The Thirties

An intimate history of Britain

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Gardiner J.

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Acclaimed author of 'Wartime', Juliet Gardiner, brings to life the long neglected decade of the twentieth century – the 1930s.J.B. Priestley famously described the 'three Englands' he saw in the 1930s: Old England, nineteenth-century England and the new, post-war England. Thirties Britain was, indeed, a land of contrasts, at once a nation rendered hopeless by the Depression, unemployment and international tensions, yet also a place of complacent suburban home-owners with a baby Austin in every garage.Now Juliet Gardiner, acclaimed author of the award-winning Wartime, provides a fresh perspective on that restless, uncertain, ambitious decade, bringing the complex experience of thirties Britain alive through newspapers, magazines, memoirs, letters and diaries.Gardiner captures the essence of a people part-mesmerised by 'modernism' in architecture, art and the proliferation of 'dream palaces', by the cult of fitness and fresh air, the obsession with speed, the growth and regimentation of leisure, the democratisation of the countryside, the celebration of elegance, glamour and sensation. Yet, at the same time, this was a nation imbued with a pervasive awareness of loss – of Britain's influence in the world, of accepted political, social and cultural signposts, and finally of peace itself.

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An Intimate History

For Joseph

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PREFACE

There will be time to audit The accounts later, there will be sunlight later And the equation will come out at last.

Louis MacNeice, 'Autumn Journal' (1939)

The thirties is a statement as well as a decade. And it is one that is frequently heard today, because while those years are gradually slipping from our grasp, what they have come to represent is ever more present: confusion, financial crises, rising unemployment, scepticism about politicians, questions about the proper reach of Britain's role in the world.

Famously, to W.H. Auden, sitting on a bar stool in 'one of the dives on Fifty-Second Street' in New York in September 1939, the thirties were a 'low, dishonest decade'. Looking back later, others followed him, labelling it 'the devil's decade', 'a dark tunnel', 'the locust years', a 'morbid age', a time tainted by the dolorous spectres of intractable unemployment, the Means Test and appeasement, that ended inexorably in the most terrible war the world has ever known. But others claimed that this was a partial picture. It ignored those areas of Britain largely unaffected by the 'Great Depression', where the symbols of prosperity were the growth of home ownership, new light industries, a consumer society — evidenced by rapidly multiplying acres of suburban semis, the hope of a Baby Austin in the garage, a branch of Woolworths in every town, roadhouses on every arterial road, lidos, cinemas, paid holidays, dance halls, greyhound racing, football pools, plate glass, the modernist and the 'moderne'. In sum, J.B. Priestley's new 'third England' to set alongside two old Englands — one 'byways England', slow, rural and benign, the other harsh, ugly and industrial.

'There ain't no universals in this man's town,' wrote Louis MacNeice in 1939. This book recognises the claims of all of these Englands (or rather Britains) to tell the story of the thirties. Its aim is to explore all three, to uncover the 'intimate history' of what it was like to live through the decade. It is not one story; it is not three stories: it is hundreds of interwoven stories, from that of the Prime Minister(s) to a discontented North London schoolteacher, from three Kings to one rather anxious Oxford vicar's wife, from the economist J.M. Keynes and the novelist Virginia Woolf to the intermittently unemployed gardener Frank Forster and the astute Hull journalist Cyril Dunn. Lives, events, aspirations, plans and the tireless search for solutions by people who felt that after the trauma of the First World War it must be possible to reorder society better, and those for whom this disastrously failed. All fitting into a panorama of Britain in the thirties, a decade that haunts us today with the magnitude of its problems, the paucity of its solutions, the dreadfulness of its ending, while snaring us with the boldness of its political and social experiments, the earnestness of its blueprints, the yearnings of its young, and the sheer glamour of its design, art, architecture, fashion, dream palaces, dance halls, and obsession with speed.

The story begins on the last day of 1929; it has no conclusion other than the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, which, while not formally ending the decade, definitively foreclosed thirties Britain.

Juliet Gardiner November 2009

A NOTE ON MONEY

Translating the value of money is fraught with difficulties. As Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776): 'The real price of every thing, what every thing really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it … but it is not that by which their value is estimated … Every commodity is more frequently exchanged for, and thereby compared with other commodities.'

www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare suggests that there are five indices that can be used to compare monetary values in different eras. I have generally chosen the lowest (the retail price index), which multiplies a sum by roughly fifty — so that £100 in the 1930s would equal almost £5,000 today. But perhaps a more useful guide is to remember that in 1935 a working man would earn between £3 and £4 a week, and that an average semidetached suburban house would have cost between £500 and £750.

PART ONE *How it was Then*

PROLOGUE *The Eve of the Decade*

'Wi' ye nae git out fra under ma feet,' seven-year-old Robert Pope's mother, wielding a mop and a bucket, scolded as she shooed him out of the house. The string bag full of jam jars he was clutching banged against his shins as he ran along Maxwell Street in Paisley to meet his friends. It was Hogmanay, the last day of the year 1929: the day that Scottish housewives busied themselves 'redding' (readying) their homes in a frenzy of mopping, sweeping, scrubbing, polishing, dusting, all to make sure that they were as clean as the proverbial new pin to welcome the New Year in through the front door as the Old Year slipped out by the back. The tallyman should have been paid off too, and any goods 'on tick' settled, since it was considered bad luck to start the New Year in debt. But that wouldn't be so easy.

By midday a queue of almost a thousand children, some clutching the hands of smaller siblings, others with bairns little more than babies in their arms, were waiting outside the Glen cinema in the centre of town. Admission was a penny for the stalls, tuppence for the balcony, and those children whose fathers were maybe out of work, or had been killed in the Great War that had ended just over a decade earlier, and whose mothers hadn't been able to spare the necessary coins, had scoured their tenement homes for empty bottles or jam jars to take back to the shop with the promise that the returned deposit could be used for the cinema.

The Glen, with its ornate façade and stained-glass windows, was one of six cinemas in Paisley, a town lying in Glasgow's southern shadow. If cinema-going was popular with adults — and it was, with some eighteen to nineteen million attendances every week in the 1930s — it was even more so for children. And if that was true of the South, it was more so in the North: in 1933 it was reported that seven out of ten children in Edinburgh went to the pictures at least once a week, most to the special Saturday-afternoon shows that cinema managers laid on for children, filling the seats by showing usually old films at cheap prices. 'Most children spend longer at the cinema than they do at many school subjects,' wrote Richard Ford, who organised cinema clubs for children for the Odeon cinema chain, and reckoned that by 1939 some 4,600,000 children went to the cinema every week all over Britain.

In Paisley the Glen had started life as accommodation for a crypto-Masonic sect called the Good Templars, a temperance movement founded in 1850 to encourage moderation in, or preferably total abstinence from, the consumption of alcohol. As an encouragement to the sober life, the Templars organised various non-alcoholic entertainments, including tea concerts which were held on Saturday afternoons and were known as 'Bursts', since those attending were handed a paper bag containing an apple and an orange and at some point were encouraged to blow up their paper bags and burst them simultaneously. In homage to this innocent way of passing a dull afternoon, those watching silent films once the Glen had been converted into a cinema in 1910 (since lack of enthusiasm for temperance had by then reduced the Templars to holding their meetings in the basement) would burst a paper bag at appropriate moments in a film, such as a gunshot; and even when the introduction of the 'talkies' in the late 1920s rendered this unnecessary, there were children who were gamely prepared to uphold the tradition.

Over a thousand children were packed into the Glen that Hogmanay afternoon. Most found seats, but the cinema could accommodate an additional 140 standing in the gangways both downstairs and in the more expensive balcony, where children were not allowed, though some slipped in regardless. The main feature was a silent film, *The Crowd*, but this was preceded by a short western which starred the ever-popular Tom Mix as a bareback-riding, lasso-twirling cowboy in one of the last silent films Mix made on his self-constructed film-set ranch, 'a complete frontier town … typical of the early Western era', Mixville in California.

At 2 p.m. the lights dimmed and a cheer went up as the children settled down to watch the film, with loud cheers or catcalls as the action unfolded. But about halfway through the second reel (which had to be changed manually) dense, sulphurous carbon-monoxide-laden smoke began to fill the auditorium, and the children started to panic. 'Fire!' one shouted — though there wasn't — prompting a mass stampede for the exits. Most of the children made for a side door that led to a narrow staircase down into an alleyway. But when they reached the bottom they found that the exit was barred by an iron trellis gate that was firmly padlocked in place. However much they pushed and screamed, the gate would not yield, as more and more frightened children continued to push down the stairs, stumbling, falling, fainting, crushed underfoot.

Others ran into the lavatories, where they smashed the windows to get out, cutting their arms and legs on the jagged shards as they did so. Those in the balcony jumped down into the auditorium, adding to the panic, and a heavy swing door was wrenched off its hinges by small boys finding a superhuman strength in their desperation. Some children lost precious minutes frantically searching for a mislaid shoe, a discarded scarf, fearing that with money so tight, they would get in trouble if they came home having lost an item of clothing.

By now smoke was swirling into the street, and anxious passers-by tried to get into the building. Driven back by the dense smoke, they summoned the police, who smashed all the windows of the cinema with their batons to let the noxious fumes escape. Within minutes the fire brigade had arrived. 'Several people cried out "For God's sake get your smoke helmets: we can't get through the smoke. The cinema's full of children,"' the Deputy-Chief Fire Marshal reported. 'As soon as my men heard about the children there was no holding them back. Smoke helmets or no smoke helmets we were off the engine into the cinema with no delay.' The firemen were followed by members of the public clutching handkerchiefs over their mouths to try to protect themselves from inhaling the smoke.

A terrible sight met their eyes: sweets, comics, torn clothes lay scattered in disarray all over the floor, seats were upturned, there were pools of blood near the doorways and windows where children had tried to claw their way out. And there were the children: heaps of contorted bodies, most dead, some unconscious, piled up in nightmarish heaps, still and grotesque. 'Behind the screen,' reported Deputy-Chief Fire Marshal Wilson, 'the space was packed with children huddled together in every conceivable attitude. They were as tightly packed as a wall of cement bags. Some still moved, others were motionless, blue in the face … some were able to scream … Legs and arms were intertwined in the most appalling tangle. In some cases it took two of us working very gradually to extricate one child.' The oldest victim was thirteen, the youngest a toddler of eighteen months, and there were all ages in between, siblings, friends, neighbours, all dead or mortally injured, trapped in a 'pleasure palace' on the last day of the decade.

Those children who could walk were led out, shocked, shaken and in some cases hysterical; others were carried to ambulances, private cars and buses to be taken to the Royal Alexandra Infirmary, suffering from carbon-monoxide poisoning or injuries sustained in the crush to get out. A tramway Inspector turned the passengers off a couple of trams and requisitioned them to convey the injured to hospital, while the workers at a nearby print factory downed tools and hurried to the Glen to carry twenty children to the safety of their works. Again and again the firemen went back, sometimes accompanied by desperate parents searching for their offspring. 'Two small bodies were found huddled together in the orchestra pit. It appeared as if two children had crept there for safety after finding the passage to the door blocked by the bodies of their young friends,' and several more bodies were found under upturned seats. A father staggered out carrying his small son, blue in the face, his head lolling lifelessly.

By 4 p.m. the cinema had been cleared: two hours after the matinee had started, fifty-nine children had been pronounced dead on arrival at the Infirmary. Many had barely a mark on them, suffocated by the weight of others frantically trying to get out, while others 'bore scratches on their face, hands and knees, eloquent testimony to the desperation with which they had struggled to get out

of the death trap … So rapidly were the victims brought in that, in order to make room for those who were alive, the bodies were hurried to a lift and conveyed to the basement. Here they were placed on trolleys by twos and threes and rushed along a tunnel to the mortuary. Numbers grew so rapidly that the mortuary was soon full and other rooms [including the hospital chapel] had to be used to accommodate the bodies.' That night ten more children died from their injuries: the final death toll in the Glen cinema disaster was seventy-one. One family lost all three children, another four families lost two children each. Robert Pope's name was not among the list of the dead, but many of his school-friends' were. A BBC New Year programme from Scotland was pulled and a four-minute silence broadcast instead. And the streets of Paisley, usually packed with revellers at Hogmanay, were eerily empty and silent.

The King, George V, and Queen Mary sent messages of sympathy, so did the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, and another Scot, the music-hall star Sir Harry Lauder. Condolences, money and offers of help poured in from all over the world, as did offers to adopt the survivors — something no one wanted even to consider.

The funerals of sixty of the victims were held on 4 January 1930. It was a bleak, grey day, with intermittent flurries of sleet as the funeral processions started out. Flags on public buildings flew at half-mast, and as services in Paisley Abbey and the four Roman Catholic churches in the town started at 11 a.m., shops shut their doors and drew their blinds as a mark of respect. Crowds lined the route, everyone wearing black or a black armband, many hurriedly made from crêpe paper; the only relief came from the wreaths atop the coffins and from the flash of white on the uniforms of the Boys' Brigade band as they followed the white coffin of one of their members, twelve-year-old Robert Wingate, playing the heartbreaking lament 'Flowers o' the Forest' as the coffin was carried up the nave of Paisley Abbey. Journalists came too, compelled by their own headlines — 'Scotland's Worst ever Cinema Disaster' — and cinema operators from all over Britain joined the mourners, hats in hands, heads bowed.

Paisley Council, mindful that many families would not be able to afford the cost of burying their dead children, offered a free burial ground at Hawkhead Municipal Cemetery for those who could not afford a plot, and the town's team of ten gravediggers was trebled to thirty. Tragically, some of this swollen workforce found themselves digging the final resting place of their own child.

Two days earlier, on 2 January, the Glen cinema manager Charles Dorward had been arrested and charged with culpable homicide. The charge hung on whether the metal trellis gate that had trapped so many of the dead had been padlocked rather than left unlocked during the performance, as it should have been according to health and safety regulations. Dorward was released on bail of £750, and hastily packed and left his home in the town where so many families had been touched by the disaster.

The case was heard before the Lord Advocate, Craigie Aitchison KC, in Edinburgh on 29 April 1930. During the proceedings it came out that on the morning of the fire the cinema had been inspected by members of the Paisley Fire Brigade, who had pronounced it safe. The Glen's owner, James Graham, agreed that there were insufficient exits, and claimed that he had repeatedly reminded Dorward that under no circumstances were the gates to be shut during matinee performances. The manager replied that they were locked on occasions to stop children who hadn't bought tickets from slipping in for free during the film. Graham replied that 'he didn't care if the whole of Paisley slipped in; the gates must be kept open'. A policeman gave evidence that when he arrived on the scene the gates were padlocked, but Dorward was adamant that he had opened them himself before the start of the matinee on 31 December 1929. The cinema chocolate girl, Isla Muir, confirmed that she had seen him open the gates. She was unable to say how they came to be closed subsequently, but suggested that two boys she had seen hanging about outside might have been responsible. After a trial lasting only two days, Charles Dorward was found not guilty by the unanimous verdict of the jury. It was concluded that although cigarette butts, spent matches and an empty cigarette box had been found

in the projection room — where smoking was not permitted — these were not the cause of the film combusting: rather it was the carelessness of a fifteen-year-old assistant, James McVey, who had put a metal canister containing the first reel of nitrate on top of a battery, causing a short circuit, that was to blame, though once the film started to smoke, the limited number of exits, the shortage of attendants and the excessive number of children packed into the cinema that afternoon had all contributed materially to the tragedy.

Lessons were learned from the Glen cinema disaster. In the new decade many municipal authorities — Glasgow included — ordered an inspection of all theatres and cinemas under their jurisdiction. Licences were scrutinised and the fitness of those holding them checked, legislation was introduced to check the 'tuppenny rush' at children's matinees, those under seven must be accompanied by an adult, there had to be a higher ratio of attendants to children, and the Cinematograph Act of 1909 was updated to extend local authorities' powers to ensure that all cinemas had a greater number of exits, that doors opened outwards and were fitted with push bars, and that seating capacity was limited, among other safety stipulations.

There was no counselling offered to the traumatised survivors. They were advised to forget about the terrible experience, and in an effort to help this healing process Paisley Town Council offered injured children and bereaved parents a week at the seaside. Small parties left Paisley a fortnight after the tragedy for West Kilbride and Dunoon. The relief fund was closed: it had raised £5,300.

It was a welcome sum. Paisley was a poor town. Although men such as the thread manufacturers Peter and James Coats, who were both worth more than £2 million (around £100 million in today's prices) when they died in 1913, had made their fortunes in Paisley, by 1929 the town was the victim of the industrial depression that swept the West of Scotland, the Valleys of Wales, and the manufacturing North and other pockets of England. Unemployment was high and rising, and wages were low for those in work in Paisley.

Yet even before the Glen cinema disaster brought the town unwanted publicity, Paisley's name was known throughout the English-speaking world. It was synonymous with soft woollen shawls bearing distinctive teardrop or tadpole patterns (probably representing the growing shoot of the date palm), usually in muted, smudged colours that had been greatly prized since the East India Company had first brought such shawls, woven of goatsdown, from Kashmir in the eighteenth century. Desirable these might have been, but they were fabulously expensive, so around 1780 weavers in Norwich and Edinburgh began to produce shawls 'in imitation of the Indian', using a new technique that reduced the cost of production by three-quarters. Paisley had a workforce of skilled weavers, but its silk industry had been hit badly by the Napoleonic Continental blockade. It seized on this new fashion accessory, and by the 1840s was effectively a one-industry town, with a monopoly of such shawl production, with the so-called 'big corks' of Paisley buying the yarn and the designs and distributing them to cottage-industry handloom weavers. Shawl-making brought new prosperity to the town — though not to the weavers, who were now outworkers rather than creative artisans, and gradually, with the introduction of the Jacquard loom, factory hands. But since by definition fashion items are just that, there were slumps and booms throughout the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth coats and jackets had replaced shawls as outer wear. The weavers of Paisley persevered and adapted to making any new products that might sell, but by 1930 only vestiges remained of the weaving industry that had made the town's name go around the world. In mid-nineteenth-century Scotland the textile industry had employed over 20 per cent of the population; by 1931 the figure was less than 7 per cent, and those who could find work found it in thread manufacture, starching and dyeing.

Those who couldn't would take a train to nearby Glasgow, with a population in 1931 of over a million and still claiming to be the 'second city of the Empire'. But Glasgow had also been hard hit, with a large proportion of its resources tied up in what would become irredeemably depressed heavy industries: shipbuilding on the Clyde, where one-fifth of the world's tonnage of ships had

been launched by the start of the First World War, coalmining in Lanarkshire, and jute and linen manufacture on Tayside. By 1930, while 16.1 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom was unemployed, in Scotland the figure was 18.5 per cent, and by 1933 it had soared to 26.1 per cent compared to the overall UK figure of 19.9 per cent. And for those in work, wages were low: less than 92 per cent of those earned in England. By 1931–32 that had fallen further, to 87 per cent. The thirties were always going to be a difficult decade for Paisley: now it had tragedy layered over hardship.

ONE *Goodbye to All That*

We have magneto trouble. How, then, can we start up again?
John Maynard Keynes, December 1930

'It is difficult to see the wood for the trees,' mused Gerald Barry, then editor of Lord Beaverbrook's *Saturday Review*, though soon to resign on a question of principle and start the *Week-End Review*, and something of a connoisseur of English eccentricities and oddities, in a BBC broadcast on the final day of the 1920s. He rounded off his talk in much the same vein. 'We cannot put the jigsaw puzzle of the present together, because we are sitting on the pieces.' In between he surveyed the year that had passed, commenting on the progress of the R100 and the R101 airships, and on the 'thirst for speed … one of the significant tendencies of our time', which had been partially slaked by Sir Henry Segrave's 'remarkable motor-car record at Daytona Beach of 231 m.p.h.', and on the extraordinary weather, which 'began with extreme and prolonged cold which those of us with burst water pipes will not forget in a hurry … followed by a superb summer and a drought which caused many towns and villages great anxiety and stopped many of us watering our gardens and washing our cars', and ending with 'disastrous floods and record gales'. The number of motorists had continued to increase, and with them the number of accidents, as had what Barry called the 'continued uglification of the countryside'. On the credit side Stonehenge, Friday Street, Runnymede and many more 'notable spots' had been saved, and in Barry's mind the fierce controversies over Sir Gilbert Scott's design for a new power station at Battersea, the erection of pylons across the South Downs as part of the new electrical grid system and proposals for the new Charing Cross Bridge were evidence that 'in 1929 we have become more conscious of the need of beauty and orderliness in our midst'.

Barry's notion of sitting on a jigsaw, knowing that there were crucial pieces to be fitted together, but unable to see how they could coalesce, nonplussed by the odd shapes and irregularities of the pieces, the intransigent way one could not be locked with what seemed to be its natural partner to make a satisfying whole, could be a metaphor that would carry all the way from the turn of the decade when he conjured up the image, through the 1930s. It would be a decade of despair and frustration for many, of confusion and stasis, and sometimes, in what seemed a purblind refusal to recognise the true nature of economic and social problems, of government inaction and public despair. Yet paradoxically, this decline would co-exist alongside rising wages and falling prices, a steady increase in living standards, a housing boom and unprecedented growth in domestic consumption. While abroad the thirties would be a decade of escalating tension and the rise of fascism — again met with uncertainty, irresolution, self-deception, misread signals, anxious hopes and missed opportunities — they were also years of experimentation, of hope, of resolution, of a confident belief that modernity had provided the tools with which to fashion a better future, above all a *planned* future, that mobilised politics, economics, science and the arts to build a brave new world (Aldous Huxley's novel — albeit a dystopia — was written in 1931 and published the following year). But while, of course, no one could be certain of the picture that would emerge from the disparate pieces at the start of 1930, there was the feeling that the coming decade would be significant. That the thirties would be very different from the twenties. As indeed they would.

The *Lady*, a magazine for women who lived a leisurely life in society, thought that 1930 'somehow assumes an added importance because it is a round number'. The magazine's columnist was 'curious' that given this 'added importance … most girls do not choose New Year's Day for their wedding instead of hastening to the altar in December. It seems such a very appropriate day for the beginning of a new life — or, at any rate a new enterprise.' One society girl did buck the trend in 1930 — though not entirely of her own volition: the wedding of Miss Zelia Hambro, daughter of Sir Percival Hambro of the merchant banking family, had to be rushed as the groom, Lieutenant Patrick Humphreys of the Royal Navy, was about to sail for China at short notice. For the wedding in Holy

Trinity church, Sloane Street, Chelsea, the bride chose 'a really lovely dress, far too good for any festivities on the China station', and her mother, who was 'rather keen on politics and belongs to the Ladies Imperial Club' no doubt enlivened proceedings on the day by being 'one of the few women in London who smokes cigars — real ones, and not the little affairs provided for women who prefer something stronger'.

There was, however, a more serious investment in marking the end of the 1920s, ten years stained by the memory of the Great War, in which 5.7 million British men had joined the armed forces, of whom three-quarters of a million had been killed and more than one and a half million seriously wounded. Proportionately this was less than the French and German losses, but there was an overwhelming feeling of a 'lost generation', as perhaps more than 30 per cent of all men aged between twenty and twenty-four in 1914 were killed in the war, and 28 per cent of those aged thirteen to nineteen. Many of those seriously wounded — physically or mentally — never recovered, and certainly never worked again: the sight of a blind or maimed ex-serviceman trying to scrape a living by selling matches or bootlaces in the street, or simply by begging, was commonplace throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Two and a half million men were sufficiently disabled to qualify for a state pension, which was calculated on a harsh sliding scale: those suffering from the loss of two or more limbs, or major facial disfigurement, qualified for a full pension (27s.6d a week); the loss of a whole right arm brought 90 per cent of that; if the arm was intact below the shoulder but had been amputated above the elbow, or the veteran was totally deaf, that netted 70 per cent, falling to fourteen shillings a week if the amputation was below the elbow or knee, or the sight of one eye had been lost. On the assumption that most men were right-handed, the award was a shilling a week less in each category if it was the left arm that was involved, though if 'only' two fingers on either hand had been blown away, a man would receive 5s.6d a week. More than that, the war had come to the Home Front, with air raids claiming some 1,400 civilian lives and leaving 3,400 wounded.

The reminders of the war were material in so many ways. Within months of the Armistice on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, war memorials to commemorate the dead were being built in cities, towns and villages all over Britain, and plaques were being screwed on the walls of railway stations, police stations, depots, schools and factories in honour of 'the fallen'. On many of them it was difficult to find space to carve the litany of the dead: in Lancashire, for example, the Chorley Pals (which became Y Company of the 11th Battalion, the East Lancashire Regiment) lost 758 officers and men. The architect of Imperial Delhi, Sir Edwin Lutyens, designed a simple concrete altar to those slaughtered in the war to stand in the middle of Whitehall: it would stand like a reproach on an axis that crossed from the Prime Minister's residence to the War Office. A nameless corpse was selected from those buried as 'unknown' near the trench-riddled wastelands of northern France, transported by boat and train in a coffin made from an oak felled at Hampton Court and lowered into a grave just inside the west entrance of Westminster Abbey. Covered with sandbags filled with sand from the Western Front, it was topped with a slab of black Tournai marble from Belgium bearing an inscription that included the words 'a British warrior unknown by name or rank'. King George V, finding himself — after a slow start — much affected by the notion, attended the funeral service for this poignant representative of Britain's lost generation on Armistice Day 1920 before unveiling Lutyens's stark concrete memorial. The ceremony concluded with a haunting rendition of the 'Last Post' that seemed to hang in the air.

Within five days over a million people had visited the grave and left hillocks of flowers at the cenotaph, and from that day forward Armistice Day has been commemorated throughout Britain by a two-minute silence as the eleventh hour strikes, those who fought and survived, and those who remembered, bowing their heads, in their buttonholes a fabric replica of the fragile, ubiquitous Flanders poppy adopted by the British Legion as the symbol of the debt owed to those whose blood seeped into the mud of the Western Front.

The new decade had a new government: David Lloyd George's wartime coalition had ended in 1922 when the Conservatives under Andrew Bonar Law withdrew their support, wishing to re-establish the old party system. Only it wasn't the old system: no longer was there a Conservative/Liberal duopoly alternating in power as it had throughout most of the nineteenth century, up until the First World War. Henceforth the Labour Party, which had only been founded in 1900, would provide the main opposition to the Conservatives. The Liberal Party had split during the war between those who were loyal to the former leader Herbert Asquith — known as 'Asquithian Liberals' — and those who grouped around Lloyd George — the 'National Liberals'.

After the 1922 election each faction claimed roughly the same number of MPs — between fifty and sixty — but the electoral system, which the Liberals had failed to reform when they had the opportunity, meant that with their support spread thinly across the country and the classes, they were increasingly doomed to be runners-up to Labour in industrial and urban seats, and to the Conservatives in wealthy and rural ones. Labour enjoyed its first taste of government — albeit a brief one — between January and November 1924. On taking power, the Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald had two objectives. One was to dispose of the Liberal Party, the other to prove that Labour was fit to govern. In both he succeeded, although the Liberal Party's decline was slow. However, by 1929 although the Liberals polled over five million votes, this translated into only fifty-nine MPs, mainly returned from Celtic fringe constituencies around the edge of Britain. By comparison the Conservatives won 260 seats and Labour 287.

The electorate that voted in the second Labour government that year had increased since 1918 by almost 30 per cent to nearly twenty-nine million — 91 per cent of the adult population were now eligible to vote, with women given the vote at the same age as men — twenty-one — rather than thirty, as had been the case when women's suffrage had first been granted in 1918.

The second Labour government had a small majority and a massive problem: unemployment. The Conservatives had narrowly lost the election campaigning under the slogan 'Safety First', copied from a campaign to reduce the number of road accidents. But it seemed that what was needed was less caution, and more action and imagination. The economy was out of balance, with more than a million workers unemployed on average throughout most of the 1920s.

The causes were complex: the war of course was partly to blame. The four years of conflict had cost — in monetary terms — £11,325 million, including loans to allies to help them fight the war; many of these, including those to Russia, would never be repaid. The war was paid for partly out of taxation, partly by liquidating foreign investment, but mainly by loans both from home and overseas. The national debt, which had stood at £620 million in 1914, had risen to £8,000 million by 1924 — the largest slice of it owed to the United States. This led to a vicious spiral: something approaching half the country's annual expenditure of £800 million went on servicing this debt, meaning that of the revenue raised by income tax, which had risen to an unprecedented five shillings in the pound by 1924, a quarter went towards debt repayment.

Stanley Baldwin, essentially Prime Minister when Ramsay MacDonald was not, that is three times between 1923 and 1937, was a Worcestershire ironmaster whose companies had profited from wartime munitions contracts. Baldwin made an honourable (and discreet) gesture by sending a personal cheque for £120,000 to the Treasury, and there was talk of a national levy. But the problem was not solely debt. The requirements of peace were very different from those of war, and the heavy industries that had expanded to fulfil military needs now found themselves with spare capacity and an export market cut by half, with American and Japanese manufacturers moving into former British markets.

Before the war Britain had been one of the most prosperous countries in the world. After a century and a half of economic growth, expanding trade and shrewd overseas investment, Britain could claim to be among the major industrialised nations and the undisputed hub of international trade and finance. Lancashire cotton mills produced sufficient yarn and textiles to clothe half the

world, the shipbuilders of the North-East alone produced a third of the world's output, Britain was the second largest producer of coal in the world; its merchant fleet accounted for almost half the world's tonnage, while Britain was a major international creditor with a large inflow of invisible earnings from investments, shipping and insurance.

However, there were serious long-term structural problems that exacerbated the consequences of war. Britain's prosperity had depended largely on 'old staples' — coal, iron, steel, textiles and shipbuilding — which had provided three-quarters of the country's exports and employed almost a quarter of the working population. At the turn of the century more recently industrialised countries such as Germany and the United States had challenged Britain's position as the 'workshop of the world', and were developing new industries such as chemicals, electrical goods and engineering more rapidly than Britain. The appeal of overseas investment, and a dependence on the Empire as the market for British goods, had led to a neglect of the domestic market and the opportunities offered by these new industries. By 1913 Britain's economic growth was little more than half what it had been in 1900, and its share of world trade had dropped from a third in 1870 to a seventh by 1914.

The necessities of war boosted Britain's traditional heavy industries — particularly those linked to the production of munitions and textiles, such as the Scottish jute industry, which was kept at full stretch manufacturing sandbags — and provided a stimulus to accelerate the development of newer ones such as electrical goods, aircraft and motor construction, precision engineering, radio and pharmaceuticals. A post-war boom fuelled by rising prices and the speculative investment of wartime profits lulled people into thinking that the normal rhythms of trade and production would soon be reasserted, and Britain would regain her pre-war markets. Indeed, there was a 'craze of speculation' in Lancashire, where old textile mills were bought and sold and new ones constructed in eager anticipation of an export boom, and shipyard owners shared a similar confidence. In 1920 coal still made up 9 per cent of Britain's exports — only 1 per cent less than in 1913. But the boom was short-lived: by 1921 increases in interest rates and a fall in prices on the world market hit exports, which in turn hit production, and by the winter of 1921–22 more than two million British men and women were unemployed. Cotton textile exports fell to less than half the 1913 figure by 1929, and would never again reach pre-war levels, while coal represented less than 7 per cent of exports: down from 287 million tons in 1913 to forty million by 1922.

It wasn't only the 'old staples' that were in decline: London was losing its pre-war position as the financial capital of the world as the City lost its exclusive authority over monetary policy at home. During the war financial exigencies had forced Britain off the Gold Standard, with the issue of paper £1 and ten-shilling notes that could no longer be converted directly into gold. Financial orthodoxy regarded a return to the Gold Standard as a prerequisite for economic stability: it was essential that the 'pound should look the dollar in the face'. As far as Lord Bradbury (a former head of the Treasury who chaired a committee appointed in 1924 to advise the newly appointed Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, on the matter) was concerned, it was not so much a question of whether the pound was overvalued in relation to the dollar, as of removing monetary policy from political influence: in his eyes the Gold Standard was 'knave-proof'. The Governor of the Bank of England, Montagu Norman, agreed: the Gold Standard was the best 'Governor' a fallibly human world could have. It was ominously portentous that the notion of the government 'meddling' in economic matters was regarded with suspicion and distaste. On the whole gold occupied the same iconic position for the Labour Party, and it was left to the economist John Maynard Keynes, who in *The Economic Consequences of Winston Churchill* (a title resonant of his Cassandra-like warnings of the effects of harsh reparation payments imposed on Germany in 1919, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace)*, published in 1925, to put the case against, or rather to point out the consequences if the Gold Standard was re-embraced. These included rising unemployment as the bank rate rose and cheap money was denied for industrial investment. In 1925 Britain went back onto the Gold Standard:

the bank rate averaged 5 per cent for the rest of the decade, making the country uncompetitive in the world market, particularly against the United States, which was enjoying boom conditions at the time.

How far and how deep would the pernicious stain of unemployment, which throughout the 1920s had never been less than a million, spread? How could men earn a living when the great staples on which Britain's industrial might had been built over nearly two centuries — iron, steel, textiles, coal, shipbuilding — were losing out to competition from Europe and the United States?

In coalmining areas such as South Wales, the Lowlands of Scotland and Lancashire, the future was bleak. Men had no work in the pits; women were laid off from the textile mills. British exports were no longer competitive in the world market. Labour costs were high — nearly double what they had been in 1914 — whereas the cost of living had only risen by 75 per cent, and the average working week had been reduced by ten hours. In crude terms, those in work were being paid more for working less. Hence the tensions between employers and their workforces — particularly in the mining industry — when international competition undercut prices and eroded markets.

How would Britain be governed, now that the old duopoly of Conservative and Liberal had been definitively replaced by new sparring partners: Labour and Conservative, alternating in power since neither seemed to have satisfactory answers to the country's economic and social ills. Would the bitter legacy of the 1926 General Strike be gradually softened, even though its collapse had brought no resolution to the fundamental problems that had caused it?

On 24 October 1929 on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, '12,894,650 shares changed hands, many of them at prices that shattered the dreams and hopes of those who had owned them', wrote the economist J.K. Galbraith in his book *The Great Crash*. Prices on the US market went into freefall, and financial companies as well as individual men and women who had speculated on the over-buoyant American economy lost their fortunes, or their modest savings, overnight. On that 'Black Thursday' (which would be followed by 'Black Monday' and 'Black Tuesday') a record 12.9 million shares were traded: the press reported losses of $30 billion over four days, and there were rumours that eleven speculators had already committed suicide. Watching the 'wild turmoil' on the floor from the public gallery of the New York Stock Exchange was Winston Churchill, former British Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'he who in 1925 had returned Britain to the Gold Standard and the overvalued pound. Accordingly he was responsible for the strain that sent Montagu Norman to plead in New York for easier money, which caused credit to be eased at that fatal time, which, in this academy view, in turn caused the boom. Now Churchill, it could be imagined, was viewing his awful handiwork.' However, there is no record of anyone having reproached him. Economics was never his strong point, so (and wisely) it seems most unlikely that he reproached himself. But, having invested heavily in the market, he himself lost a large percentage of his savings when it crashed, though he waxed philosophical: 'No one who has gazed on such a scene could doubt that this financial disaster, huge as it is, cruel as it is to thousands, is only a passing episode.'

The US market continued to decline, reaching its lowest point in July 1932, when it had fallen 89 per cent from its peak in 1929. Unemployment went from 1.5 million in 1929 to 12.8 million, or 24.75 per cent of the workforce, by 1933. 'Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers, liquidate real estate,' the Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, had advised. 'It will purge the rottenness out of the system … People will work harder, live a more moral life. Values will be adjusted and enterprising people will pick up the wrecks from less competent people.'

The Great Depression bit deeper in America (as it did in Germany) than it did in Britain, and lasted much longer, but although J.M. Keynes couldn't help 'heaving a big sigh of relief at what seemed like the removal of an incubus which has been lying heavily on the business life of the whole world outside America', the effect of the Wall Street Crash on trade worldwide would prove deleterious in the next few years. The US government initially raised tariffs against foreign imports and its overseas investment all but dried up, forcing Europe to pay for imports and pay off debts in gold which was sucked into the vaults of America (and France, which had somehow managed to stand aside from the

economic crisis). This had serious long-term consequences for the international circulation of money, and led to a collapse in commodity prices and an economic slowdown. ‘Almost throughout the world, gold has been withdrawn from circulation. It no longer passes from hand to hand, and the touch of metal has been taken from men’s greedy palms’ Keynes noted.

Yet, speaking only a matter of weeks after that cacophony of black days in New York and growing anxiety about their effect on Britain’s already ailing, out-of-joint economy, Gerald Barry thought he saw some scattered green shoots, a few straws in the wind that he might clutch at: the summer of 1929 had witnessed a lockout in the cotton industry which was solved, he said, ‘on the principle of rough justice whereby Solomon cut the baby in half’, meaning that each side agreed to accept 50 per cent of what it wanted. He was optimistic that the *rapprochement* between capital and labour begun in 1929 by the Melchett-Turner conversations (tentative corporatist interchanges between Lord Melchett — or Sir Alfred Mond, as he had been until 1928 — chairman of the recently amalgamated giant chemical firm ICI, and the trade union leader Ben Turner, which ultimately led nowhere) had been ‘further cemented’. And he also saw signs of co-operation paying dividends in agriculture, ‘that Cinderella of home industries’, with initiatives from the Ministry of Agriculture for a series of marketing schemes for foodstuffs such as flour, fruit, eggs and meat.

The shadow of the Great War had darkened the 1920s; in the 1930s men and women would grow to maturity who had no memory of that terrible carnage, and on the cusp of the decades international peace and accommodation seemed assured, with the Labour Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson’s agreement to withdraw the last British troops from the Rhine. Confrontations between the incorruptible Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Snowden and the ever-rotating French Finance Ministers showed, however, that tensions over the peace treaty of 1919 were by no means entirely relaxed, and the issue of war debts to the United States continued to be a live and fractious issue. Even so, perhaps Barry’s optimism was justified. Perhaps Britain’s economic and social ills really could still be put down to the working out of the dislocations of war, the turbulence could be expected to fade away, the normal rhythms of trade and production would reassert themselves, and British society would return to an equilibrium that it had, in fact, never really known.

TWO *A Great Clearance*

… An utterly lost and daft
System that gives a few at fancy prices
Their fancy lives
While ninety-nine in the hundred who never attend the banquet
Must wash the grease of ages off the knives …
Louis MacNeice, 'Autumn Journal' (1939)

The post of Poet Laureate, official versifier, has had a chequered history. Originating with John Dryden in 1670, it has had its peaks — Wordsworth, Tennyson — and its troughs — possibly Colley Cibber, possibly Robert Southey (who only got the laurel wreath because Sir Walter Scott declined), certainly Alfred Austin (who was wheeled on because William Morris refused). When the scholarly, pantheistic Robert Bridges (who was only in post because Rudyard Kipling had said no) died on 21 April 1930, the honorary position as a member of the royal household (ranking between the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod and the Marine Painter in the arcane hierarchy), carrying a nugatory stipend, was offered to John Masefield. He had his doubts: 'I can write verse only in moments of deep feeling … this may perhaps be a disqualification,' he wrote on 30 April to Ramsay MacDonald, who had offered to submit his name for royal approval — a mere formality, particularly since it was rumoured that Masefield was George V's favourite poet. The Prime Minister must have had many more pressing matters on his mind, but he took time out to reply to the havering fifty-one-year-old poet, reassuring him that should the spirit move him, he could 'write odes and such things' on occasions of national import, but if it did not, he could keep quiet. Masefield accepted, but made it clear that as a writer committed to the cause of 'the man with too weighty a burden, too heavy a load', he would *not* define his task as being to acclaim 'The princes and prelates with periwigged charioteers/Riding triumphantly laurelled to lap the fat of the years'. He would hold the post for thirty-seven years until his death in 1967, a longer tenure than any of his predecessors except Tennyson.

John Masefield had long hymned the sea and the men who went down to the sea in ships (although he himself was an indifferent sailor who failed in his first choice of career in the Merchant Navy, and on one occasion had to be shipped home from Chile as a DBS — Distressed British Seaman). In 1934 the perfect opportunity to fuse his maritime yearnings with the gravitas of a national event presented itself. Masefield rose to the challenge with a seven-stanza poem entitled, rather unpromisingly, 'Number 534'. '… Man in all the marvel of his thought/Smithied you into form of leap and curve,' he wrote, 'And took you so, and bent you to his vast/Intense great world of passionate design/Curve after changing curving, bracing and mast/To stand all tumult that can tumble brine.' Far from being one of Masefield's best-known 'dirty British coaster[s] with a salt-caked smoke stack … With a cargo of Tyne coal/Road-rail, pig-lead/Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays', 'Number 534' was the largest ocean-going liner ever built, the *Queen Mary*, and the occasion of his tribute was the ship's launch, when in pouring rain on 26 September 1934 in front of a crowd of 200,000 mostly umbrella-holding spectators, the consort whose name the vessel carried, the wife of George V, dressed in powder blue, smashed a bottle of Australian wine over her bows, pressed a button, and the massive 81,000-ton Cunard liner, 'long as a street and lofty as a tower' and looking like a 'great white cliff', slipped into the Clyde.

The *Queen Mary* represented many things. It was a gamble that despite a world depression this luxury liner, this super ship, would enable Britain to recapture its prestige on the seas, would win the coveted Blue Riband for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic, and would rekindle a glamorous and moneyed lifestyle that seemed lost. And yet, though its elaborate and luxurious interiors, its fabulous menus, its non-stop programme of entertainment seemed to hold out such a promise, the construction of the *Queen Mary* could be seen as an unfolding metaphor for the ambitious intentions, the rigid

yet muddled thinking, the collective misery and dashed hopes of British industrial production in the early 1930s.

British shipbuilding had suffered a similar fate to other heavy industries in the 1920s: a sharp decline from the First World War, when orders had flooded in for battleships, the big yards on the Clyde had expanded their capacity and their workforce to cope with military orders. When the war ended it seemed natural that the requirement for warships would be replaced by the need for a steady supply of merchant vessels, many of them to replace those lost at sea during hostilities. Indeed, foreseeing a boom in merchant orders John Brown & Co. had injected a huge capital sum of £316,000 into the facilities at their Clydebank yard, and shipbuilding companies merged and acquired control of the majority of Scotland's steel industry. For the first two years after the war it looked as if this would pay off: between December 1918 and December 1920 Clydebank received orders for twelve merchant ships, including seven for the Royal Mail, two large passenger liners, the *Franconia* and the *Alaunia* for the Cunard line, and another two, the *Montcalm* and the *Montclare*, for Canadian Pacific.

But in fact the industry was facing a series of problems, the most pressing of which was a decline in world trade. Added to this were technical innovations that had improved speeds and shipping capacity, meaning that what trade there was could be carried in fewer ships, fierce overseas competition, and at home overmanning, fractious industrial relations, underinvestment in new technologies — particularly the switch from steam to diesel — unprofitable credit arrangements, cut-to-the-bone profit margins and a high rate of emigration of skilled workers, mainly to Canada. As a result, by 1930, when almost no new orders were coming in, the shipyards had already been in deep trouble for some years. The only hope on the horizon was the announcement in May 1930 of an order from Cunard for an ocean-going liner. Without it, John Brown's yard would probably have had to close, with the loss of thousands of jobs. The insurance liability for the liner while she was being built and when she put to sea was reckoned at £4 million, but the commercial marine insurance market was only prepared to cover £2.7 million. The whole project was at risk, but eventually the government, only too aware of the political as well as the economic and social implications of thousands of shipworkers being thrown out of work, agreed to cover the shortfall of £1.3 million itself, though *The Times* had sounded a cautionary note: 'Is it wise that Parliament should be asked to lend a hand on a project planned on so colossal a scale that private enterprise could not find the means to carry it through?'

On 1 December 1930 the contract was finally signed, and on the day after Boxing Day, 'a particularly raw, foggy winter's day [when] the electric lights under the cranes of the building berth had to be put on soon after three in the afternoon', the hull plate was laid and named Job No. 534. It would mean three to four years' work, and 'so strong was the grim enthusiasm of managers, foremen and workers in their determination to have something to show at the end of that first day after all the months of waiting that work continued in the wet and the darkness well into the night'.

By the end of January 1931 the whole of the keel had been laid, and the lower ribs and frame were in position. With three shifts working round the clock the skeleton of the hull had been completed by late spring. By November 80 per cent of the hull plating had been riveted into place and the great liner loomed above Clydebank, its graceful bows dwarfing men and machines. There was a general feeling of optimism that ship No. 534 would be launched in May or June 1932, ready to vie with France's pride, the *Normandie*, currently under construction in Saint-Nazaire, for the Atlantic crown.

But that crown was already tarnished. Fewer passengers were making the crossing, about half as many as had done so in 1926, and those who did were less lavish in their spending: British earnings from passenger ships had been over £9 million in 1928; by 1931 they had fallen to less than £4 million, and foreign competition for fewer passengers was fierce.

On Thursday, 10 December 1931, the directors of Cunard in Liverpool decided that the Clydebank project was no longer viable: the plug was pulled on ship No. 534. At seven o'clock the next morning a notice was nailed up in John Brown's shipyard. 'The services of all employees … will

terminate at noon today.' Three thousand men directly employed on building the ship were sacked, and 10,000 men and women at work on subsidiary contracts for electrical equipment and all the other parts needed to build and equip such a liner were also affected, either losing their jobs or put onto short-time working.

The directors blamed 'world conditions'. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that while the announcement 'proved somewhat of a shock in the City … the wisdom of the decision was not questioned', though the newspaper recognised that the cessation of the project was 'an industrial catastrophe', and suggested that 'Even as an emergency measure for the prevention of unemployment a government loan or guarantee of cheap money would be a far sounder business proposition than most of the "unemployment schemes" in which public money has been sunk … here is an obvious case for government help.'

But the government did not see it like that. Speaking in the House of Commons that same afternoon, the President of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman, rejected the idea: 'I am afraid that any idea of direct government financial assistance is out of the question.' Offers poured into the Cunard Company from individuals willing to lend money to see the ship completed, and Will Thorne MP, General Secretary to the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, tirelessly lobbied the government to 'supply the necessary money needed to complete the work at a reasonable rate of interest'. The Labour MP for Clydebank and Dumbarton, David Kirkwood, a trade unionist who had himself worked at John Brown's shipyard, 'had "534" engraved on his heart', and for two years he 'outdid the importunate widow … I had written, spoken, pleaded, cajoled, threatened men and masters, shipbuilders and ship owners, Cabinet Ministers and financiers.' But no help was forthcoming. By the beginning of 1932 the Clyde was building fewer ships than at any time since 1860. Almost the only people still employed in the shipyards were 'black-coated' workers such as foremen and draughtsmen. Other shipyards were as badly hit as John Brown's and had either chained their gates shut or kept only a skeleton staff. Since the only other source of employment was the Singer sewing-machine factory, from which half the workforce had been laid off, Clydebank became a town of the unemployed, and the vast, gaunt hulk of the unfinished liner a daily reminder of that fact. And the symbol resonated beyond the banks of the Clyde. 'I believe that as long as No. 534 lies like a skeleton in my constituency so long will the depression last in this country,' David Kirkwood told the Commons. 'To me it seems to shout "Failure! Failure!" to the whole of Britain.'

By 1933 almost 75 per cent of shipbuilding workers in Scotland were unemployed. Edwin Muir, a poet and novelist born on Orkney whose family had moved to Glasgow, where he had worked as a clerk in a shipyard office, found when he revisited his former workmates that half had been laid off, and those who were still at their desks were on half time (and half pay). All were sunburned, an unwelcome mark then of the un- and underemployed who spent too many hours outside, hanging around, digging allotments, scavenging for coal and wood. 'The dead on leave' was how Muir described Britain's unemployed, borrowing the phrase ('die *Toten auf Urlaub')* from the German socialist Rosa Luxembourg.

It was not until 3 April 1934 that work resumed on No. 534. With a slow upturn in the economy, and concerned for British maritime prestige, particularly with the spectre of the *Normandie*, the government finally agreed to advance £3 million to complete the work, plus a further £5 million if it was decided to build a sister ship, as had been the original plan. A skirl of bagpipes accompanied the three hundred workers who marched through the gates of John Brown's shipyard to scour off the tons of accumulated rust on the hulk, displace the colonies of birds nesting there, and resume building. Soon some one thousand men from all over the country were supplying what was needed to complete the liner later that summer.

One of the conditions of the government loan had been that Cunard should merge with White Star Lines, creating a strong British firm to compete for the North Atlantic trade. So-called 'rationalisation' was seen as the key to increasing efficiency and productivity, and allaying schemes of

nationalisation which would cut a swathe through Britain's staple industries. It was an *au courant* term even if no one was quite sure what it meant, and it invariably meant the merger of larger companies, with smaller ones left on the sidelines. The Labour MP for Jarrow, Ellen Wilkinson, wrote of this tendency in the Tyneside shipyards: 'If the lambs would not lie down with the lions, the lions were ready to co-operate together to make certain of their victims later.' Such mergers meant that by 1937 twenty-eight British shipyards, with a total capacity of over a million tons, had been put out of business. The men thus displaced were unlikely to be absorbed into other industries. Until 1938 the highest rates of unemployment in any British industry were in shipbuilding: not just along the Clyde, but in Belfast, the North-East of England and on Merseyside too. When Palmer's shipyard closed in 1932, 'Jarrow was utterly stagnant. There was no work. No one had a job except a few railway officials, and workers in the co-operative stores, and the few clerks and craftsmen who went out of town to their jobs each day.' Across the country 60 per cent of those who had worked building or repairing ships were unemployed, compared to an average unemployment rate of around 22 per cent.

But the decay of Britain's staple traditional industries, on which the country's nineteenth-century prosperity had been based, was not confined to shipbuilding. Coal, iron, steel, heavy engineering and cotton accounted for more than 40 per cent of total unemployment, and in areas where they were concentrated — Teesside, South Wales and Monmouthshire, Tyneside, Cumberland, Lowland Scotland and Lancashire — the unemployment figure was much higher than the average: in some cases staggeringly high. In July 1931 Jarrow's employment exchange reported that 72.6 per cent of its workforce was unemployed, and in Ferndale in the Rhondda Valleys, 96.5 of those in jobs covered by insurance contributions from workers, employers and the government were out of work. In the worst of times — 1932 — nearly a third of all coalminers were unemployed, and even in 1936, when the economy was in upswing, a quarter of all coalminers were still without work, as were almost a third of iron and steelworkers.

'Everybody knows that there are at present in England prosperous districts and "depressed areas",' explained *Men Without Work*, a report from the Pilgrim Trust, which had been established in 1930 under the chairmanship of Stanley Baldwin with a £2 million gift from Edward Harkness, an American philanthropist who had inherited a vast oil fortune and who, proud that his ancestors came from Dumfries, took a most munificent interest in Britain, its society and culture, at a time when his own country was also in the throes of a deep depression.

The 'prosperous districts' were to be found mainly in the Midlands and the South of England: 'a line from the Severn to the Wash' was generally recognised as roughly delineating the areas of prosperity from those of 'distress'. Although the Yorkshire novelist and playwright J.B. Priestley famously came across three rather than two 'Englands' in his 'rambling but truthful account of what one man saw and heard and felt and thought during a journey through England during the autumn of the year 1933', he reported finding prosperity in only two of these. It was apparent in much of the first, 'Old England, the country of cathedrals and minsters, of manor houses and inns, of Parson and Squire; guide-book and quaint highways and by ways England', the Cotswolds, parts of rural 'middle England', most of Southern England, and also in the third, 'the new post-war England … of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings … all glass and white tiles and chromium plate … of giant dance-halls and cafés, bungalows with tiny garages'. It was largely in 'new post-war England' around London and in the Midlands — Leicester 'claims to be the most prosperous city in England' — that the new industries were located. Indeed, they and the lifestyles they engendered defined Priestley's somewhat scornful characterisation, since he did not much care for the 'third England' he had happened across, with its 'depressing monotony', its 'trumpery imitation of something not very good in the original' (that is, 'American influence') and its general 'Woolworths culture' of cheapness — and, he admitted, accessibility — defined by money.

Such recently established and expanding industries as light engineering, artificial-textile and motor-vehicle manufacture, electrical goods (the national grid, which was completed in 1933,

provided a stimulus for the manufacture of electrically-powered domestic appliances such as radios, cookers, vacuum cleaners, gramophones and electric irons) were invariably smaller-scale than the old industrial giants, and often a number of diverse enterprises were located in one place, each employing fewer people, but less vulnerable to the vagaries of world trade, particularly as many were producing goods primarily for the home market, and were concentrated where that market was dense.

However, in the depressed regions the most deeply disquieting fact was not just the number of unwilling conscripts into the army of the unemployed — an estimated nearly three and a half million in total in 1932, at the deepest trough of the Depression — and their concentration in certain areas: it was the length of time some of them had been without a job. Long-term unemployment was defined as having been out of work for more than a year. In September 1929 about 45,000 were in that category; by August 1932 the number had risen to 400,000, or over 16 per cent of the unemployed workforce. In Crook, in County Durham, 71 per cent of the unemployed had been without a job for five years or more, while the figure for the Rhondda Valley in South Wales was 41 per cent, and for Liverpool 23 per cent. Even in a generally prosperous city such as York, where the overall rate of unemployment was relatively low, Seebohm Rowntree's 1935 survey found that 21.9 per cent of unemployed heads of families had been out of work for between two and four years, 23.6 per cent for four to six years, and 17.9 per cent for over six.

Moreover, the numbers proved obdurate. The Pilgrim Trust reported that while there had been optimism that with industrial recovery growing rapidly after 1935, labour would start to resemble 'a fairly rapidly moving stream with only small stagnant pools here and there'. But the murky water that the long-term unemployed represented proved deep and still. While the total number of those without work fell, the proportion of those idle for longer than a year stayed roughly the same. 'Recovery had failed to solve the problem. On the contrary, as the unemployment figures fell, the seriousness [of the matter of the long-term unemployed] became more and more obvious.' Indeed, in the month before Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939 there were still nearly a quarter of a million long-term unemployed, men with little chance of ever working again — at least in peacetime.

The problem of the long-term unemployed particularly exercised politicians, economists and social scientists — either for the insight the phenomenon might provide into the nature of industrial decline, the prospects for recovery and the seemingly unstoppable rise in the cost of unemployment insurance and relief, or to help them discover if the problem was 'industrial' (that is, the long-term unemployed would get work if there was work to be got) or 'residual' (that is, was there a 'type' who were in some way 'inadequate', physically, psychologically or morally for the world of work?). Sir William Beveridge, later to garner for himself the accolade 'father of the Welfare State', had written and lectured on the subject extensively, and had suggested to the Pilgrim Trust that this was 'the crux of the matter', and worthy of extensive investigation.

What were the effects of such unemployment, particularly in single-industry towns where the decay of the staple industry polluted not only the lives of those thrown out of work with little hope of a job, but impoverished the whole community? As the Pilgrim Trust put it: 'Beyond the man in the queue we should always be aware of those two or three at home whom he has to support.' It calculated that the 250,000 long-term unemployed were responsible for 170,000 wives and 270,000 young children, 'whose burden is perhaps the heaviest of all'.

'Attention has been repeatedly drawn by the Minister of Labour … and many others, to the extent to which unemployment is "an old man's problem",' reported the Pilgrim Trust. Men in their middle years were less likely to remain without work for long: across the country 13 per cent of men between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four were unemployed, but for those between fifty-five and sixty-four the percentage was 22.6 — though of course this number was much higher in areas with the highest levels of unemployment. Men over fifty were noticeably less likely to find another job in times of high unemployment, since employers tended to regard such old-stagers as less flexible, less able to 'adjust' to modern working methods and technologies. This was seen as a particular problem

in the Welsh coalfields, where life in the pits began early: 'When he is 35 a man has already been at work for more than twenty years underground, and above that age adjustment [to new methods of coal cutting and other forms of mechanised production] begins to get harder.'

In addition, years cutting coal underground, often with scant concern for health or safety, made relatively young men old. A feature of life in the coalmines was the high incidence of disabling industrial diseases such as nystagmus and silicosis among the older miners with a (shortened) lifetime of breathing in coal dust. 'The Coal Mines Act was flagrantly broken day in, day out, year in year out,' remembers Kenneth Maher, who started work in the Bedwas colliery near Newport in Monmouthshire aged fourteen in January 1930, earning 12s.4d a week for six eight-hour shifts. Apart from the danger of explosion from the methane gas that collected in the underground passages, or the couplings breaking on the heavy metal tubs that conveyed the coal, 'the coal-cutting machines cut out the seams, raising clouds of dust. When the compressed air exhaust caught it, when the colliers shovelled it on to the conveyors, when it tipped into the tubs, it was like black fog travelling into the ventilation. A miner in South Wales who is free from dust is called a wet lung. There is a difference between silicosis and pneumoconiosis. The stone dust [found in the stones at the bottom of pits] sets like cement [in the lungs] but coal doesn't. Particles of silica cut into the lungs and kill the tissue. I remember taking my wife to my brother's home. We saw a man leaning over a low wall. My wife said, "Whatever is the matter with that man?" "That," I said, "is what dust does to a man." He was gasping and coughing his lungs up. He was dying on his feet. He was 45 years old.'

Furthermore, older men were less likely to be offered the opportunity of learning a new trade, or of relocating to find work, and thus were forced into what was in effect early retirement whether they wanted — or could afford — it or not. And usually they couldn't afford it, since with no older children still living at home who could have contributed to the family budget, the older unemployed worker was likely to be living on an income which was only half what it would have been if he was in work.

At the other end of the age range, young, untrained men often found similar difficulties in getting steady work. The school leaving age was fourteen, and only those whose family could afford to send them to grammar school, or who had won a scholarship, had any hope of secondary education. Most working-class children left elementary school at fourteen and, like Jim Wolveridge from Stepney in the East End of London, found themselves at a disadvantage. 'I went into a dead end job … Not many kids in the neighbourhood did get good jobs … I spent a few weeks calling at the juvenile exchange at Toynbee Hall, but the few vacancies that were available were for boys who'd had secondary or grammar school education. That left me, and a good many more like me, out in the cold.'

