The Impact of Mass Media

British Foreign Economic Policy, Lord Beaverbrook, and His Empire Crusade

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On Thursday, 17 March 1931, all Britons interested in the political fate of their country looked at Westminster, St. George's. It was the polling day of one of the most famous by-elections in British history.[1] While Liberals and Socialists had not even dared to put up candidates of their own, an independent Conservative, Sir Ernest Petter, a manufacturer of Diesel engines from the Midlands, contested the safest seat of the Tories in the British Isles. The Conservative Party, having difficulties in finding a voluntary candidate, succeeded eventually in persuading Alfred Duff Cooper, later 1st Viscount of Norwich, to take on the challenge. The national and provincial newspapers did not contend themselves with staying apart and playing the role of an *Observer*. Instead, the press got increasingly involved printing propaganda for one side or the other. The culminating point of the campaign was a, now famous, speech of the leader of the Conservative Party, Stanley Baldwin, castigating the political opponents as men aiming at 'power without responsibility - the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages.'[2] After two weeks of a fierce and mud-slinging electoral battle, Cooper won a decisive victory with a lead of more than 5,000 votes.[3]

The immense public attention that the by-election attracted cannot be understood if the contest is seen only within the parameters of local politics.[4] Much more was at stake. In fact, the by-election was the apex of an embittered power struggle between Baldwin, and two press barons, Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere. A defeat of Baldwin's candidate would have been Baldwin's defeat. Since 1906 the Conservatives have never had to face such a severe crisis again, they were never so close to a break-up of their party.[5]

The crisis broke out in summer 1929, after the Tories - much to their surprise - had lost the General Election in May. Dozens of former members of the House of Commons found themselves unseated. Discontent grew with a leader who had led them into defeat. Even former cabinet members, who with one exception defended their seats successfully, did not refrain from open criticism. The largest group of opponents was the old imperialist wing of the party, the so-called 'Diehards,' who were strictly opposed to Baldwin's Indian policy.[6] Others who had been against the extension of the franchise and the reform of the Poor Law saw Baldwin's conservatism as

half way to socialism. The only advantage Baldwin enjoyed was that his critics neither had an agreed alternative policy nor a clear alternative leader who would fight for the post. It was in this grumbling atmosphere that Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the *Daily Express* and other newspapers, started his Empire Crusade.[7] Provoked by an article of the *Morning Post,* which rebuked him for having neglected imperial interests, Beaverbrook published an article in the *Sunday Express* on 30 June 1929, calling for a campaign to strengthen the ties within the British Empire: 'The fiscal union of the Empire will only be achieved by a crusade carried on by those who are animated by the crusading spirit'.[8] To achieve economic unity, he demanded a fundamental tariff reform. On the one hand, he argued for lower tariffs between the various parts of the Empire and on the other, he asked for the introduction of import duties on foreign goods, especially on wheat and meat. Beaverbrook called for 'Empire Free Trade', which was – as he later frankly admitted – actually more a lie, a propaganda device. He did not favour free trade at all; in fact, he wanted to abandon the old liberal dogma of British foreign economic policy and promoted a new system of protectionism.

More than 25 years had passed since Joseph P. Chamberlain had advocated the establishment of preferential trade relations within the Empire for the first time. The Tories, who in a very difficult and burdening process had taken years and years to adopt free trade as their own policy and to close ranks, were soon again in disarray. The near split of the party and the ensuing landslide victory of the Liberals in 1906 left a deep mark on the mind of the Conservatives.[9] They remembered very vividly how the Liberals had denounced their platform on tariff reform as a mere trick to introduce a food tax. By doing so, they skilfully succeeded in alienating large portions of the electorate from the Conservatives. Since then, Conservatives, and in particular Baldwin who as newly elected leader of the party had lost the general elections of 1923 with a programme on tariffs, were very hesitant to demand the imposition of duties on foreign foodstuffs, or, at least were extremely careful in putting their words - too strong was the fear of the 'food tax cry'.

Leopold Amery, for instance, Colonial Minister and leading representative of the party's imperialist wing, was in favour of trade preferences all the time. As early as November 1928 - six months before the General Election - he tried to move Beaverbrook in this direction while guarding his own position:

> The only thing I would say is that sometimes leaders of parties have got to do a certain amount of compromising taking into account the state of public opinion. The Press is under no such obligation, and it can indeed create the public opinion with which politicians have to work. ... If only a great paper like the 'Express'

would steadily and consistently preach the whole doctrine of all round imperial preference and protection, pay no attention whatever to what politicians say or do about it, I believe it could create an immense impression in a very few months.[10]

Beaverbrook, however, waited with his campaign until the election results seemed to affirm the legitimacy of his criticism on the Conservative Party's leadership.

