

THE BRITISH LEFT-WING AND
AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS, 1918-1939

CHALLENGES FROM THE MARGINS:
SOME BRITISH LEFT-WING INTELLECTUALS AND CRITICISMS OF
AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS,
1918-1939

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

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Descriptive Note

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2009)

McMaster University

(History)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Challenges From the Margins: Some British Left-Wing Intellectuals and
Criticisms of Air Raid Precautions, 1918-1939

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. Stephen Heathorn

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 327

Abstract

This thesis investigates the leftist intellectuals in Britain who opposed the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) plans of the central government in the 1930s. It examines how a coalition of the far left advocated an alternative shelter plan and the political ideas on which this program was based. In contrast to the government policy of individual household shelters, these critics believed that the central government was obligated to provide public underground shelters for all citizens. Critics of government ARP included the Communist Party, radical scientists and architects, far left and Labour local councils, and members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Their advocacy of bomb-proof shelter plans, funded by the central treasury, pitted an activist social mentality against the liberal ethic of volunteerism espoused by the government. Drawing on a home-grown radical tradition, these critics invoked the idea of a “People’s War.” Through the observation of deep shelter construction in the Spanish Civil War, they promoted a model of radical volunteerism in which citizens were active participants in their own civil defence. This study’s primary aim is to offer a new understanding of the politics of the British left in the interwar years viewed in light of this specific issue. It demonstrates how the British left understood the relationship between the state and its citizens, and argues that leftists used civil defence to articulate their ideal of a politically active and engaged citizenry. This thesis contributes to understanding of the British left in the 1930s, demonstrating how critics used ARP to emphasize leftist nationalism and citizenship ideals and how moderate, cooperative policies evolved in preparation for war.

Acknowledgements

In the course of researching and writing this dissertation I have incurred many debts and have received support from many quarters. I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor Dr. Stephen Heathorn for his patient, sound, and helpful guidance during the writing of this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Pamela Swett and Dr. Martin Horn for their work on my dissertation committee and for their incisive comments. In addition, I am indebted to the McMaster History Department for varied assistance during my years of doctoral study, including providing travel grants. I am also grateful for the SSHRC and OGS awards that helped to enable the completion of this work.

During my studies at McMaster I have been fortunate to enjoy the friendship and collegiality of many fellow students. They are too numerous to mention all by name, but Kate Walker, Zuzana Stastna, and Hannah Elias have provided much needed friendship and practical support in the latter stages of dissertation writing. I am also grateful to many close friends who have helped immeasurably in this long process; this experience would not have been nearly as rich without them: Justin Bengry, Anthony Cantor, James MacNevin and Mary Porter, Stephanie Olsen and Rob Boddice, and especially Barbara Gribbling. Special appreciation is due to Stephanie Olsen for her careful reading of my work. Any errors that remain are mine.

Finally I would like to thank my beloved parents – my mother Idinha Haapamaki and my late father Taisto Haapamaki. Their love, support, and faith in me have made everything possible. They introduced me to a world of knowledge, encouraging my study at every turn, and this work is dedicated to them.

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List of Abbreviations

AASTA	Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants
AIR	Air Ministry Documents (National Archives)
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
ATO	Architects' and Technicians' Organisation
CAB	Cabinet Papers (National Archives)
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CSAWG	Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
HO	Home Office Papers (National Archives)
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LBC	Left Book Club
LCC	London County Council
MARS	Modern Architectural Research Group
MBSJC	Metropolitan Boroughs Standing Joint Committee
MP	Member of Parliament
NA	National Archives (Kew, London)
RAF	Royal Air Force
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects

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Introduction

The Intellectual Left and Air Raid Precautions (ARP)

In a speech to the House of Commons in 1932, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin summed up Britain's air peril and the strategic and moral questions of rearmament and defence policy with the phrase "the Bomber will always get through." Echoing both military and popular theories of air warfare in the interwar years he stated, "The only defence is in offence, which means that you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves."¹ He envisioned that a major attack on London would result in the inevitable collapse of the government. J.F.C. Fuller, the prominent commentator on warfare similarly predicted that a European enemy might launch an initial air raid of 500 planes carrying 500 ten-pound bombs. As a result, "London for several days will be one vast raring Bedlam... what of the Government of Westminster? It will be swept away by an avalanche of terror."² This brand of extreme prediction went virtually unchallenged in the interwar years, and the fear of absolute destruction guided government, military, and popular perceptions of the threat of aerial attack. The task of protecting against such attack spawned a new area of expertise in civil defence, leading to new policy directives and the implementation of regulations that would become known to the public as Air Raid Precautions (ARP).

¹ Quoted in Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain* (London: Abacus, 1995 [1940]), 326.

² J.F.C. Fuller, *The Reformation of Warfare* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923), 150.

Official policies focused on the role of the individual householder to provide for his own protection and mandated that local authorities draw up schemes to implement and police ARP. The official rejection of mass underground shelters provoked the strongest opposition, and critics argued that the government had a moral responsibility to provide equitable bomb-proof protection. This dissertation follows the development of leftist criticism of government ARP in the interwar years, and the principles that underlay their alternative proposals. Leftist critics of government ARP included the Communist Party, radical scientists and architects, far left and Labour local councils, and members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Their advocacy of equitable bomb-proof shelter plans, funded by the central Treasury, reflected an activist social mentality and socialist vision of the nation.

This study's primary aim is to offer a new understanding of the politics of the British left in the interwar years viewed through this specific issue. It explores how these individuals understood the relationship between the state and its citizens, and argues that leftists used civil defence to articulate their ideal of a politically active and engaged citizenry. One significant argument of this work is that the British left was active in forwarding nationalist, not merely internationalist, goals in the interwar years. The British left has largely been depicted as pacifist and internationalist in their discussions of military defence and foreign policy issues, and histories of leftist nationalism have mostly focused on cultural output and the working of party politics. But I demonstrate that nationalism for these leftist intellectuals was tied to a definition of citizenship that emphasized equality and community participation, and the issue of ARP highlights this

assertion. Consequently this work comments on the integrationist tendencies of the British left and their ability to use adaptive policies. It provides a new perspective into how leftist commentaries on civil defence involved more than pacifist rhetoric.

Another contribution to the existing historiography is an analysis of how the left fashioned its ideal of citizenship and volunteerism. The British government's preparations for ARP in the 1930s produced political conflict, which a variety of leftists used to propagate their own ideas about citizenship, the obligation of government, and the rights of citizens. This clash of ideas took place within a history of liberal governance of the British state and a tradition of voluntary institutions and the policy of self-help. The former organizations undertook charitable works and the provision of many social services in place of centralized government programs. Both the left and right of the political spectrum were invested in various voluntary institutions, and these ideas were central to discussions of preparation against aerial attack. The liberal ethic of volunteerism espoused by the government resulted in a structure for ARP that relied on the efforts of individuals and volunteers. The left advocated a different type of volunteerism more suitable to its working-class constituency. Reaching back to an indigenous radical tradition, these critics invoked the idea of a "People's War" in which citizens were active participants in their own civil defence. My work ties the well-traveled historical ground of leftist involvement in Spain with the idealized People's War and the fight against fascism. The criticism of ARP provides a perspective on the trajectory between these two events, particularly the tension between pacifist, militant rhetoric and moderate integrationist policies such as those espoused by Parliamentary Labour. It

illustrates how leftist constituencies attempted to bridge international and domestic concerns, and argues that the latter consideration drove many to a more moderate approach.

Subjects and Scope of This Study

This thesis focuses on a limited segment of the intellectual left who collaborated with the Parliamentary Labour Party and local Labour politicians on the issue of ARP. The subjects of this study were predominantly members of the far left – individuals associated with the British scientific left such as geneticist J.B.S. Haldane and Cambridge crystallographer J.D. Bernal, who were Communists or considered fellow travelers. The label of “communist” was not reducible to official party membership in the interwar years. For example, as historian Neal Wood notes, Left Book Club Marxist intellectual John Strachey called himself a communist though he was not actually a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).³ Most members of the Cambridge Scientists Anti-War Group (CSAWG), prominent in this thesis, would have been considered fellow travelers. The progress and challenges faced by leftist scientists have been narrated by Gary Werskey in *The Visible College*, which traces the work of Haldane, Hyman Levy, Lancelot Hogben, Bernal, and Joseph Needham from the 1920s to the 1960s, and their advocacy of “leftist science.”⁴ The ideals of leftist scientists and architects influenced the

³ Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 54.

⁴ Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 158-9. Haldane was, however, orthodox

entire discussion of ARP, and this thesis reflects their prescriptions for the common social good.