Charles Graham was born in South Shields on the north-east coast of England, 'a beautiful place. There's beautiful scenery there' — but little work. When he left school at fourteen in 1930 he 'went round the quay trying to get to sea because this was the dream in that area. But after a year I got a job as a lather boy at a barber's. Five shillings a week. I was there for about eight months. I knew I wasn't going to learn how to cut hair because he didn't want to teach me because he was afraid for his job. This was general. People were afraid of letting you know their little secrets. It was only short back and sides after all … Then I got a job as an errand boy in a grocer's shop. Trade was really competitive. One grocer's shop next to another … I used to have to fill these seven or fourteen pound bags of flour and deliver the orders … I used to have a sack barrow for deliveries and I had to walk about five miles [there] and five miles back … When I was seventeen I managed to get work from a lady who owned two hardware shops and a wholesale grocery business … My take home pay was 13/6d [minus five shillings a week deducted to repay his employer for driving lessons] (I would have had 14/- on the dole).'

Graham started work sweeping out the shop at 6 a.m., and 'very often did not finish work until eight or nine p.m. (but there was no overtime pay) … I got a job as a driver for a biscuit factory. I was only 17 then and I had a huge van … You had to go at 60 miles an hour to get round … I managed to get a job with Wall's ice cream once. With a tricycle. I was getting about 32/- a week. A fortune for

me.' But that came to an end too, and Graham got a job on a building site. 'My stepfather knew the builder. That's why I got the job … A lot of apprentices were used as cheap labour on the building site. They'd be signed on as apprentices and work for about four hours on the site and all they'd be doing was wheeling a barrow and stacking bricks like I was doing. And then when the building was completed the apprentices would be out before they'd even started laying bricks. Anyway, that lasted about eighteen months. Then I was unemployed again looking for work … During the slump you couldn't join the Army because there were so many. There was such a great demand to get into the forces, to get away from it, although the wages were only 14/- a week, with stoppages out of that. But they were so selective, just like the police. The police could say six foot, and that was your lot, and so much chest because they had anyone to choose from.' Eventually, when war broke out in 1939, Charles Graham was able to join the army. 'I don't suppose 90 per cent of the men in the army with me would have been able to get in two years before because of malnutrition. But when war broke out, they were all fit.'

Many others, taken on as cheap labour when they left school at fourteen, might find that once they reached eighteen, when by law their employer had to contribute towards their unemployment insurance, they were sacked. Being both less experienced than older men (and often untrained), and more expensive than the next wave of school leavers, a long period of unemployment followed in those regions where jobs were scarce anyway.

Donald Kear lost his job a fortnight before his twentieth birthday in 1933: 'I was a machine attendant at a small factory [in the Forest of Dean, where coalmining was the predominant industry] and it was the custom of my employer to discharge employees when they became older and more expensive to him and employ younger lads in their place. There was plenty of labour available. Young lads were hanging around the factory gates every day looking for work.'

Jack Shaw 'went butchering' when he left school in Ashton-under-Lyne, just outside Manchester. 'The idea in my dad's mind was that I was going to learn a trade. But there was a lot of butchers and he picked the wrong one. He was probably only making enough to keep his self. He gave me five shillings a week. Then I got seven and sixpence. When I got [to] about eighteen I come to ten shillings a week and he couldn't pay me any more. He said "I'll give you a reference, and that's about all I can do. I just hope you can get a job." So that's when I had my first experience of the dole.'

'I am glad that I haven't a son,' said an unemployed Welsh miner vehemently. 'It must be a heartbreaking business to watch your boy grow into manhood and then see him deteriorate because there is no work for him. And yet there are scores of young men in the Valley who have never worked since the age of sixteen … at sixteen they become insurable, and the employers sack them rather than face the extra expense. So we have young men who have never had a day's work since. They have nothing to hope for but aimless drift. I'm glad no son of mine is in that position.'

Even those signing up for apprenticeships in industries such as engineering or shipbuilding might be no better off, since when they had completed their training the depressed state of the industry could mean there were no jobs. Around 4 per cent of juveniles (those aged fourteen to eighteen) were unemployed, but again this varied from area to area. In 1933, 10 per cent of boys and 9 per cent of girls available for work in Sheffield, a depressed city, were unemployed. The true figure of young people without work was undoubtedly much higher, as these statistics relate only to sixteen-to-eighteen-year-olds: those under sixteen did not qualify for unemployment benefit, and therefore were not registered at the Labour Exchange. The implications for the future of large numbers of young people without skills, proper training or any real prospect of regular employment was bleak, not only for the individuals but for the national economy. 'They tell me I haven't the experience and they'll not give me the chance of getting it,' one young man reported in a Carnegie Trust survey complained, while others felt fed up with being 'messed around'. The Pilgrim Trust was disquieted to discover that in Liverpool there were 'large numbers of young men to be found who "don't want work"'.

During the 1930s employers in depressed areas knew that they could take their pick from a large pool of the workless, and tended to shun those in shabby clothes or exhibiting tendencies to demoralisation and apathy, the inevitable consequences of long months stretching into years searching for work. The Unemployment Assistance Board stressed problems that arose from 'loss of industrial efficiency' in the long-term unemployed. E. Wight Bakke, a young American who came to Britain in 1931 on a Yale fellowship to study the problem of unemployment, was not alone in concluding that 'even a short period of unemployment handicapped a man in his efforts to market his labour … The handicap increased with the length of time out of work … [long-term unemployment leads] to the slow death of all that makes a man ambitious, industrious and glad to be alive.'

So the dreary spiral was perpetuated: no work increasingly seen as a disqualification for work. The Pilgrim Trust also found that anyone with a minor physical defect such as a speech impediment, a slight limp, or even being short of stature, might be discriminated against, regardless of whether this was in any way relevant to the sort of work he was likely to be required to do, when there was an embarrassment of 'perfect specimens' for hire.

Disconsolate groups of the long-term unemployed, shabbily dressed, hanging round street corners slicked black by rain against a background of boarded-up shops, lounging against lamp-posts, playing desultory games in the gutter, kicking a tin around in lieu of a football, watched by ragged, grimy-faced urchins, have become a familiar image of the 1930s, captured in grainy *Picture* Post-like photographs in the years before *Picture Post* existed. The young Canadian writer George Woodcock described a typical scene when he took a free holiday from his 'wretchedly paid' job in London with a Welsh aunt in a small town in Glamorgan:

One day I decided to take a bus and visit the Rhondda area, the heart of the South Wales mining district … It was the worst of times in the Rhondda, though it probably looked little better than the best of times, since most of the mines were not working, and the smoke that would normally have given a dark, satanic aspect to the landscape was less evident than in more prosperous times. Still it was dismal enough … it had the feeling of occupied territory. Many of the shops had gone out of business, the mines had slowed down years ago, and the General Strike of 1926 — disastrous for workers — had delivered the coup de grace to the local economy. The people were shabby and resentful. Groups of ragged men squatted on their haunches, as miners do, and played pitch-and-toss with buttons, they had no halfpennies to venture. A man came strolling down the street, dejectedly whistling 'The Red Flag' in slow time as if it were a dirge.

Caught in a downpour of rain, Woodcock was

a sad, sodden object … as I came down into the valley beside a slag heap where fifty or so men and women were industriously picking over the ground. I caught up with a man walking along the overgrown road from the mine to the village, whose damp slate roofs I could see glistening about half a mile away. He was pushing a rusty old bicycle that had no saddle and no tires, but it served to transport the dirty gunnysack he had tied onto the handlebars. He had been picking up coal from the slag heap. 'No bigger nor walnuts, man,' he explained. The big coal had been taken years ago, so long ago was it that work had been seen in the village. I asked him how long he had been unemployed. 'Ach y fi, man, it's nine years I've been wasting and wasted.' … He apologetically remarked that these days nobody had a fire in the village except to cook the mid-day dinner, if there was anything to cook, so I'd find it difficult to dry my clothes. Then he suddenly brightened. 'Try the Brachi shop, man. They'll have a fire, sure to goodness. And it's glad they'll be for a couple of pence to dry your clothes.'

Long ago an Italian named Brachi had found his way into one of the Welsh mining villages and had established a modest café. Others had followed him, but his name had clung, and Italian cafés in the Rhondda were generically called Brachi shops. The Brachi shop in Rhondda Fach was a melancholy place, its front in need of a paint, a sheet of old cardboard filling the broken part of the window in which stood a few dummy packets of tea and biscuits. A dejected girl came from the back. Her black hair and olive complexion were Mediterranean, but her voice had the lilt of Wales. She

looked at me hostilely when I talked about a fire, and I think I was humiliating her into admitting that they, too, lit the fire only at mealtimes. Nobody came for meals anymore. So I spent my tuppence on a cup of tea, which she languidly made on a primus stove. She thawed a little as the kettle warmed up, and talked of her longing to go to London. I hope she got there.

The Orcadian poet Edwin Muir witnessed the state of the unemployed in Scotland when he took a journey there in 1934 at the request of the publishers of J.B. Priestley's *English Journey:*

It was a warm, overcast summer day: groups of idle, sullen-looking young men stood at the street corners; smaller groups were wandering among the blue black ranges of pit-dumps which in that region are a substitute for nature; the houses looked empty and unemployed like their tenants; and the road along which the car stumbled was pitted and rent, as if it had recently been under shell-fire. Everything had the look of a Sunday that had lasted for many years, during which the bells had forgotten to ring and the Salvation Army, with its accordions and concertinas had gone into seclusion, so that one did not even bother to put on one's best clothes: a disused, slovenly, everlasting Sunday. The open shops had an unconvincing yet illicit look, and the few black-dusted miners whom I saw trudging home seemed hardly to believe in their own existence … A century ago there was a great clearance from the Highlands, which still rouses the anger of the people living there. At present, on a far bigger scale, a silent clearance is going on in industrial Scotland, a clearance not of human beings, but of what they depend on for life.

THREE *Dole Country*

This word dole has two meanings. It means a charitable distribution, especially a rather niggardly one. It also means, or did mean, in its archaic use, a man's lot or destiny. We have contrived most artfully to combine these two meanings. As I looked back on it, the England of the dole did not seem to me to be a pleasant place. We could not be proud of its creation. We could not really afford to be complacent about it, although we often are. It's a poor shuffling job, and one of our worst compromises.

J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (1934)

'At the present time I am out of work,' recorded Frank Forster in his diary on Saturday, 14 December 1935. 'I have been out for 3 or 4 weeks. I am safe for 6 months on the Labour and for this period will receive each week 17/-. But what is to happen after that if I do not get a job, I just don't know.' Forster, who was in his mid-twenties and of strongly left-leaning persuasions, lived at home in Saltney in Cheshire with his father, who worked in the sanitation department of the local rural district council, his mother and one of his two sisters (the other was married). 'During the past few years my life has consisted of a series of periods of unemployment spaced out with periods of employment' — as a fitter's mate, in horticulture and as a casual labourer.

Life at home was not easy:

Our family at the present time is in rather straitened financial circumstances. From father's side came only 9/- Union benefit. [Forster's father was in hospital with 'the old stomach trouble'.] Mother gets 10/- from cleaning at a public house in the village. Hilda [his sister] gives in about 8/- or 9/- from her wages. She is working on a stall in Chester market. I give 8/- out of the 17/- which I get from the Labour Exchange. We have had to cut down considerably on various things and are able to buy only necessities. We are helped a great deal by our various relatives who now and again give us food or money … There is at times talk of me getting a job somewhere no matter what it is or what the money being paid is. I do not relish making small money. [I] would sooner die fighting and starving than live cringing and in slavery. The thrill which I get out of the situation is the thought of what might happen when my point of view clashes with the law or with authority when our family is bought to the point of starvation, to Poor Law level. Then, at that time, I would be able to come into my own and express my opinion against this damnable society.

The Forsters' pared-down family income would not have been unusual in an area where there was little regular work to be had — nor would Frank's feelings of frustration as a youngish man with apparently no prospects. The money he received was unemployment insurance benefit, since at some point he had worked in the building trade, which was covered by the government insurance scheme that had been in existence since before the First World War.

An unemployed married man with two children still at school who was covered by the insurance scheme would receive thirty shillings per week, or half the national average wage of £3. This benefit was paid at a flat rate regardless of previous earnings, and the scheme was intended to insure the worker against unemployment, *not* against poverty. As the author of an informative if briskly upbeat coda, 'The State Services for the Unemployed', to *Time to Spare*, a book of a BBC series of talks published in 1935 which gave the unemployed 'a chance to speak out freely, according to one of them', explained: 'Although the rates of insurance benefit may … have provided the subsistence of millions of persons, on and off, during recent years, they still have nothing to do with maintenance. No British Government, as yet, has ever accepted such a liability.' This was not entirely true, since an Out of Work Donation had been briefly granted to those who had served their country in the First World War and who had been unable to find work, and there continued to be some minimal 'liability' not only for those unemployed workers who had exhausted their benefits, but also for those able-

bodied unemployed in jobs not covered by the unemployment insurance scheme, who therefore had no benefit entitlement.

The first Unemployment Insurance Act had been passed by Asquith's Liberal government in 1911 in response to demands for 'something better than the current system of deterrent poor relief, eked out here and there by spasmodic local relief works and private charities. In those days the majority of the artisan class could and did somehow tide themselves over temporary out-of-work spells, either by saving or by trade union insurances. And as for the unthrifty and the lowest-paid workers, the opinion was that to dispense on easy terms to such people would be the road to ruin.' Much had changed: little had changed.

The Act had 'opened a new chapter in unemployment relief. The government took a leaf out of the trade union book and launched a cautious scheme of contributory insurance … the object was to cover short spells of unemployment and help men to eke out their family savings. There were no allowances for the wife and children in those days, and if State benefits, plus savings or trade union benefit, were insufficient or were exhausted, the only other public resource was the Poor Law. And in many areas the rule of the Poor Law Guardians was to offer the workhouse or the labour colony.'

Twenty years after that first Act, there was indeed a safety net in place for the unemployed and their families that had not been there before the First World War. It had been painstakingly knotted together in the growing realisation that unemployment was no longer merely an occasional eventuality that thrifty members of the 'artisan class' would be able to ride out. But the net sagged perilously in places.

Between 1920 and 1934 no fewer than twenty-one Acts concerned with unemployment insurance had been passed as various governments tried to rein in the mounting costs of unemployment benefits, grappling with the problem of those without work in a changed world, informed by the old Poor Law principle of 'less eligibility', meaning that it must not be more financially advantageous not to work than to work.

Until the slump of 1920–21, unemployment had generally been assumed to be cyclical and short-term: economic fluctuations might throw men out of work, but they would soon find another job. This informed the framing of the early Insurance Acts. Indeed, the original Act only covered seven trades, including shipbuilding, iron and steel and the building industry, where it was recognised that seasonal unemployment was frequent. But by 1930 the rate of unemployment averaged not the 4 per cent on which calculations had been made, but around 16 per cent, and in the 'black spots' such as the Welsh Valleys, Teesside, Tyneside and Clydeside it was more than double that. And in such areas more than half of the unemployment was not cyclical and short-term — it was structural and long-term. By 1934, thirteen million workers came under the umbrella of the contributory unemployment scheme, though agricultural workers, public servants (including the armed forces, the police, teachers and civil servants), non-manual workers earning more than £250 a year, domestic servants and the self-employed — which included such categories as shopkeepers — continued to be excluded until 1938, as were workers under sixteen or over sixty-five. But since a rising number of workers — about one in every fifteen of those who registered as unemployed; and again, the figure was higher in the unemployment 'black spots' — had been unemployed for longer than twelve months, they had exhausted their right to statutory benefits, and had to be supported by a series of *ad hoc* measures sequentially known as 'extended', 'uncovenanted' or 'transitional' benefit (the last designation having been adopted in 1927, when a brief upswing in the economy suggested that such relief could be phased out within eighteen months or so).

James Maxton, Independent Labour Party (ILP) MP for a Clydeside seat, attempted to get the centrist Conservative MP Harold Macmillan to agree to the following 'facts' in a BBC debate in December 1932: 'That our present industrial system could not provide regular unbroken employment to the working population: that the earning power of the employed worker was not sufficient to allow of his making provision for extended periods of unemployment: that when the ordinary industrial

system was unable to employ him, it was impossible for a man to employ himself remuneratively: that the State had some measure of responsibility for these conditions: that there were not merely breaks in continuity of employment — for some there was no hope of employment at all.'

It was never going to be possible for a series of additional tiding-over benefits to mean that unemployment could be funded by insurance contributions, and it had to be recognised that there were in effect two sorts of unemployed: those generally in regular work who occasionally lost their jobs and would be able to 'cash in' the insurance benefits they had been building up for the relatively short time it took before they found another one; and those who for reasons of their skills (or rather more often lack of skills), the trades in which they worked, the regions where they lived, or perhaps their age, were unlikely ever to find the regular work that would enable them to make unemployment insurance contributions. While the Exchequer contributed roughly a third (along with the employer and the employee) to the unemployed insurance scheme, the heavy financial burden of those out of benefit, for whatever reason, would last as long as there were high rates of long-term unemployment.

When a worker's insurance benefit was exhausted, he or she could apply for transitional benefit, but might be 'disallowed' that benefit for a number of reasons, including refusing the offer of suitable employment. But what was 'suitable employment'? Did it depend on how long they had been out of work? What if a skilled man had been unemployed for two years, but refused to take casual unskilled work, since it was likely to reduce the chances of his ever getting back into his old trade? How long could he be allowed to wait for a job if the industry in which he had previously worked was in decline, and those few jobs that remained were much more likely to go to someone who had recently been working than to one of the long-term unemployed, whose skills may have rusted with disuse? And of course in areas of high unemployment, urging a man to 'take anything' was hardly realistic since there was probably 'very little of "anything" to do'.

If the Labour Exchange decided that a claimant was unreasonably refusing to accept offers of casual work, and that his chances of getting a job in his own trade were negligible, he would be referred to the Court of Referees, which was proclaimed to be independent. If the Court disallowed his claim, he would effectively forfeit his right to be part of the unemployment insurance scheme, and if he could not support himself and his family he would be obliged to apply to what had until recently been called the Poor Law Board of Guardians for relief, assuming he had no other resources. This was also the resort of those unemployed whose work was not covered by the insurance scheme — their numbers were estimated at between 120,000 and 140,000, not counting dependents — as well as those whose benefits or wages were insufficient to keep their family. Not that this was what it was officially called any more: the Poor Law, with its dreaded spectre of the workhouse, had been abolished in 1929, the Boards replaced (in name but often not wholly in personnel) by Public Assistance Committees (PACs), which were locally funded and notorious for the discrepancies of their awards in different areas of the country.

The tenor of most discussion about unemployment dwelt on unemployed men (as indicated by titles of E. Wight Bakke's *The Unemployed Man* and the Pilgrim Trust's *Men Without Work)*. Yet a Fabian tract published in 1915, as women flooded into munitions factories, had recognised that 'unemployment in industry affects women as well as men, and often differently from men. How often do we find the state of the labour market treated as if it were solely a matter of the relationship between supply and demand for men?' However, although women tended to outnumber men in such fields as cotton, woollen, worsted and jute manufacture, and in the newer industries producing merchandise for the home market such as light electrical goods, chemicals and drugs, artificial fibres (mainly rayon or 'art' — artificial silk), tinned food and packaging, only 30 per cent of those working in the traditional heavy export industries subject to cyclical unemployment and covered by the 1911 Unemployment Insurance Act were female. Thus, between 1930 and 1932, during the worst of the slump, only 16.8 per cent of the insured unemployed were women, compared to 22.6 per cent men. And since around 50 per cent of working women did jobs that were not covered by unemployment insurance, and thus

did not show up in the Ministry of Labour statistics, it is hard to be certain how many women were unemployed at any time, though the figure was undoubtedly higher than 16-odd per cent.

There was considerable prejudice against women workers, and consequently a certain lack of sympathy for those who were unemployed — particularly married women, who were often accused of 'taking men's jobs', and were usually the first to be let go when times were hard. The First World War fear of 'dilution' — that women would be prepared to do the jobs men had left when they went to fight for less money, and would thus depress wages and exclude men from their 'rightful work' when the war was over — persisted long into the peace. The notion that a woman's place was in the home impacted on the attitude to unemployed men — and frequently on their own sense of self-worth — in that a man's wage was intended to support his family, and thus an unemployed man was not the 'provider' society expected him to be, while the 'odd shilling' a woman might contribute to the family budget by odd jobs such as sewing, 'making up', laundry or other domestic work, was seen essentially as pin money, to be dispensed with as soon as the man of the house found work again. In Nelson in Lancashire, for example, the local Weavers' Association agreed to significantly improved rates of pay for male weavers (defined as 'heads of households') who were employed to operate six or eight rather than the customary three or four cotton looms, in return for the dismissal of the married women who comprised 37 per cent of the workforce.

The indignities could be subtle: in her novel *We Have Come to a Country* (1935) Lettice Cooper sketches the scene at the Earnshaw family's tea table. Joe Earnshaw, a skilled joiner, is unemployed, and his daughter Ada has just started work.

The procedure on these occasions was invariable. Mrs Earnshaw picked out the biggest kipper and laid it on Joe's plate. She gave the next two best to the children, and took the smallest herself. In the days when Joe had been in good work and come home ravenous, there had been two kippers for him. Nowadays there was never more than one each — not always that — but, as the man and the worker, he was still helped first and given the biggest. This evening some idea of celebrating — some feeling that it was Ada's day — made Mrs Earnshaw do a thing she had never done before. She picked out the largest kipper first and slapped it, smoking, onto Ada's plate. 'There you are Ada,' she said, 'eat it up. You'll have to keep well and strong for your work.' None of them realised that a small revolution had taken place in their family life, and that Mrs Earnshaw had paid her first homage to the new head of the house. Henceforth, little fourteen-year-old Ada would be the man of the family.

And in Walter Greenwood's best-selling novel of the Depression, *Love on the Dole*, published in 1933, Sally Hardcastle's fiancé, Larry Meath, breaks off their engagement when he loses his job in a foundry. 'Why can't we be married as we arranged?' Sally demands. 'There's nowt t'stop us. You'd get your dole, and I'm working.' But Larry refuses: 'A humiliating picture of himself living under such conditions flashed through his mind: it smacked of Hanky Park [the working-class area of Salford where the novel is set and where Greenwood had been brought up] at its worst … "No …" he said, sharply, suddenly animated. "No, no, Sal. No, I can't do it … It's no use arguing, Sally. It'd be daft to do it. Yaa! Fifteen bob a week! D'y'think I'm going to sponge on you. What the devil d'y' take me for?"'

As the social investigator and occasional politician Sidney Webb observed, the assumption was that 'a woman always had some kind of family belonging to her, and can in times of hardship slip into a corner somewhere and share a crust of bread already being shared by too many of the family mouths, whereas the truth is that many women workers are without relatives, and a great many more have delicate or worn-out parents, or young brothers or sisters, or children to support'.

For unmarried women, this domestic vision translated into working in other people's homes rather than their own. With female unemployment running at around 600,000 in 1919, various committees and schemes had been set up to investigate the problem. As these committees were composed — predictably — mainly of middle-class women who rather minded the difficulties they were having in finding maids and other staff, their recommendations were invariably that domestic

training was the answer. Between 1922 and 1940 the Central Commission on Women Training and Employment trained an average of 4,000 to 5,000 women every year on Home Craft and Home Maker courses. To begin with such training was provided on non-residential courses, but the first residential centre opened at Leamington Spa in January 1930. According to the Ministry of Labour, 'This experiment [was] designed to accustom trainees to live and sleep away from home and to observe the routine which resident domestic service entails.' The experiment was judged a success, and by 1931 seven such centres had been opened, each providing eight-week training courses.

But on the whole women had no desire to do domestic work. A 1931 survey found that while more women in London were still employed in domestic service than in any other industry, their numbers had fallen by over a third since the turn of the century, and they now had a choice of other occupations 'which appear more attractive to most London girls'. Indeed, 'the London girl has always been particularly averse to entering residential domestic service', and most young women, wherever they lived, would prefer to do almost anything rather than opt for life 'below stairs' or, in the case of the prevailing 'cook general' of the inter-war years, accommodated in a poky back bedroom in a middle-class villa. In an unnamed textile town in the North-West a Ministry of Labour survey revealed that of the 380 unemployed women on the employment exchange register who were single and under forty — natural recruits into domestic service, it might be thought — only four were prepared to consider such an option, while in Preston, out of 1,248 women interviewed, a bare eleven were prepared to train for domestic service. It was partly because wages were low — a live-in housemaid in London earned around £2.3s a week and a cook general perhaps a few shillings more (though with board and food included this was not as bad as it might appear); it was partly because domestic service was not covered by the unemployment insurance scheme until 1938, so a domestic servant would not be able to claim benefit if she lost her job; but it was also partly the life: the long hours, the loss of personal liberty — 'No gentleman callers' — entailed in being a servant rather than an employee.

However, an unemployed woman who refused domestic work, or declined to be trained for it, could have her benefit refused or reduced, since she could be said not to be 'genuinely seeking work'. This had been one of the criteria for benefit since 1921, and until it was repealed by the Labour government in 1930 it had put the onus on the claimant to prove that he or she had been assiduously searching for a job, regardless of whether there was any work to be had. It was not until the end of 1932 that the Ministry of Labour finally acceded to pressure and agreed that refusal to accept a training place for domestic service should not automatically lead to loss of benefit: it would only be withdrawn if a young women had accepted training, then taken a post in service, but subsequently left it and refused all further offers of such work.

The abolition of the 'genuinely seeking work' clause caused an outcry that it was a sponger's charter that would encourage opportunists, scroungers, malingerers and loafers. The particular fear was that married women who had no real intention of seeking work, but had accrued insurance entitlements prior to their marriage, would now come forward to claim benefits — and indeed employers wrote in maintaining that they knew of women who had worked for them who were now claiming benefit even though they had left work for reasons of pregnancy or domestic duties.

Sections of the press enjoyed a field day peddling stories of abuse. A Nottingham newspaper attested to the case of a girl of sixteen who had allegedly received £150 unemployment pay in the course of a year, having paid only twenty-four shillings' worth of insurance stamps. Rebutting the charge in the House of Commons, the Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, Britain's first woman Cabinet Minister, claimed that to achieve this remarkable feat the girl 'must have maintained, with dependents' allowances, not only herself but a husband or parent, and at least twenty-three children'.

There were also concerns that by ceasing to require that claimants must be actively seeking work (however ritualistic, and often harsh and excluding, that requirement had been), labour mobility would be impaired. It was argued that there would be no financial incentive for a man or woman to 'get on his or her bike' (or rather go on the tramp) in search of a job in areas away from the depressed

regions, though this was hardly a realistic prospect for thousands of men who would either have to maintain a family back home, or move home and family for a job that turned out not to be permanent. Disquiet was not confined to the press: 'Are we to legislate on the lines that these people should think that they need do nothing themselves; that they should wait at home, sit down, smoke their pipes and wait until an offer comes to them?' ridiculed Labour's Attorney General Sir William Jowitt. Even the Prime Minister became prey to alarmist thoughts. Ramsay MacDonald's 'colourful imagination … began to picture married women driving up in fur coats to draw benefit: and the retelling of such tales became a staple part of his conversation'.

In November 1930 the Minister of Labour reported that the Act had admitted an extra 200,000 persons to benefit, and nervously cited examples of employers arranging the working hours of part-time workers so that they too would be able to claim. However, the abolition had coincided with a severe recession in the pottery and textile industries, both employers of large numbers of women — indeed, 38 per cent of married women claiming benefit in June 1930 had previously worked in the Lancashire cotton industry, where unemployment had risen from 13.3 per cent in November 1929 to 45.4 per cent in July 1930. That month, with male and female unemployment in the cotton industry at more than twice the national average, 71.3 per cent of claims for transitional benefit came from married women. A year later the figure was still 68.5 per cent.

Pressure continued to grow to stem what were regarded as 'abuses' of unemployment relief — and to take urgent action to reduce the ever-rising borrowing by the Unemployment Fund, which had climbed from £50 million in March 1930 to £70 million in December, plus an additional £60 million from the Treasury to support the unemployed, with the cost of transitional payments alone reaching £30 million. Faced with the conundrum of obviously rising costs and equally obvious rising needs, the traditional prevaricating sticking plaster was applied: a Royal Commission was set up charged with recommending how the National Insurance Scheme could be made 'solvent and self-supporting' and what should be done about those outside the scheme who were 'available and capable of work'.

Reluctant to grasp the political hot potato of actually cutting benefits, as the interim report of the Commission recommended, yet anxious to find a way of reducing costs and staunching 'abuses' (or, as they could more judiciously be called, 'anomalies'), the Labour government rushed through an Anomalies Act which came into effect on 3 October 1931, intended to deal with workers whose attachment to the labour force was considered to be marginal. Such categories included seasonal workers and married women who could claim benefit by virtue of the insurance contributions they had paid when they were single. The immediate effect of the Act was to exclude large numbers of married women from unemployment insurance benefit. Unless a woman had worked for a time *since* marriage and had paid a minimum of fifteen contributions, and could establish that she was normally in 'insurable employment' and was 'actively seeking work' — and likely to find it in her local area — her claim would be disallowed.

By the end of March 1932 over 82 per cent of married women's claims had been disallowed. It had always been difficult to calculate how many women were unemployed. Now it became all but impossible, since there was so little incentive for women to register for unemployment benefit.

While the number of disallowed claims once the 'genuinely seeking work' requirement had been dispensed with confirmed some in their conviction that there had been 'abuse' of the system, it could also be read as revealing a distressingly prevalent aspect of the slump: low wages and widespread underemployment.

Lancashire textile-weaving families needed more than one income to survive even when the main breadwinner was in work. 'We were very poorly paid. The wives couldn't stay at home on a husband's wage. Women have always had to work in Macclesfield,' said one woman interviewed for a study of the Northern silk-industry town. In 1937 a cotton-weaver working full time would make just over £2 a week, while the national average industrial wage for an adult male manual worker the following year was £3.9*s*. An insured worker with three children who was in receipt of unemployment

benefit would receive twelve shillings a week more than an employed cotton-weaver. And in the worst years of the slump Lancashire men's wages were often further depressed by 'playing the warps', or working less than a full complement of looms — and accordingly being paid less.

Moreover, in 1931 when the Lancashire cotton trade was at its lowest, it was hit by another blow when India imposed tariff barriers against imported cotton goods. 'Strong appeals went forth to … Gandhi to use his influence towards their abolition,' reported Alice Foley who had started work in a Bolton mill at the age of thirteen and was by 1931, aged forty, a JP and secretary of the Bolton and District Weavers and Winders Association.

The great Indian leader paid a personal visit to Lancashire. He chose Darwen as his seat of investigation and later came to Bolton … He arrived at the Weaver's office, accompanied by his little spinning wheel, but minus the goat which, presumably, he had left in safe keeping with his hostess, Miss Barlow, a member of a wealthy spinning family … He was a thin, angular figure, draped in a soft white dhooty [sic] garment, and with kindly eyes peering through round glasses. Gandhi listened gravely to the various appeals from leaders and officials, erstwhile [sic] plying his spinning wheel … I think he was gravely moved by what he had heard and seen of the effects of low earning, unemployment and persistent under-employment but could do nothing immediately; his people, he reminded us had always been on the verge of starvation.

In the evening a dinner had been arranged at our local Swan Hotel in his honour, but Gandhi declined to eat anything but bread and water at the repast, somewhat to the embarrassment of his hosts.

After the distinguished, diminutive visitor had left the benighted towns where unemployment for women had reached nearly 60 per cent, some 'hard-headed folks' opined that Gandhi was 'a bit of a fraud', but to Miss Foley he seemed like 'a passing saint in a world of gross materialism' in those hard, grim years.

The 1930s economy is often characterised as one divided between those in work and the unemployed, whereas in fact there were a number of economies operating: full-time work adequate to a family's needs, full-time work inadequate to a family's needs, unemployment and underemployment. When sixteen-year-old Doris Bailey's father, a French polisher in Bethnal Green in East London, was put on short-time work, she was obliged to abandon her matriculation, since the family needed money. She eventually found work in an underwear factory in Holborn, and contributed her wages to the family budget. To qualify for unemployment benefit a worker had to experience three continuous days of unemployment in any one six-day week, which meant that those who worked non-consecutive days, or for part of four separate days, were excluded from benefit. For Kenneth Maher, a miner who was often only in work part-time, it was an iniquitous system. 'Nearly all the pits in Wales were on short time. Even then the coal owners and the government of the day kept bashing the miners. The favourite trick was to work on Monday and Tuesday, off Wednesday, work Thursday, off Friday, work Saturday, or off Monday, work Tuesday, off Wednesday, work Thursday, off Friday, work Saturday. In this way the men could not claim any dole. They were taking home maybe three days' pay — about £1 or 25/-. That was bad enough, but those on the dole were in an awful plight — 18/- for a man 6/- for a wife.'

'The miners were always subject to a day or two days out. If they got four shifts a week they were lucky,' recalled Clifford Steele, whose father was a miner at Grimethorpe colliery in South Yorkshire. 'And then there were the odd occasions, perhaps in wintertime when coal was demanded, that they worked pretty regularly. It was the case of only a few hours' notice. If a man was on day shift starting at six in the morning he had to be hanging about at night to see whether the pit buzzer went. If the pit buzzer went at half past eight it meant that there was no work the following day. So it was a case of don't put me snap [packed lunch] up Mother.'

However, in industries where demand fluctuated but was generally depressed, part-time work *could* act in the interests of both employer and employee. A study of the workings of British industry

between the wars has shown that in the harsh market conditions of the 1930s in the iron and steel industry it became imperative for over-capitalised firms to secure orders 'at any price simply to provide sufficient cash flow for their creditors'. Short-time working meant that skilled men were kept on the firm's books in case an order came in, and if this was on a regular basis 'the sequence of idle days almost invariably enables the workers to qualify for Unemployment Benefit'. This suited the employers, since it allowed them flexibility and a team of experienced workers. And the employees knew that if it didn't suit them, there were plenty of unemployed men eager to take their place.

A similar situation affected women workers. As a Macclesfield Silk Trade Association member explained to a Board of Trade inquiry: 'Trade … was slack … It went up and down — and the married women thought it wasn't fair that they should be put on the dole when work was found for the girls. The boss … tried to explain. "My girls will go where there's work," he told them, "and they won't come back when things improve and I'll lose them. They'll find work in another mill. Besides there's only one wage going in with a girl." But he took no notice that many of the men were on short time or the labour [i.e. receiving benefit] too, as well as their wives.'

In the crisis year of 1931, the Ministry of Labour became concerned that payment of benefit for short-time working was 'one of the abuses of the present system'. However, an inquiry into the iron and steel trades revealed that most — though not all — employers believed that 80 per cent of short-time workers needed benefit payments in order to survive. As one employer put it: 'We know all our men and their domestic circumstances, and but for the "dole," they would be physically unable to do their work when there is any for them.' Overall it seemed that only about 15 to 20 per cent of the men normally employed in the industry 'would not be reduced to "needy" circumstances if unemployment pay is not granted' — presumably these men were members of the small aristocracy of affluent skilled labour, for differentials in the industry were very wide.

Far from suggesting that short-time workers were abusing the system by drawing benefit, the employers argued that if benefit was not allowed, there would be no sense in a man being prepared to work three days a week: he would be better off not working at all and drawing a full week's benefit. The government took the point, and the system continued. One effect, however, was to further disadvantage the 'hard kernel' of long-term unemployed, since there was always a reserve pool of short-time labour when an industry began to recover, and it was these men who stood to benefit, since there was little incentive to offer work to those who had been out of the labour market for some time, and whose skills and efficiency might be thought to have diminished. And so the curse was handed down. The sons of men already employed in an industry were much more likely to be offered apprenticeships or training schemes in that industry than other boys. If a boy started work in the same insured industry as his father, both would be eligible for unemployment benefit as of right, regardless of family circumstances. That was not the case for an unemployed youth, nor indeed, more perniciously, for the unemployed father of an employed youth following the introduction of the much-loathed Means Test.

As part of the swingeing austerity package of 1931, which also raised contributions while cutting benefits, unemployment benefit could in future only be drawn as of right for six months: after that, those still out of work and requiring support had to apply for 'transitional payments' paid through the Labour Exchange. Before this was granted, they had to undergo a household means test carried out by the local PAC. The Committee would inform the Labour Exchange of the applicant's circumstances, and the rate of relief he should receive was assessed. In arriving at this figure all forms of household income were taken into consideration. These included any pensions or savings, any money coming into the house from a working son or daughter, even household possessions. The maximum amount which an adult male could receive before losing his entitlement to benefit was 15*s*.3*d* a week.

The fact that the total income of a family was assessed led to much bitterness, and sometimes family break-up. 'The Act drove many more young men and women away from home than anything

else, because if you had a son working, and the father was out of work, the son was made to keep him,' explained a Welsh miner. 'It was one of the reasons why so many left [the Valleys] for London or the Midlands.'

Various ruses were thought up to get round this deprivation: a working child might leave home and go to live with a relative or in lodgings so that the parent would qualify for benefit. Or he or she might remain at home, but cram into an outhouse or a shed on the allotment when the Public Assistance officer was expected. Stanley Iveson, a mill worker in Nelson in Lancashire, a textile town with high unemployment, recalls the effect of the Means Test there: 'In 1931 when people were being knocked off the dole, there was a big building across [the street] … it was a model lodging house. And … lads used to go and sleep there, during the week … It was a shilling a night. So they were able to draw the dole. But they went home for their meals. And it broke up homes in those days.'

In Dowlais in South Wales Beatrice Wood's father was an unemployed miner, but her brother had a job. The Means Test

meant that everybody working had to keep their parents … there was a lot of friction between fathers and sons because the boys resented keeping their parents. We tried to live an honest life, we really tried, but … the Government was making honest people dishonest because of their rules. The Means Test man would come often, asking the same question. So we devised a plan with the help of my mother's friend. We would say my brother was living with them. It didn't matter to them because her husband was working. My mother didn't like doing it, but we had to in order to live — if you could call it living. There was a lot of people doing it. The trouble was, my brother couldn't be seen in our house because he wasn't supposed to be living there. The Means Test man came when you least expected him. Sometimes he would call just as my brother had come in from work. He would be eating his food and if there would be a knock on the door there would be one mad rush to get the food off the table (because we only had one room) before we opened the door, and my brother would have to hide in the pantry … and stay there until [the Means Test man] had gone. The Means Test man came one day when my brother was bathing in front of the fire in a tub. Well. My brother jumped out of the tub wet and naked and went into the pantry to hide. We didn't have time to take the tub out, so my mother, resilient as ever, caught hold of our dog and plunged him into the tub, pretending she was bathing the dog. My brother was freezing in the pantry. When we opened the door to let the Means Test man in, the dog jumped out of the tub and shook himself all over the Means Test man. It took all my powers not to laugh, because it was like a comic strip if it wasn't so serious … Those Means Test men were horrible men, and very arrogant. They would sometimes lift up the latch and just walk in. So my mother went one better — she kept the door locked. They weren't above looking through your window. I was always told that your home was your castle. But not us — we might as well be living in a field: we had no privacy — this was the dreaded nineteen thirties. How people suffered.

If a father was considered to have sufficient means to support an unemployed son or daughter, his or her benefit would be stopped. Donald Kear, an unemployed machine attendant from the Forest of Dean, remembered: 'Any family unlucky enough to have one of their number unemployed were forced to accept a lower standard of living because they had a passenger to carry. In our house I became the passenger. My benefit was immediately cut to 5/- a week. My father [a miner] was paid on production at the coal face. When his earnings rose a little the benefit was correspondingly reduced. The Means Test man went regularly to the office at the mine to find out how much my father was earning so these adjustments could be made.' Occasionally this inquisition meant that a son or daughter without work would find themselves without a home either, as they would be thrown out so as not to be a 'parasite' on the family; this probably happened more when a step-parent was involved.

Any entitlement to benefit passed after six months: after that it was a question of cash handouts at the minimum possible level to keep the unemployed from destitution. The dispensation felt like an act of charity, as the Fabian socialist writer G.D.H. Cole saw it. 'It is therefore — for charity begins at home — to be strictly limited to the smallest sum that will keep the unemployed from dying or

becoming unduly troublesome; and their relations as far as possible to be made to bear the cost of maintaining them in order to save the pockets of the tax payers. Behind this system is the notion that unemployment is somehow the fault of the unemployed, from which they are to be deterred if possible; and an attempt is made to persuade their relations to help in deterring them, because they will be made to contribute to their support.'

The ex-Labour MP Fenner Brockway, now an ILP member, attempted to conjure up the effects of the Means Test for those Southerners who could not envisage it, urging them to imagine the Royal Albert Hall 'filled three times over. That would represent the workers on the Means Test in Newcastle. Imagine it filled twelve times over. That would represent their families. It is beyond imagination to realise the anxiety and despair and suffering they would represent.'

In a number of Labour-controlled authorities, PACs were in fundamental opposition to the Means Test, and subverted its operation by always allowing the maximum possible centrally specified benefit, regardless of an applicant's circumstances. County Durham (where an estimated 40,000 people had to face the Means Test), Glamorgan County (where the number was around 27,000), Monmouth, Rotherham and Barnsley were among those warned by the Ministry of Labour against 'illegal payments'. If they persistently refused to conform, as Rotherham and County Durham did, the PACs were suspended and replaced by commissioners from London to 'do the dirty work'. Other authorities felt it was better to submit to the regulations, but to mitigate them wherever possible, as a statement from the London East End borough of West Ham explained: 'We were threatened with supercession, and in face of that threat we prefer to keep our poor under our own care and do what we can for them rather than hand them over to an arbitrary Commissioner from whom they could expect little humanity.'

For workers who had regarded unemployment benefit as a right, earned while they were in work and to be drawn when, through no fault of their own, they were out of it, the Means Test was not only harsh in its effects, it was degrading and humiliating in its association with destitution and the Poor Law, violating the privacy of homes they had worked hard to scrape together, prying into family matters, letting the neighbours witness their shame as their furniture was carted off to be sold.

'If somebody had a decent home, the man from the Means Test came and made a list of what you had. Then you were told to sell a wardrobe this week, some chairs next week, some pictures the week after, until you perhaps you only had your bed, two chairs and a table left. Only then would you be able to claim something off the Public Assistance,' recalled Kenneth Maher. Not all officers were brutal: some clearly felt disquiet at the job they were obliged to perform, and were as respectful and thoughtful as the brutal and inquisitorial system would permit, but nevertheless:

You were only left with the bare essentials. I bet today, in some upper-class homes there are thousands of pounds' worth of valuable goods stolen by the Means Test men from the poor in the thirties … Mother was given thirty bob to feed herself and five kids. We were left with four chairs, a table, a couple of benches and a couple of beds. I remember thinking, 'Good job we've got no rugs on the floor 'cos they'd have took them as well.'

… The Means Test bloke arrived with a van to take the best of our furniture. How I hated him with his smart clothes and the smirk on his face, twirling his stick of chalk in his fingers. I watched as he walked over to two large brass lions standing either side of the hearth, telling my mother they had to go. It didn't matter to him that they had belonged to her grandmother long since dead. The poor weren't allowed sentiment. We hadn't got much before he got cracking with his chalk. We'd got a damn sight less when he'd finished.

Such confiscations struck at the heart of an unemployed worker's sense of the modest achievements of a hard-working life, as a London sheet-metal worker explained: 'Suppose I would have to sell off that chair over there. There would be more than that chair go out of this room. How many times do you suppose the old woman and I have gone by the store window and looked at chairs

like that waiting till we could get one? Then finally, we got it … if I had to sell that, I'd be selling more than the wood and the cloth and the stuffing. I'd be selling part of myself.'

The Means Test was not only harsh and often inequitable, it also defied logic. As the *Rhondda Fach Gazette* reported: 'It is in many cases a penalty upon thrift. If a man had been careful and thrifty all of his life and has got a small income he loses exactly that amount from the dole, while a reckless unthrifty person gets it in full.'

By January 1932 almost a million unemployed were having to register for transitional payments, and were thus coming within the scope of the Means Test. Thousands were cut off from benefit, while others had their relief drastically reduced. It was claimed that in the depressed textile areas of Lancashire only 16 per cent of claimants were awarded the full transitional benefit, while a third were disallowed altogether. Throughout Britain as a whole, half of those applying for transitional payments received less than half the maximum amount, and 180,000 people were judged no longer eligible to receive unemployment benefit under the unemployment insurance scheme as a result of the application of the Means Test. The government saved £24 million in that first year. The cost to society was incalculable.

As James Maxton bitterly lectured Harold Macmillan, 'The Means Test has been useful in disclosing once more how limited were the resources of the working population. But was there any need to set up expensive investigating machinery to discover that the majority of the working class were very poor?'

FOUR *Mapping Britain*

You were such an angel to take trouble with my old women and it was really worthwhile. I do not know whether this story of an old castle will affect the Labour vote. People are so odd. They might say, 'He is a humbug: he talks Labour and lives in a castle.' But they might also say, 'How splendid of him when he lives in a castle to come and worry about our little affairs.'

Harold Nicolson writing to his wife Vita Sackville-West, who had entertained fifty ladies from the West Leicester Women's Conservative Association (his constituency) at their home, Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, on 5 June 1937

'Southampton to Newcastle, Newcastle to Norwich: memories rose like milk coming to the boil. I had seen England. I had seen a lot of Englands. How many?', J.B. Priestley asked himself at the conclusion of his *English Journey* in 1933. But although Priestley had roamed (usually by 'motor coach', which he found 'voluptuous, sybaritic … This is how the ancient Persian monarchs would have travelled, if they'd known the trick of it … they have annihilated the old distinction between rich and poor travellers') from Bristol in the West to Norwich in the East, from Southampton in the South to Yorkshire, Lancashire and Tyneside in the North, by way of Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester, Nottingham and Arnold Bennett's 'five pottery towns' in between, he had not, as most commentators had not, rambled down to England's south-westernmost extremity, Cornwall. If he had, he would have found there unemployment, poverty and despair to equal any found in the reproach that Jarrow, Merthyr Tydfil, Clydeside and the other depressed areas constituted.

The village of St Day, named for a Celtic saint and a stopping place in the Middle Ages for pilgrims on their journey to St Michael's Mount, lies nine miles north of Falmouth and seven miles east of Truro in Cornwall. A prosperous village in the early nineteenth century, its wealth was founded on copper-mining until 1870, when competition from Chile, Bolivia and Peru meant that 2,000 men were thrown out of work when the United Mines closed down. 'The dismal procession of the Gwennap [the parish in which St Day is located] Mines to the scrap heap had passed, [and] the modern history of St Day had begun. When the Great War came it was trotting down the hill at a leisurely pace. When the war ended the speed of the pace was accelerated and that was the only difference the War made,' explained Richard Blewett, the Medical Officer of Health for the district, in a 'modern historical survey' of St Day he prepared in 1935 for a Board of Education short course for elementary school teachers held at Selwyn College, Cambridge.

The land surrounding the village was 'pocked by mineshafts … and scarred by "burrows" or mine tips, over many of which nature is gradually casting a blanket of heather'. In 1935 the rate of unemployment in St Day was nearly 30 per cent, since not only had copper-mining collapsed, but so, in the mid-1920s, had the tin-mining industry around nearby Redruth and Cambourne, from where many of St Day's inhabitants came in search of cheaper housing — even in 1935 the average rent of a workman's house was not much more than two shillings a week. China clay production, which it had been hoped might fill the vacuum left by the decline of mining had done no such thing: by the end of 1932 output had fallen 40 per cent since 1929, and the price had fallen by more than 30 per cent. The Cornish economy was in paralysis, with the population having fallen in the decade up to 1931 by 0.9 per cent (while that of the rest of England and Wales had risen by 5.5 per cent), and the annual average of unemployment between 1930 and 1933 was 21.6 per cent.

Moreover, de-industrialisation at the turn of the century meant that trade unionism amongst the Cornish miners was never the force it was in the Welsh Valleys. Even when a strike was organised by the Transport and General Workers' Union in January 1939 at South Crofty mine, when police and strikers clashed, only 234 men out of a total workforce of 435 stopped work, while the seasonal and scattered nature of the tourist industry meant that unionism did not find a foothold among those toiling in hotels and other holiday amenities. Politically Cornwall, as part of Britain's 'Celtic fringe'

and with its strong tradition of religious nonconformism remained a fairly staunch Liberal stronghold during the 1930s (the Conservatives managed to take two seats in the 1931 election and three in 1935), with Isaac Foot, MP for Bodmin until 1935 — the patriarch of a radical dynasty that included the future Labour leader Michael Foot and the campaigning Socialist Workers' Party and *Daily Mirror* journalist Paul Foot — the 'towering presence'. An eloquent preacher and stirring orator, with an 'anti-drink, anti-betting, evangelical stance', Foot was revered throughout the county and the fishermen's luggers at Looe were reputed to be painted in the Liberal colours of blue and yellow in his honour. Indeed, 'Our Isaac' was an important factor in preventing what another Cornishman (though Foot was actually a native of Devon, and began his political career there), the historian A.L. Rowse, who stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate for Penryn and Falmouth in both elections in the thirties, believed was 'the prime task for Labour in Cornwall … to bring home the futility of going on being Liberal [since] Cornish liberalism [was] a fossilised survival' — as, unfortunately, was the inter-war Cornish economy.

Fishing was also in the doldrums in Cornwall by the mid-1930s. 'Outside the Duchy the legend still holds that the fisher is the typical Cornishman,' wrote the former suffragist Cicely Hamilton on her journey round England in 1938, 'but, in sober fact, that race of Cornish fishers is a race that is dwindling fast.' With the Cornish fisheries unable to compete with those of the Artic and the North Sea, there were only two first-class steam trawlers registered in the whole of Devon and Cornwall by 1938, one of which had not put to sea since 1925, and whereas there had been 150 first-class motor vessels in 1919, there were only ninety-one by 1938. The decline in the number of sailing boats was even more dramatic. It was much the same with agriculture: under-investment and out-of-date production methods on family farms that were too small to be economic without a high degree of specialisation meant that there were mutterings by the 1930s of the need to 'collectivise' Cornish farms if they were ever to be economically viable. There were, as Cicely Hamilton found, still some earning a living from the Cornish soil: flower-growers. The trade had started on the Isles of Scilly, taking advantage of the islands' mild winters. At first it had been small, 'a few boxes packed with narcissus and daffodils and shipped on the little mail boat that three times a week makes the voyage to St Mary's, and three times a week makes it back to Penzance'. But by the mid-thirties flower-growing had spread to the mainland, and 'in the spring of the year, the Great Western Railway, night by night, carries the spoil of the daffodil fields to the markets of London and the midlands'.

Apart from its abundance of spring flowers, Cornwall's mild climate appeared to offer its only prospect of economic salvation. Every summer the Cornish Riviera Express conveyed many thousands of tourists, not only 'the privileged minority who might otherwise holiday in the real Mediterranean, but … anyone who could afford the price of a third class ticket from Paddington'. The journalist and travel writer S.P.B. Mais helped the romance along with a series of promotional booklets written at the behest of the Great Western Railway hinting at 'a western land of Celtic mysticism'. Even the trains carried such resonant names as *Trelawney, Tintagel Castle, Tre, Pol and Pen*. When a rival railway company decided to make North Cornwall its own preserve, putting such places as Tintagel and Boscastle on the tourist map, it gave its locomotives such appropriately Arthurian names as *Merlin, Lyonesse, Iseult, Sir Cador of Cornwall, Sir Constantine* — and even the traitorous *Sir Mordred* was briefly considered suitable. Despite their mystic names, the trains were among the fastest in the world. In 1938 the playwright Beverley Nichols was struck by the anachronism of George VI 'flying through a country that even his father would hardly recognise, so quickly are the landscapes passing', to collect 'a grey cloak, a brace of greyhounds, a pair of gilt spurs, a pound of cumin, a salmon spear, a pair of white gloves, a hundred shillings and a pound of pepper', dues owed by the Duchy of Cornwall to its Duke/King.

The South-West's tourism boom had begun before the First World War, and it expanded dramatically between 1920 and 1938, with a rise of 80 per cent in the number of people employed in hotels, boarding houses, laundries and cafés in Devon and Cornwall. Tourists came not only by train

but increasingly by coach or car, as roads were improved and car-ownership increased. The tourist traffic was of course seasonal: employment in Cornwall would dip to its lowest point in January, and peak in June.

Cornwall, with its Arthurian romance, its Celtic culture, its periodic 'Cornish revival' movements, now intertwined with the romance of ivy-covered, suggestively gothic, disused mineshafts and engine houses, spectacular coastline and stretches of silver sand, and the charm of 'remote accessibility', also held appeal for those who had no need to fuss with a third-class railway ticket, but could motor down with a wicker picnic hamper (though the journey on A-class roads from London might well require an overnight stop). During the 1930s Cornwall became the summer destination of choice of a number of artistic, literary and generally 'bohemian' types — though with its 'reputable light' Cornwall had been attracting artists challenged to paint its ever-changing seascapes since before the First World War. Vanessa Bell went (as did her sister Virginia Woolf), Augustus John (whose son Edwin had settled at Mousehole), the artist Laura Knight (who also had a cottage in Mousehole), her friend and fellow painter Dod Procter and her artist husband Ernest, as well as the writer who gave Cornwall to popular literature, and whose work is still celebrated in an annual festival that brings literary tourism to Cornwall, Daphne du Maurier.

Although he did move not permanently to Cornwall until 1939, the painter Ben Nicholson was a regular summer visitor to St Ives throughout the thirties. There was already a thriving Society of Artists in the town, which had held an annual exhibition since 1927 and sent work to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. It was in St Ives that Nicholson 'discovered' the local fisherman Alfred Wallis, who often painted on cardboard supplied by the local grocer. 'No one likes Wallis' paintings [though of course] no one liked Van Gogh for a time,' reported the artist Christopher Wood, who had been on a walk with Nicholson when they glimpsed Wallis's work for the first time through the open door of his cottage. But they would. Today twelve of his paintings hang in Tate St Ives, and his images of sailing boats circulate on greetings cards.

But St Ives, Newlyn and Mennabilly/Manderley were as far from the concerns of St Day as were the 'professional Cornishmen' of the 1930s, most notable among them the historian A.L. Rowse and the essayist 'Q', Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Similarly, the town had little time for a new revivalist organisation, Tyr Ha Tavas (Land and Language), which emerged in 1933, declaring that it stood for 'the unity of persons of Cornish birth or descent who value their Cornish heritage, and who desire to maintain the outlook, individualism, culture, and idealism characteristic of their race', and pronouncing a determination 'to show Cornish people what Cornish men have done and what they still can do to help the World'. There had been a series of earlier Cornish revivalist movements, since 'Every Cornishman knows well enough, proud as he may be of belonging to the British Empire, that he is no more an Englishman than a Caithness man is, that he has as much right to separate local patriotism to his motherland … as has a Scotsman, an Irishman, a Welshman, or even a Colonial, and that he is as much a Celt and as little of an Anglo-Saxon as any Gael, Cymro, Manxman or Breton.' A College of Bards, a Cornish Gorsedd, affiliated to its Welsh and Breton sister organisations, was established in 1927, and held annual ceremonies conducted by blue-robed bards speaking the Cornish language. But by 1937 a newspaper correspondent reluctantly admitted: 'If we are quite truthful we have to admit that the revival of the Gorsedd has scarcely touched the lives of the common people of Cornwall.'

The members of Tyr Ha Tavas, mainly young people, lobbied local MPs to give greater importance to specifically Cornish problems, and produced a magazine, *Kernow* (the Cornish word for 'Cornwall'). However, *Kernow* always sold more copies to those outside Cornwall than to those who lived there, and the marginal political thrust of Tyr Ha Tavas failed entirely to address the social and economic problems of the county, which St Day had in great number.

Those few men still employed in the few mines operating would leave the village just after five in the morning to go down on the early-morning shift, 'up again at 3.30 p.m. then walk home …

there were no baths or showers … mining was hard, dirty and wet work and the miners did almost everything by hand. The only lighting was candles or carbide lights.' Nevertheless, work was so scarce in the Welsh coalmines that 'A number of families decided to pack up and head for Cornwall, with just a glimmer of hope that their luck might change,' remembers F.R. Clymo, who was a boy at the time.

I have no idea how many were involved in this trek, but I well remember five or six men coming to St Day … It took them almost a month to reach us, sleeping rough as they went. They were desperate men who had to make it because their families left behind in the valleys were dependent on them. About a month later when accommodation had been found their families came down in lorries, which were sponsored by the British Legion … I remember the new intake of Welsh girls and boys who came to our school … they were like refugees … [but] at no time did we have any industrial projects since the closing of the mining industry … very few people were tempted to become residents here.

The only casual work likely to be had, Clymo recalled, was

when Falmouth Docks would get a shipload of cement in, which would have to be unloaded … it was a job not done by the dock labourers, so … the labour exchange would direct a certain number of unemployed men to report to the docks … There was no such thing as refusal. Refusing meant instant stoppage of unemployment benefits … I've seen men return after three days of this work with their hands raw and bleeding through continually carrying hundredweights of hot cement from the ship to the warehouse. On another occasion, right here in the village the GPO put the main telephone cables underground from the Exchange … to the Old Post Office in Market Square. Several villagers who were unemployed were directed to do this work … they did the work with hammers and gads (steel chisels); first they moved the hard top, then they had to dig down three feet with pick and shovel … Many of them had not worked for years, so with soft hands and not much muscle they were soon in trouble with blistered and bleeding hands. Some of them got a few bruises as well especially those holding the chisels, because the hammer men, who were out of practice, invariably missed and consequently delivered a blow to the holder's hands. Yet not much sympathy was ever shown because after all it was only a temporary job, as soon as it was finished they would all be laid off and back on the dole again with plenty of time to heal their wounds … It was quite a common sight to see half a dozen [older] women on a sunny dry afternoon … heading for Unity Woods and the old Tram Road, their mission to collect sticks or any broken limbs of trees to keep the fire alight … These women wore long hessian aprons (towsers to us), some wore caps and the odd one or two smoked a clay pipe. They would round up as much wood as they could carry in the big aprons. Some would do this two or three times a week to save buying coal. Coal was cheap but they could not afford to buy it … times were bad, they were old at forty, no one was ever in a position to help them … Life was tough, only the very strongest got through.

There was, reported Richard Blewett in his 1935 survey, 'a noticeable amount of squalor in the village and its surroundings'. Electric street lighting had only arrived at St Day in February that year, no sewerage scheme existed, and water was delivered in barrels by horse and cart. A survey of sixteen households revealed an average of seven children per family, and of six people sleeping in the same bedroom.

'St Day is poverty stricken,' Blewett concluded. Three hundred and twenty of its inhabitants were excused all or part of their rates, and 50 per cent of children on the school register were entitled to free milk, which was provided when the weekly household income did not exceed six shillings per head: in 1937, Merthyr Tydfil's schools were handing out free milk to only 25 per cent of their pupils.

