



**The 'Common Wealth Circus': Popular Politics and the Popular Press in Wartime Britain, 1941–1945**

Journal:	<i>Media History</i>
Manuscript ID	CMEH-2016-0038.R2
Manuscript Type:	Articles
Keywords:	Common Wealth Party; by-elections; Second World War; Daily Mirror; Daily Express; Daily Mail.

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THE ‘COMMON WEALTH CIRCUS’:  
Popular politics and the popular press in wartime  
Britain, 1941–1945<sup>1</sup>

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*The popular press is often seen as the ‘voice of the people’. However, an intensive examination of the Daily Mirror, Daily Mail and Daily Express during the Second World War demonstrates some problems with this claim. In fact, the wartime popular press was uninterested in popular political movements, notably the Common Wealth Party, which had a string of by-election successes in the second half of the war. They only took notice of the organisation after it was electorally successful, and even then, its focus was less on its popular support than on the political elites within the party. This paper discusses the Common Wealth Party’s relationship with the press and the implications this has for our understanding of the way non-mainstream political parties were represented in the wartime popular press. It adds to current scholarship by presenting the first detailed discussion of the Common Wealth Party’s coverage in the British press, and widens the debate on the role of the press during the war.*

**Keywords** Common Wealth Party; by-elections; Second World War; *Daily Mirror*; *Daily Express*; *Daily Mail*.

Introduction

During the Second World War, the Common Wealth Party briefly threatened to change the British party-political status quo. Common Wealth was a grass-roots political movement that directly challenged the wartime electoral truce (that is, the agreement between the three major parties, Conservative, Labour and Liberal, not to contest an incumbent party in wartime by-elections) in by-elections across the country.<sup>2</sup> Common Wealth, founded in 1942, not only advocated radical politics of common ownership and reconstruction but also specifically challenged the electoral truce on the basis that it did little more than to re-elect ‘the Tories unchallenged to Parliament under a smoke screen called “unity”’.<sup>3</sup> The party contested a number of by-elections across the country between 1942 and 1945, operated 400 branches, and had roughly 15,000 members at its peak. It sent three MPs to Parliament during the war and nearly won several other safe Conservative seats.<sup>4</sup> It was demonstrably able to connect with the electorate in certain constituencies and, if only temporarily, appeared for a time to have the potential to emerge as a fully-fledged political force in its own right. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to dismiss the short-lived successes of the party but, as Andrew Thorpe and Kevin Jeffreys note, both the Liberal and Labour parties were

concerned about Common Wealth's potential to split the progressive vote,<sup>5</sup> while, by challenging (and even winning) several safe Conservative seats, the Common Wealth Party posed a problem for all members of the Coalition. The record of Common Wealth in wartime by-elections is therefore interesting not least because of the insights that its success presents into the political culture of wartime Britain.

However, Common Wealth's relationship with Fleet Street has been surprisingly neglected by historians. Angus Calder's doctoral thesis remains the most comprehensive study of the party; however, this is principally an institutional history and makes only fleeting references to the press.<sup>6</sup> Historians such as David Prynn and Vincent Geogheghan<sup>7</sup> have offered their own interpretations, but again the press plays only an illustrative role, if any, in their accounts. The party is also overlooked in histories of wartime newspapers themselves. Neither the *Daily Express*' Arthur Christiansen nor the *Daily Mirror*'s Hugh Cudlipp or Cecil King mention the Common Wealth Party in their published memoirs,<sup>8</sup> while press histories of the period by, among others, A. J. P. Taylor, Anne Chisholm, Michael Davie, Maurice Edelman and Stephen Koss, have typically passed over Common Wealth<sup>9</sup> - this despite the fact that newspapermen and women were key players in it during the war.

The movement has also been largely overlooked when it comes to discussions of wartime politics. Angus Calder and James Hinton have argued that the war saw a radical and leftward break with the past in British political culture.<sup>10</sup> Others, like Paul Addison, have suggested that the war saw a marked but not radical shift in British politics and a strengthening of the political middle ground.<sup>11</sup> More recently, revisionist historians such as Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson and Nick Tiratsoo have dismissed the idea of a radical wartime shift and have instead argued that the war saw a rise in voter disillusionment and a 'movement away from party', from which the Conservatives were the biggest losers; they do not, however, engage with Common Wealth as a manifestation of extra-party political action in any detail<sup>12</sup>. This article will argue that while Common Wealth did not necessarily represent a clear 'movement away from party', its wartime record confirms Addison's suggestion that there was an emerging progressive consensus during the war, one that Common Wealth was able to tap into much earlier than the three major political parties; but that the relative dearth of press coverage was one reason it could go no further than it did.

This article focuses specifically on coverage of the Common Wealth Party in a sample of three popular newspapers: the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*. These three papers were selected because their combined circulations totalled 7 million, approximately half of the total circulation for national dailies and because they had a degree

of political independence that their main competitor, the Labour-affiliated *Daily Herald*, lacked.<sup>13</sup> Other newspapers such as *The Times*, *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* gave Common Wealth a certain degree of coverage but they never matched the circulations of the three newspapers addressed here. The popular photo-magazine *Picture Post* provided some of the most extensive coverage of Common Wealth because of the involvement of its proprietor Edward Hulton and editor Tom Hopkinson in the formation of the party (see below); however, *Picture Post*'s reconstruction credentials and relationship with Common Wealth are already well documented.<sup>14</sup>

This article therefore considers how the popular press reported on Common Wealth's creation, its successes, and its popular support. By analysing coverage in these three-popular national daily papers during key moments in the history of the Common Wealth Party, it seeks to shed broader light on the relationship between popular wartime political movements and the wartime press.

**Political reporting in the wartime British press**

The wartime British press was of course in many ways a different entity to the peacetime press. The economic restraints of rationing meant that all newspapers in Britain had to severely restrict their pagination. The inter-war press had the luxury of twenty to thirty broadsheet pages per edition. However, between April 1941 and the end of the war, the newspapers under review were restricted to just four broadsheet pages for the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* and eight half-broadsheet (tabloid) pages in the case of the *Daily Mirror*.<sup>15</sup>

As Stephen Koss notes, 'Every newspaper carried an amount of political coverage and comment, for the simple reason that politics made news.'<sup>16</sup> This also held true for the wartime press, despite the reduction in newsprint. As recent research has shown, during the war politics remained a priority for the popular press, and during key stages of the war the popular press prioritised politics to the extent that it could dominate an issue's content.<sup>17</sup> This supports the work conducted by Mass Observation at the time, which noted a broader trend as early as March 1940 (when the popular press was, on average, restricted to eight broadsheet pages), specifically that 'the proportionate amount of space devoted to news in the *Mirror* and *Express* has risen.'<sup>18</sup> The war thus effectively witnessed a distillation of political content in newspapers. Surveys taken before the war have indicated that newspaper readers were predominantly interested in gossip, crime and sports. Both the much-cited *News Chronicle* readership survey of 1933 and Political and Economic Planning's 1938 *Report on the British*

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3 *Press* noted how the most popular news stories were human-interest, especially ones  
4 involving crime, marriage, divorce and death.<sup>19</sup> But this was not the case during the war. In  
5 fact, wartime restrictions (including, *inter alia*, newsprint rationing, censorship and the  
6 reduction of sporting competitions) meant that many of the more popular features were  
7 squeezed out of wartime newspapers, while political news retained its place. Even *Picture*  
8 *Post*, a magazine that contained a high proportion of gossip and pictures, maintained a clear  
9 progressive, social agenda during the war.<sup>20</sup>

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11 Thus, despite the belief of some historians of the press that the war led to a suspension  
12 of political coverage,<sup>21</sup> wartime newspapers devoted a greater percentage of space (if not a  
13 greater number of column inches) to politics than during peacetime. Contemporaries within  
14 the industry noted this at the time: *Newspaper World's* 'Man in the Street' claimed in 1940  
15 that the war had 'purged journalism' because it had prompted newspapers to focus on serious  
16 news instead of entertainment, and even boldly claimed that: 'Journalistically speaking let us  
17 hope that the puling times of peace never return'.<sup>22</sup> George Orwell likewise noted in 1941  
18 how the 'tone of the popular press has improved out of recognition during the last year'  
19 because 'they have all grown politically serious'.<sup>23</sup> Even Arthur Christiansen of the *Daily*  
20 *Express*, when reflecting on wartime politics, stated simply but pertinently that, 'Politics  
21 make a newspaper controversial, and controversy gets a newspaper talked about. If a  
22 newspaper is widely discussed, then it acquires new readers'.<sup>24</sup> However, as we shall see,  
23 what constituted 'wartime politics', what political activities went reported and what did not,  
24 was a more problematic issue.  
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## 42 **Forward March/1941 Committee**