If far left thinkers provided the impetus for debate, local politicians brought about some of these ideas in practice. At times Parliamentary and local Labour, the Communist Party, and unaffiliated socialists actively cooperated in agitating for ARP – though they often disagreed on policies and tactics. The Labour leader of the LCC and MP for South Hackney, Herbert Morrison, was an important figure in the development of leftist ARP. He disliked communists and contested their inroads into the Labour Party with great vigor. In the late 1930s he opposed several radical Boroughs that held a policy of non-cooperation with government ARP. Yet the centre left, typified by Morrison, is equally important to the critique of civil defence. These political actors worked through bureaucratic processes to institute the recommendations of leftist scientists such as Haldane. The following chapter will introduce some of the problems facing the interwar British left, and suggest that how they presented their alternative ARP program demonstrates their ideas of citizenship and nationalism.

The chronological scope of this dissertation encompasses the years 1918-1939. In the interwar period, the Committee for Imperial Defence and the Home Office were tasked with instituting “passive defence,” including shelters and air raid drills and ensuring civil order in the case of a future war. Informal planning for aerial defence lasted until the official institution of the ARP Department of the Home Office in 1935. The

enough to have his science columns published in the *Daily Worker* in the late 1930s. Although he would exuberantly proclaim his Marxism, he did not join the Party until 1942, and would subsequently leave it in 1950. J.D. Bernal had once been a Communist, but later claimed to have “lost,” his membership card around 1933, effectively denying any formal ties to the Party.

intensity of public debate and awareness of the issue varied greatly before 1935, during the three years from 1935 to 1938, and after the Munich Crisis of September 1938 that brought a lack of preparedness to light. The public was first familiarized with the general basis of government policy with the publication of the first ARP Circular in 1935. The provisions, however, remained abstract until the example of aerial bombing from Guernica and other cities in Spain was featured in dramatic headlines in British newspapers from 1937 onwards. It is this period that is the main focus of this thesis, concentrating on the quickly shifting political terrain and on leftist attempts to position themselves as defenders of the nation against fascism. The analysis stops at the war's onset, since this study is concerned with the role of ARP in interwar politics. The Second World War changed the structure of civilian defence, and the political field also altered dramatically.

The title of this study purports to represent "British intellectuals" commenting on the issue of ARP throughout Britain. Yet most contemporary discussion focused on England, and even more so on London and the Southeast, although officials in areas of the Midlands and the North were equally concerned about ARP provisions. Many of the leftist ideas for large communal shelters were only necessary for, and relevant to, areas of East London, although issues such as air warden recruitment, training, and the administration of local measures were relevant throughout Britain. Newspapers and journals referenced in the thesis reflected concern over these issues throughout Britain, as depictions of modern air war caused citizens to feel that no one, no matter how remotely located, was safe from aerial attack.

Source Material

This dissertation deals primarily with the rhetoric of ARP as a political issue and the leftist literature on the subject. The scope of the study encompasses leftist intellectuals' thinking on ARP and civil defence within the larger milieu of interwar defence planning. It deals with political rhetoric and the campaign for ARP disseminated through leftist literature. Therefore, source material is primarily derived from printed sources – government and non-government books on ARP, political pamphlets, and newspaper articles. Aside from the vast official and semi-official literature, and the musings of a variety of eccentric and opinionated individuals, “leftist literature” represents the largest volume of material published on the subject in the 1930s. Books on leftist ARP include publications of the Left Book Club, and Labour and Communist Party materials. Taken together, these materials indicate the extent of leftist interventions in the ARP debate. Critical books by leftist sources are prominent in the civil defence holdings at the British Library, for example. None of these materials are without bias, and often authors who claim most strenuously to be “independent” can be found in the small print to be members of political and pressure-group associations, or affiliated to one of the military services. In the 1930s there was also a large amount of pacifist material and speculative accounts on the future of modern air warfare which will be outlined in the first half of the dissertation.

Public reception can be derived through newspapers and journals, and also House of Commons Debates and Home Office files indicating the basis of concerns surrounding

public perceptions. For background on official government preparations, National Archives records from the Home Office ARP Department and the Lord Privy Seal provide a snapshot of the degree of concern surrounding public perceptions over ARP, and the “agitation” for deep shelters. My treatment of these sources is representative, not exhaustive, and they are illustrative of the highly variable range of opinion on ARP. Public reception of ARP divided in sometimes expected and sometimes unusual ways that both the government and the critics found difficult to predict. The sample of newspapers in the fifth chapter demonstrates that the topic of deep shelters aroused wide interest, even if opinion on possible schemes was mixed. Mass Observation, the large-scale survey of the opinions of a cross-section of British society that began in 1937, provides a good sense of how the public reacted to public and private shelter provisions.

Unpublished archival sources on leftist ARP are scant. Extant archives, such as the papers of the Cambridge Scientists in the Joseph Needham papers at Cambridge University Library, give little indication of the internal dynamics that contributed to publishing these sources and launching campaigns for ARP. For the most part, they contain published pamphlets and unidentified typescripts and notes. For other individual critics, personal papers that deal with ARP activities are also slight. One reason might be because ARP campaigning was an activity that took second place to their full-time professions. None of the leftist critics positioned themselves solely as ARP experts. Rather, commentary on ARP grew out of their primary technical or scientific work, and was produced within a limited period of time, primarily from 1935 to the start of war in 1939. The archives that were most useful to this study are the Joseph Needham and

CSAWG papers at Cambridge University Library, the Islington Local History Centre in Finsbury for the minutes of the Finsbury Borough Council and papers at the British Architectural Library relating to the Tecton plans for the Finsbury deep shelter – discussed in chapter five. The London School of Economics holds the papers of Richard Titmuss, the official historian of ARP, that reveal the extent to which former civil servants were concerned over charges of ineptitude surrounding their departments and interwar planning.

Study Outline

The structure of the dissertation is intended to emphasize the progression of the leftist critique of ARP in the 1930s, from the experiences of Spain to the first critiques of government policy and drafting of leftist plans for “democratic defence.” The final chapter consists of a case study of the most comprehensive attempt by leftists to institute a local, scientific deep shelter scheme, demonstrating the apex of pre-war ARP campaigning. The advocacy of alternative ARP ultimately provided the left with a prime issue to emphasize their ideas of active citizenship and the obligation of the government towards the people. The chapter sequence of this thesis accentuates the development and expression of these ideas.

The initial chapter provides context to the historiographical issues of the interwar left, citizenship, and nationalism. It introduces how the left attempted to fashion a

nationalist identity, and how ideas of citizenship and Britishness intersected. The second chapter establishes the principles behind civil defence and the implementation of official government ARP policy in 1935. It demonstrates how contradictory ideas regarding mass psychology were influenced by the limited experience of the Great War, the development of the theory of strategic bombing, and the musings of military theorists. The government, though it publicly praised the stoicism of the British people, was nevertheless influenced by fears of the mob and mass chaos in the construction of ARP policies. The remainder of the chapter explores the roots of the ARP program, the publishing of the first ARP Circular in 1935 and the immediate controversies and questions that surrounded the implementation of Home Office policy. The tradition of volunteerism and self-help are reflected in the tenor of these debates, and the conflicts between local and central authority illustrate the opposing views of civil defence.

The third and fourth chapters trace the evolution of leftist criticism of ARP, with the Spanish Civil War as the event that spurred the formulation and advancements of alternative ideas of civilian defence. I treat the ideological and technical discussions of ARP as twin developments that address both the scientific and political basis of the alternate plans. Chapter three examines the role of Spain in revising leftist attitudes towards war and national defence. While the chapter argues that Spain served as the fulcrum to leftist thought, it suggests that it was the need to defend Britain that drove much of this rethinking. Leftist critics derived both technical lessons and examples of effective political organization from Spain. British leftist observers were particularly impressed by local and collective action to protect against air raids, and emphasized the

necessity of instituting similar programs in Britain. These developments allowed the British left to re-establish the idea of the heroic and rational masses, and further gave them a model of active citizenship and an alternative to the middle-class ARP volunteerism inherent in government plans.

The fourth chapter explores the three major criticisms forwarded by the leftist activists. They formulated a technical critique of government plans, derived from observation in Spain. The Cambridge Scientists and J.B.S. Haldane were primarily involved in this debate, the former instigating an analysis of the government's "gas-proof" rooms, and the latter serving as the most prominent leftist advocate for deep shelters. I explore both of these campaigns, government reaction to them, and how the issues evolved quickly over a period of only a few years. It emphasizes how political rhetoric and charges of extremism affected the ARP critics. The leftist critics also believed that government plans would result in unfair discrimination in favour of the wealthy, because they relied on individual resources. This, naturally, went to the heart of socialist concerns and clashed with the middle class basis of government plans. Finally, these critics were concerned with civil rights and free speech issues in an era of total war. I argue that the response to these issues demonstrates the fruition of leftist ideas of social patriotism and active citizenship – encompassing old ideas of "the People" in arms and expressing the popular volunteerism evident in Spanish ARP.

