

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, FASCISM AND ANTI-FASCISM

1918-1939

Philip Williamson

The interwar Conservative party provides a challenge for recent historical definitions of British anti-fascism. Distinctions between ‘non-fascism’ and ‘anti-fascism’ and between ‘passive anti-fascism’ and ‘active anti-fascism’ have been valuable in stimulating debate about the character of resistance to fascism, but as Andrzej Olechnowicz has demonstrated these categories have been used to give priority to the political left – the Communist party in some accounts, the Labour party in others – while overlooking the substantial range of ‘liberal’ anti-fascism that included numerous Liberals and Conservatives as well as Labour figures.¹ His focus is on cross-party or non-party organisations, and as Helen McCarthy has also shown such associations which promoted citizenship and other democratic causes are certainly a notable and under-studied feature of interwar British political culture.² The Conservative party, however, raises a different range of definitional issues, and not only because it formed the main element in the most important cross-party body, the National government formed with the main Liberal groups and a few Labour leaders in 1931. Notoriously, a number of Conservatives admired fascism in one or more of its British or foreign forms, and some historians have taken this as indicative of wider Conservative sympathies. Yet the party as a whole was, at the very least, the largest ‘non-fascist’ political organisation. There are several reasons to go further. The Conservative party’s dominance of not just most of the political right but also large expanses of the political centre constituted a more decisive barrier to the growth of British fascism than the explicitly anti-fascist bodies of the political left.³ As many of its actions and statements had anti-fascist effects, the party

might well be categorised as ‘passive anti-fascist’.⁴ Further, from 1933 leading Conservatives mounted an ideological and moral resistance towards dictatorship and totalitarianism, which should certainly be classified as ‘active anti-fascism’.

In considering the interwar Conservative party’s attitudes towards fascism and more especially British fascists, the ‘party’ is taken here to mean its leaders, its ministers in Conservative and coalition governments, the strategists and publicists in its national organisation, Conservative MPs, those Conservative peers significant in national politics,⁵ and regional and local officials – rather than the penumbra of journalists and other publicists who expressed various Conservative opinions, but very few of whom were important for Conservative politicians. As a necessary preliminary, the first section of this essay will comment on suggestions that the Conservative party contained a significant pro-fascist element, and that decisions by the party’s leaders in the mid 1930s were affected by fears of losing support to the British fascist groups. It will then be argued that the Conservative party provided a considerable indirect resistance to fascism. While pursuing its main political concerns, the party had the largest role in preserving stable government, maintaining confidence in existing institutions, and containing challenges from the far left which might have provoked greater interest in fascism. At the same time it accommodated or emasculated various radical ‘right’ groups which might conceivably have defected to fascism. The third section will consider Conservative anti-fascism in the direct sense, the expression of arguments and values in opposition to British and international fascism.

Conservatives and fascists

It is now well established that British fascism was not simply a foreign import but had substantial native sources, chiefly the imperial-protectionist, radical right and diehard movements within or associated with the Edwardian Unionist alliance, as re-energised by certain effects of the Great War and early post-war political, economic and imperial

dislocations. In some significant respects interwar British fascist groups and elements of the Conservative 'right' shared a common ancestry.⁶ Wider points of apparent similarity are obvious: anti-communism, anti-socialism, and opposition to direct-action trade unionism were shared by all Conservatives. Many Conservatives were concerned about the effects of the extended parliamentary franchise created in 1918 and 1928. Some wanted institutional reform of Parliament, and some were interested in 'corporate' economic ideas. Some had anti-semitic prejudices. In the 1930s many wished to prevent another European war and were prepared to be conciliatory toward the Italian fascist and German Nazi governments, and some wanted support for Franco's Nationalists. But such views are not adequately understood if the Conservative party is conceived of as a 'party of the right', with its members located in neat ranks on a political spectrum which blended into fascism – and so liable to tumble into wholesale adoption of fascist ideas and methods.

The Conservative party was a 'liberal' party. It was integral to a parliamentary and electoral party system, sharing substantial ideological ground with the Liberal and Labour parties, and was neither a unitary body nor a simple span along a spectrum but a cluster of groups gathered together for largely contingent reasons. Each group expressed a mixture of interests and opinions drawn from various sources and which commonly pointed in different directions; the groups themselves shifted in composition and concern according to circumstances.⁷ Just as Mosley's fascism derived some ideas from Conservatives and some from socialists, so the varieties of Conservatism did not form coherent ideological packages: it was perfectly possible to be interested in or to admire some fascist notions yet be indifferent or hostile towards some or most of the other fascist ideas and methods. This was not just true among Conservative diehards or imperial protectionists, but also some progressive Conservative 'modernisers'. For example, during the furore after the fascist rally at Olympia in June 1934, the Conservative junior minister R.A. Butler privately expressed interest in the 'Corporative State' and a hope that the presence of the British Union of

Fascists (BUF) would stimulate Parliament to give greater attention to ‘the conception of modern organisation’. He nevertheless ‘sought to preserve our liberties and to avoid copying foreign models and regimenting our nation’. Such qualifications were characteristic of Conservative observations on fascism. Butler added that all he and other modernisers such as Walter Elliot, the Minister of Agriculture, wanted was ‘to organise our industry within a framework of ordered liberty’, and that it was wrong to assume that ‘those of us who talk about reorganisation and planning or the corporative state necessarily believe in Fascism’.⁸

It is not surprising that similarities existed between some fascist ideas and the opinions of some Conservatives. It is certainly also the case that various Conservative or Conservative-minded publicists, ‘society’ figures and local activists embraced ‘hard right’ views or were culpably naïve about fascist movements and governments. Some publications (those of the Britons, *The English Review*, *The Saturday Review*) and some writers (Jerrold, Petrie, Webster, Yeats-Brown, Ludovici, Bryant) have attracted particular attention.⁹ But while these groups assist understanding of British fascism, they establish little about Conservative politics: they were far from representative of the party as a whole, and the writers had no influence with Conservative politicians.¹⁰

Rather, it is notable how *few* Conservative politicians and organisers were attracted by fascism as such and were associated with fascist or pro-fascist groups; and how very *rarely* references to British fascist groups or to bodies favourable towards foreign fascist movements appear in Conservative party records and in the letters, diaries and speeches of Conservative politicians.