43 The Common Wealth Party was formed from a merger of two earlier political  
44 movements, Forward March and the 1941 Committee. Forward March, initially – and  
45 bizarrely – called *Unser Kampf* (Our Struggle), was established in March 1940 by Sir  
46 Richard Acland, Baron of Colum John and Liberal MP for Barnstaple. It was established as a  
47 pressure group, comprising Acland's 'relatively politically apathetic' and unaffiliated  
48 associates, designed to pressure progressive parties into becoming more overtly left-wing.<sup>25</sup>  
49 In essence, Forward March was a middle-class grass-roots organisation, promoting a  
50 'respectable' form of liberal socialism.<sup>26</sup> The 1941 Committee, established in December  
51 1940, was a more diverse organisation of left-wing intellectuals from all backgrounds.<sup>27</sup> Its  
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main aim was to demand the end of the “deference to the party line-up of the 1935 Parliament” by challenging the electoral truce.<sup>28</sup> It was established at the home of Edward Hulton (proprietor of *Picture Post*) and its prominent members included Acland, the novelist, playwright and now famous broadcaster J. B. Priestley, the Liberal activist and Governor of the BBC (1941–1946) Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, and former Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet Dr Thomas Jones.<sup>29</sup> Newspapermen, including editors, political columnists and editorial cartoonists, played a prominent role in founding the organisation, for instance Vernon Bartlett (*News Chronicle*), Michael Foot (*Evening Standard*), Ritchie Calder (*News Chronicle*), Tom Wintringham (*Daily Mirror*), Kingsley Martin (*New Statesman*) and David Low (*Evening Standard*).<sup>30</sup> Tom Hopkinson (*Picture Post*) later remarked in his memoir that there had been an ‘emphasis’ on inviting journalists because they were ‘in touch with popular opinion’.<sup>31</sup>

Yet despite the high number of journalists involved in both groups, it is striking how neither of the two movements received any prominent press coverage in their early months. In fact, in the case of the 1941 Committee especially, the high number of journalists in the organisation appears, ironically, to have *inhibited* the cultivation of good press. Although ascertaining the exact number of journalists involved in the group is impossible, their presence was prominent enough for Priestley to insist that the Committee’s meetings were ‘confidential, especially in view of the presence of certain people’, and on a ‘policy of silence and restraint upon the journalist nucleus’. Priestley high-mindedly felt that the 1941 Committee needed to receive positive press coverage because of its own actions ‘rather than to ask the press for space on the basis of the mere existence of the 1941 Committee’.<sup>32</sup> Edward Hulton nevertheless used his influence over *Picture Post* to raise the profile of the organisation. He did this by devoting articles to the movement that raised many of the same issues and used the same language as the Committee without directly referencing it.<sup>33</sup> For example, on 4 January 1941, *Picture Post* published its celebrated series of articles, ‘A Plan for Britain’, a plan for post-war reconstruction that closely adhered to the Committee’s own rhetoric and featured several of its leading adherents, including Priestley himself, as contributors.<sup>34</sup>

Wider press coverage of both movements was, though, either largely negative or absent throughout early 1941. As Angus Calder notes, they only received significant coverage in the left-wing periodicals *Tribune* and the *New Statesman*.<sup>35</sup> What newspaper articles were written tended to portray them as an out of touch intellectual elite: thus on 8 March 1941, for instance, the *Yorkshire Post* described the 1941 Committee as a ‘pressure



group' that appealed 'mainly to discontented intellectuals who would welcome the opportunity of exercising more power than they at present possess.'<sup>36</sup> This article in fact prompted the Committee to adopt a more proactive policy with respect to the press, out of a fear that more such articles in the *Post* could be harmful to the movement's reputation in the North of England - something Bradford-born Priestley in particular wanted to avoid. The group therefore dispensed with its 'policy of silence',<sup>37</sup> and in April sent a series of pamphlets on its general policy, on "Planning and Freedom", and "On Siege Economics", across the country, outlining their main aims and objectives. Unfortunately, these received minimal attention outside the provincial press – aside from a substantial article in the American magazine *Time*, where, one Committee member noted, 'unfortunately the issues concerned seems to have been lost on the way across the Atlantic'.<sup>38</sup>

This negative tone can also be seen in the national press. On 4 April 1941, for example, Tom Driberg, writing as "William Hickey" in the *Daily Express*, compared the 1941 Committee to the "Cliveden Set", describing it as being 'more gossiped about in London than any other new political organisation I can remember', and focusing only on the high-profile figures of Bonham-Carter and Priestley. Driberg's derisive article was prompted by a progress report written by 'Our Struggle', which claimed that a "section of the Press" had misrepresented the Committee. Driberg pointed out that the only favourable press coverage received by the Committee (comprising just four articles in total) had been 'in articles written, or periodicals controlled, by members of the Committee!' (this presumably included Hulton's *Picture Post*). Driberg's article was especially cutting given his own personal closeness to many members of the Committee. In fact, a year later he would be relying on the 1941 Committee's support in his own political contest for the Maldon by-election in June 1942.<sup>39</sup>

### The Founding of Common Wealth

The 1941 Committee and Forward March movements grew closer from early 1942 onwards when they supported independent candidates (both journalists) in the Wallasey and Maldon by-elections. In April 1942, George Leonard Reakes, a local journalist for the *Wallasey News*, received the support of Acland's Forward March and won Wallasey with over 60 per cent of the vote.<sup>40</sup> According to his own account, Reakes' victory (and the success of independents in other by-elections) came from the country's increasing fatigue,

lower morale and political frustration concerning the lack of elections.<sup>41</sup> The Liberal politician, Ivor Davies, argued that Reakes was aided by the fact that he was ‘the local personification of the little man.’<sup>42</sup> Paul Addison notes that the by-election was also greatly affected by an outdated electoral register and a radical change in the constituency’s demographics: forty thousand mainly middle-class voters had vacated the area because of the war, leaving behind the more left-leaning elements.<sup>43</sup> However, the popular press took almost no interest in the by-election, nor indeed in the role of Forward March in Reakes’s campaign: of the three popular newspapers discussed here, only the *Daily Mirror* even noted that Reakes benefited from Acland’s support.<sup>44</sup>

When, on 2 May 1942, following its success at Wallasey, the 1941 Committee published its Nine-Point Declaration, press interest was similarly negligible. The declaration itself called for a range of progressive political reforms, as follows:

- (1) Greater Equality of work, payment, sacrifice and opportunity; (2) Transfer to Common Ownership of Services, industries and campiness in which managerial inefficiency or the profit motive is harming the war effort; (3) Reform of the Government Supply Organisations... (4) Establishment of effective Works Councils; (5) Elimination of Red-Tape in the Civil Service; (6) Maximum freedom of expression; (7) British initiative in planning an Offensive Grand Strategy; (8) Repudiation of any policy of Vengeance; (9) Preliminary Post-War plans for the provision of full and free education, employment and a civilised standard of living for everyone.<sup>45</sup>

But while it received a respectable showing in the left-leaning *Sunday Pictorial*<sup>46</sup> and in Hulton’s *Picture Post*,<sup>47</sup> it was wholly ignored in the three newspapers under review - indeed not until April 1943 that the *Daily Mail* eventually published a story on the declaration.<sup>48</sup>

Even in June 1942, when Tom Driberg contested the by-election at Maldon as an Independent, specifically aligning himself with both Forward March and the 1941 Committee, press coverage remained limited. Driberg had decided to contest the election, he said at the time, as a way of ensuring that worthier candidates were put forward by the Coalition parties.<sup>49</sup> In fact it was Tom Hopkinson, editor of *Picture Post*, who, notwithstanding Driberg’s previous hostile coverage, had encouraged Driberg to run, after hearing a speech he had made condemning the suppression of the *Daily Worker*.<sup>50</sup> Driberg’s campaign benefited not only from its advocacy of the Nine-Point Declaration but also from the support of many prominent members of both the 1941 Committee and Forward March, notably Acland, Priestley, Wintringham and Bartlett.<sup>51</sup> With their support Driberg campaigned as a ‘Candid Friend For Churchill’ (though Churchill himself sent a public letter



to the constituents of Maldon deploring the contesting of the seat).<sup>52</sup> Yet, despite Driberg's fame as the *Daily Express* columnist 'William Hickey', the *Daily Express* went out of its way to state that it 'does not support his candidature'.<sup>53</sup> Other newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Herald* and the *Times* all noted in Driberg's candidacy in passing and that he was a journalist, but the coverage was fleetingly in the lead up to polling day.<sup>54</sup> When on 25 June, Driberg won the by-election with a majority of 6,000 votes these papers gave the result some coverage in its inside pages and only the *Mirror* and the *Express* commented on Driberg: the *Express*, largely just to reiterate that it did not support Driberg and the *Mirror* to congratulate him as the 'public is sick of yes-men with rubber stamps'.<sup>55</sup> Churchill noted later that he believed Driberg's victory was largely the 'by-product' of the loss of Tobruk four days earlier.<sup>56</sup> The specific roles of the 1941 Committee and Forward March remained largely unreported.