The fifth chapter considers the final pre-war confrontation between wholly opposed visions of civil defence – the government's firm individualist approach and the mass shelter vision of the leftist critics. The firm of Tecton, headed by architect Berthold

Lubetkin, was commissioned by the leftist Finsbury Borough Council in 1938 to build large underground shelters. I argue that Finsbury can be viewed as a clash between differing notions of national character and the nature of the urban populace. Sir John Anderson had publicly declared the superiority of the more haphazard way in which the British state dealt with ARP provisions. This bias is evident in the rhetoric used by the Home Office in lauding the English preference for home and hearth, and their disinclination for crowded communal shelters populated by strangers. The leftists used the issue of mass deep shelters to make opposing claims about the national interest and the desires of the people.

The conclusion reflects on the mixed legacy of the interwar leftist ARP critique and its implications for civilian protection in the Second World War. It discusses how the predictions of the government and the leftist critics played out under actual bombardment. The events of the war highlight how difficult it was to predict the effects of aerial bombardment beforehand and to prepare the populace for this eventuality. Public feelings about shelters and aerial attack were mixed, with some evidence supporting the government's claims that the English people were disinclined to use mass shelters. Yet at the same time, many of the leftist arguments concerning the viability and appropriateness of local ARP measures proved accurate. The strength of the leftist critique was demonstrated through the capitulation of the government on the question of providing at least limited deep shelter, and the importance of local authorities in the delivery of civil defence services. The professional identity of many critics was validated by inclusion into the civil service as ARP experts. Many, including J.D. Bernal and J.B.S. Haldane,

were incorporated into official ARP planning during the war. Despite their clashes with the Home Office in the 1930s, their expertise was acknowledged and used for the purpose of drafting official defence policy and instituting new shelters, allowing them to express ideas for what they deemed “democratic defence.” The thesis concludes with reflections on the nature of the People’s War, which ties together the arguments about Britishness, citizenship, and the leftist conception of nation.

Chapter One

The Interwar Left, Citizenship, and Nationalism

The national debate over ARP contained many subsidiary themes related to social, economic, and political issues of the 1930s. The purpose of this thesis is to show how ARP corresponded to leftist ideas of citizenship and nationalism. The position of socialism within the national polity had gone through many phases since the early nineteenth century. By the interwar years, it was imperative for the far left and the mainstream left to draw heavily on the rhetoric of nationalism, entailing a tacit repudiation of socialist internationalism. This thesis contributes to the historiography of the interwar left by emphasizing the nationalist basis of their discussion of civil defence. Their version of British identity expressed socialistic overtones and intersected with the British volunteer ethic. Leftist ideas were not always set in as sharp a contrast to government ideas as leftist proponents argued. The government espoused a middle-class version of the voluntary ethic. The leftist critics, however, drew on the same ideas, although they depicted a version of volunteerism in which the people themselves led the process of instituting ARP, rather than following central government dictates.

The intention of this chapter is to introduce the spectrum of political belief within the left and demonstrate some of the problems faced by these political groups. I will then delineate how I perceive their position within larger ideas of the nation, citizenship, and British identity. The leftist intellectuals' appeal to nationalism was a direct consequence

of the divisions and challenges they faced in the interwar years. Later sections of this chapter explore how ideas of citizenship, volunteerism, and national identity evolved in the early twentieth century, and how both the government and the leftist critics appealed to these concepts. The final section introduces how both nationalist and socialist ideas were implied by the use of the phrase “People’s War.”

The Spectrum of the Interwar Left

The interwar British left was notoriously divided and chronically unable to forward their political agenda in any cohesive fashion. This analysis of the leftist critique of ARP serves as a novel means of assessing the tensions among British leftists in this period. Although the 1930s was termed the “Red Decade”¹ by some, according to British Labour historian Keith Laybourn, real socialist advance was muted in the interwar years.² The immediate post-First World War years had begun with tentative optimism by Labour, leading to a short-lived minority government in 1924 and once again in 1929. The economic difficulties of the depression beginning that year led to a split within the party and the formation of a National Government under Ramsay MacDonald in 1931. This event led to deep-seated bitterness within the Party and, at the same time, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) disaffiliated from Labour in 1932 in an attempt to solidify its

¹ For analysis of the mythology of the “Red Decade” see John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties: A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1996) Also see Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s. The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

² Keith Laybourn, *The Rise of Socialism in Britain: c. 1881-1951* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1997). Laybourn argues that interwar socialism went little further than moderate trade union activism.

constituency. Historian of the Labour left Ben Pimlott has proposed that Labour could have exerted some influence on policy during these years, but the Party was consistently wrong on tactics and strategy. Contrary to the contentions of some contemporary commentators, and subsequent historians, the Party was not in a position to front a revolutionary movement or “radicalize” the working class. They had little choice but to attempt to build Party organizations and improve their electoral chances, which later bore fruit with the election of a Labour majority in 1945.³

Labour was also challenged by the far left throughout the interwar years. The CPGB, formed in 1920, turned to increasingly divisive and underhanded tactics to achieve election under the auspices of Labour. They forwarded their candidates as “Labour” representatives and ran for the London County Council (LCC) in opposition to Labour.⁴ Though interwar membership in the British Communist Party never surpassed 17,539 the Party managed to exert a disproportionate influence in intellectual circles.⁵ In *Against Fascism and War* Kevin Morgan argues that many histories of the CPGB fail to place it in a wide social and political context, and instead consider the Party as consisting of little more than a series of changing policy “lines.” He insists that the CPGB be treated as a “real organism with real interests located in a real society.”⁶ Both Morgan and Matthew Worley present the CPGB as an adaptive party in the interwar years. According to Worley, British Communists adopted the Communist International (Comintern) “class

³ Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-5, 194-95.

⁴ Bernard Donoughue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 102.

⁵ Laybourn, *The Rise of Socialism in Britain*, 124.

⁶ Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Raptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935-41* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 10.

against class” policy from 1928 to 1935 due to home-grown factors. The CPGB was searching for the optimal means to forward themselves as the sole representative of the working class. The policy was directed by Moscow, but it was not an alien imposition on the British Party. Though not a “correct” or apparently “successful” approach, it was a response to current political realities.⁷ This “Third Period” followed Communist attempts to court the Labour Party and secure affiliation in the 1920s, which presaged similar attempts after 1935. In 1937 a “Unity Campaign” was launched with the ILP and the Socialist League, though it failed to tempt Labour to cooperate with the Communists. These vacillating tactics of the Communist Party towards Labour were, as Morgan suggests, the attempts of a revolutionary party to adapt to conditions in which the possibility of revolution seemed extremely remote.

The Communist International and the CPGB changed track abruptly with the Declaration of the Popular Front in July 1935. The Popular Front, from the Communist point of view, was envisioned as an alliance between all political groups opposed to fascism.⁸ The Popular Front became most prominently associated with the Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936. The influence of cultural outlets such as the Left Book Club (LBC) created an association between the campaign to aid Spain, the Popular Front, and

⁷ Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 12-18. Worley also disputes the notion that the “class against class” policy was disastrous for CPGB membership, citing a slow rise in membership after 1931, 12. Earlier historians have not been as amenable to interpretations of the independence of the CPGB from the dictates of Moscow. See E.H. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern 1930-1935* (London: MacMillan, 1982).

⁸ Though the Popular Front was deemed to be “anti-fascist,” E.H. Carr points to the fact that the idea of a broad Western campaign against war and imperialism predated the rise of Hitler to power. The first overtures for a Popular Front were made by Communist intellectuals around 1932. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern*, 387.

communism.⁹ Ben Pimlott alleges that the Popular Front became associated with the extreme left and symbolic campaigns that went little farther than the parroting of slogans, thus limiting its political effectiveness.¹⁰ The unresolved strife between the Parliamentary Labour Party, the ILP, the Socialist League, the Communist Party, and unaffiliated socialists had a direct impact on the hurried attempts at “unity” as the threat of fascism grew. Mainstream Labourites were still largely opposed to Marxism and suspicious of the motives of the Communists. Formal attempts to include Communists in the Labour Party were roundly rejected by Labour rank and file throughout the 1930s. Yet dividing lines between CPGB and the vocal Labour left were “virtually indefinable,” and though Labour was officially opposed to Communist involvement many Communists were active in Labour associations.¹¹ These ambiguous lines led to friction, but also allowed for unofficial cooperation between leftists of differing political allegiances on the issue of civilian defence.

