Modern History*, 41 (1969), 291-303.

<sup>86</sup> G. DeGroot, *Douglas Haig 1871-1928*, (London, 1988), presents a Haig in the thrall of such values. ‘The Great War was for him not a crusade to rescue poor little Belgium, it was a defence of Empire – God’s Empire. Victory (he thought) would purify and strengthen Britain.’ (407).

<sup>87</sup> Fischer’s book, “Grasp at World Power” receiving a more anodyne title in the English translation. F. Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, (London, 1964).

experienced 1914-18 without a family member or friend enlisting, whilst the Zeppelin raids brought war to mainland Britain for the first time since the days of Bonnie Prince Charlie. Despite this, the tacitly implied notion that for four years day and night the nation in its entirety either fired a gun or mourned loved ones is obviously implausible. The war years were multi-faceted, and were not all faced ankle deep in the mud of Flanders.

The starkest contrast it produced forms the focus of this study – the discrepancy between those who served, and those who did not. It is worthwhile briefly turning to the experience of Colonel Lambert Ward, who commanded the Howe Battalion of the Royal Naval Division in 1916. In one of his first parliamentary speeches, Ward, elected in 1918 as Conservative MP for Hull North West, delivered an address which even in the dusty pages of Hansard remains deeply moving – similar in tone, it seems, to A.P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* published that year.<sup>88</sup> A subject, 'impossible to bring...forward during the war,' had been on his 'mind for a considerable time':

I should like to obtain an assurance from the Secretary of State for War that there shall be no difference made between the graves of those men who were killed in action or died of wounds and disease, and the graves of those unfortunate men who paid the penalties of their lives under Sections 4 and 12 of the Army Act, or who, in other words, were tried by court-martial and shot for cowardice or desertion in the face of the enemy...I bring this forward because it has been on my conscience for some time, as, unfortunately, it was my unfortunate duty to sit on a court-martial at which five men were sentenced to death...I had the uncomfortable feeling that, even with my limited knowledge of law, I

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<sup>88</sup> A.P. Herbert, *The Secret Battle*, (Oxford, 1919), 130. Herbert, later an independent Member of Parliament, commented 'this book is not an attack on any person, on the death penalty, or on anything else, though if it makes people think about these things, so much the better. I think I believe in the death penalty — I do not know. But I did not believe in [the protagonist] Harry Penrose being shot. That is the gist of it; that my friend Harry was shot for cowardice — and he was one of the bravest men I ever knew.'

could have got each one of those men off on a technicality if I had been in a position to act as their friend.<sup>89</sup>

How could men without such horrific experience ever truly understand the tragedy of which Ward was a part? This was a question he himself went on to cover:

I ask the House not to dismiss this petition by the remark that these men were cowards and deserved their fate. They were not cowards in the accepted meaning of the word. At any rate they did not display one-tenth part of the cowardice that was displayed by the crowds in London who went flocking to the tube stations on the first alarm of an air raid...I think it is well that it should be made publicly known and that the people of this country should understand what war is, and that Hon. Members of this House who have done well in the War, without perhaps having been very near the front line, should understand that from the point of view of Tommy up in the trenches war is not a question of honours and decorations, but war is just hell.<sup>90</sup>

Ward's speech would pass without comment for the rest of the debate. Indeed, it was only in 2006 that all 306 British soldiers shot for desertion and cowardice were pardoned, with families of the executed suffering for many years 'financial hardship (not helped by the lack of military pensions), stigma, and shame.'<sup>91</sup>

According to Putkowski and Sykes's *Shot at Dawn*, Ward's question had been prompted by a newspaper report concerning 'Jim' who, having served bravely, experienced shell shock which prevented him leaving his trenches and engaging the enemy.<sup>92</sup> 'Jim' was, it appears, Private Frederick Butcher – executed by friends and comrades who softly whispered 'au revoir' in his ear minutes before

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<sup>89</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 29 July 1919, vol.188, c.2040.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, c.2041-2042.

<sup>91</sup> *Guardian*, 16 August 2006.

<sup>92</sup> 'According to', because the date of Ward's speech 31 July, seems to be before the newspaper article cited, *Lincolnshire Report*, 9 August 1919.

pulling the triggers which ended his life. Butcher's mother was informed he had been killed in action, and his name appears on Folkestone's War Memorial.<sup>93</sup> After Ward's abortive effort, the Labour MP Ernest Thurtle took up the mantle. Getting the Labour Party to adopt the abolition of the death penalty for military cowardice in 1925, he took the motion to the floor of the Commons in April 1930.

There are two ways to view the debate that ensued. On the one hand, over half (58.5%, 80 MPs) the Phoenix Generation voted for Lambert Ward's amendment to retain the death penalty for those who deserted under, essentially, conditions of shell-shock, and then went on to encourage the others to desert. George Courthope's motion to keep the penalty for deserting a patrol post saw similar, if slightly reduced, levels of support from Tory veterans (53%, 72 MPs).<sup>94</sup> No Conservative member voted with Labour, arguably vindicating Putkowski and Sykes's charged remark about 'the Tory dinosaurs in both houses.'<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, there was more support for an evolution in policy than Lambert Ward had received in 1919. Though right-wing MPs like Tufton Beamish believed 'the man who is conquered by fear is a coward, and deserves all he gets,' members like John Hills, Gerald Berkeley Hurst and Lambert Ward himself reached rather different conclusions.<sup>96</sup> Denouncing the principle of *pour encourager les autres* which had justified the 1914 Army Act, Hills did not 'see what good you can do by shooting a man for cowardice, neither do I see that by carrying out a sentence of that kind you strengthen the nerves of the comrades of the man who is shot.' Calling into question conscription, he believed politicians 'have no right to take a man from the factory or the farm and put him into khaki and a tin hat, and then shoot him if he

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<sup>93</sup> J. Putkowski and J. Sykes, *Shot At Dawn*, (London, 1992), 255-7.

<sup>94</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 3 April 1930, vol.237, col.1564-627.

<sup>95</sup> Putkowski and Sykes, *Shot At Dawn*, 273.

<sup>96</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 3 April 1930, vol.237, col. 1572. To Berkeley Hurst, rather like Lambert Ward before him, 'it has always seemed to me an abominable thing that where, owing to exhaustion, or shock, or exposure to long privations, a volunteer, perhaps untrained or only partly trained, has given way to nerves, he should run the risk of the death penalty, while men who have not volunteered are living at home in ease and comfort.'

shows cowardice.<sup>97</sup> Abstaining from such votes was thus as much from genuine conviction as party politics (or the simple laziness of not wishing to vote), making the numbers somewhat ambiguous. These, to be sure, were difficult questions for veterans.

Ward's and Hills's speeches were indicative, illustrating the vastly different feelings engendered by huddling in a tube station to avoid a Zeppelin, and leading men to battle over the bodies of one's comrades. It would be men of the former experience, those without combat experience, who would lead Britain between the wars – indeed, of the four signatures at Munich, only Neville Chamberlain's constituted that of a man who had enjoyed civilian life throughout the Great War. There are of course demographic explanations for this – not only were the numbers of the war generation reduced by the toll of conflict, but given their youth it was always going to be difficult to secure promotion within an inert organisation such as the Conservative Party. Nevertheless, we should not automatically assume that those without combat experience learnt no lessons from the war years, or, as we will later outline, were in no position to act.

To begin with, one must acknowledge the traumatic effect that the death of loved ones must have had on politicians who remained at home. Herbert Asquith and Andrew Bonar Law both lost sons during the war, and the psychological wounds hearing of the death, hundreds of miles from home, of one's offspring are scarcely comprehensible. Stanley Baldwin, whose son Oliver returned unscathed from the conflict, acknowledged at the unveiling of a War memorial in Harrow the, often unspoken, terror of seeing swathes of the nation's youth marching off to combat. 'Of all those in 1914, as every schoolmaster and every parent knows,' he began, 'every boy, though he seldom acknowledged it, knew that he had to pass literally through the valley of the shadow of death, and he knew he might never emerge from it. That knowledge left marks on the character of thousands of Englishmen that will never be obliterated.'<sup>98</sup> The impotence of not being able to

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<sup>97</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 3 April 1930, vol.237, col.1574-5.

<sup>98</sup> S. Baldwin, *Our Inheritance: Speeches and Addresses*, (London, 1928), 3, [3 June 1926].

prevent the death of friends, so often attributed to the front generation, was also prevalent amongst those who stayed in Britain. It imbued a similar determination to, as Baldwin put it, build a better 'superstructure...upon the foundations cemented in their blood.'<sup>99</sup> The difference lay in the fact that men such as Neville Chamberlain did not actually witness the horrors that would undoubtedly haunt them in later years, and in whose honour they would erect monument after monument. This begat the learning of different lessons from 1914-18, which chapter three will address.

For all that the literary accounts of Sassoon and Owen colour our understanding of the trenches, at least they had actually served. One is struck, reading the testimony of those who remained at home, how little such men could know of events on the continent. Men who would later allow the Great War to frame much of their policy – one thinks here principally of Chamberlain and appeasement – actually derived much of their understanding of it from tittle-tattle and hearsay. 'I hope the change in command will bring about an improvement in the conduct of the war,' wrote Neville Chamberlain to his sister Ida in December 1915, 'I have been told that D. Haig has not a brain but if he has the right character I think that is even more important.'<sup>100</sup> Such a brain, as Alan Clark famously argued (albeit in a polemical manner), led to 'twenty-seven months of slaughter and exhaustion, [Haig leaving the Tommy] so perilously exposed that they were nearly annihilated.'<sup>101</sup> Gerald DeGroot and J.P. Harris have arguably presented a more nuanced case of late.<sup>102</sup> Either way, in the aftermath of war – presumably because Britain's contemporary leaders had not personally faced the brunt of some of his

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>100</sup> R.C. Self (ed), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters: Volume One, The Making of a Politician*, (Aldershot, 2000), 106, [19 December 1915].

<sup>101</sup> A. Clark, *The Donkeys*, (London, 1996), 186.

<sup>102</sup> DeGroot, *Douglas Haig*, portrays a Haig who committed serious errors, but also as a man perhaps unfairly criticised by a values system (post-1918) which he did not conduct the war in. 407: 'unbeknownst to him, during his lifetime standards changed...It was no longer enough just to win. Costs and consequences became important.' J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War*, (Cambridge, 2008) points out that the two main charges against Haig – that he did not explore alternative spheres to the western front, and that he was a luddite in the face of technological advancement that could have won the war much sooner – do not stand up (2).

more incompetent measures – the Field Marshall was treated remarkably well by the Conservative establishment, particularly upon his death in 1928. Of the Somme, Geoffrey Dawson's *Times* obituary opined that 'in the judgment of history it may be that the country will recognise the wisdom and discount the cost.' In a broad sense it praised his 'industry, coolness, [and] tenacity.' In the Commons, Baldwin eschewed delivering a verdict on his military record as 'the time has not come for us to judge,' but did praise both his regimental following of government orders, and his postwar humanitarian work as president of the British Legion.<sup>103</sup> For all Clark has been challenged by modern historians like Gary Sheffield, one must acknowledge that the initial whitewashing of Haig's reputation owed much to the fact that Britain's post 1918 leaders were in no position to judge his war (either positively or negatively), given, as Baldwin famously espoused to Keynes, they contained so many who had done well out of avoiding battle.<sup>104</sup> In most cases, discussions over the rights and wrongs of Haig's leadership waited until later life.<sup>105</sup>

At the same time, part of the reason the Mosleys and Macmillans attempted to play upon their war record was that – aside from the physical scars they bore – the non-combatant post 1918 politician sometimes held so poor a notion of what was going on during the war. No doubt such men made generous gestures – Baldwin effectively donated £120,000 to the government for war purposes, and Neville Chamberlain organised a Christmas parcel to be sent to all troops of Birmingham battalions – but these were sometimes in lieu of a profound understanding of the state of play.<sup>106</sup> In the diaries and letters of such men one sees

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<sup>103</sup> *Times*, 31 January 1928; Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 8 February 1928, vol. 213, col.93, c.99.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 175.

<sup>105</sup> James Stuart, Cabinet Minister in the 1950s, was one such example. He discussed the matter with John Davidson, the former MP for Fareham, but only in later life. Stuart's memoirs chide Haig's 'outmoded' leadership at the Somme whilst acknowledging that he 'would willingly have sacrificed his own life to save his life.' J. Stuart, *Within the Fringe*, (London, 1967), 10, 30-31.

<sup>106</sup> Williamson and Baldwin, *Baldwin Papers*, 82; Self, *Chamberlain Diary*, I, 104-5.

constantly phrases such as 'I don't know.'<sup>107</sup> Information about the war, such as it was, could sometimes be derived from questionable sources - Prime Minister turned honours salesman David Lloyd George, or the gossipy tables of the Café Royal and Carlton Club.<sup>108</sup> Chamberlain is an extreme case - he was notoriously ignorant of matters military - but differences between home and the trenches clearly existed, particularly given, as Bridgeman bemoaned, levels of governmental censorship.<sup>109</sup>

One must also consider that amongst this group would be men - latterly, of course, boys - who had avoided military service in the Great War not through objection, old age or being required elsewhere, but simply because they were too young. Rab Butler is a typical example:

The 1914 war started when I was eleven...I was at Marlborough nearly sixteen, when the war ended. Did I realise then, as I do now, how nearly I had missed that, to so many, overpowering experience...When I first entered the House of Commons in 1929 the cloak room attendants zealously and persistently called us all by military titles. I was ashamed not to have my title but bore it for a year or two until I became a Minister.<sup>110</sup>

The shame missing this experience imbued could manifest itself in an almost canine like loyalty to those, but a few years older, who had served - that figures as seemingly divergent as John Strachey and Bob Boothby would both fall under the spell of Oswald Mosley serves as evidence of this. To the latter, during 1914-18

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<sup>107</sup> Such as Chamberlain's comment on the Balkan situation: Self, *Chamberlain Diary*, I, 96 [10 October 1915].

<sup>108</sup> P. Williamson (ed), *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics: The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904-1935*, (London, 1988), 130 [18 April 1918]; Norwich, *Duff Cooper Diaries*, 66 [22 March 1918]. Relatives provided information too, see the visit of Robert Sanders's brother, J. Ramsden (ed), *Real Old Tory Politics: The Political Diaries of Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford 1910-35*, (Gloucester, 1984), 85 [27 May 1917]

<sup>109</sup> Especially during the early stages of the conflict: Williamson, *Modernisation*, 83 [May 1915].

<sup>110</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 8



school work was secondary, Boothby doing enough work at Eton 'to keep my place,' but thinking 'of nothing but the war.' Upon his wall, to the surprise of his housemaster, were pinned not photographs of his parents, but pictures of Jellicoe and Beatty. As he later wrote:

It is difficult to exaggerate the traumatic effect of the casualties in France upon the lives of boys who grew to maturity during the years between 1914 and 1918. Every Sunday the names of the fallen were read out in College chapel. As we saw all the heroes of our youth being killed, one by one, and not far away, our whole attitude towards life changed, "Eat and drink and try to be merry, for tomorrow you will surely die" became our motto. Neuve Chapelle, Loos, the Somme and Passchendaele bit deep into our small souls. If early and bloody death was apparently an inevitable consequence of life, what was the point of it?<sup>111</sup>

Such a cavalier attitude to life led to serial adultery on the part of many of this generation in the interwar period – Mosley, Duff Cooper, Boothby – and it is likewise important to note that despite the brave service war veterans put in, the years 1914-18 were not without pleasure.

Following his withdrawal from active service on account of his injured leg, Oswald Mosley's 'time until the end of the war was occupied by a plunge into social life, which began on crutches in London [and] was pursued with zest through the ample opportunities then provided.'<sup>112</sup> The great hostesses of the period – Lady Astor, Lady Cunard and Maxine Elliott – kept the glittering social scene alive and well, and offered future politicians a chance to meet men such as F.E. Smith and Winston Churchill.<sup>113</sup> For all that Duff Cooper's winning of the DSO in 1918 would seemingly make his war worthwhile, one must note the quasi-comic nature in

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<sup>111</sup> Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, 16.

<sup>112</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 74.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

which he spent the majority of it. Unable to enlist until 1917 because of his work at the Foreign Office, the first three years of his war were more notable for their debauchery than their heroism. Though he played an administrative role in attempting to get Italy and Bulgaria to intervene on the side of the Entente, he perpetually wished 'I had something to do instead of everlasting office boy work.' In social terms he did, pursuing both Diana Manners and alcohol with equal vigour. Of the former he became incredibly jealous when she drove home with a friend soon to go back to the war, Michael Herbert – 'I thereupon made a scene and said that I would never forgive her.' One wonders how far this feeling of impotence (a rarity for the sexually prolific Duff) triggered his desire to enlist as soon as possible. Of the latter, things were more comedic. In November 1915, a drunk Duff broke into his own home, climbing 'over some railings close to my own rooms. I can't think how I managed to get over them all in a top hat and an overcoat. The latter was considerably torn, so were my trousers.' All this left him making 'only [one] resolve for [1916], to get rid of my reputation for drunkenness.'<sup>114</sup> In the year of the Somme then, Duff Cooper's fiercest enemy would be lady liquor. Evidence enough that for future politicians the years 1914 to 1918 were filled with as much 'poppycock,' as 'mud' and 'blood.'<sup>115</sup>

### 1.6 The Mundane Side of Conflict

Though the exhilarating experience of joining up, and the non-military life they also led during the war, forms an important part of what the Macmillan cohort of politicians took from 1914-18, it is their actions on the battlefield that would essentially define them, rightly or wrongly, as a generation. 'I had entered the holocaust still childish,' recalled Eden, 'and I emerged tempered by my experience, but with my illusions intact, neither shattered nor cynical to face a changed world.'<sup>116</sup> What then, happened to produce this reaction?

Despite pointing out the notion that soldiers invariably did not serve for the

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<sup>114</sup> Norwich, *Duff Cooper Diaries*, 7-8, 25-6, 19, 23. [26 April 1915], [25 February 1916], [2 November 1915], [30 December 1915].

<sup>115</sup> G. Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War*, (London, 2004)

<sup>116</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 150.

entirety of the conflict, it would be churlish to deny that the future British politician was capable of extremely brave deeds. Robert Gee – later, as we will see, political conqueror of Ramsay MacDonald amidst a highly charged East Woolwich by-election in 1921 – would win the Victoria Cross for his outstanding courage whilst serving with the Royal Fusiliers. On 30 November 1917 at Masnieres and Les Rues Vertes, an attack by the enemy captured brigade headquarters and ammunition dump. Captain Gee, finding himself a prisoner, managed to escape and organised a party of the brigade staff with which he attacked the enemy, closely followed by two companies of infantry. He cleared the locality and established a defensive flank, then finding an enemy machine-gun still in action, with a revolver in each hand he went forward and captured the gun, killing eight of the crew. He was wounded, but would not have his wound dressed until the defence was organised.<sup>117</sup> Gee's wound was minor in comparison to other veterans. Serving with the Guardsmen, Harry Crookshank would be buried for almost a day under four feet of earth in August 1915 after a mine exploded – earning him the nickname “Lazarus” upon discovery – and later still would be castrated by a shell at the Somme.<sup>118</sup> His close friend Harold Macmillan would fare a little better, but he too would take bullets to the hand, hip and head, and would spend the last two years of the conflict in and out of hospital.<sup>119</sup>

Yet conflict is about much more than learning to conquer one's own fear of death. Bravery was certainly one lesson, but the war begat others. From the world of slightly pointless *bon vivants* and gaiety, men were brought into an existence at once both comradely and isolating. Writing to his mother from Marles-les-Mines in September 1915, Macmillan would write happily of men singing ‘music-hall ditties and sentimental love songs – anything and everything. It was really rather wonderful.’<sup>120</sup> Starting the war aged ‘thirty, but nothing short of terrified,’ John Moore-Brabazon (MP for Chatham from 1918 and later Churchill's wartime

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<sup>117</sup> D. Harvey, *Monuments to Courage: Victoria Cross Monuments and Headstones, II: 1917-1982*, (London, 1999).

<sup>118</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 81; F. Beckett, *Macmillan*, (London, 2006), 13.

<sup>119</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 76, 88.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

Minister of Transport) found solace in the men around him in the Royal Flying Corps. 'As I look back,' he wrote in 1956, 'I am convinced that there was more talent in No. 9 Squadron congregated together than I have ever come across in my life. There wasn't a single man in it who did not distinguish himself,' including indeed Brabazon himself, who would win the Military Cross.<sup>121</sup> One imagines that for those who served in a medical capacity – such as Walter Elliot in the Scots Greys – the attachment to one's comrades was even stronger. The experience Elliot had (later rewarded by adding a bar to his already attained MC) of manning a regimental aid post for twelve hours, attending to over 250 wounded and evacuating all to the dressing station, must have been profound indeed. As Eden noted when observing a dying rifleman, 'the wound was in the jugular and we could not even check the bleeding. It was horrible to be so helpless.'<sup>122</sup> This may well have been responsible for the reaction noted by Elliot's good friend, fellow veteran, and later Liberal MP Colin Coote: 'I think the whole epoch of 1914-18 came too close to his deep heart's core for any tale of any part of it to rise readily to his lips. There were occasional signs of deep feeling...the rest was silence.'<sup>123</sup>

This in turn indicates another consequence of war – its loneliness. However much such retrospective accounts are seeking to manipulate the reader by the use of pathos, one cannot help be moved by prose illustrating the tragic beauty of war:

There was too a certain exhilaration in going up over the top at night. Lights fired into the air continually from both side illuminated the night sky, and the whistle of passing bullets contributed to the eerie beauty of the stark surroundings. There was a certain tragic loveliness in that unearthly desolation, the ultimate nihilism of man's failed spirit. Also, for many at that stage a wound could seem a release and death was

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<sup>121</sup> Lord Brabazon, *The Brabazon Story*, (London, 1956), 87, 90.

<sup>122</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 79.

<sup>123</sup> C. Coote, *A Companion of Honour: The Story of Walter Elliot*, (London, 1965), 38-40. Anthony Eden likewise 'absolutely refused to explain or describe the horror' of the war to his wife Clarissa. C. Eden, *A Memoir, From Churchill to Eden*, (London, 2007), 121.

peace.<sup>124</sup>

This was a war of the masses, millions of men facing each other across no man's land. Yet, as Lloyd-Greame noted, 'the memories of the ordinary in any war, though for him they recall indelible pictures and friendships broken only by death, while common to us all, are essentially personal.'<sup>125</sup> Images such as that described above by Mosley are important – regardless of whether they accurately represent the thrill of battle, what they certainly do illustrate is the detachment felt by the individual during such tribulations. How could it be any other way? If evil is truly banal, then survival amidst such evil must surely take the same form. To protect themselves against the horrors, the future politicians cocooned themselves away from feeling anything. Macmillan commenting to his mother that 'perhaps the most extraordinary thing about a modern battlefield is the desolation and emptiness of it all...the thrill of battle comes now only once or twice in a twelvemonth. We need not so much the gallantry of our fathers; we need that indomitable and patient determination which has saved England over and over again.'<sup>126</sup>

Such determination was not only required when going over the top, for the First World War was as much about surviving perpetual boredom, as it was dodging German bullets. Though we must acknowledge that the often mundane nature of war letters owed much to the desire to shield loved ones from the horrors of battle, they were also dull simply because that was the nature of conflict. Warfare was dangerous, but the danger was unavoidable, it was the mind numbing slog of it all that plagued the educated future Conservative members. Lloyd-Greame's letters home tell of 'long day[s] in the trenches,' requests for 'another tin of F + M Ration Chocolate,' and the unfortunate spectre of 'much office work to get through as ever.' Beyond bland generalisations such as 'the [soldiers] are in wonderfully good condition...I think they will give a good account of themselves,'

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<sup>124</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, 69.

<sup>125</sup> Lloyd-Greame, *I Remember*, 13.

<sup>126</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 82-3.

there is precious little mention of the battlefield.<sup>127</sup> Here we must introduce a notion that we will turn to later: that war, far from being the fulfilment of the masculine ideal preached in British public schools and raised to ever new heights by the bellicose press, was in fact a bitter disappointment. Mosley would later ask, 'what option had I really got in this [war] except to be killed or to win the Military Cross? It was life simplified.'<sup>128</sup> Yet clearly there was an option, for neither extreme would occur. Is it so far fetched to assume therefore, that the post-war radical conservatism a significant number of veterans would espouse, came not just from some notion of having being cheated of the "homes fit for heroes" they and their comrades had earned, but from the pent up pressure to do something, emphatically not released by a war which was ultimately rather flat? Having built themselves up to such a high pitch of tension from 1914, the war almost descended into a bloodier version of the same type of slightly pointless societal back and forth the young men had witnessed at home: Eden expressing amused indignation at being asked to shave after a night of heavy shelling, whilst Duff Cooper still found time in France to enjoy 'sitting in a garden, talking about poetry and women and getting drunk.'<sup>129</sup> The thought of going to war in 1917 had filled the London based Duff with 'exhilaration,' he envied 'the experience and adventure everyone else had.'<sup>130</sup> When he finally got to the battlefield however he discovered that 'I am getting very bored here. The life [is] monotonous.'<sup>131</sup> It was this monotony, every bit as much as his DSO, that fired his later radicalism.<sup>132</sup>

Radical conservatism, of course, was not without precedent. Amidst fears, even amongst right-wing elements such as Leo Maxse's *National Review*, that 'outside Birmingham, the Labour Party is robbing us of the Tory democracy which has been the mainstay of the Unionist cause for the past twenty years,' constructive

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<sup>127</sup> Lloyd-Greame letters home to his wife Mary, CAC, SWIN I/1/1, 26 May 1916, Undated [probably August 1916], "Tuesday" [summer 1916].

<sup>128</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, 67.

<sup>129</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 80; Norwich, *Duff Cooper Diaries*, 73 [17 July 1918].

<sup>130</sup> Norwich, *Duff Cooper Diaries*, 53 [17 May 1917].

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 72 [14 June 1918].

<sup>132</sup> See also, Duff Cooper to Lady Desborough, 30 June 1918, HALS, DES, D/ERV/C579/10.

Conservatives set about trying to woo the working class.<sup>133</sup> Joseph Chamberlain's campaign for a quasi-socialistic form of imperial preference (carried forth into the postwar world by that Great War veteran Leo Amery), Conservative trade unionism espoused by groups such as F. Hastings Medhurst's Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, and the output of journals such as *The Worker* (latterly *The Man* and *The Woman*) all augured a Conservatism not as aristocratically aloof as that of Lord Salisbury. <sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, before the First World War such benevolence tended to take the form of out and out paternalism, there were few Booth and Rowntrees – prepared to walk amongst the slums – in Edwardian Conservatism. From 1914 this began to change. Upon his arrival at the front Harold Macmillan received his first lesson, an unexpectedly moving one, in working-class culture. Putting to work censoring soldiers correspondence, he would write to his mother that 'they have big hearts, these soldiers, and it is a very pathetic task to have to read all their letters home...There comes occasionally a grim sentence or two, which reveals in a flash a sordid family drama. "Mother, are you ever going to write to me. I have written ten times and had no answer. Are you on the drink again, that Uncle George write me the children are in a shocking state? [sic]."'<sup>135</sup> Though the army hierarchy made any notions of absolute equality amongst men impossible, by serving in positions in constant contact with working class Tommies, future Conservative politicians would have a much greater understanding of the working man than their forefathers. Few times in his life, Eden recalled, possessed 'the same close personal character of comradeship as life with the Yeoman Rifles, where we had enlisted together, trained together, fought together. The more beastly and dangerous the conditions, the more this association seemed to count.'<sup>136</sup> Though not all veterans would tread the same path to Labour as that of middle and upper class men Clement Attlee (a relatively rare exception to

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<sup>133</sup> *National Review*, October 1906, p203.

<sup>134</sup> A. Sykes, 'Radical Conservatism and the Working Classes in Edwardian England: The Case of the Workers Defence Union,' *English Historical Review*, 113, (1998), 1180-1209; K.D. Brown, 'The Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, 1904-1913,' *Journal of British Studies*, 11, (1970), 141-53.

<sup>135</sup> R. Horne, *Macmillan, I, 1894-1956*, (London, 1988), 36.

<sup>136</sup> Eden, *Another World*, 150.

the rule who bore pre-1914 witness to the drudgery of East London slums), Oswald Mosley and Hugh Dalton, they were imbued with a greater social conscience than had previously been the case amongst their class.<sup>137</sup> When veterans such as John Davidson, elected for Fareham in 1918, declared that starting with the birth of a child, they 'desired to see it properly housed, fed and clothed, in order that it might have a proper start in life,' they were espousing an empathetic mentality that could only have come from contact with the working man.<sup>138</sup> Even if historians such as Ross McKibbin have pointed out the socially inert nature of postwar Britain, this was a revolutionary step indeed.<sup>139</sup> The Conservative Party coming down from its high horse – influenced naturally by the growing working class electorate after the Reform Acts of 1918 – was a profound step in British politics.<sup>140</sup>

### 1.7 Reactions to the Armistice

After all the struggle, monotony, and, very occasionally, the pleasures of war, 'Britain [had been] raised by the efforts of the young generation to a pinnacle of power and of greatness.'<sup>141</sup> Her principle foes, Germany and Austria-Hungary had been vanquished, and her potential rival Russia appeared in a state from which it would never recover. This, then, was surely a time for rejoicing. No need to question, as Hitler did while convalescing in Pasewalk Military Hospital, 'how could this deed be justified to future generations?'<sup>142</sup> Certainly no need, as did that same German Corporal, to blame the fate of the war on Jews, Marxists and leftists. To be sure, men were worried about getting back to civilian life as soon as possible, but there was still time to celebrate. Even amidst scant resources and the need to maintain Army discipline, Gregory notes, Dieppe saw wild jubilation amongst British and Australian troops – matching even that of the celebrations in Trafalgar

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<sup>137</sup> C.R. Attlee, *As It Happened*, (Surrey, 1954), 20.

<sup>138</sup> *Hants and Sussex County Press*, 7 December 1918.

<sup>139</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*, (Oxford, 1991).

<sup>140</sup> Philip Colfox, Major turned Dorset MP, perhaps typifies the gentrified benevolence of the post-1918 world. Having been very badly wounded in the war, 'he had a soft spot for those similarly afflicted,' and employed two gardeners with war wounds. John Colfox personal correspondence with the author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>141</sup> O. Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, (London, 1932), 147.

<sup>142</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 186.



Square.<sup>143</sup> *The Times* would comment the following on London's East End:

At its best the East-end is not pleasing to any of the senses. After a night of drizzling rain and tramping crowds it is far from its best. Yet for all its dinginess and dirt the East-end looked almost as gay yesterday as the West, and gayer than most of the "comfortable" suburbs. The humblest little road could boast hundreds of tiny little flags, hung about the doors and windows or strung across the street.<sup>144</sup>

Amongst the generally buoyant mood however, as Arthur Marwick has noted, the veteran would often feel little but numbness, and this certainly appears true of the men who would shape British policy for the next forty years.<sup>145</sup>

As Philip Gibbs would write in 1920, 'where was the nation's gratitude for the men who had fought and died, or fought and lived?...That...is the question that was asked by millions of men in England...and it was assured in their own brains by a bitterness and indignation, out of which may be lit the fires of the revolutionary spirit.'<sup>146</sup> 'Modern civilization,' he would argue, 'was wrecked on those fire-blasted fields [of the Somme], though they led to what we called "victory." More died there than the flower of our youth. The old order of the world died there [as men]...vowed not to tolerate a system of thought which had led up to such a monstrous massacre.'<sup>147</sup> For all the possible later reinvention, this indeed seems to be an accurate representation of contemporary feeling. One must be careful, Mosley's assertion that on 11 November 1918 he 'dedicated myself to politics' bares remarkable similarity to Hitler's claim in *Mein Kampf* that on that same night 'I, for my part, decided to go into politics.'<sup>148</sup> Both are nonsense – the former having already been adopted by his constituency, the latter in no position to

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<sup>143</sup> Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 64.

<sup>144</sup> *Times*, 13 November 1918.

<sup>145</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, (London, 1991), 298-300.

<sup>146</sup> P. Gibbs, *Realities of War*, (London, 1920), 449.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 363.

<sup>148</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, 70; Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 187.

decide anything, save the topic of his next mediocre painting. Yet one need not be so cynical all across the board.

‘Would anything be the same again? How far could pre-war life be restored?’ Both were questions plaguing Harold Macmillan. ‘These were questions many people evaded: some devoted themselves as far as possible to the reconstruction of the old world; some dreamed of building a new one.’<sup>149</sup> Placing himself firmly in the latter camp, the future appeared uncertain yet beguiling. ‘To a young man of twenty-four, scarred but not disfigured, and with all the quick mental and moral recovery of which youth is capable, life at the end of 1918 seemed to offer an attractive, not to say exciting, prospect.’<sup>150</sup> Tinged with sadness, ‘few of the survivors of [Macmillan’s] own age felt able to shake off the memory of these years.’ He continued, ‘we were haunted by them. We almost began to feel a sense of guilt for not having shared the fate of our friends and comrades. We certainly felt an obligation to make some decent use of the life that had been spared to us.’<sup>151</sup> Even if, then, the notion of some kind of armistice night revelation seems a little bogus – Macmillan himself admitting that ‘when the war ended most of us were at a loss as to how to take up our lives’ – ideas were clearly beginning to percolate in the young men’s minds.<sup>152</sup>

As Mosley passed through the festive streets of London on 11 November, he scoffed at the ‘smooth, smug people, who had never fought or suffered’ gorging themselves on fine wine and good food. Standing ‘aside from the delirious throng, silent and alone,’ he was ‘ravaged by memory.’ The one million dead of the British Empire weighed heavy on his mind. Pre-empting Stephen Graham’s 1921 *Challenge of the Dead*, where ‘the dead challenge the living in choruses of silence from broad fields of burial,’ Mosley now saw that ‘driving purpose had begun; there must be no more war.’<sup>153</sup> Such purpose would lead him possibly into madness, certainly into wartime internment, but little of that could have been predicted in 1918. That

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<sup>149</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 101.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>153</sup> S. Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead*, (London, 1921), 88; Mosley, *My Life*, 70.

Mosley's path could have been trodden by many of his generation will form the basis of a later chapter. For now let us note that as the war came to a close, even a figure at the heart of the establishment, Edward Wood, was thinking on much the same lines. Whilst acknowledging that 'we need time and distance to gain correct perspective,' Wood believed the war to have been 'a stern critic and reformer of modes of thought and ways of life.' The 'natural and spontaneous revolt of a people' that had occurred in August 1914, and the four years of faithful service it begat, augured policies constructed to the tune of the national, rather than traditionally Conservative, gospel.<sup>154</sup>

The 'silly people' which Duff Cooper encountered on Armistice Day, 'laughing and cheering,' had already been rendered something of an "other" by the war generation. 'Those whose only taste of actual warfare was an occasional air-raid,' as one future MP wrote, simply could not understand.<sup>155</sup> Their experience of war on the home front could never compare with what men such as Eden, Mosley and Macmillan had witnessed on the continent. Speaking in 1926, Stanley Baldwin hoped that future historians would be able to write that 'a generation indeed was wiped out, but from their graves sprang a rebirth and a new kindling of the spirit that raised our country to heights which surpass the dreams of those of her sons who in past ages had sacrificed most and had loved her best.'<sup>156</sup> How far this came to pass, and how far those not 'wiped out' believed it to have done so, forms the basis of this study.

### 1.8 A Concluding Supposition

It is not the proviso of historians to indulge in speculation. Yet in a study that takes something of a psychological approach – judging mentality every bit as much as action – it is perhaps unavoidable. Hitherto, academics have been content to argue that political radicalism after the First World War was a result of the traumatic effect of seeing one's comrades die in cold blood, having to commit (or at least facilitate) murderous deeds oneself, and pent up anger at those who did not serve.

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<sup>154</sup> Wood and Lloyd, *Great Opportunity*, 1, 14.

<sup>155</sup> S.S. Hammersley, *Industrial Leadership*, (London, 1925), 31.

<sup>156</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 6 [3 June 1926].

Veterans from Hitler to Graves put forward much the same line, and its partial relevance is undeniable. The predominantly middle and upper class veterans of this analysis perhaps offer something different however. As we have seen, these were men who were raised in a strange dichotomy of masculine activities and feminine literature, who were sent to war amidst a heady atmosphere of Germanophobia convinced that they would finally become the decisive historical actors their staid youth had denied them. Yet what happened next? These, after all, were men of the officer class.<sup>157</sup> Their task was to lead men into battle rather than necessarily execute murderous orders themselves. This had two consequences. Firstly, when a comrade died it hit them doubly hard. But, just as importantly, their elevated rank actually rendered them a little impotent. As Jessica Meyer has recently shown, 'action was the very thing denied to the soldier and the emblematic figure was that of the neurasthenic war-damaged man....rather than an autonomous man of action who controlled his own destiny. The dominant masculine figure of the war thus became one associated with emasculation rather than with normative masculinity.'<sup>158</sup> Having joined up believing they would finally resolve the befuddling masculine-feminine nature of their upbringing then, their war did not necessarily deliver this. Indeed, it arguably created a feeling of greater helplessness, greater impotency, which begat a determination to do something with their post-war lives.

These men had survived the bloodiest, most mechanised carnage Europe had ever seen. This created a multitude of feelings – guilt at having lost so many friends, a certain arrogance based upon almost Darwinian notions of survival of the fittest, and an impotence derived from, in many cases, not having fought the gung-ho war they envisaged when joining up. The extent to which men felt these emotions differed from individual to individual, but that it had an acute effect one

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<sup>157</sup> A simple illustration of this would be the medals accrued by Old Etonians. Whilst only 2 M[military] M[edals] – a medal for the rank and file – were handed out, 548 DSOs were awarded – an officer's medal. E.L. Vaughan (ed), *List of Etonians Who Fought in the Great War 1914-1919*, (Windsor, 1921), 280.

<sup>158</sup> J.K. Meyer, *The First World War and Narratives of Heroic and Domestic Masculinity in Britain, 1915-1937*, Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 2004, 197.

cannot doubt. After 1918 they would attempt to make sense of their wartime experiences through political action.<sup>159</sup> To this we now turn.

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<sup>159</sup> To some extent then, both a corrective and extension of the views expressed in A. Watson and P. Porter, 'Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War,' *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 146-164. Porter and Watson argue that the violence inherent in pre- and early war culture created an atmosphere where sacrifice remained a resonant concept for soldiers, even when their comrades had been killed and the realities of service brought home. A desire for vengeance, rather than timidity and sorrow, was the more common reaction to witnessing death. Perhaps post 1918 politics, this study delineates, forms a continuation of such aggression.

## 2: The Conservative Electoral Appeal Between the Wars

*This election is all over the country a triumph for jingoism.*

- James Davidson to Arthur Ponsonby (founder member of the Union of Democratic Control), December 1918<sup>1</sup>

*The choice is between the Union Jack and the Red Flag.*

- Commander Marsden, as Conservative parliamentary candidate for North Battersea, May 1929<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Why Vote Tory?

Before we begin to evaluate the principles and actions of the politicians under consideration in this study, we may state a truism: they made, in electoral terms, the pragmatically correct choice in becoming Conservatives. Even with the criticisms levelled at interwar governmental policy from numerous sources - socialist, Churchillian, Keynesian - the facts are stark. Between the wars, save two brief interruptions from Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Party (1924, 1929-31), the Conservatives either occupied 10 Downing Street directly or had the incumbent largely in their pocket. Much of this time, it is true, was made up of nominal coalitions, but in all of these the Tories held dominant influence. Despite the revolutionary challenges to the British way of life from many fronts - the expansionist programmes of Mosley and Lloyd George, the socialism of Labour, mass unemployment, the continental examples of, initially successful, totalitarianism - remarkably little of this potentially revolutionary atmosphere permeated the upper echelons of Westminster politics. In 1923 the nation was led by a socially progressive (in pre-1914 terms) Conservative averse to unnecessary foreign adventure, and this would still be the case in 1939. The question that puzzles is why this was so. How on earth, with an electorate vastly more working

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<sup>1</sup> James Davidson to Arthur Ponsonby, 29 December 1918, BOD, PON c. 667.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, 20 May 1929.

class than had ever been the case before the 1918 Representation of the People Act, and with unemployment perpetually above the dreaded ten per cent, did the Conservative Party achieve a dominance that had eluded them under arguably more favourable pre-war conditions? Put simply, how did they win so many elections? By reference to local press reports, the following will argue that ephemeral use of war veterans certainly played its part.

There have been many attempts to date to explain the arguably perverse phenomenon of Tory success in a newly democratic political culture. Though our next chapter will deal with the man more directly, we must first note the influence of that oddly mercurial figure, Stanley Baldwin. To Baldwin's most staunch defender, Philip Williamson, the carefully cultivated image of amiable Worcestershire pig farmer has blinded us to his considerable political skill. 'Addressing his party and the public with a new note of purposefulness, idealism, and sensitivity towards labour,' Williamson argues, Baldwin harnessed 'national values' to 'Conservative causes.'<sup>3</sup> Andrew Taylor essentially agrees, pointing out that, unlike the industrial charter after the second war, Baldwin successfully bridged the gap between party principle and the needs of the masses.<sup>4</sup> Even if, as John Charmley states, Baldwin's projection as a simple, honest, quintessentially British chap sometimes amounted to little more than portraying the left, by contrast, as a foreign ideology in the pay of Zinoviev, there is little doubt his leadership was an asset to the party.<sup>5</sup> For as David Close has concluded, by painting his policies - such as they were - in such broad brush strokes, Baldwin allowed the Conservatives to become so synonymous with the nation that two successive Tory administrations - 1931 and 1935 - could be presented to the public as "National" in character.<sup>6</sup> In an age of turbulence, dependability sold.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and national values*, (Cambridge, 1999), 27, 336.

<sup>4</sup> A. Taylor, 'Speaking to Democracy: The Conservative Party and Mass Opinion from the 1920s and to the 1950s,' in S. Ball and I. Holliday (eds), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s*, (London, 2002), 96.

<sup>5</sup> J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996*, (London, 1996), 70.

<sup>6</sup> D. Close, 'Conservatives and Coalition After the First World War,' *Journal of Modern History*, 45, (1973), 240-260, 260.

Looking beyond the leader, it must also be noted that in some ways the Conservatives adapted to the post 1918 world considerably better than the traditionally more progressive parties. It is true, as Ross McKibbin points out, they enjoyed the considerable advantage of holding the levers of state just as technological improvements were making such control ever more important.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as Jon Lawrence suggests, who knows what Lloyd George or Mosley could have achieved with such advantages.<sup>8</sup> Thus, as the number of radio licenses increased from 36,000 in 1922 to 8.9 million by 1939, access to the BBC became ever more important.<sup>9</sup> This does however slightly ignore the fact that Baldwin was simply better at projecting his message than MacDonald - he, rather than the slightly dour Scot, would often deliver National Government propaganda even with the latter in Number Ten. It is also highly implausible that Baldwin could have hoodwinked a nation for well over decade without having at least some ideological points to make. For though politicians of every persuasion from Adolf Hitler to Barack Obama can sell themselves by the force of their conviction, they must at least hold some convictions in the first place. Glitz and glamour are not enough, or at least one hopes so.

McKibbin has further explanations. Though the rotten borough basically became extinct in 1832, he is correct to point out that certain anachronisms in constituency boundaries (and / including Northern Ireland) gave the Conservatives a few bonus seats - though his estimate of anything up to 30 seems a little generous, and, in any case, the Tories often won by much more than this.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, he attempts to highlight a selfish side to Conservative policy that deserves exploration. In the mid 1920s Conservative membership swelled to around 700,000 - double that of Labour. Crucially, McKibbin claims, the middle class nature of this new Conservative constituency begat an emphasis in policy on

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<sup>7</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*, (Oxford, 1991), 293.

<sup>8</sup> J. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*, (Oxford, 2009), 96.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, 'Speaking to Democracy,' 81.

<sup>10</sup> McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, 263.



deflationary economics - whereby “money” was protected at the expense of getting men jobs. Allied to this was the creation - completely the opposite of Baldwin’s harmonious rhetoric - of “two Nations”: the working class, work shy, almost parasitic “other”, and the ordinary, decent, predominantly middle class “public.” The “other” were abandoned, save for the small percentage needed to decide elections, to Labour, whilst the “public” were to be kept out of the hands of Lloyd George, Mosley, or whomever else attempted to claim them from the centre or right.<sup>11</sup> This tactical abandonment of the working classes by Baldwin is essentially corroborated by David Jarvis, who believes ‘the seductive [Joseph] Chamberlainite fallacy that a working-class electorate could be won for the right by a “big idea” lost its hold of the party...[After 1918] the Conservative party would never again waste its energies in chasing that alluring but illusory prize, the working-class vote.’<sup>12</sup> In such a conception, policy becomes almost a numbers game: enact whatever policies you wish so long as at least 51% of the next election will go your way.

Again however, this seems at least partially flawed. Whilst pragmatism can never be wholly detached from political action, the conspiratorial element of McKibbin’s argument, though rigorously (and indeed well) argued, seems to verge on the churlish. Politicians are not all liars. Principle does exist. Why did Baldwin go the polls in 1923, armed with the knowledge that he might very well lose, on a pledge to introduce tariff reform? Because Bonar Law said the party would do so. One must naturally be suspicious of one’s leaders - the idea that policy could be tailored to winning an election is undeniable - yet the notion that Baldwin would deliberately condemn an entire class to poverty to save his own job seems a step too far. Indeed, as Margaret Thatcher illustrated, Conservative policy seemingly aimed at the middle classes can play surprising well to a working class audience. The 1920s “Essex Man” was bombarded with aspirational propaganda - ‘When you are asked “Is it your own house?” how proud you are when you can say “YES!” ‘Yours! But not under socialism’ - is it so unthinkable that some of this hit home?

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>12</sup> D. Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s,’ *English Historical Review*, 111 (1996), 59-84, 83-84.

Even if, as Morgan writes, hardly one tenth of the country could have answered 'yes' to the above questions, the appeal was as much to future aspirations and a vicarious stake in the nation as to existing realities.<sup>13</sup> Conservative appeal could be a multi-faceted thing indeed: if the party could find the right hook to hang its agenda upon, there was no reason why it could not triumph in a fair fight. Even sections of the working class could often be persuaded, as Engels wrote to Marx, to 'discredit itself terribly' and vote Tory.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 The War and Elections

Each of these explanations therefore present us with a problem. Baldwin was clearly a skilful politician, and led a party which managed, by 1931, to have become intertwined with notions of Britishness and "the nation." Yet how? Baldwin was a decent man, of religious conviction and sympathetic character, but was this really enough to convince the public not to turn to alternatives.<sup>15</sup> The Conservative Party certainly appropriated the Union Jack between the wars, but given they were led into elections first by a Canadian in Bonar Law, then a country squire turned captain of industry in Baldwin, the explanations for this presumably lie beyond the leadership. Similarly, it is all very well for critics from the left to deride the party's national appeal, but one must note that Bonar Law and Baldwin won significant victories outside the country's more salubrious locations. For every Westminster, Chelsea and Epping in the blue column, one can point to electoral successes in places such as Barnard Castle, Birmingham Handsworth, and Liverpool Fairfield. Places where, as Macmillan noted in his own marginal seat of Stockton, workers were 'hanging around the streets or haunting the factories in despair,' still voted

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<sup>13</sup> K. Morgan, 'The Conservative Party and Mass Housing, 1918-39,' in S. Ball and I. Holliday (eds), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s*, (London, 2002), 58-77, 61.

<sup>14</sup> P. Norton and A. Aughey, *Conservatives and Conservatism*, (London, 1981), 176.

<sup>15</sup> Certainly it may have influenced the King's choice in sending for he, rather than Lord Curzon, in 1923. See Davidson note in A. Perkins, *A Very British Strike, 3-12 May 1926*, (Basingstoke, 2006), 26-7.

Conservative.<sup>16</sup> Until now, historians have seemingly been content either to leave the question of why this happens open, or place the emphasis on essentially negative points such as persuasive use of the new media, or the implosion of the Liberals and incompetence of Labour. This however seems incomplete.

Instead, we must begin to acknowledge that the appropriation of supposedly national ideals by the Conservative Party in this period was not some twist of fate or political conjuring trick, but merely, in part, the logical outcome of the candidates they forwarded at General Elections, and the cultural legacy of the Great War. As the previous chapter noted, much of our understanding of the 1914-18 conflict is metaphorical, and arrives in the form of platitudes. 'The cream of Britain's manhood was killed in the last war,' proclaimed one MP too young to fight, 'and those who survived were never allowed to play any part in the rebuilding of Europe.'<sup>17</sup> Whilst Bob Boothby's point has merit in the narrow context of the peace treaties, and has some credence in terms of those holders of cabinet office, the notion that the war generation were in no position to influence public affairs in interwar Britain is debatable. Perhaps because the most high profile figures in Westminster tended to be men of additional years, historians have seemingly applied this theory across the parliamentary board. To be sure, there is little to be gained by defining a generation purely based on age - as did C.L. Mowat in declaring there to be exactly 100 "war generation" MPs in 1918, by which he meant 100 members aged 41 or less.<sup>18</sup> Such methods offer us nothing except the reinforcement of old stereotypes. In any case, as we will see, Mowat was way off in his estimation. We must begin to dig a little deeper, and go beyond such simplistic assumptions.

War has, after all, long been considered a decisive factor in elections around the globe. In America, founded lest we forget by violent revolution, a man's character has essentially been assessed by his bravery in the face of danger. No surprise then, that at the last two presidential elections - McCain-Obama and Bush-

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<sup>16</sup> H. Macmillan, *The Past Masters: Politics and Politicians, 1906-1939*, (London, 1975), 64.

<sup>17</sup> R. Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, (London, 1978), 118.

<sup>18</sup> C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars: 1918-1940*, (London, 1966), 8.

Kerry - the candidate with the military record has virtually defined his campaign upon militaristic rhetoric: "John Kerry: reporting for duty," and such like. Similarly, over four decades earlier John Fitzgerald Kennedy was able to use his brave service in the Second World War to counteract any lingering doubts that voting for a Roman Catholic was somehow "un-American." Europe too has seen its ex-servicemen prosper politically. Whereas Hitler and Mussolini used their exploits in the trenches to attract members to their 'fighting part[ies], which pursue aims ruthlessly, with every means, even with force,' Charles De Gaulle would appeal to 'a certain idea of France,' 'where all [her] sons and daughters marched towards the national goal, hand in hand,' as they had supposedly done during the occupation (though where Vichy fitted in is anyone's guess).<sup>19</sup> That we do not place such cultural emphasis on military records in recent British elections possibly emanates from Churchill's crushing defeat in 1945, and the seemingly paradoxical image of the heroic war leader being jettisoned by his own people. Nevertheless, that a Westminster election could be influenced by such ephemera is a notion we must consider.

A closer evaluation of British General Election campaigns reveals that not only did the Conservative Party carve itself out a moral appeal which no other party could match during the interwar period, but it did so by forwarding candidates who had just passed that ultimate test of courage: serving in the First World War. When we speak of the Conservative appeal to national values in this epoch, we cannot forget the war years. For what major party was better placed to capitalise on the spirit engendered by the trenches? Ramsay MacDonald had opposed the war in 1914, fundamentally misreading the mob in doing so, and though Arthur Henderson's Cabinet service had somewhat redressed the balance, Labour could always be accused - as illustrated by public acceptance of the legitimacy of the Zinoviev letter in 1924 - as being treacherous.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the split

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<sup>19</sup> J. Noakes and G. Pridham (eds), *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 1: The Rise to Power 1919-1934*, (Exeter, 1983), 17, [Hitler on 26 October 1920]; C. de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre, L'appel: 1940-1942*, (Paris, 1954), 7; Idem, *Mémoires de guerre, L'unité: 1942-1944*, (Paris, 1956), 497.

<sup>20</sup> C. Brooks, *Devil's Decade: Portraits of the Nineteen Thirties*, (London, 1948), 65.

in the Liberal Party between Asquith and Lloyd George, exacerbated by the Maurice Case, meant that the other major force in British politics was poorly placed to profit from such a legacy, even if it included “the man who won the war.” Liberalism, as Michael Bentley has perceptively shown, in any case suffered from a rather Panglossian view of the world – believing the pre-1914 order in which they were ascendant would return soon enough once people worked the horrors of the war out of their collective system.<sup>21</sup> Placed against these two groups, the Conservatives - who had patriotically served under a Liberal Premier throughout the conflict, and were pragmatic enough to adapt to the times - appeared very attractive indeed.

The war years no doubt helped the Conservative image of patriotism, but the point is that after 1918 such an image needed “patriots” to sell it. It seems doubtful that most would-be Tory MPs joined the party because Bonar Law served dutifully under Lloyd George or some such. Instead most took the view of Oswald Mosley, a man who ‘knew little of Conservative sentiment and cared less.’ ‘I was going into the House of Commons as one of the representatives of the war generation, for that purpose alone.’<sup>22</sup> John Davidson, campaigning in Fareham, was not unique amongst Conservative veteran candidates in declaring himself not to be a ‘party politician, but a man who was out to do the very best for the welfare and progress of the country as a whole.’<sup>23</sup> ‘Pre-war labels,’ as John Buchan declared, had essentially become ‘meaningless.’<sup>24</sup> Presumably then, such men assumed the pragmatic - and accurate - belief that a modicum of influence under the Unionist banner was better than risking failure through association with one of the more radical ex-Servicemen groups, such as the Silver Badge Party (with appending anti-Semitism) or any of the movements under the wing of Horatio Bottomley (editor of *John Bull* and later convicted of fraud).<sup>25</sup> Toryism was also of course the creed of most of their ancestors, and, like Reggie Maudling two decades later, even if they

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<sup>21</sup> M. Bentley, *The Liberal Mind 1914-1929*, (Cambridge, 1977), passim.

<sup>22</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Hants and Sussex County Press*, 7 December 1918.

<sup>24</sup> J. Buchan, *Memory Hold-The-Door*, (London, 1940), 179.

<sup>25</sup> S.R. Ward, ‘Great Britain: Land Fit for Heroes Lost,’ in S.R. Ward (ed), *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, (London, 1975), 10-37, 21.

saw Liberal and Conservative parties as relatively similar, only the latter was free of chronic divisions – in short, the better bet.<sup>26</sup> Why *they* chose the Conservative Party is almost irrelevant however. Much more important, and hitherto ignored, is what the Conservative Party could make of *them*.

It is strange that, whilst academics have not been shy in exploring potential links between Great War commemoration and post-war politics, they have been less willing to investigate the seemingly obvious ramifications this may have had concerning elections. For instance, whilst to Mayo ‘attempts to commemorate war unavoidably create a distinct political landscape,’ they do not portend an endeavour by the existing order to reinforce itself.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, to Bob Bushaway, ‘throughout the interwar period British society witnessed an annual event (11 November) in which social and political unity was reaffirmed. The mass[es were] denied access to a political critique of the war by Kipling’s universal motto “lest we forget”.’<sup>28</sup> Regardless of whether one accepts the slightly anodyne view of Mayo or the Oliver Stone-esque conspiracy of Bushaway, that there is a debate at all is very important. If the Cenotaph potentially constitutes political currency, the same must surely be true of Great War survivors - more so, since they can manifestly nail their own colours to the electoral mast, and directly apportion their own kudos to contemporary causes.

### 2.3 Electoral Statistics

Investigation reveals that whilst the myth of a “lost generation” pervades the national consciousness, any prosopographical analysis of the House of Commons shows it to be false. The idea, which Robert Wohl firmly derides, that soldiers ‘limped home in 1919 to find...the hard-faced old men had come back and seized the levers of power’ is a nice story, but its validity is at least questionable.<sup>29</sup> Westminster was not simply a refuge for ‘hard faced men who look as if they had

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<sup>26</sup> See L. Baston, *Reggie: The Life of Reginald Maudling*, (Stroud, 2004), 36-7.

<sup>27</sup> J.M. Mayo, ‘War Memorials as Political Memory,’ *Geographical Review*, 78 (1988), 62-75, 62.

<sup>28</sup> B. Bushaway, ‘Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance,’ in R. Porter (ed), *Myths of the English*, (London, 1992), 136-167, 160-161.

<sup>29</sup> R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, (Camb, Mass, 1979), 86.

done very well out of the war,' but actually, in generational terms, rather a diverse body.<sup>30</sup> The numbers of men who brought to the post 1918 Commons the experiences outlined in the previous chapter were large, and massively concentrated within the Conservative ranks. The statistics make very interesting reading, as a turn of the page will reveal.

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<sup>30</sup> P. Williamson and E. Baldwin (eds), *Baldwin Papers: A Conservative Statesman, 1908-1947*, (Cambridge, 2004), 40.

Great War Veterans Elected in British General Elections, 1918-1935<sup>31</sup>

Party	1918	'22	'23	'24	'29	'31	'35
Conservative	148	143	113	200	135	221	171
(Non-Coupon Cons)	9						
Constitutional				5			
Independent Government Supporter	2					2	1
Combined Liberal	31	34	43	13	15	17	13
Of which							
(Lloyd George)	22	14				1	1
(Asquith)	8	19					
(Simonite)						8	9
(Samuelite)						8	3
Other Libs	1	1					
Labour Party	5	9	14	14	32	5	18
Nat. Labour						2	4
Independents	1	2	2	1		2	1
Silver Badge	1						
Page Croft-ite	1						
Total	189	188	172	233	182	249	208

<sup>31</sup> Compiled from M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's who of British Members of Parliament: a bibliographical dictionary of the House of Commons, based on annual volumes of 'Dod's Parliamentary Companion' and other sources*, Vols 3 and 4, (London, 1979). See Appendix.



The above as expressed as percentages of the total parliamentary party

Party			Year				
	1918	'22	'23	'24	'29	'31	'35
Conservatives	39	41.5	44	48.5	52	47	44
Combined Lib			27	9	9	24	24
(LG Libs)	17	26					
(Asquith Libs)	22	31					
Labour	9	6	7	9	11	10	12

Conservative dominance is striking. Even though, given their electoral success, one would expect most veterans in the Commons to belong to that party, the scale is not at all proportional. This is most obviously the case in 1929 - the one election they clearly lost during this period. Despite recording 260 seats to Labour's 288, Baldwin could call upon the support of over four times as many ex-servicemen as MacDonald. A.J.P Taylor's comment that at that election, 'the Conservatives appropriated patriotism,' is thus more accurate than perhaps he realised.<sup>32</sup> Lloyd George, arguably better placed to achieve veteran support, was stymied by the general collapse of British Liberalism, and his own failure to build the "home fit for heroes" after 1918.<sup>33</sup> The 43 ex-soldier MPs he mustered in 1923 was derisory by Conservative standards. One can analyse the Commons many ways, but by every measure the average Conservative MP was likely to have had a "better" war than his Liberal or Socialist counterpart. The number of war medals won provides a

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<sup>32</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, (Oxford, 1970), 334.

<sup>33</sup> This should be qualified somewhat, for opinions regarding the Welshman were varied even during the conflict. Officers imprisoned at the Somme could believe Lloyd George 'would bring an admirable vigour to the conduct of the war, and that he would confront the U-boat threat in the same style as he had overcome the shortage of ammunition.' Ordinary soldiers could be different: 'the prisoners say that all Tommies without exception would like to see him on a spell in the trenches, an experience which would incline him to peace soon enough. The soldiers believe that he alone is to blame for the fact that the war has lasted such a long time and that it is still going on.' C. Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916*, (London, 2006), 91.

further example.