In fact, the most significant outcome of the two by-elections and of the publication of the Declaration was the decision of the two organisations to unite under a new name, the Common Wealth party, formally launched at a conference in London on 26 July 1942.<sup>57</sup> But again, Common Wealth's birth received minimal attention from the popular press. Neither the *Daily Mail* nor the *Daily Express* mentioned its launch at all. The *Mirror* did note it, in a back-page story on 27 July 1942,<sup>58</sup> and followed it up the next day with a discussion in Bill Grieg's regular political column of the new party's intention to challenge by-elections in future. Grieg claimed that Common Wealth 'will prove a decided danger in Conservative and Liberal constituencies' since it was 'capitalising on the Left Wing trend' that he saw shaping recent by-election results. However, Grieg presented the story less as an analysis of the new party and its political potential than as a cautionary tale for Labour, arguing that it was Labour which needed to capitalise on this trend and to challenge by-elections on its own account, not to permit surrogates to take its place: '[Labour's] leaders should remember that it is as easy to commit political suicide by doing nothing as it is by attempting too much'.<sup>59</sup> The only newspaper to advance the political aims of Common Wealth on its own terms was the co-operative movement-sponsored Sunday paper *Reynold's News*, which in August gratified Priestley by predicting that the party would 'be knocking at the door of Downing Street in six months'.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the last few months of 1942, Common Wealth was referenced in the press whenever one of its by-election candidates was named, but otherwise coverage in the popular press remained very limited.<sup>61</sup> The party's contesting of four by-elections in February 1943 likewise gained little coverage. In Ashford (10 February 1943) Common Wealth's Catherine

Williamson lost against the incumbent party candidate, Conservative Edward Smith, by five thousand votes. In North Midlothian the following day, the journalist Tom Wintringham (who had been chairman of the 1941 Committee after Priestley's departure) similarly lost to the Unionist candidate, Sir David Murray, though by a margin of only 869 votes.<sup>62</sup> This was followed by a further two losses (both by a margin of over two thousand votes) in North Portsmouth (16 February) and Watford (23 February). However, whilst Common Wealth itself did not receive much coverage, its leader, Sir Richard Acland, attracted considerable press attention when in late February 1943 he publicly donated his 17,000-acre estate to the nation. The *Mirror* stated that he 'practices what he preaches', noting only briefly that he was the founder of the Common Wealth Party. The *Daily Mail* covered the story but omitted any mention of the party, whilst the *Daily Express* reported that a 'Richard Alland [sic], Independent M.P.' had donated his estate to the nation.<sup>63</sup>

**Eddisbury/Newark By-Elections, April/June 1943**

It was in early April 1943 that Common Wealth achieved a major political - and at least a minor press - breakthrough. In Eddisbury, a by-election had been called after the death of Liberal National MP, Richard John Russell. Thomas Peacock (originally a Conservative) had been selected as the incumbent candidate; however, the by-election was contested by both an Independent Liberal candidate, Harold Heathcote-Williams, and a highly-regarded RAF pilot, John Loveseed, on behalf of the Common Wealth Party. The campaign focused on political unity ('Hitler is watching Eddisbury'), social reforms, and local agricultural issues.<sup>64</sup> On 7 April Loveseed won the by-election by just 486 votes to become Common Wealth's first elected MP.<sup>65</sup>

Mass Observation, analysing the results of the Eddisbury by-election in an effort to try to understand why Common Wealth won here but lost in Watford and North Midlothian, concluded that the party's victory was a result of thorough on-the-ground canvassing.<sup>66</sup> Ivor Davies also suggested that Loveseed won because he 'had about him all the glamour of an R.A.F pilot who had also fought in the Spanish Civil War' and because a team of 'pretty girls and handsome young men were drafted into the constituency to conduct a canvass'.<sup>67</sup> Echoing Bill Greig, Addison has proposed that Eddisbury's constituents were becoming more sympathetic to Labour but that without a Labour candidate, Common Wealth became its *de*

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3 *facto* surrogate.<sup>68</sup> What is clear, however, is that coverage in the popular press played no part  
4 in the result.  
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6 Although the Eddisbury by-election received some coverage in the national and local  
7 press, it is striking how the Common Wealth Party itself received only fleeting direct  
8 mention, and then only *after* their candidate had won. Of the three popular newspapers  
9 surveyed, the *Daily Express* devoted the most space to the by-election, with columnist Trevor  
10 Evans claiming that Loverseed and Common Wealth posed the greatest threat to the  
11 incumbent candidate.<sup>69</sup> However, most coverage was given not to the party itself but to a  
12 parliamentary speech made by Sir Richard Acland *opposing* the by-election writ because of  
13 its use of an outdated electoral roll.<sup>70</sup> Loverseed's personality was also the focus of several  
14 articles in the *Express* and the *Mirror*, but the party itself and its programme again received  
15 little attention, both in the run-up to the poll and once the results were declared.<sup>71</sup> Indeed,  
16 while *The Times*, went so far as to call the success of Loverseed and Common Wealth 'a call,  
17 which cannot be safely neglected',<sup>72</sup> the *Daily Mail* only introduced its readers to Common  
18 Wealth's history and political agenda two days *after* the party had won – because 'people are  
19 wondering what this new political party stands for and how it began'.<sup>73</sup> None of the three  
20 newspapers surveyed demonstrated any interest in the reasons why the people of Eddisbury  
21 had voted Common Wealth; indeed, none regarded the party's success as newsworthy enough  
22 for their front page.  
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24 The success of their candidate in Eddisbury marked a moderate turning point in  
25 Common Wealth's coverage in the popular press. Although such coverage rarely appeared  
26 on the front pages, and was typically far from positive, it did at least now play a part in the  
27 newspapers' political discourse.<sup>74</sup> Thus, for instance, the *Daily Mirror's* Bernard Buckham  
28 used his political column on 26 April 1943 to state that although he sympathised with  
29 Common Wealth's aims (especially its championing of the Beveridge Report) the party could  
30 not survive the British system. In fact, he went so far as to claim that Common Wealth was  
31 harmful to British politics:  
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33 Britain is traditionally a two-party country, and that, taking it all round, is the  
34 best system for getting things done. It provides stable government, and effective  
35 opposition. To divide the political forces of the Left into sections is one way of  
36 defeating the objects they all have in common.<sup>75</sup>  
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38 On similar lines, George Orwell suggested, in the *Observer* and again in the *Partisan Review*,  
39 that Common Wealth's success could be seen as 'merely a product of the electoral truce and  
40 will wither away as soon as the Labour party is free to campaign again'.<sup>76</sup> Shortly after, he  
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adopted a slightly more encouraging tone, suggesting that Common Wealth should be followed closely, as it ‘might develop into the new Socialist party we have all been hoping for’ – though the compliment was undercut by his adding, ‘or into something very sinister: it has some rather doubtful followers already.’<sup>77</sup>

In June 1943, Common Wealth contested the by-election at Newark, held after the Conservative incumbent, William Cavendish-Bentinck, was made a peer. The Government’s candidate, Sidney Shepard, was challenged by three others: Independent, Alan Dawrant; Independent Liberal, J. T. Pepper; and Common Wealth’s candidate, Edward Moeran. Moeran’s campaign eloquently set out Common Wealth’s key aim: ‘We are fighting for the chance to build our own new order; not only against the darkness of Nazism, but for the promise of a new world. We fight for the future’.<sup>78</sup> However, press coverage of Common Wealth’s intervention in the by-election was both more prominent and more negative than previously. In the *Daily Mirror*, for instance, in the run-up to polling day, Bill Grieg boldly claimed on the front page that the ‘Tories should thank Sir Richard Acland’, arguing that Common Wealth’s intervention would split the anti-Conservative vote, and ensure that the seat would be won by the government (the Independent candidate was not, however, singled out for blame).<sup>79</sup> Buckham reiterated this argument the following day, stating that whilst he supported Common Wealth’s ideals, he questioned its existence; he argued that wartime by-elections were ‘particularly favourable to small new groups or party-ettes, and to freak candidates,’ and suggested that Acland would better achieve the same aims by remaining within the two-party system rather than risking ‘extinction’ in a subsequent general election.<sup>80</sup> The Conservatives duly won at Newark with a decisive majority of 13,000 and over 60 per cent of votes cast. Moeran came third for Common Wealth, some 4,000 votes behind Dawrant, the independent candidate.