Since the adoption of the Popular Front by British Communists was an adaptive strategy, it necessitated that Communists make conciliatory moves towards Labour, and also that they validate the traditions of British socialism. Morgan suggests that this acknowledgement was an admission that revolutionary politics were a non-starter and an acceptance of the primacy of the British Labour and trade union movement.¹² It also forced the Communists to moderate their political tone and concede primary political place to the Labour Party, even if communist writers, intellectuals, and activists continued

⁹ Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, 153-5.

¹⁰ Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, 202.

¹¹ Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 36.

¹² Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 38-47.

to drown out Labour in political agitation. In turn, the Labour Party continued to be a reformist rather than a revolutionary party. It worked through the electoral process, and was not geared towards mass movements, politicizing the working class, or militant posturing.¹³ In this way it provided a middle ground between the fixed ideas of the government, and the doctrinaire position of the Communist Party and its sympathizers. This view of the adaptive element of Popular Front politics is essential to this discussion. By any yardstick the Front, with its goal to halt the expansion of fascism on the continent and to exert political power in Britain, was a failure. Nevertheless, the internal dynamics of cooperation between leftist parties was an important step in building a leftist political constituency. “Leftist ARP” reflected many issues these parties could agree on. It contained undertones of pacifism that were slightly altered by Spain, but did not disappear altogether. In addition, it combined a critique of government foreign policy, but most prominently it promoted an ideal of British freedom as opposed to fascist regimentation. Alternative ARP stood for many of the ideals of the Popular Front, even as the Front itself was fraught with divergences and difficulties.

The struggle in Spain was a critical component of British understandings of the Popular Front. The importance of Spain to British interwar leftists is now a historical commonplace. A.J.P. Taylor argued that for the generation that came of age in the 1930s, Spain provided “the emotional experience of their lifetime.”¹⁴ The singular nature of the conflict even prompted some to view the Second World War as second-rate and “trivial”

¹³ Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, 194-6.

¹⁴ A.J.P. Taylor quoted in James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 13.

by comparison.¹⁵ In addition, the role of Spain in “re-militarizing” the British left to fight fascism has also been long acknowledged.¹⁶ This study argues this transformation was complex, and it was the application of air raid lessons to Britain that was the core factor in this shift. Miles Taylor has identified a “turning point” in the far left’s embrace of patriotic rhetoric, but believes this occurred in the late 1930s, only *after* the Popular Front had failed.¹⁷ I will present the case here that it was the “repatriation” of the fear of aerial attack back to Britain, rather than the advent of the Popular Front itself, that caused the greatest shift in British leftist attitudes towards war and nation. This approach considers the *nationalist*, rather than simply the internationalist, nature of the Popular Front. The application of civilian air raid lessons from Spain to Britain formed an important part of this shift, and patriotic appeals were prominent in the new rhetoric.

Both left-wing intellectuals and Parliamentary and local Labour were significantly involved in the Popular Front, and the issue of ARP corresponded strongly with both anti-fascist politics and the domestic goals of communists. As the 1930s came to a close, individuals from across the leftist spectrum echoed the calls by the leftist intellectuals and professionals for centrally funded deep shelters. Many of them belonged to a new generation of local working-class civil administrators who believed in the ability of local authorities to improve the living conditions of constituents. The idea of “municipal socialism” rose to prominence in the interwar years, by which local Labour leaders felt

¹⁵ Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 13.

¹⁶ Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Allen Lane, 1978) and Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Miles Taylor, “Patriotism, History, and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain,” *The Historical Journal*, 33, no. 4 (1990): 979-80.

that housing, health and education could all be influenced through local authorities.¹⁸ The LCC under Herbert Morrison was keen to demonstrate that it could ably administrate local areas through enlightened social planning. The LCC was responsible for social services ranging from public assistance, health, regulation, education, and transit.¹⁹ This development could be viewed as an “adaptive” strategy akin to that undertaken by the Communist Party in the same period. Labour politicians looked in alternate arenas for influence, aware that a national Labour majority was not close at hand. The interaction between the far left and Labour became even more important as ARP accelerated after the Munich Crisis of September 1938, and as the war began. The tenuous cooperation between both groups on the issue demonstrates one point of commonality during the period of the Popular Front.

The Tradition of Volunteerism in Britain and Conceptions of Citizenship

In Britain the concept of volunteerism as one basis of civil society had been long established and both the government and leftist conceptions of ARP appealed to this ideal. The arguments over ARP revolved around differing concepts of the obligations of the state towards its citizens, and vice-versa, during an era of total war in which civilians were expected to be military targets. Sonya Rose argues that citizenship, a contested

¹⁸ Daniel Weinbren, “Sensible Capital: London’s Labour Parties, 1918-45” in Matthew Worley, ed., *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45* (Chippenham: Ashgate, 2005), 202.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 21 March 1939, 36. The LCC had over two million electors, and elections for 124 County Councilors were held every three years.

category that makes clear who does and does not belong to the state, is “one of the most ambiguous concepts in contemporary academic parlance.”²⁰ Derek Heater points to the many meanings that have been employed to describe good citizenship over the course of modern European history. Opposing political groups have imbued the term with definitions that best suited their political goals at differing times and in differing circumstances. For conservatives, good citizenship was generally denoted by deferential and orderly behavior, while those towards the left of the political spectrum emphasized a more active involvement in public affairs.²¹

The individualist basis of government ARP echoed a long tradition of liberal values and notions of “self-help” that had predominated in British political and social thought since the mid-nineteenth century. Historians such as Stefan Collini and Robert Romani have argued that the development of a civic ideal in nineteenth-century England influenced political thought into the twentieth century. The professional ideal was defined by the demands of “social duty” and altruism. Gertrude Himmelfarb suggests the “pedestrian” virtues of the Victorians, including moral conscience and respectability, shaped ideas about government and the obligations citizens held towards each other and towards the state.²² This middle-class ideal went virtually unquestioned and was reflected by the myriad of voluntary institutions that sprang up in Britain.

²⁰ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

²¹ Derek Heater, *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education*, 3rd ed. (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2004), 198.

²² Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 4-8.

The idea of volunteerism and social duty as representing a uniquely “British” way of life was also important, and the endurance of this idea is reflected in this study of ARP. Other nations had similar ideas of civic duty, but the British entwined it directly to national identity. The idea of “character” was considered a determining factor for both individuals and nations.²³ The Victorians embraced the idea of a unique “national character,” evident in political and economic thinking. Robert Romani outlines the specific nature of the British civic ideal, which put a distinct emphasis on altruism and public-spiritedness.²⁴ This liberal idea is evident in the government conceptions of ARP. Yet the leftist critics were not content to rely on altruism, believing that provisions would not be made for the urban working class unless they themselves demanded that the government institute them. They argued that Britishness was compatible with socialism. Their language reflected the rhetoric of obligation rather than mere altruism although they too believed that a popular, less middle-class, version of volunteerism had a role in their social vision.

Indeed, these ideas had not been reducible to a left-right political divide, and the leftists had a strong nineteenth-century tradition of socialist volunteerism. This was rooted in associational civic ties, and many leftists disliked governmental intervention as detrimental to traditional liberties. De-politicized civic ideals at times corresponded to the entrenched nature of popular working-class conservatism. Yet socialists were often equally suspicious of governmental motives. William Morris, the pioneering British

²³ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 84-93.

²⁴ Robert Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 312-3.

socialist, had opposed continental, particularly German, models of socialism – due to “an Englishman’s wholesome horror of government interference and centralization.”²⁵ British socialists were, for the most part, particularly proud of their policy of eschewing violence and “foreign” socialism in favour of British gradualism and evolutionary change.²⁶ The broad-based language of civic volunteerism was used by varied organizations such as the Fabians, trade unions, temperance societies, and local councils. Each group inferred different meanings in this civic ideal. While some viewed citizenship as pulling together under the aegis of the government, others viewed it in terms of voluntary organizations and co-operative groups. Ultimately, however, these conceptions often had more to do with “neighbourly relations” than with the governing of the country.²⁷ They were framed in moral, rather than national or even legal terms.²⁸

The First World War showed that state intervention could contribute to the public good, and that nationalism could be compatible with social reform. The remainder of this thesis demonstrates the tension between the ideal of voluntary cooperation and state compulsion. While the leftist critics believed that the conditions of war obligated the government to provide material benefits for its citizens, leftist volunteerism proved equally important to the alternative vision for ARP. The example of Spain and the actions of local Borough Councils suggest how these ideas came together in the ARP debate.

²⁵ James Hinton, “Voluntarism versus Jacobinism; Labor, Nation, and Citizenship in Britain, 1850-1950,” *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 48 (Fall 1995): 72.

²⁶ Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1998), 5.