Before Beaverbrook moved to the British Isles, gained a seat in the House of Commons, and eventually was created a baron in 1917, he had worked as a stockbroker achieving a fortune with mergers and acquisitions. Born as William Maxwell Aitken, he was a son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister who had emigrated to Canada in the 1860s; he was a *nouveau riche* from the Dominions with a strange accent; a newspaper proprietor who boasted publicly about the power of the press,[11] and in fact of his power - not exactly the adequate prerequisites for *entrée* into the higher circles of English society. In short, Beaverbrook was a political and social outsider, detested by most members of the British establishment, including the Royals.[12] Despite his difficulties - and in part deliberate obstinacy - to accustom himself to the social codes and behaviour of the upper classes, he had friends and acquaintances from all walks of life, though one has to admit that most of these gentlemen were not fully integrated into English society themselves. Within weeks, however, Beaverbrook won over some other fellow Lords, mostly well-known entrepreneurs, to write articles in favour of the Empire Crusade, which he then published on the front-page of his newspapers.[13]

The first test of public approval came earlier than expected. That same month Sir John Ferguson, official candidate of the Conservative Party in the upcoming by-election at Twickenham, declared himself a supporter of Empire Free Trade. The Party's central office, which so far had deliberately ignored Beaverbrook's activities, was caught by surprise. Though the party leadership put strong pressure on Ferguson and frightened him into hedging, they eventually failed to change his mind. More so, their attempt to actually boycott his campaign backlashed because the whole affair generated a large amount of public interest.[14] On 8 August 1929, Ferguson - with help from Beaverbrook's newspapers - succeeded in the by-election. The victory was not a grandiose one, but it had shown that an election platform focussed on Empire Free Trade, even in contradiction to the official policy of the Party's central organisation, was not necessarily bound to be a lost cause. Encouraged by this result, Beaverbrook embarked on an all-out propaganda campaign. After the summer break, he started with a series of articles appealing to British farmers to support the crusade. This was followed up with a Manifesto pamphlet entitled 'Empire Free Trade'. With full-page advertisements in many newspapers, the gospel of Empire Free

Trade was spread. So great was the demand for his pamphlet, that within a short time a second edition was called for. Altogether 275,000 copies were issued.[15] In addition, Beaverbrook arranged with British Movietone News, the largest imperial newsreel provider, an interview presenting the case for Empire Free Trade. It was estimated at the time that this film might reach an audience of more than twenty million people worldwide.[16] At the end of October, Lord Beaverbrook made his first speech on a public platform in support of the crusade. From then on, he addressed audiences frequently, quite often two or three times per week.[17] At these meetings he not only appealed directly to potential new supporters, but made front-page headlines - at least in his own newspapers. With a circulation of some 1.6 million copies for the *Daily Express* alone, it was guaranteed that his speeches could make a lasting impression on a vast readership.[18] Empire Free Trade had a strong emotional appeal. Most British families had relatives or close friends working and living in the Dominions. In an uncertain and increasingly complicated world, those countries were seen as Britain's natural allies.

On 7 November 1929, shortly after the parliamentary session was opened, Beaverbrook carried the issue into Parliament speaking to members of the Imperial Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. A couple of days later he moved a debate on Empire Free Trade in the House of Lords.[19] It was the first of several debates on this issue that should take place in both Houses of Parliament within the following year.[20]

Most importantly, Beaverbrook did not confine himself to keep his propaganda activities going. Arousing widespread publicity, he started to transform his crusade into a real political movement. On 10 December 1929, full-page advertisements appeared in all the principal newspapers of the country announcing that an Empire Crusade register had been opened and included an enrolment form for signature. A week later, on 17 December, an executive committee of the Empire Crusade was formed.[21] The principal members of this - apart from Beaverbrook, of course - were; Patrick J. Hannon, an Irish-born industrialist and Conservative MP for Birmingham; Moseley, who sought to build up the campaign in the Midlands; Viscount Elibank, a Scotsman who kept the debate in the House of Lords going; C.A. McCurdy, once Lloyd George's Coalition Liberal Chief Whip; R.D. Blumenfeld, chief-editor of the *Daily Express* since 1902; as well as Lord Melchett and Sir Hugo Cunliffe-Owen, Chairman of British American Tobacco, who both used their connections in the world of business. Furthermore, hundreds of companies and unions were contacted directly. While from the very first days of the movement it seemed obvious that the policy was destined to meet with approval from British farmers, the call was followed by people of various backgrounds. Support was stronger in

the agricultural south than in the industrial north, and stronger in the House of Lords with its considerable number of 'Diehards' than in the House of Commons.[22] Within three months, 250,000 Britons signed the enrolment forms.[23]