Martin Pugh has argued that ‘so far from fascism being repudiated and marginalised by the conventional politicians, there was a flourishing traffic in ideas and in personnel between fascism and the Conservative Right throughout the inter-war period’.¹¹ Accordingly, in the mid 1920s ‘a number of mainstream politicians took the British Fascists very seriously and sympathetically’. However, by his account just four backbench MPs had

some association with British Fascist (BF) meetings. Several more found BF members useful as stewards for their own meetings, including those for an unofficial 1926 campaign ‘to protest against Soviet interference in British affairs’.¹² Apparently more impressive was the earlier willingness of Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, to include them with members of other ‘patriotic’ volunteer organisations as recruits for emergency arrangements during a national strike; as Richard Maguire also comments, this indicates some level of political acceptability.¹³ Yet as Richard Thurlow, Thomas Linehan and others have shown, until the late 1920s the British Fascists were fascists in name only, and not a distinct party but an anti-communist and anti-direct-action organisation committed by their leaders to uphold the established constitution and to vote Conservative. Their distinctive feature was precisely preparation for supporting the *existing* state in a civil emergency – for which purpose they even offered their services to the 1924 Labour government.¹⁴ Even so Joynson-Hicks, often considered a right-wing ‘diehard’, insisted that they could participate in the emergency strike organisation only as individuals, refusing to recognise the BF as a corporate body so long as they maintained a ‘semi-military organisation’ and claimed to act ‘in any sense in contradistinction to the work of the Executive Government’.¹⁵

None of this amounted to ‘ideological’ approval for fascism; nor do such attitudes towards nominal ‘fascists’ in the 1920s necessarily indicate sympathy for genuine fascists in the 1930s. On Pugh’s evidence, perhaps a handful of Conservative MPs had meaningful associations with both the BF and BUF. But if John Gilmour as Scottish Secretary in 1924 regarded the BF as potentially helpful in maintaining law and order in the event of an emergency, as Home Secretary in 1934 he pressed for legislation to curb the BUF’s paramilitary organisation as ‘in principle inconsistent with our free institutions’, as well as ‘in practice ... the source of repeated and serious outbreaks of disorder’.¹⁶ Of over 450 Conservative MPs in 1934 and over 380 after the 1935 election, Lymington and two others were members of the fascist English Mystery, and according to Thurlow’s review of evidence

from security service and police surveillance three other MPs showed interest in the BUF.¹⁷ Pugh's more expansive interpretation – including membership of the January Club, a discussion network established by Mosley to draw non-fascists into a presentation of fascism in a 'respectable' conservative form¹⁸ – produces around 20 MPs in some sense favourable towards the BUF. Much of his argument turns on the House of Commons debate in June 1934 on the BUF's Olympia meeting, from which he classifies eight mostly Conservative MPs as defending the methods of fascist stewards in silencing protestors. This number is contested – Jon Lawrence proposes four – but what is more doubtful is Pugh's description of these eight as 'pro-fascists', who 'defended or justified the movement' and showed 'genuine appreciation of Mosley and his organisation'. In reality just two suggested such views: the rest explicitly denied support or sympathy for the BUF's politics, or regretted that it was winning support.¹⁹ Those MPs and peers who did sympathise with the BUF – or like Thomas Moore declared that there was no 'fundamental difference of outlook between the Blackshirts and ... Conservatives' – mostly misunderstood the character of fascism, and retreated after Olympia and the publicity given to Hitler's murderous political purges in late June.²⁰ They were a minority even among the Conservative right; in contrast the great diehard cause of the mid 1930s and the dominant issue for Conservatives during the month of Olympia – resistance to Indian constitutional reform – had support from about 80 MPs.²¹ No prominent diehard politicians were associated with the BUF or the January Club, not even Page Croft, the leader of a purported precursor of British fascism, the National Party of 1917-21.

Those Conservative politicians who drew attention to the BUF's growing membership during early 1934 did so not from any desire for closer relations with the movement nor from anxiety about defections to fascism, but as ammunition in an argument within the Conservative party – for changes in party policy and for removal of non-Conservative leaders of the National government.²² Use of the BUF as an instrument within Conservative politics was also the purpose of its chief newspaper supporter, Rothermere, who for this reason

instructed his journalists to use the term 'blackshirt' instead of 'fascist'.²³ The BUF certainly did not provide, as Pugh asserts, 'the most compelling and coherent alternative' to the National government: for its Conservative critics, the 'obvious alternative' was an independent Conservative government. Nor did the BUF constitute a 'dire electoral challenge' to Conservatives, or cause the Cabinet to postpone public-order legislation from 1934 until after the 1935 general election.²⁴ The substantial increase in BUF membership from January 1934 before its collapse from July belongs less to the history of fascism than to the history of newspapers. It was an ephemeral 'bubble' generated by short-lived support from Rothermere's newspapers, comparable with Rothermere's Anti-Waste League in 1921-22 and United Empire Party of 1930-31, and Beaverbrook's Empire Crusade of 1929-31. Indeed, the BUF secured fewer members than the Empire Crusade (some 200,000 members; the BUF 50,000) and had much less impact than any of these earlier newspaper movements on Conservative politics.²⁵ In contrast to the anxieties these movements caused for party managers, the BUF barely registers at all in organisational records. The Primrose League noted 'a certain amount of interest' in the Fascists.²⁶ In Lancashire, where the BUF supposedly posed a particular electoral threat, the Conservative party's provincial council made no reference to it. The northern provincial area wanted 'immediate steps to combat' the 'menaces' of both Fascist and Communist doctrines.²⁷ As for Conservative constituency associations, Stuart Ball's comprehensive study of their surviving records has found hardly any mention at all of the BUF, and no evidence of significant concern.²⁸ Insofar as some Conservative politicians did not rule out fascism entirely in the mid 1930s, the concern was not with the current or any seriously expected political situation. Rather, during a period when Cripps's Socialist League advocated the seizure of 'emergency powers', it arose from speculation about an alternative, conceivable, but very undesired future: what might be preferred if parliamentary government were to collapse after a period of calamitous 'socialist' government. For Conservatives, in some ultimate choice between communist dictatorship

and fascist dictatorship, fascism could be the lesser evil – but nonetheless still an evil.²⁹ Such remarks were not ‘pro-fascist’.

Rather more Conservative politicians expressed admiration or support for foreign fascist regimes or movements. Richard Griffiths and others have identified at most 50 MPs who in some degree or at some time were ‘enthusiasts’ for Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany or Franco’s Nationalists. Not all of these MPs admired all of these governments or movements, some actively disliked one or the other, and very few also supported any British fascist group.³⁰ As is well established, what most of these Conservatives admired was precisely *foreign* fascism – as appropriate for other countries, a barrier to Soviet Communism, or (supposed) preserver of European peace – not as a model or import for Britain itself. So for instance Churchill, while in Rome speaking as Romans expected, declared in 1927 that if he had been Italian he would have been ‘whole-heartedly with you ... in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism’, but that ‘in England we have our own way of doing things’.³¹ Ten years later Lennox-Boyd, apparently a strong case of a Conservative ‘pro-fascist’, stated that ‘he viewed with horror the establishing in England of any system remotely resembling the dictatorships of the continent’.³² Lennox-Boyd was one of 20 MPs belonging to bodies which supported Nationalist Spain, while around 25 Conservative MPs and a similar number of Conservative peers (most prominently Lords Mount Temple and Londonderry) were members of the Anglo-German Fellowship.³³ Again these were just a small proportion of parliamentary Conservatives; taking another measure, ‘there were more Jewish Members of Parliament on the Conservative benches than members of the Anglo-German Fellowship’.³⁴ Nor did such admiration for foreign fascism influence the policy-makers. Government ministers and their large numbers of Conservative supporters had their own policy reasons (international, strategic, economic and financial) to avoid war with Italy or in Spain, and to be conciliatory towards Germany. ‘Appeasement’ was certainly not identical with ‘pro-fascism’ or ‘pro-Nazism’.³⁵ Conservative membership of the Anglo-