Clearly the Conservatives would have won Newark even if the opposition vote had not been split, but, as Mass Observation noted at the time, Dawrant’s share of the vote stemmed from the fact that he was not technically an independent candidate (being part of the Brown-Kendall group of independents) and he had told voters to vote for him ‘even if they supported Common Wealth, as the more likely of the two to get in.’<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, none of the three popular newspapers under review explored this or any other issues to determine why people in Newark or Eddisbury voted for Common Wealth; instead they portrayed it as a negative presence in politics.

### “Acland’s Circus”

During January and February 1944, six separate by-elections were held, three of which, Skipton, West Derbyshire, and Bury St. Edmunds, were contested by Common Wealth. In Skipton, Common Wealth fielded their own candidate; in West Derbyshire and Bury St. Edmunds, they actively supported two independents. The party lost in Bury St. Edmunds but won in both Skipton and West Derbyshire.<sup>82</sup> It was from now that newspapers began taking specific note of Common Wealth as a political movement.

First, Skipton: a by-election called after the death of its sitting Conservative MP. The campaign in Skipton was notable because it saw Common Wealth’s electoral machine in full swing and because, as Addison notes, the Common Wealth candidate Hugh Lawson was – unusually – supported by the local Labour Party, which offered its support if he undertook to stand down at the 1945 General Election.<sup>83</sup> Prior to polling day (7 January 1944), the Skipton by-election received very little press coverage of any kind beyond the usual small pieces about nominations and a humorous piece in the *Daily Express* about a cow heckling the candidates.<sup>84</sup> On 5 January 1944, news of the by-election appeared on the *Mirror’s* front page but its focus was largely centred on the outdated electoral register: 23,000 of the eligible voters in Skipton were apparently either dead, missing or unregistered. Although the end of the article briefly noted that the Conservatives appeared to be ‘a little scared of the Common Wealth candidate,’ the author, Bill Grieg, did not explain further.<sup>85</sup> The *Express* also mentioned Common Wealth on 5 January, quoting the rival Independent Labour candidate, who had accused Common Wealth of employing “jamming tactics” – electioneers who interrupted other candidates.<sup>86</sup>

Common Wealth won the election by the very narrow margin of 221 votes. While the result itself received little attention in the daily press (it was released too late for the Saturday editions),<sup>87</sup> after this victory the popular press did begin to report rather more on Common Wealth and the political challenge it embodied. Reflecting on Common Wealth’s second member of parliament, the *Daily Express’s* William Barkley and the *Daily Mirror’s* Bill Grieg and Bill Buckham all attributed Lawson’s success principally to his relative youth, with Grieg arguing on 10 January that the result would cause the Conservatives to seek younger candidates,<sup>88</sup> and Buckham arguing later (19 January) that the by-election had demonstrated the electorate’s ‘intense desire to force a little bright new blood into the hardening arteries of ancient Westminster.’<sup>89</sup> Barkley in fact went further, on 11 January criticising the Conservatives and noting how the result was indicative of the problem of the electoral truce, with a candidate effectively shoe-horned into a parliamentary seat without any forethought

about their ability to contribute to government ('So that what you are getting in the House of Commons is a bigger and bigger nagging chorus and a smaller potential executive - all the outward and visible signs of a Fascist democracy.') Although Barkley dismissed the Common Wealth Party as a purely wartime phenomenon (a 'temporary manifestation' taking advantage of the truce), he praised Acland and his party for 'directing our minds to the deeper foundations of political life', that is, pointing a light on the dearth of talent that was now being elected by default to political office.<sup>90</sup> The *Daily Mail* was, however, more critical: in an editorial on 10 January it asked, 'Why did this hard-headed Yorkshire constituency plump for the vague, head-in-the-clouds policy of Aclandites?' For the *Mail*, the chief reason for Common Wealth's victory was that it had focused on post-war problems and offered spurious solutions to them ('Common Wealth has a certain meretricious appeal, because it has a post-war plan, though it is not the plan that Britain wants'). The editorial concluded that the one positive outcome of Common Wealth's victory would be if it encouraged the Government to also look ahead.<sup>91</sup> What all this newspaper coverage had in common, however, was the framing of their discussion less around why Common Wealth had won Skipton than why the government had lost.

This is not to say that the reasons for Common Wealth's victory were wholly neglected by the British press. *The Times*, for example, devoted some attention to the argument that Lawson won the election because he was more forward thinking on domestic policy than the government was (though it did warn that it was 'dangerous to dogmatize about the significance of by-elections occurring in the abnormal circumstances of war and an electoral truce').<sup>92</sup> On 10 January, the *Manchester Guardian* (which had given rather more coverage to the Skipton campaign than the London press, partly perhaps because of Skipton's relative proximity to its readers) concluded that the result indicated that the electors were dissatisfied with Conservative domestic policy.<sup>93</sup> The following week, Hannen Swaffer in *The People* concurred with this sentiment, but added the warning that Common Wealth's success would divide the left<sup>94</sup> – a point also made by the *Manchester Guardian*, *Sunday Express* and *The Observer*, all of which expressed the view that Common Wealth was helping to increase tensions within the Labour Party.<sup>95</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*'s 'Private Wire' columnist even went so far as to state that 'Skipton strengthens the widely held belief that opinion is moving Left'.<sup>96</sup> In a perhaps telling contrast, the Labour Party-supporting *Daily Herald* barely mentioned the Skipton campaign, appearing far more interested in new revelations about the jet engine than the rise of a potential rival at the ballot-box.<sup>97</sup>



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2  
3 In the West Derbyshire by-election, on 17 February 1944, Common Wealth again  
4 supported an independent candidate, Charles White, against the Government's Conservative  
5 candidate, William Cavendish. This campaign attracted more sustained press coverage than  
6 both Skipton and Newark, partly because the Cavendishes had held the seat almost  
7 continuously since 1885 (except in 1918 and 1922 when White's own father had held it),  
8 partly too because Churchill had sent a series of open letters to the constituency and to the  
9 Conservative candidate's father, the Marquis of Hartington, stating that any opposition to  
10 Cavendish equated to opposition not only to the Government but also himself personally.<sup>98</sup>  
11 This alone made the by-election front-page news.<sup>99</sup> In addition, the popular press gave the  
12 election campaign and the tactics of the Common Wealth Party far more coverage than  
13 before, most notably the *Daily Express*, which effectively accused Common Wealth of taking  
14 over the campaign. As early as 9 February, the *Express* reported that Common Wealth had  
15 supplied '30 canvassers and a liberal quantity of motor-cars' to the constituency;<sup>100</sup> by 12  
16 February it was reporting 'another 50 Common Wealth agents and canvassers', followed by  
17 the emotive claim that the region's hotels had had to turn away parents who regularly visited  
18 their evacuated children in the area because of the influx of electioneers.<sup>101</sup> The *Daily*  
19 *Mirror*'s coverage was notably more sympathetic, with Bill Grieg noting on 15 February the  
20 'infectious enthusiasm of fifty Common Wealth's canvassers'.<sup>102</sup> Although the *Daily Mail*  
21 devoted less space to reporting Common Wealth's tactics during the campaign, and indeed  
22 neglected to identify Common Wealth by name, it did provide front page descriptions of  
23 White's supporters, including a 'mystery blonde' and George Reakes, the victor at  
24 Wallasey.<sup>103</sup>