The campaign's apparent success aggravated the difficulties for the Conservative leadership. On one hand, Stanley Baldwin tried to quell this debate acting publicly with deliberate negligence. As late as 20 December 1929, he instructed the Central Office to tell constituency agents that 'no official discussion of the Empire Free Trade policy should take place until further notice'.[24] A similar course was followed by most other Conservative newspapers, which, with the exception of the Rothermere press, all countered Beaverbrook's publicity efforts by simply ignoring or suppressing them.[25] On the other hand, however, Baldwin sought to accommodate Beaverbrook.[26] Before the party conference at Albert Hall on 21 November 1929, he met the press baron twice seeking a compromise without committing himself. In his speech on the conference, Baldwin tried to gloss over the differences with complimentary remarks about Beaverbrook and rhetorical support for a rather vague resolution on empire trade, which had been adopted earlier that day.[27]

These efforts were certainly not sufficient to keep Beaverbrook and Rothermere loyal to the party line, or to prevent them moving up closer. In particular, Lord Rothermere, the younger brother of the late Lord Northcliffe, was eager to bring Baldwin down. At odds with the Conservatives over India, Rothermere used his papers for severe attacks on the party leadership.[28] After the death of his brother he became the biggest proprietor of newspapers in Britain, owning not only the *Daily Mail* (with a daily net circulation of ca. 1.9 million, the largest circulation in Britain), the *Evening News*, the *Weekly Dispatch*, the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Sunday Pictorial*, but also a chain of provincial newspapers in England, three papers in Scotland, and several magazines.[29] Understandably, Beaverbrook worked hard on Rothermere to support the crusade. On 24 October 1929, Beaverbrook wrote, still aware of Rothermere's reservations on this point: 'I know perfectly that support for this campaign cannot be expected in the columns of the *Daily Mail*. But, would it be possible to give us some publicity when we get independent Conservative support?' On 30 November 1929, he sent Rothermere a telegram to the Cote d'Azur: '... will you please tell your papers to give us plenty of publicity and if possible a beneficent attitude'; two days later: '... If you can be persuaded to take any part in this movement our committee would like to make you chairman.' Followed by another telegram on 5 December 1929: 'I wish you would think about taking leadership of our movement.' On 31 December 1929, Beaverbrook pleaded again: 'I do think we should make an immense and immediate effort to rec-

oncile our policies and to launch a joint appeal to the public. The leadership will and must wait on you.'[30]

Though Rothermere was not yet convinced that the electorate could be carried with a programme including duties on foreign foodstuffs, he relished the conflict with the Party leadership, spurring Beaverbrook to run candidates at by-elections,[31] lending the support of his newspapers, and even making a substantial contribution to the campaign funds.[32] Rothermere, however, happened to not only be an additional source of strength, but also a burden on the Crusade. One problem was that he consistently overestimated his own political influence: 'If the Conservative party wants an alliance with the Rothermere Press', he bragged to Beaverbrook, 'the terms will be of a most exemplary character. They will have a direct relationship to policy and personnel. You and I have the situation entirely in our hands. Without our active support, there is not the remotest chance of the ex-Premier and his group of intimates returning to office.'[33] Certainly not being an easy character, he was regarded by the Party establishment as a mischievous troublemaker, as an 'untouchable'[34]. Conservative politicians like Leo Amery or Neville Chamberlain, who sympathised with Beaverbrook's political aims in principle and acted sometimes as go-betweens, distanced themselves because they did not want to be seen in an alliance with Rothermere. The fact that the majority of Conservative newspapers was controlled by the two press lords was nevertheless a very good reason for concern. This perception was apparently shared by some fellow Conservatives like John C.C. Davidson, the Chairman of the Conservative Party, and Sir Hugh Topping, the Party's Principal Agent. On 1 January 1930, Davidson, rather nervously, sent a note to Baldwin urging him to take an initiative. Whilst the introduction of import duties on foodstuffs was still ruled out as politically impossible, the Party Chairman advised Baldwin to use a forthcoming speech to parliamentary Members and candidates to propose a policy of limited protection:

> I have been anxiously turning over in my mind the political situation and of one thing I am quite convinced ... that in the very near future you will have to make a definite pronouncement of policy which will appeal to the country and unite our Party, which at the present moment is very much in the slough of despond. ... You must steal the thunder of both Rothermere and Beaverbrook in such a way as to prevent either of them attacking you. ... With something that our people believe in and can go into the streets, railway carriages and clubs preaching and arguing <u>for</u> we can win the country.[35]

Although Davidson denied that he was rattled, the opposite was the case. In contrast to Baldwin, he understood that the real power of the Empire Crusade was always that it reflected the disgruntled elements in the Conservative rank and file. Their enthusiasm for Beaverbrook's policy was one rea-

son; that the Crusade provided a suitable vehicle for their resentments against the Party leadership was another. This opinion was shared by many. Howell Arthur Gwynne, the Editor of the *Morning Post*, a publicly staunch supporter of the official party line, told Baldwin privately that Beaverbrook's strength was grounded in the fact that his policy was 'endorsed secretly or openly by 85% of the Conservative Party.'[36] To meet criticism of his lack of vigour as opposition leader, Baldwin used a public speech for a bold attack on the Labour government, delivered at the Coliseum on 5 February 1930. Stressing the ideal of an imperial economic union, he asked for the extension of safeguarding measures to the steel and textile industries, but postponed the thorny question of tariffs on agricultural products and even made a pledge against food taxes in any form. Aiming at publicity effects, the Coliseum speech was also an attempt to buy time. Baldwin and Beaverbrook were still in the process of negotiations, both sides fathoming the ground for a compromise. Though sending the opposition leader a warm note of congratulation, Beaverbrook indicated in a rather ambivalent wording that Baldwin's proposals fell short of his expectations: 'I hope for an opportunity of talking it over with you on some early occasion, and when perhaps I may be allowed to demonstrate to you the strength and force of our movement.'[37] The envisaged meeting took place a week later, but was of no avail. The press lord confronted Baldwin with three questions or, in fact, demands: if it would be acceptable to put up Empire Free Trade Conservative candidates; if it would be possible to get Empire Crusaders selected as official Conservative candidates, and; if he would be given the chance to persuade Conservative front benchers to declare for Empire Free Trade. Not surprisingly, not one of these suggestions met with Baldwin's approval.[38] After that failure, Beaverbrook was determined to transform his movement into a political party.[39] Tension mounted when on 18 February 1930, Beaverbrook announced the establishment of a new party, the United Empire Party. This move undeniably helped Beaverbrook to secure the support from Rothermere that he had so desperately sought after, but alienated other potential allies. Amery, for example, wrote Beaverbrook a letter the next day, expressing his deep regret about that decision.[40] Rothermere, on the other side, was most enthusiastic about that step, sending a jubilant telegram: 'This movement is like a prairie fire stop it is bigger than you me and all the Conservative Party together.'[41] The situation worsened when the press lords threatened to contest Conservative seats in forthcoming by-elections in southern England, the traditional basis of the party.[42]

Nevertheless, some hope existed that a breach between the Conservatives and Beaverbrook could still be avoided. And really, Baldwin, apparently appeasing Beaverbrook, signalled his readiness to strike a bargain. Both men met at Baldwin's house in early March and they agreed that

should the Conservatives be re-elected, Baldwin would propose a referendum and put the issue squarely before the people.[43] This was an informal agreement, rather vague in its content and timing, in particular on the policy, to be pursued until an election was held. The agreement left much room for interpretation; perhaps too much, because distrust continued to prevail on both sides. While Beaverbrook still hoped to get him committed to include economic unity of the Empire as a foremost plank in the Party programme, Baldwin was trying to pose as a food taxer and as non-food taxer at the same time, to angle for support on both grounds. While Baldwin was playing for time luring him with the promise of a referendum, Beaverbrook became increasingly impatient, in particular because the truce with the party leader had damaged his relationship with Rothermere who, on his part, tried to use the United Empire Party as a tool to promote his 'Diehard'-policies, not only on protectionism but on India and Moscow as well.[44]