German Fellowship fell as the nature of Nazi government became evident with the Austrian and Czechoslovakian crises and then *Kristallnacht*. Mosley's 'British Union' peace campaign was entirely irrelevant for government policy-makers and Conservative politics.³⁶ In mid 1939 perhaps just a dozen MPs were involved for various reasons with the anti-semitic and 'patriotic' Right Club.³⁷

Historians of British fascists and pro-fascists tend to slide into stating that 'many' Conservatives were interested in fascist groups or fascism, where 'some' would be a more accurate term, and for Conservative politicians 'a few' and usually 'very few'. This was plain to the party's Liberal and Labour opponents. Lloyd George occasionally accused the Conservative party of fascist leanings during his anti-Conservative phases following the overthrow of his Coalition government and into the later 1920s;³⁸ so too did Stafford Cripps during his anti-capitalist Socialist League phase in 1934-35.³⁹ A few further cases might be found, but such language was the obvious 'negative stereotyping' of party-political rhetoric. Rather more interesting were suggestions by some Labour leaders during the height of appeasement in 1938 that Neville Chamberlain was sympathetic towards the fascist dictatorships.⁴⁰ What is again striking is the rarity of such statements: most Liberal and Labour politicians did not mistake the views of a few on the Conservative right for those of Conservatives in general, and even when arguing party-political points hardly any considered, and none found, that the charge of pro-fascism could be made to stick on the Conservative party or the National government.

Conservative government and the National government

The two most general explanations offered for the marginalisation of British fascism are 'political culture' and 'economic conditions'. For historians who regard Conservative 'pro-fascism' as politically substantial, the first seems just something received, amorphous and frail. This makes the second – the relative mildness of the international depression in Britain,

and economic revival from 1933 – the decisive element, but also something independent, almost a force of nature.⁴¹ Yet ‘political culture’ is constantly renewed as circumstances change. The transformation in political conditions and in the conventional party system from 1914 into the 1930s, particularly with the Liberal party’s disintegration and the Labour party’s arrival as a major force, brought new vigour to political argument, values and assumptions. It also brought changes in economic and social policies. ‘Politics’ and the ‘economy’ were not separate spheres, and in interwar Britain ‘political culture’ contributed to policies and arguments which affected the character and the public perception of ‘economic conditions’.

The Conservative party had always been fundamentally a constitutional party. British politics had for centuries turned upon constitutional issues: not only the parliamentary parties but even most extra-parliamentary radicals admired the established constitution and espoused a version of British history in which the rule of law and representative institutions had secured and safeguarded popular liberties, religious toleration, social cohesion, political stability, national prosperity, and superiority over other nations. This so-called ‘Whig’ interpretation of history was at the core of ‘national identity’ and patriotic loyalties, shaped and re-shaped over generations of contrast to Roman Catholic, Spanish, Bourbon, Napoleonic, Tsarist and Prussian ‘despotisms’. Constitutional ideology united the main political parties more than any issue divided them, with the effect that disagreements were tolerated and in time accommodated, while extra-parliamentary radicals sought less to destroy existing institutions and procedures than to modify and gain access into them. The primary distinction between the two main parties was that Whigs and then Liberals were the party of constitutional reform while Tories, Conservatives and Unionists were successively the party of constitutional defence. Even the Labour party, while seeking priority for social and economic issues, accepted the existing institutional structure and procedures: it assumed parliamentary democracy as the foundation for democratic socialism.⁴² Such deep ideological

roots carried greater influence from being integral to the hard realities of historical experience, political self-interest and practical success. Parliamentary methods were the means to power, and provided party leaders with claims to authority over followers and to support from voters; for radicals and socialists they supplied the means for reform, for Conservatives and Unionists the means to preserve the social and economic structure, and for all the means to avoid a breakdown in political order in which no cause would escape damage.⁴³

When in November 1917 Bonar Law as Unionist leader reviewed the prospects of a new post-war political world with an extended parliamentary electorate and a powerful, socialist Labour movement, he declared that ‘our Party on the old lines will have no future in the life of this Country’.⁴⁴ He did not conclude that the party should turn to the radical right and resist democracy and reform; rather, the Unionist leadership allied with the pre-war progressive radical Lloyd George, expanded their party’s electoral organisation and accepted policies of social reconstruction. Similarly when post-war inflation, industrial militancy and imperial pressures generated support for ‘middle-class’, Rothermere-led and diehard ‘revolts’,⁴⁵ the party leaders did not acquiesce in any protests against ‘democracy’ but treated these revolts as a disagreement about the Lloyd George Coalition government’s ability to appeal to ‘central’ opinion. The influence of the radical right dissolved with the replacement of the Coalition by a Conservative government in October 1922, and was not revived even when this government lost a general election in circumstances which allowed socialists to form a government in January 1924.

Conservative leaders had two main assumptions about how best to defend the established order. One was to seek a ‘political’ balance in economic and social policies. From 1920 Conservative leaders helped establish a ‘deflationary’ budgetary and monetary regime which stabilised the financial system and reassured property owners and the *rentier* and salaried ‘middle classes’.⁴⁶ But they also maintained the unemployment insurance

system and made only limited attempts to restrain its rising cost. In 1923 Baldwin proposed protection as a solution to unemployment and as an electoral appeal to the working population, and when that failed the Conservative leaders replaced it with a social reform programme on a broadly 'new liberal' basis. In 1925 Baldwin resisted proposals to reduce direct taxes by means of social-service cuts as 'a most one-sided policy' which would seem 'an attack upon the working man' and undermine the aim of 'combating Socialism'.⁴⁷ That early post-war economic conditions did not produce large-scale alienation from the established party and parliamentary system owed much to Conservative policy decisions.

The other means of defence was to win elections. At some level most Conservatives, including most of their leaders, feared the effects of democracy, but the party's reaction was to make intensive efforts to ensure that parliamentary democracy worked to its own advantage. This involved not just acceptance of the implications of a mass electorate from 1918, but taking the initiative in extending the franchise further in 1928. It included continued adherence to the conventions, restraints, frustrations and occasional defeats of the party-political struggle, even though this meant acceptance of the Labour party as the main, and legitimate, opponent. Labour was treated largely and usually – though not wholly and always – as an ordinary electoral and parliamentary rival. No extraordinary measures were taken in 1924 and 1929 to obstruct the formation of minority Labour governments, with the purpose of encouraging its leaders' acceptance of existing institutions and political conventions, and their ability to restrain or defeat more extreme types of socialists. But this strategy had further implications. In order to defeat Labour at elections or prevent it forming a majority government, the party had to be spread as widely as possible, across a very broad range of opinions, seeking 'to tie together the moral, industrial, agrarian, libertarian, Anglican and nonconformist bodies of resistance' to socialism.⁴⁸ This also meant a determination to ignore or resist disaffected Conservative diehards, whose aims would be self-defeating because fatally narrowing the party's appeal. From 1924 the strategy involved taking every

opportunity to win over Liberal voters, to divide the Liberal party and to capture Liberal politicians. In 1931 it involved a repeat of 1918, agreeing to serve in another coalition under the leading progressive politician, even though MacDonald had been the Labour prime minister. The creation and perpetuation of this National government is crucial for understanding the weakness of the British Union of Fascists.