25  
26 This time Common Wealth's victory was a resounding one, White winning the  
27 election with a majority of over 4,500 votes. Such a victory, and such a Government defeat,  
28 could not be ignored by the press; however, what is most interesting about the subsequent  
29 newspaper coverage was how it focussed not on Common Wealth's policies but on its  
30 campaign strategy. Thus, while the *Daily Mail*, for instance, was relatively dismissive of the  
31 result – arguing in an editorial that Churchill should not trouble himself with party politics,  
32 that White's victory reflected the 'ancient right' of constituencies 'to think for themselves',  
33 and this should be taken by the government as a reminder that the country was 'fighting for  
34 democracy'<sup>104</sup> – what clearly exercised the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* in their reports of  
35 White's victory was Common Wealth's innovative campaigning style. Both newspapers  
36 quoted the Marquis of Hartington's observation that 'Acland had a very powerful circus. It is  
37 a new phenomenon in British politics - more than 100 trained political organisers,'<sup>105</sup> the  
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*Mail's* Wilson Broadbent remarked that the party 'has all the advantage of freedom without responsibility'<sup>106</sup> whilst the *Express* suggested that the result would cause the government to energise its 'election machine' at the next by-election<sup>107</sup>; it also noted that 'the Common Wealth Party flying squad from Bakewell' was expected shortly at the forthcoming Bury St. Edmunds by-election.<sup>108</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* focussed in its coverage of the West Derbyshire by-election campaign on the candidates rather than Common Wealth itself, though its coverage on the whole was broadly sympathetic to the movement and its supporters. Thus, for instance, on 4 February it reported how a Common Wealth supporter, Peter de Normanville (presumably one of the canvassers previously reported on), was forced to stay in a caravan since people in the district 'seemed afraid to harbour him'. For the newspaper's special correspondent, this warranted particular mention because de Normanville was a former Halifax bomber pilot who had been injured in action and lost several members of his crew.<sup>109</sup> The newspaper also argued, after the result had been announced, that it had been both wrong for Churchill to personally get involved and for the government to present by-election voting as being either for or against Churchill. Both 'Private Wire' and the newspaper's political correspondent reflected that the result indicated the country was tired of the electoral truce, even if too much should not be read into by-elections.<sup>110</sup> Yet again, though, the *Daily Herald* managed to skirt around the main issue, its editorial on 25 February (on the subject of Reconstruction) suggesting that there had 'been an immense swing of public opinion in favour of progressive politics' – yet not mentioning at any point either the recent by-election or Common Wealth itself.<sup>111</sup>

The Bury St. Edmunds by-election campaign overlapped with polling day in West Derbyshire, meaning that press coverage moved almost seamlessly from one to the other. Again, the incumbent party was Conservative, the official candidate the government-supported Mayne Keatinge. Keatinge was challenged by Margary Ashby, an independent Liberal candidate supported again by Common Wealth. This time, though, the press devoted rather more of its limited space to the Common Wealth Party. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, discussed the election much more prominently, and eye-catchingly dubbed Common Wealth's involvement the 'Battle of Bury St. Edmunds'. According to the *Mail's* special correspondent, F. G. Prince-White, on 21 February Common Wealth's 'specially trained' men were 'infiltrating' the town before the arrival of the 'spearhead of the whole fighting force'.<sup>112</sup> The following day, Prince-White reported the arrival of Common Wealth's "'Field Force'" – mostly young, or near young, men and women – who have brought new and

disturbing electioneering tactics to this ancient and otherwise amiable town', as well as a "Panzer" division' comprising 'a couple of dozen heftier girls.' The message was clear: Common Wealth was akin to a political invasion.<sup>113</sup>

The *Express* also adopted military language in its press coverage, with Common Wealth's 'shock troops' described as having 'pursued' the people of Bury St. Edmunds.<sup>114</sup> However, the *Express*' coverage was more preoccupied with alleged internecine clashes over policy between Ashby and the Common Wealth Party itself (who, a leader article implied, was only supporting her 'for the purpose of making mischief against the Coalition.'<sup>115</sup>), and even went so far as to contradict the *Daily Mail*'s description of a ubiquitous campaigning presence by noting that the 'Circus' was conspicuously absent from the constituency and that there were only six canvassers from the party in the area. 'The help is not so forthcoming as the new party proved to be at West Derbyshire', one staff reporter claimed, with neither Acland nor Loveseed nor Lawson having arrived to give Ashby their support.<sup>116</sup>

Even the *Daily Herald* briefly adopted militaristic language to report Common Wealth's electioneering style in Bury St Edmunds, with its reporter, Victor Thompson (recently returned from the war in the East) describing how Common Wealth's 'advance patrol' 'infiltrate[d]' the district. Indeed, according to Thompson the 'main Independent attacking forces were concentrating artillery fire from a series of meetings on three soft spots – The Beveridge Plan, Housing, Tory "dictatorship"', while 'Communist guerrillas' were also in evidence. By contrast, Conservative Keatinge was the 'defending commander' against this foreign presence.<sup>117</sup>

It was left to the *Mirror* to present a more favourable account of the election campaign. On 26 February, for instance, Bill Greig directly addressed the:

strange tales which have been spread regarding the activities of the Common Wealth "circus" which, according to the Tories, browbeat the electorate voting against the Government at Skipton and West Derbyshire, and is now, they say, trying the same here.

Grieg pointed out that this 'circus' consisted of no more than seven people, and accused the Conservative party of inventing a political phantom which they could then blame for losing them the election. Rather than a malicious presence distorting the vote, he claimed, Common Wealth was proving to be an umbrella under which dissatisfied voters from all parties could unite against the Conservatives.<sup>118</sup>

Ironically, press coverage of the by-election appears to have missed a bigger story than Common Wealth's alleged mischief-making. An on-the-ground analysis of the by-election by Mass-Observation not only challenged the notion of a 'circus' descending on Bury St. Edmunds (with Mr Woods, the head of the Independent Committee Room, the main electioneering centre, asserting that the seven Common Wealth staffers were 'not nearly a "circus" as the Tories have had'),<sup>119</sup> but suggested that the by-election was marked by clear evidence of Conservative dirty tricks. Not only was the local Greene King brewery (one of the largest employers in the area) accused of attempting to intimidate its workers into voting for Keatinge, but local tradespeople, most of whom had apparently 'refused to display Keatinge's poster' were nonetheless 'afraid to display Mrs Corbett Ashby's posters.'<sup>120</sup> None of these stories appeared in the *Mail*, *Express* or *Mirror*.

On 29 February, Bury St Edmunds was held by the Conservatives with a majority of over 2,500 votes. In the absence of a shock win from the political interlopers, the *Mail*, *Express* and *Mirror* alike reported the result unexceptionally, and not on their front pages.<sup>121</sup> However, both the *Mail* and *Express* reflected in editorials on the result, concurring that Keatinge had won because of his own ability and standing, but warning the Government against using the electoral truce as a way of shoe-horning bad candidates into parliamentary seats (as the *Mail* put it, 'Letters from Mr Churchill will not fill the gap left by a bad choice').<sup>122</sup>

Outside by-election coverage, it is notable how press interest in Common Wealth largely stopped at its leadership, and particularly the figure of Sir Richard Acland.<sup>123</sup> On 22 February 1944, for instance, the *Daily Express* sought belatedly to 'introduce readers to the party' because, it claimed, people were confusing Common Wealth with the Commonwealth of nations ('Most people only know [Common Wealth] has nothing to do with Australia, and not everybody knows that'). However, the article, by William Barkley and entitled 'Richard in Wonderland', focussed primarily on Acland, repeating the story about giving up his estate, and implying this was above all a political and publicity-seeking act. Acland's control over 'his' party was also described in sinister tones: thus Common Wealth's policy regarding British employment was to 'do what Dick tells you, and go where he sends you', while the party's policies on property, security, and wages were also attributed to Acland alone; Common Wealth's popular appeal and by-election successes were not addressed.<sup>124</sup> Neither did the *Daily Mail* or *Daily Mirror* take any time to explore the reasons for Common Wealth's success, though by 1944 the *Daily Herald* was more willing to make an explicit connection between recent by-election results and public dissatisfaction with the

Government's stated post-war plans, and indeed in June attributed Common Wealth's success to 'an immense swing to the Left throughout the British community'.<sup>125</sup> The *Daily Express*, however, remained at pains to suggest that Common Wealth's views did not represent those of the public, and paraphrased Edmund Burke in support of its argument: 'we should never mistake the noise of the grasshoppers for the authentic voice of the field in which the great kine browse silently'.<sup>126</sup>

Over the summer of 1944, press coverage of Common Wealth died down, though there was some coverage in September, when the party attempted unsuccessfully to affiliate to the Labour Party. Both the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express* expressed the belief that Labour's refusal was a mistake, though William Barkley in the *Daily Express* felt that Common Wealth would in any case gain very little from the relationship because Labour would simply insist that Common Wealth disband.<sup>127</sup> In the *Daily Mirror*, Bill Grieg likewise felt that Labour should have been more accommodating, seeing Common Wealth as 'a sort of Socialism in dress clothes' that would make Labour appear more respectable to the middle classes.<sup>128</sup> But newspaper headlines that summer and autumn were dominated by coverage of the D-Day landings, the liberation of France and the US presidential election; Common Wealth, never considered particularly newsworthy, certainly could not compete now.