'While 268 St Day men and women were employed in 1935, most finding some sort of work in the village, and others ventured to Truro, Falmouth, Redruth or Cambourne, 82 were unemployed' — *'NEARLY A QUARTER'* wrote Blewett in capital letters with heavy underlining. 'The fathers of 53 families are unemployed and their children number 127 at school. I can find no relationship between the unemployment of the fathers and the intelligence of the children.'

The question of the relationship between unemployment and poverty, physical health and psychological well-being (as well as crime) preoccupied politicians, both national and local, committees, commissions and inquiries, social investigators, memoirists, novelists and newspaper pundits in the 1930s. The Pilgrim Trust surveyed a thousand unemployed men drawn from six areas throughout Britain and published its findings as *Men Without Work;* E. Wight Bakke shared the life, insofar as it was possible to do so, of *The Unemployed Man* in the London Borough of Greenwich; Hubert Llewellyn Smith led a team at the London School of Economics assessing what had changed since Booth's turn-of-the-century survey *Life and Labour of the People in London;* Seebohm Rowntree set out to remeasure 'poverty and progress in York' as he had done in a survey published in 1901, and though he found poverty alleviated by 50 per cent, the cause, he noted, was different: in Booth's day it had been low wages, now it was unemployment, which had also struck the London inquiry. Herbert Tout, son of a distinguished Manchester medieval historian, did the same — though much more briefly — for Bristol; Hilda Jennings reported on conditions in the mining community of Brynmawr in South Wales, where unemployment was among the highest in Britain; the Carnegie Trust reported on the young unemployed in the same region; and there were many more specific investigations into the health of the unemployed, the incidence of maternal and infant mortality, and other long-term effects of being without work.

Believing that 'our civilisation was rather like the stock comic figure of the professor who knows all about electrons but does not know how to boil an egg or tie his bootlaces. Our knowledge begins anywhere but at home', J.B. Priestley had set out on his unscientific but evocatively impressionistic journey across England, determined not to be one of those who, because they had 'never poked [their noses] outside Westminster, the City and Fleet Street', were unaware of what was happening in 'outer England'. He was not alone. Throughout the decade Britain (most especially England) would be crisscrossed by those bent on pinning down the true state of the nation — largely by heading north. Honest inquiry, indictment, nostalgic gazetteer, guidebook (although often light on precise information — H.V. Morton's comment on the 'Five Sisters' window in York Minster was, 'No words can describe it; it must be seen,' and he found the pillars of Gloucester Cathedral 'beyond description'), z*eitgeist* entrapper, each book had a different agenda, each traveller was freighted with different baggage. But all had a common purpose: to show Priestley's 'outer England' to those in 'inner England' who would buy their books ('Fact is now the fashion' in publishing), read their articles, take notice, maybe even take action. Towards the end of the decade this documentary impulse would crystallise in the formation of Mass-Observation, which aimed to give voice to the masses it observed, in the documentary films of John Grierson and others, and in the magazine *Picture Post*. But until then the pickings were there to be had for anyone who could get a commission to turn them over.

H.V. Morton had been 'in search of' England (then Scotland, Ireland and Wales) since the end of the 1920s, but he was a self-confessed 'magpie picking up any bright thing that pleased me', and 'deliberately shirked realities. I made wide and inconvenient circles to avoid modern towns and cities … I devoted myself to ancient towns and cathedral cities, to green fields and pretty things.' Though Morton found himself drawn more into the inequities of urban industrial poverty as the decade progressed, he never lost his visceral fondness for a pre-industrial, prelapsarian rural world, and scuttled back to its soft embrace as often as he could, defending the countryside against neglect and exploitation.

The journalist J.L. Hodson roamed from the countryside of Norfolk and Suffolk up the north-east coast, taking in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and then back south to the 'English seaside' and 'London town' via the Potteries. He called the resultant book *Our Two Englands* (1936), after Disraeli's concept of two nations, one rich, the other poor. 'We know no more about the unemployed, those of us who live apart from them, than those who stayed at home knew of the Great War,' Hodson concluded of the 'six millions of men, women and children in England [who] have neither enough to eat, nor enough clothes to wear, nothing like enough either on backs or beds'.

An American professor of English, Mary Ellen Chase, found two Englands too, but while her divide was geographic like that of the other roamers, her condemnation was of a different order. Venturing north after a pleasant amble round Southern England, Chase reported in her book *In England Now* (1937) that 'there are few more ugly, more depressing places on this earth than the industrial towns of northern England. Their very names lack the euphony of the south: Manchester, Staylebury, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Crewe and Preston.' Although she noted that the North was known for its radical politics and economics, Chase conjectured that this was partly the result of the 'wilder, freer winds that sweep across wider, higher, more barren moors', she could not wait to leave behind the 'rows upon rows of identical grey houses where strident women with untidy babies stand in doorways … the smell of cheap petrol, fish and chips, smoke and wet woollens; treeless streets; advertisements for Lyons' tea, Capstan and Woodbine cigarettes; miserable shops displaying through their unwashed windows, pink rock candy, drill overalls, tinned sardines, sticky kippers, sucking dummies for babies, garish underwear, impossible hats …'

However, Cicely Hamilton, who experienced 'a stirring of the heart' every time she landed at Dover, recognised that the real England was 'essentially urban, living by the office, the factory and the shop'. She made no apologies for devoting two chapters of her survey *Modern England. As Seen by an Englishwoman* to what she called 'hard core unemployment', to 'those Englishmen cast out of industry in the fullness of their skill and experience'.

Beverley Nichols took a 'bird's eye' view of the country in 1938 to 'differentiate it from the England of 1928', and although he modestly recognised that the nation's problems 'cannot be settled in a single book … at least they can be *indicated'* Priestley had admitted, 'I have certain quite strong political opinions and I tend more and more to bring them into my writing,' and was clear about what he was looking for before he set out: 'I know there is deep distress in the country. I have seen some of it, just a glimpse of it, already. And I know there is far, far more ahead of me.'

In his indictment *Hungry England* (1932), Fenner Brockway recognised that 'figures and statistics signify little' unless they are translated to a human scale. He described a family of four 'existing on 14s.6d a week; 5s for rent at the lowest 1s.6d for coal and lighting. Allow nothing at all for clothing and household extras. That leaves 8s to provide food for two adults and two children. How can it be done without leaving actual hunger — hunger gnawing at the stomach, hunger making one dizzy and weak, hunger destroying one's body and destroying one's mind.'

The *Daily Worker* journalist and typographer Alan Hutt followed much the same route that Brockway had taken through Lancashire, the Black Country, Tyneside and Teesside, South Wales, Clydeside and Suffolk to investigate the effects of seasonal unemployment on rural poverty, and discovered — or rather confirmed — that 'The stark reality is that in 1933, for the mass of the population, Britain is a hungry Britain, badly fed, clothed and housed.'

The 'lower-upper-middle-class' George Orwell (the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair, another with 'quite strong political opinions' that he tended to bring into his writing) left his part-time job in a Hampstead bookshop and took *The Road to Wigan Pier* for two months, finding no pier (it was a music-hall joke attributed to George Formby's father), but a 'strange country [of] ugliness so frightful and arresting that we are obliged to come to terms with it'. He took the road north partly because he 'wanted to see what mass unemployment is like at its worst, partly in order to see the most typical section of the English working-class at close quarters'. What he found was fury-inducing hard-core unemployment, poverty, deprivation, exploitation, squalor and hopelessness. Some thought his account exaggerated: the right-wing historian Arthur Bryant accused him of being a 'super sensitive' tourist, searching for local colour in the land of the unemployed, producing 'propaganda' in the name of literature.

Others began to publish their autobiographies of the 'hungry thirties' during the decade. John Brown went 'on the tramp' for work before ending up as a student at Ruskin College, Oxford; the young cabinet-maker Max Cohen wrote an account of his life as 'one of the unemployed', mainly in

the East End of London; another autobiography was that of George Tomlinson, an uncomplaining coalminer from Nottingham who found that 'After four years of unemployment I get a thrill out of ignoring the pit buzzer,' and set off for a walk in Sherwood Forest, reminding himself that 'If I have lost my job, I have also lost a hard master.' Tomlinson was one of the few unemployed at the time who believed there was 'very little hostility between the "means test" visitor and the family … The visitor does his rather unpleasant job in a way that no fair-minded person could object or take exception to. He was probably unemployed himself before he took the job.'

The BBC broadcast a series of talks on unemployment in 1931. The speakers had included John Maynard Keynes, Seebohm Rowntree and Herbert Morrison, with the Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin winding up. These were followed by six lectures by Sir William Beveridge in which he aimed to diagnose the 'disease of unemployment' by tracing its origins back to before the First World War, considering whether the causes were labour or credit, and examining such symptoms as 'social malingering' before trying to calculate the cost of the 'cure'. Beveridge had begun to change his mind on unemployment, moving away from the idea that its main cause was a residual section of the population that would always be unemployable for reasons of physical or moral deficiency, to an understanding of its structural nature, recognising that 'There is not a special class or kind of people who constitute the unemployed. They come from almost every calling and have as great a variety of interests and capacities as any other member of the community. They are ordinary decent people like ourselves to whom an extraordinary misfortune has happened.' Since this was the case, Beveridge later regretted that he had not made his talks more 'human'. Instead of assailing his listeners with abstract notions and yards of statistics, he reflected, he should have talked more about the social consequences, how actual people were affected.

The human face of unemployment was given more prominence in a series of articles that appeared in *The Listener*, 'the organ of the BBC', and were subsequently published as a book, but never broadcast. *Memoirs of the Unemployed* described the psychological effects of unemployment on people's lives, their politics and their hopes for the future. The idea had come from a similar study carried out in Marienthal, a small industrial village near Vienna, where the closure of the textile mill in 1929 had thrown almost the entire population out of work, and from a competition organised by the Institute of Social Economy in Warsaw which had resulted in the publication of fifty-seven vivid accounts sent in by the Polish unemployed.

In 1932 the ubiquitous journalist S.P.B. Mais had travelled through some of England's lesser-known beauty spots at the behest of the BBC. His seventeen talks, subsequently published as a book, were entitled *This Unknown Island*. The following year the BBC commissioned Mais to give a 'human face' to unemployment on the radio by exploring a different sort of unknown island. This time, rather than idyllic places he visited Labour Exchanges, out-of-work clubs and settlements and other places where species unemployed might be located, talking to organisers and the unemployed themselves, 'black-coated' (now 'white-collar') and former rural workers, women who were either out of work themselves or were bearing the brunt of coping with no regular wage coming in. The intention of the exercise, entitled *Time to Spare*, was largely to give people who had no personal experience of unemployment 'an account from the unemployed themselves of what life is like when one is out of work, what steps they take to cope with the problems of existence … since if you have never been out of work you can no more realize the horror of unemployment than you can realize the horror of leprosy … If you have never moved outside of Sussex, you can no longer visualize the destitution on the banks of the Tyne than you can visualize a tornado in Japan.'

Mais was eager to learn all he could, but he was a naïve observer. After commenting on the neatness of the women's clothes at a female keep-fit class in Tyneside he was told tartly, 'It's perhaps just as well that you can't see what they've got on underneath.' *Time to Spare* was broadcast in early January 1933, the series introduced by the Prince of Wales. Mais called it 'an S.O.S. message, probably the most urgent you will ever hear and it vitally concerns you. You are called upon to create

an entirely new social order. The bottom has apparently fallen out of the old world in which everything was subordinated to a day's work.' He appealed to listeners (who were clearly not envisaged as the unemployed themselves) to rally round and 'make yourself known to the manager of your local Labour Exchange, or if you live in a village, to the Schoolmaster or Parson', to initiate schemes to occupy those without work.

The second series of *Time to Spare*, which started in April 1934, was rather less of an outsider's view of the unemployed: this time the producer Felix Greene toured the country as Mais had, but when he found an unemployed person with a compelling story to tell, he invited him or her to Broadcasting House in London, where he got them talking and their conversation was relayed over a loudspeaker to the next room, where secretaries transcribed their words. In his introduction, Mais suggested that things had improved since the first series, but that there was no room for complacency. Indeed, the programmes caused a furore in the press, particularly since they started transmission at the same time as the final reading of the Unemployment Bill was going through the Commons. Labour MPs quoted from them (they were reprinted in *The Listener)* to harangue the government about the Means Test and proposals to further limit the entitlement of the unemployed to benefits.

On 5 June 1934 the *Daily Herald* reported: *'Time to Spare* is shattering too many illusions. Millions are being turned against the Government.' Sir John Reith, Director General of the BBC, was summoned to 10 Downing Street to be told by Ramsay MacDonald that the series could not continue. Reith recognised that the government had the power to pull the programmes, but told MacDonald that if this were done, there would be a twenty-minute silence at the time they would have been broadcast, and it would be announced that this was because the government had 'refused to allow the unemployed to express their view'. The series continued.

Although the Director of Talks at the BBC, Charles Siepmann, was concerned that the programmes on unemployment merely attempted to ameliorate its effects, rather than probing its possible political causes, Wal Hannington, leader of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM), had his request to be allowed to broadcast turned down by the BBC on the grounds that it wished to avoid controversy. Denied a voice on the airwaves, Hannington wrote a number of books castigating government policy and describing the plight of the unemployed, with such unequivocal titles as *Never on Our Knees, Ten Lean Years, Unemployed Struggles*. Several of these were published by Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club, which brought the hardships of those suffering unemployment, as well as suggestions for the problem's solution, to a wider and very engaged audience — Gollancz had also published Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* and, in collaboration with his usual publisher, Priestley's *English Journey*.

Others drew on what they had experienced of unemployment or saw all around them, and wrote novels about how it affected men, their families, their communities. Walter Greenwood, who had three spells of unemployment from his work as a clerk and council canvasser, was the author of *Love on the Dole*, which was the probably the best-known novel of the Depression. Nevertheless, in 1936 the British Board of Film Censors twice refused to allow a film version to be shown in cinemas on both moral (too much bad language) and political (a scene of unemployed men fighting the police) grounds. It was, they declared, a 'very sordid story in very sordid surroundings', despite the fact that both the book and a play based on it had enjoyed great success. It finally reached the screen in 1941.

Although *Love on the Dole* was the only 'Depression novel' that was a best-seller, publishers were anxious to find 'authentic' proletarian writers — partly because there were so few of them. As the novelist, reviewer and editor Cyril Connolly pointed out, '90 per cent of all English authors come from the Mandarin class … A rigorous class system blankets down all attempts to enlarge these barriers. The English mandarin simply cannot get at pugilists, gangsters, speakeasies, negroes'- or the unemployed, he might have added. In June 1927 the Communist newspaper the *Sunday Worker* had written of having the 'misfortune to be compelled to make do with stories about the working-class who are "sympathetic" but have no first hand knowledge of workers' lives'.

But that changed over the next decade: with time on their hands, men turned to writing about what they knew only too well. Leslie Halward, an unemployed plasterer, had a story accepted by *John o'London's* magazine — and was paid £100 just as the Means Test man was scheduled to call. Another out-of-work plasterer, Jack Hilton, was sent to Strangeways for six months in 1932 for leading an unemployed workers' protest in Rochdale, and wrote his autobiography and a novel — about unemployed workers' protests — while he was in prison. William Holt, a weaver, went to jail for nine months for the same offence, this time committed at Todmorden; when he was released he couldn't find a job and was about to be evicted so he resumed the writing he had always done, but now his subject was invariably the experience of unemployment, selling his books from door to door in the Calder Valley. Walter Brierley recounted the harrowing tale of the depredations wrought by a *Means-Test Man* (1935); the novel sold 6,000 copies in the first year of publication. James Hanley's *Grey Children* was a story of 'humbug and misery' in the lives of unemployed shipyard workers; Roger Dataller's *Steel Saraband* was a tale of unemployment in the steelworks; Lewis Jones's *Cmwardy* and also his later *We Live* told of the hard lives of miners in the Welsh Valleys. Lewis Grassic Gibbon (the stirring pseudonym of Leslie Mitchell) wrote a powerful dialect trilogy of Scotland's ills, *A Scots Quair*, the story of a family moving from rural to urban poverty, of which the third volume, *Grey Granite* (1934), charts their response to unemployment in a fictitious industrial city. Jack Lindsay (writing under the pseudonym Richard Preston) wrote a novel dealing with the collapse of the Cornish economy.

One author had some notepaper printed with the heading 'B.L. Coombes, Miner-Author' after the success of his first book, *These Poor Hands* (1937), another Left Book Club choice, and he continued to work as both. A[rchibald]. J. Cronin, who had been appointed Medical Inspector of Mines in 1924, drew on his experience of the wretched conditions in the coal industry for *The Stars Look Down* (1935), while his sensationally successful next novel, *The Citadel* (1937), was an attack on the system of private medicine, again drawing on his experiences in Tredegar, where he had witnessed the correlation between the inhalation of coal dust and lung disease, and its 'model' treatment with the help of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society.

By the second half of the thirties the prejudice against those who had no intimate experience of working-class life, of poverty and unemployment, seems to have somewhat dissipated: there was an important story to be told, whoever the teller. The one-time editor of the *Strand Magazine* and *John O'London's*, George Blake, wrote a novel set in the shipyards, and in *Ruined City* Nevil Shute (who was an engineer rather than a manual worker) wrote of a rescue package dreamed up by an altruistic businessman for a thinly disguised Jarrow.

Although unemployment seared deepest into the working classes, not all the middle classes escaped: by 1934 an estimated 4,000 black-coated workers were without work, and their plight began to be described in such novels as Simon Blumefeld's *They Won't Let You Live* (1939), in which the graduate protagonist unsuccessfully applies for 187 jobs, eventually deciding to kill himself. Even the thriller writer Eric Ambler used the frustration of a skilled production engineer who could not find work as the basis for the plot of *Cause for Alarm*, published in 1938.

Despite the widespread evocations of unemployment, both real and fictional, which stood as indictments of a system that had failed, political calls to action — let alone revolution — were muted. The BBC dutifully bore vivid witness to the plight of the unemployed, but in its efforts to avoid more controversy than programmes such as *Time to Spare* already whipped up, it largely avoided probing the causes of unemployment and means of relieving it, other than by strenuous voluntary efforts to 'help'. When 'Edward Windsor', as Wal Hannington consistently referred to the Prince of Wales, an active supporter of voluntary movements for the unemployed, came to the microphone in December 1933 to introduce the first series of *Time to Spare*, he set the tone by asserting that 'the causes of unemployment are beyond our control, and we might differ in our estimate of them, but it is largely

within our power to control the effects of unemployment. The unemployed are just our fellow men, the same as ourselves, only less [considerably less in his case] fortunate.'

However, novels such as *Love on the Dole* were hailed as a wake-up call, with the left-wing novelist Ethel Mannin hoping that 'It is going to shock smug, fashionable, comfortably-off, middle-class London into a realisation of what the industrial north is really like.' One reader at an Ilkeston public library noticed how many grimy thumbprints such novels bore, evidence, he thought, of their having 'clearly passed through the hands of a variety of curious proletarians'. Thus, in various ways and with varying intensity, by the end of the decade the contours of unemployed Britain in the 1930s had been, if not fully explained, at least comprehensively mapped — even if some declined to listen, or to believe that the topography was quite so bleakly craggy as others portrayed it.

FIVE *Hungry Britain*

Oh hush thee, my baby,
Thy cradle's in pawn:
No blankets to cover thee
Cold and forlorn …
Thy mother is crying,
Thy dad's on the dole:
Two shillings a week is the price of a soul.
'A Carol', C. Day Lewis (1935)

The death of Annie Weaving, the thirty-seven-year-old wife of an unemployed man in South-East London, mother of seven children, who collapsed and died while bathing her six-month-old twins, offered a stark definition of poverty in 1933. Mrs Weaving had been struggling to keep her family going on the forty-eight shillings a week benefits her husband received. She did so by going without food herself, and though the immediate cause of her death was recorded as pneumonia, the coroner concluded that this would not have proved fatal if Mrs Weaving had had enough to eat, rather than 'sacrificing her life' for the sake of her children. At the inquest, the coroner was blunt: 'I should call it starvation to have to feed nine people on £2.8*s* a week and pay the rent.'

The press took up the story, and the *Week-End Review* launched a 'Hungry England' inquiry in the spring of 1933, conducted by 'an economist [A.L. Bowley], a physiologist [Professor V.H. Mottram], a housewife, a doctor and a social worker', in the hope that the debate could be settled 'scientifically'. It could not. They found that unemployment relief payments were insufficient to provide the minimum diet for a family recommended by the recently established Advisory Committee on Nutrition set up by the Ministry of Health (on which Mottram also sat), and concluded that the 'cheapest practical diet in current English conditions' were about 5*s*. a week for a man 'not doing muscular work. 4*s*.2*d* for a woman; and 2*s*.9*d*- 4*s*.10*d* for children according to age'.

In November that year the British Medical Association (BMA) established a benchmark for poverty, and this was generally accepted for most subsequent surveys. It specified that an average man required 3,400 calories a day, the cost of providing which was 5s.11d. This figure was later adapted according to whether a man was doing light or heavy work, and proportionately for women and children. Seebohm Rowntree used this standard when assessing the level of poverty in York, but Sir John Boyd Orr, Director of the respected Rowett Research Institute of Nutrition in Aberdeen (who had already been influential in getting free school milk for needy children in Scotland), used more generous figures borrowed from the US Bureau for Economics, which suggested that an active man required 4,500 calories a day and that the population as a whole needed to consume 2,810 calories per head each day.

Until the First World War 'sufficient food' was judged simply by the amount a person consumed: having 'enough to eat' meant just that. But since then there had been extensive research into medical conditions such as rickets, that revealed the importance of the sort of food consumed. There was a growing understanding of the significance of vitamins and minerals, and with it an awareness that large numbers of the low-paid and unemployed could not afford what were known as 'protective foods' — milk, fresh vegetables, meat, fish and fruit — and were subsisting on a largely cheap carbohydrate diet — bread and margarine and potatoes — washed down by copious amounts of tea sweetened with condensed milk. The link between poor nutrition and lack of money was a political question, since, in the view of the think tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP), which had been established as a result of the *Week-End Review's* campaign, hunger should not be regarded as 'an act of God … but a problem which can be analysed and treated by the same methods of common sense that we are trying to apply to other problems'.

'Common sense' suggested it was largely a question of money. A table published in the *Manchester Guardian* in December 1934 showed that to have an acceptable diet a family of a man, his wife and four children (aged five, seven, nine and eleven) needed 35s.2d to live on (excluding rent): what they received in unemployment benefit (also excluding rent) was 29s.6d — a crucial shortfall of 5*s*.8*d*.

Using the much more generous calculation that a family of five needed 43*s*.6*d* a week to live on at the most basic level, excluding rent, Seebohm Rowntree estimated that 31.1 per cent of the working-class population of York were living in poverty, as were 18 per cent of the population overall. He concluded that 32.8 per cent of the poverty was due to low wages and 28.6 per cent to unemployment, and that 72.6 per cent of unemployed families lived below the poverty line. In Bristol, Herbert Tout found that over 10 per cent of working-class families were living below the poverty line, an additional 19.3 per cent of working-class families had insufficient income, and more than a quarter of the working class in Bristol as a whole were living in utter destitution; 21.3 per cent of the families suffered as a result of low wages, and 32.1 per cent because of unemployment. But Bristol and York were both relatively prosperous cities, with unemployment rates little more than the national average. Furthermore, these surveys took place in 1936 and 1937 respectively, when the worst of the Depression had passed. What about areas such as the Welsh mining valleys, Tyneside, Teesside and Clydeside, where poverty was much more widespread, and bit far deeper for far longer?

Surveys such as those in York and London, which made comparisons with times when the only recourse for the poor had been charity and the Poor Law, showed that absolute poverty was lower, perhaps half what it had been at the turn of the century. But if poverty was defined as living conditions a little above mere subsistence, then around a third of the working class in Britain — and the manual working class constituted more than 75 per cent of the population, according to the 1931 census — lived on incomes that were insufficient for 'human needs'.

In London in 1929 unemployment and underemployment (short-time working) accounted for 38 per cent of families in poverty, and 55 per cent of the unemployed were living on the poverty line; a survey of Northampton, Warrington, Bolton and Stanley showed that the proportion of poverty due to unemployment had increased more than threefold since 1918; in Sheffield in the winter of 1931–32 it was found that 42.8 per cent of families lived in poverty. All of these calculations presumed the most rigorous housekeeping, that allowed families to exist, but certainly not to live in any meaningful sense.

The Pilgrim Trust calculated the difference between unemployment pay and the average working man's wage. The authors admitted that their sample was small, but concluded that on average, unemployment benefit equalled around 65 per cent of wages; older men, aged between fifty-five and sixty-four, would however receive only 45 per cent of the wages they would have expected had they been in work.

Britain was a world leader in nutritional research, but there was in the thirties no internationally agreed definition of malnutrition, nor a standard measurement for it. Anthropomorphic tests that judged height, weight, hair texture and other outward signs were considered fallible, and blood and urine tests were still in the experimental stage. The seemingly promising evidence of social scientists was proving problematic. Despite the provision to families of measuring jugs, scales and lined exercise books in which to record their income, expenditure and exactly what and how much every member of the household ate (which was regarded as useful training in housewifery as well as yielding survey data) in the course of a month, their findings were 'frustratingly compromised by the human factor', since it was asking a lot to expect poor and often ill-educated families to keep such detailed records over such a period. And for some the natural inclination to resist the spying of outsiders, secrets between husband and wife about money, and even the ever-present spectre of the Means Test man, meant there might be a certain amount of creative accounting in their returns.

However, social investigators on the ground were continually finding correlations between poverty and malnutrition and poverty and infant and maternal mortality, and experiments showed

clearly that improved nutrition did bring improved health and life chances. In the Rhondda, the simple expedient of supplementing expectant mothers' diets with a food distribution programme had been tried. The results were startling: 'a sharp fall in the puerperal death rate followed immediately on the introduction of this scheme, the rate dropping from 11.29 in 1934 to 4.77 in 1935'.

Poverty was poverty whatever caused it, and in areas of high unemployment wages tended to be depressed, so the incidence of those with not enough to live on was compounded. Yet the government remained resolute that regardless of what surveys showed, widespread unemployment did not mean an unhealthy nation — or part of a nation — and was quick to blame a lack of education or the fecklessness of the much-maligned working-class housewife, rather than poverty, for inadequate diets. 'There is no available medical evidence of any general increase in physical impairment, sickness or mortality as a result of the economic depression or unemployment,' insisted the Minister of Health, Sir E. Hilton Young, in the House of Commons in July 1933, while the Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Health, Sir George Newman, based his optimism on what he maintained were declining mortality rates and the near eradication of 'malnutrition requiring treatment'.

Those wayward Medical Officers of Health or investigators who declared otherwise were considered guilty of perpetrating socialist 'stunts'. Dr M'Gonigle, the Medical Officer of Health for Stockton-on-Tees, was threatened with removal from the medical register for misconduct if he participated in a broadcast on the problem of malnutrition, while Sir John Boyd Orr was summoned by the Minister of Health, Kingsley Wood, who 'wanted to know why I was making such a fuss about poverty … when there was no poverty in this country. This extraordinary illusion was genuinely believed by Mr Wood who held the out-of-date opinion that if people were not actually dying of starvation there could be no food deficiency. He knew nothing about the results of the research on vitamin and protein requirements, and had never visited the slums to see things for himself.' Despite the government's suppression of Boyd Orr's finding in the run-up to the 1935 general election, the Conservative MP and publisher Harold Macmillan, who had seen poverty and hunger up close in his own constituency of Stockton, agreed to publish *Food, Health and Income* in January 1936, thus 'informing the public of what the true position was regarding undernourishment among their fellow citizens' — half of their fellow citizens, Boyd Orr calculated in 1937.

Despite such government complacency — or wilful avoidance — there was a mounting body of evidence from independent investigators that by the 1930s the fall in rates of infant mortality (the number of deaths of children under one year of age), which had been declining impressively since the First World War, with the introduction of maternity and child welfare centres and health visitors, had slowed down considerably, so that England and Wales now ranked ninth in the League of Nations' Table of Infant Mortality, while Scotland was seventeenth. Moreover, there were considerable discrepancies between different parts of the country, and even within small areas. In a comfortable part of Manchester, for example, the rate was forty-four per thousand live births, while in a poorer area it was 143 per thousand. Seventy-six out of every thousand infants died in Glamorgan and Durham, seventy-seven in Scotland, ninety-two in Sunderland and an appalling 114 in Jarrow, whereas in the Home Counties the rate was forty-two per thousand. It was the same with maternal mortality (the number of women's deaths attributed to childbirth): in the North it was 4.36 per thousand, in Wales it was 5.17, whereas in the South-East it was 2.57. Mothers were simply dying in childbirth at a far greater rate in the depressed areas: poor nutrition during pregnancy meant that in the 1930s it was four times as dangerous to bear a child as it was to work down a coalmine. In addition, every five years perhaps a quarter of a million women were likely to suffer disabling and long-lasting 'dull diseases' caused or aggravated by repeated pregnancies and childbirths in adverse conditions. And the wives of unemployed men were not covered by their husbands' health insurance.

Nutrition mattered desperately to the health of the nation — a point that would be taken very seriously at the end of the decade, when after the coming of the Second World War the Minister of Food, Lord Woolton, drew heavily on Boyd Orr's estimates of the standard diet needed to maintain a

healthy population — yet, as the leader of the NUWM, Wal Hannington, pointed out, 'The kinds of food … necessary to provide the vitamins and calories which have been specified as the minimum requirements [recommended by the BMA] are not being eaten in the homes of the workless since they cannot afford to buy them.' A pint of milk a day would cost 2s.½d a week, while the BMA scale prescribed 2s.8d as the total weekly food allowance for a child of one to two years, and 3*s*.1*d* for one aged two to three. Again using the BMA scale, a man eating three meals a day would have exactly 3¼d to spend on each meal, and a woman 2¾d. Furthermore, Hannington quoted the Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Health, Sir George Newman himself, who had estimated in his 1933 report that the milk a pregnant woman needed would cost 4*s*.1*d* a week, while the amount allowed for her total food consumption under unemployment benefit regulations was 4s.11d. 'It would, indeed, be interesting,' wrote Hannington, 'to know how the Minister of Health would spend the odd ten pence on buying three meals a day for seven days a week.'

George Orwell quoted — in amazement — a newspaper article that suggested that by eating a diet composed mainly of vegetables and whole-meal bread, with cheese for protein, it was possible for an adult to have a balanced diet for 3*s*.11*d* a week. But the 'minimum weekly expenditure on foodstuffs which must be incurred by families of varying size if health and working capacity are to be maintained' recommended by the BMA worked out for a man, his wife and two children aged eleven and nine at 19*s*.9*d* a week, out of an unemployment allowance of £1.7s. Since the average weekly rent for three rooms in the East End of London was 12s.6d, and in Stockton-on-Tees the rent for one of the 2,756 new council houses was over nine shillings (which was beyond the reach of most of the unemployed, who continued to live in slum cottages where they paid nearer 4*s*.8*d* a week), it was hardly surprising that the Pilgrim Trust found that 44 per cent of the families of the unemployed would not be able to afford the minimum diet once they had paid their rent and allowed for other necessary expenditure. And Rowntree found that in 1933, 72 per cent of the unemployed in York were able to spend less on food than the BMA recommended, 'due to lack of means'. This finding was borne out by Dr M'Gonigle in Stockton-on-Tees, who was convinced that the malnutrition he came across was caused by poverty, and not mismanagement, as was sometimes alleged.

'I learned the meaning of hunger,' wrote Max Cohen of his days as a single, unemployed cabinet-maker. 'I knew what it was to count my pennies carefully and to spend them with hesitation and misgiving. I knew the dull finality of having no money at all.' Cohen

> came within the Labour Exchange category of a 'Young Man' (18–21 yrs). Therefore I was receiving fourteen shillings per week … apparently it was assumed by the authorities that a 'Young Man' … can in some mysterious way support himself on a smaller sum than a 'Man' (21–65 yrs) …
>
> Life … became divided into more or less rigid periods … There was Friday … the day, when after feverish waiting at the Labour Exchange, I received the life-giving fourteen shillings. After paying six shillings and sixpence a week rent, I was able, with much care and discrimination, to exist in a more or less normal fashion during the first half of the week. Of course, I could spend nothing on replacing my clothes, or on minor luxuries of any kind, no matter how trifling.
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> From Tuesday on came bankruptcy … I had no money at all, and so, in a sense, nothing more to worry about … I lived on whatever may have been left of those things I had bought at the beginning of the week — on dry bread and bits of tasteless cheese. All that was necessary was to pull my belt tighter, ignore the empty ache in my stomach and hang on till Friday and deliverance came round again.

A London housepainter aged forty-seven, married with six children, three of them under six, found himself 'unemployed and unable to fulfil my duties towards my family'. He had a weekly income (including a naval pension and the earnings of three of his children) of £4*s*.11*d*, which meant that

> after allowing for rent, rates, light, coal and gas with a balance of £2.11s to keep, house, clothe two adults, one adolescent and three children, and provide all other necessaries of life for eight persons, which position a PAC inquisition described as 'not in need of assistance' … The chief

article of our diet is bread. Margarine comes next, and it is my experience that children prefer this to dripping [from meat] … unless the dripping is made use of for frying bread when it often forms a breakfast meal when other food is not available. We invariably take sweetened condensed milk with our tea, a saving thereby being effected in the consumption of sugar; and we often use it for making rice puddings. We usually purchase fresh meat on Friday or Saturday evenings, cash being available on those days, and this being the time when butchers make an effort to sell their odds and ends. Fresh vegetables have been fairly cheap, and these together with cheap sausages, often form our principal meal on two or three days.

A skilled wire-drawer, thirty-two years old, with a wife and one child aged five, who had been unemployed for over three years, had 'little variety in our food since the staple ingredients are bread and butter and tea and cocoa and cheese. Until this year [1933] I had an allotment from which we obtained all our vegetables. A local factory bought the land and I have not yet been able to rent another. We have no garden attached to our house; we share a small back yard with five other houses … our rent is 5s6d a week.'

A twenty-five-year-old skilled letterpress printer who had been unable to find work since having a nervous breakdown after the death of his mother five years earlier, was in receipt of 15*s*.3*d* benefit. 'How do I exist on my "magnificent bounty"? I pay 8s. for a furnished room which includes laundry. Gas costs 6d weekly; letters for situations 8d; razor blades, soap, shoe blacking, haircuts etc. average 3d; and 6d a week I save to help buy boots, second hand flannels etc. This leaves me 5s6d for food. Can a man keep up health and strength on such a sum? Emphatically no! … My breakfast consists of three slices of bread and jam and a cup of tea. Dinner, two slices of bread and about 2ozs cheese. Tea two boiled eggs, or ½lb tomatoes, or a tin of baked beans. If I have 2d left at the week-end (which isn't often) I "mug" [treat] myself and buy some chip potatoes. I have not tasted meat, potatoes (barring the above occasions) or vegetables for over twelve months — and then I am told I get enough money to keep fit and strong.' George Tomlinson, a Nottingham miner, unemployed for four years, explained that 'The real secret of living on the dole [is] potatoes and bread.'

A Scottish hotel-worker, out of work since 1931, had the single man's dole of seventeen shillings a week in 1933, and when he had paid his rent, coal and laundry he was left with 5*s*.3*d*, out of which he spent 'about 1 shilling every week on stamps, stationery and typed copies of my references'; 'In the cold wet months of a Glasgow winter … my meals, which were few and far between, consisted mostly of tea, bread and margarine,' though he occasionally managed sixpence for some boiling mutton or 4½d for bacon.

Charles Graham, whose father, a merchant seaman, had died when he fell from a ship in dry dock in Australia, and whose stepfather, a miner, was out of work, recalled that his sister 'had just one attic room and two children and with only one gas ring, she couldn't cook an economical dinner. Parents would make soup with a bone, some cabbage, a few turnips and so on. But we usually had a slice of bread in the morning. For dinner a penn'orth of each, that's a penn'orth of fish and a penn'orth of chips; and probably a couple of slices of bread at night … now and then with a penn'orth of pease pudding and a saveloy from the local German butcher.' When, during the Second World War, Graham was taken prisoner of war by the Germans for two and a half years, he found his diet much the same as it had been in the 'hungry thirties'.

Graham remembered his mother baking every Sunday (in most North Country families it seems to have been Wednesdays, with washdays on Monday and the Sabbath without work).

Most of us children would be out collecting orange boxes to stoke the fire. It was a great day, Sunday, because there was plenty of bread, and oven bottom cakes and scones, and so on. We used to buy rusty cans of cheap jam in the market. A housewife would go any distance to save a halfpenny. A halfpenny was a candle and that was four or five hours of light. We were lucky, we had a distant relative of my stepfather who was a butcher and he used to let us have some offcuts of meat at the weekends [a sheep's head was another cheap meat bought for stewing]. Usually sausages was the

nearest the average working class got to meat. One of the favourite meals was pan-haggerty. You slice potatoes, put a layer in the frying pan. Put scraps of bacon in the middle then a layer of sliced of potatoes again and fill it with water and just boil away. Or corned beef in the middle. Meat was scarce. I don't ever remember having cheese except for weddings and funerals. And fresh milk was out of the question. It was mainly condensed milk [even though the tin was clearly marked 'unfit for babies'].

John McNamara, an unemployed factory-worker, remembered: 'Lancaster market used to be open till nine Saturday night, and whatever beef and pork sausages they had to sell, they had to get rid of. They couldn't put it away over the weekend because there was no refrigeration, so it would go bad on them … especially in the summer months … so the stuff went right down to rock bottom prices.' McNamara's mother, 'along with a lot of other married ladies knew this. That was the time they used to go and try and get a bit of meat for Sunday. They'd wait to the last minute. The butcher would practically throw it at them for next to nothing. The fruiterers never threw fruit away. If they'd gone bad, the bad part was cut out. What they called damaged fruit. There was nothing wrong with it but middle class people and the upper crust, they wouldn't think of buying them. But to us it was a godsend. For twopence you could get a handful of damaged apples or oranges … The only time you would get to see a chicken was Christmas. But it had taken twelve months to get that chicken. Mam would find a penny from somewhere to put in the butcher's shop and by the time the year end come she might have five bob.'

Those living on the poverty line or hovering just above it, whether as a result of unemployment, underemployment or simply low wages, lived a dreary life indeed, since 'The minimum standard makes no allowance whatever for sickness, savings, old age or burial expenses, holidays, recreations, furniture, household equipment, drink, newspapers or postage.' There was simply no margin; it was the breadline — and not always that.

With an endless struggle to find enough money to feed a family, it was hardly surprising that there was virtually no money left for anything else. And the longer a man had been out of work, the worse things got. Any small savings were used up, cooking pots, brushes, bedding, towels and clothes wore out. Families got into debt, some had to move to cheaper accommodation if they could find any, or face eviction. Economies on a budget that was already pared to the bone were made on heating and lighting, food got stodgier.

In Sunderland, Mrs Pallas's husband had been 'robust and he had a good job … But he fell out of work about four months after I was married, so I've hardly known what a week's wage was.' After thirteen years of unemployment and five children, the oldest boy's trousers had six patches.

I just tell him, he'll be all the warmer, specially in winter. My husband helps me with the darning; I do the patching. I've just put the eighth patch on a shirt of his. I take the sleeves out and put them in another — anything to keep going.

Then when we've finished with the clothes, my husband puts them into making a mat [a peg or rag rug, made by pushing strips of fabric through a sugar sack begged from the grocer or a potato sack]. Everything goes invests, stockings, linings.

Many a time my husband has had to make cups for the children out of empty condensed milk tins. He solders the handles on.

Our kettle's got about six patches on it. My husband made the patches from cocoa tins. My husband does all that sort of patching, all the cobbling and hair cutting and spring cleaning …

My husband never changes his dole money, but although he doesn't keep a halfpenny pocket money, we still can't manage. And we don't waste nothing. And there's no enjoyment comes out of our money — no pictures, no papers, no sports. Everything's patched and mended in our house.

'It's the women who suffer,' insisted Mrs Pallas. 'The man brings the dole in and he's finished — the woman's got all the rest.' When she married him, Mr Pallas was earning £8 to £10 a week: 'He's a left-handed ship's riveter — a craft which should be earning him a lot. There aren't many left-handed riveters … Many a week he's given it [his unemployment benefit] to me and I've just said,

"put it in the fire." It's just like an insult to a mother to bring in 33 shillings … I'm not blaming my husband. He'd work if he could get it.'

By the time Mrs Pallas had paid ten shillings for coal, gas and rent, and

money for the allotment rent, for burial insurance, to the clubs for the children's clothes, for chapel collection, and cigarettes for my husband, I have about ten shillings left for groceries, two shillings for milk, and about three shillings and sixpence a week for food. It varies a few pence, according to whether we have to make money out of food to buy leather for cobbling or spring cleaning and so on … I do the washing every other week because I find I can do a large amount of clothes with the same amount of soap, but it's tiring. I can't manage more than one box of matches a week. Many a time we've sat in the dark — it is gas light, and we haven't a penny for the slot maybe, or we haven't a match.

'A woman had a full time job in the home in those days,' remembered John McNamara in Lancaster. 'It was the blacklead brush to polish the grate. It was the scrubbing brush and a bucket and a floor cloth and a bar of soap [or a donkeystone if they were flagstones] to wash the floors and the tables and the paintwork. And all the paraphernalia to do the weekly washing [often with no running water, washboards to scrub with, blue dollys to make sure the sheets were white, mangling, starching, drying, ironing]. Baking day was Wednesdays. There was a day for everything.'

'It's upon the wives of the unemployed that the real burden falls,' wrote a miner who had been unemployed for eight years by 1934. 'It means they have to scrounge around for the cheapest food and for anything in the shape of clothes, and what our women don't know about jumble sales is not worth knowing. And I cannot imagine a more distressing sight than the average jumble sale in these parts.'

As well as cooking, cleaning and washing, women had to juggle almost non-existent money. Getting things 'on strap' (credit) from the grocer, balancing one tradesman's bill against another, putting a penny or two by in a club for clothing or boots, and putting a brave face on it as she paid her weekly visit to the pawn shop.

Women had to work miracles with the dole, or low wages. 'My father didn't realise how my mother was having to budget. He wasn't aware of a lot of things we had to do, my mother and me, to keep the cart on the wheels. He just tipped his money in and thought it did the job. He just pushed his head in the sand,' recalled Clifford Steele in Barnsley.

Pawn shops were as common as betting shops today. On Monday a woman would pawn her jewellery, often including her gold wedding ring (which she would replace with a sixpenny brass one from Woolworths to stay respectable), or maybe her husband's watch if he had one, or his only suit if he didn't need it that week, and would hope that she would be able to redeem them when the money came in on Friday. Then it would be back to the pawn shop on Monday again, until the family's meagre possessions got too shabby to raise any money against, or even worse, she had to sell the pawn tickets to raise a few pounds, and that would mean the things would be gone for good.

Charles Graham recalled that 'in almost every street [in South Shields] there was the old woman who offered her services as messenger for those people who were too proud to be seen going into the pawn shop. She would be well known to the pawnbroker and could be trusted. She would get a pound loan, the pawn shop would charge twopence a week until the pawn was redeemed. The messenger would get threepence or sixpence from the housewife … the parcel would never be opened [by the pawnbroker], it was just a way of getting round the law of money lending. The pawn shop was a bank.' Women would come clattering along the street in clogs and shawls to a pawn shop in Burslem in the Potteries, where unemployment was over 30 per cent in 1931, and stayed high throughout the decade. Its owner 'used to do very well. He used to reckon that it was the only shop in Burslem that had a queue on Monday morning.'

When there was not enough food to go round towards the end of the week, the woman would often go without herself so that her husband and children had a meal on the table — as Annie Weaving must have done countless times. 'We are told we ought to eat fruit, but it is very seldom that I can

afford fruit … My husband and I always have to suffer if there is anything to buy. We give it all to the bairns and we have bread and marge,' said Mrs Pallas. 'I was practically living on bread and potatoes,' remembered an Aberdeen women with two small children and an unemployed, unskilled husband. 'But I tried to get something every night for my husband and the girls. Sausages were cheap … the men in the fish [shop] would sometimes give us a bit of fish … In the winter months I walked over to the New Market. You got a great big rabbit for sixpence and we had that every Sunday, all the months that rabbits were in season … But mostly I had potatoes and bread and toast … I'd had the two girlies and then I'd had five boys — all dead-born, and I'm certain it was because of the malnutrition.'

John McNamara remembered how 'It was a common thing for a housewife, for a mother, to do a hell of a lot of sacrificing. Unknownst to hubby. Unknownst to kiddies. It was nothing for them to say, "Oh, I've had mine." And they hadn't had a bite. But you didn't find out till it was too late. A good mother went without many a meal. Kids come first. And husband. She was last though she worked harder than anyone.'

There are few tales of greater poignancy than that of an anonymous mother included in Nigel Gray's superb compilation of voices of the unemployed: 'When our baby was born we had to borrow a mattress from next door and spread newspapers on it. I used to feed the baby on a bottle of warm water. We put her to bed in a drawer. We made nappies out of newspaper. When I went before the public Assistance Committee they asked me if the baby was being breast fed and when I said yes, they reduced the allowance for a child.'

CODA *The 'Hatry Crash'*

In 1935 the body of a Woking magistrate, Francis Wellesley, was found floating face-down in the river Wey. 'Another Hatry Crash Victim', decided the headline of a national newspaper, though in fact the death turned out to be an accident rather than suicide. Furthermore, Mr Wellesley had never been an investor in any of Clarence Hatry's companies. But the dapper, Chaplinesque Hatry, the son of a silk-top-hat manufacturer who was always so well turned out himself that it was put about that the soles of his shoes were polished as well as the uppers, had become — at least to some — the personification of an attenuated British version of the Wall Street crash, when share prices plummeted and many fortunes were wiped out. And indeed it was on the day after 'Black Thursday', 25 October 1929, that Clarence Hatry had been remanded to Brixton Prison in South London to await trial on charges of fraud and forgery.

Hatry's spectacular business career — and its demise — mirrored the boom-and-bust economy of the 1920s. Given the frenzy of concern about speculation, unstable money and the financial integrity of the City of London in the shaky world economy, it was no surprise that when he and his three fellow defendants faced the formidably 'icy' Mr Justice Avory in the dock of the Old Bailey in January 1930, the prosecution was led by the Attorney-General himself, Sir William Jowitt.

The case was a complicated one, but again Hatry's story embodied another concern — or in this case a suggested panacea — of the times: rationalisation. Almost Edwardian in his spending habits, at various times he had owned racehorses, one of which, Furious, won the Lincolnshire Handicap at wondrously long odds; a yacht which cost £15,000 (almost £700,000 in today's money) a year to keep afloat; and a magnificent house off Park Lane which his wife described as 'a palace in miniature', but which the *Observer* would later sneer at as 'a palazzo in Mayfair with its classical swimming bath above and its sham Tudor cocktail bar below'. Hatry had built and lost his various fortunes largely by consolidating businesses, which was exactly what many economists and industrial pundits were recommending as the way forward for outdated, undercapitalised British industries. While Jute Industries, which he formed in 1920, was a success, there was little 'strategic logic or managerial vigour' in such creations as British Glass Industries or Amalgamated Industrials, 'a hodgepodge of cotton spinning, shipbuilding, and pig farming', according to his biographer.

However, Hatry sold the London department stores (including Swan & Edgar) he had bought and combined into the Drapery and General Investment Trust to Debenhams at a handsome profit, and merged the majority of London's private bus companies, before selling them to London General Omnibus Co., which would eventually become the nucleus of London Transport. He also financed rather less successful ventures, such as the Photomaton Parent Corporation (which operated photographic booths) and the Associated Automatic Machine Corporation (operating vending machines, mainly on railway platforms), both of which perhaps spoke more to his weakness for gizmos than his financial acumen, and leaked funds.

Nevertheless, by 1928 Hatry appeared to be successfully juggling his activities as a proto-asset-stripper under his umbrella company Austin Friars Trust, 'a £300,000 finance house which was to be the linchpin of his later enterprises and the central company in a complicated network of interrelated investment and industrial enterprises', buying companies, amalgamating them, liquidating then reconstructing them under a new name. At his trial, however, the liquidator, Sir Gilbert Garnsey, alleged that the whole group had been insolvent from the very start in May 1927.

Within that cavernous enterprise one particularly successful amalgamation was Allied Ironfounders, a combine of light castings manufacturers, and this gave Hatry the idea of pulling off a similar feat in the ailing steel industry. In April 1929 he acquired control of the United Steel Companies, but the next month the general election returned a Labour government. 'This is ruination,' Hatry lamented to Hubert Meredith of the *Daily Mail*. 'How can I possibly carry through my steel

scheme now?' And indeed, in the bear market that followed what might have been anticipated as the beginning of a full-frontal attack on capitalism, Hatry saw the value of his securities take a severe hammering.

To achieve his 'steel scheme' he needed a large amount of money — probably nearly £8 million — but he had a shortfall, and one that he was finding increasingly difficult to bridge, not least because Montagu Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England, was implacably opposed to both Hatry's scheme and its promoter. 'I say he shd stand aside as long as Hatry controls,' Norman advised a director of the merchant bank Morgan Grenfell, which had been approached for a loan.

To raise the £900,000 (more than £40 million in today's currency) necessary to float Steel Industries of Great Britain Inc., Hatry, at the suggestion of one of his directors, an Italian called John Gialdini, tipped from dextrous dealings and sailing close to the wind into illegality. A few years earlier he had audaciously managed to break into the lucrative corporations loans business, and by the end of 1928 he had cornered 90 per cent of the market. Now, in a manoeuvre 'intended to rob Peter to pay for Paul and to reimburse Peter from the profits of selling Paul' he agreed to forge corporation scrip certificates (receipts and contracts) for three of the municipalities with which he had dealings, Gloucester, Swindon and Wakefield, thereby providing security for further loans from the banks until the steel combine was floated, whereupon the forged certificates could be redeemed.

It didn't work. The City's confidence in Hatry, already ebbing, went into free fall, partly as a result of the excessive number of scrip certificates that seemed to be in circulation, and the Stock Exchange suspended dealings in Austin Friars Trust. Gialdini had already done a runner back to Italy when on 19 September 1929 Hatry, who was by now being investigated by Sir Gilbert Garnsey of Price Waterhouse on behalf of worried creditors, and his three other directors confessed to the Chairman of his companies, the 16th Marquess of Winchester, in the Charing Cross Hotel, that there were 'irregularities'. The four then piled into a taxi to tell Garnsey, 'We want to make a complete statement before the investigation is begun.' They subsequently made a formal confession to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Archibald Bodkin, in which the forty-year-old Hatry took full responsibility himself for the misdemeanours. Garnsey revealed that the total liability of Hatry's companies was in the region of £21 million, with Austin Friars Trust responsible for £15 million. The City took the news badly. 'This Hatry affair has besmirched us all, especially in the eyes of foreigners, which we can ill afford,' wrote the Governor of the Bank of England. In his diary he laconically gave his verdict: 'I do not favour bail for Hatry.'

Hatry did not get bail, nor did his young associates. When the case came to trial on 20 January 1930 it took the prosecution a full four days to present the charges, so complicated were the details, so breathtaking the sums of money involved. Hatry was defended by Norman Birkett, KC, but since he and his fellow defendants changed their pleas to guilty of all charges, all Birkett could plead was mitigation. All the lawyer's legendary powers of persuasion (which brought tears to the eyes of the accused) were to no avail. The judge failed to see the difference between Hatry's intention to redeem his fraudulent issue out of the large profits he anticipated making when his ambitious steel combine was floated and 'the threadbare plea of every clerk or servant who robs his master and says that he hoped to repay the money before his crime was discovered by backing a winner. Except that your crime was on a large scale.' Mr Justice Avory sentenced Hatry to a draconian fourteen years of penal servitude, since 'You stand convicted on your own confession of the most appalling frauds that have ever disfigured the commercial reputation of this country.' The 'bird-like' Hatry 'visibly reeled'. His son bitterly concluded that the case had been prejudged in the name of a nation that was itself reeling from the effects of the world slump, but on appeal two months later Hatry's sentence was effectively *increased* by the two months that had elapsed between trial and appeal.

The verdict of some in the City was similar to that of the judge. Hatry's Chairman, the Marquess of Winchester, who had lost money and reputation in the 'Hatry crash', had once thought that Hatry was 'an example of the alert business brain having an unusually quick perception of any proposition,

a marvellous gift for shifting the intricacies, a power of putting his case with a clarity of expression rarely found apart from legal training, coupled with an apparent frankness which amounted to a charm of manner'. He now revised his opinion, and decided that in fact what Hatry possessed was 'dangerous optimism coupled with inordinate conceit … his brain was honeycombed with crevasses into which unpleasant facts were allowed to slip and there he permitted them to remain in the hope that the glacier would never reveal its secrets'. *The Times* spoke of 'a rogue … a signalman who deliberately tampers with the signal'.

But others were less anxious to clamber onto the moral high ground. The left-wing *New Statesman*, which might have been expected to be very harsh about the unacceptable face of capitalism, was kinder. 'Hatry was not a swindler … he was rather an unbalanced optimist with a defective moral sense. He set out not to defraud the investors in his companies, but to make money, if he could, for them as well as himself … "If only I had been reasonably lucky," a man in a similar position might say, "I would have retrieved everyone's fortunes, and no one would have been a penny the worse for my illegality. How right I should have been!"' For the *New Statesman* it was the City itself that was particularly to blame: 'How in the name of fortune did the banks come to give the Hatry group so much money?' At a time, it probably wanted to add, when it was so unwilling to lend to industry in the depressed areas. Indeed, 'The Hatry case will have done some good if it rivets public attention on the joint-stock banks and reveals what part they are really playing in City speculation and in financing productive industry.'

A model prisoner with influential and eloquent supporters such as Harold Nicolson, eighteen MPs and his lawyer Birkett prepared to petition for him, Hatry was released from prison after serving nine rather than fourteen years. He subsequently borrowed sufficient money to purchase the 'carriage trade' bookshop Hatchard's in Piccadilly. Again he expanded and acquired and amalgamated and diversified, and again his rickety empire crashed. In the late 1950s Hatry was to be found cashing in on the coffee-bar craze, buying up premises in the West End to serve 'froffy coffee' to a newly affluent post-war generation of teenagers. He died of heart failure on 10 June 1965.

PART TWO *The Search for Solutions*

PROLOGUE *R101 Disaster*

It would be a *coup de maître*. British prestige confirmed with a stylish gesture. The country's position as an imperial power elegantly underlined. Brigadier-General the Right Honourable Lord Thomson of Cardington, Secretary of State for Air in the Labour government, would stroll coolly into the meeting of the Imperial Conference in London on 20 October 1930 as the delegates were getting down to a discussion of air power. Thomson would have just arrived back from a round trip to India which had taken little more than a fortnight, while the representatives from Australia and New Zealand had taken six or seven weeks to get to the mother country. It would demonstrate that Britain had taken the lead from Germany in the development of 'lighter than air' machines. Furthermore, Thomson was being canvassed as the next Viceroy of India, and the subcontinent had been showing disturbing signs of nationalist unrest for over a decade now. The previous year Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of the Indian National Congress, had pre-empted the Simon Commission's recommendations on India's constitutional future by declaring for *purna swaraj* (complete independence). Perhaps the choice of this destination for the R101, the airship in which Thomson would make his flight, would be read as evidence of how close and how benign the ties of Empire were — at least as far as Britain was concerned.

During the First World War, rigid German airships named after Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, a German cavalry officer who had been interested in constructing a 'dirigible balloon' ever since he had seen the French using them during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, had become an ominous sight over England. By the outbreak of the war there were a total of twenty-one Zeppelins in service for commercial passenger transport. Recognising their military potential (which Zeppelin had always intended), the German army and navy purchased fourteen airships, most of which were used for reconnaissance. However, on 19 January 1915, in the first ever bombing raid on civilians, two Zeppelins dropped twenty-four fifty-kilogram high-explosive bombs and a number of incendiaries on towns along the Norfolk coast, killing four people, injuring sixteen and causing considerable damage to property. In the course of the war there were fifty-one such raids; 557 British civilians were killed in all, and 1,358 injured. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, all airships were transferred to the Allies as part of the war reparations package.

The British had started to experiment with rigid airships in 1908, but a series of disasters, beginning with the unfortunately appropriately-named *Mayfly* in September 1911, put an end to their development until towards the end of the war. After it resumed, success seemed as elusive as ever: a review in 1923 revealed that out of the 154 rigid airships that had been completed and flown by Germany, Britain the United States and France, 104 (68 per cent) had been lost, along with a total of 584 lives. One life had been lost for every sixty-five airship flying hours. However, one German commercial aircraft company had flown 138,975 miles without a single fatality, and airships had the edge over 'heavier than air' aeroplanes when it came to spaciousness, comfort, load-carrying and quietness.

On leap year's day 1924, Lord Thomson, newly appointed Secretary of State for Air in the first Labour government, announced a three-year Government Research, Experiment and Development airships programme. The gauntlet was picked up by Stanley Baldwin's Conservatives when they came to power in November that year, and in 1926 the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Samuel Hoare, announced that not one but two airships, each capable of long-distance overseas voyages, were to be constructed, in the hope, as Hoare told the Lord Mayor's Banquet, that 'in a few years it will be possible to have a regular airship service between London and Bombay as it now is to have an aeroplane service between London and Paris'. At that time the sea voyage took seventeen days. While an airship could not fly fast as an aeroplane (then averaging around 120 mph) it would be able to sustain a regular 60 mph, and unlike a plane it could remain in the air throughout the day and

night. One of the airships (the R101) would be built by the Air Ministry at the Royal Airship Works at Cardington, near Bedford, the other (the R100) by a private company, the Airship Guarantee Company Ltd, owned by the engineering firm of Vickers, at Howden in Yorkshire, where Barnes Wallis, later to develop the famous 'bouncing bomb' used by the 'Dambusters' in the Ruhr in May 1943, was chief designer.

This dual capitalist/state enterprise approach was intended to ensure 'competition in design', and would mean that the failure of one ship would not terminate the whole programme, but what it also did, according to the stress engineer for the R100, N.S. Norway, later to be better known as the writer Nevil Shute, was to ensure that the lessons learned in one experiment were not shared with the other: it was rivalry, not collaboration.