It is often observed that British fascism's great opportunity came during the first half of 1934, with the high point of the BUF's membership and national prominence. But if there was any 'fascist moment' in Britain this came earlier, before the BUF's creation, indeed in the circumstances which explain Mosley's decision to form the BUF. From late 1929 to autumn 1931 there was a general and deepening sense of national crisis, with no obvious solution – just that combination of severe economic, financial and political difficulties, and disillusionment with established politics that Mosley later expected would provide the BUF with its opportunity for power. With considerable political intelligence, during those two years he anticipated much of what would happen in national politics from August 1931. With the onset of the world depression, there was much discussion of radical changes in economic policy: hence Mosley's successive economic programmes while a Labour minister and MP from February to December 1930. With all the main parties divided, there was speculation about reconstruction of the party system: hence Mosley's departure from the Labour party in March 1931, to form the New party. With a weak government without a parliamentary majority, there was concern that the restoration of strong government might require major institutional changes: hence Mosley's proposals for a small cabinet, armed with special 'general powers' to legislate without Parliament and involving 'a certain surrender of political liberty'. In these years Mosley commanded serious and impressive political attention, listened to with interest and respect not just by Rothermere but by Beaverbrook, the Liberals Lloyd George, Sinclair and Keynes, and the Conservatives Churchill, Lloyd and a younger generation of Elliot, Oliver Stanley, Boothby, Macmillan, Moore-Brabazon,

O'Connor and Mond. One example of a widespread sense of crisis is that in early 1930 some of these younger Conservatives indulged in speculative conversation with Mosley (then still a Labour minister) on 'the decay of democracy and parliamentarianism' and (with pre-Hitler innocence) 'whether it would be well to have a fascist coup'.⁴⁹ As Mosley intended, his New party gave him weight during mid 1931 in some proposals for a coalition or cross-party opposition. But much of what he wanted in terms of party re-alignment was pre-empted in August with the formation by the Conservative, Liberal and some Labour leaders of an emergency National government. Even then Mosley retained some chance of power: at a difficult moment when the new government might have disintegrated and left the Conservative party to fight an election alone in risky circumstances, Neville Chamberlain very briefly entertained a Mosley overture for an electoral alliance.⁵⁰

What destroyed Mosley's prospects and electorally obliterated the New party was the Conservative leadership's readiness to remain within the coalition government and turn it into a great anti-socialist alliance for a general election in October 1931, at which the Labour party was crushed. With the coalition winning a parliamentary majority of 500, there was now a strong government which for the foreseeable future was unassailable by the socialist left and created an assurance of political stability and civil order. Although the emergency National government had failed to prevent devaluation of sterling, it took measures to restore 'sound finance' and financial confidence and so ensure the security of the banks, rents, investments, and savings. Despite controversial reductions in government spending including unemployment payments which provoked protest demonstrations in the early 1930s, it was even more conscious than governments after 1920 of a need to minimise social and political alienation: by raising direct taxes it had taken care to create and publicise some degree of 'equal sacrifices' and to maintain the unemployment insurance system close to pre-depression levels, in terms of real prices. The elected National government introduced long-desired Conservative policies, above all protection and imperial preference, yet also what had

earlier been regarded as radical monetary measures to boost recovery: a managed currency, managed exchange rates and 'cheap money'. These policies further enabled opportunities to promote 'corporative' industrial and agricultural re-organisation.⁵¹ The National government thus had a substantial effect in easing 'economic conditions', mitigating the worst effects of the international depression and the worst anxieties about the domestic depression. From 1932 it could claim credit for economic recovery and, for a substantial part of the population, a 'dawn of affluence'.⁵²

Consequently the establishment of the National government was not just a disaster for the New party; it also destroyed any prospects of fascism becoming a force in national politics. It removed its political justifications; it introduced economic policies similar to those which Mosley and his economist and Conservative friends had wanted in 1930-31; and it cost him potential Conservative allies, with Elliot and Stanley becoming ministers in the National government while the rest understood that it provided the best means of achieving their aims. If, as is often stated, Mosley was unfortunate in his timing, this was not because the BUF's creation in October 1932 occurred as the economy began to revive, but because he had taken the plunge in the winter of 1930-31 and so was left out of the party re-alignments during autumn 1931.

For Mosley, formation of the BUF was an act of desperation: a response to political exclusion, a bid to regain public prominence and a gamble on a political crash. What he needed was a more severe version of the 1930-31 crisis, forcing not just another re-alignment of parties and policies but a breakdown in the parliamentary regime. This was never likely under the National government. Certainly the government experienced difficulties and by-election setbacks in 1933-5; certainly there were Conservative critics, a few of whom expressed doubts not just about the government but about parliamentary democracy. But a sense of historical proportion is needed. These problems and complaints were less serious than those of 1920-2 and 1929-31, and were well within the capabilities of experienced

government and party management. Of the various critics of the National government in 1934, the BUF was 'the least significant'.⁵³ Most Conservative diehards, when not pre-occupied with the India issue, were exercised by German rearmament and pressure on the government to undertake British rearmament, as it began to do in July 1934. Their criticisms and those of other Conservatives were more easily contained because one alternative to the National government was a Labour party which from autumn 1931 had moved to the left, become committed to socialist planning and pacifism, and had members flirting with the Communist party. If the largest political change the sternest Conservative critics wanted was reversion to a purely Conservative government, in contrast the best-supported Conservative statement during 1934 (in the week after Olympia) was from over 100 backbench MPs calling for continuation of the National government.⁵⁴ Government and Conservative party concerns with 'public opinion' and electoral prospects centred not just on the Labour party but even more on the possible loss of support from 'liberal opinion'. This, and not anxiety about Conservative 'pro-fascist' opinion, was the party context for the postponement of public-order legislation during 1934. The political and official 'establishment' was hostile towards the BUF's politics and methods, but Gilmour's efforts to restrict its activities faced two obstacles. The first was his officials' difficulties over legal definitions and their 'liberal' concern to preserve civil liberties. The second, related to this delicate civil liberties aspect, was a Cabinet desire for all-party agreement, which ministers could not obtain; in other words, the political obstruction came not from concern about Conservative opinion but from Labour and opposition Liberal leaders.⁵⁵ Nevertheless the extent of Conservative as well as Labour and Liberal criticism after Olympia forced a shift in BUF methods;⁵⁶ and this, together with the bursting of its membership bubble, made legislation seem unnecessary. The BUF now almost entirely disappeared as a political concern. The strategy, issues and date for the November 1935 election were related to calculations about the Labour party and liberal opinion and to issues in foreign and defence policies – not at all to concerns about the BUF.

The introduction and passage of the Public Order Act some twelve months later arose from renewed Cabinet determination to deal with BUF incitement of disorder after riots in the East End of London, and from the belated agreement of Labour and opposition Liberal leaders to co-operate. Mosley's hope that the BUF would gain new impetus from the issue of Edward VIII's proposed marriage was another instance of desperation, not least because the opposition parties firmly supported the government on a primary element of constitutional principle, that the monarch must accept ministerial advice.⁵⁷

The character of the National government is central to understanding British anti-fascism. It re-stabilised government, party politics, the financial system and economic policies; it also upheld the British parliamentary system's inherent resistance to non-parliamentary movements. Although Conservative-dominated, and often unthinkingly presented by historians as a 'Conservative' government, it was certainly not reactionary or 'right-wing'. Indeed, an attraction for Conservative leaders was that by diluting the influence of the 'diehards', it increased their range of policy options, most clearly in enabling them to pursue the tri-partisan reform process for Indian government. The government's Conservative leaders carefully preserved its claims to retain wide 'national' and 'liberal' support, and regarded its Liberal National and National Labour members as important. Because its leaders upheld liberal values and so tolerated the expression of illiberal opinions (fascist, communist and others), this did not mean that they approved of these opinions. Because prevention of another terrible war seemed to require conciliation of foreign fascist regimes, this did not mean an absence of ideological resistance to fascism as well as communism.