Number of Military Crosses, DSOs, Victoria Crosses and French Croix de Guerres in Parliament<sup>34</sup>

Party	Year						
	1918	'22	'23	'24	'29	'31	'35
Conservative	40	34	30	55	36	60	45
Labour	1	2	3	1	5	2	2
LG Lib	10					1	1
Combined Liberal	(14)	15	22	6	7	(5)	(4)
Simonites						3	2
Samuelites						1	1
Asquith Lib	4						
Other	3			2		1	

All this of course did not give Bonar Law, Baldwin and Chamberlain a free ride at Number Ten. However, what it did provide was a moral dimension to the Conservative arsenal. The charismatic appeal imbued by such glamorous veterans complemented the party's traditional and legal claims to authority, thus providing some kind of Weberian synthesis. The draw towards objects with only an arbitrary value - such as a war medal - is, as Hegel noted, uniquely human.<sup>35</sup> What separates us from the animals is our willingness to risk our lives for reasons of pure prestige. Unlike any other species, we demand recognition of ourselves as human, and are prepared to fight to the death to achieve it. Clearly Imperial Germany - however much it may have constituted a threat to the British way of life - was not a direct threat to the life of the individual Briton before 1914. People's willingness to fight was thus the fulfillment of the most innately human ideal: the desire for

<sup>34</sup> Compiled from Stenton and Lees, *Who's Who*, passim.

<sup>35</sup> An idea expanded in more modern times by F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (London, 1992).

recognition. Little wonder veterans were, and are, accorded such respect. Little wonder too, that the Conservative Party became seen as the “natural” party of government after 1918, containing as it did so many of Hegel’s “First Men.”

Whether there were degrees of prestige with regard to the various spheres of conflict is an interesting point. Aside from Gallipoli, most of the locations we immediately associate with the Great War are on the Western Front: the Somme, Ypres, Verdun, and so on. This is understandable: estimates vary but most studies claim around 80% of British troops saw some service in the West. Certainly ‘the troglodyte world’ chronicled by Graves and Blunden, and analysed by Fussell and others, is resolutely that of the Western Front.<sup>36</sup> When we think of “the trenches,” we see rainy Belgian fields not sunny Middle Eastern desert. This may seem a trivial distinction, for troops fighting the Ottomans were no less brave than those facing the Germans, yet it is an important one. The quintessential experience for the British soldier was defined as trench warfare on the Western Front. To gain maximum political capital from their service, then, it was important that the future MP served in this sphere. By and large, they did:

MPs Elected in British General Elections Having Seen Service on the Western Front<sup>37</sup>

Party	1918	'22	'23	'24	'29	'31	'35
Conservative	86	100	72	143	164	126	144
Labour	4	7	21	10	26	5	16
Liberal	21	25	12	10	13	15	12
Other	4	2	2	6		4	6

As a later chapter will illustrate, the effect upon parliamentary debates in the late 1930s of having well over a hundred veterans of the century’s first German war was profound. That the vast majority of these were nominally bound to support Chamberlainian appeasement would be supremely important. For now, we need

<sup>36</sup> P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (London, 1975), 36-74.

<sup>37</sup> Compiled from Stenton and Lees, *Who’s Who*, passim.

simply note that Westminster's Great War veterans had, for the most part, experienced the archetypal version of the 1914-18 conflict. They, and the Conservative Party most backed, were well placed to reap the electoral rewards.

## 2.4 Selling one's war record

To begin with, many Conservative candidates used their war records to camouflage their often scant governmental, administrative or even general life experience. This was quite understandable - not only was service a noble endeavour, but it had robbed young men of the years in which they would normally have gained such competences. 'Mr Fred Henderson, who was also standing, had done good work at home,' proclaimed a 1918 election letter from Lloyd George and Bonar Law to the Norfolk people, 'but not better than Captain [Michael] Falcon had done by helping General Allenby to secure one of the greatest victories in military history.'<sup>38</sup> The account of Albert Braithwaite's candidacy in the 1926 by-election in Buckrose is similarly indicative. Briefly touching on the fact that Braithwaite was a managing director of a large Leeds-based firm, his campaign manager followed up by 'mention[ing] that Major Braithwaite served in the Army as a private and rose to the rank of major and gained the DSO, of course, so did many others. He only mentioned this to show the kind of man he was.'<sup>39</sup> This idea that a war record begat some kind of vague moral supremacy was certainly one Conservative campaign agents cottoned on to quicker than their mainstream counterparts. Leo Amery - prominent on the political stage before 1914 after all - devoted two pages of a 1918 election leaflet to his war service, whilst John Loder gave over approximately one fifth of his 1929 version to the same.<sup>40</sup> Contrast such bellicosity with the 1929 veteran Liberal candidate in Brecon, Cemlyn Jones, who played upon his proficiency in the Welsh language rather than the war, and A.V. Alexander, whose Labour newspaper printed four pages in 1931 extolling his virtues without once

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<sup>38</sup> *Norfolk News*, 7 December 1918.

<sup>39</sup> *Driffild and Buckrose Mail*, 29 April 1926.

<sup>40</sup> 'Sparkbrook Parliamentary Division' leaflet, 1918, CAC, AMEL 4/8; Leicester East election leaflet, 1929, PARL, WAK 4/4.

mentioning the trenches.<sup>41</sup> Whilst Hugh Dalton's London School of Economics fellowship may indeed have suggested a more competent MP than his war service, people vote as much with their hearts as with their heads, and perhaps his 1922 candidacy - even in academic Cambridge - should have recognised this.<sup>42</sup> The Conservatives it seems may have better understood the psychology of the masses who, particularly in depressed times financially, lusted after heroes from a glorious past. 'Gallant commander,' 'the glamour of an old soldier,' such descriptions littered newspaper coverage of Conservative veteran candidacies.<sup>43</sup> Put simply, the war sold, and the Tories knew this.

Unlike their Labour opponents, Conservative candidates were virtually immune to any suggestion of treachery. Seymour Cocks may have written sympathetically to Arthur Ponsonby that the 1918 election was 'the biggest joke of the century, ... a joke that will wear thin,' but one cannot ignore the fact that, despite Labour possessing many exponents of the war - James O'Grady, John Hodge and Ben Tillett - that party could perpetually be dubbed unpatriotic.<sup>44</sup> 1918 is, to be sure, a slight anomaly.<sup>45</sup> Whilst, as Cocks noted, 'the electorate evidently preferred the Bottomleys and Pemberton Billings to serious politicians,' they would begin to change their tune.<sup>46</sup> As Sally Harris has noted, no member of the Union of Democratic Control - who had opposed the war from the outset and urged for a negotiated peace - was elected to parliament at the khaki election, though she neglects to mention Neil McLean's successful candidacy in Govan having been a

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<sup>41</sup> *Brecon and Radnor Express*, 2 May 1929; 'Hillsbro to Westminster Express' Newspaper, 1931, CAC, AVAR 8/1.

<sup>42</sup> Election Pamphlet, 1922, CRO, MPE 416/032-3. His leaflet of several pages contained but two sentences devoted to the war.

<sup>43</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 15 Nov 1922; *Woolwich Gazette and Plumstead Times*, 22 February 1921.

<sup>44</sup> Cocks to Ponsonby, 29 December 1918, PON c. 667. O'Grady, a Social Democratic Federation Marxist and Tillett of the 1889 Dock Strike fame, were far from ardent gradualists. R. Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour*, (London, 1972), 32.

<sup>45</sup> F.M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen – And Others: An Autobiography*, (London, 1933), 163. 'The nation lost its head in the 1918 election, and returned a House of Commons which represented our people at their very worse.'

<sup>46</sup> Cocks to Ponsonby, 29 December 1918, PON c.667.

conscientious objector.<sup>47</sup> This began to change: a tally of Labour MPs reveals 27 former UDC members in the 1929 parliament (9% of the total PLP), and 13 by 1935 (8% of the total). These figures, it may be noted, were only marginally less than the numbers of veterans they secured in parliament. Nevertheless, the idea that Labour candidates would constantly have to face accusations - particularly when the Tories shifted the discourse in that direction - of betraying their country is an important one. Gee versus MacDonald in Woolwich, as we will see, was perhaps apex of this. For now we may note the 1920 words of E.D. Morel, founder of the Union of Democratic Control, on his potential parliamentary candidacy in Dundee:

I retreat not one inch from the position I took up on the war when it broke out; I stand by everything I have said and everything I have written during the past five years, and I would not be induced to compromise in this respect in the slightest degree in order to secure votes... [Y]ou would have to be prepared for an avalanche of mud being thrown at your candidate, if I were your man. Mud no doubt is always thrown at elections, but this would be something quite special and peculiar, and quite out of the ordinary. There are a number of influential persons in governing circles who would move heaven and earth to keep me out of Parliament, and no calumny would be too vile, and no charge too grotesque for them to launch. In that respect they would stick at nothing.<sup>48</sup>

One method of highlighting such discrepancies in the party's war records, clearly, was the production of the Phoenix Generation come election time - for not by chance would Morel's opponent be that great self-publicist, Winston Spencer Churchill.

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<sup>47</sup> S. Harris, *Out of Control: British Foreign Policy and the Union of Democratic Control*, (Hull, 1996), 221.

<sup>48</sup> E.D. Morel to D. Watt, 12 May 1920, LSE, EDM F2 1/7.

As alluded to previously, the war resolved the masculine-feminine balance in British society decisively in favour of the former. Despite women being given the vote as reward for the sterling efforts many had shown between 1914 and 1918, the ultimate test of humanity had become one's courage in the face of danger. Manliness was in, effeminess out. This had consequences concerning election campaigns as Jon Lawrence notes; 'between the wars, displays of bravado from the platform [were] viewed with remarkable indulgence. Time and again newspapers reported, without hint of disapproval, incidents where candidates invited hecklers onto the platform to sort things out like men.'<sup>49</sup> Whilst the violence inherent in the political "brawl" worried sections of right-wing opinion predisposed to see 'a deeply rooted pathology within the social system,' this fear was exclusively applied to the collective mob, not the candidates themselves.<sup>50</sup> When Oliver Locker-Lampson surrounded himself with a fascistic militia, left his platform to grab a cheeky questioner by the tie and the hair, and addressed a meeting that escalated into a collection of free fights, the *Birmingham Gazette* proclaimed itself 'amazed,' but scarcely critical.<sup>51</sup> The character of interwar electioneering was clearly tailored towards men. In part this was tactical, before 1928 women needed to be nine years older than men to vote, but even after the "flappers" entered the electoral playing field no party exactly chased the female vote - though most were prepared to blame the supposedly unpredictable woman voter when they lost.<sup>52</sup> If Edwardian society had been chauvinistic, the war reinforced within people's minds that this was indeed logical.<sup>53</sup> *The Times* spoke for many in declaring that women should be

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<sup>49</sup> J. Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Public Politics After the First World War,' *Past and Present*, 190 (2006), 185-216, 213. Lawrence has a point. See *Daily Telegraph*, 22 and 27 October 1924 as well as the entire Robert Gee 1921 campaign in Woolwich, below. J. Lawrence, 'Fascist Violence and the politics of public order in interwar Britain,' *Historical Research*, 66 (2003), 238-67 suggests that after Olympia violence at public meetings became increasingly seen as abhorrent.

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence, 'British Public Politics,' 212.

<sup>51</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 17 and 25 May 1925.

<sup>52</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History*, 332.

<sup>53</sup> In his essay 'If I were a Dictator,' Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (an outlier in our sample, as noted) did not exactly suggest a bold new era of sexual equality. 'The masses are incapable of thinking for themselves or of knowing what is good for them...You cannot govern a country with a National Debt of seven thousand millions by consulting twenty five millions

spared the rough and tumble of the political meeting, and others noted the lack of feminine presence at such occasions.<sup>54</sup> If homes should be fit for male heroes, elections were, in part, treated in a tacitly similar vein.

At the same time, women - even before 1928 - possessed a useful role in the mindset of the Tory electoral machine. Violence, to be sure, was a male preserve: the war had been seen to vindicate that. Yet a distinction had to be wrought between the kind of rough and tumble seen at Tory meetings like Locker-Lampson's, and that at the other parties, most obviously Labour. Sometimes subtly, often not, the Conservatives were trying to draw a fault line between the ephemeral appeal both parties offered. Thus a Cambridge newspaper could report the Conservative candidate Captain Briscoe saying 'that the Red Flag and the Union Jack could not fly together. (Applause). The day that the Red Flag was hoisted over the country, the Union Jack must go down. He meant to see that the Union Jack was kept flying.'<sup>55</sup> Whilst the two parties were in fact acting little different - for all the symbolic importance, they were essentially just waving flags at one another - it was the intention of the Tory propaganda machine to hammer home the divergence in tone. So it was with political violence. This, as Lawrence crucially points out, was no longer an exclusively male polity.<sup>56</sup> The boorish nature of pre-1914 politics would no longer do, particularly if Labour was to be portrayed as thuggish, disorganized hooligans. Thus war veterans were very useful - fulfilling traditional masculine images of bravery and strength, and not alienating women by virtue of their previous gallantry. If things got rough, the audience was seen as being in the right hands.

In other regards however, the war changed the character of the British electoral map. Whilst we tend to think of the effect of conflict in national terms - in this sense, that a notable percentage of potential voters had been killed - war

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of different people. Now the Conservatives have invited five million flappers, whose intellects are usually found in their feet at their tender age to add to the general muddle. Mr Baldwin has in fact broadened the basis of chronic misgovernment. I would send these girls back to their homes and their young men.' Undated [c. 1928], SHL, ICS 84/C/12/3.

<sup>54</sup> *The Times*, 7 December 1923.

<sup>55</sup> Daily News Extract, 2 May 1924, CRO, MPE 416/045.

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, 128.



trauma was in fact felt more deeply at a local level. Lutyen's Cenotaph may have become the centrepiece for collective mourning, but it is scarcely possible to find a town in Britain that does not commemorate its *own* fallen sons. In an age where unifying concepts such as regular cross country travel and a national mass media were only just starting to become familiar, the world was a lot smaller. Grandstanding on issues of national importance was obviously necessary on occasion, but MPs were and are elected at a local level. Here a war record offered two distinct advantages. Firstly, service in a local regiment was perfect local newspaper fodder. Christopher Lowther, speaking as a Coalition Conservative in 1918, was fervently keen to point out that he had 'made a great many friends in [the Cumberland Yeomanry],' and could 'honestly say it was in a way perhaps the happiest time of my life when I was with all these excellent fellows from this county.'<sup>57</sup> Excellent fellows who would presumably pay him back on polling day. Put simply, being a native of – or having some connection like war service to – one's intended seat counted for much more than in contemporary times. Jack Strange, the gardener of Major Philip Colfox, was accordingly despatched to a meeting of the Liberal Candidate, a Welsh Methodist Minister named Chapel, to ask him the way to Halstock – a remote nearby town – in the dark. During the same campaign, Colfox was able to scrape home despite local newspapers reporting 'the Major has done it now' after he angrily responded to Chapel's prediction of victory: 'if you think that you are a bigger B.F. than I thought you were.' These were local elections fought with regard to local sensibilities: 'a great local character' like Colfox could get away with much.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, many areas of the British Isles - Scapa Flow and Portsmouth for example - had essentially been on the front line, and were thus particularly attuned to the importance of whether one had fought or not. In the years immediately following the war, local press coverage could be consequently vitriolic. Hull, hit by German bombing raids during the war, is a good case in point. Throughout the 1918 campaign *The Hull Daily News* was in virtual hysterics: 'The Zeppelins Foul

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<sup>57</sup> *Cumberland Times*, 19 November 1918.

<sup>58</sup> John Colfox to the author, 25 August 2009.

Work: Striking Record of German Infamy'; 'What Hull will Never Forget: The Murderous Work of the Zeppelins'; 'More pictures of Zeppelin Raid Damage.'<sup>59</sup> That Hull would return four MPs with some form of patriotic war service - including three Coalition Conservatives - perhaps comes as little surprise amidst such a heady atmosphere. The war naturally did not remove traditional barometers such as class and wealth from the political equation, but it provided a further plain on which contests could be fought, and one in which the Conservatives held a distinct advantage.

## 2.5 Veterans Against Non-Combatants

Some caution is necessary however. One does not wish to overemphasise the importance of a war record, for it was no guarantee of positive coverage. The case of Robert Gee serves ample notice of this. Gee was clearly a brave man, whose heroism we encountered in chapter one. That his opponent in the 1921 by-election at Woolwich should be Ramsay MacDonald, whose stance in 1914 had brought him social (even his son disagreed) and political isolation, constitutes one of history's more amusing ironies.<sup>60</sup> Almost from the outset, Gee - backed by that rogue Horatio Bottomley - seems to have decided to make the contest purely based on the differences between his and MacDonald's wars. When addressing constituents, Gee 'asked them to vote for the man who fought for his country - not for the man who was a friend of every country but his own.'<sup>61</sup> He would go on to declare himself 'desirous on this and every occasion of preventing mischievous men from entering the House of Commons, and particularly those who in time of stress and peril did nothing... to back the men who were fighting their country's battles.'<sup>62</sup> Gee crossed a line, no question. Tellingly according to the local newspaper, 'in the view of some experienced electioneers' the MacDonald equals traitor 'innuendo has been pressed a little too hard at the Coalition meetings. Voters would like to know a little more about what the gallant Captain will do when he sits in the House of

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<sup>59</sup> *Hull News and the Weekly Supplement*, 7 December 1918, 14 December 1918.

<sup>60</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, Unpublished Autobiography 'Constant Surprise - A Twentieth Century Life,' 61-2, CUL, RCS/ RCMS 41.

<sup>61</sup> *Woolwich Gazette and Plumstead Times*, 22 February 1921.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Commons.’<sup>63</sup> Gee constitutes something of an extreme case - unlike a Mosley or Eden he was not a career politician, and not only did he not adhere to the rules of the game, he probably did not even understand them. Nevertheless, his success must be acknowledged, defeating as he did a future Prime Minister in one of Labour’s traditional strongholds.

Whilst no doubt veterans proved an asset to the Conservative Party, it should also be stressed that contemporary politicians needed such men to prevent the fermentation of discontent, and conserve the status quo against any revolutionary zeal. As Stephen Ward has shown, particularly in the years immediately following 1918, the prospects for revolution in Great Britain were arguably as high as any time since Chartism in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> The only way British homes were fit for heroes after 1918 was that you needed to be a hero to live in one. When the Liberal Party in Brecon asked people in 1924 to ‘vote for [the incumbent] Jenkins who is all out for ex-Servicemen,’ it simply could not fly in the face of Lloyd George’s failure to deliver upon his famous pledge.<sup>65</sup> Though Jenkins had paid high tribute to ex-servicemen when unveiling a local war memorial, he himself had not served, and the soldierly vote deserted him to the Conservative Captain Walter D’Arcy Hall, whose Military Cross and Croix de Guerre were worth a thousand valedictory speeches. Conversely, whilst campaigning in Buckrose, one of Albert Braithwaite’s supporters was able to claim that ‘no man in Leeds had worked harder than Maj. Braithwaite had done on behalf of the pensioners, and the discharged soldiers, or done more to help those who had contracted illnesses during the war.’ He was met with sustained applause.<sup>66</sup> Therein lay the difference.

Even if such veterans subsequently expressed real animosity towards those non-combatants who entered parliament having allegedly profited during the war, they themselves provided the necessary antidote for a Conservative party that

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> S.R. Ward, ‘Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen, 1918-1920,’ *Historical Journal*, 16 (1973), 179-188.

<sup>65</sup> *Brecon and Radnor Express*, 23 October 1924.

<sup>66</sup> *Driffield and Buckrose Mail*, 22 April 1926.

might otherwise have appeared a little selfish. 'The 1919 House of Commons' to Philip Lloyd-Greame was a curious amalgam of 'men who had served in the war; but with that leaven an admixture of war profiteers.'<sup>67</sup> Alongside the Liberal maverick Joseph Kenworthy he would be praised by the *Daily Mail* as being the polar opposite to the 'war profiteers [who were] content to have achieved for a time the social distinction of being an MP.'<sup>68</sup> Mosley too noted that whilst 'the soldiers back from the war were not all idealists and the businessmen were not all war profiteers...there was a certain psychological division. The war generation was more disposed to take the 1918 programmes seriously.'<sup>69</sup> This was rather lucky, for as Baldwin wrote to his mother in 1919, the 'prevailing type' of Conservative MP was 'a rather successful-looking business kind which is not very attractive.'<sup>70</sup> Not every politician would be as generous as the future party leader himself - who in 1919 would anonymously write off £150,000, twenty per cent of his estate, to the government.<sup>71</sup> That ex-soldier MPs provided a visible alternative to the forces 'out for what they can get during the war,' men that made Baldwin 'sick,' was an important point in smoothing over the slightly tarnished Conservative reputation.<sup>72</sup>

## 2.6 A Different Type of Candidate?

Whether veteran Tory candidates actually offered anything massively dissimilar from their non-combatant counterparts is debatable. Certainly they were more prone to hyperbole. 'Before the war,' declared Davidson in Fareham, 'it had been said that [we] were a decadent race, but this had been proved incorrect. Men had performed acts of valour equal to any in the history of the nation.'<sup>73</sup> Like Oswald Spengler, many ex-servicemen candidates proclaimed the Great War to be

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<sup>67</sup> P. Lloyd-Greame, *I Remember*, (London, 1946), 15.

<sup>68</sup> J. M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen - And Others: An Autobiography*, (London, 1933), 220.

<sup>69</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 101.

<sup>70</sup> Williamson and Baldwin, *Baldwin Papers*, 40, [12 February 1919].

<sup>71</sup> See the letter to *The Times*, published under the pseudonym F.S.T, 24 June 1919.

<sup>72</sup> Williamson and Baldwin, *Baldwin Papers*, 38, [November 1917].

<sup>73</sup> *Hants and Sussex County Press*, 7 December 1918.

'a type of historical change of phase.'<sup>74</sup> It formed 'the point of contact,' as Buchan noted, 'of a world vanishing and a world arriving.'<sup>75</sup> Where, as Runciman argues, after 1945 British society did not drastically evolve, in the years following 1918 it was very much seen as doing so, and veteran politicians played their part in stoking such feeling.<sup>76</sup> Addressing a League of Youth meeting in October 1919, Mosley pointed to a group of men that 'has learnt to distrust old age and loath its activities,' adding 'the opportunity of youth is at this moment unbounded.'<sup>77</sup> The discontent that many veterans began to feel as time passed was not therefore so much a result of the contemporary picture, though things were indeed bad, but how the Britain of reality measured up to the one they dreamed of in 1918. Indeed, as early as 1923, veteran politicians were already admitting that slogans uttered in the fervour of 1918 were unhelpful. Ernest Brown, standing as a Liberal and holder of the Military Cross, declared that year in Rugby that rhetoric such as 'hang the Kaiser' and 'Britain for the British' was 'well intentioned' but 'bore no relation to reality.'<sup>78</sup> When we later turn to veterans murmuring against Baldwin and Chamberlain, it must always be borne in mind how far such views were determined by the ex-soldier's own tendency towards exaggeration in the period immediately following the Armistice. The pressure of, as Mosley put it, 'betray[ing] the trust that was placed in us by thousands of our generation who marched with us on the greatest of all crusades,' and 'who perished confident that a regenerated world would arise from their ashes,' was simply too much.<sup>79</sup>

One must acknowledge that such vague talk in part reflected a basic lack of knowledge, understandable given the war years had robbed Conservative candidates of their usual schooling at Oxford or Cambridge. At a meeting of farmers with his Liberal opponent Henry Vanney, Braithwaite was forced to admit that, contrary to his opponents long standing membership of the National Farmers

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<sup>74</sup> O. Spengler, trans C.F. Atkinson, *The Decline of the West*, (London, 1957), 47.

<sup>75</sup> Buchan, *Memory*, 166.

<sup>76</sup> W.G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory, Volume Three: Applied Social Theory*, (Cambridge, 1997), 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Harrow Gazette*, 24 October 1919.

<sup>78</sup> *Rugby Observer*, 23 November 1923.

<sup>79</sup> *Harrow Gazette*, 24 October 1919.

Union and knowledge ‘about foot and mouth,’ ‘he did not profess to be a practical farmer, and could not solve all ills.’<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Henry Page Croft would bemoan the fighting of his sacred tariff cause in 1923. ‘There was a new generation of politicians who “knew not Joseph”,’ he complained. ‘Most of our candidates only entered political life after the war, and not one in ten of them had the remotest idea how to state the tariff case.’<sup>81</sup> Given such occasional gaps in experience, it is slightly ironic that in 1935 one veteran, Harold Balfour, felt qualified to give a series of lectures explaining the parliamentary system in the most inane simple fashion: ‘You may ask why should the King send for one of just a few men? Why not one of many others? The answer is that these men are Party Leaders.’<sup>82</sup> Hardly a new Hobbes or Locke. Such veterans, however brave they had been in the war, were also prone to be less than illuminating in times of peace.

Perhaps because the ex-serviceman gained a more rounded profile as the years went by, it is likewise important to note that the appeal of the veteran did not experience greatly diminishing returns. In the late 1930s electioneers were still keen to point to their candidates bravery some two decades earlier. In 1935 the local Conservative newspaper spoke with pride that ‘[Lord William] Scott...had war service in France and Flanders from 1915 to 1918, with the 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars, being awarded the MC.’ Even in 1938, with another conflict becoming a distinct possibility, Henry Willink was portrayed as a ‘real man’s man,’ his service at the Somme, and Military Cross being held up by a Conservative Central Office keen to ‘devote a section [of the Ipswich by-election material] to the War.’<sup>83</sup> Once in parliament, veterans clung to their military titles. Harry remained “Captain Crookshank” until 1951 following the pattern of most ex-servicemen in maintaining publicly their military rank until elevation to the Privy Council (Lieutenant Colonel Rt. Hon Samuel Hoare was a notable exception). Thus in 1937: Brigadier General Louis Spears, Rear Admiral Murray Sueter, Captain Rt Hon Euan

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<sup>80</sup> *Driffield and Buckrose Mail*, 29 April 1926.

<sup>81</sup> H. Page Croft, *My Life of Strife*, (London, 1972), 173.

<sup>82</sup> ‘The Government’ Lecture Notes, October 1935, CAC, BLFR 1/1.

<sup>83</sup> Election Pamphlet and Conservative Central Office Particulars for Ipswich By-Election, February 1938, CAC, WILL III, Box 1 File 3.

Wallace, Brigadier-General Henry Page Croft, and so on.<sup>84</sup> Though he had been a King's Counsellor for decades, Charles Loseby still used the "MC" in his title as late as 1967 - possibly to offset the dubious nature of his later legal career.<sup>85</sup> Appropriation of the memory of the trenches was thus a permanent process, particularly for a Conservative Party increasingly needing, or at least choosing, to sell itself as "National."

## 2.7 A Consensus in the Making?

The move towards a "National" spirit at elections is an interesting phenomenon. One can of course trace its roots back to Benjamin Disraeli, however the post 1918 years were equally vital in its progression. Most historians have understandably attributed this to Baldwin, speaking as he did of a national 'spirit of brotherhood in which alone great things can be accomplished.'<sup>86</sup> Yet Baldwin himself was profoundly influenced by the message preached by his younger supporters. Let us not forget, Britain was governed for over half the interwar period by a peacetime coalition government, which in the modern era is almost unthinkable. That this came to pass was partly a result of the rhetoric of former soldiers, men to whom, after all, the notion of partnership had previously been one of life or death. Coalitions may be made by leaders, but they are held together by the rank and file. Thus when Leo Amery - Conservative to the core before 1914 and even prepared to risk civil war lest Ulster be handed over to Catholic 'chinks' - starts in 1918 to denounce the old party divisions, ...the old party catchwords, ...the old party prejudices,' people listen. That such an ideologue could spout the following not only reflects a certain amnesia, but a genuine evolution in thought: 'have we already forgotten to what a plight the old party business brought us

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<sup>84</sup> See Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, Volumes 320, 492.

<sup>85</sup> Loseby letter re tax evasion, 1967, IAS, AQ 197/1. His wedding photos also bear the legend, Loseby, M.C., Q.C.

<sup>86</sup> S. Baldwin, *Our Inheritance: Speeches and Addresses*, (London, 1928), 226, [12 June 1926].

before?’<sup>87</sup> Evidently, in some respects, he had.

As Geoffrey Searle has illustrated, ‘the quest for national government has been a continuous feature of modern British politics.’<sup>88</sup> That this search would find fulfillment in 1918, 1931, 1935 and - most importantly, and most fully - in 1940, owes much to the articulation of such a spirit by the Phoenix Generation of politicians. In 1918, as Searle notes, a radical like Mosley was by no means unique amidst a ‘sense of shared purpose [to unite] people of widely different backgrounds.’<sup>89</sup> Thus spoke ex-serviceman Richard Colvin in Epping, ‘the reconstruction of our social life...can best be accomplished by the **combined action** of all Parties, **and must not be hampered or delayed by Party politics and Party strife.**’<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Conservative candidates such as John Birchall in Leeds generally articulated a greater antipathy to the ‘party or caucus system’ than their Liberal or Labour veteran counterparts.<sup>91</sup> Liberals in particular seemed to have envisaged the party game continuing a little longer: in Barnstaple their nominee John Tudor Rees was asked whether he would support a Coalition Government if it came into conflict with Liberal principles. His answer was brevity itself, ‘No.’<sup>92</sup> This was clearly a trend carried over from the war, for the Conservative Party was the only major force that had not split over the issue of how the conflict should be waged, and thus possessed a greater post-war homogeneity.

As we will further explore, even if some of these figures rejected outright fusion with Lloyd George in the early 1920s or National Labour in the 1930s, such sympathy for traditionally non-Conservative causes was not merely sop for the electorate. Whilst pre-war Conservative radicals may have forwarded policies such as tariff reform and the development of social welfare which the post-1918

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<sup>87</sup> J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (eds), *The Leo Amery Diaries, Volume I: 1896-1929*, (London, 1980), 5 January 1912, 84. See also 10 January 1914, 95-6; Amery Speech Notes, 1918, CAC, AMEL 4/8.

<sup>88</sup> G.R. Searle, *Country Before Party: Coalition and the Idea of “National Government” in Modern Britain 1885-1987*, (London, 1995), 12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>90</sup> *Woodford Times*, 29 November 1918, 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>91</sup> *North Leeds News*, 13 December 1918.

<sup>92</sup> *North Devon Herald*, 12 December 1918.



generation may well have agreed with, they also proposed large expansion of the Armed Forces, militant resistance to Home Rule in Ireland, and rejection of pretty much every Labour Party initiative which a man such as Harold Macmillan would have found anathema.<sup>93</sup> There was a marked difference in the type of Tory radicalism projected to the electorate by John Loder to that of Lord Milner, Leo Maxse and others before 1918. Thus, when speaking to the people, the Loder generation showed 'a recognition that the masses, even if personally industrious, live perennially on the edge of an abyss, their normal earnings never sufficing to provide for even the ordinary emergencies.'<sup>94</sup> Having fought alongside honest Tommy Atkins, middle class Tories could no longer dismiss the working class as parasitic, scarcely even British *untermenschen*.<sup>95</sup> Edward Wood articulated an even greater change in his *Great Opportunity* - published on the eve of the 1918 election.

The war...has taught all parties much. Labour leaders, with few exceptions have proved that they really represent their organisation in giving disinterested and patriotic support to the national cause. It is to be hoped that the days when recognition of trade union leaders as spokesmen in industrial disputes was refused have gone.<sup>96</sup>

This was a profound statement for a Conservative to make at election time. Even if 1919 and 1926 would render the hope of Wood's last sentence a little unfulfilled, the war, most clearly recognised by its combatants, had brought the left "into the

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<sup>93</sup> R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985*, (Oxford, 1987), 3.

<sup>94</sup> L. Rockow, 'The Political Ideas of Contemporary Tory Democracy,' *The American Political Science Review*, 21, (1927), 12-31, 30.

<sup>95</sup> Recent liberal Conservative literature forwards much this line. See David Cameron's ideologue P. Blond, *Red Tory: How the Left and Right have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It*, (London, 2010), 9. In the interwar period, he claims, 'between two extremes [of totalitarian left and right] Britain managed to chart a more virtuous course. Any visit to an Oxbridge college where the names of the student dead from the world wars are inscribed on the walls will show you that the British elite died in almost as great a proportion as the poor, and any study of letters from the front written by the British 'Tommy' in WW1 shows that many amongst the working class died to defend a specifically British vision of a better world.' An important and perennial upper class legend therefore.

<sup>96</sup> G. Lloyd and E. Wood, *The Great Opportunity*, (London, 1919), 53.

nation.” If Britannia were to rule the waves, it first had to reconcile its own internal differences. If the Tory party was to dominate at elections, it needed to recognise this fact.

Yet if the war provided men such as Wood with a mindset broadly more sympathetic to the plight of the average worker, their socialistic world view was completed by exposure to such people in their domestic abodes. The spectre of a man such as Oswald Mosley - heir to a baronetcy no less - campaigning in the Birmingham slums, even after his defection to Labour, was admittedly bizarre. Stories circulated of Mosley leaving his Rolls-Royce outside the city centre and changing into a modest Ford. Oliver Baldwin even jovially asked him ‘where’s the champagne?’ when inspecting his pub lunch of fish and chips.<sup>97</sup> Beyond such amusement, something rather profound was occurring however. To a man such as Alfred Duff Cooper, campaigning in Oldham was as big a culture shock as the war years. ‘I learnt a great deal in Oldham,’ he later wrote. ‘I had no idea before I went there that in every ward of a great industrial city there were working men’s clubs devoted to each of the three political parties. There were eleven Conservative clubs in Oldham and each had to be visited at least once a year.’<sup>98</sup> Such visits gave him the chance to hear the ordinary man’s complaints, discuss potential solutions, and gave him a greater overall understanding of his mentality. Before 1924 Duff Cooper had been a Die Hard, seeing the right of the party as remaining true to Conservative tradition. Yet ‘in Oldham I had a glimpse of the condition of the people and had realised that a man’s head must be as wrong as his heart who denied the need of social reform.’<sup>99</sup> A great change was afoot.

## 2.8 Geographical Divides

Acknowledging such leftwards movement however, the scale of Conservative victories within this period remains shocking. In 1923, when Baldwin’s tariff reform policy flops at the ballot box, places outside the Tory heartland such as Sheffield Hallam, Hull North West and Sedgefield - future

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<sup>97</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, 190.

<sup>98</sup> A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, (London, 1953), 133.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

constituency of Labour's most successful Prime Minister no less - still return Conservatives: those who fought in the First World War. Even in the electoral *annus horribilis* of 1929, a few marginal seats represented by war generation candidates - Aberdeen and Kincardine Central, Chippenham, Yeovil and the like - do go Baldwin's way. Clearly however in the latter case, this was not a universal trend. As Charmley has pointed out, those Conservative MPs first elected in the deluge of 1924 faced a much tougher time than the generation of 1923.<sup>100</sup> As one such 1924 Phoenix Generation debutant Cuthbert Headlam constantly bemoaned, the previous years intake enjoyed a far easier electoral ride.<sup>101</sup> Whereas the 1923 ex-servicemen MPs found southern constituencies such as Cambridgeshire, Worcester and Hitchin, most of the following year's additions to the Commons came from northern, working class, areas in Labour's heartland. Unlike the Anthony Edens of the world, safe in the knowledge they would always - even in a 1929 nightmare - be returned, men like Headlam believed themselves to be little use to the party save swelling the backbenches, and fighting tough contests "the coming men" needed to be spared.<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, there does seem to be a discrepancy between those elected in 1923 and 1924. Of the twelve veteran MPs elected in 1923 who faced a contest in 1929, only two lost: Leonard Ropner in Sedgefield, and Alan McLean in Norfolk - the latter by less than 800 votes. In contrast, the 1924 intake served extremely badly. Of the 50 ex-servicemen to contest in 1929, over half (29) lost.<sup>103</sup> The defeats could also be massive: Arthur Hope, armed with his Military Cross and Croix de Guerre, lost Nuneaton by over 12,000 votes; Christopher Brooke, with his DSO, dropped Pontefract by over 7,000. Fifteen of the twenty three losers were defeated by over two thousand votes. In defeat however - as Page Croft had declared of protectionism in 1923 - such Conservative candidates fought the good leftist fight.

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<sup>100</sup> Charmley, *Conservative Politics*, 74.

<sup>101</sup> S. Ball (ed), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: The Headlam Diaries 1935-1951*, (London, 1999), 59.

<sup>102</sup> Idem, *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries 1923-1935*, (London, 1992), 261 [27 February 1933].

<sup>103</sup> The 1875-1900 control sample fared worse. The 1923 contingent won 3 and lost 2 in 1929, the 1924 cohort won only 2 and lost 7. See Appendix B and C.

Two of the four authors of *Industry and the State*, a book espousing passionate leftist Conservatism to a tee, would lose.<sup>104</sup> They were however fighting in Stockton and Leicester, not traditionally safe Tory seats. In such areas it was vital war generation MPs made the argument for a more progressive Conservative policy, even if, in 1929, it was often doomed to failure. Baldwin, as we will see, would have to serve two masters: the Die Hards and the advanced young democrats. If all the Conservatives had offered at the ballot box was the Imperialism of Lloyd, the anti-socialism of Churchill and the bizarrely moralistic rants of William Joynson Hicks, they would have headed for an even larger defeat.

Headlam may have, with some justification, seen his missing the 1929-31 parliament as detrimental to his future chances of promotion, but the cohort who suffered defeat in 1929 with him provided something great in defeat. In an election fought on an anodyne, if not completely implausible policy of “safety first,” it was important that those radical elements in Conservatism stood up - if only to counter Lloyd George’s pledge that *We Can Conquer Unemployment*. Lloyd George’s claims to be able to institute a massive scheme of public works ‘without inflation and without increasing the scale of taxation’ may seem unrealistic in retrospect, but his view that ‘the determination to succeed is half the battle’ may well have struck a chord against a seemingly lethargic Baldwinian line.<sup>105</sup> Thus, whilst Macmillan was ‘very properly’ voted out, ‘there was no ill feeling, for both my wife and I were popular.’<sup>106</sup> If the official party line of ‘safety meant the dole’ - both for the ordinary worker, and disposed MP - such progressives at least possessed the comfort of knowing they had argued against ‘an economic theory and system which had long ceased to have any validity.’<sup>107</sup> As we will see, Stuart Ball’s view that post 1945 Macmillan-Butler Conservatism was essentially a reaction to Baldwin’s economic caution cannot be fully sustained across the board, but the divergence in spirit - if

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<sup>104</sup> R. Boothby, H. Macmillan, J. de V. Loder, O. Stanley, *Industry and the State: A Conservative View*, (London, 1927).

<sup>105</sup> D. Lloyd George, *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, (London, 1929), 10, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Macmillan, *Past Masters*, 64.

<sup>107</sup> R. Boothby, *The New Economy*, (London, 1943), 2.

not always policy - in this period was already marked.<sup>108</sup> *Industry and the State*, even with a leader with whom the YMCA generation could seemingly do business, 'was heresy in traditional Conservative circles, since it advocated a state role in industry and the *Daily Mail* denounced it as socialism in disguise.'<sup>109</sup> Macmillan could thus argue for its implementation at election time, but the final decision would always be Baldwin's, and the electorate knew this. In any case, the absence from the 1929-31 parliament (or most of it) of men such as Macmillan, Loder and Duff Cooper would as profoundly effect the expansionist efforts of Mosley and Lloyd George, as it would the path of contemporary Conservatism. Most of the 1929 losers were back in the House through the essentially free ride of 1931 (still in time to see much of the slump), and in more amenable southern constituencies - St George's for Duff, Lewes for Loder. If the 1923ers faced a simpler electoral path than those elected a year later, let us not overestimate the significance of this pattern. During 1929-31, in any case, the Conservatives were out of office: in terms of progression within the forces of Unionism, it was not the worst parliament to miss.<sup>110</sup>

## 2.9 Moving Beyond the Myths

It seems to be a myth every bit as potent as the complete annihilation of British youth in the trenches that the war generation politicians first burned brightly, then had their hope, and careers, extinguished. Presumably the career of Oswald Mosley accounts for much of this. As we have seen however, this is unhelpful. There were over 200 MPs with experience of the Great War in the House of Commons throughout the 1930s. Neville Chamberlain's first cabinet of 1937 contained 11 former soldiers, including the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer John Simon, and Secretary for War Leslie Hore-Belisha. The landslides of 1931 and 1935 may have seen some getting lost in the

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<sup>108</sup> S. Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The Crisis of 1929-1931*, (Oxford, 1988), 208.

<sup>109</sup> F. Beckett, *Macmillan*, (London, 2006), 26.

<sup>110</sup> Though as J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*, (London, 1978), 298 points out, whilst around 60 of the 400 MPs in 1924 could be considered Die Hards, this was only reduced slightly (due to such men having southern constituencies) to 50 out of 261 in 1929. 'The balance in the parliamentary party therefore shifted.'

shuffle, but at least veterans were in parliament in the first place. Indeed, with the election in 1928 of Edward FitzRoy - wounded at the battle of Ypres - as Speaker of the House of Commons, veterans were well placed to make a parliamentary impact. The average year a veteran Conservative MP first elected to the Commons in 1918 would bow out of politics was, coincidentally, 1929. Thus even the run of the mill political plodder had over a decade to make his mark. The idea that, in electoral terms, the war generation was denied opportunity is only partly sustainable - and when we turn to the career of Mosley, and how so few Tory radicals followed his path, an important notion. If some fell out of the loop, it was not always the fault of a supposedly out of touch party hierarchy. Baldwin may indeed have 'frustrated the coming younger men' on occasion, but the war generation was certainly given a fair crack of the whip come election time. If Headlam lost Barnard Castle in 1935, when National candidates swept the board yet again, this was not necessarily the fault of the party leader, Neville Chamberlain, Lord Hailsham or other old men who had done "well out of the war." Most war veterans prospered and had opportunity enough to make a difference: they were a permanent feature of interwar British politics.

That most rallied to the Conservative banner was an essential pattern if one wants to truly understand the outcome of contemporary elections. In order to persuade a sizeable proportion of the population to vote against their economic interest, which, given successive Conservative administrations' complete failure to solve the problem of 'endemic' unemployment seems an accurate assertion, the party had to offer the electorate something.<sup>111</sup> One can concentrate, as critics of the left have done, on propagandistic portrayals of Labour as propagating an 'alien and

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<sup>111</sup> R. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931*, (London, 1970), 11. Against their 'economic interest' maybe a contested statement, certainly unemployment saw great regional variation by the mid-1930s. Conservative victories in northern towns/cities with higher levels of joblessness do seem to constitute this however: two Phoenix Generation members elected in Blackburn, three in Birmingham, two in Leeds together with MPs in Glasgow, Manchester, Carlisle, Stockton, and Edinburgh appear disproportionately high. One-nation Tories were always likely to play better than Die-Hards in such areas of course, but 1935, which witnessed a modest Labour recovery, was not the walkover victory of 1931. Winning in such areas remained an impressive feat.

foreign heresy.’<sup>112</sup> One must also note the tactical isolation of David Lloyd George by Stanley Baldwin, but eventually one has to recognise the merits of Conservatism during this period. Later chapters will have much to say deriding both the proto-Hayekian school of thought that state intervention was per se a dangerous thing, and the cowardice of both the party leadership and Phoenix Generation in failing to challenge such notions, yet we must also acknowledge the great electoral achievement of Baldwinian Conservatism. As Mark Mazower has powerfully shown, ‘today it is hard to see the inter-war experiment with democracy for the novelty it was: yet we should certainly not *assume* that democracy is suited to Europe. Though we may like to think democracy’s victory in the Cold War proves its deep roots in Europe’s soil, history tells us otherwise.’<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, after 1918 only on the continent’s northern fringes did effective parliamentary rule survive. One reads much, particularly from Conservative thinkers, that the British are somehow innately democratic. ‘In England the [democratic] beliefs of the Right are descended from the beliefs of a great mass of people held for hundreds of years,’ wrote Walter Elliot MC, they are ‘based on the observation of life and not on *a priori* reasoning.’<sup>114</sup> This is as simplistic as assuming all Englishmen drink tea and ride big red buses. In fact, if one believes Stanley Baldwin, it was only ‘since 1918 [that] this country has become a democracy.’<sup>115</sup> One might even more accurately say it did so in 1928. The interwar years saw not only the emergence onto the public stage of fascism and communism therefore, but also introduced the notion of genuine parliamentary accountability into the political culture. At the ballot box, the Conservative Party, and the forces of stability if not creation, needed a selling point to keep voters away from the revolutionaries. To suggest the British people almost vote Conservative in some kind of unthinking fugue is simply insulting. Yet it is difficult to explain how Britain rejected seemingly viable alternatives to Conservatism. To do so required two

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<sup>112</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 224, [12 June 1926]

<sup>113</sup> M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century*, (London, 1998), 3.

<sup>114</sup> W. Elliot, *Toryism and the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1927), 4.

<sup>115</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 29, [4 March 1927].

elements: the successful portrayal of non-Conservative political movements as “unpatriotic,” and the suppression - whether by the carrot or the stick - of those forces within the party who might have rocked the boat. It was a delicate balancing act. The first, as we have seen, was accomplished in part by the unsubtle brandishing of veteran candidates come election time. The second was a little more complex. It is to that question, and Stanley Baldwin’s role within it that forms the basis for our next chapter.



### **3: The Baldwin Enigma**

*In a talk with G[oeffrey] L[loyd] he referred to [his senior colleagues] as having no vision and talked of his wish to retire at such a time as he could hand over to a younger man. G.L. and I talked of his preference for younger men and his understanding of them.*

- Rab Butler's take on Stanley Baldwin during the 1930 leadership crisis.<sup>1</sup>

*Have you any outstanding young men in the Commons coming along?*

*No, not one.*

- Baldwin in private conversation with Thomas Jones, 1934.<sup>2</sup>

#### **3.1 Baldwin's position**

If the previous chapter was an analysis of how power can be gained, this one constitutes an interpretation of how it can be wielded. 'How' is a very crucial word here. British politics, as Rab Butler noted, is *The Art of the Possible*.<sup>3</sup> To understand why statesmen act the way they do, one must understand the parameters in which they operate. Excepting the dictatorships - and even Hitler has been dubbed a "weak dictator" - power is always a relative concept. Thus, inter-parliamentary relationships matter. A leader can only be as powerful, as forceful, as ideologically vigorous as the people around them allow. Power is a two way process: a leader may command, but needs followers. In other words, why things happen depend on how they came to pass: nothing is automatic. These may seem truisms, but they are important.

This is particularly important in the case of Stanley Baldwin to whom we now turn. Baldwin's place in British history is bizarre. In popular culture he almost

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<sup>1</sup> Butler Account of Baldwin Retirement Crisis, 15 March 1931, TCL, RAB C/4/29.

<sup>2</sup> T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950*, (London, 1954), 123 [27 February 1934].

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible. The Memoirs of Lord Butler*, (London, 1971).

fits the title of Robert Blake's book on Bonar Law, *The Unknown Prime Minister*.<sup>4</sup> In the 2002 BBC poll to determine the 100 Greatest Britons, Baldwin failed to make a list that included contemporaries such as Nye Bevan and Lloyd George, and controversial figures such as Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher. In the spectre of Churchillian heroes, and Chamberlainite villains, he has seemingly become rather lost in the mists of time. Without wishing to concentrate on one book, for it is indeed excellent, the title of Graham Stewart's *Burying Caesar: Churchill, Chamberlain and the Battle for the Tory Party*, is symptomatic of a wider phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> The most influential and indicative Conservative politician of his epoch, Stanley Baldwin, has been largely written out of a narrative that was essentially his own.

Where historians have commented, the divergence of opinion on Baldwin, for such a mild mannered man, has been surprisingly marked. As with much concerning this period, the critical side of the debate stems hugely from Winston Spencer Churchill. One entry in the index of *The Gathering Storm* was enough to sink a reputation: 'Baldwin, Rt. Hon Stanley...confesses putting party before country.'<sup>6</sup> A Baldwin parliamentary speech from 1936 is quoted thus:

Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming, and that we must rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? *I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain.*<sup>7</sup>

This, Churchill concludes

was indeed appalling frankness. It carried naked truth about his

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<sup>4</sup> R. Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858-1923*, (London, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> G.S. Stewart, *Burying Caesar: Churchill, Chamberlain and the Battle for the Tory Party*, (London, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> W.S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, (London, 1952), 607.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 185. Churchill's Italics.

motives into indecency. That a Prime Minister should avow that he had not done his duty in regard to national safety because he was afraid of losing the election was an incident without parallel in our Parliamentary history...[It was] less than justice to the British people.<sup>8</sup>

This claim appears highly debatable, even potentially libelous - at any rate, as Robert Blake acknowledged as early as 1960, 'it has no justification.'<sup>9</sup> Whereas Churchill implies that Baldwin is referring to the General Election of 1935, a cursory glance at the speech reveals he is in fact discussing the Fulham by-election of 1933, and the need for the country to convince itself - not be dictated to or lied to from on high - of the dangers that lay ahead. 'I think,' Baldwin went on to say, 'the country learned by certain events that took place during the winter of 1934-5 what the perils might be to it...We got from the country [in the 1935 election] - with a large majority - a mandate for doing a thing that no one, twelve months before, would have believed possible.'<sup>10</sup> The notion that Baldwin stabbed the nation in the back for personal gain at the 1935 General Election is therefore a decidedly shaky one, but perhaps with the view that "there is no smoke without fire" many have seen fit to denigrate him on a range of issues in its stead.

Such was the climate, that when even using the word 'Baldwin' in the postwar 1945 epoch, Tories were careful to highlight to listeners when they did not mean Stanley.<sup>11</sup> Whereas Baldwin's son Arthur found it difficult to publish his sympathetic 1955 account 'involving as it did some necessary criticisms of Churchill,' post-war attacks on the man were aplenty.<sup>12</sup> Though acknowledging his efforts in healing industrial strife, biographies by G.M. Young, and later Keith Middlemass and John Barnes, told the story of a man lethargic in the face of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> R. Blake, 'Baldwin and the Right,' in J. Raymond (ed), *The Baldwin Age*, (London, 1960), 25-65, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Ibid, 56.

<sup>11</sup> 'A Few Paradoxes of Our Times,' Oliver Lytellton Speech 15 March 1949, CAC, CHAN 4/17/08.

<sup>12</sup> A.W. Baldwin, *My Father: The True Story*, (London, 1955); P. Williamson and E. Baldwin (eds), *Baldwin Papers: A Conservative Statesman, 1908-1947*, (Cambridge, 2004), xi.

impending danger, even though both had set out to try and rehabilitate him.<sup>13</sup> This was a charge hit further home by Dilks's and Macmillan's accounts of the 1970s, which argued that whilst Baldwin may have started with good intentions, tiredness rendered him ineffective as a leader after the General Strike.<sup>14</sup> As even a relatively supportive commentator, Blake, notes, the Conservative Party - in massive part due to Baldwin's vapid leadership - had no clue what to do with the power it managed to acquire between the two wars.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the story goes, Britain spiralled almost imperceptibly downwards: unemployment, Indian devolution, the abdication of Edward VIII, all being allowed to happen with little concerted resistance from on high. The ensuing national lack of confidence, according to Skidelsky, begat appeasement and the Second World War.<sup>16</sup>

We will address foreign policy, Churchill and Chamberlain later. If one wants to understand specifically conservative politics between the wars, these are not the things to concentrate on however. Foreign policy, as we will see, was an issue even the seemingly most staunch government supporter - or denouncer - could vacillate on. Equally, though their isolation has perhaps been overplayed, both Churchill and Chamberlain were occasionally representative of somewhat narrow sections of their party. Chamberlain was a punctilious pedant, according to Headlam 'more machine than man.'<sup>17</sup> Though Macmillan would later acknowledge him as 'one of the great reformers' for his work as Minister of Health in the 1920s, the two would barely speak for the entirety of the 1929 parliament.<sup>18</sup> He could often lack, to return to Headlam, that 'spark of humanity.'<sup>19</sup> Churchill, if more

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<sup>13</sup> G.M. Young, *Stanley Baldwin*, (London, 1952), passim; K. Middlemass and J. Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography*, (London, 1969), passim.

<sup>14</sup> D. Dilks, 'Baldwin and Chamberlain,' in R.A. Butler (ed), *The Conservatives: A History from their Origins to 1965*, (London, 1977), 271-404, 296-7, 309; H. Macmillan, *The Past Masters: Politics and Politicians, 1906-1939*, (London, 1975), 112, 154.

<sup>15</sup> R. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Major*, (London, 1997), 243.

<sup>16</sup> R. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931*, (London, 1970), 424.

<sup>17</sup> S. Ball (ed), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries, 1923-1935*, (London, 1992), 113, [1 March 1927].

<sup>18</sup> Macmillan, *Past Masters*, 134; S. Ball, *The Guardsmen: Harold Macmillan, Three Friends, and the World They Made*, (London, 2005), 109.

<sup>19</sup> Ball (ed), *Headlam Diaries, 1923-1935*, 113, [1 March 1927].

deliberately casting himself as a maverick, was similarly polarising. The times he was on the “wrong side” of an argument are almost too numerous to list: Gallipoli; threatening war over Chanak; the return to the Gold Standard; India, the abdication and many more. Even for a young man looking for a political patron, he was a dangerous prospect to be treated with the utmost caution. For all his flaws then, as Blake argues, it was Baldwin who ‘represented with singular accuracy the mood of a nation wearied by the sufferings of war and its aftermath.’<sup>20</sup> He may at times have appeared simultaneously ‘unideological’ to the Die Hards like George Lloyd, the Chamberlainite bureaucrats and the young progressives of this study, but who was more indicative of a nation still seeking ontological meaning after the recent holocaust?<sup>21</sup>

Baldwin’s principle misfortune lies not in the criticism that has been levelled, nor the retaliatory defences. The hagiographies of the man, for instance, sometimes verge on the hilarious. Bechhofer Roberts’s *Stanley Baldwin: Man or Miracle?* poses the taxing question, ‘[b]irth, merit or accident: which is the basis of his greatness?’<sup>22</sup> Presumably viewing the British political scene through the lens of Mack Sennett, he concludes Baldwin to be a second ‘Charlie Chaplin, who wins our affectionate pity with his shoulder-shrugging, cane-twiddling renunciation of unattainable triumphs.’<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the anthropological preoccupation biographers have had with his Anglo-Celtic heritage does not really astound or illuminate, even if the notion that ‘had he been pure bred he would have experienced a greater intensification of strength and imagination’ is a little hard to swallow.<sup>24</sup> Where the paucity of understanding about the man causes problems are over more serious issues, and to that we must turn to Philip Williamson.

Williamson has been Baldwin’s most steadfast supporter. To him, ‘ascribing Baldwin’s success simply to the occupation of the “centre” or “middle” of politics

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<sup>20</sup> Blake, *Peel to Major*, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart, *Burying Caesar*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> B. Roberts, *Stanley Baldwin: Man or Miracle?*, (London, 1931), 261.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>24</sup> J. Green, *Mr Baldwin: A Study in Post-War Conservatism*, (London, 1933), 22. Roberts, *Man or Miracle*, 9 also makes pointed reference to his origins.

presumes that a political “centre” pre-existed in some manifest and stable form, rather than having to be defined and constructed.’<sup>25</sup> Conservatism, he goes on, was not just ‘an empty container filled and re-filled by the expediencies of the moment,’ but an organic and malleable political philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Whilst Baldwin could never exactly be described as a man of action, Williamson’s point deserves consideration. For Blake, he ‘led the party from a position of moderation, seeking to conciliate his opponents, to blur the harsh edges of class conflict, and to display as far as he could the more humane aspect of Conservatism. Up to a point he succeeded.’<sup>27</sup> Three of the party’s achievements under his leadership bear repetition. Firstly, Baldwin persuaded the Conservative Party to reject Macquisten’s divisive parliamentary bill attacking trade union funding to the Labour Party with an oratory flourish: ‘give us peace in our time, O Lord.’<sup>28</sup> Secondly, his handling of the General Strike was, by popular consensus, generally competent. As Macmillan later put it, ‘with his sympathy, his understanding, and his steadiness [Baldwin] saved a strike from drifting into a revolt.’<sup>29</sup> Perhaps because he believed the owners and the miners to be ‘equally stupid,’ he saved the country from civil war. Lastly, there was the Abdication. Though one can interpret Baldwin’s actions as ‘a shameless concoction of hypocrisy and untruth,’ once again he took the wind out of the sails of those potentially revolutionary King supporters, Winston Churchill or perhaps even Mosley’s Blackshirts, with his undemonstrative stoicism.<sup>30</sup> As Charmley notes, the idea that Baldwin was a complete failure simply does not stand up to any close scrutiny.<sup>31</sup> If Disraeli renders such a notion somewhat limited, John Ramsden was

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<sup>25</sup> P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and national values*, (Cambridge, 1999), 9. Helen McCarthy has recently shown that such constructive measures lay beyond the traditional party boundaries, and were predicated on much more than anti-socialism: H. McCarthy, ‘Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in interwar Britain,’ *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), 891-912.

<sup>26</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Blake, *Peel to Major*, 217.

<sup>28</sup> See Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Macmillan, *Past Masters*, 154.

<sup>30</sup> A. Clark, *The Tories: Conservatives and the Nation State 1922-1997*, (London, 1998), 141.

<sup>31</sup> Charmley, *Conservative Politics*, 94.

sage to acknowledge the soothing features of his 'New Conservatism.'<sup>32</sup>

We must therefore reconcile two notions. The idea that Baldwin led a party for almost fifteen years as a bumbling incompetent, yet clearly accomplished much. With reference to the Phoenix Generation however, something of a synthesis can be found. Let us view Baldwin anew: for what he presides over is something very profound. What happens in Britain between the wars was conservatism *par excellence*. Despite an empire under strain, a decimated economy, and the emergence of a Labour Party with links - if drastically overemphasised by the right - to revolutionary socialist and communist parties on the continent, the machinery of government scarcely trembled. That this came to pass was not the result of some political drift reminiscent of a dreamy Jerome K. Jerome novel. The fugue like state in which interwar British politics seems to have passed in such an interpretation is not tenable: men acted, and their actions had direct consequences.

### 3.2 The Wider Impact of the War

The Great War caused a cleavage in the British political scene. We are choosing to concentrate in the main on those who fought, how the memory of the trenches imbued a profoundly different world view to those men who experienced 1914-18 at home. This is however a little incomplete, for though veterans such as Macmillan were particularly radicalised by their soldierly experience, we must also make a further point: that those who did not fight could also be significantly moved by the war. Other than the divergence between ex-combatants and 'the hard-faced old men,' therefore, there was an equally important overall variance of opinion: between those men to whom the spectre of the war gave hope - who looked to its heroism as well as its carnage - and those who found in it little but despair, and saw it purely as proof of man's inhumanity to man. Let us not, after all, underestimate the traumatic effect of thousands upon thousands of mutilated bodies - dead and alive - returning to a home front whose inhabitants were unable to prevent such suffering.

This impotence in turn created the type of mentality this chapter wishes to

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<sup>32</sup> J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*, (London, 1978), 190.

address: that of a profoundly pessimistic and mournful Conservatism which saw danger at every turn and proceeded to take the most cautious route out of every problem. To put it concisely, the Baldwin-Chamberlain brand of Conservatism was a decisive, deliberate assertion of inaction in the face of a world teetering on the edge of disaster, in which Baldwin provided the rhetoric, and Chamberlain the details.<sup>33</sup> Unlike some, the Baldwin-Chamberlain axis did not necessarily believe the war had proved man innately selfish, merely that it had highlighted potential danger. Churchill provides an interesting example of this first phenomenon, as a man whose liberal faith was punctured by the war. Proclaiming the end of 'the mild and vague Liberalism of the early years of the twentieth century,' and the eclipse of 'the surge and hopes and illusions that followed the armistice of the Great War,' he believed 'we are entering a period when the struggle for self-preservation is going to present itself with great intensesness.'<sup>34</sup> Writing to the normally rather mild mannered Lord Linlithgow, he bemoaned that

All the time you and your friends go on mouthing the bland platitudes of an easy safe triumphant age which has passed away, whereas the tide has turned and you will be engulfed by it. In my view England is now beginning a new period of struggle and fighting for its life, and the crux of it will be not only the retention of India but a much stronger assertion of commercial rights...Your schemes are twenty years behind the times.<sup>35</sup>

The last sentence, for a man who had relatively recently doomed the country to the Gold Standard, was hypocritical at best. Nevertheless, it was illustrative of a man whom the war had rendered pessimistic and reactionary - which, when we turn to the General Strike, we will see had consequences.