The airships were to be built to the same rough specifications, designed to carry a hundred passengers in comfort, plus ten tons of mail and cargo, and to be capable of flying non-stop for fifty-seven hours at an average speed of 63 mph. But while the R100 was intended as a commercial craft, built along largely conventional lines gleaned from the German Zeppelins, the R101 was to be absolutely cutting-edge, employing the latest technologies.

The plan had been that the R101 would make its first trip to India in the early spring of 1927, but delays, design problems, and costs escalated at Cardington. By the end of 1927 only part of the R101's structure had been delivered, whereas the framework of the R100 was almost finished, despite the fact that at Howden, where Vickers controlled the purse strings, many more calculations were made on the drawing board before work was put in hand. The R100 made its first flight of 150 miles (which took five hours forty-seven minutes) on 16 December 1929, and seven months later, in the early hours of 29 July 1930, took off for Canada. Meanwhile, the R101 had made a couple of flights round Britain, in 'very perfect flying conditions', as its chief designer, Lieutenant-Colonel Richmond, put it, but had not been tested on an overseas route. And the Imperial Conference at which Lord Thomson planned to make his dramatic entrance was due to open on 1 October.

In the early hours of 2 August 1930 the R100 moored at Montreal, having been in the air for seventy-four hours. On 16 August it was back in England, where Thomson congratulated the crew on accomplishing 'this first and successful step in the development of our new generation of British airships'. It never flew again.

Meanwhile, the other great hope of British aviation was being sliced in half in its hangar. The surgical intervention was being performed to lengthen the R101 from 732 feet to 777 feet by adding a further section so that an additional gas bag could be inserted, covered, in the days before plastic, with the stretched intestines of bullocks imported from the great Chicago meatpacking factories. This was being done to give the R101 more lift: as it was, it would only have been able to carry a load of thirty-five tons; the long journey to India required twenty-five tons of fuel, leaving only an impossible ten tons for passengers, crew, luggage and stores. Already everything that could be lightened had been, and what looked like solid oak pillars were in fact balsa wood covered with a paper veneer. But it had been decided that with only weeks to go before the epic flight, drastic action had to be taken.

By 25 September the operation had been completed and the two halves of the airship sewn together again, but bad weather prevented further tests, and it was not until the early hours of 1 October that the R101 was finally 'walked out' of its hangar, some two hundred men (including a number of the unemployed from nearby Bedford) pulling the vast dirigible out of its glove-tight housing with ropes and mooring it to the Eiffel-tower-like structure to which it was attached ready for flight. Already twenty men, the 'gassing and mooring party', had left for Karachi to prepare for the R101's arrival in India. If Thomson was to meet his timetable, it was essential that the airship set off as soon as possible. It has been alleged that Thomson's impatience overrode proper safety concerns for the R101, although the airship's principal biographer strenuously disputes this. Indeed, on the day of its departure for the subcontinent, Thomson insisted to Wing Commander Colmore,

Director of Airship Development at Cardington, 'You must not allow your judgment to be swayed by my natural anxiety to get off quickly.'

There were other considerations: six weeks earlier, on August Bank Holiday, the twenty-six-year-old Amy Johnson, daughter of a fish-shop owner from Hull, had arrived at Croydon airport in pouring rain after a nineteen-day solo round trip to Australia, via India. She too had received a warm welcome from the Secretary of State for Air, who nevertheless must have reflected on the contrast between Miss Johnson's pioneering achievement and the fact that although nearly £2.5 million had been spent on the airship development programme since 1924, and questions were being asked in Parliament about such expenditure at a time of intense economic depression, so far there did not seem a great deal to show for it.

Despite the fact that the R101 had never flown in bad weather, and had not flown for even an hour at full speed in any conditions, a Certificate of Airworthiness was issued, and on 4 October 1930, the last day of British Summer Time, the R101 was ready to take off on a 'demonstration flight' of 2,235 nautical miles to Ismalia in Egypt, and then on to Karachi.

At 6.15 that evening the ministerial Daimler drew up on the Cardington airfield and the Secretary of State for Air got out. Earlier that day biscuits had been decanted from tins into paper bags to save weight; Lord Thomson's luggage, which included cabin trunks, suitcases, two cases of champagne, a dress sword weighing three pounds and a Persian carpet weighing 129 pounds to be laid for the state dinners planned for Ismalia and Karachi, amounted to 1,207 pounds. The total weight of the passengers and all their luggage was supposed to be 2,508 pounds.

The mighty silver airship, the largest in the world, with fifty-four people aboard including six passengers, slipped its moorings at 6.36 p.m. in poor weather and steered for London, where it cruised at no more than eight hundred feet above the city, its lights blazing. The practices and uniforms aboard the R101 were, as befitted the name airship, naval, but those not required for watch duty or other chores headed for the spacious dining room, where six tables had been laid with white linen and gleaming silverware presented in a gesture of civic pride by the town of Bedford. After a good dinner (for the grandees, or bread and cheese and pickles washed down with cocoa for the crew) most of the passengers retreated to the comfortable wicker chairs in the metal-lined fireproof smoking lounge for a final cigar and a brandy. Given the highly explosive nature of the gas in the airbags, no smoking (or matches) was permitted anywhere else on board. They then trooped out onto the viewing balconies on either side of the lounge, where they caught a glimpse of the mouth of the river Somme, which had such terrible redolence for most of their generation, before retiring to their cabins for the night.

At 2.07 a.m. French time, approaching the Beauvais Ridge, already well known to aviators for its notorious gusting winds, the R101, which had been flying at around 1,200 feet at fifty knots, rolling and pitching through turbulent wind and rain which had not been anticipated, suddenly nosedived towards the ground. At 2.09 it crashed into dense woods near the hamlet of Allone. The crash ignited leaking hydrogen, and flames immediately engulfed the airship, lighting up the countryside around. Forty-six perished, including Lord Thomson and his valet; Sir Sefton Brancker, Director of Civil Aviation; the Director and assistant Directors of Airship Development; the R101's captain, navigator, engineers, petty officers, charge hands and other members of the crew. Eight managed to scramble free, but of those two died of their injuries.

Virginia Woolf watched the funeral procession of the 'heroes' of the R101 on 11 October — but was not impressed.

The fifty coffins have just trundled by, lorries spread rather skimpily with Union Jacks — an unbecoming pall — & stuck about with red & yellow wreaths … the crowd smells; the sun makes it all too like birthday cake & crackers; & the coffins conceal too much. One bone, one charred hand wd. have done what no ceremony can do … why 'heroes'? A shifty & unpleasant man, Lord Thomson by all accounts, goes for a joy ride with other notables, & has the misfortune to be burnt at Beauvais … we have every reason to say Good God how very painful — how very unlucky — but why all the shops

in Oxford Street and Southampton Row shd. display black dresses only & run up black bars; why people should line the streets & parade through Westminster Hall, why every paper should be filled with nobility & lamentations & praise, why the Germans should muffle their wireless & the French ordain a day of mourning & the footballers stop for two minutes silence — beats me & Leonard …

The inquiry into the disaster, which reported in March 1931, while admiring the 'skill, courage, and devotion' of all those involved in the flight, decided that the immediate cause of the crash was a sudden loss of gas in one of the gasbags at the moment that the nose of the airship was being depressed by a very strong wind. This was probably due to the 'ripping of the fore part of the envelope' (the doped canvas outer covering), which had torn at precisely the place where it had been patched rather than replaced after an earlier mishap, so the wind got in and split open the already punctured front gasbag. In addition the watch had just changed, and the new men on duty had not yet had time to get the 'feel' of the ship. But the conclusion was less contingent:

It is clear that if those responsible had been entirely free to choose the time and the weather in which the R101 should start for the first flight ever undertaken by any airship to India, and if the only considerations governing their choice were considerations of meteorology and of preparation for the voyage, the R101 would not have started when she did … It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the R101 would not have started for India on the evening of October 4th if it had not been that reasons of public policy were considered as making it highly desirable for her to do so if she could … Airship travel is still in its experimental stage. It is for others to determine whether the experiment should be further pursued.

It was not: in December 1931 the R100 was broken up with axes and the pieces crushed by a steamroller so they could be sold for scrap. Workers from a Sheffield firm travelled to France and brought back the remains of the R101, some of which were made into pots and pans, while five tons were sold to the German Zeppelin Company. The sheds that had housed the R100 and the R101 were used to make and store barrage balloons during the Second World War. No more passenger-carrying airships were ever built in Britain. The loss of the German *Hindenburg*, dubbed the *'Titanic* of the sky', which exploded in flames on landing in New Jersey in May 1937, drew what appears to have been a final line under civil airship development worldwide.

SIX *'Can We Conquer Unemployment?'*

I reminded myself firmly that I was no economist … My childlike literary mind always fastens upon concrete details. Thus, when the newspapers tell me there is yet another financial crisis and that gold is being rushed from one country to another and I see photographs of excited City men jostling and scrambling and of bank porters and sailors carrying boxes of bullion, I always feel that some idiotic game is going on and that it is as preposterous that the welfare of millions of real people should hang on the fortunes of this game as it would be if our happiness hung upon the results of the Stock Exchange golfing tournament … I thought … how this City, which is always referred to with tremendous respect, which is treated as if it were the very red beating heart of England, must have got its money from somewhere, but it could not have conjured gold out of Threadneedle Street and that a great deal of this money must have poured into it at one time — a good long time too — from that part of England which is much dearer to me than the City, namely, the industrial North. For generations the blackened North toiled and moiled so that England should be rich and the City of London be a great power in the world. But now this North is half derelict, and its people living on in queer and ugly places, are shabby, bewildered, unhappy. I was prejudiced, of course … perhaps because I like people who make things better than I like people who only deal in money … Perhaps I would not have dragged the City into this meditation at all if I had not always been told, every time the nation made an important move, went on the Gold Standard, or went off it, that the City had so ordered it. The City then, I thought, must accept the responsibility. Either it is bossing us about or it isn't. If it is, then it must take the blame if there is any blame to be taken. And there seems to me to be a great deal of blame to be taken. What has the City done for its old ally, the industrial North? It seemed to have done what the black-moustached glossy gentleman in the old melodramas always did to the innocent village maiden.

J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (1934)

It has increasingly been recognized in recent years that Keynes' work cannot properly be appreciated if he is regarded narrowly as an 'economist' … the avocation of the economist required a combination of gifts: not only as mathematician and historian, but also as a statesman and philosopher.

Peter Clarke, 'J.M. Keynes 1883–1946: The Best of Both Worlds' (1994)

Shortly after six o'clock on the morning of Sunday, 5 October 1930, the bedside telephone of Ramsay MacDonald rang in his hotel room. 'The R101 was wrecked and Thomson was not amongst the living!' the Prime Minister wrote in his diary. 'As though by the pressing of a button confusion & gloom & sorrow came upon the world — was the world. So, when I bade him goodbye on Friday & looked down at him descending the stairs at No. 10, that was to be the last glimpse of my friend, gallant, gay & loyal. No one was like him & there will be none … Why did I allow him to go? He was so dead certain there could be no mishap … This is indeed a great national calamity, & today, I distracted in the midst of it, can but grieve.'

Two days later MacDonald, who was in Llandudno for the Labour Party Conference, addressed the assembled delegates. Looking 'drawn and haggard' he paid tribute to the man who was probably his closest friend in politics before turning to a passionate defence of his government and its attempts to deal with the crushing problems of unemployment:

We are not on trial, it is the system under which we live which is under trial. It has broken down, not only in this little island, it has broken down in Europe, in Asia, in America; it has broken down everywhere. It was bound to break down. And the cure, the new path, the new idea is organisation — organisation that will protect life not property … I appeal to you, my friends, today, with all that is going on outside — I appeal to you to go back to your Socialist faith. Do not mix that up with pettifogging patching, either of a Poor Law kind or a Relief Work kind. Construction, ideas, architecture, building line upon line, stone upon stone, storey upon storey … I think [it] will be your

happiness, as it is mine, to go on convinced that the great foundations are being well laid … and that by skilled craftsmen, confident in each other's goodwill and sincerity, the temple will rise and rise until at last it is complete, and the genius of humanity will find within it an appropriate resting place.

With tumultuous applause ringing in his ears, MacDonald hurried back to London, anxious to get to Victoria station in time to greet the flag-draped coffins of the victims of the R101 disaster as they arrived back from France, leaving others at the Welsh seaside resort to puzzle over how these stirring sentiments (or 'MacDonaldite slush and floral phrases. Meaning nothing definite') could be translated to the matter at hand: unemployment, which had stood at 1.1 million when Labour came to power in May 1929, had risen by the time of MacDonald's speech in October 1930 to more than double that. How could the task of realising the 'temple' of socialism accord with alleviating the immediate sufferings of the present crisis of the capitalist one? Or, put more epigrammatically, how could a new Jerusalem be built during the 'economic blizzard', as MacDonald characterised it, that engulfed Britain (and much of the rest of the world) in 1930?

The Labour Party had been founded to give the working classes a voice in Parliament, and it was committed to a parliamentary democratic route to achieving its aims. Now in its second term in office, but still without an outright majority, Labour might — at the outside — have five years in which to effect the transformation from capitalism to socialism, as was outlined in its first detailed programme, *Labour and the New Social Order*, adopted by the party in 1918. As Sidney Webb, the programme's main author, had put it, 'The Labour Party refuses absolutely to believe that the British people will permanently tolerate any reconstruction or perpetuation of the dis-organisation, waste and inefficiency involved in the abandonment of British industry to a jostling around of separate private employers … What the Labour Party looks to is a genuinely scientific re-organisation of the nation's industry no longer deflected by individual profiteering on the basis of Common Ownership of the Means of Production.' But the radical changes this transformation required would be quite impossible to achieve within a single Parliament: Labour would need at least one further term in office to complete the process. That would mean tailoring policies to win electoral support, while at the same time advancing from a society where explicit government intervention was exercised with a light touch, towards a socialist state with a great deal of public control. It was to be the unfulfilled task of the 1930s for the Labour Party to articulate a practical strategy for accomplishing this goal by democratic means.

Moreover, Ramsay MacDonald, his Ministers and the majority of the Labour Party were committed to this gradualist approach, believing that socialism would be achieved not as a result of the collapse of capitalism, but rather on the back of its success, since it was this that would generate the money needed for wide-ranging community social services and redistributive taxation.

'The election of 1929 seemed to us at the time a wonderful, almost miraculous victory,' wrote the twenty-three-year-old Hugh Gaitskell, at the time a lecturer in political economy at University College, London. 'We had done so much better than I (perhaps because most of my speaking had been in Marylebone!) had thought possible. We paid little, no doubt far too little, attention to the absence of a clear majority. It was enough for us that Labour was in power again, and for the first time held the largest number of seats. Our hopes for peace could be high, we would clear the slums — and, above all, tackle the unemployment.' In fact 1929 was a disastrous time for Labour to come to power, especially with a hung Parliament. As the government struggled to drain the pool of structural unemployment that had been filling up throughout the 1920s, it was knocked sideways by the flood of cyclical unemployment caused by the worldwide Depression. No country was able to cope satisfactorily with the 'economic blizzard' and find an answer to the rising unemployment that resulted. In fact Britain was less hard hit than many other countries, particularly Germany and the United States. Nevertheless, the fate of the Labour government would be in thrall to an unprecedented degree to the performance of the economy. At a time when capitalism, if not in the throes of its final crisis, was certainly being severely tested, socialists were in no doubt that the government should take charge of the management

of the economy, and that under a socialist state poverty and unemployment would fade away. But that was a long-term aim (and one without a blueprint for how it would be achieved), and while MacDonald and his colleagues spoke of themselves as socialists they were also members of the labour movement, committed to the defence of working-class living standards, which were under attack as a result of the economic crisis.

The conundrum of whether, in times of crisis, capitalism should be repaired (if made more equitable) or replaced would haunt the left in various degrees throughout the thirties, and contribute to its sense of impotence. 'The capitalist system is ossified, restrictionist and unjust; but it is expanding and stable,' wrote the economist and political theorist Evan Durbin in a book published in 1940 that explored the socialist dilemmas of the 1930s. 'The society based upon the capitalist economy is unequal and restless; but it is democratic, middle class and conservative. What then ought to be done?' However, the immediate problem was that more and more people were being thrown out of work. How could their distress be alleviated without 'propping up' the inefficiencies of the capitalist system any longer than necessary?

Not that there was any lack of ideas about how this should be done. The trouble was that most were contradictory, and several cut across party lines, which is not surprising, since there was no agreed analysis of the causes of the slump among politicians of any of the major parties — although all three had made reducing unemployment the main plank of their election appeal. It was hard to find a solution when what was causing the problem was so perplexing.

The Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden, was an exemplar of 'orthodox economics' — 'a High Priest', thought Winston Churchill: 'The Treasury mind and the Snowden mind embraced each other with the fervour of two long-separated lizards,' he wrote. Snowden was adamant that Britain's recovery would only take place as part of a stable international economy based on the Gold Standard. Thus there was an absolute imperative to maintain international confidence by keeping the economy balanced and avoiding a budget deficit at all costs.

This meant that Snowden was implacably opposed to those who saw the solution in expanding the economy through lower interest rates and a programme of public works projects. The Chancellor had made his views clear during the first Labour government in July 1924, and had not budged since: 'It is no part of my job as Chancellor of the Exchequer to put before the House of Commons proposals for the expenditure of public money. The function of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as I understand it, is to resist all demands for expenditure made by his colleagues and, when he can no longer resist, to limit the concession to the barest point of acceptance.' For Snowden, public works projects had to be strictly evaluated like any other form of investment. Unemployment was a long-term problem that would only be solved if production costs could be brought down — particularly in the export industries. Public works might redistribute unemployment; they would not end it. This was largely the view of the Conservatives too, as well as the City.

As for MacDonald, he had few firm convictions as to what was causing the slump, little confidence in his understanding of the economy (which Labour 'shall have to put under a gyroscope', he once wrote) and few ideas about how Britain was going to get out of it. But, as he made clear in his speech to Conference, he recognised that, along with peace, unemployment was the central issue the Labour government had to tackle — and would be judged by. He started the process as soon as Labour took power. 'Since our return to Whitehall,' wrote Secretary to the Cabinet Thomas Jones (always known as 'TJ'), 'the pace has been furious. The slogan is not "Socialism in our time" but "Socialism before Xmas". Big bills are being drafted on Unemployment, Roads, Factories, Pension, Coal …'

The ex-railway union leader J.H. (Jimmy) Thomas had been MacDonald's first choice as Foreign Secretary, but since Arthur Henderson 'would not return to H.O. [Home Office] but put in plea for F.O.', instead agreed to accept the post of Lord Privy Seal with responsibility for coordinating government unemployment policies. In the debate on the King's Speech he reported on his progress less than a month after taking office. Already he had tramped the country talking to industrialists

about the supposed panacea of 'rationalisation' to cut costs and improve competitiveness, having discussions with railway managers, business leaders and civil servants, and conducting 'long and delicate negotiations' with the obdurate Governor of the Bank of England, Montagu Norman. He eventually succeeded in interesting the City in 'placing industry on a broad and sound basis and ready to support any plans that in its opinion lead to this end', and by March 1930 what might now be called a Public Private Initiative, the Bankers' Industrial Development Company, had been set up to finance rationalised industry, with £6 million coming from the Bank of England and over forty merchant banks, clearing banks and other financial institutions.

As Thomas was speaking to the Commons, all sorts of other ambitious plans were being drafted. These included a £37.5-million, five-year road-building programme, improvements on the railways, £1 million for colonial development schemes which included building a bridge across the Zambezi — and plans to attract new industries to those areas of Britain where unemployment was highest. Thomas went to Canada for several weeks to try to stimulate the market for British coal and ships. His success was very limited. One of the three assistants who had been appointed to help him in his gargantuan task when they weren't busy with their other responsibilities, Tom Johnston, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (the other two were the wealthy and arrogant Sir Oswald Mosley, once a Conservative MP but now Labour's Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and fizzing with new schemes, and the veteran politician George Lansbury, whose espousal of 'Poplarism' — named after a rate strike in London's deprived East End in 1921 — had made him a symbol of local defiance of central government in the interest of the poor and needy) pressed for the construction of a road round Loch Lomond (what he got was the reconstruction of the coach road from Aberfoyle to the Trossachs). Lansbury favoured a retirement pension for workers at sixty ('Better pay the old to do nothing than the young,' commented Thomas Jones), a colonising scheme in Western Australia and a land reclamation programme at home.

By November 1930 Thomas was able to report to Parliament that £24 million had already been spent on stimulating public works schemes. But for James Maxton, chairman of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), such initiatives were certainly 'not socialism', and he taunted Thomas with being 'caught in a spider web of capitalism', and prophetically warned that a choice would have to be made between the government and the unemployed — and he knew which side he would be on.

In October 1929 a heavyweight committee was appointed under the chairmanship of a barrister, Lord Macmillan, to examine the workings of the banking and financial systems and to make recommendations 'calculated … to promote the development of commerce and the employment of labour'. Macmillan, who later confessed that he 'never learned to move with any ease in the realm of finance', was surrounded by some expert and authoritative minds. There were employers, including the President of the Federation of British Industries, a professor of banking from the London School of Economics, a director of the Bank of England, a merchant banker and a former Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, working alongside a former 'Red Clydesider', J.T. Walton Newbold, while the trade union slot was filled by Ernest Bevin of the Transport and General Workers' Union. The economist John Maynard Keynes, whose hand had been behind the 'remedy for unemployment' set out in the Liberal election manifesto *We Can Conquer Unemployment* (distilled from the famous 'Yellow Book', *Britain's Industrial Future)*, was also invited to join.

The Committee, which was criticised in some quarters as being 'packed in favour of finance', took evidence throughout 1930 and into the following year. Keynes presented his — which was in effect a dry run for his two-volume work *A Treatise on Money*, published later in the year — 'like a seminar', seeking to educate the Committee on the fundamental distinction between saving and investment: the world's wealth had not been accumulated by thrift, but rather by enterprise. Savings by themselves achieved nothing: they needed to be put to work. From this followed — though Keynes took several cliffhanging days to expound what followed: 'You are a complete dramatist,' Macmillan said admiringly — his 'favourite remedy': home investment by the government to 'break the vicious

circle' of underinvestment and mop up unemployment by increasing domestic demand rather than relying on the vagaries of the export market. Along with this went the further rationalisation of industry, protection of the home market by tariff barriers (a new departure for Keynes), and bringing down interest rates — cheap money.

Reginald McKenna, who had been a respected Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer during the First World War, and subsequently Chairman of the Midland Bank, agreed, and gave an easy-to-follow explanation of how this could work in practice: with more money in circulation more boots would be bought, more men would be taken on to make the boots, their wages would be spent on cotton goods, which would create employment in the cotton industry, and so it would go on. Ernest Bevin was equally enthusiastic, envisaging the prospect for coalminers, whose purchasing power was almost half what it should have been; if it was raised 'it would lead to a greater demand for boots for children, and clothes and furniture and luxuries and things of that kind'.

But when the ill-prepared and irritable Montagu Norman appeared before the Committee, he rejected Keynes' view that the financial system was 'jammed' and the key to unlock it was obsolete: in Norman's view it was industry that was jammed, and since he saw the Bank of England's relation to the nation as similar to that of a high street bank's to its customers — that is, to ensure that they did not live beyond their means — industry needed rationalisation, not credit, to meet its difficulties. He accepted, however, that rationalisation was hardly a short-term fix, and agreed that unemployment would be 'apt to increase' (the word 'temporarily' was added in the final report to sweeten the pill). In essence the Bank's view — more ably put by others subsequently — rejected the notion that the return to the Gold Standard in 1925, much to the disquiet of Keynes, and indeed McKenna, had resulted in inflated interest rates, or that there were any other monetary shortcomings. The basic problem was that British industry was uncompetitive, and until its house was put in order (largely by wage cuts, 'encouraging' labour mobility by cutting unemployment pay, reducing taxes on profits and — of course — rationalisation) any other remedies would be merely palliative.

By December, after less than six months in office, the verdict of Hugh Dalton, then Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office ('The under secretaries are all aristocrats,' Beatrice Webb had sniffed when the government was formed: Dalton's father had been Canon of St George's Chapel, Windsor, and an intimate friend of George V), was that 'the Labour Government as a whole has been pretty disappointing with bright patches. Thomas and Maggie Bondfield [Margaret Bondfield, Minister of Labour] are two of the most obvious failures. Few have anything good to say about either of them. MacDonald has been messing about again with the idea of the Economic General Staff, and having economists to lunch. But nothing concrete comes of it.' Thomas Jones was not much more optimistic: 'Labour is worried by the growing figures of unemployment. JHT [Jimmy Thomas] for some weeks now seemed to lose his nerve entirely. All criticism from all sides, which used to be spread over several Departments, is concentrated on him. There have been various devices for saving his face, the latest is a luncheon party which I have got to give for the PM.'

This was one of several such soundings-out about setting up 'a new machine which Ramsay could hail as his own creation'. The 'upshot of all this cogitation' was the appointment in January 1930, when employment had risen to just under 1.5 million, of an Economic Advisory Council (EAC) which would be 'the eyes and ears of [the Prime Minister] on economic questions'. MacDonald hoped it would be more than a talking shop: 'If it meets on a Monday, it must be ready for action to be taken on a Tuesday,' he insisted. The Council included bankers, industrialists, two scientists, the socialist intellectuals G.D.H. Cole and R.H. Tawney — and J.M. Keynes, plus Ernest Bevin and Walter Citrine as trade union voices.

There was considerable overlap between the personnel and the remits of the Macmillan Committee and the EAC, and since it had no executive authority and a rather vague brief, Citrine was concerned that EAC was likely to become a dumping ground for 'all the odds and ends that government likes to turn over to us'. Its secretary, the Cambridge economist Hubert Henderson, editor

of the *Nation* until it merged with the *New Statesman* in 1930, was equally underwhelmed, since according to one of his colleagues, 'He hated woolly thinking and theorising … and scorned Labour's economic theories.' In the event it proved impossible to get a consensus between the businessmen and the economists about the central issue of how to deal with unemployment, and Keynes persuaded MacDonald to set up a smaller group comprising solely economists, with him in the chair as an experiment to test 'the hypothesis, that [economics] can be treated like any other science, and ask for qualified scientists in the subject to have their say'.

By the summer of 1930 the original EAC was meeting less and less, and Bevin and Citrine had become disillusioned. The breakaway group of economists was equally fissiparous, and it proved wearisome to draft a report that was satisfactory to all — when it was published in October, Professor Lionel Robbins from the London School of Economics disassociated himself from the majority view entirely, and wrote a passionate defence of free trade. Nevertheless, no matter how ineffective the EAC was perceived to be, it was the first time a British Prime Minister had received consistent economic advice independent of the Treasury. Moreover, it was a sobering educative experience for those who sat on it, particularly Bevin and Citrine, who saw at first hand just how complex the problems were, and how irretrievably economic and political considerations were enmeshed.

If Dalton thought that the Cabinet was 'full of overworked men growing, older, more tired and more timid with each passing week', the dashing Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was seething with energy and radical solutions. After several frustrating months working with Jimmy Thomas, who was not only 'growing old and tired', but also more lachrymose, and was inclined to drink too much, Sir Oswald Mosley produced what he declared was 'a coherent and comprehensive conception of national policy', which he sent to Ramsay MacDonald on 23 January 1930. The 'Mosley Memorandum' asserted that the government needed to take charge of the economy, with a new department set up under the direct control of the Prime Minister to 'mobilise national resources on a larger scale than has yet been contemplated'. Britain's long-term economic problems would be met by systematic planning to create new industries and revitalise existing ones, while the immediate problem of unemployment would be solved by an ambitious three-year £200-million programme of public works which would cut through all the red tape involved in local authority schemes, and make roadbuilding a national responsibility. In addition, the school leaving age should be raised and retirement pensions paid earlier — shrinking the workforce from both ends. It amounted to a 'British equivalent of the Russian "Gosplan"', thought Fenner Brockway. It didn't really, though it was in favour of pretty heavy — if somewhat ambiguous — state intervention. But for Beatrice Webb its proposals were 'as grandiose as they are vague'.

Nevertheless, the Cabinet debated Mosley's package at length over the next few months. Snowden was obdurate: investment capital was limited, and if it was spent on ambitious public works schemes it would not be available to make Britain's export industries competitive. A loan such as Mosley proposed would push up interest rates and destroy overseas confidence. MacDonald was ambivalent: he was depressed by Snowden's 'hard dogmatism expressed in words & tones as hard as his ideas', yet was unconvinced that massive public spending was the answer. By February 1930 the government had already sanctioned £37 million worth of road improvement programmes but only £27 million worth of schemes had been put in hand, and only 1,620 men had been given jobs.

Mosley was coldly furious. Sneering that a Napoleon could spend £200 million in three years if he wanted to, he quoted Keynes against the Treasury orthodoxy, and resigned on 20 May 1930. His resignation speech to the House on 29 May, during the debate on a Conservative vote of censure on the government's unemployment policy, was a powerful indictment: present government policies were providing jobs for only 80,000 people a year, at a time when unemployment was over 1.75 million and still rising. It was a brilliant performance, and the sharp-tongued diarist and tireless social reformer Beatrice Webb, who recognised that Mosley possessed both 'a young man's zeal' and the ability to 'use

other men's brains', wondered, 'Has MacDonald found his superseder in O.M.?' MacDonald turned in a lamentable performance, seeming completely out of his depth in answering his critics.

The government survived nevertheless, and MacDonald reshuffled. Thomas was shoved off to the Dominions Office (though he was later allowed to retain responsibility for rationalisation), MacDonald put himself at the head of a panel of Ministers set up to develop the government's unemployment policies; that barely noticed rising star Major Clement Attlee, who considered that Mosley 'always speak[s] to us as if he were feudal landlord abusing tenants who are in arrears with their rent', replaced him at the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mosley, showing his arrogance and fatal lack of political judgement, founded his New Party in February 1931, since in his view the 'old men' in the 'old parties' had signally failed to deal with the problems of the postwar world, and thus a new party must be formed 'not to introduce Utopia but to prevent collapse'. His would be a party of neither right nor left, composed of young men with an agenda of parliamentary reform and economic planning, which sought to 'apply scientific method to public affairs to determine precisely what things must be done', untrammelled by party loyalty or political dogma, ready to take ideas from 'anyone so long as they are realist — be they Gladstone, Marx or Joseph Chamberlain'. Its role would be somewhere between a parliamentary 'ginger group', an intellectual think tank and a 'new movement' designed to 'sweep away the mockery and pretence of the old game of party politics'. Nevertheless the party formed to save Britain in its hour of crisis attracted only three Labour MPs, one of whom, John Strachey (a former member of the ILP and future Communist supporter who had resigned with Mosley when his memorandum was rejected — he had been Mosley's best man when he married the daughter of Lord Curzon) soon left. The New Party, which appeared to have 'no vision beyond the immediate emergency', largely disintegrated after failing to win any seats in the 1931 election. In October 1932 Mosley, who felt that the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had the vision and drive the British government lacked, founded the British Union of Fascists.

'Parliament itself is too big, too clumsy and too inexpert a body even to begin to tackle the complex problems of a modern community,' John Strachey and C.E.M. Joad (a maverick philosopher, writer and self-styled polygamist who became a household name in the 1940s as a member of the BBC's 'Brains Trust') had written in an article on parliamentary reform for the journal *Political Quarterly* in 1931. And in the crisis years of the early 1930s setting up committees to root around trying to find ways out of the blizzard was not indeed the prerogative of Parliament alone. As a young economist, Colin Clark, was to observe, 'The most recent universal remedy is apparently contained in the word "Plan".'

'Everyone has a Plan,' complained the Labour weekly the *Clarion*, though it considered most to be little more than 'undergraduate work', seeking compromises rather than the root-and-branch reconstruction of capitalism it deemed necessary, for which the Soviet Five Year Plan was something of a model. Indeed, there was soon an organisation the rationale of which was planning. On 14 February 1931 a 20,000-word 'National Plan for Great Britain' was published as a supplement to the *Week-End Review*, a magazine started by Gerald Barry and the editorial team who had all resigned from the *Saturday Review* when Beaverbrook converted to his policy of Empire preference. This plan was much needed because, in the view of Barry and its author, Max Nicholson, the country was in the hands of 'elderly men with elderly ideas', working with a 'Heath Robinson contrivance composed of the clutter of past generations and tied together with rotten bits of string'. The 'drift' and 'stagnation' must stop, since 'a great part of the present troubles of this country and the world are due to the failure to adapt erratic and conflicting national policies into a Plan'. The result was wide-ranging and prescient calls for an overhaul of the machinery of government, turning the Post Office and the Ministry of Works into autonomous public utilities — indeed, a measure of devolution from Whitehall and Westminster to industry the creation of a Bureau of Statistics to inform planners, designating national parks, trying to attract tourists, throwing a green belt around London and redeveloping the

South Bank of the Thames. And that June, intending to lobby to turn vision into policy, the Political and Economic Planning (PEP) group held its inaugural meeting, and started to issue regular reports and circulate digests of these reports as 'broadsheets' entitled — what else — *Planning*. With a growing number of research groups — fifteen within a year — beavering away on various topics such as town and country planning, fuel policy, housing, the press, consumer protection and government spin, PEP saw its role as being 'the ginger group of gradualness', in the words of Israel Sieff, vice-chairman of Marks & Spencer, who took over as chairman in December 1932, aiming to influence opinion-formers of any political hue in 'a crusade for continuous change'.

Unemployment hit the trade union movement hard, with falling numbers of members and a greater proportion of the wages of those in work going to support their unemployed brothers and sisters. However, until 1931 the movement had few alternatives to propose, and generally felt that the Labour government was doing its best — certainly no other party would do better — and that in general economic decisions were beyond its remit. But Keynes' attack on the Gold Standard, and the suspicion that Treasury economic orthodoxy was likely to result in a call for wage cuts, led Bevin and Citrine to decide that it was important that the TUC General Council should formulate its position. An Economic Committee was set up, and Bevin and Citrine drew on their experience on government-sponsored committees to call for the nationalisation of the Bank of England (still a private corporation independent of the government, despite its responsibility for the nation's monetary policy), iron and steel, leaving the Gold Standard and increasing government spending to increase purchasing power — very much what Keynes was also saying. If the TUC as a body was slower to develop an alternative economic strategy than its more unorthodox leaders — though by 1932 the Economic Committee had become its most influential policy body, particularly on the public control of industry and trade — defensive in the face of the growing possibility of wage cuts and calling for 'as full a development as possible of the economic relations between the constituent parts of the British Commonwealth', the government was equally unresponsive to trade union pressure.

By August 1930 Bevin was in despair. He considered the situation so serious 'that it warrants a state of emergency. The best brains in the country should be mobilised for the purpose of really tackling the problem instead of "footling about" in the manner we are at the moment.' In early 1931 he joined with some of these 'best brains' as Chairman of the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda (SSIP — usually referred to as 'zip'), with the former Fabian G.D.H. Cole as Vice Chairman, one of two bodies set up in an attempt to 'ginger up' thinking and activity in the Labour Party and provide it with the nuts and bolts of socialist policy, as Cole was convinced that the government was mired in a 'stagnant swamp' and unable to act.

The other body, the New Fabian Research Bureau (NFRB) (since, according to Cole's wife Margaret, the old one was becoming 'moribund'), was tasked with considering all areas of long-term socialist policy, while the SSIP's role was to diffuse its findings and stimulate discussion in the wider labour movement. G.D.H. Cole's intention was to 'rally the young men, among whom there is some excellent stuff', and indeed both were organisations of all the talents (and not all young or male). Apart from the Coles, participants included Stafford Cripps, a lawyer of great intellectual repute — and earning power — who was wished on a Bristol constituency as its MP in January 1931; George Lansbury; Ellen Wilkinson, the MP for Jarrow; Clement Attlee, who fourteen years later would be Prime Minister in the Labour government that would implement much of what these bodies advocated; the erratically brilliant Harold Laski; the economist Evan Durbin; another economist, the apprentice politician Hugh Gaitskell ('the cleverest and most self-contained of the young men Dalton advanced'); Arthur Pugh, General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Association (who, together with Bevin, represented over half a million workers); and Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia, who organised the international section.

Never intended as 'parties within a party' (as the ILP was charged with being), these two bodies were rather a collection of 'loyal grousers', several of whom would metamorphose into 'patriotic

gadflies' during the Second World War. They were astonishingly industrious, arranging meetings, discussions and 'kite-flying' (today's 'out of the box' or 'blue skies' thinking) sessions, educational meetings for students and trade unionists, and summer schools, in addition to producing a large number of influential books, booklets, pamphlets and memoranda, full of sound analysis and helpful advice. But for some time the government was politely but firmly dismissive of their efforts, and their penetration of the Labour machine proved to be almost as gradual as any old Fabian might have anticipated.

Hugh Dalton, appalled at how woefully ignorant he felt the Labour Party was about the workings of high finance, set out to meet 'as many City blokes as possible' in an attempt to fill in the blanks. One of these was Nicholas Davenport, who had worked with Keynes in the City and wrote the City column in the *New Statesman* under the byline 'Toreador'. Although 'all the claptrap of Clause 4 socialism' was not for him, Davenport considered himself to be a radical, and he was certainly an iconoclast when it came to the workings — or failures to work — of the City. He would look back on the 1930s as a time when 'the City's Establishment was … in effect an old boys' racket … It was a sort of Mafia in reverse — a gang based on honest dealing instead of blackmail, on good "hard" money (lots of it) instead of easy loot and on simplicity instead of cunning. The only rules were playing safe, resisting change, opposing new ideas, upholding the Establishment and being willing to dress up and go on pompous dinner parade in the City halls … the millions spent each year on guzzling [at these] junketings would amaze the underprivileged and enrage the poor.'

Davenport was alarmed that 'Because the Labour Party was so ignorant of the workings of the financial system … it was bound to cause havoc if it tried to put it all under government control.' He discussed this possibility 'many times over coffee in City dives' with Vaughan Berry, a City broker who was 'an ardent undercover Labour member', and the two decided to form 'a private dining club where City men could meet the Labour leaders and instruct them in the mysteries of City finance so that they would not make a hash of it when they came into power'. Dalton was encouraging, and Davenport recruited a number of financial journalists, a banker, a stockbroker, an accountant, a statistician, the director of a gold bullion house, and later two economic policy perennials, Evan Durbin and Hugh Gaitskell, plus Douglas Jay, who would be an influential — and profoundly anti-European — advisor to Attlee's post-war Labour government, but was then a staff writer on the *Economist*.

The private dining club, named the XYZ, met fortnightly or monthly in a room above a pub 'over a City alley deserted by night', in the private rooms of quiet Soho restaurants, a Charing Cross hotel, or in members' homes, depending on whose memoirs one reads, but always in great secrecy. Dalton, Herbert Morrison, Stafford Cripps and Attlee, all of whom except Cripps were 'sublimely ignorant of the City and suspicious of its institutions, especially the Stock Exchange which they regarded as a casino where rich men gambled to make money regardless of the state of the economy', were wined and dined so that what Dalton rather grandly called 'my experts' could attempt to 'enlighten them and exorcise the ghosts of Puritan bigotry and prejudice which haunted them'. Dalton's experts wrote papers and produced statistics on such matters as nationalising the Bank of England and the reform of the Stock Exchange, and advocated setting up a National Investment Board and an Industrial Finance Corporation.

'I like to think we did some good,' Davenport reflected forty years later, and quoted one of their number, Francis Williams, who had been City editor of the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald* at the time, and later took over as editor, assuming the role of Attlee's press spokesman after the war, who reckoned that 'Over the years, the XYZ Club drew up a blueprint for Labour's financial policy much of which … was adopted by the first postwar Labour government … [which it did] in the most private manner without attracting attention to itself.' But useful though that surely was, neither the XYZ Club nor any of the other think tanks, committees and ginger groups managed to find

any immediate solution to the problem of conquering (or tackling, as the word had less ambitiously become) unemployment.

'In the chaos of our political life today, there will be many meteors passing through the firmament,' wrote Beatrice Webb in her diary, with little enthusiasm at the prospect. 'Have there ever been so many political personages on the loose?' Mrs Webb was particularly thinking of Sir Oswald Mosley and Winston Churchill, but there were other unaligned souls out there on the loose with notions of how to conquer, tackle, solve the problem of ever-rising unemployment. The Fabian and best-selling novelist H.G. Wells thought there might be some mileage in a scheme to 'grow vines and produce white wine on the slopes of the hills in the South Wales mining area — as they do in Grasse in the South of France', wrote Thomas Jones. 'He also thought we should have large horticultural farms to produce early vegetables. I quickly discovered that he had no sense of the actual position in the derelict areas.'

The modernist poet Ezra Pound was another economic loose cannon. Long concerned about the plight of the under-remunerated artist, after the First World War he was attracted to the economic ideas of Major Clifford Hugh Douglas. Douglas, a Scot, had noticed when he was Assistant Director of the Royal Aircraft Works at Farnborough during the First World War that there was always plenty of money available to pay for what was needed, whereas before the war he was always being told that there was no money to do something useful. He came to the conclusion that there was a simple explanation for the persistence of unemployment and poverty in a modern world that was producing more and more goods. Basically, people couldn't afford to buy the things they produced: it was the persistent problem of under-consumption. So there was widespread poverty 'when physically all could be living in plenty'. If modern technology was leading to increased productivity, then the state would have to step in to increase people's ability to pay for those goods, and this could be done by effectively extending wartime controls, which to Douglas's mind had worked well.

The answer, Douglas argued, was contained in his 'three demands': a 'National Credit Office' to work out how much credit should be circulating in the economy; a 'just price' — a mechanism to absorb profits in times of inflation and return them to the people in the form of subsidised prices when the goods on the market exceeded the money available to buy them; and a 'national dividend' (a bit like a Co-op divi) to give a guaranteed basic income to all, regardless of whether they had a job or not.

This may have been an attractive economic argument, but it was a fallacious one, as G.D.H. Cole and Hugh Gaitskell (and many others) pointed out. Another of Douglas's wackier — though again rather appealing — ideas was reducing the working day of all those who worked in government offices to four hours, but doubling their number, the second shift intended to check the work of the first.

Major Douglas's economics might have been 'heresy' rather than unorthodox, a 'piece of nonsense', even a 'farrago of confusion', and Douglas might indeed be better regarded as 'a religious rather than a social reformer', but he was a hit with 'the political and social crowd that hangs round Speakers' Corners and joins in any march or demonstration' in the early 1930s. He also managed to snag the imagination of the 'fringes of the left and right', men like Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton, the poet Edwin Muir, the ex-editor of the *New Age*, a journal of ideas much concerned with modernism in culture, politics, Nietszchean philosophy and spiritualism which had been very influential among the *avant garde* before the First World War, A.R. Orage (who also published Pound on the pound) and of course Pound himself, who not only penned economic treatises, but incorporated his economic thinking into some of his poems: 'and the power to purchase can never/(under the present system) catch up with/prices at large/and the light became so bright and so blindin'/in this layer of paradise/ that the mind of man was bewildered'. However, in a time of slavish adherence to the Gold Standard, Pound was prescient in seeing that money was nothing more than a token: 'Money is not a commodity but a measure'. 'Real credit is a measure of the reserve of energy belonging to the community,' he maintained, and he proposed a 'citizen's income' given as of right, much like the vote. And, since

'far from employment bringing riches to a man, employment takes riches away since a person's riches should be calculated according to their store of time and energy, and are diminished by any encroachment on these' (a true creative artist's economics!), working hours should be cut to 'possibly three hours a day for adults between 18 and 40 … [which] should supply all men's necessities'.

One of the reasons Ezra Pound found Douglas's economic theory so appealing was that it was an implicit attack on banks and financiers, since inflation and deflation were controlled in 'a dark room back of a bank, hung with deep purple curtains'. So, 'Who my brother controlleth the bank?' For the virulently anti-Semitic Pound, the answer was obvious: a conspiracy of Jewish financiers.

Another maverick thinker frustrated with orthodox economic theories was the British-domiciled Canadian newspaper magnate, owner of the *Daily Express*, Lord Beaverbrook. Like Mosley, Beaverbrook, frustrated with the political party he had tried to influence with his radical ideas, set up a new movement. In Beaverbrook's case it was the Conservative Party that he had lost patience with. And his 'new wine' was Imperial Preference (which had been championed by Joseph Chamberlain in 1903), a tariff-protected internal market between Britain and her dominions intended to bind the Empire together and insulate Britain from the buffetings of the world economy.

In the eighteenth century Adam Smith, the principal theorist of Free Trade, had argued that the removal of trade restrictions between nations would encourage the exploitation of natural advantages, producing an efficient international division of labour and world peace. It was a doctrine perfectly attuned to the industrial hegemony that Britain had enjoyed as 'workshop of the world', buying raw materials in the cheapest markets and selling its manufactured goods in the most costly. But as foreign competition increased in the nineteenth century and the workshop began to look rickety, there were calls for trade barriers to protect British manufacturing industry and the wages of the workers, which free trade imports could undercut.

By 1930 the pressure to protect the home market was beginning to come from some unexpected quarters. It was a highly sensitive political matter, since Labour relied on the support of the Liberals in government, and for the Liberal Party, political and ideological heirs to Cobden and Bright, free trade flowed through their very veins. Snowden, too, was implacably opposed to the erection of any form of tariff barriers. Yet while the Labour government remained firm in its commitment to free trade, a protectionist movement under the leadership of Sir John Simon was stirring deep in the heart of the Liberal Party. And Stanley Baldwin, leader of a Conservative Party that was no more united in its policies to deal with the economic crisis than Labour or the Liberals, felt the breeze too, noting in April 1930 that 'The age of free trade is passing … because no new free traders are being born today.' He grew more confident about reviving old Conservative policies of tariff protection, talking cautiously about safeguarding industry and holding a referendum on what had previously been a vote-loser: food taxes. This however was not enough for those in the party who wanted MacDonald to commit to the pursuit of Empire Free Trade.

In early 1930 Beaverbrook jumped the gun and announced the start of an Empire Crusade, since 'The old Parties, slaves of tradition — impervious to new ideas — have let us down too, and … out of these old bottles it is no use looking for any new wine.' Beaverbrook's plan was to create a single economic unit from the variety of territories within the British Empire: the Empire would provide Britain with its food, while British industry would provide the Empire with the manufactured goods it needed, all behind a protective tariff barrier.

The Crusade, publicised in Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, and Lord Rothermere's United Empire Party, supported by his *Daily Mail* (between them these two papers had a circulation of nearly four million), formed an uneasy alliance 'to save the country … if necessary at the expense of wrecking every political party' by putting up candidates in every constituency represented by a free trade Conservative (though in fact Rothermere was less concerned about Empire trade than about the loss of British influence in India). In March 1931 the Empire Crusade and the United Empire Party joined together to support an independent, anti-Baldwin Conservative in a by-election

in the St George's division of Westminster, the safest (and without doubt the richest) Conservative seat in the country, where the official Conservative candidate was Duff Cooper. Baldwin, who was being attacked from 'under the piecrust' in his own party, was so anxious about the result that he almost considered standing himself. Cooper was a former diplomat and MP, a skilful gentleman-who-lunched, and both the husband of one of the notable beauties of the age, Lady Diana Cooper, and a close friend of the Prince of Wales. In the event, in a campaign in which 'the gloves were off' and there had been 'no baby or butcher-kissing', the socialite Tory 'slayed the dragons', winning a resounding victory despite the 'power without responsibility', as Baldwin accused it, of the popular press.

What Mosley and Beaverbrook advocated *in extremis* — and tainted with their advocacy — also figured in John Maynard Keynes' thinking, found instinctive support from the trade unions, and drew praise from radical young Tories like Robert Boothby and Harold Macmillan, whose Stockton-on-Tees constituency suffered deeply in the Depression, and who was exasperated by 'a shadow Cabinet … worn to a shadow by its exertions', a party with too many 'open questions and too many closed minds' — a criticism that could have been levelled at all three parties. Indeed Macmillan, who would in a little more than two more decades preside over Britain's return to affluence, had been tempted to work with Mosley's New Party himself, but had decided that 'Men do better to stick to their own parties and try to influence their policies and their characters from within.' Keynes too recognised much that he advocated in Mosley's proposals. He found the memorandum 'a very able document and illuminating'. And whereas before Mosley's resignation the dispute had been over the efficacy of public works, afterwards the focus of the argument was increasingly about tariffs. Protectionist policies began to find support not just from industrialists, but also from the City of London, economists — including Keynes — and trade unionists. But not from Snowden. The Chancellor remained as intransigent as ever, opposed both to increasing government expenditure to create jobs and also to any form of tariff barriers. Irritated by sniping from his own backbenchers, Snowden decided to give them a cold douche of reality as he saw it. In February 1931, in response to Conservative charges that unemployment costs were too high, the government accepted a Liberal amendment and set up a committee to report on the matter.

Sir George May of the Prudential Assurance Company assumed the role of picky auditor of the government's books, and his committee's report was published on 31 July 1931, the day before the House rose for the summer recess. The deliberations of the men whom Beatrice Webb described as 'five clever hard-faced representatives of capitalism and two dull trade unionists' were 'sensational' (or 'devilish', as the Bank of England feared). The May Committee forecast a budget deficit of £120 million, and to avoid this it recommended total spending cuts of £96 million, two-thirds to come from unemployment benefit, plus cuts in public works projects and the pay of teachers, the police and the armed forces. 'Luxury hotels and luxury flats, Bond Street shopping, racing and high living in all its forms is to go unchecked; but the babies are not to have milk and the very poor are not to have homes. The private luxury of the rich is apparently not *wasteful expenditure,'* expostulated Beatrice Webb. The Cassandra-like May report, which was considerably exaggerated but not questioned at the time, could not have come at a worse moment. On 11 May the Credit-Ansalt, the most important bank in Austria, had failed, threatening the collapse of the German banking system. France started to withdraw gold in large quantities from London, and by the end of July MacDonald noted 'Run on the Bank of England … £5,000,000 exported' as foreign holders of sterling unable to withdraw their money from Germany withdrew it from London instead, in what Treasury officials warned was 'an unprecedented exodus'. What had been a liquidity crisis was turning into one of confidence.

The Labour government was ill-placed to know how to restore it. In line with its election pledges benefit payments had been increased and access to benefits widened in January 1930, but the rapid escalation of unemployment and a shrinking tax base meant that the insurance fund was soon in deficit — by £75 million in 1930, and expected to rise. Unemployment benefits generally had soared as a cost to the Exchequer, from £12 million in 1928 to around £125 million in 1931.

To its critics, unemployment insurance had become symbolic of the Labour government's financial 'unsoundness' and 'profligacy'. The Holman Gregory Commission on Unemployment Insurance, set up in December 1930, issued its interim report at the end of June 1931, calling for reductions in unemployment benefits and increases in unemployment insurance contributions. And when Lord Macmillan's Committee finally issued its report in early July, 'it was not exactly a document of limpid clarity and gave little practical assistance to a distracted administration' (rather it gave the reverse, exposing the extent of London's short-term foreign indebtedness to the government's putative overseas lenders), while the minority report signed by Keynes and others saw the big picture and the long term, but was equally 'of no immediate help'.

Indeed, even after the publication of the May Committee report (on which his views were not fit for publication), Keynes still thought that MacDonald should consult 'a Commee. consisting of all ex Chancellors of the Exchequer' about the issue. Beatrice Webb, writing her diary at 4 a.m. in the middle of the crisis, considered that 'The only excuse for the Labour Cabinet is that no other group of men, whether politicians, businessmen or academic economists, whether Tory, Liberal or Labour, seem to understand the problem. No one knows either what the situation is … or the way out of it to sound finance. Even the fundamental facts of the situation are unknown.'

MacDonald set up a Cabinet Committee consisting of himself, Snowden, Henderson (who despite his position as Foreign Secretary discussing US loans considered that finance was a matter for the Treasury), J.H. Thomas and William Graham, President of the Board of Trade, to consider ways of reassuring foreign investors and easing the strain on sterling. 'Will the country pull through?' the Governor of the Bank of England Montagu Norman was asked on 15 August 1931. 'Yes,' he replied, 'if we can get them [i.e. the government] frightened enough.' Undoubtedly the government was frightened. It was also divided.

On hearing that more than £6 million in gold reserves had leached away during the past month, Snowden wrote to MacDonald on 7 August 1931 stressing the 'terrible gravity of [the whole situation]. Three millions of unemployed is certain in the near future and four millions is not out of the question. We are getting very near exhausting our borrowing powers for unemployment … we cannot allow matters to drift into utter chaos, and we are perilously near that.' It was reported in the City that MacDonald was hopeful that a loan to help prop up sterling 'could be placed in New York if satisfactory promises of good behaviour are made here'. But whatever Snowden and MacDonald thought about the imperative of balancing the budget — and by mid-August Snowden was predicting that the deficit would be £170 million, rather than the £120 million the May Committee had forecast — what the City regarded as 'good behaviour' went against the very *raison d'être* of the Labour Party: to represent the interests of working people. Now a Labour government that had proved unable to tackle, let along conquer, unemployment was being expected to penalise those very people who were already suffering most from this failure. 'It certainly is a tragically comic situation that the financiers who have landed the British people in this gigantic muddle should decide who should bear the burden,' again expostulated Beatrice Webb.

The Bank of England's agent in New York, J.P. Morgan & Co., reported that Wall Street needed to have confidence in the financial competence of the British government, and that no further loans would be forthcoming unless an economy package could be put together which satisfied the opposition parties. But this proved impossible. The Conservative Party insisted that taxation must not rise, and Neville Chamberlain, the shadow Chancellor, insisted that the economy package the government was proposing must be increased by around £30 million, while the Liberal leader Herbert Samuel insisted that there had to be 'drastic action' on unemployment insurance.

There was another option to swingeing cuts, one that Keynes had come round to favouring, and even Bevin had ventured was not unthinkable, and that was coming off the Gold Standard, and allowing the pound to settle at a lower value than its parity with gold. But no other member of the government or opposition even contemplated such apostasy: the Gold Standard was a *sine qua non*

of the financial stability necessary for a permanent revival of trade, industry and employment, and all other economic decisions had to be taken in light of this given. Anything else would, in the words of the usually cautious economist Hubert Henderson, who was no Treasury man, let loose 'a real *déringolade* [meltdown] which would lead to the complete collapse of the currency which in turn would lead to far harsher cuts than any so far contemplated'. In what is probably an apocryphal story, Sidney Webb is supposed to have gasped, 'I didn't know we could do *that,'* when Britain did abandon the Gold Standard a couple of months later.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet accepted that the budget had to be balanced to restore confidence in sterling, and no one said anything about coming off the Gold Standard (rather Snowden warned the Cabinet on 8 August that the effect of departing from the Gold Standard would be a 50 per cent fall in the standard of living of working men). Hour after hour that humid August the Cabinet wrangled, cutting, trimming. By the twenty-first, agreement had been reached that rather than making economies of £78 million and cutting unemployment benefit payments by £48 million, economies would be reduced to £56 million, unemployment benefits cut by £22 million. But the City dismissed the new targets as inadequate — and warned that gold reserves would probably only last for four more days. Chamberlain for the Conservatives and Sir John Simon for the Liberals said the same; the two opposition parties would 'turn them [the Labour government] out immediately the House met' (being August, Parliament was in recess), insisting that it was MacDonald's duty to avoid the crash. The Conservatives would give him 'any support in our power for that purpose, either with his present, or in a reconstructed government', and Samuel committed the Liberals to that line too — stressing the immense urgency of the situation.

The General Council of the TUC, seeing no 'equality' in the sacrifice they were being asked to make, and convinced that the situation was not quite so desperate as was being alleged, refused to agree to any cuts in benefits or in the pay of teachers or policemen ('Pigs,' spluttered Sidney Webb, meaning the TUC) — though it was prepared to condone those for judges and ministers. 'Practically a declaration of war,' MacDonald noted in his diary; he must have felt he was staring at a brick wall. The bankers insisted on cuts; the trade unions insisted on no cuts. As for support within Cabinet, according to his son Malcolm, MacDonald was 'disgusted with the behaviour of many of his colleagues; they lack grasp of the situation and the guts to face it … He will carry on if he can, but it is more likely that the situation will be such that he has no alternative but to resign.' At 10.30 a.m. on Sunday, 23 August 1931, MacDonald set out for the Palace apparently intending to resign 'with the whole Cabinet', but the King made it clear that should the Labour government resign, his view was that MacDonald should attempt to 'carry the country through' with Conservative and Liberal support.

That evening nine of the eleven members of the Labour Cabinet (including the key player, the Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson) made it clear that they would not agree to a 10 per cent cut in unemployment benefit, by far the most important part of the package. Clearly the government could not continue. MacDonald was confronted with some unpalatable choices: the Labour government could resign, hand over to the Conservatives and Liberals and oppose the cuts in unemployment benefit from the opposition benches, when in fact MacDonald considered them to be necessary; he could resign the Labour leadership and support the cuts; or agree, in his daughter Sheila's words, to be 'P.M. of coalition govt. (this is what King wants) Wld. have to face whole antagonism of Labour movt. Seeming desertion of principle & playing for office. Lose hold of party.' MacDonald havered: on 24 August he returned to the Palace.

The King again tried to persuade him that resignation would be a dereliction of duty: MacDonald must put country before party and head a National Government. The Prime Minister agreed that in the circumstances he would be prepared to remain as head of a government in which the Conservative and Liberal leaders Baldwin and Samuel would also serve 'until an emergency bill or bills had been passed by Parliament, which would restore once more British credit and the confidence of foreigners', after which time Parliament would be dissolved and a general election would be fought

along party lines. 'Certain individuals, as individuals, [would be invited] to take on their shoulders the burden of government' in the new configuration. 'MacDonald has been crawling along the hedgerows in search of Labour ministers these last few days,' wrote Hugh Dalton, who was not trawled. In the event, Snowden, Thomas and Lord Sankey, the Lord Chancellor, were the only three Labour Ministers who agreed to serve in the National Government.

'It was a banker's ramp', charged the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Christopher Addison, on the day of his resignation. The TUC also suspected as much, and the *Daily Herald* made the accusation public on 25 August. Bankers, it was claimed, had used the economic crisis to dictate government policy. But no one in government had doubted the bankers' insistence that the budget had to be balanced: it was *how* it was to be balanced that was at issue. The American banks made a loan dependent on a balanced budget, but insisted that the way in which that was achieved was 'quite outside our province'. But in the end, since the other two political parties were insisting on cuts in unemployment benefit payments as a condition of their support, while the TUC and an important and sizeable minority of MacDonald's own Cabinet would not agree the 10 per cut, the Cabinet resigned.