The Conservative party and anti-fascism

Conservative party attitudes towards fascism cannot be understood in relation to fascist parties and governments alone; nor were they just integral to its character as a liberal parliamentary party. They were also affected by the dynamics of the party system – by the stances it adopted towards its main opponents, the independent Liberals and more particularly the Labour party.

While the main Conservative strategy for restraining the political left was to encourage the Labour party's development as an ordinary parliamentary party, Conservative leaders still wanted not just to defeat the Labour movement but to discredit and disarm its challenges to the established order. In some senses and at most times it was presented as acceptable and even admirable; in other senses and for some periods as doctrinaire and disruptive – as a danger to democracy. From the early 1920s this became a central feature of Conservative party strategy and identity. Its official publicists and its leaders, especially Baldwin, revived and extended their party's role as defender of the constitution. They presented it as the upholder not just of established institutions but of the whole cross-party 'Whig' constitutionalist ideology, and therefore with defence of democracy and as the guarantee equally of stability, freedom and progress, of 'ordered liberty'. By merging the historical functions of the Conservative and Liberal parties, the aim was to act as the ostensibly non-partisan champion of the 'constitutional classes', rallying both Conservative and liberal opinion against the various challenges from the Labour movement.⁵⁸ In one voice, parliamentary democracy was celebrated as robust and supplying all reasonable resources for a responsible Labour party; in another voice it was described as fragile and vulnerable to the dangerous purposes of irresponsible socialists. The new democracy was 'immature', an 'experiment' balanced between anarchy on one side and tyranny on the other: to maintain it would require restraint, exertion, vigilance, dedicated service, good citizenship and political education – and, explicitly, resistance to the undemocratic tendencies and

elements inherent in the Labour party. This was a powerful political and discursive strategy. In the mid 1920s the heckling or ‘rowdyism’ of Labour supporters at Conservative elections meetings was presented as a Labour party threat to free speech and constitutional government.⁵⁹ At the 1924 election the Labour government was attacked with considerable effect as soft towards Soviet ‘bolshevism’. During the trade union troubles of 1925-6, the Conservative government changed the argument into a constitutional issue: the General Strike was ‘a challenge to Parliament, and ... the road to anarchy and ruin’. At the 1931 election the National government was said to be preserving ‘democracy’ and ‘parliamentary government’. From 1933 to 1935 the Socialist League’s calls for special emergency powers were used remorselessly to assert that the whole Labour party aimed to establish a ‘Socialist Dictatorship’.⁶⁰

This strategy towards the Labour movement reinforced the Conservative party’s opposition to fascism: taking the constitutional and democratic high ground against the first required that this should also be sustained against the second. This explains Joynson-Hicks’s very strict line in 1926 against British Fascists who were not actually fascist. It also contributed to Conservative ‘active anti-fascism’ in the 1930s. This is not to say that Conservative leaders and producers of party literature made extended criticisms of the BUF. In part this was deliberate strategy: denying attention and significance to Mosley’s party, which ministers and party officials also recommended to newspapers and the BBC,⁶¹ was politically crippling. Mosley certainly regarded poor media publicity as a considerable handicap. In part it arose from an accurate assessment of its prospects: as Baldwin stated after Olympia, ‘Mosley won’t come to any good, and we need not bother about him’.⁶² Nevertheless Baldwin did make a lengthy public comment on the BUF a few days later, giving a once-and-only admonition to prospective Conservative defectors. Pugh has remarked that this contained an ‘inept’ concession that fascism and Conservatism were on the same spectrum: ‘the policy of Fascism is what you may call an Ultramontane Conservatism.

It takes many of the tenets of our own party and pushes them to a conclusion which, if given effect to, would ... be disastrous to our country'. Yet the meaning is clear – 'ultramontane' in the sense of an unacceptable and disastrous absolutism – and the decisive drawing of the line came in Baldwin's following sentence: British fascism had 'taken from the Continent one thing which is completely alien to the Englishman, and that is a desire ultimately, common to the Communists, to suppress opposition and to be able to proceed by dictatorial methods'.⁶³ Such statements recur in Conservative party literature and guidance for speakers: in the BUF's meaning the corporate state was 'Dictatorship, pure and simple', and this meant an end to justice, the rule of law and the freedoms of speech, the press, public association, collective bargaining and democratic government.⁶⁴

The main reason why the BUF received limited specific criticism was that Conservative leaders and party publicists subsumed it within a more fundamental defence of democracy against all forms of dictatorship, authoritarianism or totalitarianism. Most evidently, this became Baldwin's characteristic rhetorical strategy, merging rejection of fascism and nazism with attacks on communism and socialism, and treating them all as the common enemy.⁶⁵ The approach had particular purposes in domestic party politics. From 1933 to 1935 it supplied a new justification for continuation of the National government, both against a possible Conservative diehard rebellion over the India bill and against a Labour party revival: 'if you have a weak or feeble Government ... you may see a slide here ... to some form of Bolshevism or Fascism'. From 1934 it assisted the delicate task of justifying rearmament in the face of the Labour and Liberal oppositions and considerable popular attachment to peace. When Baldwin was urged to impress on the electorate the possibility of another European war, he re-defined the issue in ideological terms: 'he would not put it that way. I would say that we are the only defenders left of liberty in a world of Fascists'.⁶⁶ When concern about Hitler's and Mussolini's ambitions increased during 1935 and made still greater rearmament desirable, he modified the strategy in order to seek still wider national co-

operation. He now switched to embracing the Labour movement within the constitutional order: it was a 'great stabilizing influence' and a 'bulwark of popular liberty' against communism and fascism. But if party and ministerial purposes played a substantial part, these were based upon genuine ideological opposition to fascism as well as communism, expressed in many of Baldwin's speeches and broadcasts and in much party literature. Fascism, like communism, was concerned with the eradication of individuality and creation of a 'mass mind', with the suppression of freedom and imposition of 'slavery': soon 'from the Rhine to the Pacific there will be ... millions who have been trained to be either Bolshevik robots or Nazi robots'. Britain, he declared in a broadcast in March 1934, was 'the last stronghold of freedom, standing like a rock in a tide that is threatening to submerge the world'. Accordingly, British public figures had a duty not just to their own people but to the whole world to maintain 'the torch of freedom'. Baldwin's arguments were not only political but spiritual, the evocation of moral and religious resistance to amoral and atheistic doctrines: 'the recognition of the dignity of man and of his individuality ... as a child of God ... is the unbridgeable gulf between democracy and the isms'. So frequent and prominent was defence of 'ordered liberty' as a theme in Baldwin's public statements that he became a leading international spokesman against fascism and communism, invited twice to North America during 1939 to speak on the causes of freedom and democracy.