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<sup>33</sup> P. Williamson, "Safety First": Baldwin, the Conservative Party, and the 1929 General Election, *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), 385-409, 408.

<sup>34</sup> Churchill to Linlithgow, 7 May 1933, CAC, CHAR 2/193.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



Whereas the destructive Churchill represents a rather unimportant, and indeed uninteresting, figure during the interwar epoch, the Baldwin-Chamberlain project was clearly more important. Both men learned much from the Great War battlefield in their absence. Visiting France in 1919, Chamberlain found ‘the battlefields themselves...the most dreary sight imaginable.’ He found it ‘thrilling to see the actual spots about which one had so often read.’ Not having been there in combat however, his mind was rendered intensely mournful: ‘I had one disappointment, I could not find [his cousin] Norman’s grave.’<sup>36</sup> There is a wonderfully indicative moment in Chamberlain’s letters to his sister Hilda in which he describes Ypres as

even more destroyed than I had imagined. There is literally nothing left and one could hardly find a square foot that had not been hit by some projectile. They can’t leave it as it is, it is too dangerous. The few remaining walls would soon tumble down. On the other hand, to rebuild would be to obliterate all trace of what has been before. I can’t think what they will do.<sup>37</sup>

One could scarcely come up with a better metaphor for the mind traumatised by the war, yet not having experienced it firsthand. If the war had left the veteran politician slightly muddled in his world view - for reform but uncertain how to achieve it - it also left those who had not fought in something of quandary. Some meaning clearly had to be wrought from the recent holocaust, but of what type?

Mankind after the Great War, concluded Baldwin, was like a blind person walking through a minefield.<sup>38</sup> They needed constant guiding and should not be forced along too quickly. As Williamson argues, in Baldwin’s mind progress was not inevitable: ‘checks, even retrogression, could come, whether from external or

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<sup>36</sup> R.C. Self (ed), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters: Volume One, The Making of a Politician*, (Aldershot, 2000), 332, Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, [23 August 1919].

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Other non-veteran MPs agreed with their leader. See Martin Conway’s 1923 Election Address, Undated, CUL, Add. 7676/v/l.

internal causes.<sup>39</sup> ‘There are large masses in this country who have not...yet had time to develop a keen political sense themselves,’ he proclaimed in 1927. ‘They are only too prone to be led away by really skilful and clever propaganda designed by appealing to their better qualities, to[wards] ends they would be the last to desire if they realised what those ends were.’<sup>40</sup> The Conservative election slogan of 1929, “Safety First,” was thus further reaching than the imminent need to stave off MacDonald and Snowden. ‘There may be a better industrial system imaginable than ours, and I hope indeed we may be slowly moving towards something better,’ declared Baldwin in 1925, ‘but there is no doubt in my mind that if it were possible to destroy the present system in a moment, those who destroyed it would cause a shipwreck, and they would not bring into being a ship in which to take away the survivors.’<sup>41</sup> A government’s job was not to propose wide ranging schemes to cure society’s ills, indeed there was ‘little that a Government can do,...reforms [and] revolutions must come from the people themselves.’<sup>42</sup> Indeed, this was a policy rather desperately highlighted by Baldwin writing an open letter to *The Times* in August 1928 asking 150,000 employers to take on displaced and out of work miners.<sup>43</sup> Political action in the Baldwin conception was to be limited in scale, rooted in common sense, and predicated on preserving individual freedom.<sup>44</sup> And that was about it. Any form of debate which verged on being both constructive and holistic, as the 1922 Committee discovered, was anti-Baldwinian.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.3 Baldwin’s words and his deeds

Baldwin, as we will see, made all the right progressive noises. Young veterans could see in him the leader of the party of the Nation, not of any class.<sup>46</sup> Duff Cooper could acknowledge his handling of the General Strike as ‘the greatest

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<sup>39</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 147.

<sup>40</sup> S. Baldwin, *Our Inheritance: Speeches and Addresses*, (London, 1928), 30 [4 March 1927].

<sup>41</sup> S. Baldwin, *On England*, (London, 1927), 39 [5 March 1925].

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 34 [5 March 1925].

<sup>43</sup> *Times*, 21 August 1928.

<sup>44</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 10 [19 June 1926].

<sup>45</sup> Deputation to Baldwin Minutes, Undated 1923, BOD, CPA, 1922/1.

<sup>46</sup> R.M. Banks, *The Conservative Outlook*, (London, 1929), 263.

personal and public triumph that any Prime Minister has ever had.<sup>47</sup> They could, like Rab Butler, see in him ‘my mentor...amongst living statesmen.’<sup>48</sup> Yet a fundamental rupture between such figures and Baldwin, obscured by his harmonious rhetoric and convivial personal relations, remained. He did of course have the power of patronage, and when he told ‘my dear Edward, [you] will have to be Foreign Secretary in years to come’ presumably veterans such as Wood listened intently.<sup>49</sup> Little of these kind words resulted in concrete action however; his occasional musings about removing from his government everyone over the age of 60 were little but hot air, despite the party’s tumbling fortunes in by-elections.<sup>50</sup> In reality, to leave the 1924-29 cabinet of old men, one either had to die, resign like Cecil, or flee to the city to earn money years of drinking had squandered a la Birkenhead.<sup>51</sup> Though Baldwin claimed the Great War had robbed the nation of the great talents who would have replaced the geriatrics, presumably this would not have sat too well with the forty plus per cent of contemporary MPs who had fought and survived.<sup>52</sup> As Charmley has noted, whilst ‘the left of the party received preferment from Baldwin...only those MPs who behaved themselves could expect a reward.’<sup>53</sup> It would take until 1934 for one of the authors of the interventionist *Industry and the State* to reach the Cabinet, and that was more due to Oliver Stanley being Lord Derby’s son than his progressive rejection of ‘laissez-faire’ and belief in ‘more widespread ownership.’<sup>54</sup> By his own admission (at least according to Bob Boothby), the 1930s Conservative Party led by Baldwin was ‘incompetent’ and

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<sup>47</sup> J.J. Norwich (ed), *The Duff Cooper Diaries 1915-1951*, (London, 2005), 219 [14 May 1926]. Judging by its minutes, the 1922 Committee agreed with Duff’s positive assessment. 6 May 1926, BOD, CPA, 1922/1.

<sup>48</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Williamson and Baldwin, *Baldwin Papers*, 202 [15 September 1927].

<sup>50</sup> S.L. Blackhall, *Unemployment and Electoral Politics. The Case of the East Midlands and the North-East of England*, Cambridge M. Litt Thesis, 1994, 45. Between 1924 and 1929 there were 63 By-elections, the Tories gained only 1 seat and lost 16.

<sup>51</sup> Dilks, ‘Baldwin and Chamberlain,’ 311.

<sup>52</sup> R. Pound, *The Lost Generation*, (London, 1964), 275. See Baldwin’s comment at St John’s College, Cambridge.

<sup>53</sup> Charmley, *Conservative Politics*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> R. Boothby, H. Macmillan, J. de V. Loder, O. Stanley, *Industry and the State: A Conservative View*, (London, 1927), 227-228, 217.

'extremely reactionary,' diametrically opposed to the efficiency and progression obsessed Phoenix Generation.<sup>55</sup>

What we must begin to see is that Baldwin does not simply preside over the course of interwar events, but makes (or un-makes) them. He consciously acted to stifle the forces which might have led to the apocalyptic nightmare of the Great War trench or, contemporaneously, the Crocean liberal malaise which produced fascism. Conversing with Rab Butler in the 1930s, Baldwin remarked that 'life in the country makes you see things whole and will enable you, like me, to steer between Harold Macmillan and Henry Page Croft: then you will be on the path to leader of the Conservative Party.'<sup>56</sup> He certainly followed his own advice, and this was not simply down to the pragmatic necessity to avoid offending either wing of the party: Baldwin actually believed this was the way politics should be conducted. We must thus be careful not to see in Baldwin's seemingly progressive rhetoric the words of a man determined to move the country forward. By not vehemently opposing the Labour Party in the bellicose terms employed by Churchill and the die-hards, he appeared much more modernising than the extent his deliberately strategised inactivity actually allowed, let alone entailed.<sup>57</sup> In such a context Chips Channon's comment that Baldwin was 'half Machiavelli, half Milton' seems appropriate indeed.<sup>58</sup>

It is worth looking again beyond the hot air at what Baldwin actually enacts, and the 1925 Macquisten Bill referred to earlier is as good a place to start as any. Frederick Macquisten - a proven die-hard on issues as bizarrely moralistic as lesbianism - attempted to introduce a piece of legislation designed to replace the

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<sup>55</sup> R. Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, (London, 1978), 114-5.

<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's (badly written) rant is perhaps worth quoting, albeit an extreme case. 'With three millions of unemployed or partmy [sic] unemployed Mr Baldwin does k [sic] not whether he has done well or badly...His many charming qualities are a positive danger to the country. Millions are lulled to sleep on the edge of a volcano by his soft words, his benevolence, his obvious good intentions while the smile from his pipe of peace blinds his followers to the rising red cloud of anarchy, financial ruin and despair [sic]' 'If I were a Dictator,' SHL, ICS/C/12/3.

<sup>58</sup> R. Rhodes James (ed), *Chips: The Diaries of Henry Channon*, (London, 1967), 143 [30 January 1938]

existing “contracting-out” mechanism of trade union funding going to the Labour Party with a “contracting-in” option. Baldwin then delivered one of his most famous speeches in response, stating that whilst the bill was essentially sound he would encourage his supporters to reject it so as to encourage a more peaceable kingdom, free of strife and internal conflict. All seemingly well and good: progressive politics getting the better of a mentality the country was better off rid of, or so Baldwin’s historiographical supporters have argued.<sup>59</sup> The support his speech received from young veterans, both Conservative and Liberal, was significant - the sheer volume of maiden speeches on the matter was noticeable to even a normal critic like Arthur Henderson.<sup>60</sup> It is worth quoting a couple of ex-serviceman responses:

Wedgwood Benn (Liberal)

The Prime Minister in that remarkable speech, lifted the whole thing far above the controversy in which I admit I should have indulged with pleasure. He has not threatened, and he has not even admonished. He has appealed to the spirit of fair play and of peace, which is instinctive in the hearts of all of us who sit in this House.<sup>61</sup>

Oliver Stanley (Conservative)

I understood [from contemporary press reports] that it would be the wicked Conservative party who were pressing this Measure against the Socialists speaking on behalf of the trade unions, yet I myself came down prepared to vote against the Bill. When I listened to what if I may with humility describe as the wonderful speech of the Prime Minister, I

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<sup>59</sup> Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 347.

<sup>60</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 6 March 1925, vol. 181, col. 844.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, c.849.

was even more convinced than before.<sup>62</sup>

The problem arising from such positive feeling however was that it was clearly a little misplaced. War veterans extrapolated a meaning from Baldwin's words that he did not fully intend. 'I trust this Debate will have the effect of making people in this country realise that the Conservative Party is not out for any small points of party gain,' declared Headlam, 'but that it stands for the interests of the great democracy of this country.'<sup>63</sup> But was this actually true? The party clearly stood for the preservation of the status quo, but whether it was prepared to go further is at least doubtful.

The flowery language which greeted the Macquisten Bill was, after all, not accompanied by some great change in Conservative policy. Baldwin handled the General Strike well in that he limited the likelihood (such as it was) of out and out revolution, but he certainly did not, as he claimed to be his desire, totally 'lessen the misunderstandings which threaten industrial life.'<sup>64</sup> If that had been his intention he would have replaced Joynson-Hicks at the Home Office and Churchill at Number 11.<sup>65</sup> The former endured not altogether absurd taunts from fellow MPs that he was a second 'Mussolini' and a 'national misfortune,' the latter not only had helped precipitate the economic conditions which created the strike by returning to the Gold Standard, but oversaw the confrontational government organ *The British Gazette* which even Conservative backbenchers found provocative.<sup>66</sup> Through this paper, Churchill treated readers to headlines such as 'Assault on the Rights of the Nation' and 'Organised Attempt to Starve the Nation,' whilst the end of

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, col.862-3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, col.870.

<sup>64</sup> Williamson and Baldwin (eds), *Baldwin Papers*, 180, Baldwin to King George V [13 May 1926].

<sup>65</sup> If Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett had been 'dictator,' he would have exiled Joynson Hicks to 'St Halna' [sic] and 'never allow[ed] him to reenter the country again under any circumstances.' SHL, ICS 84/C/12/3.

<sup>66</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5 May 1926, vol.195, col.295; Anthony Eden Yorkshire Post Clippings, 28 February 1928, UBSC, AP 7/1/3-4; Boothby, *Recollections*, 44.

the strike was described as a 'surrender.'<sup>67</sup> Even if Baldwin was not directly responsible for such output, he did not directly oppose it. Indeed, for a man whose benevolence has essentially been sold on his pacific oratory, stating 'the General Strike is a challenge to Parliament and is the road to anarchy and ruin' seems a little confrontational. "The soldier" was also trotted out by Churchill to defend the government cause:

#### LOYAL EX-SERVICE MEN

The Devon Motor Transport Company, which employs about 400 men, runs motor omnibus services throughout Devon and Cornwall and in and around Plymouth. 98 per cent of all its employees are ex-service men.

All the Municipal omnibus and tram employees went out on strike, but not one of the Company's men left their work. The Company is now running not only its ordinary routes, but also a considerably increased service.<sup>68</sup>

To Boothby, May 1926 'was Baldwin's hour, and his great chance of achieving the real peace in industry for which he longed. He did not take it.'<sup>69</sup> If anyone, it was Bevin and Thomas who emerged from the strike as the great figures of conciliation – despite the praise he received from establishment figures like Lord Londonderry and the Duke of Devonshire, Baldwin's post-box would conspicuously lack notes of praise from the Phoenix Generation.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps Baldwin did want to introduce radical schemes to help the working man which would supplement his words, but one must judge him on his actions. Prisoner of a right wing party caucus or not, he acquiesced in policies which were

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<sup>67</sup> *British Gazette*, 6, 8 and 13 May 1926.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 12 May 1926.

<sup>69</sup> Boothby, *Recollections*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> See his letters after the General Strike, May 1926, CUL, BALD 137.

manifestly belligerent. Appeasing rhetoric in 1925 and rigidity against the strikers in 1926 were followed in 1927 by a piece of legislation clearly reactionary in nature. The 1927 Trade Disputes Act had many reasonable features, its most pressing clause was probably that which outlawed intimidation of those wishing to cross the picket lines. Yet at the same time it essentially enshrined the views held by right wing Conservatives in the previous two years. Macquisten's bill was passed in all but name, and a general strike was rendered illegal. Here, in a sense, was Baldwin's real genius. A whole host of causes dear to reactionary Conservative hearts were tacked onto the bill - for instance, civil servants were forbidden to join a union affiliated to the T.U.C. - and his party, even the progressive young ex-servicemen of this study, scarcely battered an eyelid.<sup>71</sup> No Conservative veteran MP voted against the bill, and few even abstained. Macmillan, Loder, Oliver Stanley, and Crookshank all supported Baldwin's legislation, the first three presumably locating such a decision within their view that 'the improvement of the industrial status of the worker' is 'essential.'<sup>72</sup> These were after all still Conservatives, even of a leftist viewpoint. They accepted the constitutional argument almost unanimously: Archibald Noel Skelton believing it to be 'impossible to order a general strike without ipso facto and automatically making an attack on the constitution;' Duff Cooper referring to the real issue over 'how this country is to be governed.'<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, as Marquand points out, 'Conservative Keynesian social democrats thought of themselves as Conservatives, belonged to a self-conscious Conservative tradition and appealed to the myths and symbols of that tradition.'<sup>74</sup>

### 3.4 Articulating Dissent

There however were some signs that this generation was indeed a little different. Conciliation with organised labour was viewed in more positive terms

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<sup>71</sup> 181 Phoenix Generation MPs backed the party line, compared to just 22 abstentions – a 89%/11% split. The Tories received 386 votes for their position, equating to a 92% turnout of their supporters. See below.

<sup>72</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5 May 1927, vol. 205, col.1891-1902; Boothby, Macmillan, Loder and Stanley, *Industry and the State*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3 May 1927, vol. 205, col.149, 170.

<sup>74</sup> D. Marquand, *The Unprincipled Society: New Demands and Old Politics*, (London, 1988), 18.



than much of the Cabinet. Duff Cooper 'would recommend the Government not...be afraid of losing dignity by accepting a new offer and entering into negotiations even under the menace of a general strike.' Baldwin was also invited to parlay his personally sympathetic position into concrete action.<sup>75</sup> The message from the young members was that the act would only be palatable if accompanied by progressive advances in other areas, a viewpoint best articulated by Harold Macmillan. Pointing out that such a bill could never have been passed before the conditions created by the General Strike, and whilst pledging to support it, Macmillan fired an early indication of the radicalism that would come to light in the 1930s. 'If this Bill is to be the prelude to a general swing to the right,' he warned, 'if it means the beginning of reactionary policy, then I am bound to admit it means the beginning of the end of this party of which I have the honour to be a member.' For the electors to 'decide that this Bill is justified,' the party must 'continue to deal with labour questions,' render itself 'not unwilling to adopt a bold policy with regard to many questions of taxation, finance, social and moral questions [sic].'<sup>76</sup> He concluded with a further notice of potential intent:

I must also humbly inform the government that we do not regard this Bill as in any way a sign - we trust it is not a sign - of any attempt to set the clock back. We shall continue to support the Government in this Bill, and in its future measures according to the line its policy takes, and only according to that line. We shall demand, and we shall press for, the general forward movement which we know to be right.<sup>77</sup>

So long as Baldwin was the man to deliver progress, he was the visionary to which the young men would look up to, and were prepared to swallow the occasional retrograde measure. In the mid to late 1920s rising stars such as Eden could believe that 'the left wing of the party' was, 'in the first instance, like the Prime

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<sup>75</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3 May 1927, vol. 205, col.168.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 2 May 1927, vol. 205, col.1410-11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, col. 1411.

Minister himself.’<sup>78</sup> Like Richard Cross’s sudden disappointment upon attending his first cabinet meeting under Disraeli, the question was when such men would wake up and smell the pragmatic and static blend of the Baldwinian coffee.<sup>79</sup>

It is understandable why a young politician would gravitate towards an older figure with the glamour (and patronage) of office. Baldwin was thus the patron of Duff Cooper, Eden and Wood. Austen Chamberlain also aided the career of Eden whilst Churchill, for a while, seemed to be helping Macmillan along. ‘Like all young, talented and ambitious men’ Simon Ball’s *Guardsmen* ‘aroused their share of animus. Yet they always kept on the right side of the party managers.’<sup>80</sup> Churchill was however an odd choice, even as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and perhaps helps illustrate why Baldwin was so attractive by comparison. In 1927, whilst fishing around for some eye catching scheme for Budget time, he became interested in Macmillan’s ideas for the re-rating of industry. ‘Macmillan basked in the collective glory, and then – nothing. Churchill had achieved his purpose, made his mark, won the plaudits. He did not have much further interest in the tedious details of the rates.’<sup>81</sup> Such a move also cost the future Prime Minister the good favour of Neville Chamberlain, who had previously had kind things to say about *Industry and the State* but became very cold after Macmillan’s dalliance with Churchill. One’s patron thus had to be chosen well.

Whilst some kind of established political sponsor was thought necessary to project their message, it must be noted that, in and of itself, the Phoenix Generation’s world view was profoundly different to that held in normal conservative circles – if perhaps less than they later claimed. Indeed, the young politicians went out of their way to make this point. *Industry and the State* proclaimed that its ideas *a propos* an industrial superstructure ‘would be met with

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Eden Yorkshire Post Clippings, 14 October 1926, AP 7/1/1-2.

<sup>79</sup> D.J. Mitchell, *Cross and Tory Democracy: A Political Biography of Richard Assheton Cross*, (London, 1991), 5. As Cross recalled, “from all his speeches, I had quite expected that his mind was full of legislative schemes, but such did not prove to be the case...”

<sup>80</sup> S. Ball, *The Guardsmen*, 107.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

determined opposition in its initial stages from many Conservative quarters.<sup>82</sup> Oliver Stanley went further in 1931, stating that 'we may be, we shall be, led to take decisions and to make changes which will dismay the timid and affront the old-fashioned, for the task of Conservatism to-day is not to bring back the old world...but on its lessons to build a new.'<sup>83</sup> A massive shake up was required within the party, and, until 1929, Baldwin was seen as the man to potentially deliver that. From then on, Macmillan remembered 'that among the young progressives (the so-called Y.M.C.A. - that is my friends and I) many felt that although we would always get a friendly word from him we would get no action.'<sup>84</sup>

Action - later the name of Oswald Mosley's fascist organ - was the creed of the post war progressive. A Keynes quote discussing the memorandum which led to Mosley's resignation from the Labour Government springs to mind: 'the question for us is not whether the signatories to the Manifesto have thought out correctly the details of such a plan in all their particulars; but whether or not it is desirable to have a plan.'<sup>85</sup> In other words, the willingness to act was, in itself, a big step. As Lloyd George noted in 1929, 'one of the most disturbing features of the present situation is that, as a result of years of Tory ineffectiveness, the nation is in danger of losing confidence in its ability to win through its present difficulties.'<sup>86</sup> Against such a lethargic Conservative backdrop, it must be said the Phoenix Generation stood out, even to their nominal opponents. The Labour MP A.V. Alexander made judicious use of the ex-serviceman Conservative criticism of their leaders inaction in his 1935 election campaign. Thus Macmillan was quoted describing the front bench as 'a few disused slag heaps,' and Amery as claiming that 'what we are still asking for, and what has not yet been furnished, is some clear statement of the general economic policy of the government, particularly their policy in respect of

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<sup>82</sup> Boothby, Macmillan, Loder and Stanley, *Industry and the State*, 215.

<sup>83</sup> O. Stanley, 'The Task of Conservatives,' in D. Crisp (ed), *The Rebirth of Conservatism*, (London, 1931), 197-203, 202.

<sup>84</sup> Macmillan, *Past Masters*, 114.

<sup>85</sup> "Sir Oswald Mosley's Manifesto", article published in *Nation* 9.12, u.d.1930, KCC, JMK/A/30/231.

<sup>86</sup> D. Lloyd George, *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, (London, 1929), 5.

the monetary situation.<sup>87</sup> Amery had previously gone further: 'there are things in our social system which we have long been content to tolerate which we now know must be dealt with on a bold and comprehensive plan; a whole industrial and social order to be reconstructed. We have a better and a happier England to create, a land worthy of the sacrifices which have been made for it.'<sup>88</sup> It was not some short term cosmetic changes that Britain required, but a collective change of attitude. "Safety First" may have been plausible, but it was not exactly inspirational.

Allied to this belief that only action would cure society's ills was a steadfast rejection of "laissez-faire" as both an economic and political doctrine. On the economic side, there was not the love of free trade that had been their forefathers lot. Auckland Geddes condemned 'the materialism of the cities' as 'the millstone round the neck of democracy. The spirit of love and service is submerged in the waters of cynicism.' He continued sarcastically, 'go to the cities for the answer! Money! Pleasure! Power! Little civic sense! Little disinterested service!'<sup>89</sup> In more rural settings it was also seen as a bad thing: Edward Wood pointing out that Victorian economics had essentially been to the financial blight of the ordinary farmer for the previous half century.<sup>90</sup> It was therefore with some glee that Macmillan could label the 1932 Import Duties Act as 'the end of a period in Britain both in economics and politics...From now on Protection, not Free Trade, is on trial.'<sup>91</sup> By 1943, to Bob Boothby, the *raison d'être* of laissez-faire capitalism was 'not only dead but in a state of putrefaction.' In part, such an atypically conservative attitude seems to stem from encountering Baldwin's 'hard faced men who had done well out of the war.'<sup>92</sup> A glance at the memoirs of the Phoenix Generation shows little nostalgia for the businessman brand of backbench Tory MP. Charles Murchison, a special case in having served himself and losing a son in

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<sup>87</sup> 'Alexander Election Material: "National Government Condemned By Its Own Supporters,"' 1935, CAC, AVAR 8/1.

<sup>88</sup> 'Amery Election Speech Notes,' 1918, CAC, AMEL 4/8.

<sup>89</sup> Speech to Inter-Church World Movement, 2 May 1920, CAC, GEDD 8/1.

<sup>90</sup> G. Lloyd and E. Wood, *The Great Opportunity*, (London, 1919), 60-66.

<sup>91</sup> H. Macmillan, 'The State and Industry in 1932,' *Economics Pamphlets Miscellaneous*, VII, 2.

<sup>92</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History*, (Oxford, 1970), 175.

combat, took great strides to gain a place on the parliamentary Wealth Select Committee, ensuring that from November 1919 he could take to task 'those who had made fortunes during and out of the war.'<sup>93</sup> John Buchan too abhorred those he considered 'genuine reactionaries, not country gentlemen but business magnates, who were not much liked, and who woke to life only in the Budget season.'<sup>94</sup> In some regard therefore, these were no longer their father's sons.

Politically the state also came very much more into play. The Liberal reforms prior to 1914 had shown that it need not be left to voluntary organisations to guide the people, and the war had only exacerbated this trend. Though, in New Labour speak, Wood preferred a "hand up" to a "hand out," he reminded 'those who hold this view most strongly that war conditions will not come to an end with the conclusion of hostilities, and that in several instances it will certainly be necessary to invoke the organisation of state action to meet them.'<sup>95</sup> The experience of Lloyd George's dynamic leadership during the conflict was also not lost on the Phoenix Generation. As Lloyd-Greame later noted:

In a life-and-death struggle the Prime Minister must have the spark of divine leadership and the drive that justifies dictatorship; neither Asquith nor Chamberlain possessed these basic, compulsive qualities, so they had to be pushed aside, ~~ruthlessly and even cruelly~~, to make way for men who had the capacity to evoke the inspiration of leadership and nationhood.<sup>96</sup>

Democracy was to be defended, but not at the absolute expense of getting things done. 'There is something to be said for government by an autocrat,' observed

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<sup>93</sup> C.K. Murchison, *Family Notes and Reminiscences*, (Private collection - not published, 1940), 52.

<sup>94</sup> J. Buchan, *Memory-Hold-The-Door*, (London, 1940), 228.

<sup>95</sup> Lloyd and Wood, *Great Opportunity*, 79-80.

<sup>96</sup> Book draft of 'Sixty years of power; some memories of the men who wielded it,' Undated, CAC, SWIN I/11/4. Crossing out in original.

Wood, a viewpoint Oswald Mosley - as we will see - would take to the nth degree.<sup>97</sup> Whereas Baldwin would attempt to educate the population politically, men such as Keynes believed the masses should simply be dictated to, and that the Tories were best placed to do this:

I believe that the right solution [to the industrial crisis] will involve intellectual and scientific elements which must be above the heads of the vast mass of more or less illiterate voters...There are differences between the several parties in the degree to which the party machine is democratized...in this respect the Conservative Party is in much the best position. The inner ring of the party can almost dictate the details and the technique of policy. Traditionally the [Liberal Party] management was also similarly autocratic. Recently there have been ill-advised movements in the direction of democratising the details of the party programme.<sup>98</sup>

For all one reads much about right wing British crackpots proclaiming “Hurrah for the Blackshirts” and so forth, one must acknowledge that even progressive Conservatives were fairly ambivalent towards the democratic process, at least in its present form. If Churchill’s early praise for *Il Duce* is well known, less documented perhaps is the later anti-appeaser Louis Spears’s similar comment that ‘Mussolini rendered the world a great service when he rescued his country from anarchy. He has had difficulties, and has considered it necessary to make his people swallow many unpalatable measures. His chief asset has been the national pride he has awakened and fostered.’<sup>99</sup> Likewise, in 1930 Eden would urge his contemporaries to ‘make a close study of the causes of the collapse of parliamentary government in Europe since the war. It has not been because these

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<sup>97</sup> Lloyd and Wood, *Great Opportunity*, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Keynes note, undated, JMK/PP/45/16.

<sup>99</sup> Speech on America and the Next War, Undated - Presumably 1930, CAC, SPRS 7/2. See also Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett’s grovelling interviews with Benito Mussolini, 1927 and 22 October 1928, SHL, ICS 84/C/4/5/1.

countries are temperamentally unfitted to work the parliamentary machine. It has been for a far simpler reason, because Parliament has failed.<sup>100</sup> These nominally advanced young democrats were not exactly wedded to the Westminster system therefore, for all that many of them would go on to lead it after 1945.

### 3.5 Cross-Party Trends

Concurrent to this was an elevated sense that the party game was artificial, limiting, and preventative of action. The propensity young Conservative veterans had to look across the traditional party divide during this period was indeed surprising, even if one can find other examples in history of such feeling. Barack Obama, exploring Capitol Hill shortly after his election to the United States Senate in 2005, tells a similar story:

At a reception one evening, I started a conversation with an old Washington hand who had served in and around the Capitol for fifty years. I asked him what he thought accounted for the difference in atmosphere between then and now. "It's generational," he told me without hesitation. "Back then, almost everybody with any power in Washington had served in World War II. We might've fought like cats and dogs on issues. A lot of us came from different backgrounds, different neighbourhoods, different political philosophies. But with the war, we all had something in common. That shared experience developed a certain trust and respect. It helped to work through our differences and get things done."<sup>101</sup>

As Obama realised, such a picture was a little rose tinted. 'He had airbrushed out of the picture the images of the Southern Caucus denouncing proposed civil rights legislation from the floor of the Senate; the insidious power of McCarthyism...; the

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<sup>100</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3 November 1930, vol. 244, col.614.

<sup>101</sup> B. Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, (London, 2007), 25-6.

absence of women and minorities in the halls of power.’<sup>102</sup> Selective amnesia would mark the British parliamentary experience of the post 1918 world too – perhaps, indeed, the generational narrative along Mannheimian lines requires as such. To be sure, not every war hero became an enlightened progressive. Reginald Banks, Tory MP for Swindon having fought the Ottomans, would quite happily describe socialism as ‘our enemy’ and liberalism as a ‘plague from abroad’ akin to Russian Influenza and Jazz.<sup>103</sup> Even Archibald Noel Skelton - famous exponent of a “property owning democracy” no less - said in 1924 that ‘it was not conceivable that this country could survive a five year Government if the Socialists were returned to power.’<sup>104</sup> What exactly he imagined would happen is less clear.

Despite such anomalies, the trend towards cross-party cooperation was overwhelming. Edward Grigg is an interesting case in point. Awarded the D.S.O. and Military Cross during the war, he served as a Liberal MP with Duff Cooper in Oldham and then defected to the Conservative Party to become the member for Altrincham. His 1931 *Three Parties or Two?* was published prior to the formation of the National Government, and represented the culmination of thirteen years of an anti-partisan undercurrent in British politics, articulated most vehemently by ex-soldiers.<sup>105</sup> In part such a view was pragmatic: ‘there will be no...security for an adequate victory of the Right, unless the Right embarks at once upon a much broader appeal to the nation than it has yet attempted to make.’<sup>106</sup> Yet there were far more profound reasons for such an arrangement. Grigg believed that

fundamental changes in our laws require for their passage a weight of national opinion which transcends party and refuses to be gainsaid. The converse of this conclusion seems equally true, namely, that attempts at fundamental change, if not supported by something more than the opinion of a single party expressed through the organs which that party

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>103</sup> R.M. Banks, *The Conservative Outlook*, 18, 57.

<sup>104</sup> *Perthshire Courier*, 24 October 1924.

<sup>105</sup> E. Grigg, *Three Parties or Two? An Appeal to Liberals and Conservatives*, (London, 1931).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 13.



commands, draw upon themselves a weight of national resistance which also transcends party and refuses to be gainsaid.<sup>107</sup>

The circumstances of 1931 were, it is true, unique. Rising unemployment, a European wide credit collapse, and the imminent need for the pound to detach itself from the gold standard had created the conditions, to paraphrase Bob Boothby on any Mosleyite alternative to this, for 'all the shits' to climb 'into the same basket.'<sup>108</sup>

Such a mentality, however, was longstanding. Henry Page Croft's National Party was the first move in such a direction: 'Many of us who had seen service in the war began in 1917 to feel great vexation at the trend of affairs on the home front. The duels in Parliament between Asquith and Lloyd George appeared to be out of place and jealousies flared up in all directions at a time when there should have been nothing but a common will to win the war.'<sup>109</sup> The party - pledged to operate 'a national as against a class, sectional, or sectarian policy' - flopped at the ballot box in 1918.<sup>110</sup> It was indicative of the wider trend though. A nation that had come together to win a great war, should not be divided in times of peace.

It did not take long for this to find formal expression through the formation, in July 1919, of the New Members Coalition Group, informally referred to in the press as the "Centre Party." Like Grigg twelve years later, this was an attempt to transcend traditionally Conservative and Liberal boundaries and reach a common policy: 'to put something permanent into temporary alliance,' as Colin Coote put it.<sup>111</sup> This was indeed to be predicated on genuine philosophical fusion rather than political expediency, and thus, as the Liberal veteran Joseph Kenworthy later noted, portended the first sign of a collapse of a Coalition built on such (lack of) principles.<sup>112</sup> According to *The Times*, 'it is worthy of note that the majority' of the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>108</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules of the Game / Beyond the Pale*, (Illinois, 1991), 152.

<sup>109</sup> H. Page Croft, *My Life of Strife*, (London, 1972), 129.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>111</sup> C. Coote, *A Companion of Honour: The Story of Walter Elliot*, (London, 1965), 48.

<sup>112</sup> J.M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen - And Others: An Autobiography*, (London, 1933), 198.

new alignment 'are young men who were on active service until a few months ago,' including the Chairman Oscar Guest and Secretary Oswald Mosley.<sup>113</sup> When its manifesto was published, the Centre Party clearly chose to portray itself in language at once unifying and neophilian:

This movement expresses a desire among new members, who are not tied down by years of association with the old political shibboleths and who feel the urgency of the times demands political union...They feel that the present Coalition Party, with its system of coupons, is not popular...[S]ome evolution...of a really national and at the same time democratic party would be generally approved.<sup>114</sup>

The Centre Party spirit, like Wood and Lloyd's *Great Opportunity*, was that 'the outbreak of war restored to its rightful place the forgotten doctrine of national unity and security. For years before the war politicians had with certain, rare exceptions, appeared to have their attention fixed rather upon the necessity of preaching the party rather than the nation's gospel.'<sup>115</sup> This needed to change: 'country must [now] come before party.'<sup>116</sup>

But, one might point out, surely the circumstances already existed for such an arrangement. Reactionary Conservatism was stymied by the Premiership of David Lloyd George, whose own propensity to half truth and chicanery would be controlled by the otherwise dour Andrew Bonar Law: a perfect balance for the Phoenix Generation seemingly. Yet when it came to the crucial Carlton Club vote to end the Lloyd George era, Conservative war veterans voted decisively in favour of doing so. The total vote was 187 (68%) to 87 (32%) to fight as a separate party, with veterans voting 68 (72%) to 26 (28%) to ditch "the man who won the war."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Times*, 18 July 1919.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 2 August 1919.

<sup>115</sup> Lloyd and Wood, *Great Opportunity*, 14.

<sup>116</sup> *Times*, 2 August 1919.

<sup>117</sup> Tallied from The Voting Cards from the Carlton Club Meeting, 19 October 1922, PARL, DAV/137.

Unnecessary foreign adventure in Turkey undoubtedly precipitated his fall, but had Lloyd George enjoyed the long term backing of his parliamentary troops his fate may well have gone the route of Tony Blair in 2003-5 rather than Anthony Eden in 1956-7, and he may have clung to office. The reasons this did not happen were perhaps best articulated in a letter to *The Times* from Philip Lloyd-Greame, later President of the Board of Trade. Responding to a speech from Winston Churchill, he agreed with his assessment

that the Great War marked the close of a political epoch. So did the Reform Bill. But is there not a risk that the Coalition may combine the disadvantages of Lord Grey's Government and the Tamworth Manifesto? In 1834 men wanted a National Party. I believe the majority of men want such a party today...Though [the coalition] might succeed in achieving a single agreed purpose, such as winning the war, [it] would be wholly unsuited to deal with far-reaching and complex legislative and administrative problems of reconstruction...So far as the Coalition has failed, it has failed because it has...attempted compromises in which none of its members really believe...Mr Churchill's speech is not a plea for a Coalition. It is an appeal for a National Party.<sup>118</sup>

All this came less than a month before he denounced the Premier to his face as liking to 'keep three balls up in the air.'<sup>119</sup> Here we may read two things. Firstly, the plea for action articulated ten years later by Keynes - of almost any type, so long as it was decisive - comes through loud and clear: something a Liberal Premier leading a Conservative administration would always have difficulty with. Secondly however, there is something of a rub. Three months after the letter to *The Times* Lloyd-Greame joined the government he had just derided at the Board of Trade. This illustrates a wider reaching point which our chapter on Mosley will elaborate upon: that the best method of achieving the radical agenda the Phoenix Generation

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<sup>118</sup> Draft Letter to The Times, 9 January 1920, SWIN III/1/1.

<sup>119</sup> Lloyd-Greame letter to his father, 31 January 1920, SWIN III/1/1.

held was unclear. Should one take the Lloyd-Greame path of working within the system with the distinct possibility of being nullified by it, or embark upon Mosley's road to political isolation? It was a difficult choice, whose implications we will later outline.

### **3.6 Harbingers of the National Government?**

In the shorter term, it is impossible to chart the rise of the Labour Party without reference to the Phoenix Generation. Mosley's discourse with Robert Cecil is particularly symptomatic of progressive Conservative thought on the subject. In April 1921, shortly after the collapse of the Triple Alliance when the moderate leaders of the railway and transport unions had refused to support the miners in their resistance to wage reductions, Mosley saw the opportunity for political unity ajar:

The psychological moment for an understanding with moderate Labour has at length arrived! They should be a very easy catch on the rebound from this debacle! The hour lends itself entirely to our purpose...The Government has cut a ludicrous figure and Labour should be in a peculiarly malleable frame of mind. A real opportunity presents itself for a confederation of reasonable men to advance with a definite proposal for the reorganisation of our industrial system upon a durable basis.<sup>120</sup>

A confederation of reasonable men including moderate Labour? What was this but a - one might even say "the" - national government in the making. A year later Cimmie Mosley would write to Lord Grey, to whom Cecil and Mosley looked to as the figurehead of a new reformist administration. Her husband, wrote Lord Curzon's daughter, 'view[ed] the existence of the present government with alarm...We are convinced that it is only by the united activity of all the stable

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<sup>120</sup> Oswald Mosley to Robert Cecil, 17 April 1921, BL, BM 51163, ff.4-5.

progressive elements in the country that the [present evils] can be remedied.<sup>121</sup> That a future fascist could seek the cooperation of Labour and a former Liberal Foreign Secretary was certainly a surprising sign.<sup>122</sup>

One does not wish to go too far: sympathetic to cross-party ideals ex-servicemen Conservatives may have been, but equally they hardly all became card carrying socialists. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise the longevity of the trend. Most accounts describing the period - including Searle's *Country Before Party* and Mosley's autobiography *My Life* - write of the aforementioned "Centre Party" as a flash in the pan: a brief flirtation with political fusion before adversarial normality began to return in the Autumn of 1919, with a full recovery after the Carlton Club meeting.<sup>123</sup> Yet this simply was not the case. There was an undercurrent in British politics, led by the Phoenix Generation, pre-disposed to see the other side of the parliamentary coin. Four of the six absolute defections of the 1918-1922 parliament were from veterans of the Great War, a pattern which continued throughout the 1920s.<sup>124</sup> This was an age when it was perfectly acceptable for the Duff Coopers and Mosleys to holiday together, even after the latter's defection from Conservative ranks. That all three of the Chancellors of Attlee's 1945 and 1950 administrations (Dalton, Cripps, and Gaitskill) were ex-Conservatives may come as little surprise within such an atmosphere.<sup>125</sup>

The search for a youthful, national alternative to the status quo was a permanent feature of interwar British politics. Historians have thus far concentrated on the machinations of the old eccentrics, a pattern which is understandable given the amount of attention Churchill and Lloyd George's

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<sup>121</sup> Cynthia Mosley to Lord Grey, Undated 1921, UBSC, OMN/A/7/2.

<sup>122</sup> It has also been claimed that Grey was a route *back* to the politics of 1914, something Mosley so often denounced. M. Bentley, 'Liberal Politics and the Grey Conspiracy of 1921,' *Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), 461-478.

<sup>123</sup> G.R. Searle, *Country Before Party: Coalition and the Idea of 'National Government' in Modern Britain 1885-1987*, (London / New York, 1995), 122; O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 104.

<sup>124</sup> D. Butler and G. Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, (London, 2000), 245.

<sup>125</sup> M. Pugh, "Class traitors." Conservative Recruits to Labour, 1900-1930, *English Historical Review*, 113 (1998), 38-64, 64.

attempts to form a “National Opposition” receive in published sources such as the Nicolson diaries.<sup>126</sup> This rather suggests that the Phoenix Generation were mere window dressing for the policies of political geriatrics however, something more than a little inaccurate. In actual fact, reformist Conservatives - particularly those who became associated with Lord Allen’s Next Five Years Group in 1935 - were steadfastly determined not to be ‘charmed, fascinated and eventually absorbed by the Welsh wizard.’<sup>127</sup> Given, as early as 1931, Baldwin’s presumptive successor Neville Chamberlain ‘determined to have nothing to do with Churchill’ he would also constitute a poor figurehead - quite apart from the fact that his views on India were certain to alienate men such as Irwin (Wood).<sup>128</sup> No doubt the young men of this study could constitute pawns in the Cowling-esque game of “high politics,” but they were a viable political alternative in their own right.

Witness the various meetings attended by Walter Elliot, Harold Macmillan and Bob Boothby in late 1929. After five years of lethargic government which had failed to quell the unemployment problem, a coup was in the offing, and one which had much more ideological importance than anything later planned by Churchill or Chamberlain. The former would have taken the party back to 1914, the latter, whilst perhaps instilling greater efficiency and dynamism, would have offered little in the way of massively constructive policy. The Elliot-Macmillan-Boothby group proposed something a little different, and something much more relevant to future Conservative policy. Flying in the face of “Safety First,” the young men believed ‘we must find a policy which the mass of the Proletariat will be able to grasp at once as being helpful to the one great cause of their distress - unemployment.’<sup>129</sup> They continued, ‘if indeed we obtain the assistance of the best Liberals and Socialists, which indeed all present desired, it was quite obvious that the new party must not begin as a species of offshoot of the old Conservative Party.’<sup>130</sup> The new movement

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<sup>126</sup> N. Nicolson (ed), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, (London, 1966), 81, 89, [21 July 1931, 31 August 1931].

<sup>127</sup> Macmillan, *Past Masters*, 230.

<sup>128</sup> Butler Account, 15 March 1931, TCL, RAB C/4/29.

<sup>129</sup> Beaverbrook Account of the meeting, 5 November 1929, PARL, BBK/C/235.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

did not necessitate a total rejection of conservative causes - 'that the new party must be Imperial was...agreed to by all' - but did imply a negation of the political 'old gang with the old hide-bound fetishes, prejudices and short-sighted limitations.'<sup>131</sup>

Was the National Government an example of such 'short-sighted limitations?' Certainly in 1932, as Beaverbrook wrote to Boothby, 'there is no adventurous spirit in the Government, and this is a time for daring pilots.'<sup>132</sup> As we have seen however, this was no coincidence. Baldwin's antipathy toward Lloyd George prevented Britain's most prominent exponent of Keynes - barring Mosley - from gaining office, and curtailed the influence he could have. It says something about Baldwin that the man who had enjoyed unparalleled popularity in 1918, had proposed a viable and innovative programme economic in 1929, should be totally excluded from a "National" administration in 1931. Like Neville Chamberlain, who saw him as proceeding 'by series of audacious bluffs' with his 'usual disingenuousness,' Baldwin was 'quite obsessed by' Lloyd George and constantly worried himself with the question of 'what is the Goat up to?'<sup>133</sup> Thus once more Baldwin positioned himself as the negative antidote to an albeit risky positive force.

### 3.7 Housing the Nation

In retrospect members of the Phoenix Generation would rather regret siding with the safer of the two - after all, only two young Conservatives, Macmillan and Boothby struck up meaningful friendships with the man pledged to conquer the unemployment they so often rallied against.<sup>134</sup> There was a rather poignant moment in the early 1950s when, meeting Leo Amery for the last time, Boothby asked him whether he regretted the part he played in bringing down Lloyd George

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Beaverbrook to Boothby, 29 April 1932, BBK/C/47a.

<sup>133</sup> Self (ed), *Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, I, 306, 323, Neville to Hilda Chamberlain [19 January 1919, 26 April 1919]; Boothby, *Recollections*, 156. His friend Edward Wood tellingly knew that, after the 1929 defeat, the most soothing words he could offer would be a reminder of Lloyd George's similar failure to capture the public: Wood to Baldwin, 12 June 1929, CUL, BALD 103/41.

<sup>134</sup> Boothby, *Recollections*, 157.

and, subsequently, putting Baldwin in his place. Amery stood still for a few moments, and blinked. Then he looked Boothby in the eye and said simply, 'I do.'<sup>135</sup>

It was not so much that the Conservative leadership between the wars was absolutely disastrous: certainly things could - given a General Strike, a right wing press disposed to see communistic machinations aplenty, and soldiers returning home with arguably unrealistic expectations of a post-war heaven on earth - have gone worse. Yet we must judge a government equally, if not more so, on what it does, rather than the perils it may prevent. Housing, given a political class which had acquiesced in the righteousness of Lloyd George's pledge of 1918, is an interesting case in point. To Eden, the question of 'slum clearing and house building is [Conservatism's] most important domestic work.'<sup>136</sup> He was writing in 1926, many years after the platitudes and somewhat false dawns of the Lloyd George administration. Part of *The Great Opportunity* of 1918 had indeed been the solution of the housing problem, 'which stands almost alone in its potential influence upon the future of the nation.'<sup>137</sup> Election addresses of the men emerging from the trenches to Westminster that year are full of such rhetoric: 'better housing conditions for all classes' cried Richard Colvin in Epping, whilst John Davidson in Fareham believed it to be 'the greatest question before their mind. Starting with the birth of a child, he desired to see it properly housed...in order that it might have a proper start in life.'<sup>138</sup> To be sure, veterans of other parties - Colin Coote in Ely is a prime example - said much the same.<sup>139</sup> So too, it must be said, did that pioneer of 1920s housing, Neville Chamberlain:

My view was that housing was one of the most urgent of all problems to be solved and that unless people were shown that something really big was actually in preparation there would be serious trouble. I therefore proposed that the L[ocal] G[overnment] B[oard] should announce its

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Anthony Eden Saturday Review Clippings, 20 February 1926, AP 7/1/1-2.

<sup>137</sup> Lloyd and Wood, *Great Opportunity*, 81.

<sup>138</sup> *Woodford Times*, 29 November 1918; *Hants and Sussex County Press*, 7 December 1918.

<sup>139</sup> *Isle of Ely and Wisbech Advertiser*, 11 December 1918.



intention of setting aside a very large sum for state housing to be carried out however by the local authorities wherever possible...In this way you would strike popular imagination with a big scheme.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, one sees two distinct differences between the Phoenix Generation and their counterparts in the years that followed. Unlike the Conservative leadership, the young veterans believed positive state intervention would make great strides in curing the problem. There was, it is true, a certain collective realisation that government needed to enter the housing sphere to a greater extent than had previously been the case. Before 1914 the housing shortage had indeed been chronic, and ad hoc organisations such as the various model dwellings companies had provided an average solution at best.<sup>141</sup> By the end of 1918 the backlog of working class houses was somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000.<sup>142</sup> If we assume an average family size of 4 (and working class families, to be sure, could be larger), this would equate to a shortage of 2,000,000, which, in a population scarcely over 40,000,000 constitutes a significant 5% of people denied their own home.<sup>143</sup> The 'big scheme' of which Chamberlain talked was thus clearly something of a necessity.

To be fair to Chamberlain, his tenure as Minister of Health in the 1920s did involve bringing the state into play in a way inconceivable for a Conservative before 1914. Between 1921 and 1931, five of the seven counties building more municipal houses than private ones were contained within the Conservative

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<sup>140</sup> Self (ed), *Chamberlain Diary Letters*, I, 297, Neville to Ida Chamberlain, [16 November 1918].

<sup>141</sup> R.K. Middlemas, Review of 'Land Fit Heroes, 1916-1919,' *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972), 225-226; S. Morris, 'Market Solutions for Social Problems: working-class houses in nineteenth century London,' *Economic History Review*, 3 (2001), 525-545.

<sup>142</sup> Lloyd and Wood, *Great Opportunity*, 80; F. Fremantle, *The Housing of the Nation*, (London, 1927), 37.

<sup>143</sup> 4 is clearly a debateable figure, but is used in D. Benjamin and L. Kochin, 'Searching for an Explanation for Unemployment in Interwar Britain,' *Journal of Political Economy*, 7 (1978), 441-478.

Midland Union, which was essentially the Chamberlainian fiefdom.<sup>144</sup> Under the second Baldwin administration, some two thirds of *all* new housing, and half of that privately built, was directly state subsidised, prompting a form of crude qualitative competition between the parties which was to resurface periodically into the Bevan-Macmillan era and beyond.<sup>145</sup> Eden even saw the 1924-9 record as 'without parallel in the history of this or any other country,' and pointed forward to the 'next great task' of slum clearance.<sup>146</sup> Chamberlain was of course Joseph's son, and like his father saw in benevolent paternalist conservatism a chance to contest Labour's claim to be the party of social reform. Despite praise even from ILP sources however, this was far from the case.<sup>147</sup> Conservative policy went as far as encroaching upon socialist terrain, but it was always a distinct entity. To begin with, Conservatives saw the issue in moral rather than social terms. "The home" was their bastion against the kind of malaise they saw in the world after 1918. Even though of the younger generation, Francis Fremantle spoke in the language of his elders:

Whereas the mental and material disadvantages of overcrowding need no emphasis, even more grievous is its deadly moral effect...Housing is an economic problem, but it is not merely. Houses are commodities, built and then sold or rented; but, more than that, they are houses of people, and in homes there is the potentiality of many things...In London alone, of a population of 4 ½ million, [there were in 1921] 683,498 living more than 2 per room. What morality is possible under these conditions?<sup>148</sup>

Conservative claims could thus be unhelpful in two ways: in the first place, the

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<sup>144</sup> K. Morgan, 'The Conservative Party and Mass Housing, 1918-39,' in S. Ball and I. Holliday (eds), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s*, (London, 2002), 58-77, 66.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>146</sup> 1929 Eden Election Address Leaflet, c. May 1929, AP 6/3/3.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 66. Such as W.H. Milner, Birmingham Town Councillor and ILP Member.

<sup>148</sup> Fremantle, *Housing of the Nation*, 4, 13, 5.

paternalist and patronising attitude that had marked their pre-1914 policies had not completely dissipated. The working class, despite all they had done to save the nation between 1914 and 1918, were still something of an “other” who needed the type of civilizing which had provided the *raison d’être* for the British Empire for over a century. Secondly, for all Neville Chamberlain’s 1933 espousal of those ‘houses which have been built by the corporation, with everything that science and ingenuity can provide,’ and his belief ‘that we have gone a long way to carrying out those hopes which inspired us all during the War,’ Conservative housing policy did not do all it could, and certainly not all the Phoenix Generation demanded.<sup>149</sup>

Addison’s Scheme of 1919 to provide half a million new homes was denounced by the Anti-Waste crowd of Lord Rothermere and the People’s Union for Economy, dented by the Geddes Axe of 1920, and finally rolled back by Chamberlain himself as Chancellor in 1923.<sup>150</sup> It did however meet with great praise from young war veterans: understandable as it reflected their penchant for governmental dynamism predicated upon social reform. Fremantle eulogised thus:

The number of houses built under the two Addison Acts was approximately 214,000...Whereas previous attempts had failed, the Addison scheme succeeded in slowly but surely getting the house-building machine to move, and to good effect. While failing to reach its proposed objective...in five years, it tested every available factor and agency, aroused the whole will power and intelligence of the community to cope with the problem, focused the whole of the available building resources of the country developed fresh lines of construction, design and organisation.<sup>151</sup>

To critics of the schemes costliness, he replied that ‘the [7 million annual]

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<sup>149</sup> *Times*, 24 October 1933.

<sup>150</sup> M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-24: The Beginning of Modern British Politics*, (Cambridge, 1971), 74.

<sup>151</sup> Fremantle, *Housing of the Nation*, 37.

expense...was indeed high. But its achievement was by no means negligible.<sup>152</sup> Addison's portrayal as governmental scapegoat, once cost cutting became *de rigueur*, Fremantle regarded as unfortunate.<sup>153</sup>

Addison's scheme illustrated that, within the current framework, the state alone could not provide the solution to the housing problem. Yet the Phoenix Generation, as we have seen, were not proposing reconstructive solutions predicated upon the old order. Mosley was certainly something of an extremist with his radical views on 'socialistic imperialism,' but he was only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>154</sup> Macmillan would denounce the 'highly individualist economy' which, 'confronted by the intricate difficulties of post-war economic situation, provided the opportunity for...a multitude of individual errors which resulted in collective ruin.'<sup>155</sup> At the same time, the Conservative leaderships reliance upon the private sector to supply the "homes fit for heroes" was woefully misplaced. As McKibbin has argued, from 1920 British politics were marked by a deflationary mentality which essentially rendered Lloyd George - he of curing unemployment via Keynes some nine years later - essentially pointless at Number 10.<sup>156</sup> One may go further: after this point, until rearmament made it necessary, state intervention per se was to be kept to a minimum by governing politicians of both parties. In terms of housing - something politicians of all creeds had promised to returning soldiers in 1918 - this meant that by the 1930s the volume of homes built with some - any - form of state assistance rarely exceeded one third of the total, and in 1934-5 barely constituted a tenth.<sup>157</sup> Not only did the state's abdication of responsibility produce

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>153</sup> As Pugh points out, 'the 1919 Act was neither a failure nor a temporary expedient.' The lack of skilled bricklayers (a significant proportion killed in battle) and, as we will see, the more profitable nature of private building may have stymied it, but its achievements remain. M. Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars*, (London, 2008), 62.

<sup>154</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, 90.

<sup>155</sup> H. Macmillan, *The Middle Way*, (London, 1966), 189-90.

<sup>156</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*, (Oxford, 1991), 267.

<sup>157</sup> A.P. Becker, 'Housing in England and Wales during the Business Depression of the 1930s,' *Economic History Review*, 3 (1951), 321-341, 322. This was an improvement on the

a shortage of a million homes by 1933 - more than in 1918, plus massive regional discrepancies which meant that already depressed areas were afforded little attention by private builders seeking to make money in the more affluent south - it illustrated a profound psychological point. The Baldwin and Chamberlain mentality was prepared to intervene where there was imminent prospect of mass upheaval, other than that the economy could manage itself. An alternative solution to this was not the sole proviso of the Liberal or Labour parties however. Young Conservative ex-servicemen believed 'housing is a responsibility that the nation must bear in partnership with the local authority. It is right that the State should share the financial loss, for some years inevitable, involved in action to meet a national necessity.'<sup>158</sup> This was a profound breach in a nominally unitary political philosophy - conservatism - indeed.<sup>159</sup>

### 3.8 Ex-Servicemen and Unemployment

If men were to be found houses, they were also to be found jobs. The extent to which unemployment and the war were intertwined deserves brief elaboration. One cannot overstate the ad hoc nature of pre-1914 welfare policy, for all Lloyd George had achieved. The 1911 National Insurance Act covered only two and a quarter million workers and five trades where employment levels were erratic: it was intended to provide cyclical help rather than a permanent solution. Even with the act's extension in 1916 to cover munitions workers it was clear that the state was not prepared to intervene to permanently solve the problem.<sup>160</sup> In 1918 Britain was a world away from the welfare state of Beveridge, how this gap came to

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5% built with Government grants in the Edwardian era, but not much. Pugh, *We Danced All Night*, 60.

<sup>158</sup> Lloyd and Wood, *Great Opportunity*, 83.

<sup>159</sup> And, as Barr importantly notes, a conclusion arrived at without British Legion influence. N. Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921-1939*, (London, 2005), 114: - 'thinkers like J.M. Keynes, David Lloyd George and even Harold Macmillan were advocating a comprehensive welfare state that would make provision for all citizens, regardless of their condition or previous service. The Legion played no part in these developments, and instead, its opinions remained shackled to a traditional charitable approach that became increasingly outmoded, if socially useful, with the passage of time.'

<sup>160</sup> W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A study in public policy*, (Cambridge, 1990), 32-4.

be bridged and the degree to which this question was related to former soldiers is an interesting point.

Much has been made of the 'returning soldiers' who 'felt that, rightly or not, the promises of the post-war world were unfulfilled.'<sup>161</sup> Though much has been written about what the Lloyd George government failed to achieve in the aftermath of the armistice, it must also be acknowledged how far old soldiers precipitated - by their very image as much as their actions - that regime's more progressive policies. For instance, the Out of Work Donation Scheme (OWD) of November 1918 was born out of the desire to provide help for ex-servicemen whose long war service had rendered them ill equipped to immediately re-enter the job market. By May of the following year a policy intended to cover the 360,000 ex-soldiers it indeed did was also providing benefit for 650,000 non-combatants.<sup>162</sup> As the post-war economic boom bust in 1920, and the government faced the embarrassing prospect of 2,500,000 desolate heroes once the OWD payments reached their scheduled end, the Coalition stepped in and extended the benefits to March 1921. Not only that, due to the extreme poverty of former soldiers, the benefit from the OWD fund was uncovenanted: that is to say, that having failed to pay the requisite money to the state under the 1920 Unemployment Insurance Act, former soldiers were given access to OWD anyway.<sup>163</sup> Thus, in a period Lowe has seen as 'conservative if not actually counter-revolutionary' in terms of the relationship between the government and state, what action there was one can massively ascribe to the "the ex-serviceman."<sup>164</sup> This, given that of the approximately 1,000,000 unemployed in early 1922 over 600,000 were former soldiers, is just as well.<sup>165</sup>

Not to be underestimated in the interwar period is the tacit alliance - or perhaps harmonisation - between the interests of ex-servicemen and the Labour

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<sup>161</sup> P. Leese, 'Problems Returning Home: The Psychological Casualties of the Great War,' *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), 1055-1067, 1066.

<sup>162</sup> Garside, *British Unemployment*, 35-6.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>164</sup> R. Lowe, 'Government,' in S. Constantine, M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose (eds), *The First World War in British History*, (London, 1995), 29-50, 50.

<sup>165</sup> G. Wooton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, (London, 1956), 43.

Party. This was understandable, the National Union of Ex-Servicemen had endorsed Labour in 1919, and two of its founders were members of that party.<sup>166</sup> In this light, Jimmy Thomas's House of Commons statement on OWD in February 1921 is interesting:

I submit that the responsibility for this state of affairs is entirely the Government's. The position of ex-servicemen and of those whose period of payment has now lapsed is not a new matter...we plead again with the Government to do their duty and we are going to use every hour and every minute of Parliamentary time to press upon the Government that that the only thing that matters...is the unemployment problem.<sup>167</sup>

This then was a significant political revolution. The interests of moderate Labour and a group traditionally associated with the right - the soldier - had combined. By the 1930s, in his *Labour Party in Perspective*, Clement Attlee even began to see himself as the intellectual and physical manifestation of a total fusion between the two.<sup>168</sup> Both after all desired full employment to be precipitated by state intervention, and were prepared to negotiate with the other to get it.<sup>169</sup> In 1939 the economist Roy Harrod would write to tell one Conservative veteran MP, Louis Spears, that

Labour has recently considerably whittled down its programme. I call attention in the enclosed article to an official pronouncement entitled Labour's Immediate Programme. I believe there is little of substance - as distinguished from phraseology - here which progressive conservatives

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<sup>166</sup> S.R. Ward, 'Great Britain: Land Fit for Heroes Lost,' in S.R. Ward (ed), *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, (London, 1975), 10-37, 24.