'Well — we have what is called a "National Government" — Conservatives, Liberals, and Mr Ramsay MacDonald and a few friends,' wrote the Conservative MP for Barnard Castle, County Durham, Cuthbert Headlam, sceptically. 'I cannot see how such a combination … is going to do any good … except on paper this is not a coalition. It is a collection of people collected together to save the situation … their task, if carried out properly will make them very unpopular — they cannot go on for long without quarrelling among themselves for their policies are widely divergent.'

MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas were expelled from the Labour Party, and Arthur Henderson assumed the leadership. In September Snowden's budget (attacked by Keynes as being 'replete with folly and injustice') raised taxes, proposed a range of cuts in public workers' salaries and cut 10 per cent (though not the 20 per cent recommended by the May Committee) off unemployment pay. On 21 September, with a renewed run on the pound (partly as a result of the Invergordon Mutiny, when naval ratings refused to muster when faced with disproportionate pay cuts), the Bank of England abandoned the Gold Standard, a situation that the National Government had been brought into being to avoid. Within a year this allowed interest rates to fall to as low as 2 per cent and brought about the 'cheap money' that would help build Britain's industrial recovery.

The election that was called for October 1931 was essentially a fight between Labour and the rest: and the rest won. In 1929, 287 Labour MPs had been elected; in 1931 this was cut to fifty-two, and that included Scottish ILP Members (who eventually disaffiliated from the rest of the ILP under their leader James Maxton in July 1932, believing they could answer the need the ILP perceived among the working classes for a more radical socialist party). Labour was all but annihilated everywhere except in coalmining areas. Arthur Henderson lost his seat, as did Hugh Dalton and Herbert Morrison. Only one former Labour Cabinet Minister, George Lansbury, was returned, though two Junior Ministers, the men of tomorrow, Clement Attlee and Stafford Cripps, just managed to hang on. The so-called National Government, which was composed mainly of Conservatives and members of a terminally divided Liberal Party, swept the board with 554 seats.

Thomas Jones felt like 'the Scotch minister who had prayed earnestly for rain, and then had the whole contents of a drainpipe emptied over him' when he heard of the rout. 'The election results are *astounding,'* wrote Samuel Rich, a teacher at the Jews' Free School in London, who considered that 'teachers are the worst hit in the land, except the poor unemployed' when he received his first reduced monthly salary of £29.7s instead of the former £32.6s on 23 October 1931. 'There will be no opposition … "Socialism in our Time" is *off,'* he wrote in his diary, underlining 'off' heavily, twice.

Indeed, it seemed to many that Labour would never again come to power democratically. Hugh Dalton talked darkly about bringing the Durham Light Infantry to London to replace the Brigade of Guards. When Hugh Gaitskell was adopted as Labour candidate for Chatham for the 1935 general election he was rueful: 'The Labour Party … tried to get better conditions out of capitalism … leaving

the economic power in the hands of the same people as before … The only way in which Socialism could be got was shortly and fairly sharply … [T]hey should get the power, proceed with measures of Socialisation, and smash the economic power of the upper class.' Cripps, for his part, would hint at 'adopting some exceptional means such as the prolongation of the life of Parliament for a further term without an election', and 'overcoming opposition from Buckingham Palace', though when taxed that this sounded a bit like treason, he affected surprise that 'anybody should have thought I was referring to the Crown'.

'The one thing that is not inevitable now is gradualness,' Cripps insisted. The Webbs agreed, and in September 1932 the Fabian-inspired SSIP was merged with the minority wing of the ILP that had stayed in the Labour Party to form what became the Socialist League, another intellectual pressure group, this time with a clear, if broad, Marxist agenda, with Harold Laski and H.N. Brailsford among its members, and soon Sir Stafford Cripps as its chairman. The Socialist League became the main organisation of the left until it too was dissolved by the leadership in 1937, while the NFRB merged with a revived Fabian Society a year later.

MacDonald — and his 'ism' — were, as his daughter had predicted, faced with antagonism from most (but not all) of the Labour Party, though this had as much to do with his disdainful treatment of his parliamentary colleagues and TU supporters as with his initial 'betrayal'. Samuel Rich was amused to receive a *'jeu d'esprit'* about MacDonald that a friend wrote and slipped in a Christmas card:

If Ramsay MacDonald, you still have brains that work
Not solely to commands from high finance …
How it must chill your socialistic bones
Seated upon your unsubstantial throne —
A transient triumph — then the long alone —
Sans friends, sans party, salary or loans …

History's verdict has been kinder, more prepared to absolve MacDonald from conspiracy and self-aggrandisement, accepting to some extent his reading of the national interest, seeing little culpable substance in his *faiblesse* for eating cucumber sandwiches with and getting sentimental about aristocratic ladies, and finding the explanation for his actions in confusion, being out of touch, having an imperfect understanding (but who did not?) of economic forces, and few mechanisms at his disposal to influence those forces, and thus of clinging to outworn verities, of believing in socialism but having no plan for achieving it. In sum, being blinded by the blizzard that swept the world in which, to strain a metaphor, the windscreen wipers seemed to have frozen.

Could things have been different? Would a 'Keynesian Revolution', an idea which gained favour in the 1960s and '70s, have saved the day? Such an ambitious 'New Deal' public works programme might at least have provided Britain with a creditable infrastructure of roads and bridges. But would it have solved the unemployment problem? Possibly back in 1929 when unemployment was around a million it could have been cut by 600,000, as Lloyd George pledged, the most astute historian of that proposed 'revolution' judges, but by 1931 the Labour government's own two-year public works schemes had become operational, and unemployment remained obdurate in the face of the world slump. The theoretical basis of the 'multiplier effect' (whereby creating primary employment opportunities generates secondary or subsequent ones as a result of increased spending power) of such schemes on employment was imperfectly understood until the mid-1930s. At the time public works projects were advocated as being cheaper and more controllable than the dole, rather than because of 'the beneficial repercussions that will result from the expenditure of the newly-employed men's wages' (though evidence to the Macmillan Committee had suggested something similar, as Bevin and McKenna's enthusiasm showed). And, of course, those in the Labour Party who still imagined they were tramping along the long road to socialism noted that Keynes' solutions were intended to make capitalism work more efficiently and humanely, not bring about its demise.

The month before Labour went down to an electoral ignominy from which it would not recover until 1945, the number of those out of work was the highest ever: 2,811,615.

SEVEN *(Too Much) Time to Spare*

If the hours which are designated as leisure time are an important part of the life of the community, they are an especially important part of the life of that portion of the community who happens to have no work to do. For a man who has a job, the day's activities centre round that job. It takes the greatest share of his time. It eliminates the necessity of constant choices concerning what shall be done with his day. It provides him with the means of enjoying his spare time at the various forms of voluntary or commercial amusement fairly regularly and dressed in clothes of which he need not be ashamed.

With the man out of a job, it is different …

E. Wight Bakke, *The Unemployed Man: A Social Study* (1934)

He could make marvellous things with his hands. He once made a church from about five thousand matchsticks … I think it took him two years … He was always having to invent something … an alarm clock, that was a thing of the past, and he sat for weeks and weeks … fiddling with his tools and pieces of metal and we had a cuckoo clock … it occupied his mind for weeks.

Interview by Kate Nicholas with Mrs Bell, the daughter of a long-term unemployed Teesside man

'What animals cause you the most worry?' the unemployed Nottingham miner George Tomlinson once asked a gamekeeper: 'I was thinking of stoats, weasels, foxes and their like. But he answered sourly, "miners".' Tomlinson 'knew well enough what he meant, for the collier when he sets his hand to it is the most skilful of poachers. I loved to watch them go out in the evening, slipping merrily along a forest path [Tomlinson lived near Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest], single file like Indian braves but not a bit like Indians in their appearance. Old slouch hats, short coats with big bulging pockets, a cosh pulled down the back of the coat and sticking out above their heads.'

'Rabbits were the thing! And a good dog was half the battle.' George Bestford, an unemployed Durham miner whose father had come north when the Cornish mining industry collapsed, had 'a good whippet! I think we'd have starved if it hadn't been for the dog. Away he'd go and back with a rabbit. They always had the game keepers out and they were there watching to make sure you didn't get any of their game … I was lucky because I was well in with a farmer and he used to let me have half what we caught on his land. So on a moonlit night — away with the dogs and catch a few rabbits! Some of the farmers were very good. They would give you some potatoes or a turnip. But some would give you nothing … We used to pinch off them.'

A rabbit for the pot would supplement the endless dole diet of bread and margarine, and suet: 'Every miner's house used suet. That was like the basic. Every day you'd have something with suet in for the main meal of the day. To fill you up. You'd buy a big piece of suet from the butcher's for tuppence and every day you grated a bit of suet into the flour. Monday's dinner was always a plain suet pudding with what was left from Sunday's dinner. Another day was "pot pie" we called it. Then "Spotted Dick" with currants in it or you'd roll it out and put blackberries in the middle, tie a cloth around it and put it in the pan.'

It was not just rabbits that nature provided — or rather that the men took. Anything was fair game for scavenging for hungry families. 'We used to live off the land for quite a number of years,' explained a Derbyshire miner. 'You had to … it were a matter of getting by. If we were hungry we used to go into the field with a bit of a broken knife and find pignuts and scrape them out and put a bit of salt on … we used to go round scrounging what we could get. If we saw a barrow full of peas, we'd come back with a jersey full of peas and that were it … we used to eat owt … We used to go out and get rabbits and anything, owt what we could catch … pigeons, pheasant and ducks off the canal … Sometimes we used to pull mangols [sic] and bring them 'ome and stew 'em … we had a

gaddo [catapult], we got quite expert … wood pigeons, we used to wait for dusk for them to settle in the trees to roost and then we'd knock them out of the trees.'

In the mid-nineteenth century the political philosopher John Stuart Mill had claimed that allotments were 'a contrivance to compensate the labourer for the insufficiency of his wages by giving him something else as a supplement to them': a way, in fact, of 'making people grow their own poor rate'. Little had changed nearly a hundred years later. The notion that 'the hungry could grow their own foods and obtain a living from their own methods' was a throwback to Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers of the Civil War, but it gained a new relevance during the Depression: an allotment could provide potatoes, carrots, cabbages and other vegetables to eke out family meals. The campaign to make Britain more self-sufficient in food production during the First World War, when George V had directed that the geraniums planted around the Queen Victoria memorial opposite Buckingham Palace should be grubbed up and replaced with potatoes and cabbages, had resulted in an astonishing increase in the number of allotments. By 1918 something like 1.5 million allotments dug by a 'new short-sleeved army numbering over 1,300,000 men and women' were producing over two million tons of vegetables. The return to its former owners of land requisitioned by the government during the war and the spread of the suburbs, where most houses had gardens, meant that the number of allotments fell during the 1920s, but by the 1930s the Ministry of Agriculture was recording a revival of interest as both the Ministry and local authorities made land available for allotments, particularly in depressed areas, while the Land Settlement Association, whose main aim was to turn the urban unemployed into smallholders, encouraged not only the cultivation of produce on small plots, but also the keeping of pigs and chickens to provide food and manure.

In a prefiguration of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign during the Second World War, allotments were dug on wasteland and on roadside and railway banks, wherever the soil might yield food for the table. They clung to the steep, scoured hillsides of the Rhondda Valley, perched on riverbanks prone to flooding and huddled under the ugly shadow of gasworks — anywhere the land could not be used more profitably for some other activity. Working his allotment could be a satisfying occupation for a man who felt that was what he no longer had: out of the house, in the fresh air and using his strength to dig. Many took great pride in what they grew on their allotment or in their back garden — and many colliery houses had quite large back gardens. Charles Graves, a rather patrician journalist (and the brother of the poet Robert Graves), paid a visit to Ollerton in the Midlands, 'in the heart of the Dukeries' (a large tract of Nottinghamshire in private hands which once contained the estates of no fewer than five dukes), for the society magazine the *Sphere*. He reported: 'All have gardens … work in the mines is limited to three days a week … All of them like to … grow their own vegetables … And the Garden Holders Association among the miners is a very powerful organisation with annual cups and prizes to be won. Potatoes, cabbages, carrots all grow well at Ollerton. So do onions and woe betide the man who is caught pilfering his neighbour's celery.'

But pilfer they did: 'There were a hell of lot of allotments. And there used to be a lot of knocking off' in Ashton-under-Lyne. 'They used to be up around three or four in the morning going on the Moss pinching lettuce and celery, anything to make a meal. The Moss was more or less peat. That's why they've never built on it.' Jack Shaw's father, an unemployed miner, 'had an allotment on the Moss. He paid a pound a year. It was just a matter of growing vegetables for our house. Others had big ones and it would be like a full time job.'

But even in those places such as the mining valleys where there was a long tradition of allotment-holding, the Depression, while making such activity all the more necessary, meant it was harder to do. An unemployed man — or one on short-time hours — might well not be able to afford the necessary seeds, tools or fertiliser. The Quaker Society of Friends reported that an unemployed miner in South Wales 'who had been accustomed to grow his own potatoes … had become too poor to buy the seed, that for a time he received seed from his companions, and when that was no longer available he

went to the rubbish heaps for peelings and took out such “eyes” as he could find in order to plant his allotment’.

The Society of Friends started a scheme ‘to supply (at first free of charge) small seeds, seed potatoes, tools, fertilizer and lime’. It was so successful that the government took it up, and in the winter of 1930, 64,000 families were helped in this way. But it was one of the casualties of the 1931 economic crisis, so the Friends stepped in again, persuading the government to give pound-for-pound matching grants to some 62,000 allotment-holders; this rose to over 100,000 grants in subsequent years. In Sheffield over 117,500 unemployed men were provided with ‘the requisites for a 300 square yard plot’ in 1934, but as the Sheffield Allotments for Unemployed Scheme pointed out, ‘This is a scheme to help men who help themselves — how substantial is that self help is shown by the amount the men themselves have contributed towards the cost of supplies — no less than £24,700 collected week by week’. Moreover, such activity was giving a welcome boost to the local steel industry, since in 1933 ‘over 56,000 spades, forks, etc were supplied nationally, and these were all made in Sheffield’.

Another necessity of life was fuel. It cost at least two shillings a week to heat a modest house, and anyone who could went collecting wood or ‘scratting’ (scavenging) for coal. Herbert Allen, whose father was a frequently unemployed farm labourer (and as an agricultural worker was not covered by the unemployment insurance scheme) in Leicestershire, always went ‘wooding’ on a Saturday. ‘We never bought any coal … My step-brother and myself used to have to go wooding round the spinneys and the hedges and all that. We’d have a pram and a home made truck and we’d … walk four or five miles to the woods and pile the old pram right up, put bits of wood round the side so you got a real good height. If ever we was hanging round the house it was always: “If you’ve got nothing to do you can go and do some wooding.”’

Will Paynter, a trade union activist and checkweighman at Cymmer colliery in the Rhondda who was often on short time or out of work during the thirties, spent one day every week with his father and brother on the colliery slag heaps searching for coal. They would only manage to fill one bag each: ‘To get three bags could involve turning over twenty to thirty tons of slag which was hard work in any language.’ They then had to carry the heavy bags on their shoulders for a mile or more over the uneven and often slippery sheep-tracks on the mountainside.

‘Scratting’ around for small pieces of coal was particularly humiliating for men who had spent their working lives hewing great lumps underground. ‘If there’s one thing that makes us bitter here in the Rhondda, it’s the question of coal,’ said John Evans.

I have to pay half a crown a week for coal — though there’s plenty lying around. When we’re in work in the mines we get supplies at a small fixed rate. Why can’t we when we are unemployed? We who have worked all our lives in the mines feel we have a kind of a right to it. In these parts there are places where the coal seam comes to the surface on all sides of the hills — they are called outcrops. We could get coal there. But the companies won’t allow it — they even use explosives to make it more difficult for us to get at the coal, though it isn’t profitable enough for them to use it. Every colliery has its slag tip — where they throw out all the stuff they can’t get rid of, and among it are bits of coal. We are sometimes allowed to pick this over at certain times after the contractors have been over it. At these times the place crawls with men trying to find bits of coal — like ants on an ant heap. It’s a hell of a job, especially on a cold day, and of course one can never find enough. That’s why so many go out at night and try to steal it. But they have policemen, and if one’s caught it means fifteen shillings [fine, or worse].

In Ashton-under-Lyne there was a neat scam: coal was brought to the mills in barges, and when it was taken in lorries from the bin, it was shovelled down a chute into the barge below. ‘The chaps that was working on the barges would only be on two or three days a week, and they’d be related to the blokes that wasn’t working — brothers and cousins … well accidentally on purpose [the men shovelling the coal would] throw about six shovelfuls into the canal every time they got the chance. When the barge moved on, there’d probably be three or four hundredweight of coal,’ so the men

waiting and watching on the bridge 'used to get a bucket full of holes on a clothes line, throw it across the canal and scoop it up. Fill half hundredweight bags. Then they had a pram or pram wheels with boxes on and they used to go round the streets selling it. People used to grumble, "This bloody coal, it's all wet through." But it was only two bob for half a bag,' recalled Jack Shaw.

'Some of them [the unemployed miners] have become coal pirates,' one of their number in South Wales told Fenner Brockway, an ILP MP until he lost his seat in the 1931 election, and a fierce critic of the National Government and the Labour Party's unemployment policies. 'They get caught sometimes and do a turn in prison. But what does it matter? Prison is no hardship these days; food guaranteed and no worry. There are men who raid the coal-trucks … Every night a train climbs [the mountain] side. The men jump on it when it's going slow, scramble on top of a truck, throw coal off, and then leap down the other side and gather the coal in sacks to sell. A man was killed doing that the other night: slipped and got cut up by the train … it shows to what lengths they're being driven.'

Poverty drove many very close to the wrong side of the law — and then tipped them over. As some scavenged for coal to sell, others poached with the same intention. Charles Graves noted that 'there used to be hundreds of pheasants on Lord Savile's property, Wellow Wood. Two years ago [in 1930] they bagged 900. Last year only 35 and a similar number of rabbits.' An East Midlands miner on short time recalled that 'The best time we 'ad was when we went out pegging one Friday night … there were six of us … we ran the nets out there three times and we got twenty rabbits apiece … Some going that were, three nets for 120 rabbits.'

Dick Beavis, a Durham miner, 'spent a lot of time poaching in the 1930s. I was the "knitter". I used to knit all the nets for the lads. Put them over holes … and put the ferret in. I found that more interesting than pit heaps. And that's how I learned my political thoughts. Well whose was the land? You go on all these neglected heaps. I used to think what harm are we doing? We were caught by the police and when we received our summons it was said we were catching "conies". We didn't know what that was. (It wasn't until later in my life that I discovered that "conies" is the old English word for rabbits. Rabbits are classified as vermin — and so you could say you were catching vermin — but "conies" is not.) So the magistrate looked at me and he said, "Where did you get them?" And I said "I found them, Sir." Well, he said he'd never heard such a bloody tale and fined us all.'

A poacher might make as much as eight shillings in a good night, though often he would not make more than three shillings, and sometimes nothing at all. Others might stay on the right side of the law by buying rabbits from a farmer for sixpence, skinning them and selling the skins for ninepence and the meat for fourpence. Selling coal or garden produce could also raise a few pence. Some men set up as cobblers, cutting up old rubber tyres to resole boots, mended clocks, soldered saucepans and kettles, made rag, or peg, rugs, 'did carpentry in their back yards or kitchen, making sideboards out of orange boxes stained brown with permanganate of potash, while their wives cook and tend the children in restricted places round the fireplace, uncomplaining because they realise the necessity of providing some occupation for their husbands in order to keep them even moderately content'. An unemployed man might offer to tend the garden, paint the house or wallpaper a room for a better-off neighbour in exchange for money or goods — a side of bacon, maybe, or a joint of meat. The trouble was that there weren't many — if any — better-off neighbours in most of the depressed areas: perhaps a colliery manager, a works foreman, or a moderately prosperous farmer nearby. But most of the men and women in the towns and villages would be in the same situation: no work, not enough money to live on, certainly not to pay for services.

At harvest time or in the shooting or hunting season it might be possible for those men within walking distance of farms or orchards or country estates to get a few days' work. Often this did not bring in much money, 'but you used to get a drink of beer and that while you were in the fields', and hop-picking drew numbers of East Enders to Kent — as it always had. Some made a bit on the side in less obvious ways, breeding rats, mice or ferrets for scientific research or to sell to London Zoo to feed the snakes — though mice 'had to be alive when they got there or they would not pay for them'.

A box of five hundred mice would earn a postal order for around thirty shillings — a tidy sum when the dole for a family with two children was around twenty-eight shillings a week — though collecting five hundred mice and keeping them alive must have been a real team effort.

Women might take in dressmaking, mending or washing, bake bread or cakes, or cook 'potato plates' (scraps of meat sandwiched between two layers of potato) to sell, make toffee or jam, knit or crochet. All these activities assumed not only a few coppers to buy the materials, but also a local market that was better placed financially than the 'petty capitalist'. Some families, already living in cramped accommodation, would double up even more and take in a lodger to help make ends meet — or even 'hot sheet': an Irishwoman in the mining village of Chopwell in County Durham 'had pitmen who slept in the beds during the day and she had men who worked in the coke yard during the night. On different shifts … when one would get out of bed, the other would go in.'

Enterprise had its price. The Means Test empowered inspectors to take account of all earnings, no matter how paltry. In March 1934 *The Times* reported that 'In Durham villages one sees that men are genuinely fearful of taking an odd job to earn a shilling or two, doubtful whether their weekly means of livelihood will be cut down if they are found to be keeping a few hens.' Although the newspaper reported that 'The policy … is to make no deductions for paid earnings of this sort; on the contrary, they will encourage them,' it admitted that 'Knowledge has not yet filtered through to the men, and because all depends on their Dole they take no risks.' Indeed, the Society of Friends made a point of getting 'a clear statement from the Ministry of Labour that the small amount of produce which a man could sell from his allotment would not affect the amount of his dole. This was a great gain (even although the feeling of suspicion on this point ceased only very slowly).'

A 'worthy woman in Merthyr, who had kept a bakery' told an American sociologist who came to Britain in June 1931 to study the effects of unemployment that 'she had wanted the yard wall of her bakery whitewashed and seeing that there were 6,000 unemployed men walking about Merthyr, she had thought that it would be a good idea to ask one of them to do it in return for a few shillings. She asked one after another, but all refused; they said they "might be seen". Eventually she promised a man that if he would do it, she would undertake to let no one into the yard while he was at work and to keep the gate barred. On that condition she got it done. She then thought she would get one of them to putty the lights on the bakehouse roof. But the roof allowed no hiding place while he did the work; so no one would do it … To be "seen" earning a shilling is a terrifying prospect. The regulations may provide for such things, but the unemployed man does not know what the regulations are, and the last thing he wants is to stir up mud.' And there were always neighbours who were quick to make allegations of 'benefit fraud' if they suspected someone in receipt of dole was making a bit on the side. In Greenwich anonymous letters arrived at the benefit office at the rate of two a day, snitching on those the writers thought might be cheating.

In some ways the first weeks after a man lost his job were the easiest: there could be a sense of release, something of a holiday feeling after the tyranny of the pit or factory. The initial days would be filled with the search for work. The Labour Exchange wasn't considered much help. Most jobs were obtained by someone 'speaking for you', a relative or friend already in work who might be able to put in a good word. There was no legal requirement for employers to notify the 'Labour' of any work they might have, and the general view of the unemployed was that employers only used it as a place of last resort, when they were offering worthless jobs no one wanted. And if a man refused such a job when offered it by the Labour Exchange, he lost his entitlement to the dole for six weeks. Across the country, only one vacancy in five was filled through the Labour Exchanges in the 1930s. This is perhaps not surprising at a time when there was such a pool of men seeking work that there was no point in wasting time with the paperwork required by the Labour Exchange.

Believing that finding work was 'down to me', most men would trudge for miles each day from place to place in search of a job, following up leads that led nowhere. 'It became quite customary,' Wal Hannington observed, 'to find men walking miles from their own district, such as from Halifax

to Huddersfield, in search of work, whilst men from Huddersfield would walk to Halifax in [the] search for work — often passing each other on the road.' After a few weeks or even months of this dispiriting failure it would become apparent that there just weren't any jobs to be had locally, and this was when some men from the valleys and the smoke-filled towns would go 'on the tramp', moving from place to place in search of work.

'On the main roads leading from the coalfields to the big towns — particularly the Bath road leading from South Wales to London', Hannington saw 'almost any day hundreds of men, footsore and weary … trudging towards London having left their families at the mercy of the Boards of Guardians'. But most of the men on the road looking for work in the 1930s were probably young and single. John Brown was one. He had lost his job in the docks and, aged nineteen, left his home in South Shields and took a journey round England that was as extensive as J.B. Priestley's, if less salubrious. From South Shields he and a companion scrambled aboard a lorry bound for Newcastle, from there to York, then hearing about the possibility of a job, Brown managed to get a lift to Salford, then he tried his luck in Liverpool, Grantham, Reading, then Basingstoke, from where he walked to Guildford, where he managed to get a few hours' work painting some railings round a bungalow. Then it was on the road again, with a lift to Winchester, then on to Southampton, where he went round the shopkeepers asking for a 'pennyworth of work'. This netted him enough for a bed at the local workhouse and a shared meal of cocoa and bread and butter.

Over the next months Brown travelled from Dover to Dumfries by way of Bath, Worcester, Shrewsbury and London, where he found work for a bit. Sometimes alone, sometimes with companions — including a young woman, Hilda, who had been sacked from her job as a parlourmaid and had been sleeping out in London parks until Brown took her under his wing, he walked, hitched lifts on lorries, crawled under tarpaulins when the lorry driver was taking a break, and once was offered a lift in a private car. He slept mainly in 'spikes', the casual wards of workhouses, which varied hugely: the one at Winchester was particularly highly spoken of, but others were considered 'not fit to live in', with dirty sheets and blankets, and infestations of lice and nits. He passed nights lying on potato sacks in barns, or under hedges, and when he was temporarily in funds he would stay in cheap 'model' lodging house, or hostels run by such philanthropic organisations as the Salvation Army or the Church Army.

Food was meagre workhouse rations such as skilly (thin oatmeal gruel that must have brought Oliver Twist to mind, though this was officially abolished in 1931, and meat and vegetables added to the diet), usually given in exchange for work such as chopping wood or breaking stones (though stone-breaking was discontinued by the same order in 1931), sometimes bread and a cup of tea, maybe a cold sausage given by someone whose windows or car Brown had cleaned, or fence he'd repaired, or a cheap meal in a café which the grapevine that ran between 'roadsters' recommended, like Nash's in Southampton where a three-course meal could be got for a tanner (sixpence). Brown took whatever work he could get, including bricklaying, washing up and handing out cinema flyers. He discovered that blankets tucked in crosswise, sometimes on a necessarily shared bed, provided the maximum warmth, and learned always to sleep with his trousers under his pillow and the legs of the bed in his boots to prevent them being stolen in the night. But finally, after many months on the road, he grew 'weary of the "spikes" and "models" and barns. The "romance of the road" had turned out to be a sordid tragedy of bread, weak tea, blankets, washing and baked clothes.' John Brown went back home to South Shields — but still no job.

Max Cohen, a frequently unemployed London cabinet-maker, offered a cigarette in a café in the Strand to an unkempt-looking man, his clothes ragged and shabby, his shoes tied up with string, the holes stuffed with newspaper, who told him, 'I tramped the country, lookin' for work … But yer can't get any work — nowhere! I tried — honest. I've been out six years … never go on the road. You'll be driven from one town to 'nother. A vagrant, that's what they calls you, a vagrant. Y'ave to

go to the spike, else you'll get locked up' — 'sleeping out' was an offence under the 1824 Vagrancy Act until it was modified in 1935.

It is not possible to know precisely how many people 'on the tramp' in the 1930s were unemployed men seeking work, and how many were vagrants, but on the night of 21 May 1932, at the depth of the Depression, 16,911 men were sleeping in casual wards; the number had been 3,188 in May 1920 and 10,217 in December 1929.

'It is when a man settles down to being unemployed,' wrote the Reverend Cecil Northcott of his experience in Lancashire, 'that he finds it difficult to know how to fill his time. Beyond the weekly events of signing on and drawing the dole there is not much regulation to his life.' The clergyman spoke of 'helping his missus … becoming a permanent occupation. The brass round the kitchen range and anything that shines comes within the duties of the man'; of the fathers who took their children in the pram to the park, 'the same collection of men day after day'; of the 'handicrafts [that] have become so important in many unemployed homes' — an Elizabethan galleon made out of a block of wood, for example.

Joseph Farrington's father, an unemployed iron-moulder, had the skills of a sailor, which was how he started his working life. He would sew two canvas bags together to make a floor covering, or 'cut up different coloured coats and make a pattern. It was as though he'd bought it in a shop when he'd finished it. He could knit … he could do anything. He even used to cook the meals because my mother couldn't cook. And he made toys like so many unemployed men, wooden trains, hobby horses, dolls for the girls out of paper and packing and put faces on with indelible pencil. He was clever at making things with newspaper. He'd make a tablecloth with a pattern — just by tearing.' Arnold Deane, an unemployed Oldham man, made a magnificent fifteen-inch model of a hotel, complete with elegant grounds and railings, using cardboard and beads. It had 176 windows, a ballroom, and was lit by electric light. The construction took him two months and was photographed for the local paper.

John Brierley's father Walter, an unemployed Derbyshire miner, was not able to fill his time so productively. He 'felt ill at ease … when he was on the dole [from 1931 to 1935]. Hanging about the house and garden when other men were working and the women busy made him feel particularly inadequate. To make matters worse he was clumsy with his hands and could no more build a wall, or put up a fowl house than "fly in the air" my mother said. The tasks he was set required no skill, collecting wood or shovelling coal or muck. If he was set to weed, he would uproot the wrong plants, would knock cups against the taps when washing up, his head probably full of his latest piece of poetry or writing' — one of which, fortunately, found a publisher as a novel, *Means Test Man*, in 1935.

To the observer it might look as it did to the poet T.S. Eliot, in whose poem 'The Rock' the voices of the unemployed intone: 'No man has hired us/With pocketed hands/And lowered faces/We stand about in open places.' But in fact standing about in open places could be a necessary social activity, since there was no longer the camaraderie of work, or the money to go to the pub to meet your mates. Convictions for drunken behaviour fell by more than half between 1927 and 1932, for though the solace of a warm pub and the oblivion of drink might seem an appealing way of blotting out reality, the high price of a pint of beer (a pint of mild cost fivepence and one of strong ale elevenpence) discouraged it, though Jack Shaw reported that men in Ashton-under-Lyne 'used to go round the pubs and off licences and pinch some bottles. There were a penny [deposit] on a bottle. They'd pinch half a dozen and go round and get sixpence and get a gill [half a pint]. You could sit in all night with a gill.'

If they couldn't drink, men might still smoke. 'You could buy five Woodbines for twopence. But that's no bargain if you haven't got twopence. You'd go for maybe a week without a single drag and then when you were given a cigarette, you inhaled so deeply you'd have expected to see the smoke coming out through the laceholes of your boots.' Men would take one drag on a cigarette, pinch it and put it in their pockets for later, or go round the streets picking up butts, which they would mix up together and make their own cigarettes, 'So they were smoking for nothing.' Loose tobacco cost

around fourpence an ounce, and this might well be supplemented by dried tea leaves either in a rollup or a pipe.

It seemed that given an extremely limited amount of disposable income (if any at all), an unemployed man would rather spend it on gambling than smoking or drinking: after all, putting a bet on might prove to be the down-payment on a better life. Street gambling was illegal, but that didn't stop it: men would be posted as lookouts while their friends laid bets on pretty much anything. Horseracing was a subject of great interest — though the interest was not in the horses themselves, but in betting on them, which formed a link between the unemployed and the 'sport of kings'. 'It's always been a miner's privilege, a little bit on the horses, the dogs.' 'Blokes used to earn half a crown in the pound as a bookies' runner. There were no licensed bookies. The runners used to stand in the doorways of pubs or else the ginnel [alleyway] of some place. Some of the blokes would go round the mills and pubs and houses. Anything to get a bet.'

Men would not just play billiards, they would gamble on it, a penny or tuppence for the winner. They'd play cards for money, one of their number earning tuppence or threepence a time for 'Keeping Konk' (lookout). Pitch and toss (throwing a coin so it landed as close as possible to a wall) and crown and anchor (a dice game) were almost universal pastimes. 'In most back alleys and lanes young and old men would play their few pennies away on Sunday mornings.' Sometimes bigger events were organised, such as those on a secluded beach at South Shields to which men would come from as far afield as Newcastle or Sunderland, and the bookies came too. While some played for pence, others graduated to 'the bigger school', where the stakes for pitch and toss could be raised to five shillings a time and two lookouts were placed to warn if the police approached. For Joseph Farrington it was 'marbles — flirting. We used to make a ring of tin milk-bottle tops. If you hit one with a marble you took it out. We used to play with money, when we had money.' Jack Shaw and his friends would bet on a 'peggy', a piece of wood that one player would hit and the others had to guess how far away it had landed. Once they had to jump the local canal to get away from the police, and that in itself soon became an activity to bet on.

'They'd gamble on anything. It was the only way they had of getting a few bob. A lot of it was "Why have dry bread when I might have a bit of bread and jam?"' If life seemed an irrational lottery when it came to getting a job, why not take part in a more enjoyable lottery in the hope of turning your luck round, or at least having some control over the choices you made? 'They [the unemployed] have given up all hope of earning anything by work,' Fenner Brockway was told, 'and hundreds of them put all their hopes on horses and dogs and football matches. They put 1s. on. They may lose, they go short on food; but they're so used to going short that they don't trouble much … Betting … means excitement in the midst of monotony … You may deplore the betting mania, but you can't be surprised. What other excitement, what other chance, does existence offer these men?'

Men would keep homing pigeons, as long as they could afford to feed them (and would often bet on races between them), or greyhounds, which 'often received as much attention as any child'. More likely, they would earn a few shillings exercising the greyhounds of an employed friend. Many sports offered reduced rates for the unemployed: bowls or billiards for a penny. Young men would play football on a piece of waste ground — games that would sometimes last all day, with a leather ball they'd pooled their coppers to buy if they were lucky, a blown-up pig's bladder or caps sewn together if they weren't — and men of all ages would go to football matches. In Liverpool in the early 1930s the average gate was 30,000 when Liverpool or Everton were playing, and most professional football clubs would admit the unemployed for half price at half time and free ten minutes before the final whistle. And there was always the opportunity to try to make a few pennies by entertaining the crowds as they queued to get in, singing, juggling, playing a tin whistle, doing handstands.

Boxing was another popular sport. William Saunders would 'go round the boxing booths in the fairgrounds, we used to get £1 for standing up so many rounds'. Some of George Bestford's unemployed friends in Newcastle would volunteer for three-round contests: 'Some of them could box

and others couldn't. Those who couldn't just received a good punching-up and the fee which was paid to the boxers was five shillings, out of which they paid two shillings to the seconds. One night there was a man who was so weak and tired it was obvious he should not have been in the ring. The crowd was just beginning to voice their disapproval of his poor show when the referee waved them to be quiet and explained that the man was on the road, had not had anything to eat all day, but had come along to the Hall and volunteered to fight.' But as for the unemployed taking up tennis, badminton, cricket or golf to fill their empty hours, these were, a report on Glasgow's unemployed youth concluded, 'the pursuits of another class'.

The day of one young unemployed man from Lancashire was not untypical. He was 'one of a gang [who] used to stay in bed late in the mornings so as not to need breakfast. I used to have a cup of tea, and then we would all go down to the library and read the papers. Then we went home for a bit of lunch, and then we met again at the billiard hall where you could watch and play for nothing. Then back to tea and to watch billiards again. In the evening we used to go to the pictures. That's how we spent the dole money. In the end, I thought I'd go mad if I went on like this … in the end I joined a PT Class. But I found it made me so hungry I couldn't go on with it.'

The public library was somewhere warm to sit, and scouring the 'situations vacant' pages of local newspapers was a daily — if usually frustrating — thing to do, as was checking the racing pages, if the librarian hadn't removed them to discourage such undesirable activities, as quite a number did. The journalist and writer Paul Johnson recalled that the librarian at his local library in Tunstall in the Potteries, the tyrannical Miss Cartlich, was unsympathetic to the unemployed, who 'had no money — literally not a penny — for any form of entertainment and therefore could only walk the streets aimlessly. The reading room of the public library was thus a winter garden of rest.' But woe betide any man who fell asleep, for then Miss Cartlich would 'wake them up and escort them off the premises, if necessary taking a hand to their collar. "Out, out, out!" she would say. "I'll have no men here snoring in my reading room." If they could stay awake, however, and pretend to be reading, the men were safe.'

Many unemployed men found they developed — or now had the time to indulge — a taste for reading books. 'Thousands used the Public Library for the first time,' averred John Brown who read Shaw's plays, Marx, Engels, 'the philosophers of Greece and Rome' and a great deal of fiction in his local South Shields library. 'It was nothing uncommon to come across men in very shabby clothes kneeling in front of the philosophy or economics shelves.' Jack Jones, a Welsh miner, wrote three articles about unemployment for *Time and Tide* in 1931 in which he maintained that 'people were reading for dear life now that they had no work to go to. I tried to show how the depressed mining communities were trying to read themselves through the Depression, and how this was sending borrowing figures in the libraries such as Pontypridd, where there were six and a half thousand unemployed, up and up by scores of thousands.' However, in Deptford in South London the Pilgrim Trust noticed that when unemployment was high, borrowing from the public libraries declined, since all men's energies were focused on getting work, and to them reading was associated with well-earned leisure.

In Greenwich, E. Wight Bakke found that among those unemployed who obligingly filled in diaries of how they spent their days for him, 'an average of 10.7 hours a week was spent in reading'. While more than half that time was devoted to newspapers and magazines, the rest was taken up by books borrowed from the free public libraries. Most of these were fiction: Bakke found little evidence that the men — and presumably the women either — were particularly interested in reading books on 'Socialism or Trade Unionism or other works on economic and political theory'. But some were: an ex-army officer who had been unable to find other work 'joined the public library and read numerous books. I read no fiction at all, but turned my attention to many other subjects, astronomy, physics, economics, history, photography, psychology, and read books on psychic phenomena, the Yogi culture, and other things. I went to lectures by eminent people of all kinds, statesmen and

politicians, with the general idea of getting the world and its affairs in perspective and finding out what was wrong with everything.'

One 'brilliantly successful experiment' was the translation of an act of a Shakespeare play into Tyneside dialect in a Workers' Educational Association (WEA) class, while a young unemployed letterpress operator filled his long days by sitting in the parks, swimming or talking with 'other fellows who are out. I am a member of a library and spend most evenings reading until midnight. I find it the only thing that can take my mind off loneliness, poverty and hunger. My choice varies: Fiction — Priestley, Dell, Orczy, Tolstoy etc. (Russian writers are my favourite.) Educational and interest subjects — philosophy, psychology, travel, Socialism, economics etc.' George Tomlinson read *The Canterbury Tales*, Lamb's *Essays*, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, 'or anything that I could get hold of' as he sat on his toolbox at the pit head having volunteered for a weekend repair shift. An unemployed miner in the Rhondda was an avid reader of Balzac, and it was 'during my dole days' that Donald Kear in the Forest of Dean 'became a compulsive reader. I read anything and everything that came my way, from Jack London and Anatole France to medical dictionaries and odd volumes of electrical engineering encyclopaedias.' Kear also listened to 'weekly talks on the radio addressed to the unemployed by a man called John Hilton'. Hilton, a working-class autodidact with a trade union background, was appointed the first Montagu Burton Professor of Industrial Relations at Cambridge in 1931. He was a prolific journalist and broadcaster with an informed and compassionate interest in the plight of the poor. 'I came to have a great respect and liking for him,' recalled Kear. 'His was the only sympathetic voice the unemployed ever heard. He recommended reading as a pastime for us. "Long way ahead in the future," he said, "someone will want to know where you got your know-how, your handiness with words, and you'll tell 'em you were unemployed in the '30s and you did a lot of reading."'

'DON'T BE DEPRESSED IN A DEPRESSED AREA. GO TO THE PICTURES AND ENJOY LIFE AS OTHERS DO' urged a cinema poster outside the Memorial Hall cinema (named in memory of the dead of the First World War, but known locally as 'the Memo') at the Celynen Collieries and Workingmen's Institute at Newbridge in South Wales. The inter-war years were the great decades of cinema-building, with Egyptian, Graeco-Roman, Byzantium, rococo and baroque extravaganzas gradually giving way to 'dream palaces' that were streamlined and modern, sinuously curved, plate-glass-decorated, Art Deco buildings that seemed to pay homage to Manhattan, to ocean liners — or to TB sanatoria. Many were huge: Green's in Glasgow, built in 1927, could seat more than 4,300, while the Bolton Odeon, which opened in 1937, had 2,534 seats and forty-one employees, including usherettes, doormen, chocolate girls and pageboys as well as the expected projectionists and box-office staff.

Cinema-going remained a popular activity for those without work — though the frequency of their visits might be reduced by shortage of money, despite most cinemas selling sixpenny tickets. The reasons were obvious: it was something to do, somewhere warm to go, and a transport out of the dreary reality to romance, humour, drama, thrills. 'For two and a half hours [the viewer] could live in another world where, invariably, the spirit of adventure was given full play, justice triumphed over injustice, and the hero eventually won through.' On Merseyside, where unemployment was high, a 1934 survey found that 40 per cent of the population went to the cinema once a week and of them about two-thirds went twice. In Brynmawr in South Wales there were two cinemas, and both did good business throughout the 1930s, while in Greenwich those unemployed who were encouraged to keep diaries estimated that on average they would spend 2.6 hours a week at the cinema, usually going to an afternoon matinee when the seats were cheaper. The Carnegie Report on unemployed youth in Glasgow concluded that 'attendance at cinemas is the most important single activity' of those they interviewed, with 80 per cent seeing at least one film a week, and a quarter of those going more frequently. This was not, the report considered, altogether for the good: 'It was perhaps inevitable, but none the less unfortunate, that many acquired a habit of attending the cinemas regardless of the

standard of the films … The harmful effects of indiscriminate cinema attendance are obvious. Young men may come to accept their experiences vicariously. If their only mental sally into adventure comes while they are sitting in a comfortable seat, the enthusiasm and spirit for personal action will soon disappear.' It was hoped that 'increasing endeavour' would be made by the film industry 'to develop a high standard of artistic appreciation'.

Not all cinemas were of such magnificence as the lavish new 'dream palaces': while the patrons of Tooting in South London might watch their films in a building that was a simulacrum of the Doge's Palace in Venice (with a nod to the cathedral at Burgos), the unemployed in the Rhondda Valley were more likely to have their silver screen set up in a Miners' Institute, or a 'fleapit' or 'bug house' unmodernised since its erection possibly before the First World War — the 'Memo' in Newbridge was an exception, seating seven hundred people and decorated with both Art Nouveau and Art Deco flourishes, and murals depicting 'industrial scenes with miners toiling underground'.

Cinemas in Miners' and other Institutes were run by committees that bargained with the film distributors to get the best prices for the films they wanted to show, kept seat prices down — fourpence was not unusual, and at Mardy Workingmen's Institute in the Rhondda, where unemployment was very high, customers were asked to pay what they could afford — and also kept a close watch over what films the patrons watched. Most favoured films with a social message, such as *Broken Blossoms* (1919), a depiction of slum life, though they also responded to customer demand by showing comedies like the nihilistic (and hugely popular) Marx Brothers' *A Day at the Races* (1937) or Shirley Temple's *Bright Eyes*, which was screened 'twice nightly with matinee showings for adults on Thursday afternoons and Saturdays for children' in October 1935. Moreover, in communities where most social activities — the pub, the billiard hall, the Miners' Institute — were organised exclusively for men and either forbade entry to women or made them entirely unwelcome, the cinema was somewhere a woman could go and enjoy herself away from the confines of the home: though while a number of the films shown at Cwmllynfell Miners' Welfare Hall cinema, for instance, such as the swashbuckling *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937) or American musicals, were unisex in their appeal, an awful lot were clearly 'boy's own' adventures aimed at a male audience.

In the nineteenth century miners' pay had commonly been docked by a penny or two in the pound to pay for their children's education, and when universal free education was introduced this money was redirected to miners' institutes, which were also partly funded by the colliery owners, and in which many fine libraries were collected. Following the recommendations of the 1920 Sankey Commission into coalmining, a Miners' Welfare Fund was established to provide indoor and outdoor entertainment, financed by a levy on colliery owners, and for the first time on the royalty owners (those who owned the land on which the mines were sunk), as well as mineworkers. The fund was administered by a Miners' Welfare Committee on which representatives of all interests sat. This money was used to fund pit-head baths (despite the fact that, according to evidence given to the Coal Industry Commission, wives regarded it as their duty and privilege to wash their husbands' backs and to see that they had their hot bath before the kitchen fire), build or improve institutes, and provide scholarships and libraries. Only about thirty institutes had a cinema (the jewel in the crown was Tredegar's Workmen's Institute, which had an eight-hundred-seat cinema, a film society and hosted a series of celebrity concerts, with the top-price seats costing three shillings). Some were little more than a collection of huts, but all played an important role in the life of the community, offering evening classes and lectures, concerts, theatres and dances, debating societies, gymnastics, photography laboratories and amateur dramatics, and hosting political and trade union meetings, travelling theatrical and opera companies and *eisteddfodau* (Welsh cultural festivals). This strong ethos of education and improvement as well as entertainment led them to be referred to in South Wales as *'Prifysgol y Glowyr'* (the Miners' University), and influenced the choice of films shown in the cinemas, the books on loan in the libraries, and the periodicals lying around in the reading rooms.

By 1934 there were more than a hundred miners' libraries in the Welsh coalfields, with an average stock of around 3,000 books, though some were much smaller, with a local miner acting as a volunteer librarian one evening a week. Despite the strong religious nonconformism of the 'tin bethels' in the Valleys with their crusade for a better life morally, mentally and socially, and the fierce political and union activism of the 'Little Moscows' of South Wales, even during the 'red decade' of the 1930s few miners seemed interested in reading about politics or economics. The library committees (Aneurin Bevan headed the one at Tredegar) might acquire the complete works of Lenin or Marx, but those volumes remained on the shelves, while the ones that were most borrowed appear to have been Victorian novels (Mrs Henry Wood was much in demand), detective stories or westerns — though, as Jonathan Rose points out, so few borrowing records for the miners' libraries are extant that it is hard to generalise. An Ynyshir library lent books to three hundred out-of-work miners who read on average eighty-six books a year, whereas a survey of 437 unemployed young men from Cardiff, Newport and Pontypridd revealed that while 57 per cent claimed that reading was one of their most significant leisure activities, only 20 per cent ever visited a library, and only 6 per cent borrowed books. To them, reading meant the daily paper, mostly for sport and horoscopes, or cheap paperback novels exchanged with others in the queue at the Employment Exchange.

The institutes had received their funding from miners' wages, the Miners' Welfare Fund and the local authority, so in the harsh economic conditions of the 1930s, when many young men left the Valleys looking for work, and many of those left behind were unemployed, these all but dried up, and the acquisition budgets of most such libraries became non-existent. Miners' libraries were reduced to issuing public appeals for books, approaching sympathetic public library authorities such as those in Manchester, Bethnal Green or Finsbury in London, all of which sent boxloads of books, or reluctantly ceding their hard-fought-for autonomy and becoming essentially distribution centres for their local public library service. By 1937 many had bought no new books for over a decade, so readers were obliged to read whatever was on the shelves over and over again — and presumably most soon became disheartened by a repetition that echoed so many other dreary repetitions in the lives of the long-term unemployed.

The sports pages, the cinema, football, allotment-tending, pigeon-racing, the kazoo band — all these were traditional working-class leisure activities that in substantial areas of Britain were, by the 1930s, no longer something to do at the end of a working day, a working week, but rather had taken the place of work. What if, as seemed increasingly likely, this was not to be a phase, a transition, but a way of life? The 'idle rich' might be an accepted feature of society, but what about the idle poor — even if their idleness was unsought, regretted, enforced, unafforded? Were such men and women to be regarded as the inevitable human cost of industrial decline, to be left to decline themselves, of no further use, supported at a minimal level by the state and allowed to pass their days as if on an unpunctuated weekend, but without the resources to do so? Or were they the vanguard of a new society in which new technologies and a more efficient form of capitalism would mean that there would simply be less work to do and fewer people needed to do it? In 1934 Havelock Ellis, usually described as a sexologist, predicted, rather as Major Douglas and Ezra Pound had done, 'the four-hour working day as the probable maximum for the future. The day of the proletariat is over. Few workers but skilled ones are now needed. Most of the unemployed of today will perhaps never be employed again. They already belong to an age that is past.' However, as a Vice-President of the Eugenics Education Society, Ellis was hard-pressed to see that it would be a bad thing if the 'single proletarian left in England [was] placed in the Zoological gardens and carefully tended', since, after all, 'the glorification of the proletarian has been the work of the middle-class', and the fact was that the 'lowest stratum of a population which possesses nothing beyond its ability to produce off spring' would be phased out as a matter of economic evolution.

When the film-maker Humphrey Jennings came to make a documentary for the GPO Film Unit at the end of the 1930s, 'a surrealist vision of industrial England … the dwellers in Blake's dark

satanic mills reborn in the world of greyhound racing and Marks & Spencers', the film's working title was 'British Workers'. But by the time he had filmed, in Sheffield, Bolton, Manchester and Pontypridd, men walking lurchers, releasing pigeons, playing billiards, drinking in a pub, a kazoo band 'razzing away at "If You Knew Susie"' and later carrying a child dressed as Britannia as they play a jazz version of 'Rule Britannia', a fairground, women watching a puppet show, a ballroom slowly filling with dancers, lions and tigers padding round their cages in Bellevue Zoo, Manchester, the title had been changed to *Spare Time*. The voice-over (spoken by the poet Laurie Lee) intoned: 'Spare time is the time when people can be most themselves,' as the miners' cage descended the coalshaft. A re-evaluation of the whole notion of 'leisure' was clearly overdue. If talking about the unemployed as having leisure was to 'mistake the desert created by the absence of work for the oasis of recreation', how would it be possible to avoid the apathy that various social commentators confidently identified as the final stage the unemployed would pass through, via resolution, resignation and distress. As a 'rough progression from optimism to pessimism, from pessimism to fatalism'? And if the creation of new jobs was not on the cards, how could the unemployed be encouraged to make the 'right' use of the leisure that would be the pattern of their future?

S.P.B. Mais, in his introduction to *Time to Spare* (1935), was convinced that 'Left to themselves the unemployed can do nothing whatever to occupy their spare time profitably … This is where you and I come in … we have quite simply to *dedicate* our leisure to the unemployed,' and suggested that this meant giving the unemployed man 'a chance to work [since] playing draughts isn't going to fit him for anything except perhaps the asylum'. Mais was full of ideas for 'work': 'I don't care what it is you set up,' he insisted, 'from a forge for men to work on the anvil to a stamp collecting society. It's all grist to the mill. There cannot be too many interests in an unemployed man's life … sell him the best leather at the cheapest possible rates and let him learn how to mend his boots for himself and his family … make it possible for him to *buy* [Mais stressed: 'you will have noticed my insistence on the word *buy*. The unemployed do not want *charity*. They prefer to pay to the limit of their capacity to pay'] … to buy wood, then encourage him to learn how to make chests of drawers, wardrobes, chairs and other necessities of household furniture … to buy material and learn to make his own suits.' Give the wife and family of an unemployed man a holiday, or imitate 'the young Cotswold farmer who … gave up his summer to entertaining relays of school children from Birmingham … This principle of adoption should be extended to towns, and prosperous towns in the South like Brighton should adopt derelict towns in the North like Jarrow.' But Mais recognised that this help should involve neither 'charity (in the wrong sense) nor patronage' (though, however well-meaning he may have been, the latter seemed rather evident). What was needed was either for 'you and I' to 'join a local occupational club', or if there wasn't one, 'get one going … all that is required to start with is a disused barn, hut or shop and the goodwill of, say, a dozen unemployed men to pay a penny for the privilege of membership'.

Some initiatives were essentially social clubs, organised locally and spontaneously, usually financed by the members, and intended to be money-making activities. Some, like those in Wales (where drinking in pubs on the Sabbath was not permitted) had licensed bars, and most had a billiards table and a wireless which supplied continuous background music. Such clubs in cities tended to be in the poorer districts. In Liverpool there were reputed to be nearly 150, most housed in empty shops, cellars or basements. Apart from the ubiquitous billiards table, raffles were organised, 'the glittering prize quite often being a box of groceries with a bottle of beer or whisky for the man', card games and other 'petty gambling games — sometimes not so petty — are played from morning to night'. Many clubs organised a football team, and some a 'Wembley Club' into which members would pay a sixpence a week so that every other year when the international football match between England and Scotland was played at Wembley 'a charabanc is hired and club members attend the match and go sight-seeing in London'. At Christmas an outing to the local pantomime would be organised, and

'since some of the clubs are not lacking in the spirit of service to others, an old folk's treat or free film show for the kiddies of the locality is occasionally provided'.

There were, as Mais recognised, already a number of 'occupational clubs' in areas of high unemployment. The Society of Friends had started an educational settlement at Maes-yr-Haf in the Rhondda in 1927, and another in Brynmawr the following year. Mais spoke approvingly of a club in Lincoln where 'unemployed engineers cook the dinners for their own nursery school, mak[e] furniture for the Orphanages, toys for imbecile children, and invalid chairs for the decrepit aged', and still found the energy for 'Greek dancing' in the evening. This was probably the one started in 1927 by the WEA, which had been founded in 1903 to 'link learning with labour', with the motto 'An enquiring mind is sufficient qualification'.

The spread of such centres had been given a boost in January 1932 when the Prince of Wales, the (briefly) future King Edward VIII, who was patron of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), speaking at a meeting at the Albert Hall called upon the British people to face the challenge of unemployment 'as a national opportunity for voluntary social service', and 'refusing to be paralyzed by the size of the problem, break it into little pieces'. The response was heartening. By that autumn over seven hundred schemes were in operation in various parts of the country, and by mid-1935 the number had grown to over a thousand centres for men and more than three hundred for women, with a total membership of over 150,000. Many provided occupational opportunities as well as the usual facilities for billiards, dancing and reading. In the depressed areas of Lancashire there were 114 centres for men and thirty-five for women. There were nine in Glasgow, the same number in Liverpool and twenty-one in Cardiff. In the Rhondda there were between thirty and forty clubs which offered activities ranging from choral and operatic societies to mining outcrop coal. In Manchester, where there were some thirty centres for the unemployed (seventeen providing facilities for men to repair their own and their families' shoes), an orchestra was formed among unemployed musicians which in May 1933 gave a recital on the BBC North Regional Service, while Gladys Langford, a generally rather discontented North London schoolteacher, went to Queen Mary's Hall, Bloomsbury to hear the British Symphony Orchestra, 'a body of unemployed musicians conducted by Charles Hambourg. He is a stocky little man with a bulging bottom much accentuated by a very short lounge jacket. Enjoyed the music.'

Many clubs used church halls or schoolrooms, which might only be available for a few hours a week, but in some cases disused premises were offered, perhaps a local church, shop, pub or empty factory, or in the case of Salford a fire and police station, and the unemployed spent time painting and equipping them as places in which they would want to spend time.

Some of the clubs received help from their local authority, or Lord Mayor's Fund, others from voluntary social service agencies under the umbrella of the NCSS, the Pilgrim Trust, the Society of Friends, the WEA, which also allowed the unemployed to attend its classes free of charge, or the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM). Others were 'adopted' by local industrial or other concerns, though they tended to manage them undemocratically, with little input from the members, a situation that 'seems to have been based on the theory that unemployed men were unfitted to take any responsibility for their own Clubs and that the Management Committee, by definition, knew what was good for the men better than the men knew it themselves'.

There were five residential centres, including Hardwick Hall in County Durham, which opened in October 1934, and provided classes in upholstery and bookbinding as well as more usual crafts; The Beeches, Bournville, which was solely for women (courses there only lasted for two weeks rather than the usual six, since it was presumed that women could not afford to be away from home for any longer); and Coleg Harlech, an established adult education college which regarded itself as the Welsh equivalent of Ruskin College, Oxford. In October 1933 the Coleg started running residential courses for the unemployed offering a more academic curriculum rather than crafts and practical skills.

The various organisations received small — if any — grants from the government, usually via the NCSS or the Scottish Council for Community Service. By March 1935 the Ministry of Labour had tipped in £80,000, while voluntary donations totalled more than £125,000. However, while Thomas Jones spoke of 'trying to fob off the unemployed with a miserable grant of a few thousand pounds to Ellis' show [Captain Lionel Ellis was chairman of the NCSS]', the voluntary schemes appeared to value their independence from government funding — and control.

Despite the stringency of its financial support, the government rarely failed to instance the success of such schemes in dealing with the 'residual problem' of the long-term unemployed. And there were many successes: on Clydebank, where one club had 'a membership of seven hundred and twenty three and a waiting list of two hundred', and where men were 'split into fifty groups, occupied in motor mechanics, dress-making, photography, shorthand, music, swimming, boot repairing, metal work, woodwork and wireless'; a Boys' Club in Barnsley where members took 'a nightly run'; Blackburn, which had its own parliament, or Barnard Castle, where traditional quilt-making was being revived.

The Reverend Northcott described a club in Darwen in Lancashire, where only twenty-eight of the sixty cotton mills were still working. It was housed, 'ironically enough, in a building which had been used as a Labour Exchange … The motto is "Occupation of Hand and Brain".' Facilities were provided for 'cobbling of all descriptions, woodwork classes, discussion circles, lectures and concerts. Twenty men a day pursue the art of rug making. There is first-aid instruction, a physical instruction group, and singing lessons given in a room in the fire station. Men have gone to camp, played cricket regularly, and have learned to swim.'

Since, according to the vicar, the 'Lancashire woman who has gone to the mill has not been a great housewife', a women's centre was 'helping its members in the management of their families' food and clothes', and a number of the occupational centres had women's sections. 'Members bring old clothes and are shown how to remake them … The men have made wheelbarrows out of old boxes and wheels made out of circular discs. Jigsaw puzzles were made out of magazine pictures and three-ply wood.' In a neighbouring centre an unemployed weaver of fine cloth 'modelled two vases of fine shape' out of old gramophone records he had melted down, 'and felt immediately that he was in the line of genuine potters'. It cost a penny a week to belong to such a club, and this entitled a member to vote for a committee which drew up the programme of activities.