²⁷ Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France*, 312-18.

²⁸ Julia Stapleton, “Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England” *The Historical Journal*, 48, no. 1 (2005): 158.

Total War, Social Patriotism, and the Interwar State

The First World War re-invigorated some of the claims socialists had made regarding the role of the state in civic society. Despite the inability of interwar leftists to make concrete progress towards socialism, these ideas took root. Sonya Rose explains that during the Second World War citizenship was predominantly understood to be a moral and ethical practice to enable the nation to survive the extremes of the war. This patriotic discourse focused on the self-sacrifice of citizens in the national community, but furthermore presented the notion of a “moral community” which would build a “new Britain” following the war.²⁹ All these ideas were based on a long-standing understanding of the British nation but with a new popular twist that promised material reward for patriotism.

The experience of a total war proved that government could intervene in the economy and have a positive impact on employment, standard of living, and social welfare. Across the political spectrum, the idea of state intervention became more accepted and the left sought to capitalize on this trend. This development, as suggested by historians such as Hugh Cunningham and James Hinton, affected the left’s understanding of the state and their role as reformers.³⁰ The Labour Party had always considered itself a Parliamentary rather than a revolutionary party, and following the First World War the ways in which the state could contribute towards leftist goals became clearer. Labour was

²⁹ Rose, *Which People’s War?*, 14, 20.

³⁰ See Hugh Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism? 1750-1914,” *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), and Hinton, “Voluntarism versus Jacobinism: Labor, Nation, and Citizenship in Britain, 1850-1950”.

fully dedicated to a social compromise, described by Stanley Pierson as a “process through which the working classes were being integrated into a capitalistic system.”³¹ As Stephen Yeo has argued, collectivist socialism dovetailed quite nicely with the English axiom of “reform rather than revolution,” and the left viewed this strategy of gradualism as the epitome of British identity.³²

Paul Ward and Peter Mandler have both argued that following the First World War British leftists fully aligned themselves with the goal of producing a social-democratically ordered state.³³ The British left came to view the state as the vehicle for social transformation, and consequently adopted the notion of “social patriotism.”³⁴ Viewed as an implicit social contract, social patriotism was understood as essentially a compromise arrangement between classes. The ruling class offered incremental social reform in return for acceptance of the existing order and the parliamentary process, especially during wartime. These ideas impact the understanding of politics and ARP in this study. I suggest that war, or the threat of war, forced much of the left towards a new compromise and embrace of a social patriotism of a different order than that displayed during the First World War. This model of social citizenship integrated the older ideas of socialist volunteerism, but also demanded more of the government.

³¹ Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 346.

³² Stephen Yeo, “Socialism, The State, and Some Oppositional Englishness,” in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, eds. *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 358.

³³ See Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack* and Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 186.

³⁴ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 4, and Geoffrey Field, “Social Patriotism and the British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 42 (Fall 1992): 21.

Consequently, the left increasingly framed their views of citizenship in terms of the obligations owed by the state towards its citizens. Julia Stapleton views this development as centering on the idea of “material enjoyment,” a political concept that reached its peak in mid-twentieth-century Britain.³⁵ Peter Mandler emphasizes that in the interwar period, ideas of citizenship and national character were intertwined with that of a unique English character. For leftists, citizenship denoted a relationship of entitlement between the state and its citizens.³⁶ This is important to the discussion of ARP because many of the leftist alternative proposals were based on these revised ideas of citizenship and entitlement.

The evolution of the debate over ARP reveals interesting developments and contradictions regarding volunteerism. The government and leftist critics praised differing versions of the volunteer ethic in the call for citizens to become involved in ARP. In *The War Come Home* Deborah Cohen details the extent to which the interwar British state was based on private philanthropy rather than state intervention. Studying the case of war veterans, she concludes that volunteerism was crucial to the stability of interwar Britain. Although this era has been viewed as the genesis of the welfare state, she argues that the continued importance of volunteerism has not been adequately acknowledged.³⁷ The individualist ethic lay at the core of government ARP plans, as did the idea of cooperation for the common good between volunteers, local authorities, and the central government. Details of many aspects of official ARP were scant, and it was assumed that these

³⁵ Stapleton, “Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England,” 171.

³⁶ Mandler, *The English National Character*, 194.

³⁷ Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 18.

organizations would improvise as they prepared in the pre-war period. The provisions for both volunteers and home protection had a strong middle-class bias in that they were best suited to these households.

There was consequently tension between the expectation that the state was obliged to intervene in the interests of popular social welfare and the belief that individualism and private initiative formed the basis of both good citizenship and Britishness. This thesis suggests that volunteerism was important not only as a middle-class concept used as a substitute for government intervention or planning. Rather, leftists attempted to ameliorate a situation they disliked by organizing local volunteers to institute shelters and civil defence measures. They hoped to force the government into action, most particularly in providing funding for these plans from the central treasury. The impending threat of war helped the leftist intellectuals who proposed alternative ARP to articulate these sentiments and link a socialist idea of citizenship with nationalism.

As these discussions ranging from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century suggest, ideas of a peculiar British or English national identity were inherent in conceptions of citizenship and the state. They were also relevant to political ideas regarding patriotism and how national character should impact government policy. These discussions centred on differing conceptions of “democracy.” This is an important consideration because the words “democracy” and “democratic” appear often in leftist literature on ARP. Leftist writers often repeated the claim that ARP should be “democratic” without elaborating on the exact meaning of the term. It was assumed that

leftist readers understood what “democratic” meant in this particular political and social context.

Ross McKibbin points out that although by 1939 the word “democracy” was almost universally used to describe the British Isles, it was a highly contested term and varied according to class, region, and sex. He argues that, at least in terms of culture if not political participation, for the most part the democratic culture of interwar England was that of the new middle class in London, its suburbs, and provincial counterparts. This culture remained middle class and individualist to an extent that, according to McKibbin, even the upheaval of the Second World War did not significantly change the basis of the social order.³⁸ For the leftists “democracy” was inherently tied to their developing ideas of citizenship and what it meant to be British. This thesis presents ARP as a case study of how democracy was envisioned by the left and how it tied into the concept of the People’s War.

Appeals to British Identity by the Government and the Critics

As Peter Mandler reminds us in *The English National Character*, constructions of Britishness and Englishness were often contradictory and contextually dependent. In *Britishness Since 1870* Paul Ward also emphasizes that national identity relates to the political, economic, social, cultural and personal factors prevalent at the time any subject

³⁸ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), v, 527-533.

chooses to reflect on his or her own “Britishness.”³⁹ The difficulty in differentiating between Englishness and Britishness is well acknowledged by historians of Britain. The subjects of this study were largely English, though most of the contemporary literature referred to Britain as a whole. The secondary sources that will be cited below, and the primary sources throughout the dissertation, often refer to particular characteristics seen to embody “Englishness.” This thesis will use terms as employed in the original sources. Otherwise, “Britishness” will be used to refer to national identity except in cases where specific characteristics were generally regarded as uniquely “English.”⁴⁰

One-dimensional notions of English or British identity could not begin to encompass the wide variety of conceptions of the nation, though such ideas were easily employed to bolster political arguments. The Victorian ideal of both personal and national character presented early in this chapter still had strong cultural purchase in the interwar period. Julia Stapleton describes some of these ideas as marked introspectiveness, modesty, enjoying the quiet pleasures of home, and despising “alien” zeal and political high-handedness.⁴¹ Idealized Englishness was thought to be the basis of the English resistance to the extremes of both communism and fascism, although Ward points out that

³⁹ Paul Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

⁴⁰ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) offer interpretations on the formulation of a common “Britishness.” Marjorie Morgan in *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), notes that into the twentieth century British and English travelers often used these terms interchangeably.

⁴¹ Julia Stapleton, “Political Thought and National Identity in Britain, 1850-1950,” in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, Brian Young, eds. *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 264-6.

this argument, based on the “exceptionalism” of the English, does not stand up to historical scrutiny.⁴²

Opposing interpretations as to what true “Englishness” denoted were implicit in debates over ARP. For the government popular conceptions of national identity served as a comforting image that reassured them of English superiority. Sir John Anderson, Home Secretary in charge of ARP, frequently deployed ideas of Englishness in his discussion of government preparations. In a speech to the House of Commons he described the English state as less adaptive than its European rivals, but consequently also more solid and durable.⁴³ English people were also popularly depicted as light-hearted, unassertive and lacking driving ambition, yet reliable and dutiful in times of crisis. This was typified by Stanley Baldwin’s famous 1924 speech “On England,” when he stated, “the Englishman is made for a time of crisis, and for a time of emergency.”⁴⁴ The construction of the stoic Englishman was used to praise the ordinary people, yet, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapter, the government planned for mass panic should the people turn out not to be so tough.