### Conclusions

In April 1945, a Common Wealth candidate, Ernest Millington, contested and won the safe Conservative seat of Chelmsford. Compared to West Derbyshire and Bury St Edmunds, this by-election received very limited press coverage until it was over, largely because of the urgency of war news. What little coverage there was, though, remained largely along the same lines as before. The *Daily Express*, for instance, published a leader on 28 April that claimed Chelmsford was a 'lesson' for the Conservatives, though it also deplored the 'woolly' politics of the Common Wealth Party, politics, which 'the British people have no use for whatsoever.' The paper again took very little interest in trying to ascertain why people voted for Common Wealth, claiming instead that Millington had won because he was a war veteran, and that the Conservatives needed to take more care in appointing a similar calibre of candidate. Unlike the earlier by-elections, the rhetoric of battle was absent from the press coverage,<sup>129</sup> and only the *Mail* made a short reference to the 'shock troop tactics' of Acland's Circus, on 26 April.<sup>130</sup> This appears to be the last significant piece of wartime reportage of Common Wealth in the popular press. The end of the political truce on 21 May 1945, and the announcement of a general election a few days later, saw minor political parties effectively



side-lined from mainstream political debate. Although Common Wealth was considered important enough to be granted one party election broadcast on the BBC (presented by Acland), throughout the 1945 general election campaign the popular press only reported fleetingly on the party, though the *Daily Mirror's* 'People above Parties' feature did find room for profiles of Acland and Tom Wintringham.<sup>131</sup> Of the 23 seats contested by Common Wealth in July 1945 itself, they only won one, holding Chelmsford.<sup>132</sup>

In the end, Common Wealth proved to be a wartime phenomenon, but one that flourished despite the desultory coverage devoted to it by the mainstream popular press. Angus Calder has discussed at great length whether Common Wealth was a wartime political party or more accurately a political movement like the Popular Front.<sup>133</sup> The *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* took a simpler approach: Common Wealth was only newsworthy once it began winning by-elections, and their reporting focused almost exclusively on the party's leadership and campaigns, not policies. The reasons why so many people voted for the party were never explored in print, and 'Acland's Circus' was treated with suspicion. The Labour-supporting *Daily Herald* all but ignored it. Only the *Daily Mirror* suggested its supporters might be full of genuine enthusiasm, and even then, the paper felt this enthusiasm would be better placed within Labour.

The press coverage of Common Wealth suggests several things about wartime politics. First, the popular press gave surprisingly little publicity to the grass-roots political activities of the British people. Why people supported Common Wealth was not something the wartime press were interested in enough to devote their limited space to. Instead, the papers appear to have been more concerned with supporting the political status quo. Such conclusions challenge elements of the notion that the *Daily Mirror* was a radical *vox populi*, as A. J. P. Taylor, among others, has suggested.<sup>134</sup> They also question James Thomas' argument that the *Daily Mirror* might not have been 'radical' as such but its anti-Conservative tone was the 'voice of the people'.<sup>135</sup> This may have been the case in the 1945 general election, but the *Daily Mirror* failed to take clear opportunities to publicise popular politics outside the mainstream when these opportunities with Common Wealth arose.<sup>136</sup> This puts its take on popular and mainstream politics surprisingly close to that of the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*.

Peter Hennessy asserts that there was a seismic shift in British politics between 1940 and 1943 that, due to the wartime truce, only became apparent in July 1945.<sup>137</sup> Yet the emergence of the Common Wealth Party was a clear indicator of what was happening to politics in wartime British society. Indeed, as Ernest Millington later noted, Common Wealth



gained strong wartime support from Labour voters ‘who resented being told by their leaders to vote Tory.’<sup>138</sup> A leftward trend was also recognised by the *Daily Herald* and the *Manchester Guardian*. And radical journalists such as Edward Hulton, Tom Driberg and Tom Wintringham recognised this shift early on and were willing to capitalise on it, as evident from the disproportionately high number of journalists who helped found the Common Wealth Party. However, the case of Common Wealth also indicates that, as wartime conditions ceased, many of these radical journalists turned back towards Labour. In the 1945 general election, 85 journalists stood for election, of which at least 41 successfully entered parliament.<sup>139</sup> This saw not only a 50 per cent increase in the number of journalists in parliament, but a clear correlation between this and the rise of Labour. Of those journalists seeking office, only 5 ran on Conservative tickets. The majority, 31, were Labour.<sup>140</sup>

Popular press coverage of Common Wealth followed the party’s success; it did not lead it. Not one of its victories in different constituencies was contingent on favourable or prominent coverage in the popular press. Although more research remains to be done on the role and function of the wartime press, it is clear that Common Wealth won by-elections in spite of the press coverage it received in the most widely circulated newspapers. All three popular newspapers made similar choices about their news priorities under the economic and spatial constraints of war. None of these popular papers prioritised popular politics. A ‘People’s War’ or not, there was not enough space in the popular papers for popular politics.

### Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Siân Nicholas, Thomas O’Malley and Christopher Smith for their advice and comments on earlier drafts and the reviewers for their useful suggestions.

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<sup>1</sup> This article expands on research conducted for the author's doctoral thesis: Kristopher Lovell, 'Press, Politics and the 'People's War,' 1939-45: British Political Culture and the British Press in the Second World War' Unpublished PhD Thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 60. See also: Bennett, 'The Wartime Political Truce'; Jeffreys *The Churchill Coalition*, 140-41.

<sup>3</sup> Pryn, 'Common Wealth,' 169. See also Davies, *Trial by Ballot*, 149; Addison, 'By-Elections,' 165.

<sup>4</sup> Loveseed in Eddisbury; Lawson in Skipton; and Millington in Chelmsford.

<sup>5</sup> Thorpe, *Parties at War*, 278; Jeffreys, *The Churchill Coalition, 1940 – 1945*, 152

<sup>6</sup> A. Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party.' Vol. I & II. Calder also discusses the Common Wealth party in his seminal work, *A People's War*, 630-640.

<sup>7</sup> Pryn, 'Common Wealth'; Geoghegan, *Socialism and Religion*.

<sup>8</sup> Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned*; King, *With Malice Towards None and Strictly Personal*.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *Beaverbrook*; Chisolm and Davie, *Beaverbrook*; Edelman, *The Mirror*, Koss, *The Political Press*

<sup>10</sup> Calder, *The People's War*, 663-677; Hinton, '1945 and the Apathy School', 266-273;

<sup>11</sup> Addison does not completely ignore the common wealth party in his seminal work, but his coverage the party is limited to a few pages: Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 225-226 & 249-250; see also Addison, 'By-Elections', 165-190.

<sup>12</sup> Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo only address the Common Wealth fleetingly in their analysis: "England Arise!", pp. 54 – 55. Tiratsoo, *The Attlee Years*, 23-25; Fielding, 'What Did 'The People' Want', *passim*; Fielding, 'The Second World War and Popular Radicalism,' 39-58.

<sup>13</sup> Lovell, 'Press, Politics and the 'People's War,' 21-23.

<sup>14</sup> Stevenson, "'Planners' moon?," 58-77.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald, *The British Press under Government Economic Controls*, Appendix I Table A, 219.

<sup>16</sup> Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press Vol. I*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Conducted by the Aberystwyth University/Leverhulme Trust project, 'A Social and Cultural History of the British Press' RPG- 085, 2011-14. For example, the vote of confidence in July 1942 saw the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express* devote over 30% of its total space to the parliamentary debate on 2-3 July 1942. For a more extensive discussion of the political coverage in the wartime popular press see the author's doctoral thesis: Lovell, 'Press, Politics and the 'People's War,' 79-127

<sup>18</sup> Mass Observation File Report 126: Report on the Press, May 1940, Section 1, 2

<sup>19</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, 48; Political Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press*, 30

<sup>20</sup> John Stevenson, "'Planners' moon?," 58-77.