Several weeks later, the fragile arrangement was short of breaking apart when the Central Office of the Conservative Party issued the pamphlet No. 3153 'Baldwin's Pledge', in which the official policy was phrased in a way indicating a retreat from the agreed compromise. Instead of being involved in the drafting stage of the leaflet, Beaverbrook saw himself faced with a *fait accompli* and thought of it as a 'startling case of bad faith'.[45] Consequently, a planned political demonstration at Crystal Palace, at which both Baldwin and Beaverbrook should have spoken from the same platform, was cancelled by the latter.[46]

Meanwhile, the crusade gained more and more public attention. By the end of April 1930, nearly 50 provincial newspapers had published favourable comments or at least had given prominence to the subject of Empire Free Trade.[47] Even Liberals and Socialists, who so far had been watching the ongoing conflict among the Conservatives with gusto, became increasingly nervous. Within a couple of weeks, they produced their own propaganda material to fight Empire Free Trade.[48] Even heavier weighted indications that both parties had arrived at some arrangement with regard to parliamentary seats, similar to that made in 1906.[49] A new test of public approval thus seemed to be offered by the by-election in Fulham (West) on 6 May 1930. In contrast to the last election, there was no risk of splitting the non-Conservative votes - as the Liberals preferred not to nominate a candidate of their own. After a heavily fought election campaign, Sir Cyril S. Cobb, the official candidate of the Conservative Party, who had subscribed firmly to the aims of the Empire Crusade, succeeded in regaining the seat he had lost in the General Election of 1929.[50] For most *Observer*s, however, the victory of Fulham was in truth Beaverbrook's victory. Even

Gwynne, the Editor of the *Morning Post*, conceded to Davidson, the Chairman of the Conservatives, two days after the by-election:

> The fact is, between ourselves, that we made the mistake of not jumping Beaverbrook's claim before he was ready. As a matter of pure policy and with personalities taken clean out of it, I am warmly in favour of Beaverbrook's policy ... I cannot not for the life of me see why we have not adopted that policy. It would have put Beaverbrook in his place, it would have brought him in willy-nilly as a warm supporter, while as things are at present he seems to have taken the lead and we seem to be following meekly after him.

Despite the electoral success, the Tories were as deeply divided as ever. On the one hand, there were large sections of the party in a rebellious mood against their leader, on the other hand, there was a growing number of members with strong resentments against Beaverbrook and Rothermere, who were seen as trying to usurp the role of the parliament. Indeed, especially Rothermere, who, after the Fulham victory, was ready to swallow Beaverbrook's demand for food duties and rejoined the crusade, mounted almost unrestricted attacks on the Party leadership. The first political victim of this development was the Party's chairman. Three weeks after the Fulham by-election Davidson resigned.[51] Due to failures of political management and to personal shortcomings, he had been the focal point of inner-party criticism for quite some time, but after the *debacle* with leaflet No. 3153 and an ill-construed publicity campaign ('Home and Empire') to counter Empire Free Trade, Davidson had eventually to go.[52] His successor became Neville Chamberlain, son of Joseph P. Chamberlain, and, like his father, a supporter for imperial preferences.

Being more vulnerable than ever before, Baldwin realised that he had to act. Summoning a party meeting he started a counter attack against the press lords. On 24 June 1930, he met with the parliamentary Members of the Party at Caxton Hall, deliberately excluding the Tory peers and representatives of the country rank and file. In a devastating onslaught, Baldwin succeeded in switching the issue from the press lords' message to the medium itself. Playing the constitutional card, he stated that 'there is nothing more curious in modern evolution than the effect of an enormous fortune rapidly made and the control of newspapers of your own.' Power of this kind, he continued, 'goes to the head like wine, and in all these cases attempts have been made outside the province of journalism to dictate, to domineer, to blackmail ... you cannot take your politics from men like that.'[53] Quoting from a letter Rothermere had sent to Hannon, which suggested that the former was demanding a kind of veto power on personnel and policy, it was not difficult to get the parliamentary Members to rally around their party leader.[54] By targeting Rothermere as the least popular of the press lords, Baldwin was able to damn Beaverbrook by dint of associa-

tion. The breach was there. That day Baldwin had won a battle but not yet the war. The problems on policy still remained unsolved and the sniping of the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press continued to have its effects on the parliamentary Party, causing a 'terrible demoralisation'[55]. Four weeks later, Neville Chamberlain confided to his diary that 'if S.B. would go, the whole Party would heave a sigh of relief.'[56]