The government also drew on two older notions of British identity – the perceived British preference for home, and mistrust of strangers. Such national characterizations proved practically useful to the government. The Home Office was able to employ the image of the English as “worshippers of home,” as described by George Santayana.⁴⁵ Since the English were assumed to be highly domestic and private, they were therefore

⁴² Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 102.

⁴³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 336 (1938), cols. 2109-2115.

⁴⁴ Stapleton, “Political Thought and National Identity in Britain,” 263-5.

⁴⁵ Stapleton, “Political Thought and National Identity in Britain,” 264.

unsuited to mass shelter schemes such as those planned on the continent. I argue that the government's recommendations for individual household air raid protection were intended to enforce subtly these widespread beliefs in the minds of "middle England." This constituency was receptive to language that confirmed the individualist ethos bound with their middle-class identity. Although many factors contributed to the adoption of the individualist program by the government, officials from the Home Office would not have gone ahead with the scheme had they not been certain of the support of the middle classes. As Ross McKibbin has suggested, the interwar political economy was engineered to serve the interests of the middle class.⁴⁶

This idealization of home and antipathy towards strangers and crowds also evoked a long-standing idealization of rural Britain. Though there has been substantial historiographical debate regarding the extent to which interwar Britain could be in any sense classified as "anti-urban" or "anti-modern," some of these images were deep-seated.⁴⁷ They held a rhetorical currency, even if most Britons lived in towns and did not wish for a return to a pre-industrial past. The individualist basis of ARP was designed to appeal to middle-class constituencies, many of whom lived in the suburbs surrounding London that attempted to re-create a leafy idyll within the confines of the city. Later

⁴⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 529.

⁴⁷ Sonya Rose highlights the extent to which depictions of rural England were prominent during the war itself, despite the fact that most British people lived in urban areas, Rose, *Whose People's War?*, 197-238. Also see Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 54-66; Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850-1925* (London: Routledge, 1991), and David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1998), 195-8. Angus Calder demonstrates the extent to which the idiom of rural England, or Deep England, pervaded the literature and film of the Second World War. Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992). For a view on the overemphasis of rural nostalgia in British historiography see Peter Mandler, "Against 'Englishness': English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 7 (1997): 155-175.

analysis of reaction towards shelters demonstrates that many people shared a dislike of crowds and a willingness to remain in a home shelter during air raids.

The leftist campaign for increased ARP was also based on a socialist reading of what “the people” desired. The problem of ARP was largely an urban one. The LCC under Labour control was keen to demonstrate that the urban centre of the nation was a model of “Britishness,” and depicted their civic work as an expression of patriotism.⁴⁸ The leftist use of British identity in ARP also rested on positive depictions of the masses, articulated in Spain and carried through to the rhetoric of the “People’s War” in Britain. The leftist scientists in the 1930s appealed strongly to nationalism through their promotion of “Anglo-Marxism” which asserted the need for education as necessary to convert the public to the goal of democratic socialism. This approach was in the radical English tradition of maintaining distance from the “foreign” practices of radical politics and emphasizing home-grown socialism. Anglo-Marxism was prominently associated with J.D. Bernal and the Cambridge Scientists who favored models of science, industry and the state that were based on cooperation rather than competition.⁴⁹ These experts advocated ARP measures which they believed to be “democratic” in both conception and implementation. The architects who drafted the Finsbury plans also had specific ideas in mind regarding the rights of the citizenry and the fashioning of a scientifically ordered nation that retained its quintessentially British character. The remainder of this chapter links these ideas of citizenship and British identity to the leftist rhetoric of nation.

⁴⁸ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 58-61.

⁴⁹ The ideas of Anglo-Marxism were outlined in J.D. Bernal’s *The Social Function of Science* (London: Routledge, 1939). See Edwin A. Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists: A Study in Ideology and Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1997).

The Far Left and Patriotic Identity: Reclaiming the Masses

Having introduced how citizenship, Britishness, and nationalism entered the debate over the ARP, I return to the leftist intellectuals and how the issue of civil defence related to their attempt to widen leftist political constituencies in the 1930s. The British left attempted to align their own ideas regarding social democracy with older notions of British national identity. An embrace of patriotism, however, was a conflicted proposition for the far left. It first had to rehabilitate the idea of a heroic working-class constituency worthy of being entrusted with democratic defence. Since the late nineteenth century, many socialists had viewed the British masses as irrational, anti-revolutionary, and conformist.

As with differing notions of the role of volunteerism versus state intervention, two distinctive ideas regarding patriotic appeals emerged in British political thought. Julia Stapleton delineates two cultures of patriotism that endured from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century. The first culture, which slowly diminished, was intellectual and skeptical of emotionally exuberant patriotic expression. The second form of popular patriotism was associated with various patriotic leagues, imperialism, and emotional displays. In the early twentieth century this divide was split more neatly along left-right lines than it had been for the previous generation of British socialists.⁵⁰ As patriotism began to be associated with popular conservatism, jingoism, and the new imperialism, “oppositional” patriotism that had been employed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth

⁵⁰ Stapleton, “Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England,” 156-169.

centuries faded from use.⁵¹ De-politicized civic ideals could be seen as corresponding to the entrenched nature of popular working-class conservatism as described by historians such as Jon Lawrence.⁵² Many leftists were highly suspicious of the emotive rhetoric of patriotism, as Stapleton suggests. Therefore, the notion of the “freeborn Englishman” that had helped to define earlier radical movements now seemed irrevocably bound with reactionary elements and fell out of favour with the left.⁵³

Interwar leftists consequently faced the twin challenges of forwarding their alternative notions of citizenship and Englishness, and revising their assessment of “the masses.” On the one hand, leftist intellectuals required the support and understanding of the masses to institute a socialized state, yet found it hard to overcome a deep suspicion of this constituency that they purported to represent. It is important to note that the far left did not have much choice in rehabilitating the idea of the masses. Kevin Morgan notes that the Communists’ strategies of the late 1930s were born out of necessity. Marxists were forced to “take the masses as they were.”⁵⁴ This thesis shows how the issue of ARP provided leftist intellectuals with a means of better accepting the masses. The continental idea of a *levée en masse* served as a prototype of “democratic defence.” Appeals to revive

⁵¹ Miles Taylor, “Patriotism, History, and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain,” 974-980.

⁵² See Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Labour Party activists, many of whom did not live in working-class areas, were regarded as meddling, condescending and ill-informed about life in these communities.

⁵³ Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism? 1750-1914,” traces the demise of this rhetoric on the left to the late 1800s. Geoffrey Field similarly identifies “patriot” having lost its oppositional characteristics and becoming part of the vocabulary of the right by the “late Victorian period.” Field, “Social Patriotism and the British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition,” 21.

⁵⁴ Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 51.

a British radical tradition and the lessons of the Spanish Civil War provided both old and new examples to help articulate what “democratic defence” really meant.

The idea of the *levée en masse* and early conceptions of the “People’s War” were old concepts. The idea of conscription to defend the French Revolution was populist and radical, and had broad implications for the future of mass armies composed of citizens who would defend their nations due to feelings of patriotism, rather than duty or compulsion. English radicals borrowed from this continental notion, though as James Epstein notes, the symbols and rhetoric of English radicalism relied chiefly on the idiom of the English constitutional tradition into the early nineteenth century.⁵⁵

In practical terms, the First World War abrogated the spirit of this patriotic ideal with the advent of modern warfare and massive conscription. However, it was possibly this very disillusionment that led leftists to look to the Spanish Civil War for its revival. The militias and local governments in Spain were instrumental in providing a modern, concrete example of the heroism of the masses in the interwar period. The actions of ordinary Spaniards under conditions of aerial bombardment, as demonstrated in the third chapter, provided a means of re-envisioning the British working class and providing a model for a new *levée en masse*. The leftist commentators who traveled to Spain presented an account of the heroism of local authorities and the people. This positive representation of the people was transferred to Britain with attendant nods to the perceived peculiarities of the British or English character.