- 21 Koss, for example, has argued that 'the political press lost its primary function' because of newsprint rationing and less political content. *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press Vol II*, p. 616.
- 22 Man-in-the-street, 'Notes on News,' *Newspaper World*, 28 December 1940, p. 7.
- 23 George Orwell, 'London Letter to Partisan Review,' 15 April 1941,' in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume II, 1940-1943*, p. 113.
- 24 Christiansen, *Headlines all my Life*, 237
- 25 Geoghegan, *Socialism and Religion*, 134.
- 26 For more on the politics of Acland at this time see: Acland, *Unser Kampf*; Acland, *The Forward March*
- 27 Fagge, *The Vision of J. B. Priestley*, 45-8.
- 28 Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party,' Vol. 1, 55.
- 29 For more on Priestley see: Baxendale, *Priestley's England*, 153-155.
- 30 For more on the founding of the 1941 Committee see: Hopkinson, *Of This Our Time, 190-3*; Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 188-9.
- 31 Hopkinson, *Of this Our Time*, 193
- 32 Minutes of 1941 Committee Meeting, 4 December 1940. Dr Thomas Jones CH papers. National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; Minutes of the Fourth Council Meeting, 1941 Committee 18 January 1940. National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
- 33 Edward Hulton, 'The 1941 Committee discusses the Atlantic Charter,' *Picture Post*, 27 September 1941, pp. 14-16; Edward Hulton, 'What is the 1941 Committee?' *Picture Post*, 19 July 1941, p.29
- 34 'Plan for Britain,' *Picture Post*, 4 January 1941. See also: John Stevenson, "'Planners' moon?," 58-77.
- 35 Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party 1942-1945: Vol. 1,' 25.
- 36 'London Notes And Comment: A Pressure Group,' *Yorkshire Post*, 8 March 1941, p. 4
- 37 National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth: CH 20/29/4: Minutes of Sixth Meeting of Council 12 March 1941
- 38 National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth: CH/41 Memo to members by Raymond Gauntlett, 30 May 1941.
- 39 Tom Driberg [William Hickey], 'Uphill Struggle,' *Daily Express*, 4 April 1941, p. 4
- 40 George Reakes provides his own account of the election campaign, Acland's support and his wartime experience in: *Man of the Mersey*, 73-83
- 41 Reakes, *Man of the Mersey*, 83
- 42 Davies, *Trial by Ballot*, 155.
- 43 Addison, 'By-Elections', 167.
- 44 'Labour Stands By "Truce,"' *Daily Mirror*, 20 April 1942, p 4.
- 45 Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party' Vol. I, 90-1; see also Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 158-9
- 46 Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party,' Vol. I, 91.
- 47 'William Hickey' Fights a By-Election', *Picture Post*, 27 June 1942, p. 10
- 48 'Common Wealth', *Daily Mail*, 9 April 1943, p. 2.
- 49 Driberg, *The Best of Both Worlds*, 182.
- 50 Wheen, *Tom Driberg*, 169
- 51 Wheen, *Tom Driberg*, 174 & 186; Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 158-9
- 52 Wheen, *Tom Driberg*, 171
- 53 'Opinion', *Daily Express*, 25 May 1942, p. 2.
- 54 'Election Fight "Untimely"', *Daily Herald*, 6 June 1942, p. 3; 'Three to Fight Maldon', *Daily Herald*, 16 June 1942, p. 4; 'Maldon Polls To-Day', *Daily Herald*, 25 June 1942, p. 3; "No contest" call by premier", *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1942, p. 1; 'Answer to the Premier', *Daily Mirror*, 8 June 1942, p. 8; 'By-election: Three corner Maldon fight', *Daily Mirror*, 16 June 1942, p. 2; Parliamentary Correspondent, 'Four Contested By-Elections', *Times*, 9 June 1942, p. 4; 'Three candidates at Maldon', *Times* 16 June 1942, p. 2.
- 55 'Opinion', *Daily Express*, 27 June 1942, p. 2; W.M., 'After Tobruk', *Daily Mirror*, 27 June 1942, p. 3.
- 56 Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, 321.
- 57 Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party', Vol I., 104.
- 58 "'Danger Is Desperate'" *Daily Mirror*, 27 July 1942, p. 8
- 59 Bill Grieg, 'Big By-Election Challenges By New Party,' *Daily Mirror*, 28 July 1942, p. 3.
- 60 National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth: CH/59 J. B. Priestley, Memo: The 1941 Committee, 21 August 1941
- 61 A few examples (not an extensive list) of Common Wealth being mentioned fleetingly are: '21s At War Cannot Vote For MPs,' *Daily Express*, 6 January 1943, p. 4; 'Dunkirk Man Will Fight By-Election,' *Daily Express*, 28 January 1943, p. 3; 'Six Candidates Likely For Two By-Elections,' *Daily Express*, 1 February 1943, p. 3; '7 Candidates For 3 By-Elections,' *Daily Express*, 2 February 1943, p. 4; 'Miniature general election: seven new MPs in next 10 days,' *Daily Express*, 8 February 1943, p. 4; 'Ashford held by the government,' *Daily Mirror*, 12 February 1943, p. 4; 'Unions Ignore Truce,' *Daily Mirror*, 17 February 1943, p. 5; Guy Eden, 'New Identity Cards: For Everybody In July,' *Daily Express*, 17 March 1943, p. 1; Sir Richard Acland made 1911 speeches during his parliamentary career. Notable speeches include his defence of the *Daily Worker* (Richard



Acland, Suppression of the "Daily Worker" and the "Week," HC Deb. 28 January 1941 Vol.368 cc.479-491) and his support for the coal miners (Richard Acland, Coal Policy, HC Deb. 10 June 1942 vol. 380 cc.1141-1146).

<sup>62</sup> Davies, *Trial by Ballot*, 158; Purcell, *The Last English Revolutionary*, 220-221 Fernbach, 'Tom Wintringham,' 82-87. It has been suggested, by Purcell in particular, that Wintringham lost the by-election because of Churchill's intervention. See also: Wintringham, *The People's War*; Calder, *The People's War*, 631

<sup>63</sup> Ian Fyfe, 'Baronet M.P. gives Nation estate to be working man,' *Daily Mirror*, 26 February 1943, p. 1 continued as 'Xmas gifts still for villages,' *Daily Mirror*, 26 February 1943, p. 8; '17,000 Acres for Nation,' *Daily Mail*, 26 February 1943, p. 3; 'News in Brief: 17,000 acres for nation,' *Daily Express*, 26 February 1943, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Addison, 'By-elections', 168

<sup>65</sup> Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, 304.

<sup>66</sup> Mass-Observation File Report 1842, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Davies, *Trial by Ballot*, 159

<sup>68</sup> Addison, 'By-Elections,' 185.

<sup>69</sup> Trevor Evans, 'Six Now In One By-Election,' *Daily Express*, 20 March 1943, p. 3; 'Mr. Peacock Has Triple Farming Plan,' *Daily Express*, 18 March 1943, p. 3; 'Their First Vote For 14 Years,' *Daily Express*, 7 April 1943, p. 4; 'Three for Eddisbury,' *Daily Mail*, 27 March 1943, p. 3; 'By-Election Lit By Fires,' *Daily Mail*, 6 April 1943, p. 3; 'Padre Candidate,' *Daily Mirror*, 4 March 1943, p. 8; '3,000 Votes Are Lost,' *Daily Mirror*, 18 March 1943, p. 6; 'Tory is 6th candidate in defiance of party,' *Daily Mirror*, 20 March 1943, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Emrys Jones, '28- And They Have Never Voted,' *Daily Mail*, 23 March 1943, p. 2; Bill Greig, 'Amazing!' *Daily Mirror*, 26 March 1943, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> 'Battle of Britain Man Is Now M.P.,' *Daily Express*, 9 April 1943, p. 3; 'Common Wealth Pilot Beats Govt.,' *Daily Mirror*, 9 April 1943, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> 'The Eddisbury Result,' *The Times*, 9 April 1943 p. 5

<sup>73</sup> 'Common Wealth,' *Daily Mail*, 9 April 1943, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Common Wealth did appear on the front page after a parliamentary interjection by Richard Acland on the issue of identity cards and the electoral register was recorded on the front page of the *Daily Express*: Guy Eden, 'New Identity Cards: For Everybody- In July,' *Daily Express*, 17 March 1943, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Bernard Buckham [B.B.B.], 'Parties,' *Daily Mirror*, 26 April 1943, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> George Orwell, 'Profile: Sir Richard Acland' in (ed.) Peter Davison, *Two Wasted Years: 1943*, 105

<sup>77</sup> George Orwell, 'London Letter, [c. 23 May 1943]' in (ed.) Peter Davison, *Two Wasted Years: 1943*, 109