During 1930, bastions of free trade were falling: the Federation of British Industries, several chambers of commerce, and even the Trades Union Congress began to change their mind arguing for a reform of trade and fiscal policies. With an economic crisis getting worse every day, calls for safeguarding measures gained ground rapidly; only the Labour government and a few Liberals, led by Lloyd George, were still wedded to free trade.[57] But, growing sympathies for Empire Free Trade in Britain did not necessarily mean that this concept was very popular with the Dominions. Suffering from the economic depression as well, Canadian and Australian politicians were not keen to open their markets to British manufactured goods but tended to protect their national industries from foreign competition. On the Imperial Conference 1930, which took place in London in early October, the Prime Minister of Canada, R.B. Bennett, for instance, denounced Empire Free Trade as 'neither desirable nor possible'[58], but declared the willingness of his government to participate in an imperial tariff system of reciprocal preferences. While the Labour government was not able to commit herself to this proposal, the Conservative leadership used it as an opportunity to respond in a constructive way best fitting the party's imperialist tradition. At Chamberlain's prodding, Baldwin welcomed the principle of imperial preference and announced that at the next election, the party would seek a mandate for a 'free hand'[59] to introduce necessary safeguarding measures. Furthermore, jumping at the Canadian proposal, Baldwin and Chamberlain avoided the appearance that the change of policy was a result of, or surrender to, the attacks of the press lords.

At the end of the month, on 30 October 1930, the Conservatives assembled for another party meeting at Caxton Hall. This time all fractions were present, even Beaverbrook appeared. A motion to endorse the new policy was carried almost unanimously - with only one vote dissenting, that of Beaverbrook.[60] An attempt by the Diehards to move a censure against Baldwin ended with a strong vote of confidence for the party leader, with 462 votes for Baldwin and 116 against.[61] Though defeated twice, the day ended with a little triumph for Beaverbrook. On that same day the by-election in South Paddington took place. For the first time, the Empire Crusaders confronted the Conservative Party by nominating a candidate of their own. Very much to the dismay of the Tory leadership, the Crusaders

won their first victory putting the Conservative candidate into second place.[62]

Despite this success, the character of the whole debate was turning against the press lords. The discussion of protectionism and imperial economic unity, while still important, was more and more superseded by the question of the political role of the press. At the surface, the debate on foreign economic policy had been turned into a debate on constitutional principles. In reality, it was much more than that; it was a debate on personalities and structures, a power struggle between Baldwin and Beaverbrook, between the establishment and a group of outsiders.

As already mentioned, Beaverbrook lost this fight. After the defeat of his candidate in the by-election in Westminster, St. George's, the Crusade ran out of steam. Though Beaverbrook is still seen as a mischievous hobgoblin, the large support that his Empire Crusade attracted is almost forgotten. While Beaverbrook clearly failed to bring Baldwin down, his campaign had a more lasting, and perhaps even more important impact. With his crusade, he initiated a national debate on tariff reform and imperial economic unity; a debate which conquered first the Conservatives but then got hold of the other parties as well. Beaverbrook did not get Empire Free Trade, but was successful in changing the policy of the Conservative Party, which hitherto had been hesitant if not even hostile on that subject. Certainly, the press lord was not the sole factor in bringing about a change of mind. From the start of the campaign, and - as the example of Leo Amery has shown - even before, the idea of strengthening the economic ties within the Empire had many supporters, though they were lacking a powerful voice. During the course of the debate, they gained slowly but continually the upper hand. Emphasising the role of mass media in shaping the debate does not mean to neglect the importance of structural circumstances. The national discourse on protectionism can only be understood if seen in the context of global economic depression. With shrinking markets and rising unemployment almost everywhere, the call for safeguarding could be heard all over the world.

The General Elections of October 1931 brought a landslide victory for the forces of the so-called National Government. The Conservatives held 473 seats alone, more than three-quarters of the House of Commons. The Labour Party lost more than two million votes, returning only 46 members to the House of Commons, compared with 287 in 1929.[63] In February 1932, three months after the first National Government was formed, Britain introduced import duties on a wide range of goods, including foreign foodstuffs. Sending his congratulations to Neville Chamberlain, who as the Chancellor of the Exchequer was mainly responsible for those measures, Beaverbrook wrote: 'You have brought on the revolution. Your triumph is

greater than Peel's victory. He was right in his day. You will be justified a thousandfold in your time ...'.[64] Neville Chamberlain replied graciously: 'I can't let your generous note pass without telling you how much pleasure it gave me. I am reaping where many ... have sown. But we can rejoice together that we are on the right road at last.'[65]

Another six months later, at the Imperial Conference in Ottawa, Great Britain and the Dominions agreed on imperial preferences and the establishment of the Sterling Area.[66] Free Trade had become a dead dogma again.