Spennymoor Settlement in County Durham was started in 1931 by Bill Farrell, who had studied at Toynbee Hall, the original example of a settlement house founded by Henrietta and Samuel Barnett in Whitechapel in the East End of London in 1884 with support from various Oxford colleges. There the privileged came to live and work among the poor, in the words of Samuel Barnett, 'To learn as much as to teach: to receive as much as to give.' Funded by the Pilgrim Trust, Spennymoor was open to all (though initially there was suspicion that Bill Farrell's title, 'warden', meant 'warder') and offered classes in such things as carpentry, shoe repairing, elementary psychology and the British Constitution. It instigated a debating society, a male voice choir, a children's centre, a needlework class for women taught by Farrell's wife, Betty, and a public lending library, also on her initiative. The Farrells' interest in art and drama stimulated a sketching club and a play-reading group, with scenery made in the carpentry classes. The centre put on its first play in 1934, largely organised by a group of miners' wives, a theatre was built which opened in 1939, and soon Spennymoor was dubbed 'The Pitman's Academy' for its prodigious success in helping its members win scholarships to Oxford and adult colleges. Sid Chaplin, a very successful novelist in the 1950s, honed his writing skills at Spennymoor, as did the miner Norman Cornish his artistic talents at the 'wonderful' Spennymoor sketching club. The Prince of Wales paid a visit in December 1934.

'Ashington, pop. 40,000. Mining town mostly built in the early part of this century. Dreary rows a mile long. Ashpits and mines down the middle of the streets,' was how the 1937 *Shell Guide to Northumberland & Durham* described this Durham town. Not the sort of place to which to take a

scenic detour, but some of those — employed and unemployed — who lived in those 'dreary rows' had a yearning for the finer things. There was no public library, but there was a Harmonic Hall, built by the miners so that string bands and brass bands had somewhere to play, as could a children's orchestra with 'violins for about eighty kiddies', and there was a football pitch that doubled as a greyhound track. There was also a thriving branch of the WEA. Harry Wilson, who could have opted to learn music or drama there, instead plumped for 'Experimental Evolution', which took the students out into the surrounding area to poke 'around in ponds and look for flints'. When the course was over, he and some friends felt they were 'at a dead end again so we started on Art'. Robert Lyon ARCA, Master of Painting and Lecturer in Fine Art at Armstrong College, Newcastle, then part of Durham University, was invited by 'a number of men … all associated with the pits', to discuss the possibility of forming an art appreciation group in Ashington. After a lecture by Lyon at which he showed them black-and-white slides of Renaissance paintings and classical Greek sculptures, the twenty-four men and two girls (who didn't last long, since 'there's a strict understanding in mining districts where women fit in and where men fit in'), made it clear that that was not what they wanted: they 'wanted a way, if possible, of seeing for themselves'. So Lyon agreed (entirely against the spirit of the WEA, which was 'all theory: nothing which could possibly be interpreted as being of any use for making a living could be taught') to teach the men how to draw and paint, setting them homework each week to produce a picture on a subject like 'The Dawn', 'Deluge' or 'The Hermit', on cardboard or whatever material they could find.

Lyon took his class to look at watercolours in Newcastle Gallery, and in February 1936, thanks to the generosity of the daughter of the chairman of the P&O shipping line, Helen Sutherland, who lived nearby in Alnwick and was a discerning collector of modernist art, to London to see the Chinese exhibition at the Royal Academy, and visit the Tate and other city sights, ending up with a cream tea and madrigals in the Hampstead home of the owner of Kettle's Yard Gallery in Cambridge, 'a celebrated exercise in applied tastefulness'.

In 1936 the Ashington Group held its first exhibition of ninety-seven paintings and several engravings in Newcastle. The 'experiment' received favourable notices; soon the art world (the Surrealist painter Julian Trevelyan and the post-impressionist Clive Bell in particular) began to take notice, and the group was mentioned in a Penguin survey of art in England. Inspired by Ashington's success, other art appreciation groups started to spring up, the British Institute of Adult Education mounted three exploratory 'Art for the People' exhibitions, and in April 1937 the Ashington Group contributed some pictures to what the art historian Anthony Blunt called 'the most important event of the year from the point of view of English Art', organised by the Artists International Association.

'Unprofessional Painting' was the title of an exhibition held at Gateshead in October 1938 to which the Ashington Group sent work. 'They Paint Their Own Lives' was another, held in Mansfield, Nottingham, six months later, and indeed the corpus of work did depict 'ordinary life': a miner reading a newspaper, a Bedlington terrier — 'Miners are keen on Bedlingtons,' explained a critic in *The Listener* — miners with their pigeons, playing dominoes, having Sunday dinner with their families, poaching. But most were of men at work: down the pits hacking coal, in the pit-head baths, eating their 'bait' (packed lunch). In the early days the men sold their pictures for a pound or thirty shillings, 'to get money for painting materials', and found themselves regarded as representatives of the British 'social realist' school. But 'mining pictures would not be welcome to hang on the walls at home; landscapes would be considered more suitable. The women had had enough of mining dominating their lives, and frequently, when there were several workers in the house, reducing them to slaves. Many women were never able to get to bed except at weekends and just dozed in a chair to fit in with the different shifts.'

Such voluntary efforts to help the unemployed (and integrate them into the life of the community, since most clubs and classes were open to all, in work or not) might be rightly admired for what they achieved, but there was a suspicion expressed by the trade union movement that

occupational centres would produce semi-trained craftsmen who could be used to undercut existing wage rates, and in some areas pressure was put on unemployed union members not to join them. Others regarded the occupational clubs as little more than opium for the masses, handed down by a government that had no policies to end unemployment. Wal Hannington of the NUWM sneered at 'how craftily the ruling class, by evoking the sentiment of charity, have sought to cover up their sins and omissions in the treatment of the unemployed', and pointed out that the 'honoured gentlemen' of the NCCS had never joined in the demand for the abolition of the Means Test or the restoration of benefit cuts. Frank Forster, an intermittently unemployed casual labourer from Saltney in Cheshire, thought that 'the idea behind … the BBC broadcasting of morning talks to Unemployed Clubs … seems to be an attempt to keep those who attend the clubs quiet. To dope them … They hand out … what will keep them out of mischief. They must place their existence on a charitable basis, provide them with voluntarily contributed clubs and games etc … All this to prevent them from falling into the hands of Communists.' George Orwell was of much the same mind, arguing in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that the centres were 'simply a device to keep the unemployed quiet and give them an illusion that something is being done for them', though he conceded that what he considered the 'rubbish' the centres offered was probably better for the unemployed man 'than for years upon end he should do absolutely *nothing'*.

The educational and occupational activities at the unemployment centres may have seemed like splendid opportunities to those offering them, but from those on the receiving end, enthusiasm was not always so evident. Since club leaders were poorly paid, suitable people could be hard to find, and a great deal depended on their vitality and organisational skills. Such activities as the centres offered tended to appeal more to the young than to the older long-term unemployed, and class numbers dropped in some districts. 'What we unemployed could do with is a little less of education and a little more of entertainment,' suggested one of their nameless number in a letter to the *Spectator* in March 1933, while the anguish of an out-of-work miner permeates a documentary film made in 1932, when unemployment stood at over two million: 'We can do physical jerks, grow cabbages until we're blue in the face, but it's not paid work. It's just killing time. It's not the real work that we want.'

EIGHT *The Hard Road Travelled*

The British working man, employed or unemployed, is very conservative in his allegiance to law, order and tradition. He hates the idea of a Red Revolution, which he knows would make an awful mess … Communist visitors in the distressed areas get short shrift from men standing unemployed round disused pit-heads.

Sir Philip Gibbs, *Ordeal in England* (1937)

No saviour from on high delivers,
No trust have we in prince or peer.
Our *own* right hand the chains must sever …
From the third verse of 'The Internationale'

On the first day of 1932 the son and heir of the 7th Earl Fitzwilliam attained his majority. To celebrate, beacons were lit on the hills surrounding the family's magnificent house, Wentworth. Built in the 1720s, the largest privately owned house in Britain, it had a room for every day of the year, and five miles of corridors. In front of the façade, which was the longest in Europe, the Elsecar Colliery Brass Band struck up, and a crowd 40,000 strong joined in singing 'Londonderry Air' and 'We Won't Come Home Till Morning'. And when the birthday boy, Lord Milton, drove with his father in the first car of a fleet of yellow Rolls-Royces on a ceremonial tour of his estates, the eight-mile route was lined with estate workers and the men who worked in the Fitzwilliams' mines (on short time, given the economic climate) and their families, all waving and cheering, delighted that they had each been given a day's paid holiday and a freshly issued ten-shilling note. At various stops en route Lord Milton would open proceedings by cutting a ribbon with a gold pocket knife his father had given him for his birthday, and at the New Stubbin pit the Secretary of the Yorkshire Miners' Association stepped forward to thank the Earl and applaud him as 'the finest idealistic employer in the country today', a mine-owner who had so arranged things that not a single man had been dismissed despite the slump, and shifts had been arranged so the men received 'the fullest benefits of the Unemployment Act'.

The Wentworth miners might have doffed their flat caps and have had reason to feel grateful towards their employers, but in the 1930s most coalminers — the 'sort of grimy caryatid[s] upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is *not* grimy is supported', according to George Orwell, had both particular grievances and a particular militancy. The 1926 General Strike left a bitter legacy for men working in the Welsh Valleys, the Scottish, Durham and East Midlands coalfields, most of whom stayed on strike for months after the nine-day TUC strike collapsed. As a result many were blacklisted by the colliery owners, and never worked again. Wages were cut, hours extended and working conditions deteriorated. Employment in the coal industry fell consistently, from 218,000 in 1926 to 136,000 in 1932, and across Wales as a whole unemployment averaged 39 per cent.

At a time when over 40 per cent of the miners were out of work in the Yorkshire coalfields, a local headmaster would reputedly admonish pupils who answered his question, 'Now then, boy, what are you going to do when you leave school?' 'We're going to pit, sir,' with "Cos tha' strong in the arm and weak in the head.' Coalmining remained probably the most dangerous occupation in Britain. A West Lothian pit was known locally as 'the Dardanelles pit. It was named that because of the high accident rate — they compared it with the slaughter at the Dardanelles' in the First World War. There was widespread bitterness about the lack of compliance — since compliance invariably cost money — that many mine-owners accorded to health and safety regulations, and in the early hours of 22 September 1934 one of the worst mining disasters in British history occurred at Gresford colliery near Wrexham in North Wales, when an explosion ripped through part of the mine known as the Dennis section during the night shift. Although six miners managed to crawl to safety, three men were killed in the rescue attempt, and on the following night, Sunday, 23 September, it was agreed

that the mine should be sealed with the dead miners entombed inside. A further violent explosion a couple of days later killed a surface worker: the disaster had claimed a total of 266 lives.

At the subsequent inquiry, Sir Stafford Cripps agreed to represent the mineworkers' union *pro bono*. Despite the Labour lawyer's relentless, technically informed questioning (Cripps had read chemistry at University College London, since he considered the lab conditions there to be far superior to those at either Oxford or Cambridge, before turning to law) in pursuit of his contention that safety had been sacrificed in the pursuit of profit, it was hard to establish what precisely had caused a build-up of lethal methane gas which had ignited, particularly since the mine-owners refused to allow the sealed section to be opened for inspection. While the report that the Chief Inspector of Mines, Sir Henry Walker, laid before Parliament in January 1937 singled out no one — neither the colliery management, the firemen who worked down the mine, the shot-firers whose job it was to blow up the coal face so the miners could get at the coal to be hewn, nor the inspectors — as having been criminally negligent, he concluded that nor had any of them performed their duties satisfactorily. Yet when charges were brought in the courts by the bereaved against the company and its officials, most of the cases were either dismissed or withdrawn, and no one was convicted of any wrongdoing.

The Gresford pit disaster provoked nationwide sympathy, gifts (over half a million pounds were raised) and unease among many that until the mines were taken out of private hands the catalogue of accidents and disregard for safety would continue, as would the mining industry's generally poor industrial relations and sluggish productivity.

The previous September, unemployed coalminers had marched from South Wales to Bristol to lobby the TUC meeting there, and in September 1932 a contingent from Wales was among the eighteen from all over Britain that marched on London in what the organisers, the NUWM, called the 'Great National Hunger March of the Unemployed Against the Means Test', which culminated in a rally in Hyde Park. The NUWM claimed there were 100,000 unemployed in the park on 27 October, while the Metropolitan Police estimated the number at somewhere between 10,000 and 25,000.

This 'great march' was the largest to date, but by no means the first of the frequent protests by the unemployed since the effects of the Depression had first begun to bite in 1920. As well as numerous local demonstrations, the NUWM organised six national marches between 1922 and 1936, gathering contingents from all over the country to march to London with their demand for 'work or full maintenance at trade union rates'. 'If history is to be truly recorded,' wrote Wal Hannington, 'our future historians must include this feature of the "Hungry Thirties".' To Hannington the marches were a rebuttal of the charge — or, in the case of such proto-sociologists as the Pilgrim Trust survey team or E. Wight Bakke, the sympathetic observation — that the unemployed were apathetic, that they 'quietly suffered their degradation and poverty' despite the evident fact that 'they were hungry; their wives and children were hungry'.

In March 1930, with the number of registered unemployed standing at over 2.5 million, over a thousand men left Scotland, the Durham coalfields, Northumberland, Plymouth, Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Nottingham coalfields, the Potteries, South Wales, the Midlands and Kent to trudge, most of the way on foot, to the capital, where they were joined by the London workless. For the first time women from the depressed textile areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire made up a special — separate — contingent, in the hope that the female Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, might afford their case a sympathetic hearing. This was not to be, and the only success that what Hannington called the 'raiding parties' had was to storm the Ministry of Health, lock themselves in and address the crowds in Whitehall below, until they were forcibly ejected.

In the days after the formation of the National Government in August 1931, protest had escalated, often ending in pitched battles between the unemployed and the police, with the protesters reported as having thrown stones and hammer heads, and attempting to pull the police from their horses, while the police allegedly laid about the protesters with batons. By the end of the year over thirty different towns and cities had seen clashes between the police and unemployed demonstrators.

'This "cuts" business may bring the Empire down,' predicted Samuel Rich, a London teacher who had spent time in September 1931 working out his family's annual budget in anticipation that 'JRM [Ramsay MacDonald] will reduce all *teachers'* salaries by 15% by Order in Council'. Philip Snowden, who had translated his job as Chancellor into the National Government (until the election in October 1931), announced in his budget on 10 September that not only unemployment insurance benefit would be slashed by 10 per cent, but so would the pay of teachers, the police and the armed forces.

Articles had started to appear in the *Manchester Guardian* in the 1930–31 school year highlighting the plight of out-of-work teachers, and it was not long before suggestions were being made that the already very small number of married women teachers might be 'let go'. Although 10,000 teachers marched through the streets of London in protest on 11 September 1931 (members of what Hannington referred to triumphantly as 'the black-coated proletariat … embarking on a new experience, marching through the streets carrying banners'), Samuel Rich was appalled at what he regarded as the supine acquiescence of his profession. 'The "L[ondon] T[eacher]" and other teachers' papers all sickening today. The 10% cut is a victory! A victory! What *lice!* I hear that only 218 London schoolmasters voted to be absent yesterday after the meeting. 218! — Bah!'.

As well as demonstrations and clashes with the police over the following months there was one response that was unprecedented — and more disturbing to the government than that of the 'black-coated proletariat' — the incident that Samuel Rich thought 'might bring the Empire down', and which gave an added twist to fears about Britain's stability at the moment of acute economic crisis. 'The Atlantic Fleet has been recalled owing to dissatisfaction among the sailors,' Rich reported. *'They'll* get redress tho' as they are at the right end of the guns.' The largest ships of the North Atlantic Fleet had been gathering in the Cromarty Firth for their annual autumn exercises when the news of the cuts came through — not from official sources such as the Admiralty Board, but piecemeal via newspaper reports and rumours. The cuts were not only swingeing, they were not equitable, and bore most heavily on the lower ranks, as an across-the-board cut of a shilling a day would mean only 3 per cent off the pay of a Lieutenant Commander, while an Able Seamen between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-five would suffer a reduction of 25 per cent. This, a senior officer immediately realised, was 'perfectly absurd'. Six shillings week less money would mean real hardship to the men's families: furniture would be repossessed, clothes and shoes would not be replaced, some families might be evicted, others go short of food. Alan Drage, a Lieutenant Commander on board HMS *Valiant*, was never able to forget 'the queue of dismayed sailors outside my cabin door, each brandishing a sheet of paper covered with elaborate and meticulous calculations, which were explained to me in the utmost detail, each interview concluding, "You see, Sir, I can't possibly manage on this; what am I going to do?"'

In the canteens, which were for the lower orders only, discontent was growing: Len Wincott, an Able Seaman aboard the cruiser HMS *Norfolk*, jumped on a table and called for a strike 'like the miners', but since setting out on a march to London didn't make any sense, it would have to be passive resistance, a sit-down strike. Seamen had long been denied any effective channels of complaint such as a trade union, and were forbidden to communicate directly with their MP to express any grievances about the navy that they might have. But of course any mass resistance by His Majesty's Forces was mutiny — though none of the sailors used that word — in this case 'mutiny not accompanied by violence', but mutiny nevertheless, for which the punishment was death. If the seamen were anxious not to label their actions mutiny, nor was the Admiralty: the Royal Navy was the symbol of Britain's prestige around the world, and rarely had that prestige been more at risk, with an acute financial crisis, a run on gold, and foreign anxieties about the stability and resolve of the British government. The words used were 'disturbance' and 'unrest'. The National Government approached newspaper editors requesting them not to mention Invergordon at this sensitive time for the country. But Ritchie Calder, then a young journalist on the *Daily Herald*, did not feel constrained by such discretion, and the *Herald* ran the story.

On Tuesday, 15 September at 8 a.m. most of the stokers on the battleship HMS *Valiant* refused the order to sail from Invergordon on the edge of the Cromarty Firth to take part in exercises in the North Sea, and the crews aboard the battleships *Rodney* and *Nelson* and the battle cruiser *Hood* followed suit, all refusing to move. Over the following thirty-six hours most of the 12,000 men on the twelve ships at Invergordon refused orders.

The Admiralty appeared to be completely out of touch with the situation, taking hours to reply to any communications from the officers, reiterating that in effect every man must do his duty, and it was not until mid-afternoon on Wednesday, 16 September that the order came that ships were to return to their home ports and cases of hardship would be looked into. The strikers' resolve began to crumble, and by that night the ships started to put to sea. The nearest Britain ever came to a Battleship *Potemkin* moment in modern times was over. There were those in the Admiralty, and indeed some naval officers, who portrayed the strike as a mutiny and put it down to 'Bolshevik agitators' — a charge that was perhaps easier to sustain when Able Seaman Wincott, discharged from the navy, joined a front organisation of the Communist Party which capitalised on the 'mutiny' and his claims to have 'led' it. Another leader, Fred Copeman, who was not a member of the Communist Party at the time, became a fellow traveller and active in the unemployed movement and later in Spain. But although twenty-four ratings were discharged — though not until after the 1931 general election — the Admiralty was unable to establish that the events were anything more than the spontaneous actions of a large number of deeply disaffected men, denied any legitimate channels of complaint or redress and faced with a seemingly uncomprehending, unsympathetic and unresponsive Admiralty Board. On 21 September 1931, the same day Britain came off the Gold Standard, the government announced that there would be no pay cuts of more than 10 per cent.

Like the previous national marches and many of the local demonstrations that preceded it, the fourth national march which got underway on 26 September 1932, when a contingent of 250 unemployed men left Glasgow, had been organised by the NUWM, which had been set up in 1921 to mobilise unemployed discontent. There was little competition. The Labour Party largely accepted the view, even after 1931, that the government was doing its best in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, while the TUC (whose membership had fallen from 5.5 million in 1925 to under 4.5 million by 1932) was essentially concerned with the interests of the employed, resisting pay cuts and short-time working. The unions' contribution in the early 1930s was confined to mouthing statements 'strongly' condemning cuts in benefit payments and making 'emphatic (verbal) protests' at government inaction. 'Their line was "No illegality, wait, vote for the Labour Party,"' recalled an unemployed Kirkcaldy man, 'and Pat Devine … who was a real agitator … says "What is the workers supposed to do? Starve until we get a Labour Government?"'

In 1932, after more than a decade of high unemployment, the TUC began to consider a scheme for 'unemployed associations'. By 1934 such associations numbered 123, with a total membership of around 5,000, but they were essentially local initiatives, with no national TUC guidance or support until 1935, when the TUC offered to pay the expenses of union officials who were prepared to visit associations within their areas 'to stimulate and advise them'.

The NUWM had been established initially as an umbrella group to bring together various district councils for the unemployed which had been active in protests against post-war unemployment, the cessation of the ex-servicemen's 'donation' and what were considered other iniquities. Wal Hannington, the national organiser, was a skilled toolmaker who had been a prominent member of the shop stewards' movement in the engineering trade during the First World War, and Harry McShane, the NUWM leader in Scotland, was also an engineer. Both were founder members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), as were many of the activists in the movement. While the NUWM's slogan was 'Work or Full Maintenance at Trade Union Rates of Pay' (which meant in practice thirty-six shillings a week for an unemployed man and his wife; five shillings for each child up to the age of sixteen; a rent allowance of up to fifteen shillings a week plus one hundredweight

of coal or its equivalent in gas; thirty shillings for a single person over eighteen, or fifteen shillings if they were aged sixteen to eighteen), all members were required to take an oath 'never to cease from active strife until capitalism is abolished'.

Although a member of the CPGB himself, Wal Hannington was always anxious to distance the movement from the Communist Party and insist on its autonomy. On occasion resolutions would be passed at the NUWM's national conference reaffirming this, and repudiating any notion that the NUWM was in any way an auxiliary of the CP — though there was some substance in the labour movement's charge that any links with the Communists were concealed so as not to alienate Labour and TUC support. Moreover, however much the Communist Party might hope that the unemployed would provide, if not the vanguard for revolution, then its footsoldiers, the vast majority of those who went on the marches did so for tangible, short-term aims: to get a better deal for the unemployed from the existing state.

It is hard to get accurate figures for how many joined the NUWM, since most records come either from the movement itself or from the CPGB: some historians claim that it mobilised 'hundreds of thousands of people', while others dismiss it as remaining 'a minority movement'. One of those who helped organise the Scottish contingent on the march in 1932, and went himself in 1934, Finlay Hart, an unemployed shipbuilder, recalled, 'It was as natural as being at work and being a trade unionist, being unemployed and being in the NUWM … At the time of the '32 march to London the membership of the Clydebank branch of the NUWM would be in hundreds. There were collectors that stood at the Labour Exchange … There were regular meetings outside the Labour Exchange. Members were recruited there.'

The unemployed signed on on Wednesday and were paid on Friday. So Harry McShane and his comrades 'went always on a Wednesday or a Friday to the Labour Exchange. And we could get a good crowd at the Labour Exchange and hold a meeting on top o' a chair. And from there we organised all our marches and activities.' 'Being a member of the NUWM wasn't a necessary qualification for going on the March,' but Finlay Hart 'couldn't imagine any being on the March that wouldnae had been a member of the NUWM'. Yet in fact nine or ten of the Clydebank contingent of forty-two were not members of the NUWM. Isa Porte, who went on several marches in Scotland, 'wasn't a member myself of the NUWM but I think a lot of the people I marched with would be in it. I wouldnae think there were very many of them in political parties. There would be some in the Communist party, and then there would be Labour Party people. But the majority weren't politically committed in that way. It was just a question of being unemployed and they wanted to do something about it.'

With unemployment at an unprecedented two and a half million, or some 20 per cent of the insured workforce, the 1932 March was the largest so far. It was preceded by months of continuing unrest. Although the NUWM had enjoyed a certain amount of success in opposing the harshest application of the Means Test in some areas of high unemployment and had succeeded in raising the rates of relief benefits by some Public Assistance Committees, a demand for an end to the Means Test in Birkenhead on Merseyside had erupted in a week of protests, bans and counter-protests. An estimated 8,000 unemployed men marched in a line over a mile long to the PAC offices with their demands. During the ensuing battles between police and demonstrators, stones and bricks were hurled, iron railings torn up, windows smashed and shops looted, batons wielded and police horses charged. Dozens of arrests were made, police reinforcements had to be drafted in from across the Mersey in Liverpool, and thirty-seven demonstrators needed hospital treatment, while seven police were injured, three of them seriously.

In Belfast the next month there was a demonstration by some 2,000 unemployed men demanding better pay for relief work which soon developed into running battles between the police and demonstrators, culminating in the police opening fire on the crowds, killing two men, and having to call on the troops to restore order.

The logistics of the 1932 march were formidable: accommodation had to be found in 188 towns along the route, which was modified in the light of experience of previous marches to try to ensure that the marchers passed through places where they were most likely to be welcomed. Wherever possible reception committees would gather to meet the marchers and march into town with them, provide food, accommodation and entertainment paid for by money raised in advance, and wave them on their way the next morning. St Albans, a prosperous cathedral city twenty miles north of London provided hospitality for thirty-eight women marchers who were met on the road from Luton, escorted into town, accommodated and fed at the Trade Union Club. A concert was laid on to entertain them, and a rally held in the market square to stiffen their resolve. A cobbler took in any shoes that needed repairs, while someone else did the marchers' washing. The women left the next morning with a packet of sandwiches for the road, shouting, 'Unite with us to smash the National Government!' to the citizens of St Albans. Mrs Paisley, a sixty-three-year-old woman from Burnley with sixteen children and twenty-three grandchildren who had suffered much under the Means Test, proclaimed that she 'had had that much good food on the march that I don't want to go home'.

Others were less fortunate: if nothing else could be found, marchers were obliged to seek a bed for the night at the local workhouse (now known as the Institution), where managers had been instructed to accommodate them in casual wards and treat them as tramps or vagrants, which meant searching the men, removing their possessions, insisting on them having a bath while their clothes were disinfected if necessary, locking them in for the night, feeding them a 'spike' diet of two slices of bread and margarine and tea, and refusing to allow them to leave until 9 a.m. on the second day after their admission, by which time they were supposed to have done whatever work was required to 'earn' their keep. Not all workhouse managers insisted on all these conditions: Coventry Council, which had shown 'weakness' in 1930 when it put the marchers up in a school and paid for food provided by the Co-op, was warned that it would be surcharged if that were to happen again.

There were skirmishes along the road, usually over what the marchers were expected to put up with at some workhouses (the Lancashire marchers were seriously batoned by the police at a workhouse in Stratford-upon-Avon, and arrived in Hyde Park heavily bandaged) or restrictions put on their right to hold meetings. Harry McShane, who was in charge of the Scottish contingent, made it a practice that 'if we were banned from marching along a street, we always went up and down it twice'. Some of the Scottish marchers had come from as far away as Dundee, an eighty-mile walk to Glasgow, where they mustered before setting off on the long march south. The men would march on average for twenty-two miles a day, stopping every hour for a ten-minute rest; the cook's lorry would go ahead and 'dish out a good big lunch, usually stew'. Wal Hannington made an effort to march for a stretch with each contingent. 'He loved to lead a big body of men singing. He used to march at the head of the Scots singing "McGregor's Gathering" and get them all waving their caps on top of their sticks — with the Welsh it was "Land of my Fathers".' Most of the contingents had a band which marched all the way to London with flutes and drums, and sometimes cymbals and triangles too. 'Flautists — you cannae stop them … they would have played all the way if you'd let them.' The marchers liked to sing as they trudged along too, and the Scots had their own song:

From Scotland we're marching,
From shipyard, mill and mine.
Our banners raised on high
We toilers are in line.
We are a determined band,
Each with his weapon in his hand.
We are the Hunger Marchers
Of the Proletariat.

Tom Ferns recalled the unemployed protesters marching through the grounds of Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, 'with the Maryhill Flute Band … leading the contingent and it was playing

Connolly's *Rebel Song*, so that was quite an astonishing event going through the Royal territory'. He thought that the songs the marchers sang 'were very simple. Sometimes something simple can explain a situation better than something a bit more complicated,' and instanced songs like:

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow.
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go
Shouting out the battle cry for freedom.
Hurrah for Mary, hurrah for the lamb,
Hurrah for the Bolshie boys that don't give a damn.
The Brighton contingent added a further verse:
Ramsay [MacDonald] had a little lamb
Whose feet were black as soot,
Shouting out the battle cry of TREASON.

Some of the women sang (to the tune of 'Oh why are we waiting') 'Oh why are we marching?' and answered in the last line, 'The reason is the Means Test.' Other marchers sang 'The Red Flag' repeatedly. While the Greenock contingent on the Edinburgh March in 1933 sang 'a Russian tune, *Budenny's Cavalry March* … the *Red Flag* ["The people's flag is deepest red/It shrouded oft our martyred dead/And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold/Their hearts' blood dyed its every fold"] [it] was a very, very kind o' hymn thing. It was a bit slow and it wasnae much use for marching.'

But 'they [presumably the organisers] were strict about what we sang'. Emily Swankie and the women she was marching with 'were stopped singing one night because it was the wrong type of song — *Land of Hope and Glory!* Someone started to sing it and just because it was a good tune, we all joined in, and the woman came over and said "Just stop that. We don't want that"' It was the same with 'Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag'. One of the Scottish organisers, Peter Kerrigan, 'blew his top' when that was sung: 'Being the puritanical sort o'Scots Communist that he were, Kerrigan put an end to that song. It was a jingo song — pack up your troubles, nothing to worry about.' Another Scottish marcher recalled that although 'There wis many, many tunes we played … we never got to *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*, we never got asked to play that! It wis too capitalistic — it was associated wi' the First World War.' Other marchers 'didn't feel it was a bit militaristic because actually most of our men were ex military men', and sang it a lot.

The marchers carried banners, some with slogans such as 'We Refuse to Starve in Silence', 'No to the Means Test' or 'Wales to London', or simply with the name of their contingent. Those marching from Brighton to London in 1932 carried one that had been embroidered by women NUWM members with 'Solidarity not Charity'. These banners were heavy, and were mostly carried furled until the marchers drew near a town. Hugh Sloan wondered, as the Scottish contingent battled a blizzard through the Lowther Hills in January 1934, 'where the only occupants were sheep … why the hell we were carryin' the banner … the wind was rackin' the banner around … and we couldnae maintain our balance … it was the main banner. It just said "The Scottish Contingent". But why we were carryin' the banner in a place like that wi' strong winds blowin', I just don't know.'

Most of the marchers were in their twenties or thirties, though some younger men went too, such as William McVicar, who had only managed to find work for a few days since leaving school at fourteen, and was sixteen and a half when he set off on the march to Edinburgh from his home in Greenock in the summer of 1933. Charles Teasdale of Blantyre, by contrast, was seventy when he set off for London on the 1930 march.

The marchers travelled light, though the Brighton contingent 'borrowed' a wheelbarrow, 'trusting that we would be able to put matters right on our return', to transport their food and a pile of blankets — and to give an occasional ride to their oldest marcher, a seventy-five-year-old woman. Archie McInnes, marching from Glasgow, had 'an old army haversack — surplus equipment. Ye

carried your own gear, your knife, fork and plate, and your blankets of course. One tin mug and a plate … A change of underwear [though other marchers insisted "We didn' wear underwear in those days," and John Brown, who marched from Glasgow to London in 1932, only took "jist one of everything. I don't think I washed any o' ma underwear or socks during the time I was away" — more than a month!] and shirt, a … hand towel, soap, shavin' equipment.' Some wore a waterproof cycling cape — useful in downpours — while John Lochore set off from Glasgow wearing his aunt's old raincoat, 'which buttoned on the wrong side'. Most wore some sort of head covering, a flat cap or what the Scots called 'a bonnet', and carried a stick to help them along. 'The walking stick was a camouflaged sort of weapon … a sort of symbol it was in a way and it was very, very helpful,' according to Harry McShane. The police insisted that these potentially offensive weapons must be surrendered on the approaches to London, though some marchers managed to conceal them from the authorities.

On Thursday, 27 October 1932 the marchers arrived at Hyde Park, their ranks of some 1,500 swollen by around 100,000 Londoners, and pressed towards seven carts that had been set up as a platform. They were met by 2,600 police, including 136 on horseback and 758 special constables who lacked the training or discipline of the regular force, and whose presence, in the words of the *Police Review*, was 'calculated to cause trouble rather than avoid it … the special is an irritant rather than an antiseptic … the less they are seen and used [on hunger marches and demonstrations] the better for everyone'. The 'specials', goaded by the crowd (factory girls in Borough in South London hardly helped, screaming, 'Kiss me, Sergeant!'), attacked the marchers with batons, the mounted police charged, and the marchers retaliated, tearing up railings and breaking branches off the trees. As dusk fell nineteen police and fifty-eight demonstrators were reported to have been injured, while fourteen people had been arrested. There were similar scenes in Trafalgar Square on Sunday, 30 October, when Wal Hannington appealed, 'Let the working class in uniform and out of uniform stand together in defence of their conditions,' and leaflets were stuck on railings urging: 'Policemen! Defeat your own pay cuts by supporting Tuesday's demonstration against the Economies.'

But when Tuesday came, Hannington had been arrested, charged with 'attempting to cause disaffection among members of the Metropolitan Police', and detained in custody. Declining the offer of a Labour MP to sponsor them, since the Labour Party had listed the NUWM as a proscribed organisation in 1930, a fifty-strong deputation of the marchers collected their petition calling for the abolition of the Means Test and of the Anomalies Act, the restoration of benefit cuts and withdrawal of the new economy measures, with, it was claimed, a million signatures ('bigger than the Chartists' petition') from Charing Cross left-luggage office, intending to march from Trafalgar Square down Whitehall to present it at the bar of the House of Commons, as was the ancient right of citizens. However, the police clanged shut the gates, leaving the deputation and their petition inside and a milling crowd of supporters outside.

Those supporters marching towards Parliament — which was illegal, since processions were not allowed within a mile of the Palace of Westminster — were met by 3,174 policemen, including 2,000 on horses — some borrowed from the army for the occasion — detailed to defend Parliament. Fighting broke out which continued until midnight, as far away as the Edgware Road and across Westminster Bridge. Official figures listed twelve police and thirty-two demonstrators injured, and forty-two arrests — though only two of those were marchers. The petition was never presented: it was returned to the left-luggage office, and eventually the marchers set off back to their homes all over Britain in trains, their fares negotiated at greatly reduced rates paid for by the money they had collected en route.

Hannington was sentenced to three months in prison — his fifth term in ten years. Sid Elias, the leader of the deputation to hand the petition in to Parliament, was charged with having stirred the hunger marchers to acts of disorder in a letter written to Hannington (who never received it) while he was in Russia, which allowed the right-wing press to raise again the spectre of a 'Moscow connection', 'Russian dupes' and 'red gold' backing the hunger marches, and received the maximum sentence of

two years. Five days after the trial Emrhys Llewellyn, the NUWM's Secretary and Treasurer (who had stashed the petition in the left-luggage office) and the seventy-six-year-old veteran trade unionist, leader of the 1889 Dock Strike, Tom Mann, were also arrested. Both refused to be bound over to keep the peace. Mann addressed the court: 'If I am to be tied, if my mouth is to be closed, if I am not to participate in voicing the grievances of those who are suffering, while the incompetency of those responsible cannot find work for them, and is knocking down their miserable standards still lower, then whatever the consequence may be … I will not give an undertaking not to be identified with the further organisation of mass demonstrations and the ventilation of the troubles of the unemployed and of the workers generally.' He went to prison for two months, as did Llewellyn.

The politically engaged writers Storm Jameson, Amabel Williams-Ellis (who was the sister of John Strachey) and Vera Brittain wrote a letter to *Time and Tide* in protest:

The most important point about the recent demonstrations and hunger marches is this. Other minorities have channels for airing grievances. The unemployed who have the most serious complaint are the least articulate. Their way of saying what they want to say is taken from them if it is made impossible for them to demonstrate or to hold meetings or to state their case directly whether it be to Parliament or to the local Public Assistance Committee. Can it be that the Government are so anxious to silence them because it would rather not hear too much of what it feels like to try to feed a child on two shillings a week? It is with considerable disquiet that we see a National Government attempting to suppress the views of any body of its subjects and especially that section which has the fewest opportunities of making itself heard. The unemployed are muzzled as they have no other means of publicity for their grievances.

Just over a year later, in the bitter cold of January 1934, the unemployed were on the march again. The Labour Party, still hostile to any demands for united action with the Communists, despite the fact that Hitler had come to power in Germany in January 1933 and both the Communist and the Socialist Internationals had called for united working-class action against fascism, continued to class the NUWM as 'a mere instrument of the British Communist Party'. 'One of our troubles was that the Labour Party were opposed to our earlier marches,' recalled Harry McShane. 'The woman organiser of the Labour Party used to go ahead of us and advise people not to have anything to do with us. The Labour Party were opposed to anything, opposed to the Communist Party mainly. It's quite true to say that Hannington and myself were members of the Communist Party. And most of the leading elements were members of the Communist Party, not all of them … they did a lot o' that and it did a lot o' harm to us. But later on we managed to get Attlee [Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party from 1935] to agree to support a March and speak with us in Hyde Park … and we got the assistance of Aneurin Bevan, who was a tremendously fine person … He was probably the best speaker I've ever heard. It was on the 1934 March that I first met him.'

Equally, the TUC had refused to involve the NUWM in a rally it had organised in London in February 1933, the sole large demonstration sanctioned by the official labour movement on the issue of unemployment throughout the 1930s. 'The ILP [Independent Labour Party] seemed to do strange things at the time,' mused McShane. 'Sometimes they would support us. They tried to form separate Unemployed Committees, separate entirely from us. They and the … TUC were doing the same thing, forming rival bodies.' However, despite the fact that the official Labour Party was 'awfy absent, awfy absent', in the words of Guy Bolton, an unemployed Lanarkshire miner, local Labour Party workers, less concerned with internecine wrangles and more sympathetic to the plight of the individual unemployed, would often turn out to offer support in the form of food, accommodation or entertainment. Hugh Duffy travelled from Scotland 'on the chuck wagon in advance o' the marchers. I chalked the streets and shouted through the loudspeaker, "The Hunger Marchers are comin'! They'll be here at six o'clock! Turn out and support their cause!" And then the lads came marchin' in.'

'Local people were generally sympathetic to the Marchers. They'd come out everywhere in big droves, particularly in England. We had tremendous turn outs to see the Marchers. And we got money

from them. The money kept us going.' The local Co-op store might provide food for the marchers as they passed through a town, and even Woolworths sometimes offered meals: 'We made the most of that … it saved an awful lot of trouble in cooking.' 'We always got donations,' recalled Archie McInnes. 'A huge box of chocolate wafer biscuits from, I think, the Co-op at Lancaster … if you got cigarettes and that … ye handed it in to supplies of course. I remember at Macclesfield an elderly lady … a bystander … pushed cigarettes into my hand … They were Capstan. I was a pipe smoker. So I handed them in.' 'We elected people who had the responsibility of taking collections en route and they were very, very good at their job. They made sure they didn't pass anybody. Anybody standing en route invariably found a can under their nose. And the response was very, very good. The people seeing the unemployed marchin', they felt it in their heart. People turned out to see us.' Indeed, so generous were the onlookers that when Finlay Hart acted as treasurer on the Scottish march he was in a position to know that 'we collected on the road down [from Carlisle] to London £991. That was a lot of money. That was just from shaking collection cans and there were public meetings we were passing through … The money was used for providing food, leather, sending men home who were ill, expenses like that.'

Since more men had been out of work for longer, more families were having to suffer the indignities of the Means Test. After the government had refused to reverse the benefit cuts that had been introduced as an emergency measure in 1931, a thousand Scots from as far away as Aberdeen and Dundee converged on Edinburgh on 11 June 1933, and finding nowhere to sleep on the second night all bedded down on the hard pavements of Princes Street below the Castle. 'We didnae hae blankets wi' us. We had a haversack for a pillae' and the men slept with their backs to the railings in Princes Street so they couldn't be attacked.' The next morning women protesters had to be cleared from the tramways, the marchers washed themselves in the street fountains, shaved by looking at their reflections in shop windows and set up their field kitchens which had 'a place underneath where you fuelled them by coal, and they had a chimney for the smoke to go out. So you can imagine what it was like when the fair citizens of Edinburgh saw these field kitchens all belching away preparing some food for the Marchers … after all Princes Street's the showpiece of Edinburgh … you've got all these luxury hotels and big clubs, the Conservative Club and the Liberal Club … but the average Edinburgh working-class person was in sympathy with what the demonstrators were in Edinburgh for.'

The newspaper headlines spoke of 'Two Days that Shook Edinburgh', in reference to the Russian Revolution, to the alarm of the authorities, who quickly found the protesters accommodation for the following night; after which 'We were loaded into bloody buses and they just got rid of us.'

Local marches continued throughout autumn 1933. When the Unemployment Bill was published in 1934, it followed the main recommendations of the Royal Commission on Unemployment's report, including no restoration of benefit cuts, the continuation of the Means Test, the transfer of transitional payments away from local PACs which had firsthand knowledge of conditions in their area to a national body, the Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB), and a requirement that could make benefit payments conditional on attending a government training centre.

The government had started a number of training schemes for the unemployed in the mid-1920s, and by the late 1930s there were five funded by the Ministry of Labour. Some million and a half young people had been through junior instructional centres, which were in effect a continuation of schooling, and were compulsory in some areas, while each year about 2,000 young women took courses in 'the various domestic arts, including cooking, needlework and laundry', designed to equip them for domestic service or hotel work. There were grants available for individual vocational training, and in 1928 an Industrial Transference Board had been set up to enable the Ministry of Labour to transfer workers out of their own districts where work was no longer available — miners were natural candidates — and send them to training centres mainly situated in the depressed areas where they, and sometimes their wives, could learn skills which could lead to a new life in Canada, Australia or the more prosperous South of England. Between 1929 and 1938, over 70,000 men passed

through such centres, and though in the early days it was hard to place them in work, 63,000 eventually found jobs. Though a number drifted back to their home areas, there were continual complaints that the scheme was draining the life blood from the depressed areas — particularly as the parallel scheme for young unemployed men was transferring them at a rate of over 10,000 a year.

But it was felt that there were some unemployed who were not suitable for these programmes. In December 1929 the Ministry of Labour hatched a plan 'to deal with the class of men to whom our existing training schemes do not apply … those, especially among the younger men, who, through prolonged unemployment, have become so "soft" and temporarily demoralised that it would not be practicable to introduce more than a very small number of them into one of our ordinary training centres without danger to morale'. Such men could not be considered for any transfer scheme until they were 'hardened … for these people have lost the will to work'.

These Instructional Centres, which catered for around 200,000 unemployed men between 1929 and 1939, did not aim to teach a skill or trade, but rather to toughen the 'fibre of men who have got out of the way of work' by providing a twelve-week course of 'fairly hard work, good feeding and mild discipline' at residential camps, often in remote rural areas, which it was hoped 'would help the [men] to withstand the pull of former ties and associates'.

Although the threats to cut their benefits if men refused to attend the Instructional Centres were never implemented, the NUWM, which was concerned that this was another attempt to generate cheap labour and undercut trade union rates of pay, added them to its list of complaints against the government's attempts to deal with unemployment. It described the centres as 'slave colonies' or even 'concentration camps', though this was a rather excessive description, since men could come and go as they liked, and in any one year up to a quarter left before completing their courses.

Under the toughening-up regime the men were issued on arrival with a 'uniform' of work shirts, corduroy trousers and hobnailed boots, which they could keep if they completed the course. They slept under canvas (in the summer), or in huts, were paid around four shillings a week and issued with a pack of Woodbines and a stamp for a letter home, and were subjected to a strict regime: parading each morning for work, roll calls, lights out, and hard manual labour such as chopping down trees, building roads, digging sewers and stone-breaking. Sometimes men would be 'lent' to work on outside projects, such as the building of Whipsnade Zoo, London University's playing fields, and the Piccadilly Line tube extension, all to accustom them 'once more to regular hours and steady work'.

Len Edmondson's brother was 'sent to a camp in County Durham where the men were employed digging stone and helping to make roads for forestry work. They were accommodated in huts and following breakfast the Union Jack was hoisted [which was a particular irritant to the Welsh and Scottish attendees] whilst they were all lined up and marched to the place of work. In the evening they were lined up again and marched back to the camp when the Union Jack was then lowered.' 'They established one camp in Glen Branter in Argyllshire and a number o' other places. And it is a fact that most of the work they did was afforestation work, mostly for the dukes and the big lords, makin' roads through the forests. And I think it was at Glen Branter they actually had them diggin' holes and filling them up again. The camps were horrible … I think they got the idea o' these camps frae Hitler, because Fascism was establishing itself in Germany and they were sending all these young men to these camps,' concluded Tom Ferns, an unemployed Glaswegian who had only ever managed to find short-term jobs and was active in both the NUWM and the Young Communist League. But others enjoyed their camp days, rejoicing in the outdoor life, long walks and sports — particularly football — and rejected any notion of a 'slave camp'.

The camps were clearly authoritarian, with many, it was claimed, overseen by 'civilian sergeant-majors, retired police officers, ex NCOs of the army and officials transferred from the Poor Law Institutions'. But the most numerous complaints seem to have been about the food — stale bread, leathery meat, sandwiches 'with bread an inch thick, with a piece of cheese in between that a mouse wouldn't get up for … when the men used to be working among the fir trees they'd gnaw the resin

off the trunk … and pick wild mushrooms and eat them raw, they were that hungry,' reported William Heard, a West Ham man with a wife and five children who was sent to Shobdon camp in Herefordshire.

'I still don't know what we learned … it was a waste of time. The only thing was it took us *away* from something I suppose,' thought Heard (who featured in an NUWM pamphlet, *Slave Camps)*. But Alwyn Jones, who was sent to a camp in Suffolk from Oldham, felt 'so much rot is talked about the camps' that he wrote an article for his local paper extolling their virtues. 'A man gets four shillings a week, and of course his wife and children draw if they are unemployed while he is away. He has the best food he ever ate [four meals a day], a bed, and clothes and medical attention if necessary … in beautiful surroundings.'

Although camps continued to open throughout the 1930s, judged by results they were not particularly effective. Of a total intake of 83,000 'volunteers' between 1935 and 1938, only 12,500 subsequently found employment: 19,500 either gave up or were sacked during the twelve-week course. The last one closed in 1939, and several were converted to house prisoners of war.

The National Government had inherited the notion of transference schemes and training camps, but one initiative of its own was the introduction in 1934 of the Special Areas (Development and Improvement) Act, in recognition of the fact that there was little hope of a sufficient upswing in world trade to bring jobs back to the areas of the old staple industries — coal, iron, steel, shipbuilding. Four special investigators were appointed to examine conditions in the worst-hit areas: Scotland, West Cumberland, Durham and Tyneside and South Wales. Their reports confirmed what the government must have known already: that while trade was beginning to revive in the Midlands and the South-East, massive unemployment persisted in the depressed areas, with no real prospect of improvement. Parts of South Wales were described as 'derelict', with 39,000 men and 5,000 boys 'surplus to requirements', there was a permanent labour 'surplus' in the depressed areas of Scotland, and Durham bore out the claims of a series of influential articles in *The Times* in March 1934 which described the area as 'Places Without a Future: Where Industry is Dead'.

Alongside advertisements for Rolls-Royce, Bentley and Talbot luxury cars, holidays in the Hôtel du Palais in Biarritz, which offered 'Casino-Golf', a broadtail fur coat with a white fox-fur collar on sale at Jays of Regent Street for forty-nine guineas, and a long list of the wedding presents received by Mr Walter Elliot MP and Miss Katharine Tennant, the 'Special Correspondent' (who had reported on the 'stricken areas' of South Wales in 1928) explained that 'There are districts of England, heavily populated, whose plight no amount of trade recovery can ever cure because their sole industry is not depressed but dead.' The articles spoke of places where the 'pits are not only closed but abandoned, the works not only shut but dismantled', of families who had had 'no proper spell of work for eight years … people living on the very margin … everything superfluous has been pawned or sold … and the necessities of life are largely worn out or broken … shops are shut and boarded up … You may even see the rare sight of a pawnshop closed … the men are not starving, but they are permanently hungry.' Alongside stark photographs of mining villages such as Spennymoor and Escombe with their slag heaps, rubble and long, empty, derelict streets making them look truly like war zones, the article declared, 'It would be a failure of humanity to forget them, a failure of statesmanship to ignore them.' An editorial concluded the grim series with a call for the appointment of a director of operations charged with rehabilitating the workforce and reviving the economies of the depressed areas.

Ramsay MacDonald responded by impressing on the Minister of Labour, Henry Betterton, 'the importance of doing something to meet *The Times* leaders, and the growing chorus in the Commons'. Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, agreed, but thought it was essentially 'not a question of spending a great deal of money, but of showing that the matter had not been pigeon-holed'.

Eight months later the Depressed Areas Bill (its name was later changed by the House of Lords to the Special Areas Bill at the behest of the people of Tyneside, who found the title disparaging) was reluctantly introduced into Parliament. It proposed two full-time, unpaid Commissioners for the

areas, one for England and Wales, the other for Scotland. Their budget was £2 million, and their remit was strictly limited — there must be no suggestion that 'a sort of financial hosepipe designed to pour assistance into the districts' was being uncoiled, or that this was the thin edge of a public-works wedge. Grants could be given to local authorities and to voluntary agencies such as the NCSS in the Special Areas to initiate or subsidise amenities such as water supplies, sewerage schemes, drainage and sanitation, hospitals, children's playgrounds, football pitches or open-air swimming pools, and some money was made available for 'back to the land' initiatives such as smallholdings, co-operative farming projects and afforestation schemes — though an imaginative plan for a Welsh national park based on the American model was turned down.

One problem was that the Act was at total variance with the labour transference policies which various governments had been pursuing since the 1920s. As a Ministry of Labour official put it, government initiatives should 'neither waste sympathy nor public funds on any activity which may anchor or attach young or middle-aged people more firmly to the depressed areas'. The 'Get on your bike' attitude which has resonated for the right down the decades as a legacy of the 'hungry thirties' was expressed in the words of the National Government's Chief Industrial Advisor, Horace Wilson: 'The people who wish to work must go where the work is.'

The Act's narrow scope and the limited funds available made it seem little more than a gesture, and it drew criticism from the press and across the political spectrum. The Mayor of Newcastle regarded it as 'a flea bite, a sop'; to Aneurin Bevan it was 'an idle, empty farce', a mere palliative offering 'a bit of colour-washing colliers' cottages' in the hope of attracting new industry (as had already happened at Brynmawr). Lloyd George damned the Act as 'patching' and 'peddling hope', while Harold Macmillan, with patrician languor, ridiculed it as *'Parturiunt montes: nascetur ridiculus mus*. The mountains have been in labour and there has been born a mouse … a nice mouse, a profitable and helpful little mouse, but a ridiculous, microscopic, Lilliputian mouse.'

Other depressed areas such as Manchester and Lancashire lobbied to be 'special' too, since they too had moribund industries and high unemployment. By 1936, when the Commissioner for England and Wales, Sir Malcolm Stewart, who had been particularly disappointed at the failure to build a bridge across the Severn, which had first been mooted in the 1840s (but which did not happen until 1965), resigned, ostensibly on health grounds, he admitted that 'No appreciable reduction in the number of unemployed has been effected.' A survey of 5,800 firms that he had undertaken in 1935 showed that only eight would even consider investing in the Special Areas. They gave their reasons as inaccessibility, high local taxes, low consumer purchasing power and high rates of trade union membership. The powers of the Commissioners were increased by an Amendment to the Act in 1937 which meant that rates, rent and taxes could be remitted for industries starting or relocating to the Special Areas, and trading estates were set up with all facilities laid on in which firms could lease premises. It was also agreed that 'steps should be taken to prevent further industrial concentration round London and the South' by diverting industry to areas of heavy unemployment. The Commissioners' budget was increased annually, so that by 1938 they were allowed to spend £17 million. Nevertheless, fewer than 50,000 new jobs were created under the Special Areas legislation.

The 1934 Unemployment Act spurred the NUWM to organise another national march. Given that it was to take place 'in the dead of winter [starting in January], it is essential that proper provision be made for every marcher having stout clothes, good boots and coat, as well as a real Army pack'. Cobblers must accompany every contingent (they would repair boots overnight), and for those coming from Scotland, the North-East, Lancashire and Yorkshire, who would be on the road for more than ten days, hot food would have to be provided. This meant a one- or two-ton truck to transport the field kitchen, which was 'like an old washin' house boiler on the back of a lorry', according to one Scottish marcher. An 'ambulance unit' would also be on hand to cope with the inevitable spate of blisters and other medical emergencies. Every marcher was to be provided with a copy of the Unemployment Bill and the twelve-page *Manifesto of the National Hunger March and Congress* so that he or she would

know exactly why they were marching and what for. Generally, money was more forthcoming than it had been on earlier marches. The Tyneside marchers left with generous donations from various Durham mining lodges, and even the impoverished lodges of South Wales managed to scrape together some funds for their representatives. The Scottish contingent collected £45 in the streets of Coventry and £20 in Birmingham, while in Warrington £55 was dropped into the rattled tins of the Lancashire marchers, and they left Oxford £120 better off.

Women were in a very small minority among the membership of the NUWM. 'But there were several capable women who were very active,' recalled Finlay Hart. And when it came to the Hunger Marches, 'We didn't like women with the men in case there was any scandal,' according to Harry McShane, the Scottish NUWM organiser. 'There was a woman's contingent … and they marched a separate route.' 'We never saw any of the men on the March,' remembered Mary Johnston, who had been unemployed for over a year when she joined the Scottish women en route for London in 1934. 'We never had any contact with them. I don't suppose we ever thought of questioning them. I don't recollect any discussion on the point at all. And of course it would be quite a good thing, really, if the men were using a separate route.'

It was considered that a march from Glasgow to London would be too taxing for the thirty or so Scottish women, so the men 'set off a week or two before us … but … we would have a send off from Clydebank and we'd get a bus from Glasgow to Derby and join up with the other women, mainly the women from Northern England, Lancashire,' making a contingent of around a hundred. But Emily Swankie, who had decided with her husband John that as the Labour Exchange would have stopped his money if he'd joined the 1934 march (as he would not be available for work if he was on the road — a requirement of drawing benefit) she would march instead, since she was also unemployed. The first day out from Derby

we walked sixteen miles … we found that sixteen miles is quite a distance for people not used to marching. And if like me you were in a new pair of shoes, it wasn't funny … We never did sixteen miles again. The next day it was twelve miles. And then we cut it down to eight … We had black stockings which we were asked to wear all the time … they frowned on bare legs. No bare legs on the Hunger March … There was a wee bit of puritanism there too, but it was that they wanted to avoid at all costs any bad publicity — women marching with bare legs … There were long hours of walking and nothing really happened, passing through villages, people coming out to look at us, curious, interested some of them, not very curious, some of them not very receptive … But where we did have receptions, it was great. We had the Co-operative Guild women, some Church Guild women, Labour Party women and Communist Party women. They had made up reception committees for us … sometimes they had brought in home baking, and they got us bedded down in halls etc. for the night. In one place they anticipated we wouldn't be very well fed the next day because they knew the area through which we were going. And they made us big bowls of hard-boiled eggs. We had to stuff our pockets with them because it was on the cards that we wouldn't eat next night. And they sent in basins with Lysol — that was the old disinfectant for your feet … we were very kindly received.

Like the men, the women always marched in step when they got to a town. 'You march better when you're tuned in with other people,' thought Marion Henery. And it looked more organised and purposeful. As with the men, it was sore feet that were the main problem for the women: 'The Lancashire women wore clogs. You heard the clatter of the clogs but they never had any trouble with their feet … but a lot of other women had problems with heel blisters.' The women 'had to sleep in workhouses quite a number of times … we had always to give our names. The women on the March didnae take kindly to this. So a lot of fictitious names were given — Mary Pickford [the American film star of the silent screen] and names like that.'

Although the Labour Party and the TUC leadership continued to label the NUWM as the Communist party in disguise and to reject attempts to build a 'United Front' against unemployment (though the ILP, which had recently disaffiliated from the Labour Party and would wither henceforth,

heeded the call), there was more support among the rank and file this time. The South Wales contingent, for example, had the support of almost all the Labour MPs in the area and many of the local union branches and trades councils for the 1934 march. Reception committees were more likely to turn out as the marchers neared towns, and were more prepared to offer food and accommodation. Many committees included a clergyman who might offer his church hall, or even his church, for the night. However, the reception en route was mixed: as the marchers tramped through Windsor, servants working at the castle threw them money, but at Reading, where there was no reception committee, they had to bed down on used straw in a cattle market.

As the marchers neared Oxford they found 'students were standing on the side o' the road with bundles o' walking sticks and handin' them to us as we passed again after the police [who had confiscated the marchers' sticks] was away. They were sympathetic students, no' Communists or anything like that. But they'd seen what we were goin' through and they decided we needed sticks for walkin',' recalled Frank McCusker. Duff Cooper, who was Financial Secretary at the War Office, was appalled, and said in the House of Commons that he hoped that the university authorities would know how to deal with these undergraduates who fell into step with the Hunger Marchers. When he came to speak at the Oxford Union few weeks later Cooper was challenged about his remarks by Anthony Greenwood, known in Oxford as the 'young Adonis of the Labour Party', the son of Arthur Greenwood, who had been Minister of Health in the 1929 Labour government, but had declined to join the National Government. 'It is a vile thing,' Cooper replied, 'to encourage these poor people, under-fed, ill-clothed, to set out in bad weather, marching the roads to London, knowing perfectly well that they would get nothing when they got there. In a university with traditions, it was a suitable case for the authorities to interfere with the young fools who lost their heads and their sense of proportion.'

The Labour politician George Lansbury was the other speaker, and he disagreed, welcoming the fact that 'Christian charity' still existed among the undergraduates. It was capitalism that had failed to do anything for its victims, 'and that is the greatest condemnation of the system that can be offered'. The President of the Union, the socialist Frank Hardie, questioned the right of Oxford undergraduates to have £2,000 spent on their education while others were pitchforked into the labour market at fourteen. The motion that 'This House believes that in Socialism lies the only solution to the problems of this country' was passed by 316 votes to 247.

