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Maurice Cowling

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Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics

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BRITISH POLITICS AND
BRITISH POLICY

1933 – 1940

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Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge

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P R E F A C E

This volume is the third in a sequence about *The Politics of British Democracy*. In the future there will be an introduction bearing the sequence-title which will deal in its widest aspects with the period from 1850 to 1940 and will assess the methods used in the volumes which have now been published. Whether there will be anything more is uncertain. For that period an abundance of material is already available or will be shortly. For later periods there is a problem. It can be only a hope that a volume entitled *The Development of the Class Struggle 1924-1935* will be followed by *The Impact of Inflation* (from 1936 onwards).

For this volume no general introduction is needed. Readers who want one should read the first twelve and last forty-seven pages of *The Impact of Labour* or pages 287-340 of *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*. All it is necessary to say here is that no attack is intended. The sole aim is to remove misunderstandings based on an implied contradiction between expediency and principle, and to present democratic politicians in a multi-dimensional context where they display on the fragmented nature of God's handiwork the only rational way of acting politically.

'Rational' here means what politicians can understand. It means working through contingency and accident, not rising above them. It means that principles are manifestations of personality no less than interests and passions and that all three form the context of political consciousness.

Politicians understand as much as they need to of the situations in which they work. This need not be much. But their actions follow from the solipsisms in which they are located. In locating them and in imputing right to no one in relation to the rest, history need not deny that conflict can be good or its outcome better than its parts.

What political history can do is to dissect solipsisms. What it can also do is to show them in conflict. What it can do most of all is to show them conflicting in face of perpetual envelopment in a prudent, necessary and corporate venality.

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PREFACE

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'I doubt whether the absolutely unparalleled series of diplomatic blunders in the last four months can ever be sufficiently repaired. They may quite easily end by destroying all that you and I have worked for. For Baldwin doesn't know and cannot act, and is well fitted by virtues, dilettantism and inertia to become the Lord North of a far greater catastrophe.' Garvin to Amery, October 2 1935

'No supporter of the Government should ever again without shame lift up the Union Jack at a public meeting or on an election platform. The Labour party is alone entitled to lift not only the Union Jack which stands for Britain, but the Red Flag, which stands for Socialism and democracy. The "old man of Munich" and the rest could only raise the white flag of the coward on the one hand and the black flag of the traitor and the robber on the other.' Dalton at Southport, May 28 1939, *The Times*, May 29

'I feel that our world, or all that remains of it, is committing suicide, whilst Stalin laughs and the Kremlin triumphs.' Henry Channon MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in his diary, September 3 1939