Presenting 'dictatorship' as the ideological enemy expressed a belief that the political extremes were linked: that fascism and communism bred upon each other, that more communist activity would provoke more fascist activity and *vice versa*, degenerating into class war, civil breakdown and ending, whichever prevailed, in the destruction of democracy and liberty. Attacking dictatorship in generic terms also had the effect of reducing foreign policy complications. Conservative leaders not only understood the character of Nazism, but also had some knowledge of its practical effects. One instance is that in 1935 Baldwin, Churchill, Cecil, Halifax and Londonderry as university vice-chancellors appealed on behalf

of the Academic Assistance Council, assisting Jewish scholars fleeing from Germany; another is the establishment after *Kristallnacht* of the Lord Baldwin Fund for Refugees. But given the horrors of modern warfare, National government ministers did not want ideological and moral resistance to become a diplomatic and military crusade; and in seeking conciliation with Italy and Germany yet judging Mussolini and Hitler to be dangerously irresponsible and volatile, they sought to minimise provocations. The Cabinet twice accepted that Italian fascist and German Nazi party organisations active in Britain should be proscribed, but then agreed that action was ‘inopportune’ while agreements were being sought with their governments.⁶⁷ During 1938 the Cabinet urged newspapers to avoid excessive criticism or abuse of Hitler.⁶⁸ Neville Chamberlain was particularly insistent that foreign policy should not be conducted nor presented in ideological terms. If other countries decided that fascism or communism suited their own conditions, ‘I do not see why we should try to impose our ideas upon them so long as they do not try to impose their ideas upon us’; it was ‘neither useful nor desirable to criticise others because they prefer systems which would not suit us but do suit them’.⁶⁹ The effect was to make anti-fascism less prominent in prime-ministerial speeches and party statements than under Baldwin. The separation of appeasement and ideology could get Chamberlain into difficulties. His defence of the Italian treaty in May 1938 and attempts to prevent war during the Czechoslovakian crisis led to some Labour criticisms that he was ‘a Fascist’, and ‘truckles to the dictators because he likes their principles’.⁷⁰ But Chamberlain’s point was always that foreign fascisms had no claims and no place within Britain, and in a low-keyed way his public statements upheld ‘our democratic conditions, with their insistence on the supreme value of individual liberty’ and ‘ordered constitutional government based on peace, tolerance, moderation and freedom’. When accused of fascist sympathies in May 1938, he retorted that fascism and communism alike were ‘utterly inconsistent with our democratic notions of equality and liberty’.⁷¹ Halifax, his

foreign secretary, went further, maintaining a Baldwin-like defence of democracy in moral and spiritual terms.⁷²

Appeasement did give succour and encouragement to ‘fellow travellers’ with Nazism. But this was not the intention of Chamberlain and his ministers. With the end of appeasement in March 1939, ministerial arguments shifted, effortlessly, to the sorts of attack on Nazi dictatorship that Baldwin had been conducting since 1933, which Churchill made more frequently after the *Anschluss* in March 1938, and which Halifax intensified after the Munich settlement. The Second World War and more precisely the war crisis and creation of the Churchill coalition government in May 1940 made anti-fascism into a central British ideology; but the Conservative origins of this lay firmly in the 1930s.

Conclusion

If British fascism had indigenous sources, the same was still more so of British anti-fascism. Resistance to fascism and Nazism had deep and robust resources in British political culture,⁷³ in a parliamentary and historical ideology and in political practices and arguments that reached across the main political parties. From 1918 to 1939 Conservative-dominated coalitions or Conservative governments pursued economic and social policies which aimed to preserve as much of the established social and political structures as possible against challenges from the Labour movement, seeking a stabilisation that mitigated the effects of economic depression in ways which weakened all ‘extremist’ political movements. The Conservative party and more particularly the National government provided security against radical left governments in ways which contained serious challenge from the ‘right’, and insofar as diehards wanted an alternative government they meant a Conservative government under different Conservative leadership, not any alliance with the BUF. Few Conservative politicians were involved or interested in pro-fascist organisations, and these were much exceeded in number and importance by those Conservatives who participated in cross-party

bodies in support of democracy and freedom. In February 1934, for example, John Buchan, Lord Cecil and Lord Eustace Percy joined prominent Liberals in signing the 'Liberty and Democratic Leadership' manifesto. Baldwin became president, other Conservatives were vice-presidents Halifax and Eden gave addresses to, and the Conservative party's political education college was a conference venue for the Association for Education in Citizenship.⁷⁴ The Conservative party also mounted a defence of parliamentary institutions and ordered liberty which, while originally directed against a supposed challenge from the Labour left, was re-directed against British and international fascism from 1933 and – given the shared ground of parliamentary democracy – was expressed in similar terms to the anti-fascism of the Labour and Liberal parties. The Conservative party's contribution to British political, economic and ideological conditions made it the chief and most effective obstacle to all extremist groups in interwar Britain, with greater importance for the marginalisation of fascism than the explicitly 'anti-fascist' movements of the political left.

¹ A. Olechnowicz, 'Liberal anti-fascism in the 1930s, the case of Sir Ernest Barker', *Albion* 36 (2004), 636-60, particularly the discussion of work by David Renton and Nigel Copsey on pp. 636-60; and idem, 'Historians and the study of anti-fascism in Britain', above pp. XX-XX.

² H. McCarthy, 'Parties, voluntary associations and democratic politics in interwar Britain', *Historical Journal* 50 (2007), 891-912.

³ See e.g. J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 345-8; B. Coleman, 'The Conservative party and the frustration of the extreme right', in A. Thorpe (ed.), *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-war Britain* (Exeter University Press, 1989), pp. 49-66; J. Stevenson, 'Conservatism and the failure of fascism in interwar Britain', in Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 264-82.

⁴ N. Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 3-4, 190-2, in considering the Labour party, includes in his definition of 'passive anti-fascism' the 'state and the media' and so Labour lobbying in 1936 for what became the Public Order Act, which he describes as 'anti-fascist legislation'. The leading elements in the state and media were of course Conservative ministers or Conservative-inclined newspapers, and the Public Order Act had originated (in 1934) with, and was passed by, the National government.

⁵ Given observations in some of the literature on the 'far right', it should be noted that Lords, Viscounts, Earls and Dukes were not necessarily active or weighty in the House of Lords, and that only a few were members of or important for the Conservative party's leadership. Nor were those with other titles (knight, baronet, lady, even King), with double-barrelled surnames, or with the military or naval ranks of a retired officer thereby politically important, effective or influential, or necessarily representative either of the Conservative party or the political 'establishment'.

⁶ E.g. R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain. A History 1918-1985* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), chs. 1-2; T. Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39* (Manchester: MUP, 2000), chs. 1-2; M. Pugh, 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!' (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), chs. 1-2; Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2004), chs. 1-2; and for more particular cases, D. Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain 1933-1939* (London: Palgrave, 2003), chs. 5-6.

⁷ Best set out in M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924* (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), and *The Impact of Hitler ... 1933-1940* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975). E. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford: OUP, 2002)

rightly emphasises Conservative plurality, though his focus was just on economic ideas and he engaged in a dubious search for a Conservative ‘minimum’, pp. 280-90.