Notes

[1] For a detailed account of the by-election see Gillian Peele, 'St George's and the Empire Crusade,' in *By-Elections in British Politics*, ed. by Chris Cook and John Ramsden (London: Macmillan, 1973), 79-107.

[2] Quoted from ibid.: 100. Though the significance of the speech has been consistently overrated, it mirrored nevertheless the heated atmosphere of the time.

[3] For the election results see F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1969).

[4] An analytical framework offers David Butler, 'By-Elections and Their Interpretation,' in *By-Elections in British Politics*, ed. by Chris Cook and John Ramsden (London: London, 1973), 1-13.

[5] The most comprehensive study on the Conservative Party during that particular period is written by Stuart Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party: The Crisis of 1929- 1931* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988). For the larger context see John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940: History of the Conservative Party, Vol. 3* (London: Longman, 1978).

[6] Gillian Peele, 'Revolt over India,' in *The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939*, ed. by Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (London: Macmillan, 1975), 114-145.

[7] On Beaverbrook see Logan Gourlay, *The Beaverbrook I Knew* (London: Quartet, 1984); A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972); Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life* (London: Pimlico, 1993).

[8] Quoted from Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, 262. See also an unpublished historical overview of the Empire Crusade in: Historical Collection No. 184 (Beaverbrook Papers), BBK/G/5/6, House of Lords Record Office, London (hereafter HLRO).

[9] See Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, 2-22.

[10] Amery to Beaverbrook, 19 November 1928, No. 184, BBK/C/5, HLRO.

[11] Max Aitken Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the Press* (London: Hutchinson, 1925). In 1929 Beaverbrook controlled three major newspapers: *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, and *Evening Standard*.

[12] Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 147, 155.

[13] The first was Lord Melchett, chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries; another was Lord Waring, owner of the large general store Waring and Gillow.

[14] Concerned that the campaign might develop into a crusade against the party leader Stanley Baldwin, Leo Amery wrote Beaverbrook a letter trying to keep him in line: 'The Twickenham business obviously gives you a pretext for going for Baldwin. Don't use it. The more you can keep out of criticism of the leadership of the Party and concentrate on impersonal support of a great idea, the more rapidly will you get that idea taken up and pressed home.' Amery to Beaverbrook, 24 July 1929, No. 184, BBK/C/5, HLRO.

[15] 'Empire Crusade 1929,' No. 184, BBK/G/5/6, HLRO.

[16] Summary of the Empire Crusade, No. 184, BBK/B/248, HLRO.

[17] Lists of his meetings and speeches can be found in No. 184, BBK/G/5/6, HLRO.

[18] The first study on circulation and readership of British newspapers confirmed the view that the *Daily* and the *Sunday Express*, though to a large extent middle class papers, were read in all factions of society: *Investigated Press Circulations. Being A*

Study of the Quality and Quantity Value of Regular Readership of the Principal Newspapers and Other Publications Derived from 53,931 Interviews in 181 Cities, Towns and Country Districts throughout England, Wales and Scotland. London: Repford, [1932] 14, 28.

19 Hansard, HL (series 5) vol. 75, cols. 544-92 (19 Nov. 1929).

20 Two other debates took place in the House of Lords on 9 December 1929 ('Imperial Economic Conference'), and on 21 May 1930 ('Unemployment and Fiscal Policy'), followed by further debates in the House of Commons on 29 January 1930 ('Empire Free Trade,' Private Members' Day), 16 July 1930 ('Safeguarding Policy and Empire Markets'), and 27 November 1930 ('Empire Trade'). For details see Hansard.

21 'Empire Crusade. Preliminary Memorandum on Propaganda,' 7 January 1930, No. 189, Hannon/19/1, HLRO.

22 Among the supporters of the Empire Crusade were more than 30 peers; some of them offering substantial financial contributions. See lists of 'enrolled supporters' and 'supporters who have not enrolled,' 19 February 1930, No. 184, BBK/B/248, HLRO.

23 Summary of the Empire Crusade, No. 184, BBK/B/248, HLRO.

24 Quoted from Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 54.

25 On the British press see Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain. Vol. II: The Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Colin Seymour-Ure, 'The Press and the Party System between the Wars,' in *The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939*, ed. by Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (London: Macmillan, 1975), 232-257; Graham Murdoch and Peter Golding, '1914-1976,' in *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. by George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (London: Constable, 1978), 130-148.