<sup>78</sup> Common Wealth Election Address, 8 June 1943, quoted in Mass-Observation File Report 1845, 10a

<sup>79</sup> Bill Grieg, 'Tories Should Thank Sir Richard Acland,' *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1943, p.1, cont. as 'Tories are confident in by-election,' *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1943, p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Bernard Buckham [B.B.B.], 'Parties,' *Daily Mirror*, 8 June 1943, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Mass-Observation File Report 1842, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, 326, 470, & 526. See also Calder's coverage in *The People's War*, 637-640

<sup>83</sup> Addison, 'By-Elections,' 185

<sup>84</sup> 'Ald. Toole Challenges an M.P.,' *Daily Express*, 5 January 1944, p. 3; 'Skipton: No Farm Candidate', *Daily Mail*, 21 December 1943, p. 4; 'The Say-Nowt Election: Three In The Field,' *Daily Express*, 29 December 1943, p. 3; 'Three- Cornered Fight For Skipton,' *Daily Mirror*, 29 December 1943, p. 8; 'Cow "Heckles" Candidates,' *Daily Express*, 4 January 1944, p. 3; 'Last Words "Rationed,"' *Daily Express*, 7 January 1944, p. 3; 'Skipton Election Result Out Today,' *Daily Express*, 8 January 1944, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Bill Grieg, 'Election-With 23,000 Lost Voters,' *Daily Mirror*, 5 January 1944, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> 'Ald. Toole Challenges an M.P.,' *Daily Express*, 5 January 1944, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> 'Skipton Poll', *The Sunday Times*, 9 January 1944 p. 1; 'Common Wealth Wins by-Election', *The People*, 9 January 1944 p. 5; 'Farmers Backed New MP', *Sunday Express*, 9 January 1944, p.5; 'New Party Wins', *News of the World*, 9 January 1944, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Bill Greig, 'Skipton Starts Tory Hunt For Youth,' *Daily Mirror*, 10 January 1944, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Bernard Buckham [B.B.B.], 'How To Get Votes,' *Daily Mirror*, 19 January 1944, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> William Barkley, 'An M.P.'s Life Can't Begin At 61,' *Daily Express*, 11 January 1944, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Leader, 'Skipton Speaks', *Daily Mail*, 10 January 1944, p. 2

<sup>92</sup> 'Skipton', *The Times*, 10 January 1944, p. 5

<sup>93</sup> 'Common Wealth Victory at Skipton, *Manchester Guardian*, 10 January 1944, p. 2; 'Skipton', *Manchester Guardian*, 10 January 1944, p. 4

<sup>94</sup> Hannen Swaffer, 'As Hannen Swaffer', *The People*, 16 January 1944, p. 4



- <sup>95</sup> J. L. Gavin, 'Parties and the Melting Pot', *Sunday Express*, 23 January 1944; Private Wire, 'London Correspondence', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 January 1944, p. 4; 'Back to Party Politics', *The Observer*, 16 January 1944, p. 4.
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- <sup>100</sup> 'The Cobbler's Son: People v. Purple,' *Daily Express*, 9 February 1944, p. 4.
- <sup>101</sup> 'Horseman Chases The Tory Votes,' *Daily Express*, 12 February 1944, p. 3; Other reports of the Common Wealth electioneers in the *Express* include 'Vote of 4,000 liberals may sway election,' *Daily Express*, 14 February 1944, p. 3; "'Filth, Mud And Hooligan Gang,' *Daily Express*, 17 February 1944, p. 1.
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- <sup>103</sup> F. G. White, 'Introducing Madame Palateewa', *Daily Mail*, 16 February 1944, p. 1
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- <sup>105</sup> 'The Duke: A Very Powerful Circus', *Daily Express*, 19 February 1944, p. 4;
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- <sup>108</sup> 'Straight fight at Bury St. Edmunds,' *Daily Express*, 19 February 1944, p. 4.
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- <sup>111</sup> 'Decision', *Daily Herald*, 25 February 1944, p. 2
- <sup>112</sup> F. G. Prince White, 'The "Acland Circus" Hits Bury: Spearhead there,' *Daily Mail*, 21 February 1944, p. 1; continued as 'The "Acland Circus,"' *Daily Mail*, 21 February 1944, p. 4.
- <sup>113</sup> F. G. Prince-White, 'By Ocean Plane to Election,' *Daily Mail*, 22 February 1944, p. 3.
- <sup>114</sup> 'Mrs. Wimbush's £5-A-Week Squad On The Job In Bury: Common Wealth Opens Fire,' *Daily Express*, 21 February 1944, p. 3.
- <sup>115</sup> 'Opinion', *Daily Express*, 19 February 1944, p. 2
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- <sup>117</sup> Victor Thompson, 'He Found Jungle Warfare At Bury', *Daily Herald*, 23 February 1944, p. 3
- <sup>118</sup> Bill Grieg, 'Tories Are Fighting An Umbrella,' *Daily Mirror*, 26 February 1944, p. 8.
- <sup>119</sup> Mass Observation File Report 2035, 9.
- <sup>120</sup> Mass Observation File Report 2035, 10.
- <sup>121</sup> 'Govt. Man In At Bury,' *Daily Mail*, 2 March 1944, p.3; 'By-Election Fight Won For Govt. By 2,500 Majority,' *Daily Mirror*, 2 March 1944, p. 2; 'Bury Figures "Pleasant,"' *Daily Express*, 2 March 1944, p. 4.
- <sup>122</sup> Leader, 'Party Politics,' *Daily Mail*, 3 March 1944, p. 2; 'Opinion', *Daily Express*, 2 March 1944, p. 2.
- <sup>123</sup> 'Acland Has Enough To Keep Him "Till I Can Earn A Living,"' *Daily Express*, 4 February 1944, p. 3.
- <sup>124</sup> William Barkley, 'Richard in Wonderland,' *Daily Express*, 22 February 1944, p. 2.
- <sup>125</sup> 'What it means,' *Daily Herald*, 19 February 1944, p. 2; John Parker (MP) expressed a similar sentiment later in June 1944: John Parker and Maurice Webb, 'Electoral Truce', *Daily Herald*, 10 June 1944.
- <sup>126</sup> 'Opinion' *Daily Express*, 12 April 1944, p. 2.
- <sup>127</sup> William Barkley, 'General Election? I Doubt If The Socialists Really Want Power,' *Daily Express*, 25 September 1944, p. 2.
- <sup>128</sup> Bill Greig, 'X-Ray On The News: Back-Room Boys Help Workers Get Illness Pay,' *Daily Mirror*, 6 November 1944, p. 2.
- <sup>129</sup> 'Opinion,' *Daily Express*, 28 April 1945, p. 2.
- <sup>130</sup> 'Close Poll, Says Tory Candidate,' *Daily Mail*, 26 April 1945, p. 3.
- <sup>131</sup> 'People Above Parties: Richard Acland,' *Daily Mirror*, 5 June 1945, p. 4; 'People above

parties: Tom Wintringham,' *Daily Mirror*, 16 June 1945, p. 4.  
<sup>132</sup> Cook and Stevenson, *A History of British Elections Since 1689*, 422.  
<sup>133</sup> Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party,' Volume II', 1-13.  
<sup>134</sup> Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, 549; See also Cudlipp, *The Prerogative of the Harlot*; Cecil King, *Strictly Personal*.  
<sup>135</sup> James Thomas, 'Reflections on the Broken Mirror,' 111.  
<sup>136</sup> This appears to also support Bromley's analysis of the *Mirror's* coverage of the Beveridge report. Bromley argued the *Mirror* was not especially interested in promoting debate and often ignored the 'authentic voice' of its readers. Bromley, 'Was it the Mirror Wot Won it?' 122.  
<sup>137</sup> Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-1951*, 66.  
<sup>138</sup> Millington, *Was That Really Me?* 110.  
<sup>139</sup> *Newspaper World* estimated 43 journalists entered parliament in the 1945 general election, whilst J. F. S. Ross estimated 41: 'Many Journalists Elected to New Parliament,' *Newspaper World*, 4 August 1945, p. 10  
<sup>140</sup> Ross, *Elections and Electors*, pp. 436-8. Table 85 and 86; *Newspaper World's* figures differ slightly claiming that 33 journalists were elected Labour MPs whilst 7 were elected for the Conservatives, but the ratio remains approximately the same as Ross's: 'Many Journalists Elected to New Parliament,' *The Newspaper World*, 4 August 1945, p. 10.

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