<sup>167</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 23 February 1921, vol. 138, col. 1094.

<sup>168</sup> See the review in *The Times*, 10 August 1937.

<sup>169</sup> Agree or not, MPs still had to deal with such questions - and often at the same time. Only a week after the opening of parliament, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's schedule of 17 February 1925 read '5pm: Committee on Unemployment, 8.15pm, Capt. Fairfax: Employment and Ex-Servicemen, Capt T.J. O'Connor: Housing and Labour.' SHL, ICS 84/14.

need boggle at. It will not please those conservatives who are rigidly wedded to complete *laissez-faire*. But those who recognise that a great enlargement of state activity is destined to come willy-nilly will appreciate that Labour socialism of today differentiates itself in degree rather than in kind, and by the emphasis it places on the workers' interest and on limiting the scope for profit.<sup>170</sup>

When chronicling the rising "respectability" of Labour, one cannot ignore that party's connection to former soldiers. Though it failed to make the most of NUX sympathy after 1918, as Ward points out, this mistake would not be repeated during and after the century's second great conflict.<sup>171</sup> And at the same time, that a left-leaning don could believe such a pro-Labour epistle had any chance of success with a Conservative MP, owed much to the overall cleavage that the unemployment question had wrought in British politics.

Cabinet papers reveal that whilst successive centrist governments may have sympathised with the unemployed ex-serviceman to a degree unseen before 1914 - Baldwin referred to them as 'not the usual type of unskilled or work-shy men' - they were unwilling to break with traditional policy.<sup>172</sup> The Chancellor Baldwin of 1922, unlike the Phoenix Generation, had seemingly not advanced beyond the world of Queen Victoria: 'money taken for Government purposes is money taken away from trade, and borrowing will thus to depress trade increase unemployment.'<sup>173</sup> His unsuccessful electoral flirtation with protection a year later aside, under him the Conservative Party would only with great reluctance ditch an outlook that, if not exactly pointing towards a yellow brick road of prosperity, could perhaps avoid the road to Wigan Pier. Unless, of course, there was a Wall Street Crash.

Thus, as Garside points out, interwar governments spent much of their time

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<sup>170</sup> Roy Harrod to Louis Spears, 3 February 1939, SPRS 1/245.

<sup>171</sup> Ward, 'Land fit for Heroes Lost,' 25.

<sup>172</sup> Cabinet conclusions on unemployment, Chaired by the President of the Board of Trade (one S. Baldwin), appendix I, 6 October 1921, TNA, CAB/23/27.

<sup>173</sup> Baldwin's Necessity for National Economy memo, 20 November 1922, CAB/24/140.



merely containing the unemployment problem rather than seeking to solve it.<sup>174</sup> Such, as we have seen, was the prevailing mindset. It has however been argued by Williamson and McKibbin that, whilst unemployment was endemic, there was little the political elite could do about it. To the former, the radical schemes of Mosley and Lloyd George 'did not offer...any obvious means of escape.'<sup>175</sup> To the latter, it is all very well for Skidelsky to point to the deficit budgeting based achievements of Sweden, the US, Germany and France in reducing unemployment in the 1930s. Such successes however were not so clear cut. As even an exponent of Keynesian economics pointed out, Roosevelt's much vaulted "New Deal" 'was purely empirical; and based upon no principles whatever.'<sup>176</sup> It achieved only moderate success, with 1936 constituting the single really spectacular year of growth.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, in Australia the finance minister Ted Theodore saw his proto-Keynesian scheme of expanding credit to farmers and small businesses rejected by a Conservative establishment (principally the upper house in this case) à la Mosley. Sweden's economic and geopolitical also provided options not open to a Great Britain becoming increasingly hostile to great trading nations like Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. Thus, McKibbin points out, one cannot say alternate policies were ignored by - he concentrates on the MacDonald - government, and the international comparison certainly did not offer particularly workable solutions either.<sup>178</sup>

### 3.9 Debates on Unemployment

Where such an argument rather falls down is in claiming that, before 1936, there was no vocal Keynes opposition to governmental orthodoxy. This is clearly questionable. McKibbin himself cites R.F. Kahn and Keynes's own *Can Lloyd George Do It?* as evidence of an economic set in favour of public works schemes years in advance of the *General Theory*, something Garside very much agrees with.<sup>179</sup> It is

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<sup>174</sup> Garside, *British Unemployment*, 28.

<sup>175</sup> P. Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British politics, the economy and Empire, 1926-1932*, (Cambridge, 1992), 525.

<sup>176</sup> Boothby, *Recollections*, 90.

<sup>177</sup> McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, 202.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 209-210; Garside, *British Unemployment*, 388.

likewise worth quoting Skidelsky verbatim:

Keynes rejected *laissez-faire* as a policy before he developed a convincing economic theory explaining why *laissez-faire* would not work. Economists have taken this as a sign of his “institutions” running ahead of his theory, but this characterisation is too one-sided. From 1924 to 1929 Keynes developed a powerful critique of *laissez-faire*, but it was not specifically economic-theoretical, though it carried a strong theoretical charge. It was directed to show that the presuppositions of *laissez-faire* – the psychological and organisational conditions which had made it work as a policy in the nineteenth century – had passed away.<sup>180</sup>

So it was with the Phoenix Generation. Certainly there was a radical political alternative to the orthodoxy.<sup>181</sup> Neither Keynes in Cambridge or, as the next chapter will illustrate, Mosley in Westminster were operating in a vacuum. The idea that high employment should be sacrificed for a sound currency was not the all encompassing mentality it has been presented as, nor were opponents of it isolated crackpots.<sup>182</sup>

McKibbin suggests that a demand led cure for unemployment was impossible within the existing system. He may be right, he may be wrong: Garside has offered an inconclusive estimate of the would-be effects of Lloyd George’s schemes to *Conquer Unemployment*.<sup>183</sup> Middleton too has noted that the dirigisme which was possible in Hitler’s Germany could have never occurred in a democratic

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<sup>180</sup> R. Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes, Volume Two: The Economist as Saviour 1920-1937*, (London, 1992), 219-20.

<sup>181</sup> Opinions were changing. As Greenaway illustrates with reference to alcohol, the idea that the state should tackle “moral” problems was far more entrenched than before the war. Big government, by pre-1914 standards, was in. J.R. Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics Since 1830: A Study in Policy Making*, (Basingstoke, 2003), 183-193.

<sup>182</sup> Williamson, *National Government*, 12.

<sup>183</sup> Garside, *British Unemployment*, 367-79.

Britain.<sup>184</sup> These two conjectures, though accurate in and of themselves, profoundly miss the point however. Naturally the British system of government would not allow the range of options open to a Hjalmar Schacht or even Franklin Roosevelt, who was congratulated by none other than Adolf Hitler for his 'historic efforts in the interests of the American People. The President's successful battle against economic distress is being followed by the entire German people with interest and admiration.'<sup>185</sup> Yet, paradoxically, this view essentially makes the Skidelsky point more valid. The economic radicals were not economists alone. Not only did Keynes predicate economic reform upon political change, the Phoenix Generation formed a vanguard of men in precisely the political position – if only numerically – to enact such sweeping moves. What Baldwin and Chamberlain lacked was not the opportunity, nor even particularly the inclination, to help the poor unemployed. They simply lacked the drive.

War generation members certainly attempted to ginger their elders into action. Some, it is true, were afflicted by the modesty that often beset the new arrival at Westminster, Macmillan included.<sup>186</sup> Leo Amery however was in no such quandary, and as Dominion's Secretary presented a memorandum to the cabinet prior to the 1929 election that makes for sober reading. He began by commenting that

no one expects us to compete with Mr Lloyd George in extravagant schemes for borrowing hundreds of millions in anticipation of speculative land dealings, or with the Socialists in similar schemes plus a general policy of doles based on confiscatory taxation. But we are expected to do something, and something much bolder than can be done within the ultra-conservative financial limits which we have hitherto set

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<sup>184</sup> R. Middleton, *Towards the Managed Economy*, (London, 1985), 179.

<sup>185</sup> W. Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939*, (New York, 2006), 31.

<sup>186</sup> Macmillan, *Past Masters*, 151.

ourselves.<sup>187</sup>

If said boldness did not involve out-bidding the Liberal Party, it did entail massive advances in road construction. Amery continued:

even if our schemes are to be on a much more modest scale than those put forward by our opponents, they must, if they are to produce any appreciable effect, or to appeal to the imagination of the public, involve expenditure considerably in excess of our normal Budget provision.

Alas, Baldwin was not a man prone to such action.

In the Baldwinian negative conception of the world after war things were certainly bad, but they could be much worse. To the mindset which looked with hope to the future this would not do. 'The problem,' wrote Lloyd George in 1929, 'should be faced in the same spirit as the emergencies of the war. The suffering and waste caused by unemployment are as important as was the problem of the provision of munitions during the war.'<sup>188</sup> Baldwin, on the other hand, explicitly stated in 1927 that unemployment was more than tolerable if it meant the prevention of an arms race which could precipitate a future war.<sup>189</sup> Similarly, with the Abdication Crisis of 1936, not only did Baldwin facilitate the removal of the monarch who had made an albeit nominal donation to the miners after the General Strike a decade earlier, he had stuck a dagger to the heart of the mentality - articulated by Edward VIII scarcely a month before his ousting - that 'something must be done.'<sup>190</sup> Duff Cooper's papers also reveal the fear held within Cabinet that Baldwin's bluff would be called: that Edward would accept his resignation and send for Churchill, who in turn would launch a populist programme of rearmament

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<sup>187</sup> Leo Amery Secret Cabinet Memorandum on 'An Employment Policy for the Election,' 18 March 1929, CAB/24/202.

<sup>188</sup> Lloyd George, *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, 5-6.

<sup>189</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 110 [3 August 1927].

<sup>190</sup> F.M. Miller, 'The Unemployment Policy of the National Government, 1931-1936,' *Historical Journal*, 19 (1976), 453-476, 471.

and mass slum clearance, roping in by turn Mosley's fascists, the Beaverbrook-Rothermere press, and elements of the left.<sup>191</sup> Such paranoia was not the leadership the unemployment question needed.

Instead, Macmillan had it about right, unemployment was not 'merely deplorable' but 'shameful and intolerable.'<sup>192</sup> Not only was it symptomatic of a deeper malaise, it was the problem itself. The 'snores of government' which, to John Moore-Barbizon MC, 'resounded through the country' did not coincide 'with the hopes some of us had for it.'<sup>193</sup> The Gladstonian brand of liberalism, even to a former member of that party Edward Grigg, 'had no place in the modern world.'<sup>194</sup> Instead, the great danger lay precisely in 'inactivity and drift.'<sup>195</sup> Whereas the sheer variety of schemes proposed to counter unemployment has been used by McKibbin to argue that there was essentially no workable solution to the problem, it seems much more pertinent to emphasise the underlying and widespread desire for reform.<sup>196</sup> To be sure, there were differing opinions amongst veterans as to how best solve the issue. Page Croft, Amery and Auckland Geddes would argue strongly in favour of assisted emigration to the Dominions - particularly to reward ex-servicemen.<sup>197</sup> The latter even believed that 'unless we can hive off something like five million people as quickly as possible we shall have absolute chaos in this country' (though as Pugh has recently shown actually getting people to emigrate was another matter).<sup>198</sup> Some, like Walter Elliot and Robert Bower, extolled the virtues of autarchy whilst others, most notably Macmillan, believed the best solution to be some form of planned *Middle Way* that avoided the excesses of the

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<sup>191</sup> Duff Cooper Abdication Account, 1936, CAC, DUFC 2/16.

<sup>192</sup> Macmillan, *Middle Way*, 13.

<sup>193</sup> Boothby, *Recollections*, 50.

<sup>194</sup> Grigg, *Three Parties or Two?*, 30.

<sup>195</sup> Macmillan to Keynes, 29 August 1932, CO/5/43.

<sup>196</sup> McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, 207-215.

<sup>197</sup> Page Croft, *Life of Strife*, 169; Original Diary Draft, 11 March 1919, AMEL 7/15.

<sup>198</sup> J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (eds), *The Leo Amery Diaries, Volume I: 1896-1929*, (London, 1980), 256 [20 February 1919]. M. Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars*, (London, 2008), 390-412. John Buchan presumably would have concurred. See A. Lownie, 'John Buchan: Conservative Politician,' *Conservative History Journal*, 1 (2003), 8-9.

totalitarian regimes.<sup>199</sup> Whilst some war veterans such as Eden and Banks did not subscribe to the pervading ex-serviceman mentality of economic action, and criticised Lloyd George and Mosley's schemes as 'megalomaniac,' the majority were divorced from the Conservative leadership in spirit.<sup>200</sup>

BUF era Mosley was certainly out on a limb in absolutely rejecting the parliamentary system as moribund and outdated, albeit less of one than one might assume. A massive realignment was generally called for however. As Grigg put it:

the call of the nation for deliverance from the confusion of parties and from divided aims can be heard on every side; but only a movement broad enough to embrace all those who think in terms of the nation and not in terms of class, whose political instincts are Parliamentary and constitutional on traditionally British lines, and who are genuinely convinced of the need of fiscal reform, can respond to that call effectively.<sup>201</sup>

Thus, whilst the required changes had to come from within the British tradition, there were few ex-veterans exactly sentimental for parliamentary procedure in its present state. 'All over the world established systems of government are being challenged or have been challenged effectively,' Grigg noted. 'Even in England confusion and distress will not reign indefinitely without bringing collapse or revolutionary action or both.'<sup>202</sup> Whilst his solution was a Conservative-Liberal alliance, the diagnosis of the problem was distinctly Mosleyite.

### 3.10 Battle Lines Drawn

Thus, by 1929-33 we have a Britain decidedly in decline, and one where the

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<sup>199</sup> W. Elliot, *The Endless Adventure: A Rectorial Address delivered at Aberdeen University on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1934*, (London, 1934), 22; Address to the Executive Committee of the Conservative and Unionist Association, Cleveland, June 1931, CAC, BOWR 1/1; H. Macmillan, *Reconstruction: A Plea for a National Policy*, (London, 1933), 126.

<sup>200</sup> Banks, *The Conservative Outlook*, 270.

<sup>201</sup> Grigg, *Three Parties or Two?*, 79.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

battle lines had been clearly drawn. To young radicals, Conservative policy was seen as 'geared towards the bosses,' as looking after the supply side of the market when demand was the great issue of the day.<sup>203</sup> Cuts could be countenanced, and indeed from 1931 enacted by a Conservative dominated administration, but the state needed to take charge.<sup>204</sup> Labour too had their problems. Led by a Baldwin with a Scottish accent, whose 'reluctance to take positive action' shocked even one of his own party's veterans, Clement Attlee, the orthodox left also offered little.<sup>205</sup> 'MacDonald had no constructive ideas,' Attlee believed, 'while at the Treasury Philip Snowden had fallen completely under the spell of orthodox finance and the influence of Montagu Norman.'<sup>206</sup> From across the floor Boothby was even more damning in declaring Labour's Chancellor to be 'lighted by no gleam of originality, and [without] a single constructive idea...Mr Snowden's mind is like an arid desert. Not a single oasis jags its bleak horizon. There is nothing there but negation.'<sup>207</sup>

Negation is an interesting concept. The notion that contemporary leaders *did* nothing is both unhelpful and inaccurate. It suggests they were more kind hearted, and lethargic, than was borne out by reality. In such a conception, Baldwin and MacDonald almost become seen as Bertie Woosters at Number Ten, intellectually empty yet cuddly dullards who charm a British nation peculiarly amenable to such characteristics. Such a viewpoint not only ignores the two men's personally unattractive and patronising sides - Baldwin with his constant talk of "educating the masses," MacDonald with his astonishing vanity - but suggests they,

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>204</sup> Perhaps this is the key difference from the German example. Cuts made Weimar seem vindictive and ungrateful, in Britain it better fitted that nation's volunteer ethos. David Cameron's 'Big Society' may currently (September 2010) appear vacuous, but it certainly attempts to draw on this spirit. As Whalen shows, between 1928 and 1933 war pensions were cut by a third - moving ex-servicemen bodies like the *Zentralverband* and *Reichsverband* into the arms of Hitler. R. Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939*, (Ithaca, 1984), 170. Once a space (Armistice Day) and an atmosphere (charitable endeavour) had been created, there was political manoeuvrability to deal with the British ex-serviceman who, in any case as we saw in the introduction, had been poorly rewarded by comparison in any case.

<sup>205</sup> C.R. Attlee, *As It Happened*, (Surrey, 1954), 74.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>207</sup> Boothby, *The New Economy*, (London, 1943), 23-4.

and the mentality they represented, were a mere conduit of the collective will.<sup>208</sup> Not so. Baldwin and MacDonald were guardians of a particular ideology which happened to hold the levers of power: this “orthodoxy” required constant protection against forces they - possibly rightly, probably otherwise - viewed as dangerous and foolhardy. When Baldwin enunciated the two root principles in judging political action as ‘[adherence to] common sense’ and ‘the preservation of individual freedom’ we should listen.<sup>209</sup> Such political *catenaccio* was all very well in times of prosperity, it was however singularly ill-fitted to the interwar epoch. These were not times for a ‘ruminative rather than executive’ mindset.<sup>210</sup>

The difference may be surmised by attitudes to the following, with which a Chamberlain or Baldwin would have profoundly disagreed, and a Macmillan or Loder would have found much solace:

Democracy either means that the will of the people shall be implemented, or it means nothing. Yet to suggest a system which can do what the people want done is often denounced as a denial of democracy, since effective action is regarded as a danger to liberty. In the name of freedom, for example, people are condemned to live in slums for fear that a government powerful enough to rebuild the slums might misuse its power and put them in prison. Consequently we live in a State of universal negation within a system of individual inhibition.<sup>211</sup>

These are the words of a man absolutely beyond the mainstream pale by the late 1930s, and imprisoned as an enemy of the state in 1940. Oswald Mosley may have been many things, but in a world where the leaders of left and right were offering little beyond Victorian economics, he was not the pariah he would later become. How he went his way, and the other members of the Phoenix Generation went

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<sup>208</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 29-30 [4 March 1927]; R. Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, (London, 1981), 170.

<sup>209</sup> Baldwin, *Our Inheritance*, 10 [19 June 1926].

<sup>210</sup> R. Jenkins, *Baldwin*, (London, 1987), 14.

<sup>211</sup> Mosley note on ‘democracy’, c.1931, OMN/B/4/8.



another, is a question one cannot adequately answer by deriding Mosley as mad or hubristic. For much of the period of this study, young Conservatives held more in common with a future fascist than their erstwhile leaders.<sup>212</sup> Why they did not follow his path is a more complex question than one might think, and goes beyond the widespread post-1945 view that totalitarian ideals are inherently wrong. As we will see, such a belief is a more teleological construct than one might think.

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<sup>212</sup> Though the Phoenix Generation's influence was rather negligible. Minor victories within the party were of course secured. John Ramsden shows Macmillan's influence in the foundation of the Conservative Research Department. J. Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy: The Conservative Research Department Since 1929*, (London, 1980), 27. When John Buchan received a branch within the CRD to chair (on education, 28), old heads like Joseph Ball jealously guarded their power at Party Central Office. Was this but another Baldwinian sop?

#### 4: A 'logical Tory'? Reflecting on Mosley's Break with the Democratic Establishment

*Well, whatever happens, we will keep out the Welshman.*

- Ramsay MacDonald to Stanley Baldwin, concurrent to Lloyd George's expansionist programme at the 1929 election.<sup>1</sup>

*A Fascist is a logical Tory.*

- Aneurin Bevan, during the debate on Mosley's Olympia Meeting.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.1 Mosley in History

'With the exception of Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (1961), excellent within its limits, none of the recent writers have that indispensable quality of sympathy. They write to condemn, and the result is they fail to understand.'<sup>3</sup> So wrote Oswald Mosley's most credible sympathetic biographer, Robert Skidelsky, whose otherwise stellar rise through academia was momentarily checked by his unduly benign account of the fascist leader. Skidelsky, no doubt influenced by his 'healthier obsession' with John Maynard Keynes, later admitted to accepting 'too readily the "Locust Years" theory of the interwar period, with its corollary that the mediocrities in charge of the party machines kept the great and talented "in the wilderness", to the great detriment of the country.' Thus he went looking for the place of 'heroic values in politics,' minimised the undoubtedly abhorrent nature of Mosley's anti-Semitism - before and during his fascist days - and cost himself an Oxford fellowship in the process.<sup>4</sup> Skidelsky has of course gone on to have a distinguished career as member of the House of Lords and political commentator, particularly as the economic downturn from the autumn of 2008 brought Keynes and his ideas back into the mainstream, but his association with Mosley will

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<sup>1</sup> "Cato," *Guilty Men*, (London, 1940), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 14 June 1934, vol.290, col.534.

<sup>3</sup> R. Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, (London, 1981), 551.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, *Interests and Obsessions: Selected Essays*, (London, 1993), xii. See also Skidelsky's interview in *The Guardian*, 4 July 2006.

probably cost him an arguably deserved reputation as one of the top historians of his epoch.

Mosley's BUF years do not especially interest us, in and of themselves. The extent to which the British Union of Fascists held sway over the general populous has been widely discussed in recent times, presumably a debate riding on the back of a televisual obsession with Hitler's Germany.<sup>5</sup> The arguments involving it are often of a purely academic nature (in both senses): whether fascist support was at 20,000 or 40,000 people by the outbreak of war is irrelevant in the grand scheme of things. On the other hand, Mosley the political operator - even after his adoption of the fascist label in 1932 - is of the outmost relevance to an accurate understanding of interwar Britain. 'One hears Mosley talking and one hears Mr Skidelsky talking,' noted one reviewer of the 1975 biography, 'but talking in a room without people.'<sup>6</sup> Skidelsky found this criticism shrewd, and so it seems to be.<sup>7</sup> Aside from complaints of undue leniency, his book presents Sir Oswald too much as a unique, isolated, figure, rather than as part of the political system. Mosley misread the zeitgeist by calling himself a fascist, but by less than we might imagine. For as even a prominent contemporary critic, Elie Halévy, noted, there was little in this era dividing men as seemingly diverse as Mosley, Stafford Cripps, and Lord Eustace Percy.<sup>8</sup>

Mosleyite violence, together with the baiting of East London Jewry, could never have been countenanced by the majority of the Phoenix Generation. Yet the ideas that informed his fascist turn were by no means uniquely his. As Stephen Cullen has shown, the BUF stressed three ideas - hyper-patriotism, the ethos of the ex-servicemen of the Great War, and the use of modern, dynamic methods to defeat the economic crisis - that, as the preceding chapters have shown, were not so far

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<sup>5</sup> For example, M. Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts: Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars*, (London, 2005) and S. Dorril, *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism*, (London, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 April 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Concurred with by a similar thinker, F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (London, 2001), 71.

removed from the views of many on the left of the Conservative Party.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Hitler, Mosley did not believe democracy could never work, but that advances in science had made it obsolete and outmoded. Many, as we will see, agreed in part.<sup>10</sup>

It is no exaggeration to say that Oswald Mosley was the British politician most profoundly affected by the First World War. His claim that he decided to go into politics on Armistice Night is, as our first chapter noted, post facto hokum. Nevertheless, his statement that ‘we of the war generation’ were radicalised upon realising that ‘the old world could not or would not give a decent home and living for our companions’ is beyond dispute.<sup>11</sup> His son later commented that, ‘there is something unfulfilled about Tom in the war...He had flown bravely in the RFC; but it is evident that when in the trenches he was involved in no attack, and seems unlikely that he had to undergo a large-scale attack.’<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this is true, perhaps not: Mosley did refer in *My Life* to ‘going over the top’ but this could be dramatic license.<sup>13</sup> Regardless, if one wants to castigate a British politician for his war service Winston Churchill seems a far better bet: wangling his way to becoming a battalion commander, spending the majority of his time away from the trenches catching up on political gossip, and denouncing ‘his corps commander as a “villain” when he refused him leave (on the very sound grounds that if a battalion was in the trenches then its commanding officer should be there too).’<sup>14</sup> What matters most is what Mosley perceived himself to be: a man baptised by the fire of trench warfare, imbued with the determination to change the world for the better, a world only he and his comrades truly understood. Even if George Mosse has posited that such self perceptions were, in reality, self constructions, Mosley and his contemporaries at

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<sup>9</sup> S. Cullen, ‘The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932-40,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22 (1987), 115-136, 116.

<sup>10</sup> For now, we may acknowledge Ramsay Muir who believed the British Cabinet to be bloated in size and overly weighed down by details. R. Muir, *How Britain is Governed: A Critical Analysis of Modern Developments in the British System of Government*, (London, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 75.

<sup>12</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules / Beyond*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, 69.

<sup>14</sup> G. Corrigan, *Blood, Sweat and Arrogance and the Myths of Churchill's War*, (London, 2006), 23.

the very least posit an interesting manifestation of this phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the would-be saviour of 1940, Mosley had got most of the major decisions in his career right. His crossing of the floor over Black and Tan brutality in Ireland led T.P. O'Connor to regard 'him as the man who really began the break-up of the Black and Tan savagery.' Upon his adoption of the Labour cause in 1924, Beatrice Webb regarded him as 'the perfect politician' as well as 'the perfect gentleman,' whilst Ramsay MacDonald was much impressed with his young recruit.<sup>16</sup> Though he would fall out with the MacDonald-Snowden leadership almost as soon as he was appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1929, this a position many understood, and even agreed with. Josiah Wedgwood, a Labour MP wounded at the Dardanelles, responded to Mosley's much praised 28 May 1930 resignation speech thus:

We have listened to one of the most eloquent and one of the most dangerous speeches I have ever heard in this House...[N]o-one who listened to it can deny that as he spoke he was converting Member after Member in this House to his views. I watched the Liberal party, with the exception of the four strong men from Cornwall. I watched the Conservative party. Man after man was saying to himself: "that is our leader."<sup>17</sup>

Wedgwood was a critic, in no way inclined towards a Mosleyite agenda. If even he could acknowledge the cross party appeal the man could have - he also ignores the penchant Labour men like Strachey and Forgan must have had for him - it is surely time to take Mosley more seriously. To judge Mosley purely on his dark side would be akin to writing a history of Churchill by skirting over 1940 and purely concentrating on the Sterilisation Clause of the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act or the

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<sup>15</sup> G.L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986) 491-513.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 55, 109-119.

<sup>17</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 28 May 1930, vol.239, col.1405.

dead ANZACs of Gallipoli. We should not ignore the abhorrent Mosley that emerges from the late 1930s, but his whole career should not be judged in these terms.

With the notable exception of Bob Boothby who recalled events with trademark rebelliousness, it was in the interest of Mosley's contemporaries to portray him operating on a different plane altogether. This was simply not the case: Mosley may have operated on a different point on the spectrum to men like Macmillan, but it was still the same spectrum.<sup>18</sup> Here then is the truth this chapter intends to get at. For the most part, Mosley had a point in prophesying national regression that most men of his generation agreed with. Not only that. Extra-parliamentarianism, seen as his sole preserve in a world post-1945 which rejects such tactics, was a solution many would have countenanced, even recommended. The nature of Mosley's later semi-respectable fellow travellers - stuffy old men like Lord Rothermere - serve to obscure the fact that, before 1932, most of his chief political collaborators were veterans from the centre ground, even progressive left (as something of a curio, President-elect Roosevelt replied to Cynthia Mosley's congratulations at his victory praising 'that fine [by then fascist] husband of yours,' and expressing the hope that they would repeat 'that jolly [fishing] trip soon').<sup>19</sup> We must begin to turn this period on its head. From the perspective of a reformist young Tory MP of the war generation, who was the best man to lead Britain? Stanley Baldwin, whom we have just seen had failed to deliver upon the nature of his rhetoric, and would offer very little in the way of the dynamism the nation appeared to require? Or Sir Oswald Mosley? A gamble yes, but one with an interventionist policy not without adherents (Lloyd George and Keynes), who claimed, with arguably more credence than Baldwin, to be the voice of the post-1918 world. Mosley must hold total responsibility for his actions whilst in the political wilderness, but his journey there was not his choice alone. If "the system" had failed to provide both adequate leaders, and forceful enough protest to such

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Pugh perhaps overstates matters, but his view that 'Mosley was actually typical of men from his class and his generation in the emotive way he reacted to the war and its aftermath' should not be dismissed out of hand. M.Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars*, (London, 2008), 16.

<sup>19</sup> FDR to Cynthia Mosley, 12 December 1932, UBSC, XOMD 4/2.

lethargy, to try and escape it was entirely logical, as Ward has argued.<sup>20</sup>

Skidelsky attempted to justify Mosley's fascist conversion by reference to the incompetence of the nation's leaders. This chapter is not an attempt to do that. Instead, it seeks to illustrate that he was not alone. Desperate times call for desperate measures: whether Mosley would have made a better national leader than Baldwin or MacDonald is impossible to say. What the following will show is that one cannot, by reference to his BUF or Union Movement days, claim conclusively that he would not have done. The perceived wisdom, conceived along the lines of the Whig interpretation of history, obviously sides with the status quo. This is a teleology. Macmillan, Stanley and the like did not ultimately align themselves with the man they had much in common with, and the rest, as they say, is history. The righteousness of that decision, given their viewpoints, is at least open to interpretation. For if, as Amery acknowledged, 'the rank and file of the Conservative Party, in Parliament and in the country, which chafed under the inertia of recent years, would have responded with enthusiasm to a bold lead,' we should view the potentiality of a Mosley led Britain with more credence than hitherto.<sup>21</sup> David Howell has suggested that Mosley had burnt his bridges with the Labour Party by 1930-1, possessing no base within the party to back up his agenda.<sup>22</sup> Certainly he did not play his hand as best he might. Yet, as we will see, he had potential allies outside that party's structure.

#### 4.2 Moving Beyond the Ephemera

His controversial political views aside, it is important at the outset to clear

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<sup>20</sup> S.R. Ward, 'Great Britain: Land Fit for Heroes Lost,' in S.R. Ward (ed), *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, (London, 1975), 10-37, 32.

<sup>21</sup> L.S. Amery, *My Political Life, Volume Two: The Unforgiving Years 1929-1940*, (London, 1955), 16. The 1922 Committee concurred. Minutes, 22 January 1930, BOD, CPA, 1922/2.

<sup>22</sup> D. Howell, *MacDonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922-1931*, (Oxford, 2002), 43 shows how he failed to secure the votes (by a long way) to get onto the party's parliamentary committee in 1927 and 1928. Mosley's failure at the PLP meeting of 22 June 1930, where he had been manoeuvred to put his motion condemning the government to the vote in place of a more convivial discussion 'demonstrated the ability of the government to contain open dissent to a small, predictable and often divided section' (45). Mosley's signatures on his December 1930 memorandum were, according to MacDonald, '10<sup>th</sup> rate.' (79).

up that other potential source of Mosley's undoing: his philandering. His witty slogan 'Vote Labour, sleep Tory' apart, his bed hopping led to Baldwin to regard him as a 'wrong 'un', whilst Birkenhead dubbed him a 'perfumed popinjay of scented boudoirs.'<sup>23</sup> The Phoenix Generation on the other hand could scarcely have cared less. How could it be otherwise: Duff Cooper was 'incapable of restraining his carnal appetites' after marrying Diana Manners, whilst Boothby and Macmillan maintained a co-operative, if strained, relationship throughout the decades of the former cuckolding the latter.<sup>24</sup> Macmillan, it is true, constitutes a slightly special case. The mental breakdown he suffered in 1931, months after the birth of Sarah (the daughter more likely to be Boothby's than his), left him '[un]willing to sacrifice any more of his established relationships when so many were already in tatters.'<sup>25</sup> The buccaneering swagger required to carry off the New Party project was thus a little beyond a man only just emerging from a sanatorium, whom a friend had found banging his head against the wall of a railway compartment in sheer frustration at his lot.<sup>26</sup> Doubtless there were reasons to personally dislike Mosley. Duff Cooper saw him and his wife as 'worse than foreigners.'<sup>27</sup> Yet in the upper class milieu of interwar Britain, provided one stuck to 'rules-of-the-game about what was acceptable,' one could share wives as well as politics.<sup>28</sup>

There were, after all, much more important questions, such as what on earth British democracy actually stood for. AJP Taylor saw the fall of Mosley in 1930-1 as 'a decisive, though negative, event in British history: the moment when the British people resolved unwittingly to stand on the ancient ways.'<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the best indication of this lies in Harold Nicolson's diary entries during the period of the Second World War when British democracy stood alone. Nicolson, a former

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<sup>23</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules of the Game / Beyond the Pale*, (Illinois, 1991), 96, 49.

<sup>24</sup> J. Charmley, *Duff Cooper*, (London, 1986), 33.

<sup>25</sup> S. Ball, *The Guardsmen: Harold Macmillan, Three Friends, and the World They Made*, (London, 2004), 112.

<sup>26</sup> L. Olson, *Troublesome Young Men: The Rebels Who Brought Churchill to Power in 1940 and Helped to Save Britain*, (New York, 2007), 58.

<sup>27</sup> J.J. Norwich (ed), *The Duff Cooper Diaries 1915-1951*, (London, 2005), 210 [17 August 1925].

<sup>28</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules / Beyond*, 96.

<sup>29</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, (Oxford, 1970), 360.



associate of Mosley's now back within the establishment fold at the Ministry of Information, documented thus:

3 July 1940: [Attlee] also feels that we should before the country a definite pronouncement on Government policy for the future. The Germans are fighting a revolutionary war for very definite objectives. We are fighting a conservative war and our objectives are purely negative. We must put forward a positive and revolutionary aim admitting that the old order has collapsed and asking people to fight for the new order.

22 Jan 1941: Winston refuses to make a statement on war aims. The reason given in Cabinet is that precise aims would be compromising, whereas vague principles would disappoint. Thus all those days of work have led to nothing.<sup>30</sup>

By the 1940s then, as Mazower notes, 'the power of Nazi dreams contrasted...with the ideological timidity of the British.'<sup>31</sup> The *Wehrmacht* were fighting for clear objectives, albeit odious. The British, by contrast, were not fighting for the Poles, the Jews or because Hitler was an evil man. Instead, as Corrigan is at pains to point out, 'Britain went to war in 1939 for the reasons that great powers always go to war: because it was in her interests to do so.'<sup>32</sup> That Mosley was operating within an environment where British democracy lacked the romantic language - "fight them on the beaches" et al - and the totems - the horrors of Auschwitz - to defend itself is a crucial point.

In recent years there has been a shift away from the traditionally pessimistic picture of interwar Britain.<sup>33</sup> Far from being crushed by poverty, it is

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<sup>30</sup> N. Nicolson (ed), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1939-45*, (London, 1967), 99, 101, 139. [3, 12 July 1940, 22 January 1941].

<sup>31</sup> M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, (London, 1998), 186.

<sup>32</sup> Corrigan, *Blood, Sweat and Arrogance*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Surmised from one perspective in Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*, 195-8.

pointed out, Britons of all classes enjoyed both rising expectations and higher living standards to match. In a sense all this rather goes against the grain. Whilst not ignoring the extensive revision that historians have made to the traditional picture, ours is a story which partially eschews such arguments. Instead of asking whether the democratic system succeeded within its prescribed limits or not, the question is over the very nature of those limits. Veneration for totalitarian regimes which acted more decisively than Westminster was by no means Mosley's sole preserve during this period. Nor was such praise limited to dictatorships of the right. Putting *Bolshevism in Perspective* John Loder argued it had been 'distorted in the western mind,' believing it instead offered 'hope' and 'lessons' to be learned.<sup>34</sup> Returning from Russia in 1933, Macmillan remarked to Thomas Jones that he similarly had been impressed with what he saw.<sup>35</sup>

For all democracy appeared triumphant in 1945, by 1929 British 'parliamentary government appeared to be unstable government,' and was met by 'a high tide of criticism.'<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, much of this lay at the feet of the 'boneless wonders,' Baldwin and MacDonald.<sup>37</sup> Yet the problem was philosophically wider ranging than simply two individuals. Indeed, Mosley and Baldwin essentially voiced the same problem: how could modern technology, advancing at a pace incomprehensible to the average voter, be reconciled with a mass democracy. Baldwin placed his faith in his own educative powers, Mosley believed the system itself needed overhauling - and he was not alone. Aside from the youthful Phoenix Generation, thinkers of left and right were not adverse to tearing up centuries of tradition. On the one hand, Stafford Cripps doubted whether a Socialist Government could 'maintain its position of control without adopting some exceptional means, such as the prolongation of the life of Parliament for a further term without an election.'<sup>38</sup> Even George Lansbury spoke in quasi-fascistic language that under him 'the House of Commons shall function as a House of

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<sup>34</sup> J. de V. Loder, *Bolshevism in Perspective*, (London, 1931), 213, 228.

<sup>35</sup> T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950*, (London, 1954), 87 [3 February 1933]

<sup>36</sup> R. Butt, *The Power of Parliament*, (London, 1967), 116, 118.

<sup>37</sup> See Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*, 110-125.

<sup>38</sup> S. Cripps, *Problems of a Socialist Government*, (London, 1933), 39.

Action, and not as a decaying institution.<sup>39</sup> H.G. Wells's call for a 'liberal fascism' is also well known.<sup>40</sup> Concurrently from the right, Winston Churchill sympathised with those 'doubting whether institutions based on adult suffrage could possibly arrive at the right decisions upon the intricate propositions of modern business and finance.'<sup>41</sup> Whilst, then, the British do tend to get a little pious about their stability of parliamentary democracy, we must be careful not to misrepresent or overplay the nature of this.

### 4.3 The Example of Anthony Eden

Nominally the old parliamentary system withstood, but the cracks were noticeable, if one looked hard enough. The problem with some men of this epoch is that, having been raised in a staid, placid existence, they were too eager to mind their language. Anthony Eden, seemingly in his earliest guise a Baldwinian Conservative *par excellence*, is one such example, and had almost imperceptibly begun to waver in his faith. In a 1929 article in *The Yorkshire Post* he opined that 'Conservatism is not static. It is indeed essential if we are to appreciate the policy and purpose of the Conservative party in this generation that we should never overlook its progressiveness in essentials.'<sup>42</sup> By the mid 1930s he was declaring that 'the Conservative party does not exist merely to make a Socialist govt impossible...[Its] purpose is positive and not negative.'<sup>43</sup> Were these just warning shots across the lethargic Baldwin's bow, or a sign of something deeper? Certainly Eden did not break with the established order, and for all his claims of being a progressive seems the least likely high profile former soldier to do so. He seems not to have understood the economic complexities grasped by Mosley and Macmillan, and in any case was primarily devoted to matters of foreign policy.

Eden constitutes an interesting case. Mosley later recounted that it always remained a mystery to him why he was so assiduously groomed for leadership by

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<sup>39</sup> G. Lansbury, *My England*, (London, 1934), 135.

<sup>40</sup> P. Coupland, 'H.G. Wells's Liberal Fascism,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), 541-558.

<sup>41</sup> Butt, *Power of Parliament*, 118.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Eden Yorkshire Post Clippings, 9 April 1929, UBSC, AP 7/1/3-4.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Future for Conservatism' Note, c. 1935, AP 7/1/57.

the Conservative Party, eventually suggesting it owed much to his 'fine war record, good looks, and...generally distinguished appearance.'<sup>44</sup> From the perspective of the backbenches, his appointment to the Foreign Office in 1935 was tellingly seen by Walter Elliot as 'grand news!...This is the first victory of any of the younger men since the financial policy began to show such startling victories for the Old Boys.'<sup>45</sup> Congratulations had previously flooded in from scores of ex-servicemen such as Macmillan, Loder and Douglas Hacking.<sup>46</sup> Quite why the younger men flocked to him is something of a mystery, for Mosley was correct in ascribing vastly superior talent to Macmillan and Stanley, men who also had greater interest in the domestic issues of the day. One cannot of course overlook his connections, for the darling of Baldwin was not to be trifled with. Yet - as with Baldwin's benevolent rhetoric - the blame probably lies at the misunderstanding, whether deliberately cultivated by Eden or not, that he was "one of them." His Military Cross was the mark of a brave man. Whether it qualified him - as he was dubbed upon receipt of a 40,000 strong pro-disarmament petition in 1932 - to be 'representative of the ordinary people [who] filled the trenches...and filled nearly a million graves' is a completely different issue.<sup>47</sup> A man who, after his resignation in 1938, 'intend[ed] to make a few big speeches on such general topics as Democracy and Young England, in which (while avoiding current topics in Foreign Affairs) he will clearly indicate that he stands for postwar England against the old men' should really have known a little bit more about the Jarrow poor and East London slums than he did. Then again, his erstwhile fellow travellers should have seen this too.<sup>48</sup>

Eden, like the earlier illustration of Lloyd-Greame in 1920, was a veteran suspicious of the system who chose to work within it. In terms of his own personal gain, one cannot question this decision. Foreign Secretary at the age of 38 and eventual Prime Minister are accolades not to be sniffed at. Whether they were worth cow-towing to a Westminster system that presided over 3 million

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<sup>44</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, 273.

<sup>45</sup> Elliot to Eden, 23 December 1935, AP 15/1/142.

<sup>46</sup> AP 15/1/44-42-32 respectively.

<sup>47</sup> *Guardian*, 29 January 1932.

<sup>48</sup> Nicolson, *Nicolson Diaries 1930-39*, 334 [11 April 1938].

unemployed and appeared moribund by 1940 is another issue. Aside from youthful vigour, Eden was not the 'substitute Mosley' the National Government presented him as.<sup>49</sup> His doubts about the status quo never resulted in concrete action. For all his wartime bravery, he seemed to lack political decisiveness, illustrated as we will see by the restrained nature of his (perhaps surprisingly sporadic) protests at Chamberlain's foreign policy. In many senses he constituted a man with an agenda, but with neither the concrete policies nor the will to do anything about it.

#### 4.4 Planning

The same cannot be said however for the Phoenix Generation as a whole. As Mosley later wrote, 'the failure to secure a consensus in 1930 was a tragedy, because nearly all the ablest men in British public life had in varying degree foreseen the coming crisis.'<sup>50</sup> This was not mere retrospective self-justification. For 'the consensus for national action,' of which Mosley spoke, begat to Friedrich Hayek an inevitable *Road to Serfdom*:

We still believe that until quite recently we were governed by what are vaguely called nineteenth-century ideas or the principle of *laissez-faire*. Compared with some other countries...there may be some justification for such belief. But although till 1931 this country had followed only slowly on the path which others had led, even by then we had moved so far that only those whose memory goes back to the years before the last war know what a liberal world has been like.<sup>51</sup>

Hayek was admittedly on a McCarthy like quest to find 'the totalitarians in our midst,' those to whom planning per se was a way of political life.<sup>52</sup> Yet his acknowledgement, even critically, that 'veneration for the state,' 'the enthusiasm for "organisation" of everything, and that inability to leave anything to the simple

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<sup>49</sup> Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 286.

<sup>50</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, 272.

<sup>51</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

power of organic growth,' had become 'marked in this country,' is a vital point.<sup>53</sup> Here the Phoenix Generation provided the intellectual foundation - through a glut of books calling for industrial reconstruction - for the anti-Hayekian position.<sup>54</sup>

'Nothing but intellectual confusion can result from a failure to realize that Planning and Socialism are fundamentally the same.'<sup>55</sup> So noted Hayek and Lionel Robbins in response to Harold Macmillan's 1933 *Reconstruction*. That a future Prime Minister should write a tract described by a leading economist as a 'blueprint for the destruction of liberty' seems, at first glance, a little strange, even given previous references to Macmillan's radicalism.<sup>56</sup> Yet, from their perspective, the LSE economists had a point. Consider the viewpoint espoused in 1927 by the ex-servicemen Macmillan, Loder and Stanley:

It cannot be claimed that the industrial machinery suggested in the foregoing pages is a panacea. But, like the League of Nations machinery in the realm of international disputes, it is at least a machinery. Those who have most hopes of the League have their optimism not so much in the value of the machinery itself for the purpose of dealing with a grave crisis when it may arise, as on the psychological fact that long years of joint action and joint conciliation...will create understanding among the statesmen of the world which will be of value when the crisis does appear.<sup>57</sup>

Such a philosophy bares striking relation to Hayek's later denunciation of the mania in British political society for 'planning for planning's sake.'<sup>58</sup> Taking control

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>54</sup> Such as L.S. Amery, *The Forward View*, (London, 1935); H. Macmillan, *Reconstruction: A Plea for National Policy*, (London, 1933) and F.N. Blundell, *A New Policy for Agriculture*, (London, 1931).

<sup>55</sup> Ball, *Guardsmen*, 131.

<sup>56</sup> F. Beckett, *Macmillan*, (London, 2006), 34.

<sup>57</sup> R. Boothby, H. Macmillan, J. de V. Loder, O. Stanley, *Industry and the State: A Conservative View*, (London, 1927), 227.

<sup>58</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 187.

was thus an ends as well as a means for the state envisaged by the Phoenix Generation, a viewpoint shared by elders like Lloyd George and Keynes. Rab Butler - a man chronologically similar to a Mosley, but personably in the Baldwin mould - put it well: 'this is an era of planning, because it is an era of crisis. If it be taken for granted that our age is a building age, then it is refreshing to feel that change, reconstruction or revolution, whatever you may call it, may come from the Right in politics.'<sup>59</sup> In an era where Victor Cazalet could compare Henry Ford to the genius of Albert Einstein, seemingly the Phoenix Generation constituted the impetus for just such a change.<sup>60</sup>

Whilst the "political outsider" historiography of the period concentrates on the big name eccentrics - Churchill and Lloyd George - and the essentially irrelevant hedonistic social world of the smaller fry - *bon vivants* like Duff Cooper - one should not ignore the important meetings that were taking place amongst the young men. Faith in the Baldwin-Chamberlain leadership was, by 1929, on the wane, and understandably so. Talking to Macmillan in July 1930, Harold Nicolson found him at the end of his tether with 'the old party machines.' Hinting at a future Pitt-like Ministry of young men, Macmillan believed 'the economic situation is so serious that it will lead to a breakdown of the whole party system.'<sup>61</sup> Throughout 1929, 1930 and 1931 the radical ex-servicemen politicians of this study were in constant contact. The Elliot-Macmillan-Boothby meeting of November 1929 referred to in the previous chapter was but indicative of a trend whereby the young men were becoming increasingly disillusioned with their leader's negativity.<sup>62</sup> Mosley did not take the leap into the New Party wilderness without thought. Seventeen Labour MPs signed the Mosley Memorandum of December 1930 - including Nye Bevan - and his social schedule of the 1929-31 parliament

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<sup>59</sup> Butler review of Lord Eustace Percy's book "Democracy on Trial," 25 March 1931, TCL, RAB, K/2/235.

<sup>60</sup> R. Rhodes James, *Victor Cazalet*, (London, 1976), 109.

<sup>61</sup> Nicolson (ed), *Nicolson Diaries 1930-39*, 51 [2 July 1930].

<sup>62</sup> See 1922 Committee Minutes, 11 November 1929, BOD, CPA, 1922/2.

reads like a *Who's Who* of young talented politicians.<sup>63</sup> In November 1930 he dined with Duff Cooper, Stanley, Macmillan, Bracken and Boothby. Later, Stanley, Macmillan and the future Conservative Whip David Margesson came to stay at his house in Denham, whilst in May 1931 he attempted to woo John Moore-Brabazon to his cause.<sup>64</sup> Baldwin even began to talk of people hunting 'with packs other than their own.'<sup>65</sup> Mosley's jump into the unknown was not made without some consideration therefore.

He had, after all, every reason to suppose he would gain followers from both left and right. Keynes did 'not see what practical socialism can mean for our generation in England, unless it makes much of the [Mosley] manifesto its own.'<sup>66</sup> Its insulation and demand led solutions to curb unemployment, 'will shock the many good citizens of this country who have laissez-faire in their craniums, their consciences, and their homes...but how anyone professing and calling himself a socialist can keep away from the Manifesto is a more obscure matter.'<sup>67</sup> From our perspective, why he did not gain followers from the right is just as important. Boothby has ascribed it to a single speech of Lloyd George's, made immediately following 'the most dramatic scene I witnessed during my fifty years in Parliament,' Mosley's resignation from the Labour Government. Instead of praising the departing Chancellor the Duchy of Lancaster, '[Lloyd George] described his memorandum - similar, but distinct from the later "manifesto" - as 'an injudicious mixture of Karl Marx and Lord Rothermere.'<sup>68</sup> Whilst after Mosley 'sat down, it was clear he had the support not only of the great majority of the Labour Party, but many other members,' Lloyd George completely killed any united progressive

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<sup>63</sup> Talking to Gerald Barry, Mosley claimed that Mond was on his side, and Walter Elliot had drafted much of the Mosley Memorandum. 2 February 1931, LSE, BAR 1.

<sup>64</sup> Nicolson (ed), Nicolson Diaries 1930-39, 60, 68, 74 [29 November 1930, 15 February 1931, 6 May 1931].

<sup>65</sup> R. Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, (London, 1978), 82.

<sup>66</sup> "Sir Oswald Mosley's Manifesto", article published in Nation 9.12, u.d.1930, KCC, JMK/A/30/231.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 28 May 1930, vol. 239, col. 1373.



opposition stone dead.<sup>69</sup> In such a milieu, taking the safe root within the existing parties was made all the more attractive for the Phoenix Generation, many of whom were situated in marginal constituencies.

#### 4.5 The Choice

Be that as it may, one cannot dismiss the notion that whilst such men may have bravely served during the war, they essentially took the cowardly route out of the economic turmoil Britain found herself in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Boothby's letters to Mosley are illuminating on this point. Citing the example of Randolph Churchill - he might equally have picked Joseph Chamberlain - Boothby told Mosley he cared about his 'political future far more than about any single factor in public affairs.' He could 'conceive of no greater tragedy than that you should take a step which might wreck your chances, or at any rate postpone the opportunity of carrying through constructive work.' Yet he knew to his 'cost the limitations of the existing young conservatives. They are charming and sympathetic at dinner. But there is not one of them who has either the character of the courage to do anything big.'<sup>70</sup> Perhaps, it is true, Boothby should have looked in the mirror a little. Here was a man who believed the system of laissez-faire capitalism 'could no longer work,' that Mosley 'was right and almost everyone else was wrong,' yet did not follow his instinct.<sup>71</sup> Boothby instead counselled in favour of trying 'to collar one or other of the [party] machines, and not ruin yourself by beating against them with a tool.'<sup>72</sup> Once Mosley had clearly decided in favour of a break with the old order however, was he still not the better option, regardless of the risk, than a political establishment unable to break the contemporary impasse?

Mosley's problem, as the Conservative Boothby noted, was that 'our chaps won't play, and it's no use deluding yourself that they will.'<sup>73</sup> In a way, for all we have come to see Mosley as a controlling megalomaniac, there was a real sense in which power did not interest him. The assertion of absolute rationality, as his son

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<sup>69</sup> Boothby, *Recollections*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Boothby to Mosley, 18 May 1930, N. Mosley, *Rules / Beyond*, 144-5.

<sup>71</sup> R. Boothby, *The New Economy*, (London, 1943), 45. Boothby, *Recollections*, 81.

<sup>72</sup> Boothby to Mosley, undated, N. Mosley, *Beyond / Rules*, 152.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

noted, was more his driving motivation: people would either believe his case or they would not.<sup>74</sup> Thus, a little surprisingly, it was with the Macmillans and Stanleys that one finds the greater degree of Machiavellianism. Walter Elliot would have proved most useful to Mosley in Scotland, 'but [he] has spent the last twelve months consolidating his position in the Conservative party, won for himself a good deal of rank-and-file support' and 'won't give it up unless he's sure he's going to win.'<sup>75</sup> Oliver Stanley, as Cuthbert Headlam jealously lamented, had also been earmarked by Baldwin for an eventual rise.<sup>76</sup> The perceived key to personal success, as Headlam articulated Boothby had singularly failed to do, was not to offend too many people.<sup>77</sup> Whether this was good for a nation manifestly requiring a different style of leadership to the status quo is an entirely different matter.

There was of course one major move against Baldwin, in March 1931. The Business Committee (with a firm prod from Lord Beaverbrook), containing a few of the more senior Phoenix Generation MPs such as Amery, Lloyd-Greame and Hoare, appear to have hatched a plan whereby a Chamberlain-Hailsham combination would unseat the incumbent. It all fizzled out rather quickly: Duff Cooper's victory at the Westminster by-election ending any real hope of a Beaverbrookian coup.<sup>78</sup> In any case this move, as Butler scorned, had come from Baldwin's 'nearest - the Old Gang,' not the rank and file.<sup>79</sup> It was also at the behest of a traditional Tory agenda - the Empire - that, as chapter five will outline, the average ex-serviceman MP was conflicted over.<sup>80</sup> Certainly the Phoenix Generation did not, as the party agenda Topping stated of the parliamentary caucus as a whole, 'lean much more towards

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>75</sup> Boothby to Mosley, Ibid, 151.

<sup>76</sup> S. Ball (ed), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald, The Headlam Diaries 1923-1935*, (London, 1992), 261 [27 February 1931].

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 288 [5 December 1933].

<sup>78</sup> See Appendix for Duff Cooper's Acrostic regarding his leader - indicative of Baldwin's success.

<sup>79</sup> Butler Account of the Retirement Crisis, March 1931, RAB, C/4/29.

<sup>80</sup> Talking to Gerald Barry, Mosley claimed that were it not for his 'bloody' Empire Crusade Movement, Beaverbrook would have supported him out right. Barry Notebook, 2 February 1931, LSE, BAR 1.

the views of Mr Churchill than to those expressed by Mr Baldwin.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this influenced the decision of that other veteran spoken of as a second Mosley, George Lloyd (who threatened to jump ship over India with the finance of Lady Houston), to stay within the Conservative fold.<sup>82</sup>

If there was one man who most epitomised the safer route Mosley could have taken it was Harold Macmillan. The two men's intellectual similarity was certainly striking. 1927's *Industry and the State* was but indicative of a mind that in 1932-3 - with 'The State and Industry' and *Reconstruction* - was thinking on virtual Mosleyite lines. This was hardly shocking: both employed Allan Young as an intellectual collaborator, in Mosley's case as a New Party parliamentary candidate, in Macmillan's as co-author of *Reconstruction* and *The Middle Way*. Consequently, free traders which Mosley saw as living in the nineteenth century were similarly denounced by the Stockton MP as peddling 'old, negative arguments.'<sup>83</sup> Mosley's penchant for imperial insulation was likewise replicated by Macmillan's praise for 'reciprocal trading arrangements within the Empire.' 'If this policy is ever to get beyond the stage of theoretical discussion,' he continued, 'there will be required not only an Imperial Secretariat, but some machinery' which would put 'internal development on lines with the general policy of economic unity.'<sup>84</sup> In broad terms, when Macmillan believed 'we must realise the essential contradictions of *laissez-faire* even while we may appreciate the energy and drive of a rugged individualism,' Mosley concurred with a plea to 'harmonise individual initiative with the wider interests of the nation.'<sup>85</sup> They were, even linguistically with Hegelian concepts such as a 'middle way' and a 'synthesis,' like two peas in a pod.<sup>86</sup>

But, the argument often goes, Mosley was fundamentally beyond the pale. Men from Bevan to Macmillan may have concurred with elements of his political philosophy, but would balk at the prospect of concrete association. This is true,

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<sup>81</sup> Topping to Neville Chamberlain, 25 February 1931, CUL, BALD 166/52.

<sup>82</sup> J. Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire*, (London, 1987), 188.

<sup>83</sup> O. Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, (London, 1932), 11; H. Macmillan, 'The State and Industry in 1932,' in *Economics Pamphlets Miscellaneous VII*, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Macmillan, 'State and Industry,' 6-7.

<sup>85</sup> Idem, *Reconstruction*, (London, 1933), 6; O. Mosley, *Greater Britain*, 12-3.

<sup>86</sup> H. Macmillan, *The Middle Way*, (London, 1938); O. Mosley, *My Life*, 316-321.

but only to a certain degree. Certainly both sought intellectual solace in the same source, John Maynard Keynes. Indeed, the Cambridge economist was perfectly happy to endorse Mosley's New Party Election manifesto: 'I find it rather difficult to criticise the enclosed.'<sup>87</sup> His only criticisms were, probably surprisingly for such a neophilian politician like Mosley, that 'it sometimes has an air putting forward something new, but in fact what is being said is something which we have got tired of hearing, however sound it may be in fact. I feel the document dates rather - that it is perhaps a year old in feeling.'<sup>88</sup> Similar chides were reserved for Macmillan. Commenting on an early draft of *Reconstruction*, Keynes noted that whilst

I like the enclosed very much. My criticisms are really due I expect to the sort of middle position you occupy. My main feeling is that you are not nearly bold enough with your proposals for developing the investment functions of the state. You are trying to minimise the part the State must play and you endeavour to get your results by a sort of combination of private enterprise and subsidy; and I doubt the feasibility of this at any rate in present times.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, rather than the image we might expect of Mosley the extremist, by the early 1930s both he and Macmillan were operating on remarkably similar lines, and were being urged to go further.

Macmillan's reaction to Mosley's resignation from the Labour Government is well known but emphatically deserves repetition at length. Writing to *The Times* on 27 May 1930, he remarked that

faced with a startling and even spectacular calamity [the doubling of unemployment since Labour took office] Sir Oswald seems to have conceived a novel, and no doubt according the accepted political

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<sup>87</sup> Keynes to Mosley, 21 February 1931, JMK/L/31/24.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, JMK/L/31/25

<sup>89</sup> Keynes to Macmillan, 6 June 1932, JMK/CO/5/39.

standards of what are called “respectable statesmen”, incredibly naïve idea. He drew up, and actually went as far as to present to his chief, a memorandum which suggested an attempt should be made to carry out at least some, if not all, of the pledges and promises by the exploitation of which the Socialist Party obtained power...

Is it to be the accepted rule in our politics that a political programme is to be discarded as soon as it has served its electoral purpose?...Must a programme always sink to the level of a fraudulent prospectus?

I suspect that this is the real way that the game ought to be played. Only, if the rules are to be permanently enforced, perhaps a good many of us will feel it hardly worth while bothering to play at all. Sir Oswald Mosley thinks that the rules should be altered. I hope some of my friends will have the courage to support and applaud his protest.<sup>90</sup>

This produced a snippy repost from Rab Butler - unlike Macmillan too young to fight in the war - the next day: ‘when a player starts complaining [about] the game, it is surely the player, and not the game, which is at fault.’<sup>91</sup> Yet it was arguably the game where the fault lay. By sticking his neck out so publicly Macmillan showed not only political bravery - he was of course out of parliament in 1930 - but an appreciation of the spirit of the times.<sup>92</sup> As Butt points out, true democracy had arrived as recently as 1918 with the extension of the franchise, and by the late 1920s and early 1930s the system had failed to adapt to the realities of such a new political culture.<sup>93</sup> The five giants of disease, ignorance, squalor, idleness and want, that by 1942 Beveridge believed needed slaying through ‘social insurance and

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<sup>90</sup> Times, 27 May 1930.

<sup>91</sup> Times, 28 May 1930.

<sup>92</sup> This was particularly brave given the (perhaps understandable) penchant of Tory by-election candidates to parrot the official line. See Patrick Buchan-Hepburn’s campaign in *The Times*, 25 January 1931. Baldwin’s decision, by 1931, to re-adopt safeguarding could also be read as a conversion to state intervention of sorts, and even if they were hardly uniformly convinced of its merits, the young Tories began to imbue their rhetoric with cries that Britain was becoming the ‘dumping ground’ of every major world manufacturer.