⁸ These statements were made at or following an *English Review* luncheon addressed by Mosley: Butler to Lord Brabourne, 15 June 1934 (adding, pointedly, that ‘my loyalties were naturally with the government’) and 20 June 1934, India Office Collections, British Library, Brabourne papers F97/20B. For other Conservatives interested in economic organisation and planning, see L.P. Carpenter, ‘Corporatism in Britain 1930-1945’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976), 3-25, and D. Ritschel, *The Politics of Planning* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), esp. ch 5, but note the wide interest in such ideas, on the left as well as with Mosley. For Elliot and other younger Conservative modernisers, see also below p. XXX.

⁹ R. Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right* (1980; Oxford: OUP edn. 1983), esp. pp. 21-7, 40-9, 61-8, 233-9. Bryant has received extensive study, in work by Andrew Roberts, Julia Stapleton, Reba Soffer and Richard Griffiths.

¹⁰ See e.g. D. Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure* (London: Right Book Club, 1937), for one of their most active journals, the *English Review*, and its luncheon discussion club: its editor records contacts with prominent politicians as ‘mere formalities’, and its political impact as negligible (pp. 334, 344-5).

¹¹ Pugh, *Blackshirts*, p. 5; see also M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939* (Oxford: Blackwell 1982), pp. 279-81; ‘The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia debate’, *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), 529-42; and ‘The National government, the British Union of Fascists and the Olympia debate’, *Historical Research* 78 (2005), 253-62.

¹² Pugh, *Blackshirts*, pp. 58-61. For the anti-soviet campaign, including Albert Hall meetings, see *Times*, 16 July, 17 Sept. and 16 Oct. 1926: because unofficial, these had no support from the party organisation.

¹³ Cabinet 47(25), 7 Oct. 1925; R. Maguire, “‘The fascists ... are to be depended upon’”: the British government, fascists and strike-breaking during 1925 and 1926’, in N. Copey and D. Renton (eds.), *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 6-26.

¹⁴ British Fascisti Council offer to the Home Secretary, *Times*, 28 March 1924. Generally Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, pp. 46-7, 51-4, 57; Linehan, *British Fascism*, pp. 63-6; D. Baker, ‘The extreme right in the 1920s: fascism in a cold climate, or “Conservatives with knobs on”?’ in M. Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 19-26; Pugh, *Blackshirts*, pp. 56-7.

¹⁵ *Times*, 28 April 1926; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 55 (also noting Joynson-Hicks as vice-president of the National Citizens Union threatening to resign if it allowed Fascists to join *en masse*); Pugh, *Blackshirts*, pp. 66, 98.

¹⁶ Gilmour, 'Preservation of public order', appendix to Cabinet 24(34), 3 June 1934, and his further memoranda, CP 189(234) 11 July 1934. Compare Pugh, *Blackshirts*, pp. 59, 163-4, using Gilmour's temporising House of Commons statements while awaiting Cabinet decision rather than his private advice to the Cabinet, and Pugh, 'National government', 254, which mysteriously lists Gilmour as a 'pro-fascist'. Similarly, although Oliver Locker-Lampson used 'fascist' stewards in 1926 (Pugh, *Blackshirts*, p. 61; Pugh, 'National government', 254), he is correctly listed as an 'anti-fascist' in 1934 in Pugh, 'British Union of Fascists', 532: see *HC Deb* 290, cols. 1993-4.

¹⁷ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 101.

¹⁸ Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers*, pp. 49-53..

¹⁹ Pugh, 'British Union of Fascists', 532-4, and compare J. Lawrence, 'Fascist violence and the politics of public order in inter-war Britain: the Olympia debate revisited', *Historical Research* 76 (2003), 250-1. Of Pugh's supposed 'pro-fascists' speaking in *House of Commons Debates [HC Deb]* 290, 14 June 1934, Winterton deprecated anything that would help the fascist cause (cols. 1985-6, 1989), Lovat Fraser was not a supporter (2001), Howard had 'no respect or admiration for [Mosley's] principles' (2009), Dixey had 'no sympathy nor any regard' for him (2028), Macquisten thought the BUF misguided and Mosley a megalomaniac (2038), and Pike did 'not agree with Fascism' (2040).

²⁰ Moore in the *Daily Mail*, 25 April 1934, quoted in Pugh, *Blackshirts*, p. 151; D.S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur* (Manchester: MUP, 1987), pp.146-7; G. C Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right 1918-1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 45-6, 86-8, 139.

²¹ C. Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire* (London: Oriental UP, 1986), pp. 136-7. A Commons debate on an Indian matter on 13 June attracted far more diehard interest than the Olympia debate on the following day.

²² E.g. Howard, Hales and Macquisten in *HC Deb* 290, 14 June 1934, cols. 2011-12, 2032-3, 2036, and Lloyd in July 1934, quoted in Ramsden, *Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, pp. 336-7. For the limited aims (and failure) of the Lloyd 'movement' in late 1933, see Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure*, pp. 341-5.

²³ Well explained in N. Smart. *The National Government 1931-1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 102-4.

²⁴ As claimed in Pugh, *Making of Modern British Politics*, pp. 279-80; Pugh, 'British Union of Fascists', 530-1, 540-1; and Pugh, 'National government', 259-62. What follows supports the contrary verdicts in Lawrence, 'Fascist violence', p. 249' and J. Lawrence, 'Why Olympia mattered', *Historical Research* 78 (2005), pp. 265-66. For public order legislation see p. XXX below.

²⁵ For Anti-Waste, see Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, pp. 55-59, 73-5, 120-1, and for the later movements S. Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party ... 1929-31* (London: Yale UP, 1988), ch. 3, pp. 210-12, 222-3.

²⁶ Grand Council minutes (noting also 'a good number of letters'), 7 June 1934, MSS Primrose League 7/1, Bodleian Library, Oxford: compare M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 191.

²⁷ National Union executive committee minutes, 14 March 1934, Conservative Party archives NUA 4/1/5, Bodleian Library, Oxford, and for the Lancashire area, see AREA 3/1/2: compare M. Pugh, 'Lancashire, cotton and Indian reform: Conservative controversies in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History* 15 (2004), 147-50.

²⁸ I am very grateful to Stuart Ball for this information, derived from his examination of the interwar records of some 150 Conservative constituency associations, in all parts of Britain.

²⁹ E.g. *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays 1932-1939*, ed. N. Smart (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1996), p. 87 (32 Oct. 1933); *Parliament and Politics The Headlam Diaries 1923-1935*, ed. S. Ball (London: The Historians' Press, 1992), pp. 292-93 (13 Feb. 1934). For a similar Liberal view, Lothian reported in Butler to Brabourne, 20 June 1934, Brabourne papers F97/20B.

³⁰ See Olechnowicz, 'Liberal anti-fascism', p. 643.

³¹ *Times*, 21 Jan. 1927, and see R.J.B. Bosworth, 'The British press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini', *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (1970), 173-80, and Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers*, pp. 14-15.

³² P. Murphy, *Alan Lennox-Boyd* (London: Tauris, 1999), p. 47 and see pp. 42-6. As an admirer of foreign fascisms and advocate of some fascist notions for domestic purposes, Lennox-Boyd is a key example in Pugh, *Blackshirts*, esp. pp. 9, 58, 146, 148.