The 'young fools' of Oxford were not the only less obvious supporters of the Hunger Marchers. Fifteen-year-old Esmond Romilly, a nephew of Winston Churchill, who was a pupil at Wellington College and who kept a porcelain bust of Lenin on his study shelves under a portrait of his uncle and next to six copies of *The Communist Manifesto*, was a fervent, if unfocused, enthusiast too. With his brother Giles he had started a magazine, *Out of Bounds*, 'against reaction in the public schools', which contained attacks on the Officer Training Corps, fascism (though Michael Wallace of Oundle was allowed space for a defence), traditional public schools which were 'concerned with the production of a class', as well as informative articles on subjects such as masturbation ('some form of auto-eroticism is absolutely inevitable') and progressive schools (including Dartington, which permitted copies of the *Moscow Daily News* as well as the *Times Literary Supplement* in its library) plus some rather memorable poems by the schoolboy Gavin Ewart. The Romillys were delighted to announce in the first issue, published in March 1934, that *Out of Bounds* was 'Banned in Uppingham — Banned in Cheltenham', and they could gleefully add 'Banned in Aldenham, Imperial Service College and Wellington' (from whence it sprang) by the second. Furthermore, the *Daily Mail* had picked up the story under the headlines 'Red Menace in Public Schools', 'Moscow Attempts to Corrupt Boys', 'Officer's Son [the Romillys' father was a colonel in the Scots Guards and had commanded the Egyptian Camel Corps in the First World War] Sponsors Extremist Journal'.

L. Shinnie of Westminster School reviewed the collected *Listener* articles *Memoirs of the Unemployed* for *Out of Bounds*, concluding that 'members of the public schools can only make certain that they will not suffer the conditions depicted in this book if they join with the working classes to

achieve a better society'. Esmond Romilly managed to persuade his mother not only to contribute half a crown to the National Hunger March Committee, but also to pen a letter to the *Daily Worker* expressing her 'entire sympathy with the cause of the unemployed who have had their benefits cut and I am glad they are availing themselves of a traditionally British method to voice their grievances'. Nellie Romilly had wished to add 'God Save the Queen' at the bottom, but had been dissuaded. However, young Romilly later realised the political capital that could be made out of a sister of the wife of Winston Churchill writing such a letter, and it never appeared.

One afternoon in February 1934 Henry Crowder, a black American jazz musician and the lover of a wealthy and rebellious socialite with a restless social conscience, Nancy Cunard, went to her flat and found her wearing 'a bizarre collection of garments — a man's overcoat, an aviator's helmet and several scarves — which, she told him, were partly for warmth and partly for disguise. She informed him that she was off to join the hunger marchers and he was to tell no one. Off she went with a small movie camera in her hand.'

Much later, Nancy Cunard wrote to a friend: 'It was at Stamford [that] I met them [the hunger marchers], up that great road … One thought the dog of the Inn had been put in the soup, just as we were all sitting down, in pretty great cold, eating stew on the roadside … Why the hunger march? In protest against the Means Test.'

'We were on the road when this car drew up,' remembered Tom Clarke, who was on the march from Dundee. 'I think it was a Rolls Royce — I'm not very good on cars. This woman got out … [she] was taking newsreels or films. [Peter] Kerrigan said, "That's Nancy Cunard." I didn't at the time know who Nancy Cunard was. To me here we were fighting capitalism and yet ye'd get these people coming along and dropping money, maybe a pound note or more, into a collection bag. I remember quizzing Kerrigan about this. I says, "How the hell does this happen?" He says, "Well, they're so accustomed to giving tips, this doesn't mean a thing." They may have intended well, they may not, but they just gave tips.'

'Eighth day,' wrote Joseph Albaya, who was marching in a Sheffield contingent on 17 February. 'Kettering — one of those towns that didn't know what unemployment was — also where the inhabitants looked at us if were dogs.' The marchers were put up in the workhouse. 'Speech by Mayor to welcome us — (he said he believed in action by constitutional means).' The next day it was 'on to Bedford our longest trek to date — never been so tired as on this day — feet in a terrible condition … the trek was about 32 miles on hard roads — admittedly may have done rambles this length but never with the necessity of keeping in step — dark before we reached Bedford — five miles out the leaders had to keep encouraging the marchers — kept telling us we were there — these to my mind were silly tactics as the result was disappointment — had one final rest on the side of the road — utterly fagged out — was stretched out in a ditch — a Good Samaritan came out and dished cigarettes out.'

Aware that the Home Secretary, Sir John Gilmour, and the Attorney General had both warned mothers along the marchers' route to keep their children indoors and shopkeepers to shutter their windows, hinting at the prospect of 'grave disorder, public disturbances', even 'bloodshed', the NUWM was determined to avoid confrontations. 'We're here to demonstrate against the operation of the Means Test and the economy cuts and not to have a diversion or fight with the police which would misrepresent the whole idea of the March,' warned Harry McShane. 'We're here to protest peacefully and with discipline.' Any transgressor would usually be packed off back home — though only after a meeting had been held with all the contingent to decide his fate. Misdeeds might include drunkenness (though according to most marchers this was rare: 'There was no money for drink anyway in the first place.' It took Frank McCusker six weeks to march from Scotland, and 'I could say I had about six pints o' beer frae Glasgow to London'), scrounging, brawling, stealing another man's boots, pilfering the collection boxes or pulling off a scam such as arriving in a town in advance of the main body of marchers, collecting money from sympathetic onlookers and pocketing the proceeds before rejoining the march.

If the marchers were organised, so were the authorities. Instructions were reiterated that any soft-hearted local PAC thinking of offering food or loans of blankets to the marchers would be surcharged for this largesse. Chief Constables along the route were required to file reports about the number, progress and behaviour of each contingent, and whether any marchers had previous convictions for breaches of the peace.

In fact both sides were concerned to avoid any aggressive confrontation as the marchers streamed into Hyde Park on Sunday, 25 February 1934. Unknown to police or marchers, a vigilante committee had assembled in a small flat behind Selfridges, watching the action and hovering by the telephone to report any police brutality among the crowd of over 50,000 marchers. It was a distinguished posse, 'rather like the members of a cultural, intellectual and progressive *Who's Who':* E.M. Forster, Professor Julian Huxley, Vera Brittain, her husband, Professor George Caitlin, and her friend the novelist Winifred Holtby, 'tall, calm and big-boned', and Dr Edith Summerskill were there, as were a couple of barristers, two young solicitors and Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*. Claud Cockburn brought H.G. Wells, who had been unwell, and was 'wrapped in mufflers'. The assembled group were either members of, or distinguished left-wingers who had been invited as observers by, the National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL), since previously reports of acts of harassment by the police had been easy to discredit since they came mainly from the victims themselves.

The NCCL (now Liberty) had been set up by a one-time actor and freelance journalist, Ronald Kidd, who also owned a radical, free-thinking bookshop, the Punch and Judy, in Villiers Street, where unexpurgated copies of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* could be purchased, as well as books about the Soviet Union which were not 'full of hysterical anti-communism', and the barrister, writer and soon-to-be Independent MP, A.P. Herbert, as a result of Kidd's disquiet at the behaviour of police *agents provocateurs* during the 1932 Hunger March, and Herbert's unease at the police acting as 'bandits', ordering drinks in nightclubs after hours in order to secure convictions. The civil libertarians peered down at 'the sea of hats in the Park — caps, trilbies, hard felts and the occasional bowler' marching through the grey, slanting drizzle, and some ventured down to the edge of the crowds to get a closer look. The music of the pipe and flute bands of the Scottish marchers (Glasgow's contingent alone boasted eight flute bands) hung in the air, interspersed with much shouting of slogans and singing of 'The Internationale' as the lines of unemployed marched in step, watched by lines of police, one unit atop Marble Arch with a telephone, ready to direct operations and summon reinforcements in case of trouble.

Joseph Albaya, who had been on the road for sixteen days, recorded:

Got up late for the GREAT DAY … put on clean shirt … long boring wait at Friends' Meeting House where leaders entertained us in usual fashion by usual speeches — fell in outside, raining on my new outfit … put on selling *Hunger March Bulletins* — papers not counted so had plenty of chances of making a dishonest penny — rather alarmed by the reports of the older marchers of not keeping to the ranks consequently rather felt like a hero [sic] lined outside for ration of oranges and cigarettes and the singing of the daily ritual (the 'Internationale') — set off in fine style — rather impressed by the military bearing and dignity of the comrades — the consciousness that it was their Great Day had made the marchers buck themselves up — the contingent headed by Scottish pipers, fifes and drums … raining lightly all the time — my papers getting wet and not selling — soon picked up a companion who was trying to convey the usual idea that we were in for a blood bath — crowds increasing — also police contingent headed by three mounted policemen … under the command of a military-looking old bastard … Noticed that comrades' London banners are much bigger and better than provincial ones and that London comrades are much more militant and less apathetic than provincial comrades [possibly partly because they were less exhausted] … the police led us into a better class district off the main traffic roads — blocks of imposing flats — I went berserk … yelling obscenities at the occupants of the flats — I was sobbing with rage — I never knew what class consciousness was until

that moment — I was ready to do anything, charge the police, smash up everything in sight — it was the way the occupants of the flats looked at us … every flat seemed to have a balcony from which they laughed at us and then contemptuously threw down money — their contempt was so open that even the dullest of the marchers could see it. Christ! … if they had been on a level on us and not above us on their balconies well … I should have taken part willingly in my first riot.

Jack Gaster, a young lawyer, was the ILP representative on the London reception committee:

I was based in Marylebone and we were always organising the Hyde Park meetings … we used to go down to some stables behind Great Ormond Street owned by the Co-op and arrange for eight or ten horse drawn vehicles to come to Hyde Park to form a platform. In those days … there were no loudspeakers or anything like that … I had to marshal [the marchers] out of Hyde Park which was a very important job because we were determined to march down Oxford Street. The police were determined that we shouldn't. They wanted to keep the marchers off the main streets. There were hundreds of thousands in the Park. We arranged for part of the march to leave Hyde Park by the Bayswater Road entrance … and another part to go out via Park Lane … and both to converge … There were police lined up, very senior officers because it was a very important thing, 'mounties' too. They said 'Sorry, Mr Gaster, you can't go down Oxford Street.' I said 'We're going down.' I was trembling in my shoes … but I very carefully put the Scottish marchers behind me. They were the real tough ones. I said, 'These lads haven't walked from all over England to be pushed into the back streets.' 'Sorry, we can't allow it.' I said, 'Very well. We're going down Oxford Street and the responsibility is yours … There's going to be a fight. Do you want a fight? Does the government want a fight?' They withdrew and we marched down Oxford Street.

In the event the entire occasion went off peacefully: 'not a scuffle, not a baton raised. No report from anywhere of even so much as a pane of glass broken. No bloodshed!' the NCCL observers, who had had no need to pick up their phone, recorded. The same was the case at a rally in Trafalgar Square.

After queuing in the snow some two hundred unemployed marchers were allowed into Parliament, where some struck up 'The Internationale' in the Central Lobby, while those allowed into the Strangers' Gallery interrupted debate by shouting 'Hear the Hunger Marchers!' and 'Down with the Starvation Government!' All were ejected, and they eventually returned home without having been able to present their petition to Parliament, the reduced train fares that had been negotiated with the railway companies covered by money raised on the march.

However, some female textile marchers, led by Maud Brown, the women's organiser of the NUWM, had managed to penetrate 10 Downing Street and confront Ramsay MacDonald's daughter Ishbel, who was 'very friendly [and] offered … tea … but on a point of honour we refused it', recalled Mary Johnston, one of Miss MacDonald's unexpected visitors. 'We felt it would be weakening our position if we accepted tea.' Before they left the Prime Minister's daughter suggested that maybe the unemployed women might try domestic service, according to one of them.

Ramsay MacDonald refused to grant the marchers an audience. 'Has anyone who cares to come to London, either on foot or in first-class carriages, the constitutional right to demand to see me, to take up my time, whether I like it or not?' he asked rhetorically in the Commons a few days later. 'I say he has not.'

Sir Herbert Samuel, the Liberal leader and former Home Secretary, was despairing:

No one can say that the grievances of these men, who have walked to this city from many parts of this island, are trivial or imaginary … What should they have done other than what they have done, if they want to draw the attention of the nation to their plight, to stir the nation out of what is really a shameful complacency, and to protest against the utterly inadequate measures that have so far been taken? Are we to say to them, 'If you are disorderly, we cannot listen to you; it would be to discourage disorder. If you are orderly, we need not listen to you?' …

It is said that they are Communists, and therefore that they ought to be ignored. Let us not attach so much importance to labels, but see the realities behind the name. There is not here, and

everyone knows it, any deliberate plan or attempt to overturn society. This march is nothing more than a protest, a bitter cry. They say to us: 'Hear us; see us; help us.' It is that and nothing more …

It is said that these men are not representative of the whole body of the unemployed. Perhaps not, but there is no one else to represent them; there is no other organisation that speaks urgently in their name.

That 'bitter cry' was heard again in January 1935, when the 1934 Unemployment Act was implemented, and under what the National Government referred to as a 'Great Social Reform', responsibility for administering Means-Tested relief for those who had exhausted their unemployment insurance entitlement, and the able-bodied uninsured unemployed, were transferred from the 183 local PACs to a new national Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB). A national sliding scale of relief was to replace the various local scales of the PACs, some of which in depressed areas had been lenient in their interpretation of the test. Indeed, as late as 1935 a number of councillors in South Wales boasted that the Means Test had never operated in their area.

When the new rates were announced they turned out to be lower than those previously allowed, and large-scale agitations broke out in South Wales (including the storming of Merthyr Tydfil UAB office, where 90 per cent of claimants had been receiving full rates of benefit), spreading to the North-East (where 10,000 marched on Sheffield Town Hall to demand the repeal of the Act and the immediate restoration of old allowances) and Scotland, with the unemployed besieging local authority offices and PACs with complaints about reduced benefits. Forty-eight per cent of all those in receipt of benefit across the country had seen them cut, while only 34 per cent had seen an increase. An emergency two-day debate in Parliament revealed the divide in the country, as MPs representing seats in the Midlands and the South of England 'listened in often puzzled silence' to the 'virulent attacks' from their colleagues of all parties from the depressed areas. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, admitted that 'It had been realised for the first time that very large numbers of working men in Great Britain, and particularly in Scotland, were paying rents much lower than had been thought [which meant that their benefit had been cut, since the sliding scale reckoned that rent equalled around a quarter of living costs], and were living under very bad conditions.' A Standstill Act was introduced for two years which allowed the unemployed to choose whichever rate was the higher, that of the UAB or their local PAC.

These protests had been essentially local and spontaneous (though with some NUWM support), and it was not until two years after the previous one that another NUWM-organised march set off. But that 1936 Hunger March was eclipsed, both then and down the years to come, by a much smaller march of only two hundred men, organised with Labour Party and TUC support and led by a Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, to protest at the singular situation of one devastated town, Jarrow.

If Jarrow has come to epitomise the 'Hungry Thirties', what, if anything, was the importance of those other seven Hunger Marches from all over Britain? Their success can't be judged in terms of concessions wrung from the government, but though the numbers involved were relatively small, the name — the indictment — 'Hunger March' stuck, giving the decade its epithet. Winston Churchill called them 'Anger Marches', and they were that too. Most of those who took part were realistic about what they achieved. The hated Means Test was still in force when war broke out in 1939, though the government did raise benefit payments after the 1934 march. Rather, marchers spoke in terms of 'showin the authorities that ye are nae prepared to take things lyin' down': 'I felt we had the guts but we had nae policy. I never knew anyone on the March that got a job through it … [but] the March meant that you were trying to tae do somethin' about it. They wernae just accepting it'; 'I don't think we achieved any success. We had this approach by Government: you were down and they were trying to keep you down … But the Hunger Marches kept alive the spirit to keep fighting'; 'It highlighted the situation that people were in … it brought to the notice o' the general public the conditions o' the unemployed at that time'; 'I don't think we achieved that much out o' it. But we let the people in the whole o' the country know the conditions that were going on as far as we were concerned in Scotland,

or South Wales, or the North East'; 'Being a Marxist you know you're no' gaun tae get any immediate results. It's a process of development and it takes the form of struggles and the class struggle in a' its aspects. I didn't expect any dramatic victory.'

There was no dramatic victory, but the Hunger Marchers helped to rewrite the concept of 'welfare', reclaiming it as part of the commons, as a social right rather than something given selectively as a matter of discretion to mendicants. This reading would underpin the Beveridge Report of 1942, and subsequent social welfare legislation after the Second Word War.

If the marches achieved few concrete results, did they politicise the unemployed? Did the unemployed come to see themselves as a dispossessed class in revolt against capitalism? Many — politicians of all parties and most of the press — portrayed the unemployed as vulnerable to exploitation by the Communist Party for its own nefarious ends. Some charged that the NUWM was controlled by the Communist Party, others saw it as a recruiting ground providing footsoldiers for the Party. The third World Congress in 1921 had directed all Communist Parties to 'participate directly in the struggle of the working masses, establish Communist leadership of the struggle, and, in the course of the struggle create large, mass Communist Parties'.

The CPGB would certainly have liked to gain control of the unemployed movement, build it up as a mass political organisation and direct its activities towards the overthrow of capitalism, but most marchers insist that the overlap of the NUWM and the CPGB was small among the ordinary members, indeed that most members had no particular political affiliation. Very few of the tens of thousands drawn into the agitation went on to join the CPGB — and in fact few actually joined the NUWM. 'The people's flag is deepest pink/It's not as red as people think/And ere their limbs grow stiff and cold/The Dundee workers will be sold'- sang one sceptical marcher. The total number who paid tuppence for an NUWM membership card and a penny a week for a stamp was probably around 15,000 by the end of 1931. When there was government action that was regarded as hostile to the interests of the unemployed, membership would surge: 2,000 a week were recruited in response to the cuts in benefit and the introduction of the Means Test in 1931. Numbers rose throughout 1933 when the NUWM was engaged in active protests and was meeting harsh opposition, but fell again until early 1935, when the announcement of another round of benefit cuts for the unemployed gave a further impetus, and membership rose to above 20,000. But by the time of the final Hunger March in 1936 it had declined to nearer 14,000, and it only rose slightly in late 1938, coinciding with a campaign for winter relief. Some of the unemployed joined in support of a particular campaign, and then left, most let their membership lapse if they found a job, while a few found even the required penny a week subscription unaffordable. This was not the behaviour of 'a militant army committed to revolutionary change', and throughout the 1930s those who went on hunger marches remained a minority among the unemployed, the unemployed remained a (sometimes, in some places, large) minority within the working class, and moreover a minority without economic power.

The successes that the NUWM achieved among the unemployed were less in politicising them (though a number of Hunger Marchers subsequently did go to fight on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War) than in drawing attention to the failure of the government to do enough about unemployment, gaining sufficient sympathy for their cause that the government took care not to be seen to be acting provocatively, and particularly in helping unemployed individuals fight for their rights.

The NUWM did have victories in getting local PACs to raise benefit rates, or to impose the Means Test less harshly, and it also evolved a system of local committees trained in legal aspects of unemployment regulations and benefits to advise members, and, supported by advice from the legal department, to represent a member who took his or her appeal to the National Umpire at Kew. So successful was this growing expertise on national insurance questions that the NUWM was sometimes asked for help by a trade union branch, and William Beveridge invited Wal Hannington and Sid Elias to advise official committees on several occasions.

The Maryhill local branch of the NUWM in Glasgow was

a hive of activity … People coming in were getting cut off from benefit as a result of the Means Test and all the other anomalies that were introduced then. And their case was taken up and there was always somebody at the Labour Exchanges representing them … the NUWM was organising, fighting appeals against the decision when people's benefits were cut, even turning out when people had been evicted for arrears of rent, advertising the many demonstrations which were taking place in Glasgow — at least one a week, where anything from 5,000 to 20,000 people were turning up … we used chalk or whitewash in the streets … we had a problem eventually. There were so many demonstrations taking place — unemployed and other — there wisnae enough space left at the street corner to advertise them all.

Michael Clark was 'never a member o' the Communist Party. I was in sympathy quite a lot, but I never did join … these fellows read politics and history goin' away back hundreds of years about the Clearances in Scotland … the big shot landlords and all that. I'd time for adventure books, but no time for politics!' Nevertheless, Clark took over as rent convenor on behalf of the NUWM in Greenock, taking direct action in disputes. 'We'd go to a house where eviction was threatened [for falling behind with the rent] and sit in the house … as many of us as possible, to occupy the house so's they widnae get takin' the furniture. And then we'd negotiate with the Parish Council and councillors … to get like a settled fee … for them to pay the rent, make up the arrears.'

The NUWM also organised social events for the unemployed: country rambles, football matches, whist drives, socials, study circles, concerts and dances. 'The jiggin', the dancin' was right popular — many of the best dancers in town went. Well, you could say that the unemployed got plenty o' time to practise! They got quite a good band together … they could go up to town and at the Palais de Danse they could have held their own wi' the best o' them.' Then there were days out for the children of the unemployed — including an outing to Battery Park near Greenock for 4,700 children who were provided with milk and buns and a bag of toffees to take home.

The charge stuck, however, of a movement controlled from Moscow, financed by 'red gold' and aiming at revolution. Yet if the NUWM attracted only relatively small numbers, the Communist Party certainly did no better. By August 1930 membership, which had peaked at 12,000 immediately after the General Strike in 1926, had fallen to fewer than 2,500, while the Labour Party had around 200,000 individual members. Since 1929 the CPGB had been pursuing the Communist International (Comintern)-dictated 'class against class' policy, identifying the Labour Party as the 'third capitalist party' and 'social fascists', and had severed links with other left-wing organisations including the ILP.

Villages such as Mardy at the head of the Rhondda Valley and Lumphinnans in the West Fife coalfield were demonised as 'Little Moscows' for their industrial militancy, opposition to the coal owners — and to the capitalist system in general — and their supposed unwavering support for communism (though the 'class against class' policy had eroded cooperation in local politics with Labour built up over a decade — as it closed so many doors — and reduced the CP to an opposition party). Miners formed the hard core of the membership, but the party was strongest in London and Scotland. While most CPGB members were relatively young, working-class men, by late 1932, 60 per cent of them were out of work, and that figure was higher in Scotland. There were few female members, since women had been 'completely neglected' in the drive to grow a mass party, and the Young Communist League could only claim two or three hundred members.

Moreover, the avenues of persuasion could be narrow. In Bolton, members of the Communist Party petitioned the central library to subscribe to the *Daily Worker* and periodicals such as *The USSR in Construction* and *Labour Monthly*, as well as to purchase what the local press dubbed 'red' books (such as Lenin's *Complete Works* and Plekanoff's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism)*. The chief librarian circulated sample copies for a month, but the Library Committee gave hardly an inch, agreeing only that *Labour Monthly* could be placed in the reading room — and that for a trial period of six months only.

Nevertheless, the decision had been taken not only to try to grow a mass working-class revolutionary movement, but also to engage in electoral politics. However, Communist candidates performed poorly, and seemed unable to capitalise on growing disappointment first with the Labour, and then with the National Government. Even in Seaham, Ramsay MacDonald's own constituency, disgust with the 'great betrayer' did not translate into support for the Communist candidate, who only picked up 677 votes. The Party's most solid support was in London and the depressed mining areas, particularly those in Scotland and South Wales, and at the depth of the Depression in January 1932 membership had risen to 9,000. Yet in the Merthyr Tydfil by-election in 1934, Wal Hannington only managed to pick up 9.4 per cent of the votes, and the Communists were hardly more successful in local elections. In Gateshead even a local 'Douglas Credit' candidate polled more votes than the Communist contender, and no council in England was ever controlled by Communists. Although Communist participation in elections was of considerable 'nuisance value', splitting the left vote and sometimes, as in Whitechapel in London's East End, West Fife and a Sheffield seat, letting in a Conservative or National candidate, it was not until the 1935 election that the Party managed to send an MP to Westminster, when Willie Gallacher won West Fife and Harry Pollitt, the General Secretary, came within a whisker of being returned for East Rhondda.

Attempts to build an industrial base met with little success either: the Minority Movement, the Communist industrial organisation, urged the setting up of alternative unions to rival existing trade unions, but only two ever came into being: the United Mineworkers of Scotland, based in the coal mines of Fife, and the short-lived United Clothing Workers of East London. The Minority Movement never attracted more than seven hundred members, and when it was finally wound up in 1933 it could claim only 550 party members organised in eighty-two factory cells.

The Party's greatest problem in the early 1930s was its retention rate: if the NUWM leached members, so did the CPGB, partly due to 'rotten' organisation, and partly to the rigour and commitment demanded of recruits to the cause. An anonymous member of the Bromley Communist Party in Kent recalled that it had been 'a serious decision' when, after much discussion, eight people 'decided that the time had come to make a commitment to the Communist Party … for one thing the police, including the special branch, took a great interest in the activities, however trivial, of even rank and file members of the party. Secondly, a great many employers refused to employ anyone known to be associated with the party, and lastly, it meant virtual segregation and exclusion from the work of the Labour Party and even some Trade Unions.' Cut off from the rest of the 'reformist' left, the CPGB built itself something of a world within a world. 'Like practising Catholics or Orthodox Jews, we lived in a little private world of our own … a tight … self-referential group,' frequenting cafés such as Meg's in Parton Street in London and the Clarion in Market Street, Manchester ('Communists met in cafés rather than pubs: there was quite a strong inhibition against drink'), the pro-Soviet Scala cinema in Charlotte Street in London, Henderson's 'bomb shop' (which became Collet's bookshop) and others in King Street and the Farringdon Road, as well as meeting at dances and whist drives organised by the Friends of the Soviet Union, the League of Socialist Freethinkers, the Rebel Players and the Federation of Student Societies, and the activities of the Workers' Theatre Movement and the British Workers' Sports Federation. They rambled collectively at weekends, took holidays at Socialist youth camps or Communist guest houses, or stayed in youth hostels as part of hiking trips (some YHA wardens were rumoured to be 'sympathisers'). If the expenditure of £5 was feasible, they might take a week's holiday with the Workers' Travel Association in the Lake District, or maybe the Trossachs.

Certainly a great deal was asked of a Communist: attending frequent meetings, organising, speaking, selling Party literature, trade union activities, membership of other outside bodies and 'front' organisations. Ernest Trory suggests the level of commitment required: 'I had become engaged to a girl who was not at all interested in the Party. The engagement was later broken off but in the meantime I began to spend more time dancing and taking her to the pictures than was consistent

with Party work … To make matters worse, I frequented the Empire Club. A real sink of iniquity … spending my time gambling and playing cards, when I was needed by the Party at a critical time …'

As well as regular attendance at 'advanced political training lectures', the Bromley Communists were expected to sell the weekend edition of the *Daily Worker* (produced in its early days in an unheated office without electricity, the editor typing articles by candlelight) outside Woolworths and Marks & Spencer's in the town centre, although they found they could shift more copies late on Saturday evenings, 'when the bus crews returned to Bromley garage at the end of a day's work'. However, 'sales were not very great, twenty to thirty copies being considered adequate compensation for the long hours worked'. Perhaps that was hardly surprising, since at the time the *Daily Worker*, the first issue of which had appeared on 1 January 1930, echoed the Communist Party's dilemma. It was to contain none of the 'frills … dazzle … corruption and entertainment' of the popular press, so as not to distract readers from the struggle. But Harry Pollitt, the Party's General Secretary since 1929, was prepared to venture that he thought the paper was 'dull and dismal', and suggested that those who produced it should study the 'techniques of the capitalist press'. 'We constantly talk about being close to the masses,' Pollitt argued in June 1930 when the paper was selling a maximum of 10,000 copies and haemorrhaging some £500 each week from Party funds, 'but no one can say we carry this out in regard to the paper.' What the 'masses' wanted was more general news, sport, humour and topical features, but what they got in the pages of the *Daily Worker* was 'nothing save struggle and death on every page'. Two journalists, one from the *Daily Mail*, the other from the *Daily Express*, were invited to moonlight on the *Daily Worker* to teach the staff how to use capitalism's skills against the capitalists. However, faced with the edict of the CPGB's severe theoretician, R. Palme Dutt, that 'The task is to destroy (not to take over) … so-called "general news" and "sport" … and replace it by working-class technique,' the pair scuttled back to their day jobs. Despite a gradual dilution of the paper's strict on-message stance with more news — including some investigative 'scoops' — the odd photograph of Gracie Fields, film reviews, excellent cartoons and a women's page with recipes and knitting patterns, it was some time before racing tips, which had disappeared after the first few issues, were allowed back; they remained a distinct selling point for much of the century.

In January 1933, Hitler's assumption of the German chancellorship led to a change in the class-against-class policy, and in the summer of 1935 the Seventh (and last) Congress of the International affirmed the Soviet intention 'to establish a united front on a national as well as an international scale' against fascism — a front that it was argued should include democratic political parties across a wide spectrum. This was not to be a call to which the British Labour Party responded, though the change of policy did bring the CPGB new recruits, among them engineers, railwaymen, textile workers, builders and some in the distributive trades. Jack Gaster, who had previously regarded the Party as 'ultra sectarian … their concept of a United Front was "We'll unite with anyone who unites with us,"' and had helped expel 'a secret group of Communist Party members within the ILP', had himself lost patience with the ILP by 1935 and joined the CPGB, undertaking frequent legal work for the Party.

Although the CPGB remained an overwhelmingly working-class party, it had always attracted a small number of intellectuals, particularly scientists, and in the 1930s it gradually drew in a coterie of undergraduates and recent graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, sometimes referred to sneeringly by Rose Macaulay as 'the not-so-very intelligentsia', or, as Beatrice Webb labelled them, 'the mild-mannered desperadoes'.

In 1931 David Guest, son of the Labour peer Lord Haden-Guest, returned to Trinity College, Cambridge, after a year studying in Germany, where he had become convinced that the threat of fascism was dangerously real, and that communism was the only hope, and set about organising the Cambridge branch of the CPGB. This attracted his fellow philosophy student Maurice Cornforth, the poet Charles Madge, John Cornford, James Klugmann and Guy Burgess, all of whom were mentored by Maurice Dobb, an economist and Fellow of Trinity College who had been a member of the Party since 1923, and who had suffered professionally for his affiliation.

The best-known, most-heard (if most tenuously linked) of those Oxbridge students and ex-students who were drawn to communism in the mid 1930s were the 'MacSpaundays' — the poets and would-be poets W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis. 'Tell us about the Thirties,' a group of Cambridge undergraduates urged Day Lewis after the Second World War; '… it seems to be the last time that anyone believed in anything.' 'We were singularly fortunate compared with the young of today,' acknowledged the poet, 'in believing that something could be done about the social and political evils confronting us … no one who did not go through this political experience during the Thirties can quite realise how much hope there was in the air then, how radiant for some of us was the illusion that man could, under Communism put the world to rights.'

What communism offered such young intellectuals was 'substitutes for a faith, heterogeneous ideas which served to plug "the hollow in the breast where God should be"'. Most of Day Lewis's friends who became active in left-wing movements, or sympathetic to them, had similar backgrounds. All had been to public schools, 'with their tradition of both authoritarianism and service to the community'. Three were the sons clergymen — Day Lewis himself, Louis MacNeice and Rex Warner — while W.H. Auden had 'a devout Anglo-Catholic mother … we had all lapsed from the Christian faith, and tended to despair of Liberalism as an effective instrument for dealing with the problems of our day, if not despise it as an outworn creed'.

For Day Lewis the attraction to communism had both a religious and a romantic dimension: 'My susceptibility to the heroic, played upon by Russian films in which the worker, mounted upon his magnificent tractor, chugged steadily towards the dawn and the new world, joined up with my natural partisanship of the underdog to create a picture, romantic and apocalyptic, of the British worker at last coming into his own.' Nevertheless, he was, he admitted, 'an extremely odd recruit to the Party' in Cheltenham, where he was teaching at the time (though with a 'gentlemanly refusal to indoctrinate my pupils with Left-Wing ideas'). The CPGB cell there resembled 'more of a combined study-group of a nonconformist chapel than of a revolutionary body', consisting as it did of 'one or two school teachers, a waiter, and several men who worked at the Gloucester aircraft factory … as an "intellectual" I was given the job of political education. Never can there have been a more signal instance of the blind leading the shortsighted. I mugged up *Das Kapital, The Communist Manifesto*, the writings of Lenin, and endeavoured to teach dialectical materialism and economic theories I only half understood to people who lived their lives right up against the fact of economic necessity.'

Although Auden issued a clarion call to his generation to stop 'lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down', he did not join the CPGB. Nor did MacNeice, another 'Marxist of the Heart' for whom 'comrade became a more tender term than lover'. Despite this, MacNeice could see communism's attraction after the 'jogtrot' left of the Labour Party, which was 'notoriously lacking in glamour', and he could appreciate why 'these young poets had turned to the tomb of Lenin … The strongest appeal of the Communist Party was that it demanded sacrifice; you had to sink your ego.' Though he was 'repelled by the idolisation of the state', MacNeice was able to console himself with Marx and Engels' dictum that it would soon 'wither away'. Spender did actually sign up, but his membership was short-lived.

Other Cambridge Communist sympathisers who would later gain notoriety for their espionage activities on behalf of the USSR included Donald MacLean, H.A.R. (Kim) Philby and Anthony Blunt, who was always 'thought of as a fellow-traveller, never as a Party member [and who made] extremely cynical remarks about Communism that went beyond the call of duty in suppressing the fact that he was one'.

But there were those who were prepared to make the commitment. In December 1931 the October Club (named after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917) was started in Oxford by an American Rhodes scholar, Frank Meyer, who subsequently translated to the London School of Economics, where he remained active in student politics until he was deported by the government. By January 1933 it could boast three hundred members, though not all of these were card-carrying Communists.

However, by 1934 Communists had effectively succeeded in taking over the Oxford Labour Club, hanging a huge portrait of Lenin on the wall of the club's meeting house to signal their entryism. Not everyone advertised their affiliation, but Philip Toynbee, the son of the Oxford historian Arnold Toynbee and grandson of the classicist Gilbert Murray, who had joined the CPGB at the end of his first term at Oxford and 'retired deeper and deeper into this secretive hive … was not a clandestine member, but sat on a little iceberg peak above the submarine majority, revealing, as we used to say, "the Face of the Party"'. Toynbee exemplified the song 'we would ruefully sing at our evening socials [the Bromley branch members would, no doubt, have joined in] :

Dan, Dan, Dan!
The Communist Party man
Working underground all day.
In and out of meetings,
Bringing fraternal greetings,
Never sees the light of day.

His undergraduate life consisted largely of sitting through interminable committee meetings, sometimes lasting 'from lunchtime until eight or nine in the evening', leafleting, demonstrating in support of strikes in Oxford factories, taking part in 'slogan-shouting marches through London', attending international Communist Party conferences, going to work alongside the miners in the Rhondda Valley, soaking up 'the whole lively atmosphere of purpose and intrigue'. In 1938 he was elected the first Communist President of the Oxford Union (to be succeeded by Edward Heath two terms later).

While there were probably around two hundred card-carrying Oxford undergraduates, in Cambridge several dons were members of the CPGB, including Dobb, the biochemist 'Doggy' Woolf and the literary scholar Roy Pascal. By 1935 the Cambridge Socialist Society of around five hundred members was dominated by Communists, of whom again some two hundred were Party members. The Cambridge cell, centred on Trinity and King's colleges, was active in the town organising anti-war demonstrations, supporting CP candidates at elections and welcoming the Hunger Marchers in February 1934 (Margot Heinemann owed her conversion to an encounter while at Newnham with the wan and down-at-heel marchers, and remained a Party member all her life), as well as within the colleges agitating for better pay and conditions for college servants, distributing leaflets and selling copies of the *Daily Worker*.

But despite this varied and gifted glitterati, 'traitors to their class' until the Party line changed, the 'entry of the intellectuals' remained something of a trickle, and for every student, scientist or poet who declared for communism there were hundreds of workers. Though the membership of the CPGB rose to a pre-war peak of 18,000 in December 1938, the vast majority of members were working-class. Moreover, distrust of the eggheads did not fade easily: in 1938 one veteran at the fifteenth Party Congress railed against 'these unscrupulous semi-intellectuals who pose as left revolutionaries, who put their "r"s in barricades, instead of putting their arse on the barricades'.

NINE *Primers for the Age*

I regard *Nature* as perhaps the most important weekly printed in English, far more important than any political weekly.

Arnold Bennett, November 1930

Mr [H.G.] Wells at one time appeared to think that the scientists might save us. Then more recently it was going to be international financiers. But so many committed suicide. So now it is going to be aviators. Perhaps soon we will be told to pin our hopes on a dictatorship of midwives.

Professor F.S. Blackett, 'The Frustration of Science' (1935)

In October 1933 the writer H.G. Wells gave a dinner party. Since he had invited too many guests to fit round the table in his flat in Chiltern Court, off Baker Street, the party dined first at the Quo Vadis restaurant in Dean Street, Soho — a building in which Karl Marx had once rented rooms — and then repaired to the flat, where it was promised that Moura Budberg (a Russian aristocrat and probably the common-law wife of the writer Maxim Gorky, who had to come to London as Wells' mistress, but continued to maintain distinctly shady links with the Soviet Union) would entertain the assembled company by playing the harp. It was a glamorous evening, with the socialite Lady Emerald Cunard 'in ermine, almost invisible under pearls and diamonds, scenting out the lions', the novelist Enid Bagnold, now married to the head of Reuter's, Sir Roderick Jones, 'brazening out' a nettle rash by covering her face with an orange veil, Harold Nicolson, Max Beerbohm, and 'H.G. at the centre, rosily smiling, all the guests talking at once'.

Unfortunately a number of the guests, including Moura Budberg, were taken ill with food poisoning, so there was no music that night, but there was endless discussion, as there always was at Wells' *soirées*, including one the month before, assembled 'to discuss a magnificent idea he has, to unite science to save the world against all its growing dangers: Fascism, Communism, Japanism, Americanism and Journalism … H.G. "chaired" the meeting in his squeaky voice, which becomes quite a handicap in such circumstances. Nothing was decided, naturally, except the *need for something*, and H.G. will go on giving dinner parties to discuss saving the world.'

'Saving the world' from the list of spectres Wells evoked, as well as those of the economic slump and intractable unemployment at home, was something discussed at a lot of top people's dinner tables in the 1930s. And scientists were at the forefront of such debate, as many were convinced that scientific methods would come up with solutions that inexpert, ill-informed, blundering politicians seemed utterly unable to locate.

Although he was primarily interested at the time in 'the reproductive physiology of monkeys and apes, and the bearing of any evidence on the evolutionary interrelationship of monkeys, apes and man', which he was well placed to research as Prosecutor, or research fellow, at the Zoological Society in Regent's Park (a post he had achieved at the young age of twenty-four), Solly Zuckerman also had a wider range of interests. The atmosphere of the time encouraged him to discuss with some friends, including the young political economist (and great joiner of discussion groups) Hugh Gaitskell and G.P. 'Gip' Wells, the zoologist son of H.G., the idea of forming a small dining club. In the autumn of 1931 'Tots and Quots', an abbreviation and inversion of the phrase in Terence's *Phormio: 'Quot homines, tot sententiae'* — 'So many men, so many opinions' — convened for the first time at Pagani's restaurant in Great Portland Street.

It was a distinguished (entirely male) table: the robustly confident young scientists who assembled to 'let ideas roam' over the question of 'what role science might play in social development' included the physicist and crys-tallographer J.D. Bernal (reverentially known as 'the sage' although he confessed that even his encyclopaedic knowledge had lacunae when it came to 'fourth century Roumania'), who believed that science 'held the key to the future', while socialism had the ability to turn it; the geneticist J.B.S. Haldane, perhaps 'the last man to know all there was to be known',

with a matchless ability to communicate the complex in public lectures, books and his regular science columns in the *Daily Worker;* the biologist and author of the best-selling *Mathematics for the Million* and *Science for the Citizen*, books he described as 'primers for an age of plenty' intended to equip their readers with sufficient knowledge to become effective citizens in a scientific age, Lancelot Hogben, a conscientious objector in the First World War whose acute mind challenged everything; the prehistorian Gordon Childe (another success with what he referred to as the 'bookstall public'); the sinologist and historian of science Joseph Needham; the zoologist J.Z. Young; the Cambridge economic historian M.M. Postan and the Oxford economist Roy Harrod. Others, such as the literary critic I.A. Richards and the geneticist Lionel Penrose, declined to join but volunteered to 'clock in' as guests when the subject under discussion interested them.

Tots and Quots dinners lapsed for a time in the mid-1930s (not helped by the fact that Hugh Gaitskell probably lost the Minute Book), but the club reconvened in 1939 (with a slightly shuffled membership which now also included Richard Crossman) as a 'platform to proclaim our views … about the vast potential [for the] applications of scientific knowledge when dealing with the complicated problems of war'.

But although 'Gip' Wells, who had co-written the best-selling *The Science of Life* with Julian Huxley at his father's bidding, resigned after the first dinner, complaining that 'he had hoped the whole thing would be fun, whereas we were obviously going to become monastic and deadly serious', the small (fourteen was the average number) group of scientists and economists met regularly during the worst years of the Depression, eating well as they pondered the responsibilities of their discipline in a country shot through with social and economic problems.

In 1934 Ritchie Calder, the scientific correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, advocated that the House of Lords should be replaced by what he called a 'Senate of Scientists'. The year before, the Nobel Prize-winning biochemist Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins, in his Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, had urged the formation of a 'Solomon's House' of the wisest (men) in the land who would assemble to synthesise knowledge, appraise its progress and assess its impact on society. The nutritionist F. LeGros Clark stated that scientists found politics 'a disreputable game', which it was their duty to 'try to transform into a pastime with clean, scientific rules'. Professor Frederick Soddy was explicit: since science was society's 'real master', society should 'insist on being ruled, not by a reflection of a reflection, but directly by those [scientists] who are concerned with the creation of its wealth, not its debts'. J.B.S. Haldane, writing in *Nature* in January 1934, had suggested that refusing to apply scientific method to the conduct of human affairs would bring about the failure of Britain's political and economic system.

When it was suggested to the eminent biologist Julian Huxley that he should stand for Parliament, he dismissed the idea, saying that what guided his life was a passion for truth, not its 'obscuration'. In the book he was invited to write for a series entitled 'If I Were Dictator' (since this was before the full development of Hitler's Third Reich or Stalin's USSR, the word 'dictator' was not freighted with the same terrible associations it later came to carry), Huxley further showed his disregard for democratic politics, proposing instead a corporatist state in which elections would be 'superfluous'. A central planning council would replace Parliament, which was little more than a 'talking-shop', according to Huxley, and lacked the necessary expertise to the run the country (as, presumably by extension, the electorate lacked the necessary expertise to choose a government).

Social issues in the 1930s had a direct bearing on the scientific community: technological advances were charged with having thrown thousands out of work, and creating machines for military savagery; the Hunger Marches were a symbol of the malnutrition of the unemployed, which Sir John Boyd Orr would quantify in 1936 in his book *Food, Health and Income;* Oswald Mosley was using spurious 'scientific' arguments to inflame anti-Semitism; genetic inheritance was the subject of much debate — the sterilisation of 'morons' (defined by the journal *Nature* as making up 'a large proportion of the slum population … mental defectives of comparatively high grade … people lacking not only in

intelligence but also in self-control, which is the basis of morality, and they reproduce recklessly') was seriously discussed in Britain and put into practice in Nazi Germany; while the growing threat of war later in the decade rallied scientific expertise to steel defences and develop weapons of destruction.

Moreover, world events were enlarging Britain's scientific community. British scientists were made acutely aware of the pernicious uses to which scientific theories and inventions could be put when Jewish scientists such as the chemists Gerhard Weiler, E.F. Freundlich and Michael Polanyi, who had been dismissed or resigned from their research or teaching institutes after Hitler came to power, fled to Britain, as did the biochemist Herman Blaschko, the biologist Hans Krebs, the physicists Max Born, Hans Bethe, Heinrich Kuhn, Rudolph Peierls and Kurt Mendelssohn. Boris Chain, a young biochemist, left Germany on 30 January 1933, the day Adolf Hitler was created Chancellor, and came to Britain, where he sought the help of J.B.S. Haldane. Chain eventually moved to Oxford University, and in 1945 he and Sir Howard Florey shared the Nobel Prize for their work on isolating penicillin (though the university denied him even a readership).

After Chain, Haldane sought out more young scientists who needed to flee Hitler's Germany, working alongside Professor F.A. Lindemann (who had himself been born and educated in Germany and later, as Lord Cherwell, would be Churchill's wartime scientific advisor) and an Oxford Professor of Organic Chemistry, Robert Robinson, on the Academic Assistance Council (AAC — renamed the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning in 1936). The Council, chaired by the physicist Sir Ernest Rutherford, director of the prestigious Cambridge Cavendish Laboratory, had come into existence in May 1933 after William Beveridge (then director of the London School of Economics) wrote a letter to *The Times* drawing attention to the plight of Jewish scientists in Germany and Austria. Beveridge had been alerted to the situation by Leo Szilard, a Hungarian scientist who had worked with Einstein (who had declared his intention never to return to Germany and to resign from the Prussian Academy of Sciences in protest at Hitler's racial policies in March 1933), and a young Englishwoman, Tess (Esther) Simpson, who went on to run the organisation.

By 1935 around 25 per cent of all scientists and 20 per cent of all mathematicians had been dismissed from German universities under the Nazis' harsh race laws. The AAC sought to enable such people to continue their research in British universities or industry or, as so many yearned to do, to move to the United States, thus 'salvaging' a number of scientists, in some cases with great difficulty. 'Brains in Germany seem to be going cheap and we have no tariff for them,' wrote W.J. Sollas, the aged Professor of Geology at Oxford. By May 1934, sixty-seven 'wandering scholars', as Rutherford called them, had found positions at London University, thirty-one at Cambridge, seventeen at Oxford and sixteen at Manchester, greatly enriching the British scientific community.

Although the early 1930s were 'by far the richest time there has ever been' for scientific innovation, in the opinion of the chemist and novelist C.P. Snow, with an *annus mirabilis* in 1932, when John Cockcroft and Ernest Walton succeeded in splitting the atom, and James Chadwick did likewise with the neutron, there was disquiet among sections of the scientific community. Many felt that those outside their profession looked down on scientific activities as culturally inferior to the arts, and they themselves were seen as little more than lab rats producing work only 'of great *value in their own departments'*, in the dismissive view of T.S. Eliot. The Bishop of Ripon, E.A. Burroughs, in his address to the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Leeds on 4 September 1927, had invited the scientific community to declare a ten-year moratorium on research, for the general good of mankind, since while science had undoubtedly advanced knowledge, it had done nothing to increase wisdom. (H.G. Wells had recently in effect suggested a similar — though permanent — 'holiday' for the episcopate, also in the cause of human progress.) Society was suffering, in the Bishop's view, from a 'moral lag, a gap between moral and scientific advance, for man's body had in effect gone on growing while his soul had largely stood still or gone back'.

Notwithstanding the Bishop, scientific research carried on, but the Association strove harder to break down public resistance to the advance of science. Some scientists discussed whether by growing

more specialised they might have become 'blinkered' to the wider concerns of humanity, while others addressed the question of whether science had a particular relevance — even a special duty — to society. And a small number of radical scientists at Cambridge (particularly), London and a few other universities, or assembled round the Tots and Quots dining table, despaired that their agenda for the 'social responsibility of science' was not in fact what generally drove scientific endeavour or its public perception. As Zuckerman pointed out, the 'efforts of scientists are generally misunderstood, because they are not interpreted to the world by scientists themselves, and because few of those who are immediately responsible for the conduct of social affairs are scientists. There are, for example, no scientists in the Government.' Moreover, as the Marxist mathematician Hyman Levy argued to Julian Huxley in a BBC broadcast in 1931, 'Since scientists, like other workers, have to earn their living … to a large extent the demands of those who provide the money will, very broadly, determine the spread of scientific interest in the field of applied science … I know of no scientist who is so free that he can study anything he likes, or who is not limited in some way by limitations such as the cost of equipment.'

J.D. Bernal (whose book *The Social Function of Science* was a manifesto and a blueprint for the unlimited potential of science for progress, especially once it was freed from the shackles of capitalism) took up the theme in response to a criticism from a fellow scientist that 'Bernalism is the doctrine of those who profess that the proper objects of scientific research are to feed people and protect them from the elements, that research workers should be organised in gangs and told what to discover.' It wasn't, he riposted, as if the idea that science had a social function was new. It was 'palpable and admitted fact', and that function was 'largely economic under present conditions and likely to become even more so'. Nevertheless, under capitalism, science was not generally regarded as being capable of 'solv[ing] completely the material conditions of society', Bernal wrote in 1935, 'but rather the best application of science is conceived of as producing such a fatuous and stupefying paradise as … *Brave New World* [by Aldous Huxley, Julian's younger brother, published in 1932]; at worst, a super-efficient machine for mutual destruction with men living underground and only coming up in gas masks'.

To Hyman Levy, as to Bernal, Lancelot Hogben, J.B.S. Haldane, Joseph Needham and other radical scientists, only a society transformed along socialist lines into a planned economy producing an abundance of socially useful goods, equitably distributed to all sections of the population who would thus feel 'practically and morally bound to one another in this great collective endeavour' would devote sufficient scientific resources to the solution of economic and social problems. For Levy, what had become clear was 'not only the social conditioning of science and the vital need for planning … but the impossibility of carrying this through within the framework of a chaotic capitalism' in which scientists felt unlistened to, undervalued and underfunded (only 0.1 per cent of the Gross National Product was devoted to scientific research and development in the 1930s; by the 1960s it was nearer 3 per cent). For Bernal, 'Science has ceased to be the occupation of curious gentlemen or of ingenious minds supported by wealthy patrons, and has become an industry supported by large industrial monopolies and by the State.' But in a capitalist society this had resulted in 'a structure of appalling inefficiency both as to its internal organization and as the means of the application to problems of production or of welfare'. Bernal's plan, or map, of the future direction of science had analogies with Keynes' economic plan: government would need to take a centralised directional role in the healthy development of science and technology, as in the economy.

But unlike Keynes, Bernal was and continued to be a Marxist all his life (though his membership of the CPGB lapsed in 1933 — or was allowed to lapse, since at the time the Communist Party entertained a certain suspicion of intellectuals). 'During the years of the great Depression I began to study in a more serious way the works of the founders of Marxism, and there I found a philosophy … that could be lived and could be a guide to action,' he wrote. *The Social Function of Science* was explicit — and much quoted both by those admiring and those critical of the 'red scientists' of the

1930s of whom Bernal was at the forefront ('that sink of ubiquity', Hyman Levy called him) — in insisting on science's social responsibilities. Bernal also played a key role in the regeneration of the Association of Scientific Workers: 'In its endeavour science is communism … In science men have learned consciously to subordinate themselves to a common purpose without losing the individuality of their achievements … Only in the wider tasks of humanity will their full use be found.'

Across the river from the laboratories of London University and the Tots and Quots dining tables, an ambitious building designed for a new way of living was taking shape. In January 1935 the young Frances Lonsdale, who would become both a Somerset farmer (as a near neighbour of Evelyn Waugh) and an acute biographer of Edward VIII, was picking her way behind her future husband, Jack Donaldson, through the 'dust and rubble of a new building that had recently arisen in the suburb of Peckham. The building, which had been minutely planned to serve an entirely original purpose, had a front elevation of curved glass windows set in concrete two stories high, and was functional, not in the architectural sense of the word in much use at that time, but in response to the needs of an inspired conception … Although built with a flat roof and without decoration, it had an elegant buoyancy which was to remind one, when it was lit up at night, of a great liner at sea … It was not quite finished, and it was for me astonishingly material evidence of what seemed an incredible venture.' This modernist wonder had been designed by Sir Owen Williams, a noted structural engineer rather than an architect (a species he dismissed as 'decoration merchants'), who already had to his credit the huge Boots factory in Nottingham and the glittering, black-glass-fronted *Daily Express* office in Fleet Street. Its simple, airy construction was designed expressly for the occupant: the Pioneer Health Centre, a cause to which Jack Donaldson would donate £10,000, nearly half the money he had inherited from his father. Lord Nuffield was also a donor.

This 'form following function' ethos of modernist architecture was particularly salient, since the Pioneer Health Centre was constructed to house a large-scale experiment on the effect of the environment on health, a concentration on preventative rather than curative medicine. The pioneers were a husband and wife team, Dr George Scott Williamson and Dr Innes Pearse, and the new Health Centre was the result of five years' fund-raising activity by the couple to move their work from a small house nearby to this beacon to their conviction that, like illness, health could also be contagious. Once a patient presented at a doctor's surgery or hospital ward, Dr Pearce believed that he or she would be in 'the advanced stages of *incapacitating* disorder' — that is, they *felt* ill. She had been appalled when working in a welfare clinic in Stepney in London's East End to realise that she had never seen a healthy baby. The only time mothers came to the clinic was in an emergency, and all she could do was to treat the ailing infant. There was no time to enquire into the circumstances of the exhausted-looking mother, and of course she never saw the father.

What was needed were not just health facilities that acted as a 'sieve for the detection of disease', but conditions in which people could 'keep fit and ward off sickness *before* they were smitten'; these would be provided by a place where the *practice* of health was distinct from the conventional practice of medicine. Only families, which the Peckham pioneers had decided were the 'units for living', were allowed to join, each paying a shilling a week (the Centre was intended to be self-supporting), and every member had to submit to periodic 'health overhauls' designed to check their capacity for individual, family and social life. For an additional few pence they could use a wide range of recreational facilities including a gymnasium, badminton court, roller-skating rink, swimming pool, billiards tables, a theatre space, and rooms for sewing parties or gramophone recitals. There were facilities for children (who had to be restrained from using the glass ashtrays for games of curling along the long corridors) and a nursery club for the under-fives, with specially designed equipment (and much note-taking by the staff) intended to improve family life and enhance personal development. While the Pioneer Health Centre was distinctly modern, experimental and forward-looking in its concept, organisation and habitat, it simultaneously looked back to a pre-industrial community in

which a doctor knew his patients in health as in sickness, and the circumstances of their lives, a country village (though without the feudal superstructure) recreated in a busy, fractured inner-city area.

Although Peckham had been chosen because it was a densely populated yet reasonably prosperous working- and lower-middle-class area where such facilities might be expected to add value to the inhabitants' lives, the first survey of five hundred members conducted in 1936 found that 59 per cent suffered from ailments such as diabetes, high blood pressure, tuberculosis or cancer, even though they believed themselves to be healthy. Vindication indeed of the Centre's prophylactic aims, the pioneers thought.

'We are not here to dispense charity, nor to seek out the most helpless and unfortunate in order that we may succour them,' Dr Scott Williamson told the Medical Officer of Health for Camberwell, in whose fiefdom the Pioneer Health Centre was located. Rather the Centre's aims were 'social self maintenance', and the pioneers were 'scientists hoping to find out how people living under modern industrial conditions of life might best cultivate health, and thus to benefit humankind as a whole'. The subscribers to this pioneer 'laboratory' (who described themselves as 'guinea pigs') spent their time there in conditions of 'controlled anarchy': the staff were instructed, 'Don't make rules to make your life easier,' and Williamson encouraged the idea that the somewhat undisciplined children would eventually evolve their own system of order. Most of the staff lived communally in a large house on Bromley Common, and when not at work in the Centre they 'wrangled all day long'. From 1935 a home farm established on the Common grew organic vegetables and produced fresh milk — 'vital foods' — at cost price for the Centre with the aim of discovering 'how far the early symptoms of trouble [detected in a "C3" population] can be removed by fresh food grown on organic soil' — Williamson and Pearse were both members of the Soil Association council.

The Pioneer Health Centre was high-minded, utopian, convinced ('strong meat', Donaldson thought) — and ultimately not possible to sustain. Partly as a result of the introduction of the National Health Service in July 1948 the Centre was unable to attract sufficient funding, and it closed in 1950.

While it may have been unrealistic to imagine in the economic climate of the 1930s that Pioneer Health Centres could be rolled out all over Britain, health centres practising medicine alongside welfare clinics (which Williamson and Pearce derided as 'polyclinics') were also a rarity (and indeed would be until the 1960s). Although the Dawson Report back in 1920 had advocated a system based on groups of medical practitioners working from publicly funded health centres which integrated preventative and curative medicine, this appeared too much like costly state interference with the autonomy of doctors, and the idea was shelved.

There was, however, a 'polyclinic' in the neighbouring (and much poorer) borough of Bermondsey, which opened in 1936 as part of what the radical borough (which had pulled down the Union Jack from the municipal flagpole and run up a red flag instead when the ILP won a majority on the Council in 1924) liked to describe as the 'Bermondsey Revolution'. It was the brainchild of Alfred Salter, a doctor and the ILP MP for West Bermondsey, and the husband of Ada Salter, the first woman Labour mayor in Britain. Salter was determined to bring together 'a solarium for tuberculosis, dental clinics, foot clinics, ante-natal and child welfare clinics', formerly scattered in 'ordinary dwelling houses', into one building that would serve as 'the Harley Street of Bermondsey', where the range of services would provide the poor of the borough with 'the best diagnosis and advice that London could provide … as good as any the rich could secure'.

Bermondsey did not rest content with a state-of-the-art health centre. It took its message out into the streets, proselytising about healthy living by means of posters, large-print pamphlets (forty-two were produced in 1932 alone), lectures, and electric signs flashing warnings against spitting, messages about the advantages of drinking milk, and pithy slogans such as 'Your son and heir needs sun and air'. Furthermore, a disinfectant van was equipped with a cinema projector and a lantern for outdoor showings of short films made by the Public Health Department (the cameraman's day job was as a radiographer), including such masterpieces as *Where There's Life, There's Soap* (a film for

children on personal cleanliness), *Delay is Dangerous* (about the early signs of tuberculosis and the need to seek medical advice) and one with a slightly admonishing ring, *Some Activities of Bermondsey Council*, intended to remind the borough's citizens how much their elected authority was doing for them in the fields of housing and public health (which it undoubtedly was). The open-air screenings took place in the summer months (though not in July and August, as it didn't get dark until 10 p.m., and in any case many Bermondsey residents were away in Kent hop-picking — a film, *'Oppin*, was made about that too). The Council fitted twenty-four lamp-posts in various parts of the borough with special plugs so that the 'cinemas' could be plugged in, and films were shown in the street, in the courtyards of new housing estates, in parks, children's playgrounds and the new Health Centre. By 1932 there were over sixty shows a year, drawing an audience of around 30,000, though both the number of shows and the size of the audiences had begun to tail off by the end of the decade.