<sup>93</sup> Butt, *Power of Parliament*, 116-118.

allied services,' were abundant - for all the later revision - in a nation whose political ruling class were unable to prevent them.<sup>94</sup> Playing the game was a needless distraction from preventing the 'needless scandal' of poverty which Beveridge, and post 1945 administrations of left and right, would arguably tackle rather better.<sup>95</sup>

Until then, progressive politicians would rather duck the issue. Macmillan's letter was a step in the right direction but he should have gone further. Whilst Simon Ball implicitly lauds *The Guardsmen* (Macmillan, Salisbury, Lyttelton and Crookshank) being repelled by the far right, Mosley's breach was not, initially, of this sort.<sup>96</sup> Mosley could be wildly overoptimistic about his chances: the £250,000 and support of Beaverbrook which he claimed in November 1930 was all he needed to 'sweep the country' was Panglossian in the extreme.<sup>97</sup> Yet his plan was essentially sound. As Nicolson commented,

unless the economic situation can be dealt with on undemocratic lines, I.e. independent of votes, we shall go smash. Not even Holland, but worse than Holland... Tom Mosley tells me that he will shortly launch his manifesto practically creating the National Party. He hopes to get Morris of Oxford to finance him. He hopes to get Keynes and similar experts to sign his manifesto. He hopes that Stanley and Macmillan will also join.

All seemingly went swimmingly from his viewpoint. The economy continued to tumble, William Morris stumped up £50,000 a couple of months later, and Keynes, as we have seen, was very sympathetic to the Mosley of this era.<sup>98</sup> All that was missing was that final ingredient: the adherence of his youthful intellectual fellow

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<sup>94</sup> W. Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, (London, 1942), 166.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

<sup>96</sup> Ball, *Guardsmen*, 135.

<sup>97</sup> Nicolson (ed), *Nicolson Diaries 1930-39*, 59 [6 November 1930].

<sup>98</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules / Beyond*, 170; Aside from the previous, see Mosley to Keynes, January 1930, JMK/M//2/55-56.

travellers.

As Boothby predicted, those from the right shied away when the moment came. Meeting Macmillan on the train, Nicolson - who had ditched Lord Beaverbrook's warm embrace at the *Evening Standard* for Mosley - found him putting forth 'the usual young Tory view that his heart is entirely with the New Party but [arguing] that he can help us better by remaining in the Conservative ranks.'<sup>99</sup> The honesty of this claim was at least doubtful, for Macmillan did 'not hesitate to admit that if we could obtain a certain number of seats in Parliament, most of the young Tories, all the Liberals and a large proportion of the youngish Labour people would come over to us.'<sup>100</sup> What was required was not a more effective ginger group with Toryism, but a definable break - even if one not ruling out a later reconciliation. Whilst Macmillan saw the great New Party opportunity as being five years away, the time for action was 1929-31: the time he himself would later dub, 'the great divide.'<sup>101</sup> For after then Baldwin would begin to regain control over his party, and slowly start to address, albeit in his usual negative manner, national issues like India rather than press barons.

#### 4.6 The New Party in Context

For all his later aping of the continental regimes, Mosley's New Party was an authentically British reaction to the trauma engendered by the Great War. Whilst rejecting fascism as 'excessive,' Mosley lauded 'the new generation of men who are weary of words and have learned the harsh dictates of action are challenging the men of words and their systems of paper with a new and victorious reality...May the present movement find in this country an expression of its dynamic purpose not unworthy of the peculiar contribution of the English people to history.'<sup>102</sup> Pointing towards the achievements of Soviet planning, he believed that 'it is essential not to deal with those out of Insurance by methods with a Poor Law taint

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<sup>99</sup> Nicolson (ed), *Nicolson Diaries 1930-39*, 76 [30 May 1931].

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid; H. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change 1914-1939*, (London, 1966), 243.

<sup>102</sup> New Party Manifesto, undated 1931, PARL, BBK/C/254.

- they are a national problem and should be nationally treated.'<sup>103</sup> This was almost the exact rhetoric spouted by Macmillan as the 1930s marched on. Finally resigning the Conservative whip in June 1936 on the grounds that that party was unable to produce the 'things for which many of our comrades died,' he had long taken the Mosleyite line that Baldwin and MacDonald had 'shirked the social and economic problems...they have applied no strong and forceful direction to our policy. They have elevated inactivity into a principle and feebleness into a virtue.'<sup>104</sup> Thus, Macmillan and Amery could both later describe Mosley's fall as 'a tragedy,' with the former even judging his own political timidity to be 'poor stuff of which I am now ashamed.'<sup>105</sup> At the time, Amery had also praised the Mosleyite 'fireworks,' and his ability to 'make the speech I should have liked to make.'<sup>106</sup> We should therefore take Mosley's later claim that 'within all political parties potential fascists are to be found - among men who are well known in party politics, and still more among the rank and file,' perhaps more seriously than one might imagine.<sup>107</sup>

The main source of the breach with Mosley was the fact that Macmillan and company were not prepared to join the economic to the political dots, whereas he was. As Marquand notes, adherents of Keynesian social democracy 'rejected the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century, but they never quite broke with the utilitarian conception of man and society which lay behind it.'<sup>108</sup> The private sphere was sacrosanct to most of the Phoenix Generation, whereas Mosley believed it possible to be encroached upon for the greater good. As the New Party manifesto outlined:

Organisation is necessary to the life of the community and involves discipline, but organisation should bring a higher standard of life and

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> *The Star*, 20 March 1936.

<sup>105</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 263, 166, Amery, *Unforgiving Years*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (eds), *The Leo Amery Diaries, Volume II: The Empire At Bay 1929-1945*, (London, 1980), 199 [8 September 1931].

<sup>107</sup> O. Mosley, *Greater Britain*, 152.

<sup>108</sup> D. Marquand, *The Unprincipled Society: New Demands and Old Politics*, (London, 1988), 19.



greater opportunity for individual enjoyment and development. In the last resort the right to live is preferable to the right to blether. Modern democracy may have to choose in some degree between these two rights.<sup>109</sup>

Evidently Mosley's contemporaries preferred, as he would see it, blether and indolence to the organised rigidity he was offering. Given the severe handicaps inherent in the Westminster system to deliver Marquand's 'developmental state,' and the collapse of the Keynesian consensus in the 1970s under external pressures, it is far from certain Mosley was wrong.<sup>110</sup> If nothing else, he at least articulated a problem which arguably even Keynes himself ignored: to what would Keynesian economics lead - contraction of political liberty or the "stop-go" Britain of the 1950s and 60s?

#### 4.7 After 1931

Though in November 1931 Nicolson had confidently predicted fascism not to be suited to English sensibilities - to be 'doomed to failure and ridicule' - as the slump showed only minor signs of improvement over the next eighteen months political figures ceased to be so blasé.<sup>111</sup> By late 1932 Lloyd George was 'not so sure it may not be possible.' "I do not know what our condition really is. On the surface all seems right enough. But what is happening at this moment underneath?"<sup>112</sup> In a sense then, Mosley was a little unlucky. A large body of men believed in the viability of a 'transition between a battered capitalism and the organized State,' saw that the old gang 'rule of fourteen years has...reduced this country, at home and abroad, to a low and dangerous condition,' yet resolutely pinned their hopes on some kind of *deus ex machina*.<sup>113</sup> This was the most vital potential "underneath" of which Lloyd George spoke: men of some influence, possessing a politico-moral importance (engendered by their war service), who constituted to the New Party

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<sup>109</sup> New Party Manifesto, 1931, BBK/C/254.

<sup>110</sup> Marquand, *Unprincipled Society*, 173.

<sup>111</sup> Nicolson (ed), *Nicolson Diaries 1930-39*, 97 [24 November 1931].

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 132 [21 October 1932].

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 98 [11 December 1931]; O. Mosley, *Greater Britain*, 147.

'the main response which we are getting,...which is very encouraging, com[ing] from the younger Conservative group [which] is distinctly fascist in character.'<sup>114</sup> Like the post-facto underplayed split between the Eden and Churchill views on anti-appeasement, the various anti-establishment factions were unwilling to cooperate. Before 1931 the young war generation members seemed held back, both by some residual notions of party loyalty and their own timidity. After then, Mosley had been deemed an unacceptable ideological bed-fellow, and Lloyd George's Council of Action which appeared in 1935 too much of a vehicle for the Liberal Party, even if its aims largely coincided with The Next Five Years Group of which Macmillan and four other veteran MPs were members.<sup>115</sup>

The counter argument in defending the Phoenix Generation against accusations of cowardice, aside from the portrayal of Mosley as some kind of isolated lunatic, is twofold. Firstly, as with foreign policy, the war generation MP seeks to blame the leadership. Baldwin, as we have seen, is deserving of some scorn. Yet the idea that a Chamberlain premiership would ride to the progressive rescue was clearly fanciful. No doubt, Neville had been a decent Minister of Health and Mayor of Birmingham, he was also his father's son. Yet he had proved a spendthrift Chancellor who, as we have seen, had taken a completely different lesson from the Great War to the veteran. One example here will suffice. In March 1934 a series of well-argued and moving articles appeared in *The Times* on conditions in Durham. With the aim 'of carrying the message from the north to the south' - a divide the Stockton MP Macmillan could appreciate - *The Times* told of 'desolation' and 'plight,' and of 'places without a future.'<sup>116</sup> A commission was subsequently sent to discover Scotland, Durham and South Wales: though how places like Blackburn (with an unemployment rate of 32%) and Birkenhead (38%) were left out was a little mysterious. Oliver Stanley, as Minister of Labour

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<sup>114</sup> Nicolson (ed), *Nicolson Diaries 1930-39*, 75 [11 May 1931].

<sup>115</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 425, 634-6. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Duff Cooper would later describe 'the four years that followed the General Election of 1931' as 'pleasant but unimportant ones in my life.' A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, (London, 1953), 179. Clement Attlee, a veteran in her majesty's opposition, filled more columns in Hansard than any other member in 1932. C.R. Attlee, *As It Happened*, (Surrey, 1954), 77.

<sup>116</sup> *Times*, 20 March 1934.

hampered by office from forwarding the radicalism seen in *Industry and the State*, was somewhat critical. Euan Wallace, in government as Civil Lord of the Admiralty and a member of said commission, was more forthright in urging the capitalist system to justify itself by investing its surplus in public schemes.<sup>117</sup> Macmillan, bound by no position and about to temporarily jettison the Conservative whip, was furious. Firstly, in language typical of his generation, he semi-sarcastically denounced the commission:

War is the not the only operation in which it is sometimes an advantage to have a visitation from general headquarters to the front line trenches. I am glad that there has been on this occasion a visit from Whitehall to the Passchendaele of Durham and South Wales.<sup>118</sup>

He then took square aim at Stanley, who though essentially on the fence, had failed to espouse the verve that had marked their previous years of collaboration. After denouncing the 2 million pounds of funding the government had proposed for such areas as 'in comparison with the problems before us...a mouse,' he let fly on his former co-author:

As my right hon. Friend knows well, the most skilful jockey needs the help of whip and spur, especially if he was to deal with a somewhat obstinate and lethargic mount, and I like to feel that I am perhaps of some service to him in that capacity even if he has to disown me and try to conceal, what he does not always conceal successfully, his obvious impatience with the policy of his present owner and trainer. However, he has got one great advantage. Instead of the crude and immature alliance he had then [with Macmillan], he has now the Members of a Cabinet as the inspiring source of his work. Fastidious eaters consider not only their fare but their company, and, if he is satisfied with his, I am

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<sup>117</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 22 November 1934, vol. 295, col. 267.

<sup>118</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 21 November 1934, vol. 295, cc.228-9.

quite content with mine.<sup>119</sup>

Comparing Cabinet to ‘a prison without bars,’ he concluded that ‘a great responsibility lies upon members of a Government who remain in that Government if they are dissatisfied with the scope of its policy.’<sup>120</sup> Yet in light of this, as with Boothby calling the other young men not to side with Mosley in 1930-1 cowards, Macmillan’s insistence that his return to the Conservative ranks was due to the belief that a Chamberlain premiership would pursue a much more robust policy is hard to fathom. Throughout this period, Chamberlain had bemoaned responses like his as ‘the continual nagging and carping by the young Tory intellectuals,’ and been tight with the treasury purse strings.<sup>121</sup> As Macmillan later wrote, ‘if [Chamberlain] had none of Baldwin’s lethargy, he had little of Baldwin’s imagination.’<sup>122</sup> Put simply, he made the wrong call – as, vis-à-vis foreign policy, so would Eden who had similarly envisaged a more dynamic form of leadership under Neville (he certainly received that).<sup>123</sup> To paraphrase Lyndon Johnson then, for the Tory leadership it was better to have a Macmillan on the inside pissing out, than on the outside pissing in, and they successfully manipulated him – something contemporary Tories younger than Macmillan suggested in the Commons.<sup>124</sup> Mosley and Macmillan essentially both accomplished nothing in terms of social policy during the 1930s. At least the former showed a degree of consistency in totally rejecting the status quo.

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<sup>119</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 13 December 1934, vol. 296, col. 641.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, col. 642.

<sup>121</sup> K. Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, (London, 1947), 233.

<sup>122</sup> Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, 520.

<sup>123</sup> See the interview with Sir Frank Roberts, 3 July 1996, CAC, DOHP 14.

<sup>124</sup> See Thomas Martin’s comments, Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3 December 1934, vol. 295, col. 1350. Headlam too had his say, col. 1350: ‘I was amused when I heard the Minister of Labour call to memory his salad days when he and the hon. Member for Stockton-on-Tees (Mr. Macmillan) were known as the most progressive element in the Conservative party. I am not sure now when, I suppose, I am approaching my dotage, that I am not beginning to appreciate that there is a good deal in what these two Members thought some years ago; and I am basing that view not only on what I have seen and heard in the North of England, but also on the passage in the May Report, which is very applicable to this matter. In that report it was stated: It is only now that the nation is beginning to realise the true character of our post-war problem.’

The second defence of the lack of war generation rebellion is that it was impossible for them to get what they wanted in the short term, and at least post 1945 Britain bore the hallmark of what they had fought for. This seems difficult to swallow on two levels. Firstly, only with the coming of war did Beveridge and others begin to win the argument: 'a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching' and so forth.<sup>125</sup> This could hardly have been banked upon. It also assumes that the conditions in interwar Britain were in any way tolerable. For all one does not want to subscribe to the old "locust years" theory wholesale, the situation certainly was bleak. The north was riddled with unemployment, with areas 'in a pit of permanent local worklessness.'<sup>126</sup> London, particularly its east and north, was full of 'Special Areas' - that contemporary euphemism for slums - which successive governments, as Baldwin actually admitted, had failed to defeat.<sup>127</sup> Mosley may have misdiagnosed the solution to the crisis, but he did appreciate its urgency. There was hardly time to wait for Hitler to ride to the rescue.

It also assumes that nothing could have been done. Modern British politics, it is true, does appear a little inert by continental comparison. Not for us the continual governmental changes seen in Italy, the never ending industrial militancy of France, or the various uprisings of eastern Europe. All seems stable enough. The notion that political outsiders have no power is a fantasy however. In a recent study, Lynne Olson has argued that the Churchillian and Edenite anti-appeasement MPs 'demonstrated how a small band of men, lacking much political power or influence, could change the course of history by standing up for what they believed in.'<sup>128</sup> Her arguments for such, as the next chapter will illustrate, are perhaps over simplistic. Nevertheless, the idea that we should look beyond the Cowling-esque preoccupation with the political big hitters is an important one. By the late 1930s there were over 200 ex-serviceman MPs. This, no doubt, was an eclectic group:

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<sup>125</sup> Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, 6.

<sup>126</sup> *Times*, 21 March 1934.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 10 June 1935.

<sup>128</sup> Olson, *Troublesome Young Men*, 364.

ranging from George Lloyd's opposition to Indian Home Rule to Edward Wood's Round Table approach, and from Churchill's dogmatic belief in laissez-faire to John Buchan's call for 'an honourable opportunism,' and Stanley's assertion that such questions were 'irrelevant.'<sup>129</sup> Yet they were united by a common experience, and even allowing for certain discrepancies of ideology, were of such number that some significant form of consensus was almost inevitable. Recent British history has provided examples of leaders surrounded by their potential enemies - Blair and Brown, Thatcher and Heseltine - the question always remains whether the challenger is prepared to play Brutus. 'Treason doth never prosper,' wrote John Harington. Why? 'For if it prosper, none dare call it treason.' Ultimately however much might like to think otherwise, we condemn Mosley because he lost, not on moral grounds.

#### 4.8 Avoiding Teleology

The problem thus, as chapter six will expand upon, is that we judge the interwar period by modern sensibilities. As Richard Law sagely put it, 'there is a permanent disposition in the mind of man to forget the past and discount the future, and to assume the present is the grand climacteric to which the whole of history has been tending.'<sup>130</sup> This is a grave danger. There is a pervasive Fukayamian veneration of democracy in the current world that simply did not exist in the interwar period, particularly in Great Britain. For all we see groups such as Harry Pollitt's Communist Party and Mosley's Fascists as isolated in mistrusting the democratic system, this was not so. To be sure, the political culture was not as rife with such contempt as Weimar Germany - the British democratic state had, after all, delivered victory in 1918. Equally however, there was nothing approaching "faith" in democracy: Mussolini was by no means absurd in comparing it to a deserted temple with no followers.<sup>131</sup> For a recent historian like Adrian Gregory has gone as far to suggest, that in the event of an Italian style nominal victory in

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<sup>129</sup> A. Roberts, *The Holy Fox: The Life of Lord Halifax*, (Oxford, 1997), 19-30; J. Buchan, 'Introduction,' in D. Crisp (ed), *The Rebirth of Conservatism*, (London, 1931), ix-xi, ix; O. Stanley, 'The Task of Conservatives,' in Crisp (ed), *Rebirth*, 197-203, 201.

<sup>130</sup> R. Law, *Return from Utopia*, (London, 1950), 31.

<sup>131</sup> Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 14.

1918, it was even likely that an opportunistic populist would have seized power in Britain à la *Il Duce*.<sup>132</sup>

Democracy was on the ropes, having failed its most deserving citizen, the ex-soldier. The hopes and promises espoused by the Phoenix Generation in 1918 - availability of jobs, clean housing, stable government - had been proven every bit as false as the similar words of Lloyd George. War generation politicians were clearly not myopic to the problem. Stanley demanded that 'democracy may be made the instrument of progress, and not only be the prelude of decline,' whilst Elliot believed that 'government, citizenship itself, all have to be recast, or restated in the idiom of our own time.' He continued, urging that 'the re-moulding that other lands have undertaken has been decreed for us also.'<sup>133</sup> Manifestly Baldwin and MacDonald were not the men to deliver the promised Jerusalem. Yet the acknowledged failure of the current political culture - gradualism and "safety first" - apparently did not augur a failure of the politics per se. If Headlam was prepared to acknowledge that his impoverished voters 'will only be human to vote against me' in 1931, he proved unwilling to take such dissent to its logical conclusion.<sup>134</sup>

The question was not free trade versus protection, world markets against imperial insulation, but whether one prioritised the reduction of unemployment or political liberty. Whitehall, as Garside points out, favoured the latter, Mosley the former.<sup>135</sup> Confidence and the lack of reserves to spend when the economy "inevitably" picked up were issues trotted out by the Treasury to justify inaction, but they were not the key issue at hand. As the Macmillan report noted, much to Hayek's chagrin, by 1931 parliament found 'itself increasingly engaged in legislation which has for its conscious aim the regulation of the day-to-day affairs of the community.' It 'now intervenes in matters formerly thought to be entirely

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<sup>132</sup> A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge, 2008), 248. A. Watson and P. Porter, 'Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War,' *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 146-164, 164 agrees on the centrality of victory.

<sup>133</sup> Stanley, 'The Task of Conservatives,' 203; W. Elliot, *The Endless Adventure: A Rectorial Address delivered at Aberdeen University on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1934*, (London, 1934), 38.

<sup>134</sup> Headlam to Baldwin, 25 March 1931, CUL, BALD 166/142.

<sup>135</sup> Garside, *British Unemployment*, 391.

outside its scope.<sup>136</sup> This worried a significant body of people beyond the LSE intelligentsia. Thus, despite unemployment having become even more of a 'moral' problem than before 1914, despite Keynes having essentially worked out a demand led alternative of public spending by 1929, the expansion of executive power which could have curbed the issue was rejected.<sup>137</sup> Mosley's point, essentially, came down to too many cooks spoiling the broth. In response Treasury memorandum dismissively noted, 'if...delays are to be obviated, not only the rights of Local Authorities and the whole machinery of local government will have to be overridden, but a very dramatic policy would be necessary in dealing with the rights of private individuals.'<sup>138</sup> One might disagree with Mosley, but his argument was certainly potent, and the questions perennial. Even if one accepts Daniel Ritschel's contention that planning could mean different things to different people, the consensus that did form – for non-Mosleyite groups like Political and Economic Planning illustrate the broad nature of such feeling – was at least akin to Baldwin's imprecise appeal to the political centre.<sup>139</sup>

The muddling that resulted eventually produced a Keynesian state, but one that emerged into the world somewhat premature. Mosley had lost in his gamble to inaugurate a form of government controlling economic and political spheres, whilst Macmillan had gained some ground on the former, but proved unable to bring either himself or many others to believe in the latter until an improving economy removed the focus on such issues. After 1932 Mosley moved further and further into the arms of extremists. Ignoring Habeas Corpus or not, his incarceration in the summer of 1940 was understandable in the atmosphere of the time. He had goaded Jews, incited violence and consorted with those wishing both Hitler and Hitlerism would be seen in the British Isles. Nevertheless, if one traces the story back to 1930-31, some balance may be reached – his tale, as Matthew Worley recently

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<sup>136</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 12.

<sup>137</sup> Garside, *British Unemployment*, 380, 326.

<sup>138</sup> See Unemployment Policy Committee Report, 1 May 1930, TNA, CAB/24/211.

<sup>139</sup> D. Ritschel, A Corporatist Economy in Britain? Capitalist Planning for Industrial Self-Government in the 1930s, *English Historical Review*, 106 (1991), 41-65.



noted, equally indicative of the problems of translating ideas into action.<sup>140</sup> What followed after 1945, our sixth chapter will outline. In terms of the interwar years it was representative of the confusion that, as we will see, would also mark British diplomacy.

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<sup>140</sup> M. Worley, 'What Was the New Party? Sir Oswald Mosley and Associated Responses to the 'Crisis,' 1931-1932,' *History*, 92 (2007), 39-63.

## 5: Guilty Young Men? Foreign and Imperial Policy from the Armistice to the ousting of Chamberlain

*It was not such folly as it may now appear, to have believed at that period (1926-29) that the League of Nations might succeed in the purpose for which it was created. The First World War had profoundly shocked the conscience of mankind...There existed in 1919 a sentiment, which it would hardly be an exaggeration to call universal, that such a thing must never be allowed to happen again.*

- Alfred Duff Cooper, who would break with Chamberlain over Munich, writing in 1953.<sup>1</sup>

*One of the most striking features of this Debate is the rather disquieting fact that there obviously exists a profound division, not only of opinion, but of feeling, between men who feel the same politically.*

- Edward Grigg, during the parliamentary debate on the Munich Agreement.<sup>2</sup>

### **5.1 The twists of the historiography**

Scarcely is there a dirtier word in modern politics than “appeasement.”<sup>3</sup> The image of Neville Chamberlain waving his piece of paper at Heston has become indicative of surrender, cowardice and, even betrayal. Even with subsequent adventurous military action by western powers in Suez, Vietnam and Iraq meeting with varying degrees of failure, liberal democratic opinion still views the “wait and see” nature of the British path to war in 1939 as ignoble. Thus we have our interwar diplomacy divided into two camps in the popular mind: *Guilty Men* of the Chamberlain, Edward Wood (as Lord Halifax) and Stanley Baldwin type, and those who recognise *The Gathering Storm* of Hitler’s Germany like Churchill and Eden.<sup>4</sup> The former, as

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<sup>1</sup> A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, (London, 1953), 159.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Fifth Series, 6 October 1938, vol.339, col. 534.

<sup>3</sup> Synthesised in R. Carr, ‘Veterans of the First World War and Conservative Anti-Appeasement,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, (forthcoming)

<sup>4</sup> “Cato,” *Guilty Men*, (London, 1940); W.S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, (London, 1952).

Kershaw unwittingly points out was generally an old aristocrat at the heart of the establishment.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, as Olson gleefully notes, ‘most of the MPs who opposed appeasement in the 1930s, including Churchill, had fought in the war. (The exceptions, like Ronald Cartland, Bob Boothby, and Dick Law, had been too young).’ Whereas ‘most of the government ministers responsible for appeasement had never been in the trenches,’ the anti-Chamberlainite was generally a swashbuckling, handsome, and brave renegade, for which Eden and Duff Cooper provided very public examples.<sup>6</sup>

This however is the historiography of appeasement told at its simplest. In fact, its twists and turns could well take up a PhD thesis on their own – and with Andrew Stedman’s recent offering, they essentially have.<sup>7</sup> *Guilty Men* of course kicked it off, and the Chamberlain bashing continued virtually unabated through the 1940s and 1950s with John Wheeler Bennett and Lewis Namier adding to what “Cato” had started.<sup>8</sup> By the 1960s however, things began to change. The opening up of papers – both governmental and personal – together with an increasing abhorrence to war symbolized by the CND and Alan Clark’s *Lions Led by Donkeys* gave rise to the question, put most explicitly by Donald Cameron Watt, of whether a revisionist school had emerged on the subject.<sup>9</sup> Even Martin Gilbert, who had previously savaged *The Appeasers*, began to see the course as ‘never a coward’s creed.’<sup>10</sup> For differing reasons, academics began to converge on the idea that, sensibly enough, whilst Chamberlain had ‘hoped for the best’ he also ‘expected the

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<sup>5</sup> I.K. Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry and Britain’s Road to War*, (London, 2004), 53-64.

<sup>6</sup> L. Olson, *Troublesome Young Men: The Rebels Who Brought Churchill to Power in 1940 and Helped to Save Britain*, (New York, 2007), 39.

<sup>7</sup> A.D. Stedman, ‘Then what could Chamberlain do, other than what Chamberlain did?’ *A synthesis and analysis of the alternatives to Chamberlain’s policy of appeasing Germany, 1936-39*, Kingston University PhD Thesis, 2007, passim.

<sup>8</sup> J. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy* (London, 1948), and L. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude 1938-1939*, (London, 1948)

<sup>9</sup> D.C. Watt, ‘Appeasement: The rise of a Revisionist School?’ *Political Quarterly*, 36 (1965), 191-219.

<sup>10</sup> M. Gilbert and R. Gott (eds), *The Appeasers*, (London, 1963) and M. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement*, (London, 1966)

worse.<sup>11</sup> What else, begged Paul Kennedy in 1983, could a small nation losing its place in world affairs, and with little to gain from any war, do but appease?<sup>12</sup> Thus by 1989, John Charmley – building upon his hero Maurice Cowling – could speak of *Chamberlain's Lost Peace*: whose architects 'reputation stands better now than it has ever done.'<sup>13</sup>

Charmley would be rather swimming against the tide however. By the late 1980s, academics were beginning to return to the *Guilty Men* thesis. R.A.C. Parker's *Chamberlain and Appeasement* portrayed a Prime Minister by no means the victim of circumstance who consciously chose conciliation, and never wavered even after Hitler's absorption of the rump Czech state had rendered any *realpolitik* explanation predicated on German self-determination evidently fallacious.<sup>14</sup> These post-revisionists also alleged that, if Chamberlain was perhaps not the aloof and arrogant ignorer of official advice the critics of the 1940s and 1950s had suggested, he put such a negative spin on the intelligence coming out of Germany that he talked both his cabinet and people into a policy they might not otherwise have swallowed. In other words, he deceived others willingly in order to appease. In such a tale, as Olson has noted, it is feasible – even necessary – to return to old notion's of a myopic PM and visionary Churchillian outsiders.<sup>15</sup>

This most recent picture is however a little hard to digest. Churchill, after all, claimed to be speaking for the best of England: 'the grand old British race that had done so much for men, and had yet some more to give.'<sup>16</sup> Such deeply ingrained moral convictions, such a chivalrous heritage, could surely never stand for Chamberlain's peace with *dishonour*. Yet even if we ignore the pragmatic rather than moral nature of previous British diplomacy (Salisbury's "Splendid Isolation"

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<sup>11</sup> D. Dilks, "'We Must Hope for the Best and Prepare for the Worst': The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-39,' *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 73 (1987) cited in R.C. Self (ed), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters, Volume 4: The Downing Street Years*, (Aldershot, 2005), 6.

<sup>12</sup> P. Kennedy, *Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945*, (London, 1983), 38.

<sup>13</sup> J. Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, (Chicago, 1989), 212.

<sup>14</sup> R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, (London, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Olson, *Troublesome Young Men*, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 217.

and Beaconsfieldism spring to mind), it is clear Churchill's line makes no sense.<sup>17</sup> Though by 1939 Duff Cooper could conclude that '[Chamberlain's] is an unbroken record of failure in foreign policy,' prior to Hitler's march into Prague the exact opposite was true in the public mind.<sup>18</sup> The Britain to which Churchill appealed was, not for the first time, unrepresentative of the contemporary reality.

As even a critic noted, 'to say that all the blame must rest on the shoulders of Neville Chamberlain or of Stanley Baldwin is to overlook the obvious... Given the conditions of democratic government, a free press, public elections and a cabinet responsible to Parliament and thus to the people, given rule by the majority, it is unreasonable to blame the entire situation on one man or group.'<sup>19</sup> This is true in two regards. Firstly, as this chapter will show, parliamentary attitudes towards Hitler's Germany were indecisive at best. Men - even those, like Eden, later eulogised as the 'one strong figure standing up against...surrender...and feeble impulses' - could trade positions at the drop of a hat, or movement of a Wehrmacht division.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, the prevailing mentality in Britain between the two wars was that 3 September 1939 should never have happened, that is to say for Britain to engage in another war, per se, was a horror beyond horrors. This point can scarcely be made more emphatically. Neville Chamberlain was not somehow hijacking public opinion for his own cowardly ends. Though he clearly enjoyed lapping up the plaudits as the man of peace, as for a while did Mussolini, he was also merely reflecting his electorate. Much has been written about Chamberlain manipulating the press, through his minion Joseph Ball or the pliability of Geoffrey Dawson's editorship of *The Times*, but the crowds that greeted his return from Munich could not be fabricated.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J. Charmley, 'Conservative Tradition in Foreign Policy,' *Conservative History Journal*, 1 (2003), 6-7.

<sup>18</sup> 'Chamberlain: A Candid Portrait,' by Duff Cooper, n.d. 1939, CAC, MRGN 1/5.

<sup>19</sup> J.F. Kennedy, *Why England Slept*, (London, 1962), 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 217.

<sup>21</sup> R.B. Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and Truth,' *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), 131-142; Olson, *Troublesome Young Men*, 143; More generally see J. Margach, *Abuse of Power: The War Between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan*, (New York, 1978),

The Phoenix Generation had played their part in this the moment they opened their political mouths. Concurrent to the unsubtle brandishing of their military records come election time was a vocal determination that 1918 should indeed “end all wars.” As one ex-serviceman candidate put it: ‘the one great and universal heirloom of all times and generations should be the memory of the past four and a half years, so that they may never be repeated. For only if they never are repeated will they not have been in vain.’<sup>22</sup> ‘War,’ Mosley concurred, ‘must never happen again.’<sup>23</sup> Such ‘pervasive representation of the war dead as martyrs for peace,’ as Alex King notes, was undoubtedly a powerful determinant of the widespread support for appeasement.<sup>24</sup> A culture that could generate the Cenotaph, a raft of anti-war literature too numerous to list, and even - in admittedly rare and bizarre circles - sustain stories that somehow Kitchener had survived, laying in wait like King Arthur to someday return as the nation’s saviour, was not one exactly geared for war.<sup>25</sup> This chapter will illustrate the effect of throwing veteran politicians into just such a heady atmosphere, charting their outlook on foreign affairs from victory in the first war to the onset of the second.

Foreign affairs must, of course, include the Empire. For years British historians have entrenched themselves into an arguably artificial divide between diplomatic and imperial history. Accounts of this period almost treat Colonial and Dominion opinion as something British leaders could waft away like some annoying insect: A.J.P. Taylor, for example, chose to not even mention Canada, Australia, South Africa (save two references to Smuts’s opinion of the peace treaties) or New Zealand throughout his *Origins of the Second World War*.<sup>26</sup> The independence movements in Ireland, India and Egypt naturally cannot be left out of any story of Britain between the wars, but the effect has often been to minimise

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passim. See Fremantle’s letter to Osborn, 3 October 1938, HALS, FJO/B66 – ‘the enormous majority of this and other countries shuddered’ at the prospect of war.

<sup>22</sup> Colin Coote in *Isle of Ely and Wisbech Advertiser*, 27 November 1918.

<sup>23</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, (London, 1968), 71.

<sup>24</sup> A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, (Oxford, 1998), 212.

<sup>25</sup> S. Goebel, ‘Remembered and Remobilized: The “Sleeping Dead” in Interwar Germany and Britain,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39 (2004), 487-501, 498.

<sup>26</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Origins of the Second World War*, (London, 1991), passim.

the relation between imperial and foreign policy. One can study both Michael Collins and Benito Mussolini, but never shall the two meet in any form of narrative. The unhelpfulness of this technique can be surmised in two words: Winston Churchill. For the divisive atmosphere in which he met the appeasement years was, as is well documented in the memoirs of contemporaries, a path allegedly augured by his belligerent views on India.<sup>27</sup> Other than the general fear of war, if one wants to explain why men such as Churchill and Amery were initially seen as wrong about Hitler, and Halifax and Baldwin right, it is as well to study their previous approaches to Mahatma Gandhi, as contemporary estimates of German military strength. The view that Churchill's opinions on India begat a chasm amongst radical conservatives that even the threat of Hitler could not overcome should not be swallowed wholesale however, as we will see.

At the same time, British decolonisation has a historiography which perhaps requires a little revision.<sup>28</sup> Economics, of course, has been an ever present analytical tool. 1930s John Strachey - before his reinvention as post-war Labour Minister - took the Leninist position that colonial exploitation would augur mass protest against the British.<sup>29</sup> From the opposite perspective, Niall Ferguson has pointed to an 'empire for sale' after the financially draining effects of the second world war.<sup>30</sup> As these two positions illustrate, the argument has essentially come down to whether decolonisation occurred as a result of the weakness of the ruling power - *Britannia Overruled* - or was forced, as Mansergh asserted, by the bravery and cunning of the nationalist uprising.<sup>31</sup> Gibbon and Kennedy, it is true, offer a wider debate about the nature of empire - inevitable 'decline and fall' versus peaks and troughs - but, in British terms, academics have been stuck on the question of

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<sup>27</sup> Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 171.

<sup>28</sup> See J. Darwin, 'Decolonisation and the End of Empire,' in R.W. Winks (ed), *Oxford History of the British Empire, V: Historiography*, (Oxford, 2001), 541-557.

<sup>29</sup> J. Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power*, (London, 1932), passim.

<sup>30</sup> N. Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, (London, 2003), 294.

<sup>31</sup> D. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 2000); N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, (London, 1969).

“did they jump or were they pushed?”<sup>32</sup> There is nothing necessarily wrong with this. Gandhi, Nehru, Collins and de Valera were all compelling figures whose tactics - such as the latter two manipulating Irish-American opinion - were astute.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, war had clearly left its mark upon a ravaged Britain, whose imperial overstretch was now at breaking point.

As with appeasement however, the historiography leaves something to be desired. To be blunt, it is somewhat unclear what actually happens in imperial terms between the wars. Attitudes towards the Dominions, Egypt and India, to Darwin, serve as indicators of a ‘powerful trend towards self government in British policy’ in this period.<sup>34</sup> Yet, at the same time, ‘for all the piety of its new principles, postwar imperial policy seemed strangely reluctant to liberate Britain’s dependencies or hold out firm promises of independence.’<sup>35</sup> British leaders, Darwin continues, retained confidence in their ability to rule, and any antagonisms between ruler and the ruled were seen as both temporary and curable: ‘if the lion had ceased to roar, it was not ready to lie down with the lambs.’<sup>36</sup> Such confusion presumably arises from the general preoccupation with the road to 1939: all that is necessary to understand the British position in the world between the wars is their relationship with Hitler. If the historian chooses to discuss the Empire, it is generally either in terms of which chunk of Africa Britain could dangle in front of Germany and Italy, or the pyrrhic nature of the decision to fight on in 1940.<sup>37</sup> Thus we content ourselves with the simplistic story of British imperial strength slowly being eroded by external factors, the second war exacerbating the trend, before the “Winds of Change” were at last acknowledged in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (London, 1788); P.M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (New York, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> T.P. Coogan, *Michael Collins*, (London, 1990), 130-140; R. Kee, *The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism*, (London, 2000), 684.

<sup>34</sup> J. Darwin, Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy between the Wars, *Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), 657-679, 657.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 679.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> Some do both. Ferguson, *Empire*, 362-3.

<sup>38</sup> A. Marr, *A History of Modern Britain*, (London, 2007), 188-9.



Just as the third chapter did not accept the widely held image of an inert Stanley Baldwin as definitive, this one will not sit upon old laurels. Imperial decline cannot be divorced from general diplomacy. Both are symptomatic of a wider adjustment in the way Britain perceived herself in the post 1918 world. Though this is not a study of individual policy makers (to be sure Lloyd, Halifax, Churchill and so on will naturally crop up), it is an analysis of collective thought, and in such terms will Britain abroad be viewed. We will consider the development of attitudes amongst the Phoenix Generation to Germany and the colonies as one story. How former soldiers viewed the decline of an empire they had risked their lives to protect, how they reacted to British military excesses in the colonies, and how they viewed the prospect of another war are complex issues, and ones not best served by simply pointing to set pieces such as the resignation of Duff Cooper and Amery yelling 'in the name of God, go!' Opinions changed gradually and sometimes ambiguously, and thus need to be sketched over the (relatively) *longue durée*. Three pillars of policy - foreign, imperial and League of Nations intertwined to a large degree. It is one long narrative which needs to be teased out, and will be treated as such. First then, to the victorious days of 1918.

## 5.2 Early Attitudes to Germany

When Major Jack Cohen made his way to the stage to address the Liverpoolian electorate in December 1918, the respectful audience stood in unison. He however did not, his legs having been blown off in combat. To hammer home his patriotism - the Conservative electoral machine evidently not one for poignant subtlety at this time - patriotic songs enlivened the Sun Hall before the speech making began, which was followed by a fife and drum band marching as a preliminary to the Major himself.<sup>39</sup> Having been helped onto the stage, Cohen let fly with an anti-

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<sup>39</sup> Jack Cohen's war record was an extreme case. The *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 14 December 1918 reported the following: 'Contrasting the war records of Major Cohen and Captain Joseph, [one non-veteran supporter Sir Archibald Salvidge] claimed he was as much entitled as Captain Joseph to walk about the streets in jack boots and spurs.' D.F. Pennefather - "I say that even if Major Cohen never opened his lips in the House of Commons the mere fact of his being there, coming in and going out every day, would be far more eloquent than a thousand speeches."

German tirade that must have constituted catharsis for both himself, and many in the audience who had directly or indirectly experienced something similar to his fate. 'With the Kaiser he bracketed the whole German nation,' reported the *Liverpool Post and Mercury*. Germans were to be excluded from Britain, restrictions were to be placed to prevent her from waging war again, the Kaiser himself was to be put on trial and 'there should be no Peace Conference, but merely an acceptance of the Allied terms.'<sup>40</sup> Such views were, perhaps unsurprisingly, by no means unique amongst victorious candidates. Richard Barnett in St Pancras demanded the Kaiser be 'brought to punishment.'<sup>41</sup> 'We must make them pay to the last farthing,' argued Christopher Lowther, 'even if they were beggared for a hundred years.'<sup>42</sup> The Norfolk public were similarly reminded by Michael Falcon to 'look at the conditions they imposed on Romania. Do you mean to say that they would not have done the same to us?'<sup>43</sup> Somewhere in Pasewalk Military Hospital, Adolf Hitler was probably seething.

The conditions of 1918 were however a little artificial – as John Ramsden recently noted.<sup>44</sup> It was, after all, hardly the time to voice pro-German sentiment. Yet the notion, which would resurface in the 1930s, of appealing to Germany's better side was by no means novel. For all the twentieth century has been defined on such terms, the concept of Britain, with France by her side, going to war against Germany took a little getting used to. When, at the start of the war, *The Times* brought up Haldane's pre-1914 sympathies toward the Germans, Lord Milner

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<sup>40</sup> *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 14 December 1918.

<sup>41</sup> *St Pancras Guardian*, 6 December 1918.

<sup>42</sup> *Cumberland Times*, 7 December 1918.

<sup>43</sup> *Norfolk News*, 7 December 1918.

<sup>44</sup> J. Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: Britain and the Germans Since 1890*, (London, 2006), passim argues that, throughout the adversarial history of the Anglo-German relationship in said period, there has often been a countervailing sense that a meeting of minds was possible. When, in 1965, the Queen made the first state visit to Germany since the time of the Kaiser, a German journalist wrote: 'No relations between peoples have been more deeply disturbed ... and this precisely because there was so much sympathy, so much wooing, willingness to understand, even admiration involved on both sides. The pain of disappointment corresponded to the degree of previously nurtured expectations.' Football only became an issue since England's post 1966 malaise, and Beckenbauer's ruthlessly effective leadership over the next two and half decades (as World Cup winning Captain and then Manager).

fumed that 'if it is necessary for good and effective patriotism to hate the nation to which your country happens to be opposed, I am afraid I don't possess that virtue.'<sup>45</sup> Months later, in a similar vein, Amery replied that 'all this harping on Prussian militarism as something that must be rooted out, as in itself criminal and opposed to the interests of an imaginary virtuous and pacific entity called Europe, in which we are included, is wholly mischievous.'<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Victor Cazalet was not alone amongst his cohort in being impressed at the arguments of Norman Angell. It was difficult, he concluded, to summon up the supposedly necessary reservoirs of patriotism: particularly against a nation which had produced such talented artists and musicians.<sup>47</sup> Rhetoric espoused in the aftermath of triumph should not blind us to the longer term, relatively benign perceptions of Germany. The *sonderweg* of German history, the particular *Course* of which A.J.P. Taylor wrote, can only - if indeed at all - be sustained in retrospect. Neither Chamberlain from one perspective nor the anti-appeasers from another operated in the shadow of Auschwitz and Treblinka.<sup>48</sup> After these horrors, it must also be said, (West) Germany was very brought back into the European fold and permitted - for the Allies still had some say - to experience its "economic miracle" of the 1950s. Anti-Germanism, so vividly expressed in 1918, was in actual fact a rather transient phenomenon.<sup>49</sup>

### 5.3 Internationalism

'The Conservative is wrong,' noted a young Edward Wood, who believed that 'in each of the cardinal instances that presents themselves to mind - Ireland, India, Egypt, the general treatment of domestic questions - the source of the trouble lies solely or even mainly in excessive "liberalism", that a full blooded Conservative

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<sup>45</sup> J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (eds), *The Leo Amery Diaries, Volume I: 1896-1929*, (London, 1980), 109 [4 August 1914].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 116 [26 May 1915].

<sup>47</sup> R. Rhodes James, *Victor Cazalet*, (London, 1976), 12.

<sup>48</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany Since 1815*, (Oxford, 1945)

<sup>49</sup> C.P. Blacker, *Have You Forgotten Yet?*, (London, 2000), 8. The school-time contemporary of many future Tory MPs, C.P. Blacker, 'could not picture a war against a civilised and previously friendly nation, least of all against the Germans whom I had always liked.'

would be any more successful in prescribing remedies.’<sup>50</sup> We have hitherto seen the prevalence of a leftist viewpoint vis-à-vis domestic policy, and it certainly was sometimes little different concerning diplomatic affairs. ‘Many of us who fought in the Great War,’ wrote an Eden months away from becoming Foreign Secretary, ‘must then have felt that if ever we survived we must devote our energies to establishing in international affairs some rule of law and justice, without which peace can never be assured.’<sup>51</sup> Here he was but reflecting the long held position of his contemporaries, that the League of Nations was the path to solving the world’s ills. For all the retrospective condemnation, the League provided a constant hope of salvation for the Phoenix Generation. The 1938 By-Election in Ipswich is an interesting case in point. Henry Willink’s Election Pamphlet at once linked the supposedly special insight of the ex-serviceman with the pro-League position:

Since the General Election of 1935, the international situation has been anxious and critical. We have in Mr Eden a Foreign Secretary who knows, as I do, at first hand what war means, and who is a whole-hearted supporter of the League of Nations. I support without qualification his declaration of foreign policy:-

“We will embark upon no action which would be contrary to the text or the spirit of the Covenant... While we recognise that the League is at present seriously handicapped by incomplete membership, we believe it still provides the best means for obtaining that [peaceful] result.”<sup>52</sup>

Eden, of course, was soon to resign. Yet the ideas that informed his time as Foreign Secretary were longstanding.

From the 1918 declaration of Cyril Entwistle - campaigning in Hull - that

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Thoughts of Some of the present Discontents of the Conservative Party,’ Summer 1922, CAC, HLFX/2.

<sup>51</sup> *Outlook*, October 1935.

<sup>52</sup> Election Pamphlet from the 1938 Ipswich By-Election, February 1938, CAC, WILL III Box 1 File 3.

'nothing should be allowed to impede the League of Nations,' veterans fully associated themselves with the cause.<sup>53</sup> Alfred Duff Cooper was a particularly strong advocate, progressing from a position of 'sceptical benevolence' to a belief that 'either the League of Nations must triumph or there must be another war.'<sup>54</sup> Between January 1928 and April 1929 alone he spoke at 19 meetings of the League of Nations Union.<sup>55</sup> This same organisation, let it be noted, could also count upon the donations of Victor Cazalet, and contained John Loder within their executive committee.<sup>56</sup> At one such event, revealed in the lengthy correspondence between him and Gilbert Murray (then Chairman of the Executive Committee of the League of Nations Union) Duff's 'splendid contribution' contributed to an 'astonishingly successful' gathering: 'six hundred new members were roped in there and then.'<sup>57</sup> Whilst placing the success of this meeting solely on Duff's shoulders would presumably be an exaggeration, his speeches certainly bear the hallmarks of a fervent belief combined with reasoned argument which the observer could find attractive. To the question, 'do you really believe in the League?' Duff

would retort, "Do you believe in the fire brigade? I disapprove of houses on fire and I know of no organisation for putting them out other than the fire brigade. It may be badly managed, it may be inefficient, but none the less if I could help it I would certainly do so. I also disapprove of war. I know of no mechanism that exists for preventing it other than the League of Nations. The League may fail...But so long as there is the faintest chance of its succeeding I believe that we should give it all the help we can."<sup>58</sup>

Duff, by his advocacy of the League, represented to world a certain type of Tory.

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<sup>53</sup> *Hull Daily News*, 28 November 1918.

<sup>54</sup> A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, (London, 1953), 157.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>56</sup> See Murray to Cazalet and Murray to Loder, 27 and 14 June 1936, BOD, GBM c.225.

<sup>57</sup> Murray to Duff Cooper, 7 February 1928, CAC, DUFC 2/1.

<sup>58</sup> Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 157-8.

The Attorney General Lord Hailsham, would write to him to request that he speak at, rather than chair, a Marylebone meeting of the Union as 'it has the great advantage of giving...my people a bit of a change and letting them hear from one of the younger Conservative Members the true Conservative doctrine.'<sup>59</sup> From the Liberal perspective, Murray also deigned to put Duff on last at a meeting 'so that you will have more freedom in making it clear that good Conservatives can be good Leaguers and good members of the L.N.U.'<sup>60</sup> To some Tories this was oxymoronic. Even Austen Chamberlain - lauded with the Nobel Prize for Locarno but seven years earlier - scorned 'oh! These peace lovers. They are far worse than the men of war.'<sup>61</sup> To be sure, such ardent belief in the League could sometimes be *sui generis* to the war generation. Men like Lord Birkenhead, as Duff informed Murray, could hardly be relied upon to sing the League's praises.<sup>62</sup>

As Bonar Law denounced Britain acting alone as 'the policeman of the world' and Ataturk successfully challenged the Versailles system by force of arms in the early 1920s, so the Phoenix Generation responded.<sup>63</sup> Collective security would certainly become a vocal concern to such men in the 1930s, yet it should be remembered that for the previous decade they had been known to voice opinions diametrically opposed to such belligerence. Auckland Geddes, speaking in 1920 upon his appointment as Ambassador to Washington, noted that '[England] has changed enormously during the war. Her people, the English people, as I know them, are intensely anti-militarist; they are seeking peace, they are liberal, democratic, they wish prosperity restored to Europe.'<sup>64</sup> This, then, was hardly the time for unnecessary foreign adventure. Writing decades later, after widespread denouncement of appeasement, Lloyd-Greame's account of the autumn of 1922 reflects such a spirit:

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<sup>59</sup> Hailsham to Duff Cooper, 16 October 1927, DUFC 2/1.

<sup>60</sup> Murray to Duff Cooper, 16 September 1927, DUFC 2/1.

<sup>61</sup> Chamberlain to his sister Hilda, 15 May 1932, UBSC, AC 5/1/582.

<sup>62</sup> Duff Cooper to Murray, September 1927, GBM c.202.

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 7 October 1922.

<sup>64</sup> Speech at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, 25 May 1920, CAC, GEDD 8/1.

What finally precipitated Lloyd George's downfall was his impetuous account of the Greeks in the post-war clash between Greece and Turkey, known as the Chanak crisis... The Greek army had been overwhelmed in Asia Minor and massacred in Smyrna and the victorious Turkish army [had] advanced to the Dardanelles. Lloyd-George's encouragement of the Greeks in their campaign in Asia Minor was as unpopular as it was disastrous.<sup>65</sup>

Chamberlain and Halifax did not thus invent the notion of diplomatic conciliation. Taylor's comment that Munich 'was a triumph for British policy,...a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life;...a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles,' was not the mischief making it appeared to be.<sup>66</sup> Men from all spectrums had preached the necessity of European unity and reconciliation.<sup>67</sup> The reactions to the Genoa Conference - from two figures later to denounce appeasement deserve repetition: 'had Genoa succeeded, there might perhaps have been no...Second World War,' 'the conference crashed, and with it all the hopes of a generation.'<sup>68</sup> Whilst such retrospective views are couched in the assumption that the conference would have nipped Hitler in the bud, they also reflect the notion that a solution to the German problem was both workable and desirable. The question of Versailles's moral validity is essentially irrelevant, what mattered was that there was a clear German grievance, and one, given the attitudes of Gustav Stresemann, Franz von Papen and essentially most German statesmen, which was not limited to the Nazis. Dealing with it without the use of force was not the outrageous idea it would later come to be seen as, as evidenced by reactions to Genoa and Locarno. 'Blessed are the

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<sup>65</sup> Unpublished Book draft of 'Sixty years of power: some memories of the men who wielded it,' Undated, CAC, SWIN 1/11/4.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, *Origins*, 235.

<sup>67</sup> To Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, to accept the validity of Versailles meant to 'endorse a series of territorial, racial and religious injustices in Central Europe.' 'The Next Move' Essay, SHL, ICS 84/C/12/14.

<sup>68</sup> H. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change 1914-1939*, (London, 1967), 125; R. Boothby, *The New Economy*, (London, 1943), 13.

Peacemakers, they shall be labelled the children of God' was hardly Chamberlain's sole preserve.<sup>69</sup>

#### 5.4 A Case Study of Imperialism: Ireland

Concurrent to a rather confused attitude regarding the Germans and the application of force was a growing division over the nation's imperial position. Dean Acheson famously espoused in 1962 that 'Britain has lost an empire, and yet to find a role.' Yet the very losing of the Empire was itself accompanied by a pervading national confusion. In some sense 1919 constituted a global assertion of the French Revolutionary concepts of '*liberté, égalité, et fraternité*.' The Wilsonian world, with the notable exception of Germany, was predicated on national self-determination. The difficulty for the British was explaining how this might not always apply to 400 million Indians or the Irish Republican Army. Some of course, like Churchill, had no such preconceptions: Gandhi was but a 'seditious fakir of a type well known in the east,' and attitudes towards Britain's closest colony often did not, as Bridgeman noted, progress beyond 'the old narrow, bigoted hatred of Roman Catholics and refusal to believe that any good can come out of Southern Ireland.'<sup>70</sup> The Indian Defence Committee - whose first meeting was attended by 64 MPs - undoubtedly represented a significant body of Conservative Party thought. As, one such veteran supporter, Henry Page Croft noted in bellicose language:

Those of us who believe that British rule in India is vital for the welfare of Indians and the safeguarding of British interests may be driven... to show that we place the safety of India and the preservation of the Empire before any considerations. We are reinforced in the belief that we represent ninety-five per cent of the Conservative Party in the country.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Matthew 5:9.

<sup>70</sup> P. Williamson (ed), *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics: The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904-1935*, (London, 1988), 154 [17 December 1921].

<sup>71</sup> H. Page Croft, *My Life of Strife*, (London, 1972), 232.



Such viewpoints were not merely the preserve of stuffy old men. George Lloyd had fought in the war and returned to pen the radical - within Conservative thought - *Great Opportunity* with that upholder of precisely the opposite view on India, Edward Wood. To men such as Lloyd, the great sacrifices of British manhood had not been given merely to toss away the jewel in the imperial crown within a decade. A New Party pamphlet from the 1931 General Election espoused this view perfectly:

Even now, from a hundred platforms adorned with Union Jacks Tory orators are mouthing with pompous insolence the platitudes of Empire. The British Empire means nothing to these well-fed mongers of the stocks and shares of all the markets of the world. It was not built by such as they, but by the sweat and blood and tears of millions of unknown men and women, who have worked and died under every sun, and sailed and fought over all the seas.<sup>72</sup>

To Conservatives of the Churchill and Lloyd type, the war had been about the preservation of the Empire, not its dissolution. To do so was almost to sully the heroism of the dead.

Whilst the Die Hards were not isolated mavericks however, they did go against the evolving trend in Conservative thought *towards* slow decolonisation. One must be clear, there were very few - if any - on the political right who believed the Empire was *per se* a bad thing: Lloyd was by no means fanciful in believing he could carry the Conservative rank and file with him on the subject (witness the ambivalent reactions to his grandstanding at the October 1932 Party Conference).<sup>73</sup> Yet, due to the violent nature of British rule, the Empire was clearly losing something of its *raison d'être*. Though maintained by *force majeure*, the imperial role was justified on a more ephemeral notion of a certain moral benevolence. The natives needed the British, and thus they stayed. Holes began to

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<sup>72</sup> The New Party and the Old Toryism Pamphlet, by W.E.D. Allen, 1931, UBSC, OMN B/7/1.

<sup>73</sup> J. Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire*, (London, 1987), 182-3.

appear in this façade almost immediately after the war. Amritsar proved a shock to British sensibilities, yet it was Ireland where the idea of empire truly began to be questioned: perhaps a little surprisingly since, their white skin side, they were often deemed innately less useful subjects than the Indians and Egyptians whose war service met with praise amongst men normally prejudiced against them on racial grounds. Ireland is indeed a significant example, and it is worth examining at some length.

With the passage of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1914, its subsequent suspension due to the war, and the Easter Rising of 1916, Ireland was always likely to become a contentious issue for politicians at the conflict's conclusion. The Coalition manifesto in 1918 treated the issue in decidedly ambiguous terms. Whilst pledging to deliver 'self government,' the secession of Ireland from the British Empire and the forced inclusion of Ulster into a Dublin parliament were declared to be 'two paths which are closed.'<sup>74</sup> According to the Coalition's leaders, 'the main body of Irish opinion' was also 'seldom...less disposed to compromise than it is at the present moment.'<sup>75</sup> With a few exceptions, the Phoenix Generation placed less emphasis on Ireland in getting elected in 1918 than they did on issues like reconstruction. Where they did comment, most were broadly more sympathetic to the nationalist position than non-veteran Coalition candidates. Of the latter, one might highlight Neville Jodrell - standing in Ely - who viewed Ireland as a place 'where German poison had been insidiously spread...[and where] they had division and disloyalty, all the result of German intrigue.'<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Leo Amery attended a meeting where one Tory advocated Home Rule, but only because during the war 'the Irish were the worst soldiers in the field.'<sup>77</sup> Into such an atmosphere did the Phoenix Generation enter.

The Irish question took two forms in British politics in the period immediately after 1918 - a low road and a high road. The first was represented by

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<sup>74</sup> *Times*, 22 November 1918.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Isle of Ely and Wisbech Advertiser*, 4 December 1918.

<sup>77</sup> Amery diary, 23 October 1919, CAC AMEL 7/15.

the use of Black and Tan troops to terrorise the Irish countryside - a policy most, including the Bishop of Ardagh, felt to be 'connived at, if not originated, by the British Government.'<sup>78</sup> The second concerned the attempt to move beyond such violence, and create a workable Irish Government. Before the summer of 1920, British politicians had yet to consent to the former, and had managed little concerning the latter. Between the election and May 1920 only (a relative word) 14 Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) Officers had been murdered by the Irish rebels, and this had been met with no widespread indiscipline in response.<sup>79</sup> Republican hunger strikes at Wormwood Scrubs Prison in the Spring of 1920 had also passed without major incident.<sup>80</sup> Ireland was not a pleasant place to be in first eighteen months after the Great War, but it was at least tolerable. Then both sides raised the stakes, violence ensued, and the Phoenix Generation produced arguably their most righteous early stand.

Were one wishing to point to a date when attitudes to the Irish question intensified, the Sack of Balbriggan on 20 September 1920 would be as reasonable as any other. The levels of British auxiliary troops in Ireland had increased dramatically that summer - between 1 May and 31 July 1920 556 Irishmen had resigned from the RIC, being replaced by 800 Black and Tans - and the 'destruction of property' seen in Balbriggan as 'vengeance for the death of [RIC] comrades' would be a pattern that would only continue.<sup>81</sup> For our purposes however, it marks the date that parliamentary perspectives concerning Ireland began to change. Before then, as Boyce notes, attitudes had 'developed along fairly orthodox - not to say predictable lines.'<sup>82</sup> The Liberals disliked the repressive violence, Conservatives giving varying degrees of support. From September 1920 on however, both the conservative press and the Phoenix Generation made a dramatic move against the government. The word reprisals began to appear with

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<sup>78</sup> Letter from the Bishop of Ardagh to Joseph Devlin MP, 5 November 1920, PARL, LG/F/15/1/2

<sup>79</sup> Kee, *The Green Flag*, 667.

<sup>80</sup> Coogan, *Michael Collins*, 139-140.

<sup>81</sup> Kee, *The Green Flag*, 681.

<sup>82</sup> Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles*, 50.

increasingly regularity in conservative newspapers - *The Times* printing 7 headlines containing the word in September, and 14 in October, compared to just 3 in August.<sup>83</sup> With a more rebellious spirit in the air, the Phoenix Generation were not about to disappointment, and would help shape, rather than just reflect, contemporary feeling.

On 4 November 1920

Mr Mosley asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether, in view of his discovery that certain Irish assassins never sleep more than one night running in the same place, he has yet devised a more efficient system of bringing these murderers to justice than...burning the next day houses of other people in the vicinity of the outrages.<sup>84</sup>

Greenwood could only reply that he was satisfied that all was well. Aside from sarcasm, Mosley's question reflected two other parts of his makeup. One was the obsession he would have with efficiency, which would mark his whole career from the Birmingham Proposals of 1925 through to his plan for an allegedly more equitable Eur-Africa imperial system in the 1950s.<sup>85</sup> The other was his view of how a war should be fought, which he had undoubtedly gained from the trenches. Mosley was not opposed to violence per se - as those attending the Olympia meeting would discover in 1934 - but he believed there was a certain way one should undertake it, and the Black and Tans were alien to this notion. Veterans of all parties broadly agreed. Kenworthy, in comparing the events in Ireland with German atrocities committed in Belgium during the war, provided an eloquent condemnation:

If we do not condemn it, we shall be as guilty as the German people and worse. This house may not condemn it, but I hope the people outside

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<sup>83</sup> *Times*, 1 August 1920 - 31 October 1920, passim.

<sup>84</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 4 November 1920, vol. 134, col.542.