³³ S. Haxey, *Tory M.P.* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1942), pp. 207-9; E.W.D. Tennant, *True Account* (London: Max Parrish, 1957), p. 194; for pro-Franco numbers and a lower AGF figure (22 MPs and 12 peers), see N. Crowson, *Facing Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 207-9. Though the two peers had been ministers, neither had influence with Conservative leaders after 1935: see I. Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

- ³⁴ G. Bruce Strang, 'The spirit of Ulysses? Ideology and British appeasement in the 1930s', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19 (2008), 487.
- ³⁵ Re-affirmed in *ibid.*, 483-93, but evident in all serious studies of 'appeasement'.
- ³⁶ Pugh, *Blackshirts*, p. 273, writes of a 'rapprochement', but this was wholly on Mosley's part in that he supported appeasement: ministers had no political interest in him or his campaign.
- ³⁷ R. Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted* (London: Constable, 1998), pp. 145-55, 158-60; R. Thurlow, *The Secret State*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 207-8, describes the total membership as 'miniscule'.
- ³⁸ See speeches in *Times*, 30 April 1923, 23 Feb. 1925, 29 Sept. 1928.
- ³⁹ E.g. speeches in *ibid.*, 8 Jan. 1934, 10 June 1935.
- ⁴⁰ See below pp. XXX.
- ⁴¹ E.g. Stone, *Responses to Nazism*, pp. 187-8; Pugh, *Blackshirts*, pp. 315-6.
- ⁴² See e.g. P. Ghosh, 'Gladstone and Peel', in P. Ghosh and L. Goldman (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 47, 72-3; R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), pp. 16-23.
- ⁴³ For a distinctly hard-headed yet subtle explanation, see Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, pp. 3-12, and see R. Skidelsky, 'Great Britain', in S.J. Woolf, *Fascism in Europe* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 276: 'the instinctive cleverness of political arrangements which got [Britain] through a dangerous decade is astounding' and 'the sheer political competence of the ... parliamentary system ... is remarkable'.
- ⁴⁴ Ramsden, *Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p. 118.
- ⁴⁵ See, variously, Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, chs. 2-3, and R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 50-58.
- ⁴⁶ McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, pp. 265-75.
- ⁴⁷ P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 168-173.
- ⁴⁸ Cowling, *Impact of Labour*, p. 421, referring to Baldwin's 'function'.
- ⁴⁹ H. Nicolson diary, 15 Feb. 1930, Nicolson papers, Balliol College, Oxford. On 'crisis' and Mosley's activities and connections, see P. Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government ... 1916-1932* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), ch. 4 (esp. pp. 145-9), pp. 230-1, 276, with further details in M. Worley, 'What was the New party? Sir Oswald Mosley and associated responses to the "crisis", 1931-1932', *History* 92 (2007), 39-63, and the symposium on the New party in *Contemporary British History* 23 (2009), 421-542.
- ⁵⁰ Williamson, *National Crisis*, pp. 435, 445-6.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 344-5, ch. 11, pp. 433-54, ch. 14 and conclusion. For economic measures see also A. Booth, 'Britain in the 1930s: a managed economy?', *Economic History Review*, 2nd s. 40 (1987), 499-522, and for 'corporative' proposals, Ritschel, *Politics of Planning*, ch. 5.

⁵² J. Stevenson and C. Cook, *The Slump* (London: Cape, 1977), ch. 2.

⁵³ Cowling, *Impact of Hitler*, p. 16, and see chs. 1-3 for the various oppositions and the government's political management.

⁵⁴ 'The National government ... a Conservative manifesto', *Times*, 14 June 1934.

⁵⁵ Cabinets 29 and 31 (34), 18 and 31 July 1934; and for desire to legislate, readiness to ignore any Conservative 'extremist' criticism, but exasperation at non-co-operation from the 'Liberals and left wing', see Somervell (Solicitor-General) journal, 15 July 1934, Somervell papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Generally, G. Anderson, *Fascists, Communists and the National Government* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), pp. 11-18; Thurlow, *Secret State*, pp. 182-97;

⁵⁶ Lawrence, 'Why Olympia mattered', pp. 268-9, comments on Mosley's resentment at *Conservative* criticism.

⁵⁷ P. Williamson, 'The monarchy and public values 1910-1953', in Andrzej Olechnowicz (ed.), *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 223-57.

⁵⁸ For much of this paragraph see Williamson, *Baldwin*, ch. 7, esp. pp. 235-42; material in official Conservative publications readily supports the evidence from Baldwin's speeches. For 'constitutional classes', McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 58.

⁵⁹ J. Lawrence, 'The transformation of British public politics after the first world war', *Past and Present* 190 (2006), 198-201.

⁶⁰ Aside from numerous Baldwin speeches, see Conservative Party *Hints for Speakers, Politics in Review*, and *Election Notes 1935*, pp. 348-53, in the Conservative Party Archive.

⁶¹ Thurlow, *Secret State*, p. 182, and see Cabinets 6 and (36), 12 and 19 Feb. 1936, on the BBC being persuaded not to broadcast talks by Mosley and the Communist, Pollitt, as leaders of parties 'advocating the forcible overthrow of the constitution'.

⁶² T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931-1950* (London: OUP, 1954), p. 130 (12 June 1934).

⁶³ *Times*, 18 June 1934; Pugh, 'National government', p. 261, and *Blackshirts*, pp. 151-2; and see Lawrence, 'Why Olympia mattered', pp. 267-8.

⁶⁴ *Notes for Conservative Canvassers*, Sept. 1933, quoted in C. Bussfeld, 'Democracy versus Dictatorship' (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), p. 204, and Conservative party *Election Notes 1935*, pp. 378-85.

⁶⁵ For this paragraph see Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 313-35; P. Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the totalitarian challenge 1933-40', *English Historical Review* 115 (1999), 615-19, and the commentaries on Conservative party literature and speeches in Bussfeld, *Democracy versus Dictatorship*, pp. 194-206, 246-71.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Diary with Letters*, pp. 123-4 (27 Feb. 1934).

⁶⁷ Cabinets 55 (36) and 182(37), 29 July 1936 and 8 July 1937.

⁶⁸ Though this did not amount to government 'control', as argued in R. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989). The various newspapers had their own reasons for wanting to avoid war: see M. Meznar, 'The British government, the newspapers and the German problem 1937-39' (Durham PhD thesis, 2005).

⁶⁹ Speeches in *Times*, 13 May and 14 Dec. 1938.

⁷⁰ Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives', 640-1.

⁷¹ Statements in *Times*, 29 June and 10 Dec. 1937, 7 Jan., 13 May and 14 Dec. 1938

⁷² Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives', 623-7, 634-8.

⁷³ Compare Stone, *Responses to Nazism*, p. 9, which asserts the importance of continental anti-fascist authors. However, the book's focus is on formal political writings, rather than the politics of the politicians and of the political public in general.

⁷⁴ *Times*, 15 Feb. 1934; E. Simon (et. al.), *Constructive Democracy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), consisting of addresses delivered at an AEC conference at the Bonar Law Memorial College in July 1937. For the AEC generally, see Olechnowicz, 'Liberal anti-fascism', 657-59.