An impressive modernist 'drop-in' Health Centre (designed by the Georgian émigré architect Berthold Lubetkin, who had already designed a prototype TB clinic for Dr Philip Ellman, the Medical Officer of Health for East Ham and a member of the Socialist Medical Association, which was never built) opened in Finsbury in North London, another very poor borough, in 1938. Built like a 'megaphone for health', with two wings splayed out from a central axis, it housed a TB clinic, a foot clinic, a dental clinic, a mother and baby clinic, a disinfecting station, a lecture hall and a solarium where the sun-starved children of the borough might benefit from ultraviolet-ray treatment, as well as fumigating facilities and a mortuary in the basement. So representative of a better life for all those who had previously suffered 'C3'-level health — and health care — was Finsbury that it was depicted on one of Abram Games' wartime posters urging 'Your Britain: Fight for it Now'.

But for those not resident in one of those London boroughs and without reasonable means, provision for the unwell in the 1930s remained an example of hotchpotch availability, lack of funding and reluctance to extend state involvement, all resulting in inequality of access to medical services.

Men working in insurable occupations and earning less than £250 a year were covered by a contributory National Health Insurance scheme, introduced in 1913, to (barely) tide them over in times of sickness and provide basic medical treatment and medicines from a 'panel' doctor. However, by 1936 only around twenty million people, about 40 per cent of the total population of 47.5 million, including six million working women, were covered. They did not include dependent wives (except in the case of maternity benefit) and children. Those earning over £250 a year would have to make their own private sickness insurance arrangements — though they could contribute to the NHI scheme through voluntary payments if they could afford to.

The NHI scheme did not cover dental or ophthalmic treatment, though some of the larger 'approved societies' (usually friendly societies or industrial insurance companies, and a few trade unions) which administered the scheme might offer such fringe benefits to attract customers. This meant that for many working-class men and women tooth decay and premature toothlessness were inhibiting and intermittently painful features of life ('Teeth, teeth, teeth, they are half the trouble [with women's health],' wrote a country district nurse in February 1938), while Woolworths offered 'do it yourself' eye tests for those unable to afford to consult an ophthalmologist about their need for spectacles.

There were continual complaints that those who received their treatment from the NHI scheme, known as being 'on the panel', got inferior treatment. At least 5,000 doctors remained outside the scheme, and those operating within it in suburban or rural areas often derived most of their income from private patients. A GP employing one assistant could easily have 4,000 panel patients (for each of whom he would receive a capitation fee of about 9s.6d), and it was quite usual for a single doctor to be responsible for as many as 2,500 patients, so those in poor areas with a large percentage of their patients 'on the panel' were likely to give only cursory consultations.

In industrial areas the doctor's surgery would often be housed in a shop where the window would be painted halfway up to ensure some degree of privacy. Patients would queue outside (even when

it was raining) until it was their turn to see the doctor. Doctors were not salaried (nor were hospital consultants), so they relied on fees and/or insurance payments, the latter of which were invariably lower, so in general poorer areas, where there were few if any fee-paying patients, were served by either less able or more altruistic doctors. In more prosperous middle-class areas, doctors would usually see their patients in the front room of their own homes. The fee-paying patient would have an appointment and be shown in at the front door by the doctor's wife (or maybe a maid, if finances and status permitted), whereas panel patients would enter by the surgery door, and sit and wait until the doctor was ready to see them. The surgery would smell of phenol, since most GPs were expected to perform operations such as removing appendixes and tonsils, hysterectomies, hernia repairs and suchlike, although increasingly these took place in the local cottage hospitals found in suburbs, smaller towns and rural areas, which by 1935 provided around 10,000 beds. Or patients might request a home visit (more readily agreed to for private patients), when all the technology available would be the instruments the doctor could carry in his (or very occasionally her) Gladstone bag.

Eileen Whiteing remembered that if influenza or tonsillitis were suspected in her comfortable Surrey home, 'Dr Cressy would be sent for and he usually prescribed the dreaded "slops" which meant that we were only to be given such things as steamed fish, poached eggs, beef tea, milk puddings and so on, until he called again in a day or so.' Doctors' fees varied depending on the area and sometimes on the patient's ability to pay. A doctor attending poorer families would usually require to be paid cash at the time of a consultation or visit (as earlier 'sixpenny doctors' had) rather than sending in a bill. If an operation were needed, the surgeon's and anaesthetist's fees would have to be found, plus nursing home fees.

Having a baby for a middle-class woman often meant a private nursing home, whereas for most working-class women it would be a home confinement, possibly but by no means necessarily with the help of a midwife who delivered babies as the sort of community service that 'wise women' had provided for other women down the ages, often at low cost and sometimes with inadequate standards of medical knowledge or hygiene, as a 'Report on Maternal Mortality in Wales' showed. It was not until 1936 that the Midwives Act obliged local authorities to provide trained midwives, and it was not until 1946 that the number of hospital births exceeded those at home.

So the uninsured, the unemployed who had exhausted their sickness benefit entitlement and whose names were removed from doctors' lists as 'ceased to be insured" (although doctors were no longer paid to treat such people, 'If they were well known to us, we felt morally under an obligation to attend to their wants when asked to'), the dependents of those covered by the NHI and the poor and old, would have to spatchcock together medical care as they did other social services. In the first instance they were likely go to the local chemist for a bottle of patent medicine (almost £30 million a year was spent on patent medicines during the 1930s, and it was not until the 1939 Cancer Act that the advertising of cancer 'cures' bought over the counter was banned), and only if that was ineffective would they seek medical advice. They might be able consult a doctor who participated in the Public Medical Services, or be treated by those employed by enlightened local authorities such as Glasgow, Oxford or Mansfield in Nottinghamshire. Most local authorities, though, provided only those services they were statutorily obliged to, mainly concerned with infant and maternity care, or mental and infectious diseases. People might join a doctor's 'club' and pay a small amount each week, or go to the outpatients' department of a public hospital.

Married women were particularly disadvantaged if they could not afford to pay for their medical care. They were not covered by the NHI scheme, and were considered a poor risk by insurance companies since the mass of burdensome 'dull diseases' contingent on their biology would be likely to prove expensive — a burden the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Sir George Newman, admitted privately he was reluctant to enquire into too deeply, since it was 'a wandering fire to which there are no bounds' that would create demands way beyond the resources of the Ministry of Health. There were few women general practitioners, since most preferred to work directly with women and children

in clinics, and many women were reluctant to take their troubles to a male doctor, so they struggled on with varicose veins, anaemia, prolapsed wombs, phlebitis, haemorrhoids, rheumatism, arthritis, chronic backache, undernourishment and exhaustion without ever seeking medical advice. Death in childbirth remained at much the same level –4.1 per thousand — in 1935 as it had been in 1900, and in the depressed areas of South Wales and Scotland it was 6 per thousand. Better antenatal care as well as improved living conditions might have helped, but the primary cause of death in childbirth was medical, and it was not until the mid-1930s that puerperal fever, which presented the gravest danger, became treatable with sulphonamide drugs.

Hospitalisation was not covered by health insurance, and the choice was between voluntary hospitals, which had originally been endowed by the rich for the care of the poor, and which included some of the most famous London teaching hospitals, and local authority hospitals, many of which had been former Poor Law institutions. The voluntary hospitals were permanently strapped for cash by the 1930s, and were dependent on bequests, fund-raising events such as concerts and fêtes, flag days and patients' fees. Those on low incomes might have been paying a few pence a week which would give them the right to treatment should they need it (or if they were lucky their employer might have made a block provision for employees in this way), or they might be charged whatever the hospital almoner assessed they could afford. But the days of such hospitals were numbered: it was clear that voluntary contributions were no longer sufficient to keep them going, despite the fact that private patients' fees, mostly paid through insurance schemes, covered almost half such hospitals' costs), and by the end of the decade more hospital accommodation was provided by local authorities than by the voluntary sector.

The financial difficulties of the voluntary hospitals and the fact that they were not planned on a national scale according to the needs of the community, gave an opportunity to a group of medical practitioners who had a larger vision for health. The Socialist Medical Association (SMA) had been founded in 1930 with the support of, among others, the first Minister of Health, Christopher Addison, the journalist and propagandist for science Ritchie Calder and medical scientists and practitioners such as Somerville Hastings, a surgeon at the Middlesex Hospital in London and a Labour MP, Charles Brook, a London GP, David Stark Murray, a Scottish pathologist, and Richard Doll, who in the 1950s would prove the link between smoking and lung cancer. The SMA looked to the creation of a socialised medical system which would both streamline the chaotic health provision of the 1930s and ultimately make health care 'free to all rich and poor'. Furthermore, it wanted to end what it regarded as the 'lonely isolation' of the GP by creating salaried posts and locating them in a series of health centres based on municipal hospitals that integrated all aspects of medical care — owing something to the Peckham, Finsbury and Bermondsey models.

Although this blueprint for socialised medicine appears to prefigure the creation of the NHS in 1948, it was at local level — particularly in London — that the SMA came nearest to implementing its ideas in the 1930s. 'Municipal socialism' increasingly seemed to be a plausible strategy for undermining the National Government, and during the 1934 London County Council (LCC) elections the SMA produced a health manifesto claiming that the capital's ill health was due to poverty, bad sanitation and inadequate medical care and treatment (due to lack of resources), for which 'the anarchy of capitalism', reflected in uncoordinated health care provision, was to blame. Seeing health as 'every bit as important as education', SMA members were appointed to a range of LCC committees when Labour won control, and were able to put some of their ideas into practice, such as increasing the allocation of resources to municipal hospitals, improving the conditions and pay of nurses and other medical staff, providing outpatient facilities at most hospitals for the surrounding community and ridding hospitals of any Poor Law connotations, since 'every possible suggestion of charity, subservience, and general second rateness must be banished'. Instead London's citizens should regard 'the municipal hospitals as their own [since they had] every right to use them and expect the best from them'. But although the reform of London's health provision was of considerable

interest to other authorities, even Somerville Hastings, chairman of the LCC Hospital and Medical Services Committee, recognised that it was unlikely to be fully possible 'within the limits of existing legislation'.

As well as inadequate hospital provision, the range of remedies doctors could provide was still very limited: during their brief consultation patients would be given a handful of pills, which might come in a range of colours but would in fact probably all be aspirins, though bottles of dilute mixtures of powerful drugs such as kaolin and morphine were also dispensed. A Welsh doctor provided his miner patients with a tincture of chloroform and morphine, effectively an addictive drug, for their chronic chest conditions. Many general practitioners had few aids to diagnosis, a stethoscope, thermometer, ear syringe and maybe a speculum being fairly standard, sterilising instruments was a dispensable luxury, and doctors had to pay for laboratory tests themselves — and therefore tended not to take advantage of new techniques and treatments that were being developed during the 1930s. A Welsh doctor who prescribed little but 'black liquorice' for his miner patients' pneumoconiosis was regarded as a cut above other practitioners in the town, since he had a machine that enabled him to take a patient's blood pressure.

Aware of their limited therapeutic arsenal, doctors essentially bought time by dispensing medicine, hoping that an illness would turn out to be self-limiting and would disappear, while patients appeared to be satisfied if they left the surgery clutching a bottle of medicine (private patients would have their bottle wrapped in white paper and sealed with sealing wax and usually delivered by the doctor's errand boy on a bicycle after evening surgery) or, less frequently, a box of pills, for which they had paid two or three pence. Aspirin powder for pain relief had been available since the turn of the century, and a tablet form had been patented in 1914, insulin injections to control diabetes had been introduced in the 1920s, followed by kidney dialysis, radium treatment for cancers, skin grafts and blood transfusions. Salvarsan was effective as a cure for syphilis and pernicious anaemia could now be treated with iron injections (rather than raw liver sandwiches, as previously), while the significance of vitamins began to be appreciated, leading to new therapies using vitamins C and D in cases of scurvy and rickets.

However, there were few things in the medicine cupboard in Eileen Whiteing's home 'apart from fruit salts, cough mixture, plus iodine for cuts … and we certainly did not include [the commonplace aspirin] in our home remedies, having to endure headaches and other pains until they went away of their own accord … cod liver oil and "Virol" were favourite remedies for winter ailments … and in the case of nerves or depression, a strong iron tonic would be prescribed, with the advice to "pull yourself together".'

Diphtheria in children, an infection resulting in the throat thickening and the danger of suffocation, was one of the spectres hovering over the inter-war years, with some 50,000 cases every year. Two thousand children died each year from diphtheria and whooping cough until effective vaccines began to be used towards the end of the decade. Eileen Whiteing recalled that when she and her sister caught 'the dreaded diphtheria … Mother refused to let us go away to hospital, so a trained nurse was engaged at great expense, and, between the two of them, plus the resident maid, we were nursed safely through the long weeks of fever. Disinfected sheets had to be hung over the bedroom doors, all visitors had to wear white coats and face masks, and the whole house had to be fumigated by the local health officers at the end of the isolation period … People were endlessly kind … since illness was quite a serious event then: I remember hearing the news in hushed tones that straw had been spread over the road outside the house of one of my friends while he lay desperately fighting for his life with double pneumonia in order that the noise of passing traffic should not disturb him until what was known as the "crisis" was past' and the patient's dangerously high temperature either fell, or he or she died of exhaustion or heart failure, since in the absence of any effective medication, all the doctor could do was visit several times a day, wait and watch.

It was not until 1935–36 that real advances in medical treatment were possible with the manufacture of sulphonamides, anti-bacterial drugs effective for the treatment of a range of serious illnesses including streptococcal and meningococcal infections, the 'miracle drug' of those pre-penicillin years.

Tuberculosis was another killer disease that awaited its antidote: in the first decade of the twentieth century it was responsible for one death in every eight, and although that figure was steadily declining by the 1930s, there were still some 30,000 deaths a year from respiratory tuberculosis, and it continued to be seen as a deadly and frightening disease, freighted with social stigma. George Orwell, the most pungent chronicler of the mid-century, who had first contracted TB in 1938, died from its effects in January 1950, aged forty-six. In 1925 the typical tuberculosis dispensary was described by the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health as 'an outpatient department, stocked with drugs that are mainly placebos, or an annexe of an office for the compilation of statistics', and not much had changed a decade later. Although tuberculosis could be managed to an extent, and a diagnosis was no longer an automatic death sentence, there was no effective treatment until BCG (Bacille Calmette-Guérin) vaccine, after fraught years of trials and considerable resistance from the medical profession, started to be used extensively in Britain in the 1950s. Until then treatment consisted either of radical surgery — usually collapsing a lung, an operation performed on the principle of putting the diseased portion of the body to rest so it could combat disease with its own resources — or exposure to fresh air, on much the same principle of encouraging the recuperative power of nature, since there was not much else on offer.

The notion that sunshine and fresh air helped TB sufferers (and sufferers from other medical conditions) had been popular since the late nineteenth century, and those who could afford it might take the *Train Bleu* to the South of France or head for the bracing air of the Swiss Alps. The first British sanatorium for the open-air treatment of tuberculosis opened in Edinburgh in 1894, and others followed in Glasgow, Renfrewshire and Frimley in Surrey; they soon spread throughout the country, including one funded by the Post Office Workers' Union in Benenden in Kent. Some were for the well-off (though the rich usually chose Menton or Davos), many were funded by philanthropists (although, despite its romantic, artistic connotations, TB was regarded primarily as a disease of the poor, and did not attract the same level of donations or research funding as, say, cancer, despite the fact that even at the end of the Second World War it accounted for more deaths between fifteen and twenty-four years of age in Britain than any other condition). Ireland had one of the worst death rates from TB in the world, and although it had been falling since the turn of the century, it started to rise again in 1937, in stark contrast with the rest of the United Kingdom and Europe, due mainly to poverty and a lack of specialist services such as x-ray machines, which barely existed outside Dublin. Faced with the helplessness of the medical profession, those afflicted turned to folk remedies, desperately trusting in the efficacy of a daily dose of linseed oil mixed with honey, swallowing raw eggs or paraffin oil, goats' milk or dandelion-leaf sandwiches, or positioning themselves in the street outside the Belfast gasworks, since fumes from the vats were reputed to clear the lungs.

Since tuberculosis was 'the principal social disease of our time' in the view of Britain's Chief Medical Officer of Health, with implications for the whole community, the government, in conjunction with local authorities, funded a network of sanatoria (sometimes using old Poor Law infirmaries for the purpose) for free treatment, and aftercare to be provided by tuberculosis dispensaries. If possible the sanatoria were in isolated locations, since statistics showed that tuberculosis was more prevalent in urban areas than rural, and TB was regarded with such suspicion that any proposal to build a sanatorium invariably met with stiff local opposition. (Indeed, local authorities could obtain a court order for a person suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis to be forcibly removed from their home, although they rarely did so.) Ideally they were surrounded by pine trees (which were 'much appreciated for their exhilarating resinous aroma'), recalling Otto Walther's German sanatorium in Nordach in the Black Forest, 'an abode for Spartans' 1,500 feet above sea level

and 'exposed to every wind', the model for so many dilute British establishments with names such as Nordach-upon-Mendip and Nordach-on-Dee. They were governed by strict rules — visitors one Saturday afternoon a month was not unusual — with a regime regulated by bells which included rest, a great deal of food (though not always of the highest quality), some outdoor exercise whatever the weather, and indoor crafts such as wood whittling, raffia work, crocheting and painting, and absolutely no sharing of cutlery or crockery. Spitting, a not uncommon habit in the 1930s, was forbidden, since sputum was know to be a carrier of the tubercle bacillus.

Belinda Banham, who had trained as a nurse at St Thomas's Hospital in London, wrote that the treatment provided to tubercular patients in the 1930s by the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital in Margate (founded in 1791 as the Royal Sea Bathing Infirmary for Scrofula)

consisted, for the main part, in exposure to the elements … each ward gave onto two verandahs, one on either side. The verandahs were equipped with shutters which were never to be closed in the day, and at night only with the permission of the night sister. Permission was rarely granted, even when the snow was falling, as it was thought contrary to the patients' interest. Cloaks were allowed to nurses only in moving to and from the wards. Strength and stamina were essential to survival … It is difficult today to conceive of the patience and heroism of patients occupying those beds. The length of stay was indeterminate and never less than six months. With tuberculosis of the spine … two or three years was common … with patients often immobilised for two years or more … Efforts were made to protect nurses from contracting tuberculosis, mainly by means of an ample diet … nonetheless, several nursing colleagues did acquire the disease and two died in my time there.

When Dr W.A. Murray arrived at Glenafton Sanatorium in Ayrshire in 1934, he found chilblains 'prevalent among staff and patients', which was hardly surprising since the wards had no heating and the icy Scottish wind blew in round the ill-fitting windows, raising the linoleum from the floors in waves 'which made a ward round something like a trip on a roller coaster. Rain also came through the windows to such an extent that a patient with some skill as a cartoonist' depicted the doctor 'doing his rounds in thigh boots while a patient sailed a toy boat round his bed!'

Fresh air was also recommended for supposedly susceptible children who might be 'pre-tubercular' (though some were actually suffering from malnutrition), and could be removed from their infectious homes during the 'delicate years of growth'. By 1937 there were ninety-six open-air day schools in England, catering for 11,409 children; a further 3,985 children boarded at open-air residential schools, while those 2,451 children already affected by pulmonary TB might well attend one of the thirty-six sanatorium schools (or one of the further sixty-five schools catering for children suffering from non-pulmonary tuberculosis). Meanwhile, forty of the 221 schools in Glasgow had been constructed on 'open-air principles', with open verandahs, sliding doors to the classrooms and plate-glass windows, and two 'preventoria' for children who had been exposed to tuberculosis were built. Those children who for whatever reason could not attend such an institution might be shipped out to foster parents in rural areas to get their fresh air that way.

One problem was the reluctance of those who suspected that they had tuberculosis to seek medical advice, since ill-informed prejudice about the disease might well mean that they were shunned 'like lepers' by family and friends, lose their job and find it hard to get another even when they were well again, and have difficulty in getting life assurance cover. 'The world regards the "lunger" as an outcast,' wrote a sufferer in the *Western Mail* in November 1938. 'Filled with an exaggerated dread of any word ending in "osis," unthinking people recoil from anyone who had "had it" … Every week scores of "lungers" are released from clinics, hospitals and sanatoria … Each patient goes his own way. Yet each one finds himself up against the same problem … He is not wanted; he is avoided; he is feared — and then alack! forgotten … His own relatives are afraid to have him in the house … Jobs are out of reach … Two kinds of suffering have attended me through the battle [to get well in the sanatorium]. One was the distressful horror of the disease itself. The other is the mental agony born of my knowledge that when I emerge from the fight … I am taboo to my fellow countrymen.' Such

considerations sometimes influenced GPs, who were obliged by law to report cases of tuberculosis, which may mean that rates of incidence in the 1930s were actually higher than reported.

Early diagnosis significantly improved the chance of recovery. The information-aware Bermondsey Public Health Department produced a film for their travelling cinemas, *Consumption*, in 1932 which illustrated how 'a consumptive, by placing himself under medical treatment and obeying simple rules of hygiene, can live an ordinary life for many years, without fear or risk to himself or those with whom he comes into contact'. Dr Salter himself played the doctor the patient consults after coughing blood into his handkerchief. He is seen sending the young man to a local authority sanatorium where he gradually gets better and is taught a new trade. On his return home he declines to kiss his wife since he is still contagious, and she makes up a bed for him in a shed in the backyard — provided free of charge by the council.

One way that people might receive treatment was to be admitted to Papworth Village Settlement, near Cambridge, founded by Dr (later Sir) Pendrill Varrier-Jones in 1917 along the lines of Ebenezer Howard's 'garden city' of Letchworth, where, as he explained in an article in 1931, if a tuberculosis patient was found to be 'suffering from extensive and permanent damage he would be able to live and work permanently in a village settlement with his family. The whole tuberculosis problem would be revolutionised. Those who thought they had tuberculosis would present themselves at a very early stage … and the success rate in treatment would be revolutionised' — not that Varrier-Jones believed that tuberculosis could be *cured:* treatment was a life sentence.

By 1938 Papworth, which was infused with the same spirit of experimentation ('studying the mechanisms of resistance') and holistic treatment as the Pioneer Health Centre in Peckham — 'We are dealing with persons, not cases,' Varrier-Jones was fond of saying — offered a hospital and a sanatorium consisting of open-air shelters with canvas flaps constructed in Papworth's carpentry workshops for which patients were issued with waterproof blankets to keep off the snow: glasses of water holding false teeth froze solid by the beds. A population of a thousand, including 360 children, lived in the 142 semi-detached cottages to which patients were able to move as they grew stronger, with a verandah and a garden, but no ornaments or wallpaper allowed, as these harboured germs, the windows permanently open. They ate a rich diet that included eggs, milk, porridge and cocoa, and were able to make use of communal facilities such as a swimming pool, join clubs for tennis, cricket, athletics and book reading, and to go to the cinema or pub on site. Since 'not everyone is fitted for a life in Utopia', the emphasis was on self-discipline externally policed. Patients lived under a strict paternalistic regime that censored entertainments they laid on themselves and the films they were allowed to watch, and leave passes were rigorously controlled. There was a psychiatric clinic to counsel the despairing.

As well as families, Papworth admitted single men from 1927 and single women (most of them former domestic servants) from 1929, their hostels sited some distance from each other, with 'a tumulus heaped up' between them to help maintain segregation. However, several inter-patient marriages did take place, and on such occasions Dr Varrier-Jones would present the happy couple with an engraved glass vase.

Varrier-Jones had hoped that the settlement would become financially self-sufficient through farming and market gardening — and in any case he thought it essential that those that could, should work, or they would soon '"throw up the sponge" if they were treated as permanent invalids'. However, the income thus generated turned out to be too little, so he set up a factory turning out travel goods and furniture. Patients were also employed in signwriting, printing, boot repairing and jewellery making, plus some horticulture and poultry farming. By 1930 Papworth's turnover was £85,000, and by 1937 this had increased to over £130,000, with a number of Cambridge colleges purchasing pieces of the well-made furniture.

The incidence and treatment of tuberculosis provides something of a metaphor for a nexus of 1930s attitudes. The clean, sweeping design of tuberculosis hospitals, sanatoria and health centres

that rejected Victorian and Edwardian decoration — curtain rails with heavy plush curtains, flocked wallpaper, cornices and curlicues that might harbour dust and therefore bacilli — the fervent belief in the health-giving properties of fresh air, 'aerotherapy' as it was sometimes known, and sunlight, and therefore the use of glass, wipeable venetian blinds, open-air balconies, the curved buildings looking like great ocean liners, such as the expanded Benenden sanatorium, or Harefield hospital, built in Middlesex in 1938 in the shape of an aeroplane floating in the verdant countryside. The Finsbury Health Centre had been explicitly designed to catch the changing angle of the sun, and the interior murals by Gordon Cullen urged 'Fresh Air Night and Day' and 'Live Outside as Much as You Can'.

Flexible interiors were also part of the ethos: Peckham Health Centre had moveable glass partitions which meant that almost whatever they were doing, its members could be observed by the experts like goldfish in a bowl. Such buildings united zealous democratic (and usually socialist) reformist urges with modernist architectural forms that let light into what were formerly dark and hierarchical spaces. Above all there was the debate about what 'caused' tuberculosis. Was it hereditary — the Leicester Schools' Medical Officer was of the opinion that parents with tuberculosis should be prevented from having more children (How? Celibacy? Segregation? Sterilisation?), and the city's Medical Officer of Health made sure that patients were handed a leaflet when they left the sanatorium advising them not to marry or have children. Was it unhealthy living conditions or an inadequate diet that was responsible? Did poverty cause tuberculosis? Or was it that tuberculosis caused poverty (through lack of earnings)? Could an individual take charge of his or her own medical destiny by clean living, or were environmental factors beyond individual agency responsible?

Average life expectancy was increasing: by 1930 it was 58.7 years for men and 62.9 for women, whereas in 1900 it had been 48.5 for men and 52.4 for women, and infant morality was slowly falling. But this was only part of the story. Relief at the decline in the incidence of infectious diseases (such as tuberculosis) overlooked indicators of poor health such as anaemia, debility and undernutrition, and failed to differentiate between different parts of the country. In fact the death rate was rising: between 1930 and 1931 it increased from sixty per thousand to sixty-six, and in the depressed areas of Lancashire, Teesside, South Wales and Scotland the picture was bleak, with the death rate in the early 1930s as high as it had been before the First World War. Infant mortality rates rose, and not just in the depressed areas. There were marked differences between classes: in Lancashire and Cheshire the number of childhood deaths varied from around thirty-one per thousand among the well-off to ninety-three in the poorest class. Deaths in childbirth were 2.6 per thousand in the South of England, but 5.2 in the North and 4.4 in Wales. Surveys indicated that 80 per cent of children in the mining areas of County Durham and the poorest areas of London showed signs of early rickets, which was put down to both poor diet and lack of sunshine under the smoke-laden industrial skies (hence the preoccupation with sunlight of the health centres); modern estimates suggest that between a quarter and a half of all children living in areas of economic depression survived on a diet that was inadequate to maintain normal growth and health.

The charge that there was a connection between ill health and government policies was consistently contested during the Depression. Again tuberculosis provides an exemplary study, with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Sir George Newman, attributing the rise in deaths from the disease in the industrial areas of South Wales (from 131 per 100,000 in young men aged fifteen to twenty-five in 1921–25 to 197 per 100,000 in 1930–32, and for young women from 185 to 268 in the same period) to 'geographical features of coalmining districts', by which he meant the lack of sunlight in the deep valleys in which the villages were located. He also allowed social factors, such as 'the tendency to crowd into small rooms and halls, some lack of playfields and facilities for open-air recreation, sometimes an unsuitable diet and the tendency to conceal the presence of tuberculosis', while for the mortally afflicted young women it was a question of 'migration to domestic service' and not returning home until the disease was in its terminal stage. Nonsense, a member of the Committee

against Malnutrition riposted: 'There is no evidence that the valleys are deeper and narrower today than formerly, and migration to service does not account for the increase in male mortality.'

Although the Ministry of Health declined to draw a correlation between poverty and the disease, citing 'a complex interaction of a considerable number of factors', those on the ground had no such doubts. A former MoH for Cardiff was unequivocal: 'Poverty has long been recognised as a prime factor in the causation of tuberculosis, principally through its effect on nutrition,' he wrote in 1933. A tuberculosis officer for Lancashire, asked to conduct a survey in Durham, concluded that 'The principal means by which poverty is found to cause tuberculosis are the overcrowding and undernourishment which are the chief distinguishing features between the poor and not poor families [some 3,000] studied,' and considered the link between tuberculosis and undernourishment to be more significant than that between tuberculosis and overcrowding.

In Jarrow, the death rate from tuberculosis was higher in 1930 than it had been before the turn of the century, at a time when rates across the rest of the country were falling by 50 per cent. The fact that there were fewer cases of spinal, bone and joint tuberculosis in Jarrow than might have been expected could be put down to the fact that fewer of the people who lived there were able to afford fresh milk. (In the 1930s almost 30 per cent of non-pulmonary tuberculosis deaths and 2 per cent of the pulmonary strain were caused by tubercular cows' milk or infected meat: in 1931 a thousand children under fifteen died of tuberculosis of bovine origin, and many more were crippled, but by the end of the end of the decade still less than 50 per cent of milk was pasteurised.) 'There is no mystery about the high tuberculosis rate of Jarrow,' flatly asserted 'Red Ellen' Wilkinson, the Labour MP for the town (so named by virtue of both her politics and her flame-coloured hair), scourge of the National Government's policies towards the unemployed. It was not caused by the supposed facts that '"the women do not know how to cook … The Irish have a racial susceptibility to tuberculosis … The families are too large … The geographical formations are unfavourable" … all of which reasons have been put forward by various medical authorities'. Rather, it was caused by the vicious cycle of 'bad housing, underfeeding, low wages for any work that is going, household incomes cut to the limit by public assistance, or Means Test or whatever is the cutting machine of the time … these mean disease and premature death'.

But still there were those who preferred to see tuberculosis as an individual responsibility, a sickness of advanced civilisation, when the simple life in the fresh air had been abandoned in favour of irregular hours, too little exercise, the stress of modern life, even 'the thoughtless misuse of leisure time'. All of which were ills that could be rectified by a stiff dose of self-help, rather than costly programmes of social welfare.

As the number of unemployed inexorably mounted month on month to over three million by 1931, politicians, economists, scientists, writers and commentators investigated, pronounced, theorised, constituted themselves into committees and wrote reports, and gathered together to lunch and dine, all in an effort to find reasons for and solutions to Britain's economic and social problems. In October, November and December that year the BBC invited a selection of prominent public figures to ruminate in front of a microphone on 'What I would do with the world'. Out of ten speakers, three advocated eugenics.

Lord D'Abernon, a former Ambassador to Berlin and then Chairman of the Medical Research Council, suggested that 'A wise dictator would devote his attention in the first years of his dictatorship to measures calculated to improve the human race,' since 'By excessive latitude given to the weak-minded, by imposing burdens in the shape of taxation on the hard-working to help out the improvidence of the inefficient and less capable, we are doing for the human race exactly what every intelligent breeder avoids in the animal world: we are stimulating breeding from the weak, the inefficient, and the unsound.' Sir Basil Blackett, a director of the Bank of England, agreed that he would ensure that 'we make ourselves and the human race better fitted intellectually and physically to use the scientific knowledge which the twentieth century places so freely at man's disposal'. His

programme would make the study of eugenics 'a compulsory item in the training of every man or woman who is destined to take up administrative service in any part of the world', while at home 'we [cannot] afford much longer to follow the aggressively dysgenic course of breeding mainly from the unfit'. Leo Amery, a former (and future) Conservative Minister, decried what he called the 'short-sighted sentimentalism' that he felt had characterised the whole trend of British social and fiscal policy in recent years, discouraging 'thrift and self-reliance' and encouraging 'the actual multiplication of the improvident and the incompetent'.

The term 'eugenics' was first used by Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, in 1883. Its etymological roots lie in the Greek words for 'good' or 'well' and 'born'. Eugenics was to be the science (and practice) of improving human stock 'to give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable'. The Eugenic Education Society (as it was originally called) was formed in 1907 in order to spread the knowledge of hereditary factors and how they could be applied to the improvement of the race — the 'self direction of evolution', as the logo for the Second International Eugenics Conference in 1921 proclaimed. Membership declined after the First World War, but revived again — though never reaching the same level — in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and by 1932 it had reached 768. Obviously this was a select number, but the Eugenics Society never sought a mass membership: rather it aimed to influence the legislative process by permeating the medical profession, the media and universities, and in the 1930s some very distinguished people took an interest in its work, including Julian Huxley, G.K. Chesterton. George Bernard Shaw, J.M. Keynes, J.B.S. Haldane, Richard Titmuss and A.M. Carr-Saunders (Director of the London School of Economics from 1937).

Central to eugenics was the conviction that a large part of those who came to be known as the 'social problem group' of the dependent and destitute were the result of genetic defects. But how could this be relevant to the Depression, when the number of unemployed (those who were necessarily economically and socially dependent, and sometimes all but destitute) had risen to three million, since three million people could hardly be congenitally 'unfit'? How did eugenics shed any light on the fact that unemployment was regional, concentrated in certain industries like shipbuilding, mining and heavy engineering, and not in other occupations?

Eugenicists were sceptical of the notion that poverty and ill health were linked to social and economic factors: rather they blamed the fecklessness and feeble-mindness of the lower orders. Many tended to be persuaded not by the findings of Dr Corry Mann, whose research in the London docklands led him to conclude that poor health was caused by low incomes, and that better pay resulted in better food, with consequent health benefits, but by investigations such as those undertaken by two academics in Glasgow. 'What is not demonstrated,' they wrote, 'is that simple increase in income would be followed by improvement in the condition of children. Bad parents, irrespective of their income tend to select bad houses, as the money is often spent on other things. The saying "what is the matter with the poor is poverty" is not substantiated by these investigations.'

To eugenicists, the ever greater numbers of unemployed served as vindication of what they had 'known' all along: the threat posed by the differential birthrate, whereby those of low intelligence reproduced at a greater rate than those of higher intelligence, and the fear that society was threatened by a small minority of the hereditarily inferior who would 'swamp' it if they were not controlled. If, as eugenicist doctors such as Raymond Cattell 'proved', the unemployed had low IQs, were 'hereditarily defective individuals', 'social inefficients', as the *Eugenics Review* had it, they would just go on breeding more unemployables, a veritable 'standing army of biological misfits'. Unless they were stopped.

The upper and middle classes were clearly producing fewer offspring than those lower down the social scale. For Julian Huxley, the differential birthrate was already dysgenic by 1925: 'The proportion of desirables is decreasing, of undesirables increasing. The situation must be got in hand. But it is impossible to persuade the classes which have adopted contraceptive methods to drop them by

appeal to self-control. The way to stop the rot is to diffuse these practices equally through all strata of society.' Although the first birth control clinic had been set up in London by Dr Marie Stopes in 1921, and in 1930 the British Medical Association reluctantly gave qualified approval to doctors providing contraceptive advice to married women, the eugenicists feared that it was upper- and middle-class wives who were making rather too effective use of such knowledge, while those who in their view needed it most were confounded by the mess of pessaries, jellies, douches, 'womb veils', ointments, douches, tablets, condoms and diaphragms on offer, and relied instead on unreliable methods such as *coitus interruptus* or unsuitable domestic substances. What was needed was a foolproof means of contraception — preferably 'the regular consumption by mouth of a substance preventing fertilisation, taken at daily, or better at weekly or monthly intervals' — which 'even the stupidest and therefore the most undesirable members of society' could manage, a Eugenics Society Memorandum concluded.

But 'the pill' was decades away, so would 'diffusion' mean compulsion? 'No public assistance without control of birth rates', the psychologist Raymond Cattell bleakly sloganised. Julian Huxley's solution to the tendency (as he saw it) 'for the stupid to inherit the earth, and the shiftless and the imprudent and the dull', was much the same: to make unemployment relief conditional upon a man's agreement to father no more children. 'Infringement of this order could possibly be met by a short period of segregation in a labour camp. After three or six months' separation from his wife he would be likely to be more careful the next time.' The zoologist Dr E.W. MacBride, who had managed to 'demonstrate' the innate inferiority of working-class children, went further, suggesting in 1930 that 'In the last resort compulsory sterilisation will have to be inflicted as a penalty for the economic sin of producing more children than the parents can support,' though he did suggest that before that last resort was reached, 'Citizens should receive instruction from the State in the means of birth control.'

In 1932 the Minister of Health appointed a committee to make recommendations on the sterilisation of the 'feeble-minded' in England and Wales. Under the chairmanship of Sir Laurence Brock, the Committee included three enthusiastic eugenicists, one of whom was Brock himself. After untangling the family histories of so-called defectives and assessing whether they produced feeble-minded offspring themselves, the Brock Committee concluded that a quarter of a million people in Britain were suitable candidates for voluntary sterilisation on account of being 'mental defectives'. It was unanimous in believing that it was justified in allowing and even encouraging 'mentally defective and mentally disordered patients to adopt the only certain method of preventing procreation': sterilisation. In reaching this conclusion, the Committee had privileged any studies that suggested that defectiveness was hereditary — 'Broadly speaking stupid people will produce stupid children,' Dr MacBride had asserted — despite dissent from such witnesses as J.B.S. Haldane and Lancelot Hogben, who argued that there could be no scientific certainty on this point, rather that the evidence suggested environmental factors were more likely to be to blame. The Committee did, however, reject compulsory sterilisation.

The Eugenics Society was delighted with the Brock Committee's findings, and confident that if 'the general public could be educated to distinguish between sterilization and castration many members of the Social Problem Group would avail themselves of facilities for voluntary sterilization in order to prevent the birth of unwanted children'.

However, no legislation was forthcoming. It was considered that the public was not behind such a programme, the Roman Catholic Church believed that sterilisation violated the God-given right to reproduce, and by the time the Brock Committee made its recommendations in the summer of 1934, the Nazi Party had embarked on a compulsory sterilisation and euthanasia programme in Germany which increasingly discredited the eugenicists and made repugnant to most people the idea of sterilising — even voluntarily — groups and classes of people.

CODA *Searching for the Gleam*

'A party of English doctors and scientists passed through,' wrote the British Consul in Leningrad, Reader Bullard, in his diary on 26 July 1931. 'Mostly much impressed by what they had seen, and as they had been taken to all the showplaces and nothing else this is perhaps not remarkable.' The British footfall through the Soviet Union in the early 1930s was, if not heavy, then at least regular and highly questing. Many on the left regarded the Soviet Union as a successful, planned, egalitarian society, the one place where the problems that beset Britain had, as they saw it, been resolved. Those who went made the journey because they wanted to see the Soviet system for themselves, to have their opinions about what was wrong with Britain — the decay of capitalism, the class system, the searing inequalities of wealth and opportunity — confirmed, and to bring some lessons back home. 'We saw in the Soviet Union the negation of the immoralities of industrial capitalism and the system of private profit,' the political activist and author Margaret Cole recalled. 'We were eager to follow the gleam … The hopes for what the makers of the Revolution set out to achieve compared to the dead hopelessness of breadlines and the dole were more than enough to outweigh doubts.'

Sidney and Beatrice Webb went for a two-month tour in the summer of 1932, sailing on the Russian steamer *Smolny*. As befitted two Fabians and rigorous social investigators, in the months before their departure the Webbs had immersed themselves in 'Soviet literature of all types … [but] at present we cannot make our way to any settled estimate of success or failure … All I know is that I *wish* Russian communism to succeed,' Beatrice wrote.

Lenin had translated the Webbs' *Theory and Practice of Trade Unionism* into Russian ('An example of the quality of boredom being twice blessed,' thought Malcolm Muggeridge), and by virtue of this the Webbs had become 'ikons in the Soviet Union', and were given a superior tour to that allowed to most Intourist visitors, though their itinerary was the usual one: collective farms, schools, clinics, factories. When they came to dine with Reader Bullard ('At least he came to dinner and she came to two pieces of toast and a glass of red wine. Nine out of ten tourists have their insides upset by bad food, and Mrs Webb is one of the nine') they explained that they were 'mainly interested in the organisation of the State, the way the wheels go round, and they seem to have collected a great deal of information'.

Theirs was a tiring trip, so tiring for a couple whose joint ages totalled 147 years that Beatrice managed to write little more than headings in the black notebook labelled 'Russian Tour. 10 shillings Reward if Lost'. Sidney had viewed the Soviet Union 'with the relish of a scientist whose theoretical proposition has stood the test of practical experiment: "See, see, it works, it works."' Beatrice too felt a sense of satisfaction: 'The problem we have been seeking to solve for the last fifty years — poverty in the midst of plenty — is today being solved, and very much as we should have solved it, if we had had our way.' But her enthusiasm was tempered: she queried, 'How far can you disentangle what is good in Russia from what is bad? … Can you take the economic organization of Soviet Russia and reject the "dictatorship" of a creed or caste? … These are the sorts of problems which have to be solved by those who wish to supersede, in their own country, capitalist profit-making by the equalitarian production, distribution and exchange of the wealth of the nation.'

George Bernard Shaw paid a visit in July 1931 and was refused permission by his minders to see what he wanted, so Reader Bullard took him to the Kazan Cathedral (which he did 'not find very interesting') and St Isaac's Cathedral ('the anti-religious museum'), then invited the Fabian playwright back for tea at the Consulate, where 'he talked for two hours and told us all a lot about Russia … just waving away anything that did not fit in with his preconceptions'. Hugh Dalton (former Labour Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and future Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence (from the Treasury, and a keen suffragette-supporter) tipped up in that busy summer of 1932. 'They have come to look at Soviet finance,' noted Bullard. The feminist author and journalist

Cicely Hamilton, one of the few visitors to speak any Russian, arrived in June, intending to write an article about the country (which she found drab, though she approved of the way young Soviet children in nursery schools were dressed alike and had their hair cropped so that you could not tell their sex) for *Time and Tide*. A vinegar merchant, one Mr Cook, arrived with a letter from the Mayor of Leeds addressed to the President of the Soviet Union, 'whom he had been unable to see', so the Consul invited him to dinner, at which 'the innocent' praised a factory canteen he had just seen as 'better than anything in Leeds'.

Naomi Mitchison, a tireless traveller and writer, the sister of J.B.S. Haldane and the wife of a future Labour MP, was one of the Fabian Dalton/Pethwick Lawrence group that also included the formidable bookshop-owner Christina Foyle. Mitchison arrived in Leningrad wearing a garment of her own invention, a white jacket with 'pockets all around it like purses in a belt', and professing that her interest was mainly archaeological — though she made a particular point of finding out about birth control, and also about abortion practices, since Russia was the only country in which abortion was legal. 'She'll be pretty closely watched,' commented Bullard darkly. On her return Mitchison was overheard 'advocating a revolution for England'.

J.D. Bernal had been among a party of English doctors and scientists the previous summer. His enthusiasm for the USSR had been aroused by the unexpected visit to London a few weeks previously of Nikolai Bukharin, a close associate of Lenin and head of the Academy of Science's section on the history of science and the Director of Research for the Supreme Economic Council, who led a delegation of Soviet scientists to the second International Congress of the History of Science and Technology. Bukharin (who would perish in Stalin's 'great purge' in March 1938) had somewhat dominated proceedings, speaking of how 'a new science' to parallel the new economic system had been born in the Soviet Union. Bernal, who considered the Congress 'the most important meeting of ideas that has occurred since the Revolution', could not wait to see this 'new science' for himself.

Two tours — in July and August 1931- were organised by the *Manchester Guardian's* science correspondent, J.G. Crowther, under the auspices of the Society for Cultural Relations. The doctors — some of whom were shocked to see women undergoing abortions in state clinics in Moscow without benefit of anaesthetics, which was normal practice — were in the majority, but Julian Huxley, who was very impressed that the Soviet authorities were 'preparing to increase expenditure on pure scientific research far beyond that attempted in any capitalist country', was one of the handful of scientists. In July Bukharin had hosted a lavish banquet (paid for by the Soviet government) at the Dynamo sports stadium in Moscow; the August party was rather less sumptuously entertained, and Bernal 'saw very much of the difficulties as well as of [the] achievements. I saw the construction camps for the Dnieper dam, and at the same time saw something of the hard times that were produced in the period of early collectivisation … and yet there was no mistaking the sense of purpose and achievement in the Soviet Union … It was grim but great. Our hardships in England were less: theirs were deliberate and undergone in an assurance of building a better future. Their hardships were compensated for by a reasonable hope.'

Bernal was to return to the USSR several times, once in 1934 with his then lover Margaret Gardiner, who soon got bored with the November celebrations in Moscow, watching 'column after marching column, gun carriages, tanks, all the grisly paraphernalia of power and war, with that row of grey men sitting there hour after hour to take the salute and acknowledge the applause'. Although Gardiner found Russia 'drab', she detected a feeling of hope, and was distressed and disturbed when, during her and Bernal's visit, Sergey Kirov, the Communist Party leader in Leningrad and a member of the Politburo, was assassinated — possibly on the orders of Stalin.

The art critic and travel writer Robert Byron set off for Russia in January 1932, determined to concentrate on the paintings and buildings he wanted to see, and to ignore politics: 'I almost went out of my way to avoid the state manifestation of communism — factories, clubs etc … as for Bolshevism

and the Five Year Plan and all that — it seems too uninteresting to bother with … though I daresay I shall become interested.' Ten days later he had indeed become very interested:

No more shall I be deceived by English intellectuals who all come on conducted tours — by our standards it is all *evil*… If the five-year plan works, it will be the industrial barbarism come true — apes in possession of machines, violently, madly nationalistic, hating and hated by the opposing human beings. But will the five-year plan work? It may seem stupid to write like this after a fortnight here — but there is the other side. They have cast so much off, all the futilities and extravagances that hamper us — somehow in spite of the devil worship one breathes a fresher air, and however much their experiment may menace our civilisation, one can't wish it different or fail to wish them success up to a point. In fact one's mind is filled with a flat contradiction — apparently insoluble, and the only concrete impression is simply one of intense interest.

Robert Haslam, a comfortably-off businessman, joined the rush to check out a (relatively) new social experiment, leaving his home in Bolton 'in the Rolls' in August 1932, bound for Hay's Wharf in London and thence to the Soviet Union. He spent a month travelling around on a trip arranged by Intourist, but found little to commend post-Revolutionary Russia, with its generally poor food, lukewarm baths, unflushable lavatories, uncomfortable trains and what he decided were hopelessly inefficient factories — though he was impressed by a pioneer camp near Yalta. Haslam found it 'increasingly difficult to come to an opinion on much of it, but I do feel there is no stability'. Defiantly he wrote in the visitors' book of the Russian ship that bore his party back to Britain: 'St George for Merrie England/No Soviets for me/I quite enjoyed the Sibier/But then, thank God, I'm free!'

Malcolm Muggeridge had shared the intellectual left's enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. Disillusioned with his work on the *Manchester Guardian'* and with Britain under the new National Government, he resolved in 1931 'to go where I thought a new age was coming to pass; to Moscow and the future of mankind', as the newspaper's Russian correspondent. Muggeridge and his wife Kitty (a niece of Beatrice Webb, who considered that she and Malcolm were 'the most gifted and certainly the most "proletarian" of my nieces and nephews') 'sold off pretty well everything we had, making, as it were, a bonfire of our bourgeois trappings: my dinner jacket, for instance, Kitty's only long dress … as well as most of our books, which we considered to be bourgeois literature of no relevance in a Workers' State … We even wound up our bank account. What possible use would a bank account be in a country where bankers along with industrialists, landlords and priests had all been eliminated? … Kitty was pregnant again, so that our next child would be born a Soviet citizen [the Muggeridges had left their three-year-old son Leonard behind at school in the Lake District]. It all seemed wonderful.'

But it wasn't. Soon Muggeridge grew impatient with life in the Soviet Union: 'We might as well have been back in Didsbury. Revolutions, like wars, upset things far less than might be superficially supposed. As the very word "revolution" implies, they have a way of ending up where they began.' He grew wearily amused too, as did Bullard, by the endless procession of distinguished visitors and their pronouncements:

Shaw, accompanied by Lady Astor (who was photographed cutting his hair), declaring that he was delighted to find that there was no food shortage in the USSR [the Ukraine in particular was enduring a famine at the time]. Or [Harold] Laski singing the praises of Stalin's new Soviet constitution [though Laski, who visited in 1934, tempered his enthusiasm for Russia as 'a land of hope' with concern about the repressive nature of the regime, declaring that he was sure that 'if I lived in Russia I should court difficulty from my sense of the need to form a Council of Civil Liberties']. Or Julian Huxley describing how a 'German town-planning expert was travelling over the huge Siberian spaces in a special train with a staff of assistants, stopping every now and again to lay down the broad outlines of a future city, and then pushing on, leaving the details to be filled in by architects and engineers who remained behind … I shall treasure until I die as a blessed memory the spectacle of them travelling with radiant optimism through a famished countryside, wandering in happy bands about squalid, over-crowded towns. Listening with unshakeable faith to the fatuous

patter of carefully trained and indoctrinated guides, repeating like schoolchildren a multiplication table, the bogus statistics and mindless slogans endlessly intoned to them.

Within months of his arrival Muggeridge left the country of which he had entertained such high expectations and travelled to Montreux in Switzerland, where he and Kitty had decided to run a guest house for the Workers' Travel Association (a Labour Party tourist agency). Before he left, Muggeridge had written a series of articles for the *Manchester Guardian* which were published in March 1933. '"We must collectivize agriculture," or "We must root out the Kulaks" (the rich peasants). How simple it sounds! How logical! But what is going on in the remote villages? In the small households of the peasants? What does the collectivization of agriculture mean in practice in the lives of the peasants? What results has the "new drive" produced? … That is what I wanted to find out.' What he found was that 'the civilian population was obviously starving in its absolute sense: Not undernourished as, for instance … some unemployed workers in Europe … There had been no bread for three months … The only edible thing [in the markets] in the lowest European standards was chicken … the rest of the food offered for sale was revolting and would be thought unfit, in the ordinary way to be offered to animals.' It was 'the same story in the Ukraine — cattle and horses dead; fields neglected; meagre harvests despite moderately good climate conditions; all the grain produced was taken by the Government; now no bread at all, no bread anywhere, nothing much else either; despair and bewilderment'.

Muggeridge's reports, which were confirmed by Gareth Jones, a former Political Secretary of Lloyd George who had gone on a walking tour of Russia that same year, were the first accounts of the famine by a Western journalist, the first indication that collectivisation, far from being a socialist dream, was turning into a nightmare. But not everyone wanted to hear them: the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* was lukewarm, wishing that Muggeridge had restricted himself to 'plain, matter-of-fact statements of what you saw … If we denounce we are apt to be in unpleasant company.' George Bernard Shaw (who, Jones reported, was 'after Stalin the most hated man in Russia') had written to the *Guardian* after an earlier report from Muggeridge, describing his comments as 'a particularly offensive and ridiculous attempt to portray the lot of the workers as one of slavery and starvation. We the undersigned are recent visitors to the USSR … We desire to record that we saw nowhere evidence of such economic slavery, privation, unemployment … Everywhere we saw a hopeful and enthusiastic working class, self-respecting, free up to the limits imposed on them by nature and the terrible inheritance from the tyranny and incompetence of their former rulers … setting an example of industry and conduct which would greatly enrich us if our system supplied our workers with any incentive to follow it.'

Muggeridge, despairing, 'discarded the *Manchester Guardian* and wrote a further series of articles, 'as bitter and satirical as I knew how to make them', about what he had seen, which he sent off to the *Morning Post*, a 'reputable Tory newspaper of the extreme Right' (which was taken over by the *Daily Telegraph* in 1937).

Some who kept the faith in the Soviet model had a disquieting time as news of Stalin's purges and show trials became known, while others were able to accept these as the inevitable 'infantile disease' of a revolutionary society; the few who lost their faith found the disillusion hard, and felt rudderless as they drifted through the crises of capitalism, their lodestar tarnished.

PART THREE *Planning England (and Scotland and Wales)*

PROLOGUE *Follies*

When the journalist Henry Vollam Morton (known as Harry), encouraged by the warm reception and almost bi-monthly reprints of his book *In Search of England* set off *In Search of Wales* in 1932, his route wound round the mountains of Snowdonia and along the craggy coast of what he called the 'Land's End of Wales'; he met the ex-Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George, 'a strong wind in the war years', walking down a lane in his home village of Criccieth. Morton then struck inland through the Llanberis Pass, bound 'through the thin rain' for the small town of Betws-y-Coed. Had he instead stuck to the coastal route, he would have come across a strange private fantasy demesne, a sliver of Italianate Surrealism that clung to the Merioneth Peninsula.

Aber Iâ ('estuary of glass') had been bought in the mid-1920s by the 'intuitive' (that is, virtually untrained) architect Clough Williams-Ellis, the son of a local Welsh squarson, whose professional training amounted to three months' study at the Architectural Association in London. He intended to make an imaginative gesture by building a 'holiday retreat for the more discerning' among the 'cliffs and woodland rides and paths that crisscross the whole headland between high crags', replete with 'an exuberant jungle of exotic and subtropical flowering shrubs (mainly rhododendrons)'. Portmeirion, as Williams-Ellis christened his fiefdom, owed nothing to prevailing notions of functional architecture; rather it was a Mediterranean extravaganza of campaniles, piazzas, an observatory tower which incorporated a camera obscura, Regency-type colonnades, colour-washed baroque houses, a vaguely Jacobean-style town hall, *trompe l'oeils*, pillars, obelisks, orbs, ponds, terraces, grilles and a range of architectural jokes and whimsies.

A hotel opened for visitors in 1926, and throughout the 1930s Williams-Ellis extended Portmeirion with fifteen more buildings, many incorporating architectural salvage that he had acquired over the years. In that decade (and indeed during the Second World War too) the resort served as a retreat for celebrities such as Noël Coward (who would write *Blithe Spirit* during a week's stay in 1941), George Bernard Shaw, Augustus John (who liked to speak Romany with a gypsy who lived in a tent in the woods until he was killed by a motorcyclist leaving the car park), Bertrand Russell (who wrote *Freedom and Organisation, 1814—1914* at Portmeirion in 1934) and the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII), who also spent time there in 1934, and required that a bath and lavatory be installed in his bedroom, since it was not appropriate for a royal to share such facilities. Williams-Ellis even acquired a hotel, renaming it the Mytton and Mermaid, near Shrewsbury, so that those travelling from London and the South-East could break their journey for a night. Visitors could come for the day, too, and paid on a sliding scale: the more people there were, the higher the entrance fee. Usually the entrance fee was around one shilling, but it rose to a dizzying ten shillings (around £25 in today's money) when the Prince of Wales was in residence.

Williams-Ellis admitted that while he had 'an acute inborn instinct for architecture', he remained 'in some respects half-baked as a technician', and many saw him less as an architect and more as a stage designer. Few if any of his exuberant excesses would have been possible had he followed his own precepts, as set out in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* while he was on leave from France during the First World War: 'Anyone who cares for England must be interested in national planning, the provision of a comprehensive co-ordinated and compulsory development and conservation scheme for the country as a whole, urban and rural, public and private.' In fact the building of Portmeirion was only possible because there were then 'no Building Regulations, no Town & Country Planning Act, no regulations about Historic Buildings'. Although Williams-Ellis thought there ought to be all these things (and said so repeatedly), 'privately, secretly, he relished their absence', wrote his wife. So effective was Williams-Ellis at 'calling my own tune' that when Snowdonia was declared a national park just after the Second World War, something he had long agitated for, its boundaries were drawn to exclude Portmeirion.

No planning permission was needed, or sought, for another 'world-class folly' that opened to the public for the first time in the summer of 1929. Roland Callingham, a London accountant, owned a large house and garden in the leafy commuter suburb of Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire. Callingham was a model-railway enthusiast, and commissioned the largest outdoor Gauge 1 railway layout in England for his garden, dragooning his gardener and other household servants, family and friends into making scale models of houses, shops, a castle, pubs, a cinema, a station and a church to set alongside his railway line, constructing roads and streets to connect them, and fashioning Lilliputian-sized people to inhabit his construction. Named 'Beckonscot' (an amalgam of Beaconsfield and Ascot, where Callingham's railway collaborator lived), the first model village in the world covered a site of around two acres. It was visited by Princess Elizabeth on the eve of her eighth birthday in April 1934 with her grandmother Queen Mary, wife of the by then ailing King George V. The serious-looking, cloche-hatted, white-gloved child, third in line to the throne, peered through shop windows at the miniature goods for sale, watched 1:12-scale trains leaving from Maryloo (an amalgam of Marylebone and Waterloo) station, listened to the 'choir' singing in one of the several churches (they would later include a model of one built in Beaconsfield as a memorial to G.K. Chesterton, who died in 1936), and took it upon herself to rearrange the sheep in the fields.

By May 1937, when the American magazine *National Geographic* featured Beckonscot, the miniature country town was attracting over 57,000 visitors a year, and boasted a racecourse (Epwood — combining Epsom and Goodwood) a fairground, docks and an Art Deco aerodrome which looked remarkably similar to a miniaturised Croydon airfield.

The intention was that Beckonscot should grow and develop just like any other town, so as the decades passed, modern concrete slabs were erected in place of some of the pargeted buildings, elaborate ironwork at the railway station was replaced by concrete and glass, and the original steam trains gave way to diesel. But in 1992 it was decided that the 'progress' of the past sixty years should be reversed, and Beckonscot returned to how it had been when Princess Elizabeth (who by then had been on the throne for nearly forty years) had visited. 1960s-style blocks of flats were torn down, concrete offices destroyed, glass and metal bus shelters uprooted, all to be replaced by workshops and mock-Tudor cottages, while individual shops, many modelled on actual Beaconsfield establishments of the 1930s, replaced a supermarket and all the buildings were repainted in 'the drab colours relevant to the time'. The children's author Enid Blyton, creator of Noddy and Big Ears, had moved to Beaconsfield in 1938, and a replica of her house, Green Hedges, was recreated as part of a village that now stands in a perfect 1930s time-warp, viewed through binoculars the wrong way round, with its tea-drinking matrons sitting under shady umbrellas, its edge-of-town roadhouse next to the tiled swimming pool with its two-foot diving tower with five springboards, its eternally grazing cows, sheep and horses and more exotic animals in the zoo, its pink-coated huntsmen permanently in full Tally ho!, its polo field, its miller perpetually carrying sacks of grain into the windmill, watched by two archetypal figures from the 1930s countryside, hikers in shorts with rucksacks on their backs and carrying stout sticks.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.