<sup>85</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, 179-87,483-85.

will. If not, then Germany will have won the war. The Prussian spirit will have entered into us. The Prussian spirit at last will be triumphant, and the 800,000, the flower of our race, who lie buried in a score of battlefields will really have died in vain.<sup>86</sup>

Interestingly most of those generally critical of the government's Irish policy, as Robert Cecil articulated, 'did not agree with the kind of speech with which we have heard. I cannot accept a view...which almost ignores the outrages on the police, and is confined entirely to a condemnation of...reprisals.'<sup>87</sup> Yet the Phoenix Generation apparently did. Mosley criticised Kenworthy, but only for not going far enough. The German 'method is not our method,' he cried, 'our method is far more reminiscent of the pogrom of the more barbarous Slav, and represents a far greater breakdown of law and order and justice than did the German method in Belgium.'<sup>88</sup> War veterans did not condemn the violence primarily because it was unacceptable in a traditionally moral sense however (though this was not an insignificant part of their arsenal), but because it was unacceptable to the type of chivalrous war they believed themselves to have fought a few years earlier.

Their outrage was very specifically targeted, both against individual Black and Tan battalions and the government which condoned their actions. The official army troops, the Phoenix Generation were keen to stress, would never have condoned such behaviour. Mosley, as he himself acknowledged, was not speaking for the poor Irish peasant but

largely on behalf of the troops stationed in Ireland, whom I believe to be entirely innocent of anything of the nature described this afternoon, [and for whom] I wish to see the demand for an inquiry pressed. Famous regiments that for generations past have performed most magnificent services to this country, are today labouring under certain

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<sup>86</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 20 October 1920, vol.133, col.962.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, col.966.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, col.1011.

imputations - imputations which I have every reason to believe are unjust. They are shouldering the guilt of others.<sup>89</sup>

The 'others' of which Mosley spoke were plainly Lloyd George and Greenwood, men who had 'surrendered something which I, at any rate, believe to be more important in this world even than the outrages in Ireland...[Namely,] the very root principle of British justice.'<sup>90</sup> One should perhaps not go too far. Not every member of the Phoenix Generation was a critic of government policy. Arthur Henderson's 20 October 1920 vote of censure against the government was heavily rejected by our war veterans, who initially by and large remained loyal to the government line.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, when one charts the development of what Boyce has dubbed 'the English Conscience' concerning Ireland, the Phoenix Generation would play an important role.<sup>92</sup>

From a constitutional standpoint, their stand was also significant. Let us not forget the dangers to British democracy in this period of which Baldwin so often warned. Official sources, both military and political, were greatly worried about what the Black and Tan whirlwind might augur on British soil. A mob of wild, rampaging young men armed to the teeth was but a *freikorps* in the making, even if one temporarily located across the Irish sea. The army had visions of their own disintegration, Lloyd George the potential for strife at home.<sup>93</sup> That veterans did not side automatically with their former comrades, particularly in the light of Mosley's later overt adoption of militaristic regalia, is an important point.

## 5.5 The Domestic Consequences of Empire

Criticism for government policy - as ever - was most vocally seen from the opposition benches. After Henderson's request for an inquiry was refused, the Labour Party set up a commission of its own to investigate the state of affairs in Ireland. When the commission finally left Dublin on 14 December 1920 after taking

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, cc.1008-9.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, col.1013.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, cc.1035-1040.

<sup>92</sup> Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles*, 61-82.

<sup>93</sup> Art O'Brien to Michael Collins, 12 December 1920, NAI, UCDA P150/1900.

in Cork, Killarney and Limerick, it returned with 'evidence...more than sufficient to justify the strongest condemnation of the policy of the British Government.'<sup>94</sup> Yet running parallel to the party political game was the hitherto somewhat ignored case of the Phoenix Generation, pledged to support the Bonar Law-Lloyd George leadership. The two members who crossed the floor over the issue - Mosley and Henry Cavendish Bentinck - were ex-servicemen, and became co-founders of the Peace with Ireland Council at the same time, as Irish documents reveal, as meeting with representatives of the rebels.<sup>95</sup> Important to the Council's allure, as Boyce states, was that it 'was a non-party organisation and could not be suspected of working for mere political advantage at the expense of the government.'<sup>96</sup> Its stated aim of an honourable solution to the Irish problem received the backing of various veteran MPs including Walter Elliot, who had previously broken with the Coalition line over the ignominious Restoration of Order in Ireland Bill.<sup>97</sup>

Just as important as condemning the violence however, war veteran politicians seemed to place a greater importance in drafting an equitable and workable political solution for the island of Ireland. On 20 October 1920 the House of Commons had been packed - the issue under discussion, reprisals. Two days later, when the time came to debate the Government for Ireland Bill the Liberal Kenworthy expressed anger at the empty chamber - 'look at the benches now, my own benches as well as any others. That alone shows the whole farce of proceedings.'<sup>98</sup> Kenworthy's point was entirely valid - what was the point of condemning (and eventually eliminating) the troubles in Ireland if, ultimately, it did not achieve a peaceful and lasting political solution? The war veteran politician as a whole seems to have given greater thought to the eventual composition of an Irish state - and been more sympathetic to its very existence - than the average Unionist backbencher, who as Mosley later noted, could be 'fanatical on the Irish

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p62.

<sup>95</sup> Art O'Brien to Arthur Griffith, 2 December 1920, NAI, UCDA P150/1900.

<sup>96</sup> Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles*, 65.

<sup>97</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 6 August 1920, vol.132, cc.2961-2964.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 22 October 1920, vol. 133, col.1265.

question.<sup>99</sup> Edward Hilton Young believed it was necessary to hand over widespread economic control to Dublin 'in order to enable them to construct a fiscal, revenue, and economic system which is suitable to the needs of their own country.'<sup>100</sup> Before crossing the floor, Mosley himself was advocating a 'Cuban solution' - complete internal independence, with certain safeguards for foreign and defence policy.<sup>101</sup> The key, as Edward Wood noted, was that both sides should talk: 'Let us recognise that just as in the war the purely military effort was just a percentage of the whole national task, so in Ireland the matter is in by the far larger proportion a question of political amelioration rather than of firm administration.'<sup>102</sup> In a similar vein, Cyril Enwistle had immediately challenged Lloyd George's assertion that, unlike in Ulster, those claiming to speak for southern Ireland would not be prepared to settle for anything less than a republic, asking 'will you at least try them?' Lloyd George stated he would not.<sup>103</sup> One cannot describe Phoenix Generation opposition to Black and Tan violence as purely calculative, given that whilst condemning the low road of British policy they were also contributing much to a high road solution.

Veterans seemed to have their collective finger more on the pulse than the government. As late as June 1922 Lloyd George would write to Churchill claiming that 'if the Free-Staters insisted on a constitution which repudiated Crown and Empire and practically set up a Republic we could carry the whole world with us on any action we took.'<sup>104</sup> Any action? What American president could have supported a re-conquest of Ireland with that nation's large Irish electorate? For as Carroll has stated, 'the Irish question was an important issue in American public life for nearly two decades during the early twentieth century.'<sup>105</sup> Eamon de Valera knew this, and his tour to the United States in 1919 was undeniably an astute

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<sup>99</sup> O. Mosley, *My Life*, 156.

<sup>100</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 4 November 1920, vol. 134, col.1259.

<sup>101</sup> Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 98.

<sup>102</sup> *Evening Standard*, 10 August 1920.

<sup>103</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5 August 1920, vol. 132, col.2754.

<sup>104</sup> Lloyd George letter to Churchill, 8 June 1922, CAC, CHAR 22/13.

<sup>105</sup> F.M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910-23: A study in opinion and policy*, (Dublin, 1978), 189.



move.<sup>106</sup> In Westminster such tactics were acknowledged to be prudent by Kenworthy who pointed to ‘people abroad’ having ‘the greatest sympathy with a nationality struggling for freedom against what is represented to be a tyrant power over them.’<sup>107</sup> Mosley too spoke of the possibly negative consequences the American Commission’s findings in Ireland that ‘Imperial British Government has incited their agents to slay, burn and loot’ could bring.<sup>108</sup> That Lloyd George refused to acknowledge the fact that world opinion might not automatically be pro-British - even after the Black and Tan violence had reached its crescendo - points to his over reliance on “Die-Hard” Conservatism to retain power. As Beaverbrook later noted, ‘few people stopped to think on the amazing...position of Lloyd George...a Prime Minister without a Party.’<sup>109</sup> This precarious position seems to have influenced the nominally Liberal Prime Minister to an extraordinary extent during the Irish affair: for, as Edward Wood noted, ‘he can make no...offer unless assured of its acceptance.’<sup>110</sup> Thus whilst it was certainly easier for a lowly backbencher to revolt against the traditionally Unionist position than a cabinet minister (notably a man like Philip Lloyd-Greame did not resign from the Board of Trade over the issue), one must acknowledge that the war brought the Phoenix Generation a moralistic perspective others did not, or could not, possess.

If the Irish question was indeed on everyone’s lips in 1920 and 1921 - Charlie Chaplin remembered the first question he was asked when arriving in France to promote *The Kid* was on the subject - it was but symptomatic of a greater struggle.<sup>111</sup> Ireland was simply one of the battlegrounds in the ideological struggle over the future of empire within British Conservatism. In the centre stood the Coalition, with its “carrot and stick” approach to diplomacy - Irish rebellion would be quashed with the one hand whilst the other greeted Eamon de Valera at

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 149-151.

<sup>107</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 20 October 1920, vol. 133, col.960.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 6 July 1921, vol. 142, col.1505.

<sup>109</sup> M. Beaverbrook, *The Decline and Fall of Lloyd George: And Great Was the Fall Thereof*, (London, 1963), 9.

<sup>110</sup> *Evening Standard*, 10 August 1920.

<sup>111</sup> C. Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, (London, 2003), 262.

Chequers.<sup>112</sup> To the right of this had emerged a group of reactionary zealots such as Leo Maxse, editor of the *Morning Post*, Page Croft, and Bottomley, who saw potential threats to British interest at every corner. To such men, any threat to the Empire needed elimination: 'socialism' was a 'grave danger' to 'the maintenance of law and social order'; trade unions needed to be stripped of their Bolshevik elements; the Bolshevik revolution itself needed overturning by continued intervention in Russia; a new treaty was required to 'adequately' punish Germany; India, Ireland and Egypt were not isolated occurrences but part of widespread conspiracy to cripple Britain.<sup>113</sup> Behind this 'international conspiracy,' however obliquely put, lurked 'international Jewry.'<sup>114</sup> The empire such men envisioned was far more representative of Seeley's *Expansion of England* - a bellicose "Greater Britain" where those of English blood proclaimed the greatness of their race above all others - than the more liberal texts that had begun to appear in the pre-war period, most notably Angell's *Great Illusion* and Brailsford's *War of Steel of Gold* which rejected such irrational discourse.<sup>115</sup>

Opposed to these points of view were leftist conservatives, of whom the Phoenix Generation formed a significant part. We have already noted the opposition of Mosley and Elliot to the events in Ireland. Such opposition went beyond House of Commons debates however. Under the tutorship of his mentor Robert Cecil, Mosley sought to bring Lord Grey back to politics as the figurehead of a new government as we saw. When the Irish question looked likely to destroy the Coalition in November 1921 Cecil advised the King to make Grey Prime Minister instead of Clynnes, Asquith, or Law.<sup>116</sup> The potential for a Cecil-Mosley inspired coup d'état lasted months, and profoundly involved the Phoenix Generation. On 5 March and

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<sup>112</sup> For details see Beaverbrook, *Decline and Fall of Lloyd George*, 96-123.

<sup>113</sup> See, for instance, the "Die Hard Manifesto" sent to *The Times*, 8 March 1922, p14. Also for the pre-1914 nature of such thoughts on the Irish question, see R. Rosenbaum (ed), *Against Home Rule: The Case for Union*, (London, 1912). Contributors included Bonar-Law, Balfour, Austen Chamberlain and even Leo Amery.

<sup>114</sup> See Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, 74-86.

<sup>115</sup> J. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, (Chicago, 1971); N. Angell, *The Great Illusion*, (London, 1910); H.N. Brailsford, *The War of Steel and Gold*, (London, 1914).

<sup>116</sup> Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, 67.

15 April 1922 Gallipoli veteran Henry Cavendish-Bentinck (who had crossed the floor with Mosley) hosted meetings attended by around twenty people, including several ex-servicemen politicians such as Godfrey Locker-Lampson, William Ormsby-Gore, Aubrey Herbert and Mosley.<sup>117</sup> At the meeting it was decided that Cecil himself would lead any movement against Lloyd George. Such men were advocates of an Irish, and indeed broad foreign, policy widely opposed to that of Maxse's set. This was certainly good for the ordinary Irishman or Indian, but whether the diminution of such bellicosity was helpful when it would come to resist the confident powers of Japan, Italy and Germany is certainly questionable.

For the meantime, 'there [was] widespread distrust and suspicion between the wage earning classes and the government' noted Cecil in a letter to Mosley.<sup>118</sup> Though conceding that 'doubtless the war is the chief cause of many...misfortunes' he denounced 'the vacillating foreign policy of the government...[who had] squandered millions in futile attempts at a forcible reconstruction of Europe.'<sup>119</sup> The Black and Tans had constituted 'a policy which not only failed in its purpose but [sullied] the reputation and honour of our country.'<sup>120</sup> Whilst the Phoenix Generation was by no means unanimous in supporting such views - for instance, politicians such as Charles Foxcroft and Archibald Boyd-Carpenter rarely diverged from the governmental line - one can certainly say their experience of the war helped shape such moralistic opinions. In many ways the seeds such men laid down would only germinate in the 1930s. The ex-serviceman Liberal MP Wedgwood Benn's vote for German reparations to be suspended until a more equitable system be found in July 1921 was too soon for most to countenance. But he raised several interesting points: that the issuing of Coupons in 1918 had produced a House designed 'to make Germany pay,' and that the Reparations Bill had been passed in an atmosphere whereby objection might equal treachery. Certainly the latter point seems accurate - Neville Chamberlain writing in 1919 that

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>118</sup> Lord Robert Cecil letter to Oswald Mosley, Undated 1921, OMN/B/2/1

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Kenworthy's Keynesian rejection of Versailles was 'egregious.'<sup>121</sup> Ironically of course it would fall to just that man to build upon the more conciliatory foreign policy the Phoenix Generation had first propagated in the 1918-1922 parliament.

In the short term, the British withdrawal from Ireland may seem at first glance a little strange. As Kautt states, in Ireland 'there was no Jominian decisive battle, no high body count, no campaign of manoeuvre.'<sup>122</sup> Collins fought a clever war, but with incredibly limited resources. Negotiating the ceasefire he remarked to Greenwood that 'you had us dead beat...when we were told of the offer of a truce we were astounded.'<sup>123</sup> Yet when the truce came on 21 July 1921, and the Anglo-Irish treaty was ratified on 7 December that year, no-one was in the least surprised. The reason for such acceptance lay more in depleted national self confidence than military woes. As the United States found in Vietnam fifty years later, an army is only as strong as its home front. Whereas pre-1914 Conservatism had been typified by Lord Randolph Churchill's assertion that 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right,' the Phoenix Generation brought with them to Westminster a less dogmatically unionist position. The 'bigots' Bridgeman denounced in the Conservative Party were, whilst not exactly a dying breed, having to face an alternative world view.<sup>124</sup> The new foreign policy of the Phoenix Generation was not exactly Gladstonian, yet morality rather than naked self interest was indeed the new order of the day. In a sense then, the First World War produced the absolute opposite effect to that argued in Louis Menand's recent *Metaphysical Club*, whereby the American doctrine of diplomatic pragmatism stemmed from a few men's experience of the Civil War.<sup>125</sup> War imbued within the Phoenix Generation an abundant need to do "the right thing." Clearly British policy in Ireland was

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<sup>121</sup> R.C. Self (ed), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters - Volume One: The Making of a Politician*, (Aldershot, 2000), 322 [27 July 1919].

<sup>122</sup> W.H. Kautt, *The Anglo-Irish War 1916-1921: A People's War*, (London, 1999), 101-102.

<sup>123</sup> Beaverbrook, *Decline and Fall of Lloyd George*, 84.

<sup>124</sup> Williamson (ed), *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics*, 155 [19 December 1921]. For the anti-Catholicism inherent in the Conservative Party, one might note that in 1918 only 14 Unionist candidates ("coupon" and "non-coupon") were of that religion. *Bradford Catholic Herald*, 28 December 1918, 6.

<sup>125</sup> L. Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, (New York, 2001), passim.

illegitimate, and they were prepared to say as such.

No doubt this alternate, somewhat pacifist, imperial-foreign policy was not always divorced from expediency - Mosley would protest the intervention in Russia in 1919 not for moral reasons, but because it went to his 'heart to think of £100,000,000 being spent...supporting a mere adventure while the unemployed are trying to keep a family on 15s a week.'<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, by chipping away at Lloyd George's legitimacy, by focusing on British reprisals rather than issues such as the plight of 'the Protestant population in Cork' - as Unionist backbenchers were prone to do - veteran Conservatives did not give the Prime Minister room to manoeuvre.<sup>127</sup> When Greenwood tried to justify his policy by reference to British troops 'who served in the late war' being led by officers who wore 'badges of valour and courage,' he crucially did not receive the support of those best placed to legitimise his argument, the Phoenix Generation.<sup>128</sup> The Great War was potentially a powerful rhetorical weapon, but one of limited currency to those who had not served themselves.

## 5.6 What Should Empire Be?

That the British had begun to question their own moral righteousness was a profound step in both foreign and imperial terms. Lord Halifax in particular has been indirectly condemned for this, even by a sympathetic biographer: 'every view [he] held in India - that ninety percent of the problem was psychological, that everything should be done not to slight the Indian *amour-propre*; that short-term humiliations were to be endured in the expectation of a general settlement... worked well in the context of India. When Halifax went to on to apply [this] to his dealings with Nazi Germany, everyone of these assumptions was to prove catastrophic.'<sup>129</sup> Yet these were not his assumptions alone: a significant proportion of his generation agreed. A Leo Amery speech concerning the 1931 Statute of Westminster - which codified Balfour's 1926 Declaration that the Dominions had

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<sup>126</sup> N. Mosley, *Rules of the Game / Beyond the Pale*, 26-27.

<sup>127</sup> On the Cork Protestants see Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 6 July 1921, Volume 144, col.606 and col.611.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 21 October 1920, Volume 133, cc.937-38

<sup>129</sup> A. Roberts, *The Holy Fox: The Life of Lord Halifax*, (London, 1997), 47.

reached virtual equality with the mother country - deserves quotation at length. Following a Churchillian oration of the usual sonorous and imperialist type, Amery replied that

we have just listened to one of the most powerful and most impressive speeches which has been delivered in this House for a long time, and yet it was a speech which I feel was based upon a conception of the British Empire utterly different from that which I hold. I do not believe that this Empire can be held on the foundations of old legislative supremacy, but only on the foundations of free co-operation...

Let us go forward. We have come to the end of one great chapter in British history, a chapter to which we can look back with immense pride and satisfaction. If that chapter were all, then its inevitable end in this Statute would be the end of the British Empire. But I accept the closing of this chapter only because I believe that it is the prelude to a new chapter. On that new chapter we ought to enter with courage, with confidence, with the forward view.<sup>130</sup>

We may note two points here. Firstly, Amery, like many of his ilk, did not believe reform of the Empire to be a prelude to its end. Page Croft and the like were not alone in believing in its essential righteousness, even if they rejected large scale readjustment to its nature. More importantly however, there once again can be gleamed a divergence of opinion between conceptions of the British position amongst the Phoenix Generation. In part this was a matter of age: those veterans born in the 1870s and earlier, like Lloyd, were more prone to take a traditional 'Britannia Rules the Waves' view than younger men like Macmillan or Mosley. Nevertheless, amongst a group who had shown real unity over domestic issues such as unemployment and housing, foreign and imperial policy marked the start

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<sup>130</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 20 November 1931, vol. 239, col. 1199, 1207-8.

of a divergence that, as the impact of Hitler became more felt, would prove crucial. Such dividing lines however, could be remarkably blurred.

Reactions to the Black and Tans in Ireland had, at times, illustrated the Phoenix Generation at their progressive best. Coercion as the sole measure of control had been rejected, and the notion of consent had moved beyond flowery 19<sup>th</sup> century concepts that somehow the British were needed, to a more concrete and realistic idea of an ongoing dialogue between ruler and subject. One can thus draw a relatively straight line between Mosleyite attitudes towards the Black and Tans, through Irwinism in India, to Macmillan's *Winds of Change* in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet whilst Phoenix Generation progressivism can be seen at every point, so too can the reactionary counterpunch. Churchill is an easy and crucial reference point: Irwin's 1929 Declaration was 'unfortunate,' Gandhi negotiating with the Viceroy was a 'spectacle,' and so forth.<sup>131</sup> He was hardly isolated in his views however.

The traditional picture of the 1930s is of Churchill as a lone wolf, eventually joined by brave young men like Eden and Duff Cooper. That India alienated him from others within his party is indeed a crucial point. The extent of his isolation is however questionable. Clearly, as *the Gathering Storm* documented, it begat Churchill's breach from pseudo-Baldwinites like Eden and Halifax.<sup>132</sup> Yet, in part (as chapter three outlined) due to the younger men's frustration with the party leadership, coupled with a mixed view on how the war should effect the nature of empire hitherto shown, Churchill was not the renegade he later appeared: most in the party often regarding him as 'mischievous' rather than dangerous.<sup>133</sup> Conservative attitudes in the early 1930s, later spun by both sides as almost a 90%/10% split between liberal progressive and Churchillian outcast, were divided into two much more equal camps than one might suspect. Take Colonel Gretton's 1931 amendment to the 1931 Statute of Westminster, which proposed banning the

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<sup>131</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3 December 1931, vol. 260, col.1287, 1295; Austen Chamberlain, writing to his sister Hilda, expressed similar misgivings vis-à-vis the Irwin Declaration, 6 November 1929, AC 5/1/485.

<sup>132</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 44-5.

<sup>133</sup> John W. Dulanty to Joseph P. Walshe, 25 November 1931, NAI, DFA 19/6.

Irish Free State from repealing legislation pertaining to its constitutional status on the grounds of national security (i.e. naval concerns). Whilst a solid 69% (360 MPs) of Baldwin supporters rejected the motion, only 53% (94 MPs) of Conservative war veterans did the same.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, a Labour amendment to the 1935 Government of India Act arguing that it ‘imposes undue restrictions on the exercise of self-government’ was rejected by the Conservative Phoenix Generation to a lesser extent than the average Tory MP, but only marginally (74% compared to 71%).<sup>135</sup> The Black and Tans had proved a liberal streak within the Phoenix Generation, but they, after all, were still Conservatives, as was Churchill. One might label Halifax wrong about Hitler and Churchill wrong about Gandhi, but these were not opinions held in a vacuum, from which their contemporaries were somehow immune.

### 5.7 Resultant Confusion

The galling historiographical point about Britain’s international position between the wars is the idea that she could be absolutely certain what her next move should be. How on earth could this be the case? As the Phoenix Generation illustrate, a group of men of similar social outlook, having gone through a similar experience of warfare, could reach many different conclusions, sometimes complimentary, often contradictory. If parliament was just restricted to war veterans, the average foreign secretary would still have to reconcile the internationalist pro-League of Nations Duff Cooper of the 1920s, the bellicose imperialism of Page Croft, men like Elliot who opposed the use of oppressive force, overtly pro-Germans such as Archibald Ramsay, and sometime anti-Italians such as Eden, to name but a few. Britain’s world role between the wars was in constant flux, to pretend otherwise is to fail to do justice to either side, denying the anti-appeaser the credit they are due over Hitler, and the more conciliatory men the understanding their attempts at peace deserve. Sam Hoare, as Secretary of State for India, articulated the point well:

I look back with regret to the golden age of my predecessors...In India

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<sup>134</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 24 November 1931, vol. 260 cc.350-55.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 5 June 1935 vol. 302 cc. 2010-2015.



there was no Press, and there very few educated people taking an interest in what was happening. The Viceroy had a glorious time. The British Administration was a benevolent despotism unquestioned by the people it was administering, and everything went on just as I should have desired that it should go on to-day. Unfortunately you and I have lived in a time when all these things have changed.<sup>136</sup>

Just as the Phoenix Generation - for which Hoare, despite the latter's chagrin at the prospect, was as much a part as Duff Cooper - had denounced the lack of dynamism in domestic policy, there was a real determination that Britain's world position should be resolved one way or another.<sup>137</sup> To do something was again very much an *idée fixe*: but there were differing perspectives on what that something should be.

The most pressing question was naturally who would Britain fight, and who could be relied upon to provide support. Francophiles such as Eden and Spears could be relied upon to take an anti-Italian line. In a 1940 essay, the latter opined 'that the present war would have been avoided if the French and ourselves had followed a common policy in the post-war years. Why did we not do so? Although both nations were loyal to each other as allies in the last war, they never really understood each other.'<sup>138</sup> Such words were tailor-made for 1940, when Churchill had proposed an Anglo-French Union and Alan Crosland Graham could speak of 'the twin upholders of the temple of European Civilisation.'<sup>139</sup> Realistically however, understanding or not, no common policy was possible with a France which swung so repeatedly from Blumist left to conservative right.<sup>140</sup> As Thomas Jones commented of Munich, 'had the French Parliament been summoned not more than ten Senators would have voted for war,' a view which even a later anti-

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<sup>136</sup> Chelsea Conservative and Unionist Association Report, 1935, CUL, TEMP VII/3/59.

<sup>137</sup> J.J. Norwich (ed), *The Duff Cooper Diaries 1915-1951*, (London, 2005), 229 [20 January 1936].

<sup>138</sup> Essay on France as Britain's Ally, 1940, CAC, SPRS 7/7.

<sup>139</sup> 'What Will and What Should Be the Post-War World?' 18 January 1940, LSE, COLL MISC 0771/3/2.

<sup>140</sup> Note Frank Roberts Comments on French Weakness, 3 July 1996, CAC, DOHP 14.

appeaser like the veteran Mark Patrick could subscribe.<sup>141</sup> Opposing Mussolini, with a real chance it would be single handed, was thus a risky business. Yet, as Peters points out, Eden's colleagues often saw his policies as based on little more than outright hostility to Italy, a point Charmley suggests had some validity.<sup>142</sup> Even younger men like Stanley, Ormsby-Gore and Duff Cooper were reluctant to align themselves too closely with him early in his tenure.<sup>143</sup>

For a man later to resign over the very principle of negotiations with *Il Duce*, Eden's views in fact seem uncoordinated at best. The journalist Leo Kennedy found him 'rather more pro-League and anti-Italian than I am,' yet an earlier conversation between the two revealed an Eden closer to his predecessor at the Foreign Office, Sam Hoare, than he would perhaps later like to admit:

At any rate, his policy for the moment, he indicated, would be to give the Italians the choice of "either...or"; by which he meant getting France and ourselves to say to Italy: "Now here you have the chance of considerable economic expansion in and around Abyssinia, and a tacit admission that your interests are very great if not predominant there. You can have that without a fight. [He] preferred the idea of making concessions to Italy now to making them after a victory: but he did admit that they might be more ready to accept them in a couple of months time, if they had had their victory, than they are now."<sup>144</sup>

For a man who would gain prestigious office essentially on behalf of his predecessor's perceived cowardliness, this was not the call to arms one might expect, even at this early stage of diplomatic proceedings.

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<sup>141</sup> T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950*, (London, 1954), 413 [5 October 1938]; Note on Foreign Policy, 1 January 1939, SPRS 1/245.

<sup>142</sup> A.R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931-38*, (New York, 1986), 377; Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 26-7, 36-7, 44-9.

<sup>143</sup> Jones, *Diary with Letters*, 161 [14 January 1936]

<sup>144</sup> Memoranda of Conversations with Eden (within Kennedy's Journal), 20 and 13 August 1935, CAC, LKEN 1/18.

## 5.8 The Impact of Hitler

If attitudes towards Mussolini were fuzzy at best, much the same can be said of Hitler. There has been much praising of the so-called 'foreign office' mindset - that of young men like Eden, and his minions such as Bobbety Cranborne.<sup>145</sup> Clearly there was a divide between the views of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, and Eden emerged triumphant in 1940. Yet, concurrent to the former being more perceptive than his critics allow, the latter was by no means an accurate, or even consistent, soothsayer. As Alec Cadogan icily commented in December 1941, 'does A. realise that *he* is responsible for the great and tragic appeasement - not reacting to German occupation of the Rhineland? How lucky he is - no one has ever mentioned *that!* And that was the turning point.'<sup>146</sup> Motivated by his driving aim to avert another German war - words which, in Mosley's hands would be considered treacherous - Eden was indeed 'prepared to make great concessions to German appetites' prior to Hitler's first great diplomatic coup.<sup>147</sup> Thus he was 'not in the least concerned' when Hitler remilitarised the German sections of the Rhine river in November 1936, and as late as December 1937 was taking 'the line that we must make every effort to make an agreement, but that it must be a general agreement and not one of "sops."<sup>148</sup> Even his departure from high office in February 1938 was anodyne in the extreme. Having received a note from Lloyd George that 'the country is on the look-out for a young man who has ideals as well as brains and courage...if [you] take a strong line now [you are] made,' Eden resigned with a whimper, leaving Harold Nicolson perplexed.<sup>149</sup>

Similarly, Munich - where Duff Cooper was glorified by Churchill as the 'one minister alone [who] stood forth' - was hardly the black and white story it later

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<sup>145</sup> Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 27-8.

<sup>146</sup> D. Dilks (ed), *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, (London, 1971), 415 [1 Dec 1941]

<sup>147</sup> N. Nicolson (ed), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, (London, 1966), 243 [13 February 1936]

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 279, 314 [15 November 1936, 9 December 1937]

<sup>149</sup> Lloyd George to Eden, February 1938, UBSC, AP 8/2/27. Nicolson, *Nicolson Diaries and Letters*, 324-5 [22 February 1938]

seemed.<sup>150</sup> In language reminiscent of Chamberlain's much criticised 'faraway people of whom we know nothing,' Duff recorded in late August 1938 that 'nobody wanted to fight for Czechoslovakia.'<sup>151</sup> Having then let off much hot air in Cabinet on 25 September about the Prime Minister betraying 'the honour and soul of England,' Duff toadied up to Chamberlain the very next day, expressing his sorrow at having 'expressed my opinions too frequently and too forcibly.' Even on the brink of resignation, he thought Chamberlain's 'a very good Government and I don't want to thwart it.'<sup>152</sup> Once out of office, he wrote to Winterton glad that 'my resignation was made easier for me by the fact that the Prime Minister agreed it was best that I should go' – 'the last thing' Duff wanted was to 'injure the government.'<sup>153</sup> If Halifax, as Roberts sagely points out, has been too readily dubbed an appeaser to the very end, Duff Cooper has been similarly miscast.<sup>154</sup> He, like many, was conflicted.<sup>155</sup> Hitler was a member of the front generation, and such men, as Eden attempted to outline in their first meeting, 'should be the last to ever wish for another war.'<sup>156</sup> Germany was a nation with whom many felt they could do business.<sup>157</sup>

The key, as Mosley articulated, was that a decision had to be made, one way or the other. BUF foreign policy has been widely seen as kowtowing to Hitler. This undoubtedly has some credence. Yet Mosley was above all a realist. As he wrote in his New Party days:

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<sup>150</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 268.

<sup>151</sup> Norwich (ed), *Duff Cooper Diaries*, 255 [30 August 1938]

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 271 [30 September 1938].

<sup>153</sup> Duff Cooper to Winterton, 6 October 1938, BOD, WINT c.64.

<sup>154</sup> Roberts, *The Holy Fox*, 117-8. Rab Butler, Roberts suggests, may have successfully parlayed some of his faith in appeasement onto Halifax post-facto (140).

<sup>155</sup> The existence of confusion on all sides of the debate is evidenced by the letters of Jack Pritchard, involved with Macmillan's Political and Economic Planning. Though he wrote to Halifax, Chamberlain, Butler and others to denounce their perceived cowardliness, he likewise admonished 'the left wing Conservatives' such as Eden, 'McMillan' [sic] and Boothby from taking a stand. Pritchard to Vyvyan Adams, 10 October 1938, UEA, PP 5/1/61.

<sup>156</sup> A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, (London, 1962), 64.

<sup>157</sup> Malcolm Bullock MP, after all, had described the 'Hitler movement' as 'on the whole good' in 1932, 7 March 1932, BOD, CPA, 1922/2.

A case exists for progress on the lines of the Protocol towards a universal underwriting of world peace in company with powerful colleagues on a precisely defined international organisation. A case also exists for complete isolation from any continental entanglement which may drag this country into war in which it has no interest. No case, however, exists for partial, ill-defined and therefore dangerous obligations which involve this country in European entanglements without any of the advantages or offsetting security of comprehensive world organisation.<sup>158</sup>

This was precisely the point. Chamberlain's view that individual negotiations with the dictators, backed up by steady if sluggish rearmament, may have proved incorrect. Crucially however, as Cowling and Charmley have noted, such a strategy was never allowed to be played out in its entirety.<sup>159</sup> Chamberlain may have been wrong, but prior to September 1938 he was consistent. After that he became prisoner of forces - the desire for action - that rendered him inconsistent and a instigator of policies - guarantees of national frontiers - that were not his own. Like Lloyd George after 1920, prisoner of a Tory agenda, Chamberlain after Munich was vastly inhibited by Churchillian pressures. These vastly contradictory influences - even a relatively monolithic body like the Phoenix Generation could not agree on the right course - augured a diplomacy that played into Hitler's hands. If that was in part Chamberlain's fault, it was also a result of the diversity and incoherence of his critics.

Nor in May 1940 was it "Churchill to the rescue," for all the later rhetoric. Just as his isolation in the early 1930s has been overplayed, one cannot deem the response to his assumption of the Premiership as exactly euphoric, even amongst that group which had allegedly catapulted him into high office. Moore-Brabazon wrote to console Sam Hoare with the thought that 'this is *not* the last war

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<sup>158</sup> New Party Manifesto, 1931, PARL, BBK/C/254.

<sup>159</sup> M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy 1933-1940*, (Cambridge, 1974), passim; Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, passim.

administration by a long way,' whilst another veteran Maurice Hely-Hutchison compared anti-Chamberlainites to 'parachutist troops who had descended beyond the lines in Conservative uniform.'<sup>160</sup> Oliver Stanley - son of Lord Derby and author of *Industry and the State*, no less - even refused to serve under Churchill, and wrote to Chamberlain hoping 'to serve under you again' someday.'<sup>161</sup> These were complicated times.

### 5.9 The Statistics of Appeasement

It is only through detailed examination that one can challenge widely held assumptions, and pick through the myths and counter myths. This is as true vis-à-vis appeasement as anything else. Winston Churchill has presented us with a Chamberlain 'blameworthy before history,' whose 'own angle of vision' was proved decisively wrong.<sup>162</sup> In corollary to this, we have the image of young against old - baring remarkable similarity to Alan Clark's thesis of the first war that lions were led by donkeys - whereby youthful MPs had some special vision of foreign policy, that they alone recognised the threat of Hitler. Here, the Edens and Duff Coopers masterminded a shift in attitudes which eventually led to the toppling of the treacherous Chamberlain, his replacement with the oracle like Churchill, and victory was thus assured.

The Phoenix Generation of this study were manifestly well placed to make a difference to proceedings. At the time of Munich there were 168 Conservative members who had served in the first war, some 45% of the 377 total. By the fall of Chamberlain in May 1940 their representation had slightly decreased to 161, 43% of the total. Suffice to say, they were in a real position to influence events, and any block vote against appeasement from them would presumably have unseated the Prime Minister. These numbers begat a clear problem with the 'troublesome young men' thesis. In the decisive vote on Norway, there were 42 Conservative 'noes.' 42 men was not a massive number. If a quarter of the Phoenix Generation had voted against the British Foreign Policy of the late 1930s, a shift in course would have

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<sup>160</sup> A. Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, (London, 1994), 144-5.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>162</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 284, 275.

been possible. That they did not do so perhaps invites us looking at the period with views that go beyond the black of *Guilty Men* and white of Edenite heroes.

To do so, it seems sensible to look at how men actually voted in House of Commons, rather than rely on later myths and legends. Thus, the following represents data tallied from seven parliamentary divisions from 1935 to 1940. The only editorial decision by the author was to select votes that contained a dimension reviewing the overall nature of British Foreign Policy, and a reasonable chronological progression. The 1939 votes on the creation of a Ministry of Supply, and introducing conscription, are indeed interesting, but are excluded; in the first case that it gets bogged down in minor clauses, in the second that the debate is conducted more over libertarian issues of coercion than general diplomacy. To the charge that Labour Amendments were bound to produce a negative response from Conservatives, there is no dispute. Certainly the peaks and troughs of the numbers should not be taken too seriously in this light: more of interest are the comparison between the sets of figures, not the numbers themselves. Similarly, Conservative Amendments that led to votes on the nature of Government policy would have been used, but they are few and far between.

The divisions under analysis are as follows. Firstly, the 11 March 1935 motion raised by Clement Attlee condemning the publication of a Government White Paper identifying Germany as the clearest threat to British interest.<sup>163</sup> Following this is a vote held immediately after Hitler's incursion into the Rhineland on Command Paper 5107 (10 March 1936), and a Labour Amendment (25 February 1937) to the Defence Loans Bill that the £400,000,000 proposed to be borrowed should be viewed with misgiving 'without any constructive foreign policy based upon collective security under the League of Nations.'<sup>164</sup> Next comes Arthur Greenwood's motion to condemn Anthony Eden's departure from the Foreign Office (22 February 1938), and the vote on Munich (6 October 1938).<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 11 March 1935, vol.299 cc.169-174.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 10 March 1936, vol.309, cc.2095-2100; Ibid, 25 February 1937, vol. 320, cc. 2340-3.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 22 February 1938, vol. 332, cc. 321-6; Ibid, 6 October 1938, vol.339, cc. 557-562.

Lastly we will outline the responses to the 27 February 1939 attempt to extend the 1937 Defence Loans Bill to £580,000,000, and the vote on Norway which cost Chamberlain the Premiership on 7 May 1940.<sup>166</sup> Obviously, given the slight variations that by-elections wrought parliamentary numbers, figures are contemporary percentages rather than directly indicative.

We may deal with one preconception straight away. Olson in particular has painted a picture of uniformed veterans overthrowing Chamberlain in May 1940. Roger Keyes 'hero of the Great War,' Spears who 'served...in the Great War,' join Eden, Churchill and the rest in an ex-serviceman band of brothers determined to restore righteousness to British policy.<sup>167</sup> To be sure, men yet to fight (and die) in the second war itself, such as Ronald Cartland, constitute a significant strand to such a thesis - yet it is one that undoubtedly derives its main moral thrust from veterans of the first war. Chamberlain's political assassination is not only right because he has been proven wrong, but because those cast as Brutus are more qualified than him to judge matters. Statistically, this point does not stand up however. Olson gleefully notes that forty-two Tory MPs rejected Chamberlain and what he stood for in the Norway vote.<sup>168</sup> That over 11% of his party voted against him was a clear indictment, no question, but it was not one that came exclusively, or even particularly, from veterans. In actual fact, only 6% (11) of the 161 strong Conservative Phoenix Generation MPs entered the No lobby. Numbers, rather than myths, do not lie.

Put simply, Chamberlain and Halifax did not act alone. Their foreign policy was broadly backed not only in the country, but in parliament:

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, vol. 344, cc. 1038-1043; Ibid, 7 May 1940, vol. 360, cc.1361-1366

<sup>167</sup> Olson, *Troublesome Young Men*, 292, 301.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 304.



% of National Government, Conservative Phoenix Generation, and All National Government Supporting War Veterans (Total Phoenix Generation) Who Back the Government on Foreign Policy

	Average National Government MP	Conservative PG	Total PG	1875-1900 Control
March 1935	78	81	77	75
March 1936	87	86	91	89
February 1937	72	78	73	67
February 1938	79	85	80	79
October 1938	87	84	86	90
February 1939	55	64	59	65
May 1940	68	69	68	66

As this illustrates, there was barely a hair's breadth between the average Conservative MP and men of the supposedly renegade younger generation. 84% of those Tory members who had fought in the last war were presumably overjoyed at 'peace for our time' in October 1938, or did not have the gumption to oppose Chamberlain's popularity. Almost seven out of ten veteran Conservatives were even prepared to support him in his last stand, scarcely different from either the control or average Tory MP.

There have been various explanations for this. "Cato" opined thus:

During the whole period in which rearmament was alleged to be taking place, there was no serious revolt among the massed legion of the Tory back-benchers. This remarkable situation was due to the efforts of one man, Captain David Margesson. He was, and is, Government Chief Whip...The Captain exactly resembles a thoroughly efficient Sixth Form prefect who enjoys and earns the esteem of the Headmaster in managing the rest of the school. The Captain applies to the House of Commons Old School Tie Brigade the methods of a public school. If one

of the “boys” has erred, or strayed into the wrong lobby, the rest of them will quickly be notified that the fellow is a bit of an outsider. And the friends of outsiders, in the public school code, are of course to be regarded as outsiders themselves.<sup>169</sup>

Whilst, given the educational upbringing of the Phoenix Generation, this seems a nice metaphor, it is not one that should be accepted to any great degree. Margesson was certainly a ruthless operator, telling the rebellious John Profumo on 8 May 1940 that ‘I can tell you this you contemptible little shit, on every morning you wake up for the rest of your life you will be ashamed of what you did last night.’<sup>170</sup> Men who had faced the bullets and shrapnel of the Great War trench had however presumably seen much worse and, in any case, many like Eden and Duff Cooper had earlier written to Margesson expressing joy at his rise to prominence.<sup>171</sup> Had the Phoenix Generation opposed Chamberlain *en bloc* earlier, their political lives would certainly have been at risk. Yet Duff Cooper allegedly resigned in 1938 to ‘retain something which is to me of great value...[to] walk about the world with my head erect.’<sup>172</sup> Likewise, Bobbety Cranborne believed Munich to have achieved peace, ‘but where is honour? I have looked and looked and I cannot see it. It seems to me to be a wicked mockery to describe by so noble a name the agreement which has been reached.’<sup>173</sup> This then, was not just a question of what Britain could or could not do to the Phoenix Generation, but one posited on moral grounds. To not oppose in greater numbers what they did not believe, pressure from Margesson or not, must constitute something of a failure, if only in the terms they themselves set. If Chamberlain was supposed to stand up to Hitler, they could perhaps have stood up to the Chief Whip a little more.

Doing something, in the terms of opposing government policy, could be

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<sup>169</sup> “Cato”, *Guilty Men*, 91-92.

<sup>170</sup> Olson, *Troublesome Young Men*, 305.

<sup>171</sup> See the letters congratulating him on his appointment as Privy Councillor, 19 December 1932-16 February 1933, CAC, MRGN 1/2. Other correspondents included Lloyd-Greame, Euan Wallace and John Moore-Brabazon.

<sup>172</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3 October 1938, vol. 339, col.40

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 4 October 1938, vol. 339, col.232

achieved two ways. Obviously one could enter the opposition lobby, but there was a second option. As Harold Nicolson recorded, 'our group decide that it is better for us all to abstain, than for some to abstain and some to vote against. We therefore sit in our seats, which must enrage the Government, since it is not our numbers that matter but our reputation.'<sup>174</sup> Abstention, to the anti-appeaser, was seemingly a de-facto no vote. Such a view does make sense: Churchill, Eden, Duff Cooper, Macmillan, Keyes, and many others who 'look none too good on any list' did indeed abstain on many occasions from supporting Chamberlain.<sup>175</sup> Abstentions are naturally hard to judge. Whilst the anti-appeaser might like to think of them as a rejection of governmental policy, they could equally represent a member undecided on the issue, or just absent through illness, holiday or prior commitment. Churchill later claimed that 'the thirty or forty dissident Conservatives could do no more than register their disapproval by abstention.'<sup>176</sup> Aside from the obvious retort that Margesson had not yet successfully bricked up the "no" door of the Commons, it may be of greater interest to take Churchill at his word, and to compare the Phoenix Generation's record to both that of their ex-servicemen counterparts in Labour and the Liberal Party, and the average National Government supporter. Over the page we do just that.

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<sup>174</sup> Nicolson (ed), *Nicolson Diaries and Letters*, 375 [6 October 1938]

<sup>175</sup> Ibid

<sup>176</sup> Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 270.

% of National Government Supporters, Conservative Phoenix Generation, and Combined Opposition Labour-Liberal ex-servicemen who oppose - vote against or abstain - the official party line

	Average National Government MP	Conservative PG	Ex-Servicemen in Lib-Lab Parties	1875-1900 Control Sample
Mar 1935	23	19	36	25
Mar 1936	13	14	11	11
Feb 1937	28	22	23	33
Feb 1938	21	15	16	21
Oct 1938	13	16	30	10
Feb 1939	45	36	16	35
May 1940	32	31	25	34

Despite a slightly imperfect comparison given the difference in parliamentary support, the abstention picture was manifestly not a one way street. Opposition veterans were in a quandary concerning Munich (one Liberal even supported Chamberlain) and, aside from February 1939 - a Labour Party amendment - one notices no massively disproportionate difference between the figures. Viewing an abstention as a 'no' vote is thus by no means a certainty. Nor indeed did veterans oppose their leader with particularly greater vigour than the other Conservatives born between 1875 and 1900.

As a brief coda to this overtly statistical section, it might also be of interest to note that, whilst Conservative support for Chamberlain held, one can detect a waning in his "national appeal" from 1939: dangerous for a wartime leader. Whilst it is true that National, National Labour and National Liberal numbers in the nominal coalition were low, it was clearly a positive for any leader to have a war veteran, not of his party, pledge to support him. That this began to diminish over

time, compared to Conservative figures, is worthy of acknowledgement in seeking to explain Chamberlain's downfall.

% of National Ex-Serviceman Support for Foreign Policy

	National Ex-Servicemen	Conservative PG
March 1935	82	81
March 1936	83	86
February 1937	62	78
February 1938	92	85
October 1938	91	84
February 1939	36	64
May 1940	50	69

The notion of some monolithic voting pattern regarding appeasement is thus a fallacy. John Sewell Courtauld could abstain from the Munich vote, but back Chamberlain in 1940, whilst Robert Bower could reject the motion condemning Eden's demise but vote against the Prime Minister over Norway. Foreign Policy was a rich and complex tapestry, any analysis on the late 1930s must be predicated on such an assumption. As Cowling noted, the vast majority all parties and ideological persuasions, ultimately, danced to Hitler's tune.<sup>177</sup>

### 5.10 Concluding Thoughts

Rather than the traditional notion that foreign and imperial policy produced a group of young men steadfast in the former and liberal in the latter, the picture was much more ambiguous. It seems that differing notions of Britain's international position after 1918 served to divide opinion amongst a cohort who had shown relative consistency over the meaning of the trenches and the need for a progressive domestic policy. If the failure to support a Lloyd George or Mosley break with the establishment marked the first nail in the Phoenix Generation's coffin (as a monolithic entity), Hitler constituted the second. There clearly was a liberal streak in their contemporary dialogue - Mosley on Ireland, Duff Cooper and

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<sup>177</sup> Cowling, *Impact of Hitler*, 7.

Eden's advocacy of the League, Amery's new form of imperialism, and so on. Yet running parallel to this was an uneasy feeling that traditional conservative notions of British strength were no longer sustainable - such men were not myopic to, for example, the lack of reliable allies. Condemning the Black and Tans was right, standing up to Hitler with every sinew the country could muster likewise. Within the boundaries of the British system however, there were limits to what could be achieved. The moralistic tone which worked so well with the former, made no sense with the latter.

There was a link between foreign and imperial policy, but not the simplistic one often forwarded. Churchill saw his star dim as a result of India, and this had consequences concerning Germany. Halifax applied similar tactics to Hitler as he had to Gandhi, and this also impacted upon events. Yet these 'great men' were but indicative of wider *mentalités*. Had Churchill been the lonely windbag he appeared, he would not have been in a position to make the comeback he did. Clearly his support had to come from within Westminster, for even Chamberlain's critics acknowledge the support appeasement had in the nation as a whole. Thus we must be extremely careful with the post-facto accounts of the period. It suited the Edens to portray Churchill as isolated over imperial issues, because then they can explain away their reticence to stand fully square with him over Germany. The story only works this way and, for all the post-1945 construction by surviving members of the Phoenix Generation writing self congratulatory epistles to one another, the ambiguities should not be forgotten.<sup>178</sup>

Chamberlain could only do what was possible, and, as Francis Fremantle wrote in 1938, 'there is no practical alternative.'<sup>179</sup> Signing away foreign lands to keep the peace was perhaps ignoble, but clearly practical. By 1944-5 Eden and Churchill were preparing to do exactly the same with Poland.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, as Liddell

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<sup>178</sup> See Duff Cooper to Emrys-Evans, 3 December 1953, BL, EE, Add. 58247, f.12. Eden and Emrys-Evans correspondence, 26-28 May 1962, ff.64-5, Attlee to Emrys-Evans, 31 December 1960, f. 48 and Emrys-Evans-Amery correspondence, ff.16,45.

<sup>179</sup> Fremantle to Osborn, 3 October 1938, HALS, FJO/B66.

<sup>180</sup> For all his later diary references to Munich (for example, 598, 13 September 1956 and 601, 20 September 1956), Macmillan would later worry that Winston Churchill was twice

Hart noted in that regard, 'it would seem that the situation into which we are getting is even more crazy than that of 1938-39.'<sup>181</sup> There are questions one can ask about the long term decline of British influence but by the late 1930s, as Stedman asks, 'what could Chamberlain do, other than what Chamberlain did?'<sup>182</sup> If force was morally repugnant to suppress an Irish Republic, how could it be used to prevent the Sudeten Germans from joining their fellow countrymen? For all the sometime criticism of Halifax and his Prime Minister, the Phoenix Generation never solved this conundrum satisfactorily. The resulting confusion saw Britain stumble into war in 1939 not knowing for what they fighting. The domestic consequences of this, we will now address. Even as the Reich collapsed, we will see, Hitlerism would continue to have consequences for the Phoenix Generation.

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prepared to sell Poland short . 1944-5 as we have noted, but also on 12 May 1953, 232, 'Does Churchill know what he wants as a settlement with Russia? Will Central and Eastern Europe be sold out in a super-Munich? All these things are very worrying. At present I can do nothing in the Cabinet. But I shall *not* stay if we are now to seek 'appeasement' and call it Peace.' P. Catterall (ed), *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957*, (Basingstoke, 2003).

<sup>181</sup> Liddell Hart to Eden, 10 January 1944, KCL, LH 1/258/24.

<sup>182</sup> Stedman, 'What could Chamberlain do,' *passim*.

## **6: Victory through Butskellism?**

*It is the spirit of progressive conservatism which arises from something lying deep in the mind and character of our people...It makes them distrustful of dictators and suspicious of political programmes.*

- Rab Butler, October 1941.<sup>1</sup>

*Professor Hayek's book, The Road to Serfdom...tells the naked TRUTH. The Truth alone can make us FREE. We are fighting this awful war to be FREE. Let us make certain we do not lose the battle to the bureaucrats on the Home Front.*

- Waldron Smithers, *Socialism Offers Slavery*, 1945.<sup>2</sup>

### **6.1 1940 and the Domestic "What If?"**

10 May 1940 stands as a landmark day in British history. As German Panzers prepared to strike in the west, Neville Chamberlain, despite his best efforts to hang on, ceded the office of Prime Minister to Winston Churchill. The change that followed was of course not merely one of personality, but of ethos. Unlike Chamberlain, Churchill saw no future for his country - perhaps, just as importantly, for himself - in a negotiated peace, thus all the talk of never surrendering. Just as importantly however was the domestic dimension. As Chamberlain's health waned, Churchill became Conservative Party leader on 9 October 1940, an office he would not relinquish for almost 15 years: much to the chagrin of younger (increasingly middle-aged) men like Anthony Eden. Five days later the Carlton Club was destroyed by a German bomb, perhaps a fitting metaphor for the destruction of pre-war Conservatism. Almost unthinkingly, Tories had handed power to a former Liberal, and one - with the exception of those policies outlined in the previous

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<sup>1</sup> Butler Speech to Conservative Central Committee, 2 October 1941, BOD, CPA, CRD 2/28/3

<sup>2</sup> W. Smithers, *Socialism Offers Slavery*, (London, 1945), 7.



chapter - who had enjoyed no meaningful connection with the party caucus at all.<sup>3</sup> The impact of this, due to the necessity to concentrate on the war, would not be seen until 1945 and beyond.

Historians are loath to indulge in questions of 'what if?' 10 May 1940 is an occasion when such considerations should be put aside however. The previous day's gathering of Chamberlain, Margesson, Churchill and Halifax has been well chronicled. For whatever reason - lack of military knowledge, the feeling that the chance would come again on better terms, constitutional difficulties or simple intuition - Halifax did not grab the Premiership that was his for the taking.<sup>4</sup> Churchill became war leader by default, and the consequences remain with us to this day. Yet such consequences were not limited to the war against Nazism. As we have seen, the pre-1940 differences between Halifax - as Edward Wood and Lord Irwin - and Churchill could scarcely have been more marked. Whereas Wood saw 1918 as a *Great Opportunity*, Churchill took profoundly negative lessons from the war. Whilst Churchill was a liberal in terms of economics, Wood believed liberalism should be applied to human relations. Thus the events of 9-10 May and 9 October 1940, if marking a new course in foreign policy, saw the Conservative Party take a very retrograde step domestically. Back, one might contend, to neo-liberal ideas espoused in the party between 1906 and the outbreak of the Great War.<sup>5</sup>

The war years are often seen as shifting both the country, and the Tories, leftwards. Mass Observation reported that by December 1942 about two people out of five had changed their political outlook since the beginning of hostilities.<sup>6</sup> There were numerous explanations for this. Labour could no longer be labelled as

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<sup>3</sup> As Michael Bentley asks, after 1940 should we really see Churchill as a 'displaced Marlborough, seeking his Blenheim'? M. Bentley, '1931-1945: National Government and Churchill Coalition,' in A. Seldon (ed), *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party in Power Since 1783*, (London, 1996), 285-314, 287.

<sup>4</sup> A. Roberts, *The Holy Fox: The Life of Lord Halifax*, 203. One might argue that, as had proved the case in 1923, it would have been too difficult for a peer to assume the Premiership in the democratic age. Certainly hoops had to be jumped through to get Douglas-Home into office in 1963 yet, in the midst of wartime, would this have mattered so much? It is impossible to say with absolute certainty.

<sup>5</sup> H. Kopsch, *The Approach of the Conservative Party to Social Policy During World War II*, University of London PhD Thesis, 1970, 30.

<sup>6</sup> 'Mass Observation,' *Social Security and Parliament*, *Political Quarterly*, 14 (1943), 246.

unpatriotic traitors in underhand league with the Soviet Union, for the party was serving, in broad terms, loyally enough under Churchill whilst the USSR was taking the brunt of German aggression. National institutions like the BBC and the Army Education Corps, much to the chagrin of Conservatives like Henry Page Croft, were also home to numerous leftist intellectuals bringing something approaching guild socialism to the masses.<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, as Addison has pointed out, the difference between the first and second wars was one of respective *raison d'être*. The Great War, fought in the conditions before the 1918 Reform Act, did not need to be justified to the masses. It did not, beyond patriotic hot air, need to be predicated on much (though the National War Aims Committee in 1917 indicated that reform was on its way).<sup>8</sup> The Second World War, fought in a truly democratic age, could not be sustained in terms of national survival once the imminent threat of German invasion had subsided. As Alan Crosland Graham MP noted in January 1940, whilst the first war could merely be fought 'to stop Kaiser Bill from bossing the world,' during the second 'class divisions, through the spread of education and the leveling out of wealth, will gradually almost entirely disappear.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, the story goes, in the search for meaning and with electoral pragmatism very much in mind, the Conservative Party adapted itself to modern conditions as it is often prone to do.

Perhaps because of this the eleven year period when the party, unusually, did not hold sole power is seen in somewhat benign terms – particularly in its participant's memoirs.<sup>10</sup> Conservative acquiescence to the principle, if not always the details, of Beveridge's schemes, together with the progressivism of acts like

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<sup>7</sup> Croft to James Stuart, 13 April 1942, CAC, CRFT 1/19.

<sup>8</sup> Labour, by and large, supported the War Aims in 1918. J.T. Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History*, (London, 2007), 52. The point then is not that concessions were not made, but that the Lloyd George administration's hand was not forced to extent the coalition would be after 1940 (partly of course, due to internal pressure). See also D. French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-18*, (Oxford, 1995), 2001.

<sup>9</sup> 'What Will and What Should Be the Post-War World?' 18 January 1940, LSE, COLL MISC 0771/3/2

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, R.A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible. The Memoirs of Lord Butler*, (London, 1971). 26: After 1945, 'the Conservatives, when thrown into opposition, were provided with a healthy opportunity and compelling motive for bringing both their policies and their characteristic modes of expression up to date.'

Butler's reforms of the education system, seemed to suggest the war had reformed patterns of thought.<sup>11</sup> After 1945, as Phoenix Generation members such as Macmillan and Eden not only assumed greater national prominence, but jockeyed for the leadership, it seemed that a new broom had swept clean. Churchill may have been nominally in charge, but the young men were able to convince an old man increasingly ready to adopt anything to remain leader. This was no longer a discourse held on Baldwinian terms - where the leader paid lip service to but did not adopt his minion's ideas - but one where leftist ideas were allowed to flourish. There is, it is true, something in all of this. Conservatism did adapt. The Phoenix Generation did help set the political agenda. Yet this is not the whole story.

Historians have long argued over the nature of the post 1945 consensus. Few - Ben Pimlott is a partial exception - dispute that there was, to some degree, an increasing homogeneity between the two parties engendered by the experience of wartime coalition.<sup>12</sup> The degree of this homogeneity is open to question however. Kevin Jeffreys and Rodney Lowe have been pointed out the limitations of any perceived bi-partisanship, whilst Paul Addison later suggested that *The Road to 1945* he hypothesised prior to the advent of Thatcher would perhaps have to be modified somewhat.<sup>13</sup> That the 1947 *Industrial Charter* was a change for a party led by Neville Chamberlain - he who could regard Labour's leaders and their ideas as 'dirt' - seven years earlier seems difficult to dispute. Whether the party actually believed its own rhetoric is a more complex affair, and something this chapter intends to sketch out. To be sure, as Ira Zweiniger-Bargielowska has shown, the

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<sup>11</sup> An assumption outlined in J. Ramsden, 'A Party for Owners or a Party for Earners? How Far Did the British Conservative Party Really Change After 1945?' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 37 (London, 1987), 49-63. Ramsden's argument that there was a 'continuity of content' (63) in Conservative Policy c.1940-1951 is borne out here, but not in the manner he suggests.

<sup>12</sup> B. Pimlott, 'Is Postwar Consensus a Myth?', *Contemporary Myth*, 2 (1989), 12-15.

<sup>13</sup> K. Jeffreys, 'British politics and social policy during the Second World War,' *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 123-144; R. Lowe, 'The Second World War, consensus and the foundation of the welfare state,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), 152-83; P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*, (London, 1994), 279.

idea the Tories could repudiate the welfare state after 1945 was impossible.<sup>14</sup> Yet even though interwar progressives began to assume positions of real influence, the radical agenda many espoused before 1939 was arguably put to one side. To succeed in the post-war era, the Conservative had to speak the language of Hayek as much as that of Macmillan's *Middle Way*, and probably more. The war diverted the path of interwar conservatism off course. As the following will outline, this was not necessarily towards the progressive Valhalla Anthony Eden harped on about during the early 1940s, or the Phoenix Generation had envisaged in the 1930s. For as Michael Bentley notes, 'it seems striking how little the Tory Party moved into the centre when beckoned there [in 1943-4].'<sup>15</sup>

## 6.2 The Boat

One should not begin too negatively. There is much one can say in praise of the type of Conservatism that emerged from the fall of Chamberlain. Though Churchill's appointments could be occasionally idiosyncratic, the war years at least kept the old boys from enjoying a monopoly on office. Chamberlain had, it must be said, become ever more contemptuous of informed opinion when filling key positions. Chatfield as Minister for the Co-ordination for Defence (January 1939), Burgin as Minister of Supply (July 1939) and Gilmour at Shipping (October 1939) were evidence of a mind increasingly divorced from contemporary feeling, and the young men. With Churchill possessing - indeed predicating his leadership upon - the ability to change personnel after the turbulent summer of 1940, Tories of the post-1918 generation finally reached positions of prominence.