26 On 11 November, he sent him an invitation for a private talk: '... It seems not inappropriate that this letter should be written on Armistice Day.' Baldwin to Beaverbrook, 11 November 1929, No. 184, BBK/C/19, HLRO.

27 Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 51-52.

28 Hints for a personal grudge against Baldwin are given in John Barnes and David Nicholson, *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 5.

29 Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain Vol. II*, 423.

30 All documents in No. 184, BBK/C/284a, HLRO.

31 Rothermere to Beaverbrook, 1 December 1929, ibid.

32 According to one document, he had promised to give 5,000 Pounds: Empire Crusade Fund, No. 184, BBK/B/248, HLRO.

33 Rothermere to Beaverbrook, 5 July 1929, No. 184, BBK/C/284a, HLRO. On Rothermere see S. J. Taylor, *The Great Outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), 225-327.

34 'I am bound to say that there is a list of "Untouchables". Both you and I are on this list.' Beaverbrook to Rothermere, 3 July 1929, No. 184, BBK/C/284a, HLRO.

35 Davidson to Baldwin ('secret'), 1 January 1930, No. 187, Dav/190, HLRO.

36 Quoted from Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 55.

37 Beaverbrook to Baldwin, 5 February 1930, No. 184, BBK/C/19, HLRO.To Rothermere he commented that 'Baldwin made a bad speech. His party is overwhelmed with depression.' Quoted from Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, 281.

[38] Ibid., 281-282; Barnes and Nicholson, *The Empire at Bay*, 14-15.
[39] Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 58.
[40] 'My dear Beaverbrook, I am sorry you have done this, as it makes the situation much more difficult for all who were sympathising with you.' Amery to Beaverbrook, 19 February 1930, No. 184, BBK/C/5, HLRO.
[41] Rothermere to Beaverbrook, 28 February 1930, No. 184, BBK/C/284a, HLRO.
[42] Barnes and Nicholson, *The Empire at Bay*, 15.
[43] Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 62-63.
[44] See Rothermere's public declaration and Beaverbrook's response to it on 7 March 1930, No. 184, BBK/C/284b, HLRO.
[45] Quoted from Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 74.
[46] Empire Crusade, 1930: General Chronology of Events, No. 184, BBK/G/5/6, HLRO.
[47] See a list of those newspapers, 23 April 1930, No. 184, BBK/B/248, HLRO.
[48] See, for instance, 'Notes for Speakers: The Beaverbrook-Baldwin Alliance,' 14 March 1930, HLRO, No. 184, BBK/F/5; '? What is this Empire "Free Trade",' published by the Labour Party, June, 1930, No. 184, BBK/B/249, HLRO.
[49] Topping, Principal Agent of the Party, to Davidson, 2 May 1930, No. 187, Dav/190, HLRO.
[50] On the Fulham by-election see Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, 18.
[51] Interestingly, Davidson produced various drafts of his letter of resignation, some of them apparently been written even before the Fulham by-election took place. See No. 187, Dav/190, HLRO.
[52] For the background see Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 73-74, 83-84.
[53] Quoted from Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*, 298; see also Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, 289.
[54] Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 91.
[55] R.A. Butler, M.P. for Saffron Walden, Essex, to his father. Quoted from ibid., 92.
[56] Quoted from Robert Jacob Alexander Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 274-275.
[57] Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1966), 371-372.
[58] Quoted from Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, 295.
[59] 'Free Hand' was a phrase coined and introduced into the debate by Neville Chamberlain after he had taken up his new position as Party Chairman in June 1930.
[60] Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, 103.
[61] Ibid.
[62] The election results were as follows: E.A. Taylor (Emp. Crus.) 11,209 (37.4%), Sir H. Lidiard (Cons.) 10,268 (34.3%), Miss D.Evans (Lab.) 7,944 (26.6%), Mrs. A.N. Stewart-Richardson (Ind. UEP) 494 (1.7%). Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, 40.
[63] Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940*, 411-412.
[64] Beaverbrook to Chamberlain, 8 February 1932, No. 184, BBK/C/80, HLRO.
[65] Chamberlain, to Beaverbrook, 9 February 1932, ibid.
[66] Cf. Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy, 1914-1950* (London: Arnold, 1962), 192-200; Roy Douglas, *World Crisis and British Decline, 1929-56* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 26, 127; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990* (London: Longman, 1993), 84-90.