There is a sense that the Phoenix Generation missed the boat however. Henry Willink - whose 1944 White Paper laid some of the foundations for the NHS - at the Health Ministry is something of a successful exception. Whilst Oliver Stanley, Harold Macmillan and others within our cohort were indeed apportioned office, they were leaven with members just too young to have served in the first war, who

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<sup>14</sup> I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Austerity and the Conservative Recovery After 1945,' *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), 173-197.

<sup>15</sup> M. Bentley, '1931-1945: National Government and Churchill Coalition,' in A. Seldon (ed), *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party in Power Since 1783*, (London, 1996), 285-314, 309.

did not share the optimism of their immediate elders in either the utility or righteousness of interventionist government. Men in the Butler bracket were regarded as suspicious from the outset. Harold Macmillan, as we saw, later wrote that he 'always felt a certain contempt for those "gentlemen in England now abed", whether in the First War or the Second, who voluntarily missed their chance or chose to avoid danger by seeking positions of security.'<sup>16</sup> Euan Wallace's diary in November 1939 recorded similar:

It still remains difficult to explain why completely inexperienced people of the type of "The Idealist" should be employed in the War Office instead of at the front, while their elders who have already demonstrated their intelligence as well as their courage, are obliged to remain in idleness.<sup>17</sup>

Such jealousy was understandable. Having served bravely and anonymously in the first war, the chance to help decide the overall fate of the second was not to be passed up easily. Yet their reluctance to challenge Baldwin and Chamberlain had come back to haunt them. Euan Wallace, Oliver Stanley and others were still marked as "coming men," but that pool was swelling by the day. Men like Richard Law, Rab Butler and Geoffrey Lloyd had rather jumped the queue in joining the government. There were also those like Patrick Buchan-Hepburn, Richard Pilkington and Quinton Hogg who had missed out on 1914-18, but gone on to serve both in interwar Westminster and on the battlefield against Hitler. There was a real danger that the Phoenix Generation would be leapfrogged into high office. This was true in both a literal, and ideological, sense.

### 6.3 The Importance of Butler

With an already doddering Winston Churchill at the helm, and figures such

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<sup>16</sup> H. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change 1914-1939*, (London, 1966), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Wallace Diary, 18 November 1939, BOD, WALL MS. Eng. Hist. c.495.

as Max Beaverbrook whispering in his ear, the Conservative manifesto in 1945 could have been more right wing - indeed proto-Thatcherite free market - than it in fact was.<sup>18</sup> That the party did not swing completely to the right - and thus, probably, avoided an even heavier defeat - was to a great extent the work of the Butler generation. There was a real danger that Tory policy - lacking a notionally sympathetic leader like Baldwin, or even ruthless technocrat like Chamberlain - could fall under the spell of the party's occasionally ultra-right caucus. Baldwin has come in for much criticism throughout this account, yet it cannot be denied he prevented the forces of extremism from taking hold within the party. The idea that the war moved all Tories left is a fallacy. The language of Joynson Hicks and Birkenhead had to be modified for a post-Dunkirk age, but the harsher elements of Toryism were by no means swept aside by some kind of progressive deluge, for all the consensual talk.

The Catering Wages Bill is an interesting example. Seemingly an uncontentious piece of legislation to be introduced a few days before the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1943, it in fact brought about the biggest Tory vote against the Coalition Government during the conflict. At issue was control: the government's ability to regulate employee wages. Of the 365 Conservative MPs, 110 voted against the Bill, and a further 148 members (including 9 ministers) were absent from proceedings. Thus, 68% of Conservative members were not prepared to support increased state control - even during war time. The Phoenix Generation were little different: of the members present in the Commons, 46 voted for the bill, 48 against.<sup>19</sup> Neither the Conservative Party nor conservatism per se died during the war. Traditionally prejudices still abounded. Thus the importance of the Rab Butler type.

'If the world is to be convinced that we are the nation whose lead can be followed in any post war reconstruction, we must make people understand that we

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<sup>18</sup> Though J.D. Hoffman, *The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945-51* (London, 1964) 269, takes a decidedly mixed view of Tory 'evolution' over the 1945-51, he does credit men like Oliver Stanley for holding Churchill and the men of the right back.

<sup>19</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 9 February 1943, vol. 386, cc.1277-1282.

are determined to maintain the present national unity and to create better conditions.'<sup>20</sup> So wrote Butler in his wartime pamphlet *A Future to Work For*. Indeed, the title of this epistle is as relevant as its content. As we have seen, by 1940 Nicolson, Attlee and others within the administration were questioning the very point of the war: why die to defend an essentially moribund capitalism? Therefore, such statements not only represented a reinvigoration of Conservatism after the lethargic age of Baldwin, but a fourth arm in the fight against Hitler. The virtually unbroken series of Conservative led reconstructive bodies, from the War Aims Committee - set up 10 days after the start of the Battle of Britain - to the last meeting of the Principal Reconstruction Committee in May 1945, represented a profound step indeed. This war had to be about something, or, at least sold to the people along such lines.

Butler was the driving force, most obviously in the field of education.<sup>21</sup> Though the framework for the division of the scholastic system into primary, secondary and further brackets had essentially been enshrined through the Hadow and Spens Reports in the 1920s and 1930s, this did not necessarily augur any action.<sup>22</sup> Reports, as those concerning electoral reform in the interwar period had shown, did not mean policy. It was then to Butler's great credit that, unlike the pre-war Phoenix Generation, he knew how to finesse his leader's seeming indifference. Churchill, busy playing the role of world statesman, was not a particularly sympathetic patron - even if Butler later eulogised his supposedly reformist leanings on education.<sup>23</sup> After a letter from Rab merely floating the notion of a Joint Select Committee, Churchill replied on 13 September 1941 thus:

I certainly cannot contemplate a new Educational Bill...No one can

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<sup>20</sup> *A Future to Work For*, 1941, CPA, CRD 2/28/3.

<sup>21</sup> A driving force yes, but not a revolutionary. See his later comment that 'Looking back to 1944 I do not think that I and my colleagues at that time considered ourselves solely as idealists. The 1944 Act did not mark out the road to an educational Utopia, but was a very necessary act of immediate reform.' R.A. Butler, 'The 1944 Education Act and Beyond,' The University of Essex Noel Buxton Lecture (Essex, 1965), 24.

<sup>22</sup> Addison, *Road to 1945*, 172.

<sup>23</sup> Butler, 'The 1944 Education Act and Beyond,' 1.

possibly tell what the financial and economic state of the country will be when the war is over. Your main task at present is to get the schools working as well as possible under all the difficulties of air attack, evacuation etc.<sup>24</sup>

This was a recurring theme. Conservatives who had little constructive to say - Churchill and Kingsley Wood were the prime examples - used the war quite adeptly as an excuse for saying nothing. The trick, as the Phoenix Generation seemingly missed, was to ignore such talk and simply act. William Beveridge was clearly the yardstick here - particularly given how the Tories later tried to portray Butler as a more effective version. Both men's success lay in their ability to circumvent the staid nature of the governmental machine. After the setting up of an interdepartmental committee to look at insurance schemes in May 1941, and months of fairly vapid talk, Beveridge simply submitted his own proposals and awaited the reaction.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, whilst taking the Churchillian line that 'it would be unwise to dogmatise or to theorise as to what reconstruction will be necessary after the war,' Butler ploughed on regardless with his education reforms.<sup>26</sup> Wartime conditions were obviously a more opportune moment to put forth changes, yet perhaps something else was at work. Perhaps the regimented nature of the Phoenix Generation's formative experience - the war - was at odds with the freer, more liberal, Oxbridge upbringing of Butler, Law and that younger cohort. Their minds, one might suggest, were more open to challenging authority.

#### **6.4 A New Conservatism?**

Arguably the most obvious concern with the notion that Conservatism changed to accommodate a new consensus is the very fact that the party pushed this line so hard. There seems a real risk that "the lady doth protest too much." At the 1945 election, Butler wrote, 'we were shaken out of our lethargy and impelled to re-think our philosophy and re-form our ranks with a thoroughness unmatched

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<sup>24</sup> Churchill to Butler, 13 September 1941, CPA, RAB 2/5.

<sup>25</sup> Addison, *Road to 1945*, 169.

<sup>26</sup> Butler Speech at Central Council Meeting, 2 October 1941, CPA, CRD 2/28/3.



for a century.<sup>27</sup> Earlier Eden had similarly spoken of the defeat as a ‘blessing, because it gives us the opportunity to redefine our faith and our political objectives.’<sup>28</sup> Yet hadn’t the party espoused reformist rhetoric throughout the war years? Eden had very early in the conflict noted that ‘war presents an audit of the nation; it exposes weaknesses ruthlessly and brutally, and this war is going to do that too. These weaknesses will call for changes.’<sup>29</sup> Quinton Hogg had also famously warned his leaders that ‘if you do not give the people social reform, they are going to give you social revolution.’<sup>30</sup> Such calls, for all the later eulogising, it appears were unheeded.

Accounts praising the Tory Party during this period generally adopt three arguments. Firstly, they look to the pre 1939 legacy of Macmillan, Eden and the more “liberal conservatives.” Generally, in other words, the Phoenix Generation of this study are held up as harbingers of a less aloof, more caring form of post-war conservatism. Arthur Marwick pointed to ‘the very large groundwork of social and political agreement in the thirties’ giving rise to the ‘ideological structure which took Britain safely through the forties and brought her to rest in the fifties.’<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as Marwick argues, vehicles aiming for universal peace after the Great War provided common ground for men divided on other questions, the League of Nations Union most prominent in this regard.<sup>32</sup> Certainly the veteran Harold Macmillan’s dabbling during this period with conscientious objectors, wealthy industrialists and the Stockton poor serves as an example of how varied interests were encompassed by progressive Toryism in the years immediately prior to the Second World War. Yet though Addison’s *Road to 1945* essentially begins in such pre-conflict machinations, we should not be afraid to question such assumptions.

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<sup>27</sup> Conservative Research Department, *The New Conservatism: An Anthology of Post-War Thought*, (London, 1955), 7.

<sup>28</sup> A. Eden, *Freedom and Order*, (London, 1947), 422 [3 October 1947].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 49 [6 December 1939].

<sup>30</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 17 February 1943, vol.386, col.1818.

<sup>31</sup> A. Marwick, ‘Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political “Agreement,”’ *English Historical Review*, 79 (1964), 285-298, 285. On the LNU see H. McCarthy, ‘Parties, voluntary associations, and democratic politics in interwar Britain,’ *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), 891-912.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 291.

Daniel Ritschel for one, together with our fourth chapter, have shown that there could be limits to advanced right wing opinion before 1939.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly and thirdly come the impetus engendered by war years. Here, as we have seen, academics point to the Butler-Willink reforms as evidence conservatism could not only adapt to the times, but drive the nation forward during the conflict. This movement was, in part, helped along by the third leg of the new conservatism: the Tory Reform Committee (TRC). The TRC, like many of the 'One Nation' groups of this time, enjoys much post-facto praise. Its endorsement of the Labour claim for the immediate implementation of Beveridge's proposals, together with the stand it took in favour of equal pay for women teachers in the 1944 Education Act, seem to indeed augur progressive politics.<sup>34</sup> Certainly then, Conservatives recognised the world was changing. But the thorny question remains of whether they actually thought this was a positive trend.

Viscount Hinchingsbrooke was one of the Butler cohort of Conservatives threatening to leapfrog the Phoenix Generation into high office. In 1943 he had become Chairman of the TRC and therein established quite the progressive power base. Thus throughout the early months of 1943 he set about trying to woo the masses with a propagandistic deluge outlining just how great the Tories believed progress to be. In the *Evening Standard* he opined of the virtues of 'Modern Toryism':

Modern Toryism rejects Individualism as a philosophy in which the citizen has few duties in society...It is hopeful of planning which it regards as a grand design to bring the aims of man into a true relation with the aims of the community.

Modern Toryism is exhilarated by the Beveridge Report and sanguine of passing into law at an early date measures to give effect to the bulk of its

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<sup>33</sup> D. Ritschel, A Corporatist Economy in Britain? Capitalist Planning for Industrial Self-Government in the 1930s, *English Historical Review*, 106 (1991), 41-65.

<sup>34</sup> Addison, *Road to 1945*, 219.

recommendations.<sup>35</sup>

This final reference to an 'early date' is very important. The Tories, throughout the Beveridge to Butskell period, gained much by being vague on detail - particularly, that is, in retrospect. Thus, whilst in February 1943 the TRC pamphlet *Forward - By the Right!* had claimed its raison d'être to be 'encourag[ing] the Government to take constructive actions on the lines of the Beveridge scheme,' and lauded the TRC's parliamentary amendment to call for the immediate creation of a Ministry of Social Security to give purpose to the report, there would be some later backtracking.<sup>36</sup> By October 1944, with Beveridge seemingly quietly shelved for the moment, the TRC claimed that 'it was never suggested that there was a possibility of bringing these reforms into operation until the war was over.'<sup>37</sup> As Ewen Green observed, something of a parallel existed in the 1950s - whilst Harold Macmillan would later claim his era of full employment stemmed directly from the 1944 White Paper, that very document had only spoken of in terms of 'high and stable' employment.<sup>38</sup> There were, it is true, wiggle room on the earlier declarations. Certainly however, the Conservatives were at least trying to exploit their own ambiguity.

Even more telling would be Hinchingsbrooke's reaction to the election loss in 1945. This was a man, let us not forget, who in 1943 had claimed that 'a complete *volte face* in our outlook is required and where private interests obstruct they must be ruthlessly cast aside.'<sup>39</sup> A man who had denounced the "'individualist" businessmen, financiers, and speculators ranging freely in a laissez-faire economy and creeping unnoticed into the fold of Conservatism to insult the Party with their votes at elections.'<sup>40</sup> It seems to follow he would react like Macmillan - disappointed to lose power, but recognising that maybe the country needed an

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<sup>35</sup> *Evening Standard*, 8 February 1943.

<sup>36</sup> Tory Reform Committee, *Forward - By the Right!*, 1943, No. 5 and 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 1944, No. 12.

<sup>38</sup> E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 2002), 170. In H. Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune 1945-1955*, (London, 1969), 26, he had made the claim that the 1944 White Paper concerned 'full employment.'

<sup>39</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*, 8 August 1943.

<sup>40</sup> *Evening Standard*, 8 February 1943.

administration of the left, albeit temporarily. Yet in September 1945, come Labour's "New Jerusalem," he espoused the following:

I have never accepted the doctrine that it is the duty of a minority opposition to give aid and comfort to a hostile Government any more in the constituencies than at Westminster.

We are not obliged to make obeisance before those in the seats of power, to lick their boots, or minister to their daily needs.

If the appeal to you, therefore, by the Socialist Government is national savings for the nationalisation of the mines, my counsel is to reject it.

If the appeal is National Savings for a State-owned Merchant Marine, or inland transport system, or medical service, I would turn it down.<sup>41</sup>

A progressive landslide then, was met not by grudging welcome or lukewarm praise but, in essence, a call for passive resistance. Electors were told to completely ignore the overwhelming instinct they shown for change, and resist the administration to almost all ends except violence.

## 6.5 The Generational Shift

Hinchingbrooke was an extreme case, but at the same time merely the tip of an iceberg. Though Tories patted themselves on the back for accepting the terms of the new Keynesian consensus, in reality the party was split down the middle.<sup>42</sup> Whilst the Phoenix Generation, as we have seen, flirted with Keynes in the 1930s, a new prophet was on the scene: Friedrich von Hayek. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* remains a classic, and very readable, study of the dangers of totalitarianism. It was however more reminiscent of Churchill's prediction that a Labour victory in 1945

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<sup>41</sup> *Daily Herald*, 26 September 1945.

<sup>42</sup> To quote Oliver Lytellton, for example: 'The Socialists today are making a great song and dance about their responsibility for the creation of the Welfare State. They point to the National Health Service as being their child. In point of fact, everybody knows that it was fathered by Mr Churchill's Coalition Government.' Undated Typescript, CAC, CHAN 4/17/08.

would augur a British Gestapo than the 1930s leanings of the Phoenix Generation. Churchill had of course read Hayek, and he was far from alone in this regard. To be sure, Die Hards like Waldron Smithers swallowed *The Road to Serfdom* whole:

Socialism is assuming a new name, "State Control." State control can only continue to function by compulsion and by force. It entails the regimentation of our daily lives, and forced labour, and its inevitable consequence, as Dr Hayek points out, is Nazism.<sup>43</sup>

This again was an extreme point of view. Few Tories – Enoch Powell was an interesting exception – would have compared Bevin or Attlee to Hitler.<sup>44</sup> Yet Hayek was more imbedded in Tory thought at this time than all the talk of a Keynesian consensus suggests. Whilst Phoenix Generation members like Henry Willink 'almost tremble[d] with uneasiness' when listening to 'rigid right-wing talk,' this was not true of those but a few years younger.<sup>45</sup> Though Harold Macmillan could lament the failure of Quintin Hogg's 1963 leadership bid as a missed opportunity to continue what 'Stanley & John Loder, & Boothby, & Noel Skelton & I had tried to represent from 1924 onwards,' in reality he was ignoring the shift in nominally progressive Conservative thought that had occurred.<sup>46</sup>

Beveridge, we have noted, was not welcomed with the open arms Tory retrospect seems to suggest. Indeed, it is worthwhile noting how relatively little contact there was between 'the people's William' and Rab Butler when the two were supposedly pursuing mutual aims: extended welfare provision. When Beveridge wrote to Rab in October 1941 saying he would be 'delighted to come over and have a talk over the question of social services' one might expect the start

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<sup>43</sup> Smithers, *Socialism*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> S. Heffer, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell*, (London, 1998), 113 – particularly throughout his by-election campaign in Normanton (1947).

<sup>45</sup> 'In Memoriam' Booklet for Henry Willink, 11, obtained through Magdalene College Library, Cambridge.

<sup>46</sup> Green, *Ideologies*, 191.

of years of back and forth.<sup>47</sup> Yet scarcely was it the case. Whilst the two were not exactly strangers during the 1940s, Beveridge's papers at the LSE reveal no epistles from Butler. Similarly, the only meaningful correspondence with the TRC is a note from Hinchingsbrooke thanking Beveridge for inviting him to lunch, and Beveridge's reply praising a TRC amendment in November 1943 arguing for more constructive measures in the direction of his report.<sup>48</sup> Hardly scintillating stuff, and more suggestive of a Beveridge looking for cross-party support than the Tories looking outside their traditional box.<sup>49</sup> Even if TRC members accepted the broad outlines of Beveridge's scheme, let it be noted, they held massive reservations over the details: particularly the removal of the old Friendly Society schemes of insurance provision.<sup>50</sup> Quintin Hogg's diary seems to suggest that pragmatism rather than reformist verve characterised the Tory response:

Although I did not accept the attack on the [present insurance companies or approved societies], I was convinced that one had to choose between the report and the present system (unless a new solution were proposed), and that if faced with the choice I should choose the report.<sup>51</sup>

Yet progressive Conservatism had indeed changed, just not in the manner often outlined. As Harmut Kopsch noted in his 1970 PhD thesis, what had gripped the Tory Party during the war was not a penchant for the interventionist state, but the exact opposite: neo-liberalism.<sup>52</sup> In large part because of the comic regard in which the presidencies of George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan across the Atlantic

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<sup>47</sup> Beveridge to Butler, 24 October 1941, CRD 2/28/3.

<sup>48</sup> See the various correspondence during 1940-45, LSE, BVR 2/b/39-44. For the limited examples, see 22 October 1943 and 27 November 1943 respectively, BVR 2/b/42/3.

<sup>49</sup> Beveridge addressed the 1922 Committee on 2 December 1942, but it seems not to have sufficiently moved them to pass any comment. BOD, CPA, 1922/4.

<sup>50</sup> Q. Hogg, *A Sparrow's Flight: The Memoirs of Lord Hailsham of Marylebone*, (London, 1990), 211.

<sup>51</sup> Hogg Diary, 23 January 1943, CAC, HLSM 1/6/1/17.

<sup>52</sup> Kopsch, *The Approach of the Conservative Party to Social Policy*, 397.

have sometimes been held in Britain, together with perceived notions that Thatcher “broke the mould,” neo-liberalism is rarely taken seriously as a coherent and long-term brand of conservative thought.<sup>53</sup> Yet for all the adoption of Beveridgean clothing, it was Hayek rather than Keynes to whom the Phoenix Generation’s younger counterparts turned. On 11 August 1944 Rab Butler received a letter asking whether he had yet found time to read *The Road to Serfdom*. His reply three days later is certainly interesting:

I am glad to know that “The Road of Serfdom” [sic] has come your way: I too thought it was well worth reading. I have recently resumed the Chairmanship of the Conservative Committee on Post-war Problems and am planning to put in some hard thinking in that direction during the coming Autumn.<sup>54</sup>

Hayek was of course only one of presumably dozens and dozens of authors Butler must have been reading at the time. At the same time however, the link between *The Road to Serfdom* and post-war conservatism could already be detected. Thus, if Kopsch was cogent in identifying a neo-liberal trend in Conservative thought during this period, perhaps he was unwise to exclude the TRC generation from such conclusions.<sup>55</sup>

## 6.6 Making Sense of the Times

When all this was going on, the reader may well ask, where exactly were the Phoenix Generation? Why, if they had disagreed with the direction the party was

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<sup>53</sup> Hogg himself explained the rationale for laissez-faire in the post-1945 epoch. In Q. Hogg, *The Case for Conservatism*, (London, 1947), he noted argued the role of Conservatism is not to oppose all change but to resist and balance the volatility of current political fads and ideology, and to defend a middle position that enshrines a slowly-changing organic humane traditionalism. In the 19th century, he claimed, Conservatives opposed classic Liberalism, favouring factory regulation, market intervention, and various controls to mitigate the effects of *laissez faire* capitalism, but in the 20th century, the role of Conservatism was to oppose a danger from the opposite direction, the excessive regulation, intervention, and controls favoured by Socialism.

<sup>54</sup> Butler to G.O. Stephenson, 14 August 1944, CPA, RAB 2/5.

<sup>55</sup> Kopsch, *The Approach of the Conservative Party to Social Policy*, 43.

taking ideologically, did they not stand up and dissent? In part this can be answered geographically. Though nominally possessing more prestige – certainly more experience – than the Hinchingsbrooke-Hogg generation, this was precisely the wrong position to be in should one's aim be determining the post-war world. Instead of burning the midnight oil in Whitehall on some domestic scheme that would make the conflict worthwhile, Eden was traversing the world as Foreign Secretary. Instead of helping shape the Tory response to Beveridge, Halifax was aiding the war effort in Washington, Duff Cooper in Paris, John Loder in Australia, Macmillan in North Africa and so forth.<sup>56</sup> The Phoenix Generation – also not helped by the early deaths of members like Euan Wallace and Victor Cazalet – was not yet important enough (Eden is a clear exception) to decisively influence the path of the war, yet too important to be kept at home where post-1945 Britain would be shaped. Meanwhile, those of the Phoenix Generation who did remain in Britain during the conflict were usually older men like Waldron Smithers and Ralph Assheton whose political careers had essentially already reached their zenith, and whose pre-1914 lives were as formative as the Great War itself. Such older veterans, as Assheton wrote to Beveridge, often felt that 'I don't suppose you and I will ever agree on the best way of getting the kind of world we want to live in.'<sup>57</sup> This was a bad start to any notion of a post-war Phoenix Generation shaped state, at least if defined in pre-1939 terms.

One cannot also ignore Adolf Hitler as a point of reference. Whilst Mosley was something of an exception in overtly aping him, he was by no means unique in looking abroad for lessons – something our fourth chapter outlined. Hitler and

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<sup>56</sup> Macmillan's views at this time do indeed suggest his absence was missed. Recording a conversation with De Gaulle in his diary, he noted that 'in my country, as in his, there were old men who looked backwards, rather than forwards to the future. We needed young men with young minds...[As a result of the conflict, g]reat wealth would pass away. Property would be held in trust for the benefit of the people, but we hoped to see the transformation from one society to another without revolution or disturbance, and it depended on my country, as in his, on whether men of progressive opinions could work together and inspire the necessary changes...I realised his impatience on finding old men and minds still in control.' H. Macmillan, *War Diaries: Politics and War in the Mediterranean, January 1943-May 1945*, (Basingstoke, 1984), [2 June 1943], 105.

<sup>57</sup> Assheton to Beveridge, 6 January 1944, BVR 2/B/43/1.



Mussolini were men of the front generation who had attempted something profound with the notion of government. This, as Hayek pointed out, had led such countries on *The Road to Serfdom*. There was thus something of a necessity for the Phoenix Generation to cover their tracks. Mosley's incarceration provided something of a neat coda, yet there was a concurrent need to repudiate their pre-1939 attitudes towards government and the state.<sup>58</sup> Whilst praising Schacht's economic measures and Mussolini's ordered society in the 1930s was seen as a little risqué, after 1939/40 it would be almost abhorrent. To make clear they recognized such abhorrence, given their previous leanings, the Phoenix Generation added a dash of Hayek to their previously Keynesian tonic. Eden's 1946 comment that 'we avoid both the extreme of individualism, and the folly of total State domination' would thus become the norm in party preaching 'freedom and order.'<sup>59</sup>

All this was very important, a revolutionary moment in Conservatism indeed. Whereas the Phoenix Generation had been rendered essentially pessimistic by years of failure and the continentally empirically proven danger of political activism however, men such as Richard Law were thinking a little differently. To be sure, a letter from the 1901 born Law to Paul Emrys-Evans at the start of the conflict told of a man at the end of his tether:

When one thinks of it - all those who were killed last time, all those who are going to be killed now - everything wasted through the stubbornness and lack of imagination of a few old men and the shamelessness of a lot of young ones. If ever I engage in politics again I shall leave the Conservative Party. You remember that man we were talking to after the division the other night, Quinlet or some such name - that's the Conservative Party. And I don't belong to it. This theory that it is possible to 'educate' the Conservative Party won't hold water. But I

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Elliot, for example, wanted as much as 50% of post 1945 housing to be built by the private sector. Heffer, *Enoch Powell*, 123.

<sup>59</sup> Eden, *Freedom and Order*, 397 [7 March 1946].

don't suppose any of us will ever be in politics again.<sup>60</sup>

Such assertions, patently, were proved false. The Second World War would provide a reinvigoration of such men who, lacking the chastening experience of the hopes of 1918 going to waste, would attempt to sculpt their own post-war Valhalla. Utopianism, the preserve of the Macmillan generation who believed government could cure – or at least provide the mechanisms to cure – all societal ills had, the claim went, ipso facto been proved wrong: 'a perfect society,' noted Law, 'is no more to be realised than a perfect human being.'<sup>61</sup> The cohort encompassing the TRC and Dick Law age bracket would have two aims. Some form of progress, to be sure. But also the limitation of activism within all parties and policies. In some sense this was a repeat of Baldwinism, only this time the Baldwin's were almost identical in appearance (ideologically and in terms of age) to the activists. Moderation of ambition was the key, as Law outlined in 1945 concerning the regulation of world food supplies:

It may not be very dramatic, and there may not be many headlines. But that's the way we're going to get the kind of world that we all want - by working for it, patiently and steadfastly, over a wide field and for a long time. We're not going to wake up one fine morning and find it in our Christmas stocking. We'll have to work for it - you and I, and millions of other ordinary, decent, humdrum people just like us.<sup>62</sup>

If one wishes to seek a reason why, in part, austerity Britain seems so drab to modern audiences, this type of language is a reasonable place to start. To be sure, people bombed out of their homes were not always so amenable to the type of promised land talk peddled by Bevan and Attlee, but the message projected by the Tories occasionally appeared devoid of any hope – if defined collectively –

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<sup>60</sup> Law to Emrys-Evans, 13 September 1939, BL, EE, Add. 53239 ff.3-4.

<sup>61</sup> R. Law, *Return From Utopia*, (London, 1950), 9.

<sup>62</sup> Law talk on Food Supplies, 17 October 1945, *ibid*, ff.33-4.

whatsoever. In 1950 Law crystallized this in his *Return from Utopia*. Hoping to capitalise on the perceived failures of Attlee's 1945 administration, and citing Hayek as an inspiration, Law declared that

to turn our backs on Utopia, to see it for the sham and the delusion that it is, is the beginning of hope. It is to hold out once again the prospect of a society in which man is free to be good because he is free to choose. Freedom is the first condition of human virtue and Utopia is incompatible with freedom. Come back from Utopia and hope is born again.<sup>63</sup>

Rather than conversion to Keynes's interventionist plans for the economy, post-1945 conservatism would be defined by a distinct lack of ambition. 'The problem for twentieth century man,' wrote Law, 'is how to control the consequences of his own actions....Having mastered the world, he has become his own slave.'<sup>64</sup> Like Hayek, he argued that in both world wars 'the ideas of the vanquished corrupted the victors.'<sup>65</sup> 'The planned economy, of its very nature, is incompatible with liberty,' and Labour after 1945, however obliquely put, was taking Britain along *The Road to Serfdom*.<sup>66</sup>

### **6.7 Reflecting on Churchill's "Gestapo" Comment**

The tendency to see Churchill's 1945 "Gestapo" comment as the ravings of a senile old man are, quite simply, misplaced. He may well have been wrong, but he was hardly out on a limb politically. In 1951 the victorious Conservative campaign would be littered with much the same type of rhetoric. As a pamphlet ahead of the 1955 election put it, 'the Conservative Government has a very definite idea of the proper relation between the State and the Individual. The aim of the new Government elected in 1951 was to restore freedom, to reduce the burden of

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<sup>63</sup> Law, *Return From Utopia*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 91, 97.

taxation and to give individual men and women a better chance to live a decent life.’<sup>67</sup> A pledge to ‘restore freedom’ reads very strangely indeed: to be sure, the economy had been regulated by more levers than the Tories would themselves have used, but Attlee was hardly ruling a totalitarian state.

Perhaps this helps answer a paradox posed by Paul Addison. That the national swing to the left during the war presaged the Conservative defeat in 1945 and resumption of party strife seems reasonable. Yet this seemingly runs against the burgeoning consensual age of politics engendered by the spirit of wartime coalition.<sup>68</sup> The answer may lie in attitudes to liberty. Whilst Labour essentially triumphed in their desire to implement far reaching reform after 1945, they in fact reached the edges of what the Conservatives had defined as acceptable in a free society. That the Labour Government faltered by 1949-50, essentially dying in office in a similar manner to Baldwin’s 1924-9 administration, was a profound step. Had a second generation of “New Jerusalem” inspired leaders taken office the parameters of political acceptability may well have been extended. As it was, Butler, Law and Macmillan rode back into office, and set up bricking up the boundaries of the state. Like Franco’s Falange, the revolutionaries were told they shall not pass, only this time it succeeded. If Labour’s “Gestapo” was prevented, its more socialistic elements were also quietened, only to resurface once Thatcher took Hayek to similar extremes.

If one wishes to see how subtly Conservative Party progressivism changed from the late 1930s to the 1950s, Harold Macmillan is a fascinating example. Whilst Macmillan himself, backed by the *Sunday Express*, labelled his post-1945 work as ‘the second edition’ of his 1938 *Middle Way*, in reality his ideas had changed significantly.<sup>69</sup> This, as he hinted at in *The Tides of Fortune*, was possibly the influence of conversations with leading TRC members like Hogg and Peter Thorneycroft.<sup>70</sup> Put simply, the state had shrunk rapidly in his conception of an

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<sup>67</sup> Conservative Central Office, *The Campaign Guide 1955*, (London, 1955), 1.

<sup>68</sup> Addison, *Road to 1945*, 164.

<sup>69</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 287. *Sunday Express*, 15 May 1947.

<sup>70</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 300.

ordered society. The language remained the same – a ‘mixed economy’ along ‘the line of progress’ – but even Macmillan had not managed to swim successfully against the Hayekian tide. In Truro in April 1947 he declared that ‘socialism leads inevitably to totalitarianism.’<sup>71</sup> He followed this up with a declaration in Wandsworth that ‘we believe in real democracy, political and economic. In every country it is becoming more and more apparent that socialism and democracy cannot live together.’<sup>72</sup> This, let it be noted, was the atmosphere in which that great bastion of Tory progressivism – *The Industrial Charter* – was published but a month later. Whilst the charter acknowledged that elements of the “New Jerusalem” – nationalisation of coal, the railways and the Bank of England - could not be overturned, its architects believed fundamentally that the instigators of such policies were dangerous, or were at least prepared to paint them in such terms. While later lauded as ‘the first landmark on the road to Conservative recovery in the field of ideas,’ and drafted by a committee including Macmillan, Stanley and Lyttelton, the document in fact represented the ideas of Baldwin, rather than the pre-1939 Phoenix Generation.<sup>73</sup> Like Baldwin, they needed to adopt the cloak of progress, or, as party papers put it, ‘to convince the people that it accepted the need for full employment, the welfare state and controls in time of scarcity.’<sup>74</sup> At the same time, they needed to reverse Labour’s policies as far as post-1945 opinion would allow, whereby the Conservative Party would ‘sketch its own policy for dealing with the worst outrages of Socialist legislation without simply proposing the wholesale reversal of that legislation.’<sup>75</sup> This then, was by no means the realisation of *The Middle Way*, but a reactive form of politics.

## 6.8 The Hayekian Demographic Timebomb

Positivity, as Ira Zweiniger-Bargielowska sagely illustrated, was manifestly missing from the Tory message after 1945.<sup>76</sup> To be sure, there were examples of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 306.

<sup>73</sup> History of the Conservative Research Department, Undated, TCL, RAB H/46/20.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, RAB H/46/44.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Austerity and the Conservative Recovery,’ 188.

modernisation and democratisation. David Maxwell Fyfe's reforms removed the financial barrier to becoming a Conservative candidate – limiting subscription to election funds at £50 a candidate, and thus preventing the previous “buying” of seats by out of touch country bumpkins.<sup>77</sup> Woolton's drive to replace these lost funds with grass roots subscription was also remarkably successful: auguring a rise from 937,000 party members in April 1947 to 2.5 million by September 1948.<sup>78</sup> These however were rather cosmetic measures. Whilst Churchill's dramatic language extolling ‘the forward upward road toward freedom and recovery’ may occasionally have resembled a vivid Delacroix painting, it was usually followed by a warning of ‘the downhill path of tightening controls...that make for domestic unhappiness and worry.’<sup>79</sup> For in ‘a world where the state has come to stay,’ Butler declared, ‘we shall seek to find an enduring place for private initiative.’<sup>80</sup> Such views, however well put, were rather pessimistically Orwellian for a society seeking a more constructive programme from the ashes of war.

The rejection of Butler's ROBOT scheme (named after three of its civil servant advocates) in February 1952 to break with Bretton Woods and instigate a free-floating pound is sometimes seen as the moment the Tories accepted the Attlee consensus.<sup>81</sup> Reducing spending on welfare provision was not countenanced to provide cheap money and a jolt to the economy through the stimulation of the export trade. Together with the 1958 resignations from Macmillan's government however, one should pay a little more attention to the actors in the post 1945 Tory melees, rather than simply note the conclusions. In the first instance, Eden stepped in to foil Butler – a rare piece of domestic interference for a man, as we have seen, with relatively little knowledge in such areas. Six years later, Macmillan indeed survived the challenge of Thorneycroft, Powell and Birch. Thus Keynesianism seemed to emerge victorious. Yet who were its challengers? Not the stuffy old men the Phoenix Generation had faced between the wars, but a younger type whose

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<sup>77</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune*, 295.

<sup>78</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Austerity and the Conservative Recovery,’ 189-90.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> ‘Looking Ahead: Progressive Conservatism Speaks,’ 2 October 1944, CPA, CRD 2/28/3.

<sup>81</sup> Namely Sir Leslie Rowan, Sir George Bolton, and Otto Clarke.

principal point of reference was the century's *second* war.

This could already be seen with the TRC during the conflict. With 1943 forming a convenient twenty-five year long generational gap between the end of the first war and the point where the Phoenix Generation arguably should have been shaping Tory policy, in actual fact TRC membership was split down the middle. Comprising fourteen members of the Phoenix Generation and the same number of MPs who had donned uniform for the first time against Hitler, already the balance of power was shifting away from the Great War veteran.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, with the chairman Hinchingbrooke and joint-secretaries Thorneycroft and Molson all falling into the latter camp, arguably even by 1943 post-war Conservatism could never be what Macmillan and his cohort had desired in 1939. Whilst the second war grouping would remain keen to ensure the kudos of their veteran predecessors – Amery wished them ‘more power to your young elbows’ in October 1943 – the ideological breach was clear.<sup>83</sup> For all Labour were hoping for a postwar consensus built on the promise of a New Jerusalem, it would be the mission of the Thorneycroft cohort to limit the scale of this. This was not merely the repetition of the age old pattern of anti-socialism, but a revolutionary creed which derived from Hitler and Hayek.

The classic statement of the post-Hitler age remains Isaiah Berlin's 1958 Inaugural Oxford lecture on the ‘Two Concepts of Liberty.’ Pointing to 1789, and with first-hand experience of fleeing Soviet Russia, Berlin warned of the nature of self-mastery (positive liberty):

The French Revolution, like all great revolutions, was, at least in its Jacobin form, just an eruption of the desire for “positive” freedom of collective self-direction on the part of a large body of Frenchmen who felt liberated as a nation, even though the result was, for a good many of them, a severe restriction of individual freedoms.

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<sup>82</sup> Advance Copy of *Forward – By the Right* sent to Leo Amery, October 1943, CAC, AMEL 2/1/36.

<sup>83</sup> Amery to Hinchingbrooke, 13 October 1943, *Ibid.*

Though we have seen that in 1940 some form of *raison d'être* had to be found for the war beyond crushing Nazism, once this had been achieved the organ that instigated such progressive measures – the state – had to be watched with an eagle eye. The following was again from Berlin's lecture, but could equally have come from Richard Law, Peter Thorneycroft, or a host of twentieth century born Conservatives:

It seems to me that the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised is demonstrably false. If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict - and of tragedy - can never wholly be eliminated from human life.

The fear of catastrophe reigned in the hopes of man. The Conservative Party was particularly sensitive to such trends, given its historical role as the party of order and stability. Like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, if they denounced the cruelty of Mr Jones, they were forever afraid of unleashing a Napoleon.

Perhaps then, it is time to view May 1940 a little differently. The substitution of Chamberlain for Churchill, rather than Chamberlain for Halifax may indeed have led to a more vigorous prosecution of the war against Nazi Germany. It may indeed have given hope to the occupied peoples of Europe, and given Roosevelt something to think about. Yet it also resolutely shaped Britain's domestic future. Beveridge assumed some prominence to be sure, but was always hammering against a Prime Minister whose belief in progress had been shattered by the First World War, who saw the market rather than the state as the instrument of control over the destiny of the nation, and would impose a neo-liberal form of leadership that, though temporarily abated in the party under Eden and Macmillan, was always ready to resurface. Correlli Barnett may paint an image of 1940s Conservatism as riddled by paternal, interventionist Tories foolishly help



Labour tinker with Britain's governmental structure, but the reality was decidedly more ambiguous.<sup>84</sup> Thatcher did not so much build anew as dust off the cobwebs. That Hogg and Thorneycroft returned to political prominence under her, and the aged Macmillan lambasted the selling of the family silver, remains indicative.

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<sup>84</sup> C. Barnett, *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945-1950*, (Basingstoke, 1995), passim.

## Conclusion

### C.1 Retrospect

The Phoenix Generation never forgot the First World War. Almost seventy years after its start, Harold Macmillan replied to a letter from his former comrade in arms, Harold Balfour:

Dear Harold. Your letter touched me deeply. It was very kind of you to send it. How well I remember those days at the beginning of the war. It is sad to see now so much division in our country for then, at least, we had a sense of all being on the same side. Yours HM<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Macmillan is a bad example: he, after all, is well known for his death bed sorrow that the unemployment levels in the Stockton of the 1980s were the same as they had been sixty years earlier. This was clearly was not *his* Britain. Yet he was far from alone in being ravaged by memory – James Stuart, for example, retaining a lifelong anti-Germanism.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Louis Spears may be better known for his staunch support of Churchill's views on appeasement, but an equally concrete expression of his personality exists in the Belgian town of Mons. Following initial correspondence with Mayor Victor Maistriau in 1937, he would spend the next fifteen years trying to get a monument erected memorialising the 1914 battle that took place there, and in which he was a combatant. Recognising that Spears would be *particulièrement sympathique* to the cause, Maistriau entrusted him with raising

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<sup>1</sup> Macmillan to Balfour, 20 November 1984, CAC, BLFR 1/1.

<sup>2</sup> J. Stuart, *Within the Fringe*, (London, 1967), 87: 'Let those who live to follow after me remember that the Germans cannot be trusted – nor can the Japs, after Pearl Harbour. They are both to be feared. People today buy Mercedes motor cars and Volkswagens because they have a reputation for good workmanship, but I for one will never knowingly buy anything made in Germany or Japan, and I hope others will on reflection take a similar view.' At the same time, Stuart was proud to take the salute from his former regiment, the Scots Guards, on their return from Suez (178).

funds in Britain and her Empire.<sup>3</sup> Having reached £850 of the £1000 target by the outbreak of war in 1939, the project was put on hold for years with Spears depositing the money into War Bonds on 3 May 1940.<sup>4</sup> Yet after the war he wrote to prominent figures in the town trying to locate Maistriau. 'It is,' he stated having tracked down the Mayor, 'desirable never to forget the association of the British Army with Mons.'<sup>5</sup> By 1952 the arrangements were in place and, having unsuccessfully attempted to have Churchill attend, Lord Alexander travelled to Belgium to preside over its unveiling.<sup>6</sup> Spears, having worked so hard for its construction, was also persuaded to say a few words. His oration was both indicative of his generation, and undeniably moving:

There are things which can never be forgotten, glories which cannot be tarnished, sufferings which last all one's life. The survivors of these battles feel deeply that it was the best of us who never came back to the country. We who have seen another war have become old. Time has been hard on us, the years which have passed since 1914 weigh heavily on our shoulders. But our comrades at Mons will always be young, they smile in our memory with the brilliance of their twenty five years at they smiled at the death here, nearly forty years ago. All our Ex-Servicemen, the whole Empire, is grateful to you.<sup>7</sup>

## C.2 Promise

The crucial point of this thesis is that such feelings were articulated beyond autobiographies and poems however. To be sure, the Phoenix Generation were prone to artistic flourish: Duff Cooper's love letters to his future wife attest to that.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Maistriau to Spears, 28 October 1937, KCL, ELSKC 7/1.

<sup>4</sup> Spears War Bond Form, 3 May 1940, Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Spears to Mme. Maistriau and, subsequently, Maistriau himself, 7 October 1946 and 1 July 1947, Ibid, ELSKC 7/2.

<sup>6</sup> Churchill to Spears, 16 July 1952, Ibid, ELSKC 7/3.

<sup>7</sup> Spears Speech, 11 October 1952, Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A. Cooper (ed), *A Durable Fire: The Letters of Duff and Diana Cooper 1913-1950*, (London, 1983), passim.

Yet – unlike the Graves and Sassoons - this was not their sole, or even main, outlet of grief. It is important not to view all ex-servicemen as almost wandering zombies in interwar Britain – overcome by emotion, and only able to articulate their views in the narrow form of soldierly concerns like war pensions and compensation for wounds sustained under fire. To be sure, these are legitimate and important areas of interest, and ones ably examined previously, but this analysis has contended that the spectrum needs to be widened a little. Great War veterans entered the Westminster bloodstream in numbers in no way commensurate merely with that of a pressure group, or political flash in the pan. They were also not mere replicas of the authors. These were men who parlayed their radicalisation into directions that arguably could not have been foreseen in 1918. Oxford and the trenches did not always augur a road to literary contemplation, but, as illustrated here, could influence one in a number of ways.

The trenches of the Great War were not only a bloodier Toynbee Hall – where the upper class, in small numbers, dipped their toe in the lives of the average worker – but a revolutionary experience for many. It took lives which had been meandering along and provided them with a purpose they had lacked. One does not wish to be over dramatic, but the lives of the Phoenix Generation do almost reverse von Clausewitz's doctrine: politics, to the Edens, Mosleys and Loders, was almost a continuation of war. What they had failed to achieve on the battlefield – the safety of their comrades, the crushing military defeat of Germany (the speed of whose defeat and Allied inability to penetrate their hinterland must have been equally puzzling to the victors) and, in some cases, the rather unfulfilled nature of the combat (achieving neither the killing of the enemy nor military medals they had sought) – begat a fervour to achieve something after 1918. Thus the rhetoric of 1918 was doubly important. Certainly they believed in Lloyd George's words – building "homes fit for heroes" was indeed desirable. Yet it also represented the plugging of a gap opened up by the conflict. These men needed to make their mark in life. This, crucially, would be determined by how far they could move England beyond 1914 – not how far they could bring it back it into being.

### C.3 Averting Danger as Baldwin's Great Victory

The other critical dichotomy concerns how far these men were masters of the forces the war had unleashed. At election time, particularly in the years immediately following the conflict, veterans exhibited little inhibition about flouting their war service. The acclaim this brought them presumably was a real shot in the arm to their confidence. It also, given the scant political knowledge the young men could have at this time, did them no harm at the ballot box. When it came to appeasement too, ex-servicemen like Duff Cooper would attempt to imbue their arguments with a tacit moral authority the war had provided, though this indeed was a two-way street – Chamberlain's foreign policy, contrary to the myths, was supported to an even larger degree by former soldiers. At any rate, war service was a useful piece of political currency for any candidate, and, as we saw, helped buttress the Conservative Party's national appeal. Disraelism was back, and had the kudos of an important set of people. This was clearly one dimension.

Yet did either the veterans themselves, or the Conservative leadership, really understand what they were unleashing? One only need view the figures of ex-servicemen admitted to public asylums to see what the conflict could unleash long term.<sup>9</sup> The Phoenix Generation had of course been more lucky, but they had seen the same sights as those more viscerally affected. Baldwin acted to quell such forces. Aside from taming the socialistic tendencies the conflict had produced, he dangled the carrot of office in front of the young Tory veterans, but rarely within reach. His political agenda similarly gave hope to the Macmillans, but its leftist rhetoric was not the launching pad to progressive activism. Baldwin then, as Conservatives tend to do, erred on the side of caution. Hitler abroad, and a pervasively shell shocked culture at home, augured an arms-length strategy with the ex-serviceman. The world needed to change, but this was the time for evolution, rather than revolution.<sup>10</sup> The penchant the Phoenix Generation had

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<sup>9</sup> F. Reid, *"Have You Forgotten Yet" Shell Shock, Trauma, and the Memory of the Great War in Great Britain, 1914-1930*, University of West England PhD Thesis, 2006, 164. 2,500 admissions by 1919, 4,673 by 1920 and 6,435 by 1921.

<sup>10</sup> As K. Mannheim put it, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology: Vol 6*, (London, 1997), 103 'Conservative reformism consists in the substitution of individual factors by other

shown for the latter was worrying. Better though, to keep them within established circles and perpetually frustrated, than to turn them away. Arguably, Baldwin may have thought, they did not know their own minds. Certainly, even when they outlined so readily how the war had changed them, perhaps indeed they did not. Government policy, as Reid has perceptively noted, was tailored to make people forget.<sup>11</sup> Any examples of shell-shock, however tacit, were to be kept out of sight. Thus the hyper-masculine portrayal of war veterans come election time, military uniforms, medals and all. 1914-18 was to be about glory, not anguish. Veterans were to be considered part of the Conservative tradition, rather than something new. The stakes were high – as Weimar showed, when veterans felt betrayed (and even when they were almost slavishly appeased by the state) the democratic polity was in trouble. By keeping ex-soldiers in house, Baldwin accorded them avenues for their various causes, and political space to vent, but never lost sight of the importance of retaining them within the fold.<sup>12</sup>

#### C.4 A Study in Failure?

Ultimately then, is this a study in failure? The mere repetition of the age old tale of youth burning brightly, only to be outwitted by age? It also, one might contend, contains elements of a generation merely “growing up.” The reason Macmillan did not enact his *Middle Way* agenda across the board was simply that he had matured past such ideas, and realised, as Rab Butler noted, that politics is only *The Art of the*

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individual factors (‘improvements’)...The Conservative only thinks in terms of a system as a reaction, either when he is forced to develop a system of his own to counter that of the progressives, or when the march of events deprives him of all influence upon the immediate present.’

<sup>11</sup> Reid, *Have You Forgotten*, 110.

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Cohen sees the British spirit of voluntarism as constituting a key explanation for the loyalty of ex-servicemen to the democratic state, despite its faults. Organisations such as the British Legion, she posits, formed space for servicemen to contact non-combatants (donors) and thus to re-enter normal life. In Germany veterans, despite being comparatively well rewarded, rejected the state’s overtures whilst Weimar left little room for charitable endeavour – an important source of communication shut down. Was, one might ask, the Tory Party another vessel for veteran-non-combatant dialogue? D. Cohen, *The War Came Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany 1914-1939*, (London, 2001), 8.

*Possible*.<sup>13</sup> These points may be taken in turn.

Firstly, by most concrete measures the Phoenix Generation was an outstanding success. Including Attlee, every Prime Minister from 10 May 1940 to 18 October 1963 had seen active service in the First World War. Every Conservative Foreign Secretary from June 1935 to December 1955 likewise.<sup>14</sup> Given their economic views, it is perhaps significant that the Phoenix Generation rarely occupied 11 Downing Street – the Chancellor of the Exchequer being reserved for men like Snowden and Chamberlain between the wars, and, besides Macmillan’s brief tenure, Butler and Thorneycroft after 1945. Nevertheless, their presence was felt in most issues of the day. From the General Strike to revolts over economic lethargy through to appeasement, the Westminster in the decades following 1918 may well have had a decisively different character had veterans not occupied it in such numbers. The state that emerged after 1945, if inaugurated by Labour, received the Phoenix Generation’s seal of approval in its overall form. This, given the occasionally virulent Hayekian opposition from the Tory backbenches, was important in ensuring that historians could talk of a post-war consensus. Even though not of their direct making, the planned nature of post-1945 society was perhaps their enduring legacy.<sup>15</sup>

By their own standards however, they failed. The Macmillan of the 1980s was not simply an out of touch anachronism, but a testament to such failure. Thatcher was possible because Keynesianism had been seen to fail – it was no longer, as Charmley noted, the philosopher’s stone it had appeared in the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Yet even the manifestations of such failure – principally “stop-go” and stagflation –

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps tellingly Macmillan recorded in his diary that ‘Disraelis and Churchills are not liked by Parliaments or People. The prefer (in our system)...Baldwins, Neville Chamberlains.’ P. Catterall (ed), *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957*, (Basingstoke, 2003), 95 [11 August 1951].

<sup>14</sup> Counting John Simon’s RFC service and his position as “National” Foreign Secretary this could arguably be extended back to 1931.

<sup>15</sup> One example of planning was the various satellite towns and garden cities that emerged after 1945. Writing to Frederic Osborn in 1942 Francis Fremantle suggested eleven Tory MPs might be open for Osborn’s ‘indoctrination’ on the subject, compared to seven from the other parties. Fremantle to Osborn, 18 May 1942, HALS, FJO/B66.

<sup>16</sup> J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996*, (London, 1996), 94-5.

could have been hypothesised by 1945. It was not so much that the post-1945 state was predicated on contradictions, but that it was built upon too much compromise. Aside from Labour's woes – its New Jerusalem leaders dying in office and an incoherent nuclear policy threatening to engulf the party – the Tories were similarly dogged by indecision. The issue that emerged from the early 1940s was essentially what Mosley had been articulating in the early 1930s, did political liberty and economic prosperity necessarily go hand in hand? Before 1939 the Phoenix Generation had, to some degree, bought Mosley's argument. The state needed to intervene to correct market failures to a significant degree. Yet Hitler, and the onset of a new group of Tory radicals inspired by another world war, threw such conclusions into doubt. Hayek and Thornycroft seized the initiative: basic provision for the people would have to be raised, but the market was, by and large, the tool to do this. It is quite convenient to consider 1945 as something of a pivot. Thirteen years earlier, Mosley had formed the British Union of Fascists and would take extreme Keynesianism into the abyss. Thirteen years later, Enoch Powell resigned from Macmillan's government in a free market fit of pique, and would later crash and burn himself. Two clever men, radicalised by two wars, tossed their careers aside for opposing economic ideologies. That both faded into disgrace serves as evidence that if Hayek's dream would have to wait, the Phoenix Generation could hardly claim the knock out ideological victory Macmillan's talk of 'having it so good' suggested either. The generation had not filled the historic role they had allotted themselves – evidence both of Mannheim's 'Problems of Generations,' and the limitations inherent within the Conservative Party structure.

Aside from Baldwin's skillful handling of them, two events threw the Phoenix Generation off course. By not supporting Mosley at the time of his resignation, the war generation missed the boat. 1930-1 was the time to redraw the political map. That a "National Government" of the old men came into being in August 1931 should not blind us to its more youthful alternatives. Some form of coalition between Lloyd George, and the Labour and Conservative types who flirted with Mosley's New Party – Stanley, Macmillan and Bevan – would have provided a real electoral alternative, not only to the Labour left, but the National Government



centre. That it did not emerge – due its main player’s arrogance, and minor figures political pragmatism – was a key moment. To be sure, the National Government would have to begin to correct unemployment, but orthodox finance did not appreciate the sense of urgency the young men did.<sup>17</sup>

As the 1930s went on, foreign policy began to supersede employment concerns. Here again the Phoenix Generation were found wanting, though in this instance one must be more sympathetic. There was no right way to handle Hitler, for all the later lambasting of Chamberlain and Halifax. He led a nation with the combination of economic strength and genuine territorial grievance arguably unseen in European history. Fears (accurate as they indeed were) concerning another holocaust of, due to technological developments, a much worse kind even than 1914-18 abounded in Great Britain – not least amongst veterans. Jubilant public scenes at the conclusion of the Munich Agreement were replicated amongst Tory former soldiers who, even if a few dissented like Duff Cooper, had no coherent alternative to appeasement. Few, it must be said, rallied to Churchill. This then, was not age outwitting youth, but youth not fighting for its beliefs in the first instance and having no better answer to age in the second.

To the accusation that they simply matured past early radicalism and what emerged after 1945 was the logical outcome of such a process, one may offer a qualified endorsement. Certainly the Phoenix Generation showed signs of adapting to circumstance. Acknowledging the hold both Hayek and legacy of the war had had, they too espoused the post-1945 Tory message of freedom in all things. Pre-1939 words praising Mussolini or Stalinism would clearly have to go. That they evolved one cannot question. Yet this should not blind us to what they had said before. British politics was not heading in the direction it arrived at in 1945 in the years before the conflict. For example, an Eden administration of 1938 or even a Halifax government of 1940 would probably have pursued entirely different objectives – with an entirely different structure of government - to what in fact

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<sup>17</sup> Though Appendix D shows, one must be wary of the gap between rhetoric and how the Phoenix Generation actually vote. Sympathy towards labour yes, sympathy towards Labour more debateable. Tories were still Tories.

emerged. The experience of coalition government during the Second World War is often held in high regard by the Tories. Begrudgingly they confess their previous sins – conveniently hiding much under the *Guilty Men* foreign policy critiques – and make clear that the party had changed for the better: Butler, Eden and Macmillan auguring a better age. This is debatable. What emerged after 1945 was a Tory party committed to freedom from state interference and, after the debacle of 1945, winning elections. In the early 1930s, in the eyes of men who would come to lead later on, government had been a tool for good. By 1943, the Tory Party was already beginning to see it in rather more Orwellian terms. The legacy of one war had been replaced by another. Labour alone marched forth, whilst the Conservatives returned to their old, negative, dialogue peddled albeit by an even more youthful cohort.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this has merely created some kind of Hegelian political synthesis, arguably however it has limited the nation's progress. Either way, we still live with the consequences.

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<sup>18</sup> Only 13% of the Phoenix Generation, as mentioned in the introduction, served in the Commons after 1945, and only 8 (less than 2%) of them in Cabinet. For all that Macmillan and Eden were in 10 Downing Street this seems a generational shift indeed. Whilst veterans such as Lytellton augmented the ex-servicemen number, they had not served in parliament between the wars. It was this twin experience, I argue in the Mannheimian model, that was transitive.

Appendix A

*Duff Cooper's Acrostic, Undated 1930*

Steadfast of purpose have you proved - and the  
Twice tried custodian of your country's fate  
And neither sought the many to placate,  
Nor feared the private malice of the few.  
Lately, when civil turmoil fires grew -  
Engendered out of misery by hate -  
You were the statesmen that preserved the state  
Because the English people trusted you  
And when your task is ended - and the cheers  
Loud echoing round you shall have died away -  
Down the long corridor of crowded years  
Welcome awaits you where you longed to stay  
In fields and lanes, in books and quiet spheres  
Not unnumbered in your noiscent [?] day.

CUL, BALD 240/8/2.

## Appendix B

### Phoenix Generation MPs

Key: a – appointed to non-parliamentary position, d- died, e- lost election, p – assumed peerage, r – retired/resigned from constituency, s- resigned due to scandal.

MP	Date of Birth	War Service/Medals	Constituency/Election Record	Joined Tories From Another Party	Resigned the Tory Whip (year resigned/restored)	Cabinet Post Pre-39	WW2 Cabinet Post	Cabinet Post After 1951
ACLAND-TROYTE, Gilbert	1876	Served in France 1914-18, DSO.	Tiverton 1924-45r					
AGNEW, Peter	1900	Joined Royal Navy 1918.	Camborne 31-50e, S. Worcs 55-66r					
AINSWORTH, Charles	1874	Middle East as Lieut-Col, Egypt and Turkey.	Bury 1918-1935r					
ALBERY, Irving	1879	Served in Egypt and France 14-18	Gravesend 1924-45e					
ALLEN, John Sandeman	1892	Col. Served in France/Belgium 14-19. Intelligence Officer in Flanders, Gallipoli and Salonika.	Birkenhead W 1931-45e					
AMERY, Leo	1873	Served in France 14-18. DSO from Boer War.	Birm South 1911-18 and Sparkbrook 18-45e.			*	*	
APPLIN, Reginald	1869	Brevet Maj. MC + DSO.	Enfield 1924-29e, 31-5r					
APSLEY, Lord Allen	1895	Commanded	Southampton 1922-29r, Bristol 31-42d.					
ARCHER-SHEE,	1873		Finsbury Central 1910-					

Martin		Gloucestershire Regiment 1915-17, France. DSO from Boer War.	18, Finsbury 18-23e.					
ASHMEAD-BARTLETT, Ellis	1881	Served in the Dardanelles 16-19	Hammersmith N 1924-6r					
ASTBURY, Frederick	1872	Lieut-Commander in RNVR, recruited for the Royal Navy.	Salford W 1918-23e, 24-9e, 31-5r.				* (35/N)	
ASTOR, John	1886	Served in France 1914-18, Major 1919.	Dover 1922-45r.					
BAGLEY, Edward	1876	Served three years in Egypt and Palestine as RASC Officer	Farnworth 1918-22e.					
BAILLIE, Adrian	1898	Scots Greys, Lieut.	Linlithgowshire 1931-5, Tonbridge 37-45r					
BAIRD, John	1874	Awarded DSO, served in France 1914-5.	Rugby 1910-22, Ayr Burghs 22-5p.					
BALDWIN-WEBB, James	1894	Served in France.	The Wrekin 1931-40d.					
BALFOUR, Harold	1897	Served with RFC, and RAF 14-23. MC.	Isle of Thanet 1929-45r					
BANKS, Reginald	1880	Served in India/Mesopotamia 14-17	Swindon 1922-9e, 31-4a					
BARCLAY-HARVEY, Charles	1890	Gordon Highlanders, western front.	Kincardine 1923-29e, 31-39a					
BARNETT, Richard	1863	Staff Officer 1914-16.	St Pancras S-W 1916-29r.					
BARTON, Basil	1879	Captain. MC.	Hull C 1929-35e					
BAXTER, Arthur	1891	Served with Canadian Army in France 1915-18	Wood Green 1935-50, Southgate 50-64d					
BEAMISH, Tufton	1874	Rear-Admiral. Saw action at Jutland.	Lewes 1924-31r, 36-45r.					
BEAUMONT-THOMAS, Lionel	1893	Served in France 14-18.	Birm King's Norton 1929-35r					

BECKETT, William	1866	Captain, Asst. Secretary Northern Command 14-16	Whitby 1906-18, Scarborough 18-22r, Leeds N 23-9r					
BELL, William	1875	Western Front 1914-18. DSO, FCdG.	Devizes 1918-23e.					
BENN, Ion Hamilton	1863	Commanded Flotilla of Raiders along Belgian Coast with RNVR. Awarded DSO and FCdG.	Greenwich 1910-22r.					
BIRCHALL, John Dearman	1875	Major, served in France 1918.	Leeds N-E 1918-40r.					
BLAIR, Reginald	1881	Served in France and Middle East 14-16	Bow 1912-22r, Hendon 35-45r					
BLUNDELL, Francis	1880	Served in France 1914-19. Captain.	Ormskirk 1922-29e.					
BORWICK, George	1879	DSO and Legion of Honour.	N Croydon 1918-22r.					
BOURNE, Robert	1888	Hereford Regiment 1917, Capt	Oxford City 1924-38d					
BOWER, Robert	1894	Served at sea 14-18.	Cleveland 1931-45r					
BOWYER, George E	1886	MC, France.	Buckingham 1918-37r					
BOYCE, Harold	1895	Served with Australian forces in France, Gallipoli and Egypt 14-18.	Gloucester 1929-45e					
BOYD-CARPENTER, Archibald	1873	France 1915-18. Major.	N Bradford 1918-23e, Coventry 24-29e, Chertsey 31-37d.					
BRAITHWAITE, Albert	1893	DSO, MC. Western Front.	Buckrose 1926-45e, W Harrow 51-9d					
BRAITHWAITE, Joseph	1895	Lieut RNVR, served in Dardanelles, Egypt and Palestine 14-19	Sheffield Hillsborough 1931-5e, Holderness 39-50, NW Bristol 50-5e					
BRASS, William	1886	Served with Flying Corps in	Clitheroe 1922-45r.					



BUTLER, James	1889	Served in the war with the Scottish Horse.	Cambridge Uni 1922-23e					
CADOGAN, Edward	1880	Served 'overseas' 1914-18. Major.	Reading 1922-3e, Finchley 24-35r, Bolton 40-5r.					
CAMPBELL-JOHNSON, Malcolm	1871	Served with BEF 1914-18	East Ham S 1931-5e					
CAMPION, William	1870	DSO. Lieut-Col.	Lewes 1910-24a.					
CARVER, William	1868	Major, France 1914-19	Howdenshire 1926-45r					
CARY, Robert	1898	4th Dragoon Guards on Western Front 16-19	Eccles 1935-45e, Withington 51-74r					
CASSELS, James	1877	Served with RASC in France and Germany 1916-19. Captain.	Leyton W 1922-9e, Camberwell N-W 31-35r.					
CASTLE STEWART, Arthur	1889	France 1914-18, MC	Harborough 1929-33r					
CAVENDISH-BENTINCK, Henry	1863	Served at Gallipoli, Lieut-Col.	Norfolk N-W 1886-92e, Nottingham S 95-06e, 10-29e.					
CAYZER, Charles	1896	Served in France 1916-18, Lieut.	Chester 1922-40d.					
CAYZER, Herbert	1881	Commanded Troops in France 1915.	Portsmouth S 1918-22r, 23-39p.					
CAZELET, Victor	1896	France 1916-18, MC	Chippenham 1924-43d					
CECIL, Hugh	1869	Joined the RFC 1915, given pilot's wings though not allowed to make solo flights.	Greenwich 1895-06e, Oxford Uni 10-37r.					
CHAPMAN, Robert	1880	Served in France for 3 years. DSO, CMG.	Houghton 1931-35e					



CHARTERIS, John	1877	Brig-Gen, Royal Engineers, DSO, CMG	Dumfriesshire 1924-29e					
CHILCOTT, Harry	1871	Lieut-Commander, RNAS 1915-17. Intelligence work 1917-22.	Walton 1918-29r.					
CHILD, Smith	1880	Commanded Royal Artillery Division on Western Front.	Stone 1918-22r.					
CHURCHILL, Winston	1874	Brief Service in France 1916	Oldham 1900-06, NW Manchester 06-8e, Dundee 09-22e, Epping 24-45, Woodford 45-64r	* 04-22 elected as Lib	*	*	*	*
CHURCHMAN, Arthur	1867	Lieut-Col Suffolk Regiment 1914-17	Woodbridge 1920-29r.					
CLARKE, Ralph	1892	Gallopoli, Egypt and Palestine	East Grinstead 1936-55r					
COATES, Norman	1890	Wounded at Suvia Bay. Served in Europe 1914-18. Lieut-Col. MC.	Isle of Ely 1922-23r.					
COBB, Edward	1891	Served in BEF 1914-16, DSO	Preston 1936-45e					
COCHRANE, Archibald	1885	DSO, served in the Navy.	Fife East 1924-9e, Dumbartonshire 32-6a					
COHEN, Jack	1886	Served in France 1914-17, where he lost both legs. Major. Prominent in the British Legion.	Liverpool Fairfield 1918-31r					
COLFOX, Philip	1888	Served in France/Flanders 1914-17.	N Dorset 1918-22 W Dorset 22-41r.					
COLMAN, Nigel	1886	RNVR Capt	Brixton 1927-45e					
COLVILLE, John	1894	Three times wounded on western front, officer.	Midlothian N 1929-43a			*		
COLVIN, Richard	1856	Commanded 2nd London Mounted Brigade and	Epping 1917-23r					

		Essex Volunteers 1915-7							
COOKE, James	1879	France 1916-19, Maj in RAMC.		Hammersmith S 1931-45e					
COURTAULD, John	1880	Action in France		Chichester 1924-42d					
COURTHOPE, George	1877	Colonel. Wounded. Awarded the MC.		Rye 1906-45r					
CRAIG, Norman Carlyle	1868	Lieut-Com RNVR 1915		Isle of Thanet 1910-19d					
CRANBORNE, Robert	1893	Guardsmen with Macmillan		S. Dorset 1929-41p			*		
CRAVEN-ELLIS, William	1880	Served 1914-9, Lieut Col.		Southampton 1931-45e					
CRAWFORD GREENE, William	1884	France and Mesopotamia 14-19		Worcester 1923-45r					
CRITCHLEY, Alfred	1890	Served with Canadian Forces in France, DSO, CMG		Twickenham 1934-5r					
CROFT, Henry Page	1881	Serves in France 1914-16. Sent home after his reports regarding superiors cause controversy.		Christchurch 1910-18, Bournemouth 18-40p					
CROOKSHANK, Chichester	1868	France 1914-18, Col		Berwick and Haddington 1924-9r, Bootle 31-5r					
CROOKSHANK, Harry	1893	France 15-16, Salonika 17-18, Captain.		Gainsborough 1922-56p				*	
CROOM-JOHNSON, Reginald	1879	KOYLI in France		Bridgwater 1929-38a					
CROSS, Ronald	1896	RFC 1914-19		Rossdale 1931-45e, Ormskirk 50-1a					
CROSSLAND	1896	France 16-17, Russia 18-9.		Wirral 1935-45r					

GRAHAM, Alan			Captain.						
CROWDER, John	1890		RHG 1914-19		Finchley 1935-59r				
CRUDDAS, Bernard	1882		DSO. Colonel. Western Front, Egypt, and Gallipoli		Wallasey 1931-40r				
CULVERWELL, Cyril	1895		Served in the Army during the war.		Bristol W 1928-45r				
CUNNINGHAM-REID, Alec	1895		France, Sappers then RFC. Captain		Warrington 1922-3e, 24-9e, St Marylebone 32-45e				
CURTIS-BENNETT, Henry	1879		Secret Service 1916-19		Chelmsford 1924-6r				
CURZON, Francis	1884		Battalion Commander RNVR		Battersea 1918-29a				
DALRYMPLE-WHITE, Godfrey	1866		Lieut-Col. Commanded Battalion then Aide-de Camp.		Southport 1910-23r, 24-31r				
DAVIDSON, John H.	1876		Staff Officer. Participated in Battles of Marne, Ypres and Aisne. Head of Planning, W/F 1916.		Fareham 1918-31r				
DAVIES, George	1875		Major, France 1914-19		Yeovil 1923-45r				
DAVISON, William	1872		No active service. Raised Battalion 1914.		Kensington S 1918-45a				
DE LA BERE, Rupert	1893		Served overseas with the RAF 1914-18		Evesham 1935-50 S Worcs 50-5r				
DEAN, Percy	1877		RNVR, Awarded VC for actions at Zeebrugge, 1918		Blackburn 1918-22r				
DENISON-PENDER, John	1882		Captain and ADC in France and Belgium 1914-16		Newmarket 1913-18, Balham 18-22r				
DESPENCER-ROBERTSON, James	1886		Western Front 1914-19		Islington W 1922-3e, Salisbury 31-42d				
DEWHURST,	1866		Remount officer in England		Northwich 1918-22r				





FLEMING, David	1877	Served in France and Belgium, MC	Dunbartonshire 1924-26a				
FLEMING, Edward	1891	E. Lancs Regiment in France	Withington 1931-50d				
FORD, Patrick	1880	Served with Cameron Highlanders 1914-15	N Edinburgh 1910-23e, 24-35r				
FOREMAN, Henry	1852	Raised two battalions during the conflict.	Hammersmith N 1918-23r				
FOXCROFT, Charles	1868	Became candidate for Bath after predecessor KIA in WW1.	Bath 1918-23e, 24-29d				
FRASER, Keith	1867	Major 1914. Little front line service, if any.	Harborough 1919-23e				
FRASER, Ian	1897	Blinded at the Somme, served 1915-6	St Pancras N 1924-29e, 31-7r, Lonsdale 40-58p				
FREMANTLE, Francis	1872	Medical Officer, western front. Awarded MC.	St Albans 1919-43d				
FULLER, Albert	1894	Capt Indian Army	Ardwick 1931-35e				
GADIE, Anthony	1894	RFA 1914-18	Bradford C 1924-29e				
GANZONI, Francis	1882	Captain in BEF 1914-18	Ipswich 1914-38p				
GAULT, Andrew	1882	Served in France with Regiment he had raised and equipped. DSO.	Taunton 1924-35r				
GAUNT, Guy	1870	Naval Commander. CMG, KCMG	Buckrose 1922-26r				
GEDDES, Auckland Campbell	1879	Major. Staff of GHQ France.	Basingstoke 1917-20a			*	
GEDDES, Eric	1875	No active service. However, despite being a civilian, Geddes was appointed Director of Military Railways on the	Cambridge 1917-22r			*	

			western front with a military rank.										
GEE, Robert	1876		VC 1918 for bravery in France		E Woolwich 1921-22e, Bosworth 24-7r								
GIBBS, George	1873		Commanded battalion, western front.		Bristol W 1906-28p								
GILMOUR, John	1876		Served at Gallipoli, later in Egypt and Palestine (where wounded). Won the DSO and bar.		Renfrewshire E 1910-18, Glasgow Pollok 18-40d				*				
GLEDHILL, Gilbert	1889		Served with BEF overseas 1915-7		Halifax 1931-45e								
GLUCKSTEIN, Louis	1897		BEF 1915-18		Nottingham E 1931-45e								
GLYN, Ralph	1884		Major. Active Service, awarded MC.		Clackmannan 1918-22e, Abingdon 24-53p								
GOLDIE, Noel	1882		Served as Staff Capt in France 1914-18		Warrington 1931-45e								
GRACE, John	1886		Served in France 1914-7		Wirral 1924-31r								
GRAHAM, Frederick	1893		Served with BEF 1914		Cumberland N 1926-35e, Darlington 51-9r								
GREENE, Walter	1869		Served on Western Front, won the DSO.		Chesterton 1895-1906e, Hackney N 10-23e								
GRETTON, John	1867		Col, TA.		Derbyshire S 1895-1906, Rutland 07-18, Burton 18-43p								
GORDON, Alexander Theodore	1881		Active Service in Boer War, but in WW1 head of Forage Department of the War Office, Scotland.		Aberdeen and Kincardine 1918-19d								
GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN, Arthur	1865		Commanded Garrison Battalion in France 14-16		Tunbridge 1892-1906e, Dudley 10-21e, Taunton 21-22e				*				
GRIGG, Edward	1879		Served overseas 1915-9,		Oldham 1922-25r,				*22-25				

		DSO, MC	Altrincham 33-45r	elected as				
GRIMSTON, Robert	1897	Salonica and Palestine 1916-19, Lieut RGA	Westbury 1931-64r	Lib				
GUEST, Charles	1874	Overseas 1915, 1917-18. Col.	Pembroke 1910-18, N. Bristol 22-23, Plymouth Drake 37-45e	*10-23 elected as Lib				
GUEST, Frederick	1875	Aide-de-Camp to French 1914-6, DSO 1917	E. Dorset 1910-22e, 23, Bristol N 24-9e, Plymouth Drake 31-37d	*10-22,23-29 elected as Lib				
GUEST, Oscar	1888	Served with RFC 1914-18	Loughborough 1918-22r, Camberwell NW 35-45e	*18-22 elected as Co. Lib				
GUINNESS, Walter	1890	Served in Egypt and Gallipoli. Awarded DSO 1917 and Bar in 1918.	Bury St Edmonds 1907-31r		*			
GUNSTON, Derrick	1891	Capt, served in France 1915-19	Thornbury 1924-45e					
GUY, James	1894	RNVR and RM 1914-18. MC.	Edinburgh C 1931-41r					
HACKING, Douglas	1884	Served two years in France.	Chorley 1918-45p					
HALES, Harold	1868	Served with RN Gallipoli 1915	Stoke on Trent 1931-5e					
HALL, Douglas	1866	Served with BEF 1914	Isle of Wight 1910-22r					
HALL, Frederick	1864	Lieut Col RFA, DSO, Western Front	Dulwich 1910-32d					
HALL, Walter	1891	France 1914-19, MC and bar. FCdG.	Brecon 1924-9e, 31-5r					
HALL, William	1870	Commanded several ships, taking part in the Battle of Heligoland Bight. Admiral.	Liverpool W Derby 1918-23e, Eastbourne 25-29r.					
HAMBRO, Angus	1883	Fought in the war from	S. Dorset 1910-22, N.					



			1917.		Dorset 1937-45r				
HAMILTON, George	1877		Army in France 1914, RFC 1917, Director for National Service 1916. Major.		Altrincham 1913-23e, Ilford 28-37r				
HAMMERSLEY, Samuel	1892		Served at Gallipoli and with Tank Corp in France, 1915-18		Stockport 1924-35r, Willesden E 38-45e				
HARMSWORTH, Esmond	1898		Capt Royal Artillery		Isle of Thanet 1919-29r				
HARRISON, Gerald	1895		Capt, Egypt, Palestine and Syria 16-19		Bodmin 1924-9e				
HARTINGDON, Edward	1895		Lieut-Col in France 1915-18		Derbyshire W 1923-38p				
HARVEY, Samuel	1885		Major, France and India for duration of war		Totnes 1922-3e, 24-35r				
HAY, Thomas	1882		Maj in Leicestershire Yeomanry		S Norfolk 1922-23e				
HEADLAM, Cuthbert	1876		DSO, served overseas for the duration (France), Lieut-Col		Barnard Castle 1924-9e, 31-5e Newcastle 40-51r				
HEILGERS, Frank	1892		Major, Gallipoli, Palestine and Egypt 1915-19		Bury St Edmonds 1931-44d				
HELY- HUTCHINSON, Maurice	1887		Irish Guards 1915-18, DSO, MC		Hastings 1937-45r				
HENDERSON, Robert	1876		Capt, France 1914-19		Henley 1924-32d				
HENDERSON, Vivian	1884		Awarded the MC for bravery at Ypres. Col.		Glasgow Tradeston 1918-22e, Bootle 24-9e, Chelmsford 31-5r.				
HENDERSON- STEWART, James	1897		BEF 1917-19		E Fife 1933-61d				
HENEAGE,	1881		RFA France 1914-18, Lieut-		Louth 1924-45r				

Arthur HENNESSY, George	1877	Col	Major. France 1915-18	Winchester 1918-31r					
HENNIKER-HUGHAN, Arthur	1866		Royal Navy Captain 1914-6, Rear Admiral 1916	Galloway 1924-25d					
HERBERT, Aubrey	1880		Wounded, imprisoned (and escaped) at Battle of Mons. Military Intelligence in Egypt and re Albania.	S Somerset 1911-18, Yeovil 18-23d					
HERBERT, George	1892		Served in Army 1914-19	Rotherham 1931-33r					
HERBERT, John	1895		France and Flanders 1916-18	Monmouthshire 1934-9a					
HICKMAN, Thomas	1859		Brig-Gen with BEF.	Bilston 1918-22r					
HILDER, Frank	1864		Officer in Egypt 1917	SE Essex 1918-23e					
HILLS, John	1867		Served in France 1914-16	Durham City 1906-18, Durham 18-22e. Ripon 25-38d					
HILTON YOUNG, Edward	1879		Served as Lieut-Commander RNVR at sea and in Serbia, Russia and Flanders 1914-19. DSO.	Norwich 1915-23e, 24-9, Sevenoaks 31-5p				* from Lib 26	
HOARE, Samuel	1880		Intelligence Officer in Russia and Italy.	Chelsea 1910-44p				*	
HOLBROOK, Arthur	1850		Commander RASC 1914-19	Basingstoke 1922-23e, 24-9r					
HOLLAND, Arthur	1862		France 1914-19, Lieut-Gen	Northampton 1924-7d					
HOLT, Herbert	1890		France 1914-18	Upton 1924-9r					
HOMAN, William	1900		Served in France 1915-17	Ashton-Under-Lyme 1924-8s					

HOPE, John	1869	Wounded during the war in France.	Midlothian 1912-18, M North and Peebles 18-22r				
HOPE, Arthur	1897	Served in France and Turkey. FCdG.	Nuneaton 1924-29e, Ashton 31-9a				
HORLICK, James	1886	Coldstream Guards 1908-20	Gloucester 1923-29r				
HORNE, Robert	1871	Director of the Railways on the Western Front. Honorary Military Title.	Glasgow Hillhead 1918-37p	*			
HOROBIN, Ian	1899	RNVR and RAF 1918	Southwick 1931-35r, Oldham E 51-59e				
HOTCHKIN, Stafford	1876	Capt 21st Lancers, MC	Horncastle 1920-22r				
HOWARD, Tom	1888	Served in France with Machine Gun Corp	Islington S 1931-35e				
HOWARD, Donald	1891	Capt in France 1914-9	Cumberland N 1922-6p				
HOWARD-BURY, Charles	1883	DSO. Lieut Col KRRC	Bilston 1922-4e, Chelmsford 26-31r				
HOWITT, Alfred	1879	Capt RAMC in France	Reading 1931-45r				
HUDSON, Austin	1897	Machine Gun Regiment France	Islington E 1922-3e, Hackney N 23-45e, Lewisham N 50-6d				
HUGHES, Collingwood	1872	Lieut Com RNVR	Peckham 1922-4r				
HUNTER, Archibald	1856	Commander of the 3rd Army. DSO from Sudan campaign.	Lancaster 1918-22r				
HUNTER, Michael	1891	RFA, Capt 1914-18	Brigg 1931-35e				
HUNTER-WESTON, Aymer	1864	Invalided from Gallipoli July 1915. Commanded Battalion at the Somme,	North Ayrshire 1916-35r				



KER, James Campbell	1878	Intelligence Duty in Simla	Stirling 1931-35r					
KEYES, Roger	1872	Command of Submarine Fleet at Harwich, later Rear and Acting Vice-Admiral. Planned and led Zeebrugge and Ostend raids.	Portsmouth N 1934-43p					
KINDERSLEY, Guy	1877	Inspector of QMG Services France 1917-18. Maj.	Hitchin 1923-31r					
KING, Douglas	1877	DSO, Flanders and Gallipoli. FCdG for actions in Flanders. RN Division.	Norfolk N 1918-22, Paddington S 22-30d					
KNATCHBULL, Michael	1895	Royal Horse and Field Artillery, Capt. France 1914-8, also Gallipoli 1915	Ashford 1931-33p					
LANCASTER, Claude	1899	Capt Royal Horse Guards. Officer.	Flyde 1938-50, S Flyde 50-70r					
LANE-FOX, George	1870	Lieut-Col. Yorkshire Hussars. France 15-17	Barkston Ash 1906-31r					
LEES-JONES, John	1887	Served with BEF in Salonika	Blackley 1931-45e					
LEIGHTON, Bertie	1875	Maj, France 14-18	Oswestry 1929-45r					
LEWIS, Oswald	1887	Egypt 1914-16	Colchester 1929-45e					
LOCKER-LAMPSON, Godfrey	1875	Military Service 1914-16, western front.	Wood Green 1918-35r					
LOCKER-LAMPSON, Oliver	1880	Lieut-Commander in the RNVR. Served in Belgium 1915. Allegedly asked to help assassinate Rasputin, 1916. CMG, DSO.	Ramsey 1910-18, Huntingdonshire 18-22, Birm Handsworth 22-45r					
LONG, Richard	1892	Major Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry	Westbury 1927-31r					

LLEWELLIN, John	1893	Served in France 1915-19, MC.	Uxbridge 1929-45r				
LLOYD, George	1879	Egypt, Dardanelles, Mesopotamia and Arabia 1914-18. DSO.	W Staffordshire 1910-18a, Eastbourne 24-5a				
LLOYD-GREAME, Philip	1884	Awarded the MC for Western Front Service (though only active service for one month).	Hendon 1918-35r	*			*
LOCKWOOD, James	1888	Capt, RFA, Served in France 1916-18	Shipley 1930-35r				
LOCKWOOD, John	1889	Coldstream Guards 1914-18	Hackney C 1931-5, Romford 50-5r				
LODER, John	1895	Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine 1914-19	Leicester E 1924-9e, Lewes 31-6p				
LOFTUS, Pierse	1877	Suffolk Regiment	Lowestoft 1934-45e				
LORT-WILLIAMS, John	1881	Middlesex Imperial Yeomanry 1914-18	Rotherhithe 1918-23e				
LOWTHER, Christopher	1887	Maj, invalidated out when wounded on western front.	N. Cumberland 1918-22e				
LOWTHER, Claude	1870	Raised, but did not command, three battalions 1914.	Eskdale 1900-6e, 10-18, Lonsdale 18-22r				
LUCAS, Jocelyn	1889	Served overseas 1914-19 (wounded, prisoner), MC	Portsmouth S 1939-66r				
LUCE, Richard	1867	DMS Egypt 1915-18	Derby 1924-9e				
LUMLEY, Roger	1896	Western Front 1916-9, Captain.	Hull E 1922-9e, York 31-7a				
LYMINGTON, Vernon	1898	Served in France 1916-19 with machine gun regiment.	Basingstoke 1929-34r				
LYONS, Abraham	1894	Served with Durham Light Infantry 1914-16	Leicester E 1931-45e				

MACDONALD, Peter	1895	Served in France 1915-19, Capt	Isle of Wight 1924-59r					
MACMILLAN, Harold	1894	Three times wounded on western front, officer.	Stockton 1924-29e, 31-45e, Bromley 45-64r	* (35/37)	*	*		*
MAKINS, Ernest	1869	Brig-Gen with BEF. 1914-18. DSO from Boer War.	Knutsford 1922-45r					
MARGESSON, David	1890	Adjutant in 11th Hussars.	Upton 1922-3e, Rugby 24-42p					
MARSDEN, Ernest	1883	Commanded HMS Ardent at the Battle of Jutland	Battersea N 1931-5e, Chertsey 37-50r					
MASON, Glyn	1887	DSO with bar, France, Macedonia and Palestine 1915-18	Croydon N 1922-40r					
MAXWELL FYFE, David	1900	Served with Scots Guards 1918	Liverpool West Derby 1935-54p					*
MAYHEW, John	1884	Served with Infantry in France 1916-17, Lieut-Col	East Ham N 1931-45e					
MCDONNELL, Angus	1881	CMG 1918, served in France 1916-18	Dartford 1924-9r					
McEWEN, John	1894	Western Front 1914, RFC 1916	Berwick 1931-45e					
McLEAN, Alan	1875	Maj, 1914-19	SW Norfolk 1923-9e, 31-5r					
McLEAN, Charles	1882	Major. Awarded a DSO in 1917 for bravery. CMG. France and Flanders.	Brigg 1918-22r					
MELLOR, John	1893	Mesopotamia 1914-5 (wounded, prisoner)	Tamworth 1935-45, Sutton Coldfield 45-55r					
MERCER, Herbert	1862	Commanded 3rd Reserve Battalion 1917-9	Sudbury 1922-3e					
MERRIMAN, Frank	1880	France 1915-19	Manchester Rusholme 1924-33a					
MEYER, Frank	1886	Lieut-Col, Essex Yeomanry	Great Yarmouth 1924-29e					

MILLS, John	1879	Maj, France, Gallipoli and Egypt 1915-18		New Forest 1932-45r				
MOLLOY, Leonard	1861	Maj, DSO, France.		Blackpool 1922-23r				
MOND, Henry	1898	France 1915-18. Major.		Isle of Ely 1923-4, East Toxteth 29-30p	*23-4 elected as Lib			
MOORE, Thomas	1888	Served in France, Ireland and Russia 1914-19. Lieut-Col.		Ayr Burghs 1925-50, Ayr 50-64r				
MOORE-BRABAZON, John	1884	Pilot. Captain in the RFC, served on Western Front. MC.		Chatham 1918-29e, Wallasey 31-42p				
MORDEN, Walter	1880	Lieut-Col 1915-18		Brentford 1918-31r				
MOREING, Algernon	1889	Served in France 1915-19		Buckrose 1918-22, Camborne 22-23e, 24-29e	*22-24 elected as Liberal			
MORRIS, John	1894	Royal Engineers 1914-19		N Salford 1931-45r				
MORRISON, William	1893	Served in France 1914-18, MC 1915		Cirencester 1929-59r		*		
MORRISON-BELL, Clive	1871	Fought and captured during the war. Repatriated 1918. Maj.		Honiton 1910-31r				
MOSLEY, Oswald	1896	Served in the RFC and on the Western Front.		Harrow 1918-24e, Smethwick 26-31e.	* (20/never)			
MOSS, Herbert	1883	Served at sea 14-17.		Rutherglen 1931-5r				
MUIRHEAD, Anthony	1890	Captain, MC, Western Front		Wells 1929-39d				
MURCHISON, Charles	1872	Drove Red Cross Ambulance in France.		Hull East 1919-22, Huntingdonshire 22-23e, 24-29e.				
MURRAY, Charles	1866	War Office Staff 1915-17, Director of National		Edinburgh S 1918-22r				





PALMER, George	1857	Commanded a Brigade, 1915-6, France	Westbury 1918-22e				
PATRICK, Colin Mark	1893	France 1914-19	Tavistock 1931-42d				
PEAKE, Osbert	1897	France, Lieut with Coldstream Guards	Leeds N (from 56 NE) 1929-56p				*
PEAT, Charles	1892	City of London Yeomanry 1914-18	Darlington 1931-45d				
PEEL, Sidney	1870	DSO, France, Lieut-Col	Uxbridge 1918-22r				
PETHERICK, Maurice	1894	France 1918	Penryn 1931-45e				
PETO, Geoffrey	1878	Capt Wiltshire Yeomanry	Frome 1924-29e, Bilston 31-35r				
PICKERING, Emil	1882	DSO, Lieut-Col, RFA, invalided.	Dewsbury 1918-22r				
PICKTHORN, Kenneth	1892	France and Macedonia, army and RAF.	Cambridge University 1935-50, Carlton 50-66r				
PIELOU, Douglas	1887	Served in France 1915	Stourbridge 1922-27d				
PIKE, Cecil	1898	Served with RGA overseas 1915-19	Sheffield Attercliffe 1931-5e				
PILCHER, George	1882	Served with Calcutta Port Defence 1915-19	Penryn 1924-9r				
PLUGGE, Leonard	1889	Capt, RAF 1918	Chatham 1935-45e				
PONSONBY, Charles	1879	Gallipoli, Egypt, France and Palestine 1914-19. FCdG avec Palmes.	Sevenoaks 1935-50r				
POWNALL, Assheton	1877	Lieut-Col London Regiment 1915	E Lewisham 1918-45e				
POWELL, Evelyn	1883	Grenadier Guards 1900-27	Southwark SE 1931-35e				
du PRE, William	1875	Colonel in European war, 1914-18	Wycombe 1914-23e				
PRESCOTT,	1874	Served in France, invalided	Tottenham N 1918-22r				

William		out after falling from a horse.							
PRICE, Charles	1872	Maj, France 1914-18			Pembrokeshire 1922-29e				
PROCTER, Henry	1883	Major with Australian Forces 1916-20			Accrington 1931-45e				
RAMSAY, Archibald	1894	Served in France 1914-16, Capt Coldstream Guards			Peebles 1931-45r				
RAMSBOTHAM, Herwald	1887	Major in France, MC			Lancaster 1929-41p		*		
RAMSDEN, George	1879	Joined army August 1914 and remained			Elland 1918-22d				
RAMSDEN, Joseph	1883	Served overseas 1915-19			Bradford N 1924-9e, 31-45r				
RANKIN, James	1880	RFA, Mesopotamia and Persia. Elected twice whilst away on active duty (1916 and 18)			E Toxteth 1916-24r				
RANKIN, Robert	1877	Capt, RASC, France 1915-18			Liverpool Kirkdale 1931-45r				
RAPER, Alfred	1889	Served as a pilot, eventually Lieut.			E Islington 1918-22r				
RAW, Nathan	1866	CMG, Lieut Col. Western Front medical officer.			Liverpool Wavertree 1918-22r				
RAWSON, Alfred	1876	RNVR 1916-18, Sub Lieut			Brighton 1922-44r				
RAY, William	1876	Remount Service 1916-18			Richmond 1932-37r				
RAYNER, Ralph	1897	A Brigadier, served in France 1915-17, Afghanistan 18-19			Totnes 1935-55r				
REID, James	1890	Served overseas with MGC 1914-18			Stirling and Falkirk 1931-5e, Glasgow Hillhead 37-48p				
REMNANT, James	1863	Lieut-Col in RASC 1914-18			Holborn 1900-28p				

RENTOUL, Gervais	1884	Legal Adviser to HQ Staff, Eastern Command. 1915 Capt General List.	Lowestoft 1922-34a					
REYNOLDS, James	1865	Served with Canadian Forces in France, DSO	Liverpool Exchange 1929-32d					
RHODES, John	1884	Lieut-Col, Royal Engineers, DSO	Stalybridge 1922-3e					
RHYS, Charles	1899	Although in school for the vast majority of the Great War, he did serve in 1918. For service in Russia in 1919 he was awarded the MC.	Romford 1923-9e, Guildford 31-5r					
RICKARDS, George	1877	Cheshire Regiment 1915- 20	Skipton 1933-43d					
ROBERTS, Ernest	1890	Served in France 1916-7, Capt	Flintshire 1924-9e					
ROPNER, Leonard	1895	Served in France with Royal Artillery, Col, MC.	Sedgefield 1923-9e, Barkston Ash 31-64r					
ROYDS, Percy	1874	Commanded ship at the Jutland, CMG.	Kingston-Upon-Thames 1937-45r					
RUGGLES-BRISE, Charles	1882	Served in France 1914-18, MC	Maldon 1922-3e, 24- 42d					
RUSSELL, Alexander	1879	Served in France 1915-18	Tynemouth 1922-45e					
RUSSELL, Albert	1884	Royal Engineers, 1915-18	Kirkcaldy 1931-35e					
SANDERS, Robert	1867	Lieut-Col. Served in Egypt, Gallipoli and Palestine.	Bridgwater 1910-23e, Wells 24-9p			*		
SANDON, Dudley	1892	Maj RFA	Shrewsbury 1922-23e, 24-29r					
SASSOON, Philip	1888	Officer in France, then Priv-Secretary to D. Haig, 1915-18	Hythe 1912-39d					
SCOTT, Samuel	1873	Served in Gallipoli, Egypt	W Marylebone 1898-					

		1915-17, Maj Royal Horse Guards	1918, St Marylebone 18-22e				
SCOTT, Lord William	1896	Served overseas 1914-18. MC. Lieut then Capt	Roxburgh 1935-50e				
SHAW, Archibald	1895	DSO 1918	Renfrew W 1924-29r				
SHAW, Peter	1888	Served overseas 1915-19	Liverpool Wavertree 1935-45r				
SHAW, William Thomas	1879	Served with RASC 1914-18	Forfarshire 1918-22e, 31-45r				
SHAW, Geoffrey	1896	Served with KOYL 1914-18	Sowerby 1924-9r				
SHEFFIELD, Berkeley	1876	Served in the Lincolnshire Regiment and Yeomanry.	Brigg 1907-10e, 22-29e				
SHIPWRIGHT, Denis	1898	Capt RFC 1918, also served in army	Penryn and Falmouth 1922-3e				
SHUTE, Joseph	1873	Served in France 1915-18, RASC. Member of Imperial Graves Commission.	Liverpool Exchange 1935-45e				
SMILES, Walter	1883	Commander RNVR, overseas 1915-19. DSO.	Blackburn 1931-45, County Down 45-53d				
SMITH, Harold	1876	RNVR 1914, Lieut.	Warrington 1910-22, Wavertree 22-23e				
SMITH, Robert	1880	RASC 1917-19	Aberdeen and Kincardine 1924-45r				
SMITHERS, Waldron	1880	Served in Cavalry 1914-18	Chislehurst 1924-45, Orpington 45-54d				
SNADDEN, William	1896	BEF in France 1915-17	Kinross 1937-55r				
SOTHERTON-ESCOURT, Thomas	1881	Scots Greys 1904-10, Capt	W Riding 1931-35r				
SOUTHBY, Archibald	1886	Royal Navy, made Commander 1919	Epsom 1928-47r				

SPEARS, Edward	1886	Served overseas (France) 1914-18. FCdG avec Palmes.	Loughborough 1922-4e, Carlisle 31-45e	*22-4 elected as Lib		
SPENCER, Richard	1892	RFC 1914-18	St Helens 1931-35e			
SPENDER-CLAY, Herbert	1875	France and Belgium 1914-18	Tonbridge 1910-37d			
SPENS, William	1885	Capt, served in India and Mesopotamia.	Ashford 1933-43a.			
SPROT, Alexander	1853	France 1914-18, CMG	Kensington S 50-59p			
STANLEY, George	1872	Awarded CMG 1916	East Fife 1918-22e, N. Lanarkshire 24-29d			
STANLEY, Oliver	1896	RFA, MC, France and Belgium	Preston 1910-22e, Willesden E 24-29a			
STARKEY, John	1859	Capt in Nottinghamshire Yeomanry	Westmorland 1924-45, Bristol W 45-50d	*	*	
STEEL, Samuel	1882	Served in France, Salonika and Mesopotamia. Major.	Newark 1906-22r			
STEVENSON, James	1883	Served with Royal Corp of Signals in France 1914-18	Ashford 1918-29e			
STOTT, William	1863	Served in France 1916-18, Lieut-Col.	Glasgow Camlachie 1931-5e			
STOURTON, John	1899	Although in school for the vast majority of the Great War, he did serve in 1918. Served in Russia 1919.	Birkenhead W 1922-23e, 24-9r			
STREATFEILD, Sidney	1894	Capt in France 1914-19	S Salford 1931-45r			
STRICKLAND, William	1880	Served in Egypt and Palestine	Galloway 1925-9e			
STUART, James	1897	Won MC and bar, Capt. Royal Scots.	Coventry 1931-45e			
			Moray and Nairn 1923-59p			*

SUETER, Murray	1872	Commanded RNAS units in Italy 1917-18	Hertford 1921-45r					
SUGDEN, Wilfrid	1879	Served overseas 1914-19.	Royton 1918-23e, Hartlepoons 24-9e, Leyton W 31-5e					
SURTEES, Herbert	1858	Commanded infantry brigade, western front 1915-16. DSO from Boer War.	Gateshead 1918-22e					
SUTCLIFFE, Harold	1897	RFA in France 1917-18	Royton 1931-50, Heywood 50-55r					
SYKES, Mark	1879	Lieut-Col on the outbreak of war but sees no active service. Works for Kitchener in the War Office.	Hull Central 1911-19d					
SYKES, Frederick	1877	Commanded RNAS in E. Mediterranean 1915-16, previously France 1914-15.	Sheffield Hallam 1922-28a. Nottingham C 40-45e					
TERRELL, Reginald	1889	Capt, wounded at the Somme.	Henley 1918-24r					
THOM, John	1891	Served in France 1914-18, commanded battalion. MC, DSO.	Dumbartonshire 1926-29e, 31-2a					
THOMSON, Frederick	1875	Egypt and Salonika, severely wounded at the latter. DSO.	Aberdeen South 1918-1935d					
THORP, Linton	1884	Served overseas 1914-19, Major	Nelson and Colne 1931-5e				* (35/N)	
THORPE, John	1887	Capt in European War	Manchester Rusholme 1919-23e					
TINNE, John	1877	Capt RFA 16-19	Wavertree 1924-31r					
TITCHFIELD, William	1893	Capt in France with RHG 1914-15 and 1916-18	Newark 1922-43p					

TOUCHE, Gordon	1895	Served in Gallipoli, Palestine and Egypt 1915-18	Reigate 1931-50, Dorking 50-64r				
TODD, Alfred	1890	Served in France 1915-18, Capt	Berwick 1929-35e	* (35/N)			
TRYON, George	1871	Capt in Grenadier Guards 1914, subsequently Brevet Maj	Brighton 1910-40p		*		
TUFNELL, Richard	1896	Served in Grand Fleet at Lieut-Commander	Cambridge 1934-45e				
VAUGHAN- MORGAN, Kenneth	1873	Served with RASC 1915-19	Fulham E 1922-33d				
WAKEFIELD, William	1898	Served with RNAS 1917-23. Flight-Lieut.	Swindon 1935-45, St Marylebone 45-63p				
WALLACE, Euan	1892	Served in France 1914-18, Capt	Rugby 1922-3e, Hornsey 24-41d				
WARD, Albert Lambert	1875	Commanded Howe Battalion of Royal Naval Div.	Hull N-W 1918-45e				
WARD, William	1894	Captain during the war, MC	Hornsey 1921-24r, Wednesbury 31-32p				
WARD- JACKSON, Charles	1869	Served in France with Yorkshire Hussars and with staff.	Leominster 1918-22e				
WARDLAW- MILNE	1879	Indian Defence Force 1916-19	Kidderminster 1922- 45e				
WARNER, William	1867	RAF 1914-18	Mid Bedfordshire 1924- 9e				
WARRENDER, Victor	1899	Grenadier Guards, MC 1918	Grantham 1923-42p				
WATERHOUSE, Charles	1893	Served in France 1914-18. Capt, MC.	Leicester S 1924-45e, 50-57r				
WHEELER,	1872	DAQMG Western	Faversham 1910-27d				





WILSON, Matthew	1875	DSO 1918, Commanded battalion	SW Bethnal Green 1913-22e						
WINBY, Lewis	1874	Lieut-Col Westminster Dragoons 1914-18	Harborough 1924-29r						
WINDSOR-CLIVE, George	1878	Coldstream Guards 1914-19, CMG. Lieut-Col.	Ludlow 1923-45r			*			
WINTERTON, Edward	1883	Gallipoli and Palestine 1915.	Horsham 1904-18, 45-51r, Horsham and Worthing 18-45			*			
WOOD, Edward	1881	Some active service, but mostly behind the lines in France on account of his missing hand.	Ripon 1910-25a			*		*	
WOOD, Edmund	1898	Served in France 1918	Stalybridge 1924-29e						
WOODCOCK, Herbert	1871	Active service 1914-18	Liverpool Everton 1924-29r						
WORTHINGTON-EVANS, Laming	1868	Temporary Major. Administrative Duties only.	Colchester 1910-29, Westminster 29-31d			*			
WRIGHT, John	1886	BEF 1914-19, RFC 1916, Squadron Leader 605	Erdington 1936-45e						
WRIGHT, Wallace	1875	Served in Cameroon, France 1915-19, DSO, CMG.	Tavistock 1928-31r						
YERBURGH, Robert	1889	Served in the army 1915-19, retired as Brevet-Major.	Dorset S 1922-29r						
YOUNG, Arthur	1889	Served overseas 1914-18, retired as a Major.	Glasgow Partick 1935-50, Scotstoun 50d						

## Appendix C

### Control Sample of MPs

*The following members form a control for this study. Born between 1875 and 1900 they represent the Conservative MP chronologically, though not experientially, of the Phoenix Generation. Periodically, as noted, they have been compared to Phoenix Generation voting patterns.*

Name	Date of Birth	Reason for missing military service	Constituency/Election Record	Cabinet Post Pre-39	WW2 Cabinet Post	Cabinet Post After 1951
ADAMS, Vyvyan	1900	Still at school.	Leeds W 31-45e			
ANDERSON, Alan	1877	Government work.	City of London 35-40r			
ASTOR, Nancy	1879	Woman	Plymouth 19-45r			
ASTOR, Waldorf	1879	Serving in the House of Commons.	Plymouth 10-19p			
BATEMAN, Arthur	1879	Businessman.	N. Camberwell 31-35r			
BIRD, Robert	1876	Businessman.	Wolverhampton West 22-29e, 31-45r			
BLAKER, Reginald	1900	Still at school.	Spelthorne 31-45r			
BLANE, Thomas	1881	Merchant and Member of the Court of the Common Council, City of London.	S. Leicester 18-22r			
BOOTHBY, Robert	1900	Still at school.	E. Aberdeenshire 24-58p			
BOSSOM, Charles	1881	Businessman.	Maidstone 31-59r			
BURNETT, John	1876	Chairman of National	Aberdeen N 31-35e			

			Federation of Grocers' Associations					
BUTLER, George	1887		Foreign Office		Cambridge Uni 23-29d			
BUTT, Alfred	1878		Based at the Ministry of Food		Balham 22-36r			
CAMPBELL, Edward	1879		Vice Consul at Java.		NW Camberwell 24-29e, Bromley 30-45d			
CAPORN, Arthur	1884		Practised Law.		Nottingham W 31-35e			
CAZALET-KEIR, Thelma	1899		Woman		Islington 31-45e			
CHANNON, Chips	1897		American Born.		Southend West 35-58d			
CLARKE, Frank	1886		Businessman.		Dartford 31-38d			
CLARRY, Reginald	1882		Businessman.		Newport 22-29, 31-45d			
CONANT, Roger	1899		Still at school.		Chesterfield 31-5e, Bewdley 37-50, Rutland 50-59r			
COOPER, Thomas	1892		Practised Law		Edinburgh W 35-41a			
COPELAND, Ida	1900		Woman		Stoke 31-35d			
CRICHTON-STUART, Colum	1886		Diplomatic Service		Northwich 22-45r			
CRITCHLEY, Alexander	1893		Councillor		Edge Hill 35-45r			
DAVIDSON, Frances	1894		Woman		Hemel Hempstead 37-59r			
DAVIDSON, John	1889		Worked for Bonar Law.		Hemel Hempstead 20-23e, 24-37p	*		
DIXEY, Arthur	1889		Practised Law.		Penrith 23-35r			
DUCKWORTH, William	1879		Councillor		Moss Side 35-45e			
EALLES, John	1881		Practised Law.		Erdington 31-36d			
EMERY, James	1886		Businessman.		Salford W 35-45e			

EMMOTT, Charles	1898	Still at school.	Springburn 31-35, E Surrey 35-45r			
FERMOR- HESKETH, Thomas	1881	Farmer	Enfield 22-23e			
GOULD, James	1882	Cardiff City Council	Cardiff C 18-24r			
GRAVES, Frances	1884	Woman	S Hackney 31-35e			
GRAVES-LORD, Walter	1878	Practised Law.	Norwood 22-35a			
GREENWOOD, William	1875	Businessman.	Stockport 20-25d			
GREER, Harry	1876	Businessman.	Clapham 18-22r			
GRIDLEY, Arnold	1878	Controller of Electric Power Supply 1916-18	Stockport 35-50, 50-55p			
GUINNESS, Gwendolen	1881	Woman	Southend 27-35r			
HAILWOOD, Augustine	1875	Woman	Ardwick 18-22e			
HALL CAINE, Gordon	1884	Served on Government Committees	E. Dorset 22-29e, 31-45r			
HAMILTON, Charlie	1900	Still at school.	Bath 29-31r			
HARTLAND, George	1884	Journalist	Norwich 31-35r			
HASLAM, John	1878	Chairman of National Federation of Grocers' Associations	Bolton 31-40d			
HENN, Sydney	1861	Director of Army Priority at War Office	Blackburn 22-29d			
HIGGS, Walter	1886	Businessman.	W Birmingham 37-45e			
HIGHAM, Charles	1876	Propagandist	S Islington 18-22r			

HEPWORTH, Joseph	1876	Businessman.		Bradford E 31-45d			
HILTON, Cecil	1884	Businessman.		Bolton 24-29e			
HOLMES, Stanley	1878	Councillor.		NE Derbyshire 18-22 (as Lib), Harwich 35-54p			
HORSBRUGH, Florence	1889	Woman.		Dundee 31-45e, Moss Side 50-59p			
HUDSON, Robert	1886	Diplomatic Service.		Whitehaven 24-29e, Southport 31-52p	*		
ILIFFE, Edward	1877	Newspaper Publisher.		Tamworth 23-29r			
IVEAGH, Gwendolen	1881	Woman.		Southend 27-35r			
JACKSON, Joseph	1879	Practised Law.		Heywood 31-35r			
JAMIESON, Douglas	1880	Practised Law.		Maryhill 31-35r			
JARVIS, John	1876	Worked with the Government on labour relations during the conflict.		Guildford 35-50r			
JOHNSTON, James	1900	Still at school.		Clackmannan 31-35e			
KENNEDY, Alfred	1879	Practised Law.		Preston 24-29a			
KIRKPATRICK, William	1878	Businessman.		Preston 31-36a			
LEIGH, John	1884	Newspaper Editor.		Clapham 22-45r			
LIDDALL, Walter	1884	Businessman.		Lincoln 31-45e			
LLOYD, Cyril	1876	Businessman.		Dudley 22-29e, 41-45r			
LORIMER, Henry	1879	Practised Law.		S Derbyshire 22-24r			
LOYD, Arthur	1882	Egyptian Civil Service		Abingdon 21-23r			
LYLE, Charles	1882	Businessman. (Tate and Lyle)		Stratford 18-22e, Epping 23-24r, Bourmouth 40-45p			

MACANDREW, Charles	1888	Practised Law.	Kilmarnock 24-29e, Partick 31-35, Bute and N Ayrshire 35-59r		
MAITLAND, Adam?	1885	Businessman.	Faversham 28-45e		
MARJORIBANKS, Edward	1900	Still at school.	Eastbourne 29-32d		
MILNE, Charles	1879	Practised Law.	W Fife 31-35e		
MITCHELL, Harold	1900	Still at school.	Brentford 31-45e		
MITCHELL, Stephen	1884	Businessman.	Lanark 24-29e		
MITCHELL- THOMSON, William	1877	Serving in the House of Commons.	NW Lanarkshire 06-10e, N Down 10-18, Maryhill 18-22e, S Croydon 23- 32p		
MITCHESON, George	1883	Practised Law.	SW St Pancras 31-45r		
MOREING, Adrian	1889	Businessman.	Preston 31-40d		
MORGAN, Robert	1880	School Headmaster	Stourbridge 31-45e		
MORRIS, Owen	1896	Practised Law.	Cardiff E 31-42a		
MUNRO, Patrick	1883	Imperial Civil Service	Llandaff, 31-42d		
NELSON, Robert	1888	Businessman. and Engineer	Motherwell 18-22r		
NEWTON, George	1879	Practised Law. and County Councillor.	Cambridge 22-34p		
NORTH, Edward	1900	Still at school.	Nuneaton 31-35r		
NUNN, William	1879	Advisor to the Government of Siam	Whitehaven 31-35e, Newcastle W 40-45e		
OAKLEY, Thomas	1879	Associated with Friendly Society Work.	The Wrekin 24-29e		
ORMISTON, Thomas	1878	Practised Law.	Motherwell 31-35e		





Lionel		during the conflict, Lionel required at home.					
ROWLANDS, Gwilym	1878	Businessman.		Flintshire 35-45r			
RUNGE, Norah	1884	Woman. Although Superintendent of Soldiers' and Sailors' Free Buffet, Paddington Station 1915-19		Rotherhithe 31-35e			
RUTHERFORD, John	1887	Practised Law.		Edge Hill 31-35r			
SALT, Edward	1881	Businessman. (Salt)		Yardley 31-45e			
SANDERSON, Frank	1880	Worked at the Ministry of Munitions		Darwen 22-23e, 24-29e, Ealing 31-45, Ealing E 45-50r			
SIMMONDS, Oliver	1897	Businessman.		Duddeston 31-45e			
SIMPSON-HINCHLIFFE, William	1880	Practised Law.		Sowerby 22-23e			
SINGLETON, John	1885	Practised Law.		Lancaster 22-23e			
SLATER, John	1889	Businessman.		Eastbourne 32-35d			
SMITH, Bracewell	1884	Businessman.		Dulwich 32-45e			
SMITH, Louis	1879	Businessman.		Sheffield Hallam 28-39d			
SMITH-CARRINGTON, Neville	1878	Practised Law.		Rutland 23-33d			
SOMERVELL, Donald	1889	Practised Law.		Crewe 31-45e		*	
SOMERVILLE, Daniel	1879	Businessman.		Barrow-in-Furness 22-24e, Willesden E 29-38d			
SOMERVILLE,	1876	Serving in the House of		Birmingham E 10-18,		*	

Daniel		Commons.	Erdington 18-29, Tamworth 29-35d			
STEWART- SANDERSON, Alexander	1876	Businessman.	Middleton 23-40d			
STOREY, Samuel	1896	Practised Law.	Sunderland 31-45e, Stretford 50-66e			
TATE, Mavis	1893	Woman	W Willesden 31-35, Frome 35-45e			
TODD, Alan	1900	Still at school.	Kingswinford 31-35d			
TREE, Ronald	1897	Residing in Australia.	Harborough 37-45e			
WARD, Irene	1895	Woman	Wallsend 31-45e, Tynemouth 50-74r			
WARD, Sarah	1895	Woman. Although VAD 9th Staffordshire detachment 1914-18	Cannock 31-35e			
WEBBE, Harold	1885	Munitions Worker.	Westminster Abbey 39- 50, City of London 50- 59r			
WELLS, Richard	1879	Businessman.	Bedford 22-45e			
WILLIAMS, Herbert	1884	Worked at the Ministry of Munitions	Reading 24-29e, Croydon S 32-45e, Croydon E 50-54d			
WILSON, Roderick	1876	Businessman.	Lichfield 24-29r			
WINDSOR- CLIVE, Ivor	1889	Serving on London County Council.	Ludlow 22-3p			
WOLMER, Viscount Roundell	1887	Serving in the House of Commons.	Newton 10-18, Aldershot 18-40p			
WOMERSLEY, Walter	1878	Businessman..	Grimsby 24-45e			
WOOD, Kingsley	1881	Practised Law.	Woolwich 18-43d			*

WRAGG, Herbert	1880	Businessman.							
YOUNG, Frederick	1876	Agent-Gen in London for South Australia				Belper 23-29e, 31-45r Swindon 18-22r			

## Appendix D

### Conservative Voting for Labour Policy / Votes of Confidence

#### Lord's Amendment Desiring to Reimpose the 'Genuinely Seeking Work' Clause to the 1930 Unemployment Act

Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 30 January 1930, vol. 251, col. 1307-1312

	Phoenix Generation	Control	Actual Vote
Back Labour	0	0	273
Back the Tories	68 (49.5%)	16 (62%)	124
Abstain	69 (50.5%)	10 (38%)	217

The PG therefore made up 55% of the total opposition, whilst constituting 52% of the Conservative Parliamentary Party.

#### Vote of Confidence Regarding the 1929-31 Government

Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 16 April 1931, vol. 251, col. 363-489

	Phoenix Generation	Control	Actual Vote
Back Labour	0	0	305
Back the Tories	102 (74%)	26 (87%)	251
Abstain	35 (26%)	4 (13%)	58

The PG therefore made up 40% of the total opposition, whilst constituting 52% of the Conservative Parliamentary Party.

#### Labour Amendment to 1934 Unemployment Act to Keep 14-16 year olds from paying National Insurance

Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 3 December 1934, vol. 295, col. 1375-1378.

	Phoenix Generation	Control	Actual Vote
Back	0	0	41

Labour			
Back the Tories	117 (53%)	41 (50%)	303
Abstain	102 (47%)	41 (50%)	270

The PG therefore made up ~39% of the total Tory vote, whilst constituting ~46% of the Conservative Parliamentary Party.

## Appendix E

**Old Etonian Phoenix Generation Members** – see E.L. Vaughan (ed), *List of Etonians Who Fought in the Great War 1914-1919*, (Windsor, 1921) passim.

NAME	YEAR OF BIRTH	YEAR LEFT ETON	ETON HOUSE
COLVIN, Richard	1856	1874	RD, RAHM
STARKEY, John	1859	1876	HEL
BECKETT, William	1866	1882	GEM
WARD-JACKSON, Charles	1869	1883	AC
CECIL, Hugh	1869	1884	GEM
FRASER, Keith	1867	1884	JME
HILLS, John	1867	1885	HEL
WILSON, Arthur	1868	1885	CHE
FITZROY, Edward	1869	1886	ACJ
BRASSEY, Henry	1870	1887	RAHM
CAVENDISH-BENTINCK, Henry	1863	1887	ECAL
FOXCROFT, Charles	1868	1887	ECAL
GREENE, Walter	1869	1887	FHR
HOPE, John	1869	1887	ACJ
CAMPION, William	1870	1888	RAHM
MORRISON-BELL, Clive	1871	1888	FT
GUEST, Charles Henry	1874	1889	HEL
LANE-FOX, George	1870	1889	ACA
PEEL, Sidney	1870	1889	KS
TRYON, George	1871	1889	RAHM, HGW
FREMANTLE, Francis	1872	1890	KSE
HURST, Gerald Berkeley	1877	1890	KS
SCOTT, Samuel	1873	1890	ECAL
BAIRD, John	1874	1891	RCR
WHELER, Granville	1872	1891	ECAL
GIBBS, George	1873	1892	JME
SHEFFIELD, Berkeley	1876	1892	ACA
SPENDER-CLAY, Herbert	1875	1892	RAHM
HENNESSY, George	1877	1893	PHC, CHA
LEIGHTON, Bertie	1875	1893	ECAL
BIRCHALL, John Dearman	1875	1894	TD
CHILD, Smith	1880	1894	RAHM
LOCKER-LAMPSON, Godfrey	1875	1894	SAD
ACLAND-TROYTE, Gilbert	1876	1895	SAD
WINDSOR-CLIVE, George	1878	1895	SAD
COURTHOPE, George	1877	1896	RAHM

CROFT, Henry Page	1881	1896	EH, TCP
RAMSDEN, George	1879	1896	HD
TINNE, John	1877	1896	CHE, CL
McDONNELL, Angus	1881	1897	SRJ
PETO, Geoffrey	1878	1897	KS
PONSONBY, Charles	1879	1897	CHA
HERBERT, Aubrey	1880	1898	ACB
LLOYD, George	1879	1898	FT, SAD
CADOGAN, Edward	1880	1899	ACB
DENISON-PENDER, John	1882	1899	HWM, HM
GUINNESS, Walter	1890	1899	ECAL
HENEAGE, Arthur	1881	1899	ELV
LOCKER-LAMPSON, Oliver	1880	1899	SAD
STEEL, Samuel	1882	1899	ACJ
WOOD, Edward	1881	1899	WD
HAMBRO, Angus	1883	1900	ACA
POWELL, Evelyn	1883	1900	PW
WINTERTON, Edward	1883	1901	WD, HM
HOWARD-BURY, Charles	1883	1902	PW
CURZON, Francis	1884	1903	EI
KEELING, Edward	1888	1903	KS
ORMSBY-GORE, William	1885	1903	ECAL
PAGET, Thomas	1886	1903	RWW-T
WILLEY, Vernon	1884	1903	PW
BOWYER, George E	1886	1904	AAS
BRASS, William	1886	1904	JME
HELY-HUTCHINSON, Maurice	1887	1904	KS
HORLICK, James	1886	1904	JHMH
LOWTHER, Christopher	1887	1904	ELV
MASON, Glyn	1887	1904	ECAL, JMD
MEYER, Frank	1886	1904	R S de H
ASTOR, John	1886	1905	ACA, RS de H
DUNCANNON, Vere	1880	1905	CHA
LUCAS, Jocelyn	1889	1905	RCR
WILLIAMS, Charles	1886	1905	RCR
COLFOX, Philip	1888	1906	TCP, EIC
EASTWOOD, John	1887	1906	RPLB
BARCLAY-HARVEY, Charles	1890	1907	HB
SASSOON, Philip	1888	1907	HFWT
CROWDER, John E	1890	1908	SAD, PVB
FISON, Guy	1892	1909	RS de H

MACMILLAN, Harold	1894	1909	KS
MUIRHEAD, Anthony	1890	1909	RPLB
CLARKE, Ralph	1892	1910	RSK
HALL, Walter	1891	1910	JMD, VleNF
HOWARD, Donald	1891	1910	HBr
BRISCOE, Richard	1893	1911	RSK
CRANBORNE, Robert	1893	1911	HTB, SGL
JAMES, Archibald	1893	1911	PVB
RAMSAY, Archibald	1894	1911	EWS
TITCHFIELD, William	1893	1911	HTB, SGL
CROOKSHANK, Harry	1893	1912	KS
EDNAM, William	1894	1912	CHKM
LLEWELLIN, John	1893	1912	ABR
McEWEN, John	1894	1912	RPLB
MELLOR, John	1893	1912	FHR, H de H
PATRICK, Colin Mark	1893	1912	PVB
CROSS, Ronald	1896	1913	RPLB
APSLEY, Lord Allen	1895	1914	EI, TFC
DREWE, Cedric	1896	1914	CHKM
HUDSON, Austin	1897	1914	AEC
LODER, John	1895	1914	RPLB
STANLEY, Oliver	1896	1914	OEC
STUART, James	1897	1914	LSRB
CAZALET, Victor	1896	1915	RPLB
DUGDALE, Thomas	1897	1915	AEC
EDEN, Anthony	1897	1915	ELC
LUMLEY, Roger	1896	1915	CMW
PEAKE, Osbert	1897	1916	HM
BAILLIE, Adrian	1898	1916	HM
WARRENDER, Victor	1899	1916	RPLB
HARMSWORTH, Esmond	1898	1917	HBr
LANCASTER, Claude	1899	1917	RPLB

Decade	Number left Eton in this decade
1870s	2
1880s	17
1890s	30
1900s	27
1910s	29
Total	105



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Stanley Baldwin, Cambridge University Library (CUL, BALD)  
Henry Balfour, (CAC, BLFR)  
Lord Beaverbrook, House of Lords Records Office, Parliamentary Archives, Westminster (PARL, BBK)  
Monty Belgion, (CAC, BLGN)  
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