⁵⁵ See James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Interwar Leftist Intellectuals and Patriotism

The literary far left contributed to the language of Englishness in the 1930s with evocations of a proto-socialist British past. British leftists had long emphasized a pre-industrial ideal that had existed prior to the ravages of industrial capitalism. In this sense leftists were not immune to at least some facets of rural nostalgia expressed by some politicians, intellectuals, and writers. This state, “before the fall,” included the “golden age” of the British labourer, custom, and mutual obligation.⁵⁶ Marxist depictions of British democracy were particularly in evidence during the later phase of the Popular Front. The formation and success of the Left Book Club, a prime cultural forum for the Popular Front, and journals such as *Left Review* and *Fact*, helped leftist intellectuals contribute to these national discussions, reconciling leftist political ideology with Englishness.⁵⁷ Popular and active patriotism was represented by the Peasant’s Revolt, the Diggers and Levellers, Wilkes and Paine, Chartism, and eventually the struggle against fascism.⁵⁸ Marxist Jack Lindsay published *England, My England* in 1939, extolling the communal England of lore. Lindsay and *Left Review* editor Edgell Rickword similarly praised British socialist traditions in *A Handbook of Freedom*.⁵⁹ These evocations of

⁵⁶ Stapleton, “Political Thought and National Identity in Britain,” 258-260. Reminiscent of E.P. Thompson’s accounts of the loss of custom, the “freeborn Englishman,” and the moral economy of plebian crowds are dependent on definitions of “true Englishness.” E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1993).

⁵⁷ A good example of this is the Left Book Club volume by A.L. Morton, *A People’s History of England* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), which emphasized the history of the common man.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, 41.

⁵⁹ Jack Lindsay, *England, My England* (London: Fore Publications, 1939) and Jack Lindsay and Edgell Rickword, *A Handbook of Freedom: A Record of English Democracy through Twelve Centuries* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1939).

English tradition were resurrected and merged with ideas of the people's struggle, identified in the Spanish Civil War.

George Orwell was the most prominent of the “leftist intellectuals” to be identified with outspoken patriotism in the 1930s. Orwell has been portrayed as a nationalist anomaly among leftist intellectuals. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to suggest that others also expressed nationalist sentiments and arguments in the 1930s, and furthermore did so in an arena not commonly associated with leftist commentary – military and defence issues. Stephen Lutman has written on the nationalism of Orwell, arguing that from his experiences fighting for a Marxist militia in Spain he developed a very English narrative of his experiences, which he then used to describe the “loyalties, emotions, feelings and values” of English life.⁶⁰ His most overt work of nationalist writing was undoubtedly *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, published in 1941.⁶¹ The title of the book reflects the combination of nationalism and social patriotism that leftist intellectuals desired. Lutman argues that Orwell's experiences in Spain helped him to reconcile his commitment to social revolution with the necessity of opposing fascism. This internal struggle explains the link, though not necessarily smooth, between *Homage to Catalonia*, an account of his experiences in Spain, and *The Lion and the Unicorn*.⁶² This argument is echoed in this thesis although I will also emphasize that the arc of nationalism between Spain and Britain was not merely a romantic one for British leftists. It was also a practical one, related to the organization of

⁶⁰ Stephen Lutman, “Orwell's Patriotism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2, no. 2 (1967): 149-54.

⁶¹ George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941).

⁶² Lutman, “Orwell's Patriotism,” 154.

local authorities and the participation of people in their own civil defence. The role of ARP shows how the rhetoric of “democratic ARP” was practically imagined.

Framing “The People’s War”

The Spanish militias were seen as a pure expression of leftist nationalism and as prototypes for a “People’s War” by George Orwell. Both Orwell and the Marxist military theorist T.H. Wintringham were prominent in Home Guard activities during the war. The arguments of this thesis support those of Tom Buchanan, a historian of British involvement in the Spanish Civil War, who views the leftist political education in Spain as the genesis of the “People’s War.”⁶³ The extent to which the Second World War was actually a “People’s War” has been thoroughly questioned. Angus Calder, who previously wrote about the war in these terms, revised his earlier work in his book *The Myth of the Blitz*.⁶⁴ The popular sacrifice of the war has been credited with producing the welfare state after 1945, and Labour was certainly well positioned to capitalize on this sentiment. Yet historians such as Steven Fielding have questioned the extent to which ordinary Britons desired a “new Britain” along leftist lines. Fielding has argued that the Labour victory in 1945 was not the result of any radicalization of the electorate or a desire for

⁶³ Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 190-91.

⁶⁴ Angus Calder, *The People’s War* (London: Cape, 1969), and *The Myth of the Blitz*. Sonya Rose in *Which People’s War?* shows how race, class, and gender limited the extent to which different groups were accepted as fully belonging to the nation. Also see Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998) on how “belonging” in the national wartime state was gendered. On “consensus,” the classic work is Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975).

left-wing social change. Rather, disaffection from politics bled votes from the governing Conservative Party and benefited Labour.⁶⁵

However, the phrase did reflect how many *wished* to see the war, and it was used by a variety of commentators to reflect unprecedented civilian contributions. The leftist intellectuals used it no less than the government or the press. Most of the popular representations of the “People’s War” were associated with “romantic populists,” such as J.B. Priestley. Though leftist political ideas fit well with ideas of the People’s War, the concept was not owned by the left. Priestley fashioned a middlebrow culture of symbolism and had a wide circulation that was populist and forwarded an inclusive version of Englishness.⁶⁶ His wartime writings and broadcasts became synonymous with the People’s War, and he outlined a positive version of mass Englishness. Chris Waters argues that the characteristics of national identity were fundamentally reconfigured in the interwar years, with Priestley re-writing the working class into the heroic national narrative, albeit in a de-politicized context.⁶⁷ The cultural expression of the People’s War also reflected specific pastoral images of the nation. Neil Rattigan, historian of Second World War film, has argued that particular images of a bucolic, “mythical” southern England were “made to stand duty for Britain.”⁶⁸ Consequently the very broadness of the

⁶⁵ Steven Fielding, “What Did ‘The People’ Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election,” *The Historical Journal*, 35, no. 3 (1992): 623-639. See also Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson, and Nick Tiratsoo, *‘England Arise!’: The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ John Baxendale, *Priestley’s England: J.B. Priestley and English Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 61.

⁶⁷ Chris Waters, “J.B. Priestley 1894-1984, Englishness and the Politics of Nostalgia,” in Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler, eds, *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain: Essays in Memory of John Clive* (London: Routledge, 1994), 209-10.

⁶⁸ Neil Rattigan, *This is England: British Film and the People’s War, 1939-1945* (London: Associated

ideal of the People's War meant that ideas regarding "democracy" and popular action – cornerstones of the left's ARP campaign – were by no means fixed solely to leftist politics in the public mind.

It is clear that there are many limits to the historical claims that can be made about the People's War and its antecedents or legacies. This thesis is most concerned with how politics was portrayed on the left and the attempt by leftists to use nationalist appeals to realize their long-term goals. As Stephen Brooke has suggested, the wartime Labour Party took care to maintain its pragmatic socialist identity throughout the war. Despite its participation in the wartime coalition, Labour continued to advocate its traditional position on many issues.⁶⁹ The case of ARP demonstrates both sides of this political strategy on the part of leftist intellectuals and Labour supporters in local and national government. They were obligated to concede a certain amount of moderation and cooperation with a government apparatus they disliked. At the same time they used the opportunity to attempt to forward their idea of nation, citizenship and democracy. To what degree they were successful in fomenting socialist feelings in pursuit of a "new Britain" following the war is not within the scope of this study. I aim rather to discuss what the "People's War" meant to these leftists and their specific ideas in nationalist and socialist terms and how the leftist campaign for alternative ARP fit into their vision of this "People's War."

University Press, 2001), 15-6.

⁶⁹ Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party during the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 7-11.

Chapter Two

The Formulation of the Principles of ARP:

World War One to 1939

Preparations for defence against aerial attack in the interwar years were a product of existing assumptions about “the next war.” These included the fear that poison gas would be deployed against civilians and the assumption that aerial bombing might cause a “knock-out blow” within days. The Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) concluded in 1922 that an enemy air force could drop almost 300 tons of bombs on London within 48 hours. Only two years later Sir John Anderson, the future head of governmental civil defence, had revised this figure to 350 tons in the first 48 hours in the event of a major attack, with 100 tons per day for a month to follow.¹ These figures rose further still for the rest of the decade and into the 1930s. In 1934 Winston Churchill suggested in the House of Commons that 30,000-40,000 casualties could be expected in a week to 10 days of aerial attack.² The scenarios that were considered likely in the late 1930s included 60 day attacks that would leave 600,000 killed and 1,200,000 injured, requiring £300,000 per month for coffin timber alone.³

The official historian Terence O’Brien concluded in the years following the Second World War that “casualty inflation” was endemic in the interwar period, beginning with the first ARP meetings in the mid-1920s when authorities revised casualty

¹ Terence O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), 12-15.

² Cornelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 437.

³ Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: HMSO, 1950), 13.

estimates upwards. The Air Staff assumed 50 casualties per ton of ordnance dropped, based on data collected from bombing reports from the First World War. Another official historian, Richard Titmuss, noted, “this simple and easily remembered multiplier soon acquired a validity to which, in statistical theory and for other reasons, it was hardly entitled.”⁴ However, the accounts of both O’Brien and Titmuss highlight the difficulty of making any definitive claims regarding casualty estimates. Both men noted that reports of bombing from the Spanish Civil War did little to discredit the use of the “multiplier” figure of 50 casualties.⁵ Consequently, it is clear that existing data was difficult to interpret, and that much depended on the perspective and pre-existing biases of observers. The accepted figures for casualty numbers became the policy basis of the Air Raid Precautions Department, which was established under the Home Office in 1935. By the Munich Crisis in September 1938, the letters “ARP” were known by nearly every adult Briton. In the words of one historian, “visionaries, enthusiasts, disarmers, civil defence, and pulp fiction” contributed to the fear of aerial attack and debate over how the civilian population could be protected from these dangers.⁶

A series of assumptions about the purported effect on morale of mass air raid casualties underpinned government preparations for civilian protection. This chapter will delineate these assumptions, and demonstrate how they contributed to interwar thinking on home defence policy from the end of WWI to the implementation of an official ARP

⁴ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 12. Casualty figures recorded in the Second World War were actually somewhere between 15 and 20 per ton. Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule: British Air Strategy, 1914-1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 123.

⁵ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 13-4, and O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 172.

⁶ Tami Biddle Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 102.

policy from 1935. It will emphasize the factors that primarily impacted the planning of civil defence and the prioritization of pressing concerns. Several factors combined to create ideas of how the masses would react under sustained aerial bombing, which had at their root the idea of the chaotic nature of crowds and the danger of mob rule. Based on limited evidence of panic during air raids during the First World War, government planners worried that aerial attack would lead to domestic chaos and demands by the citizenry for the government to sue for peace. These fears linked back to the conclusions made regarding the raids of WWI, including the necessity of war production.

This chapter will also outline the analysis and predictions provided by military experts on gas warfare and the threat from the air, providing an indication of just how entrenched popular assumptions regarding air warfare were. Moreover, it will be demonstrated that these ideas in turn informed official discussions of civilian defence, including how and why the RAF was prioritized over the other military services, but also revealing the pessimism that underlay discussions of British aerial defence in the 1930s. These anxieties about the threat from the air and its likely impact on popular morale led to the drafting of ARP plans in notably individualistic terms. The consequence of these analyses and anxieties was that the government determined that the individual householder ought to be responsible for the shelter of his own family, drawing on the long tradition of “self-help” in Britain; official policy discouraged any attempt to provide large communal shelters.

While planners at times took solace in the belief that during a war citizens would comport themselves with stoic Britishness, they nevertheless feared that the reality of air

attack would reveal the opposite and they felt the responsibility to plan accordingly. The Home Office held steadfastly to the principle of crowd dispersal, in order to avoid the threat of panicked mobs and the devastating impact on morale of mass casualties at a large shelter. At the same time however, the government placed faith in the rationality of individuals, basing plans for ARP on the individual householders preparing their own shelters. The debate between the government and leftist critics was consequently based on the leftist attempt to change the underlying class basis of the government's view of crowd behavior. The critics believed that the working class of East London would utilize mass shelters with the same decorum as middle-class constituents of the London suburbs. The final section of this chapter sets out the policies, the controversies and conflicts with local authorities over ARP funding, and how ideals of proper British behaviour contributed to the debate.

General concern and fear of gas warfare and high explosive bombing during the period did not necessarily translate into a galvanization of support for either government ARP or a clamor for alternative measures. The extent to which the general public was in a state of panic or concerned about ARP provisions varied widely between areas, political constituencies, and as continental political events such as the Munich Crisis prompted concern. Anxiety that ARP planning was proceeding too slowly was mixed with indifference and a frequent lack of enthusiasm. In early 1938 the ARP Department was headed by E.J. Hodson, a retired RAF Wing Commander who was appointed Under-Secretary of State for the purpose of publicizing ARP. He noted that recruiting for ARP

in the Metropolitan Boroughs “was really going on more slowly than was safe.”⁷ This could be attributed to many possible causes, including hostility to government measures, an inefficient recruitment system or general apathy on the subject of ARP. The situation altered yet again following the Munich Crisis of September 1938, which caused many to question whether digging trenches in public parks and sandbagging buildings was adequate preparation. The slow enlistment of volunteers was a grave concern to the Home Office and the House of Commons as will be explored, and the Crisis spurred the registration of ARP workers.

ARP and Civil Defence in Historiographical Context

The official British government histories of ARP, published in the 1950s, are *Problems of Social Policy* by Richard Titmuss and Terence O’Brien’s *Civil Defence*.⁸ These accounts set out themes that would be followed by military historians for several decades, depicting ARP as an adjunct to strategic policy and as a function of bureaucratic planning. Literature about interwar military planning has thus largely treated the subject of ARP as a minor facet of national preparedness. One historian has noted the dearth of literature on the interwar formation of ARP, since the subject was viewed as an

⁷ National Archives (NA), HO 45/18198, 30 March 1938 weekly ARP Committee meeting. Two months earlier *The Times* had noted “ARP Apathy” in the slow recruitment of First Aid workers. *The Times*, 14 January 1938, 10.

⁸ Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: HMSO, 1950) and Terence O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955).

“embarrassment for central government.”⁹ The preponderance of evidence, however, shows that ARP services functioned to much the same standard as other war preparations in the 1930s. The fact that it was considered a secondary priority, and that all preparations were later judged in the light of the war itself is perhaps to blame for the lack of focus on interwar planning for air raids as a stand-alone historical subject. Public reaction to ARP in the 1930s was extremely complex, with a mixture of fear, indifference, and resigned acceptance. It has therefore been difficult to access both public feeling and to craft coherent narratives of how government policies were received. This study aims to analyze interwar ARP planning through the arguments of the critics, who have received even less historical attention than has government planning for ARP in the interwar period.

One means of assessing public reaction to ARP has been to consider the role of the local authorities in the administration of ARP, a theme prominently reflected in this study. Robin Woolven has studied the preparation for, and civil administration of, ARP in wartime London. The provision of most services was highly localized, producing problems and opportunities for local councils. He argues that despite admitted failures and gaps in the delivery of wartime ARP services, the local administrators and the LCC generally preformed their tasks ably.¹⁰ From 1934 the LCC was dominated by Herbert Morrison and Labour councilors who were staunch defenders of local government, and who viewed ARP as a chance for it to do well by its constituents. Woolven has explored

⁹ Robin Woolven, “Civil Defence in London 1935-1945: The Formation and Implementation of the Policy for, and the Performance of, the A.R.P. (later C.D.) Services in London” (PhD. Diss., University of London, 2002), 22-3.

¹⁰ Woolven, “Civil Defence in London 1935-1945”.

the role of the Munich Crisis in solidifying government ARP policy, and the agitation for deep shelter in St. Pancras and Hackney.¹¹

More recently, historians have highlighted the importance of communal and social structures to how people perceived the threat of air raids.¹² Joseph Meisel has suggested new directions for the study of ARP through the consideration of the critics and local councils in planning alternative shelter schemes. He charts the clash of government ideals and the social commitment of progressive architects in the Borough of Finsbury in 1939.¹³ Following the Spanish Civil War, these critics pushed for “deep shelters” – those buried at a minimum of 60 feet below the surface and thus almost entirely impervious to even a direct hit. Meisel’s article is the lone account that places the critics of ARP within a wider perspective, considering the debate over the issue as a clash between the fundamentally different views of civil society held by the government and leftist scientists and professionals. My work echoes these clashes between differing ideas of planning and national identity in interwar Britain, and I position leftist ARP criticisms within the wider frame of leftist politics in the 1930s.

¹¹ Respectively, Robin Woolven, “London, Munich, and ARP,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 43 (1998); “Air Raid Precautions in St. Pancras, 1935-45: The Borough Against the German Air Force,” *Camden History Review*, 16 (1989), and “First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions,” *Hackney History*, 6 (2000).

¹² Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992); John Gregg, *The Shelter of The Tubes: Tube Sheltering in London* (Harrow Weald: Capital Transport Publishing, 2001); Philip Ziegler, *London at War, 1939-1945* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), and David Gloster, “Architecture and the Air Raid: Shelter Technologies and the British Government 1938-44” (MsC. Thesis, Imperial College, London, 1997).

¹³ Joseph S. Meisel, “Air Raid Shelter Policy and its Critics in Britain before the Second World War,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 5, no. 3 (1994).

WWI Legacy: Morale and ARP

The advent of air attack during the Great War shocked the national consciousness with the realization that Britain was no longer an “island fortress,” naturally protected from the turbulent politics of the continent. The spectre of aerial invasion was first popularized by H. G. Wells whose novel *War in the Air*, published in 1908, emphasized the destructive power of aerial technology and the fear that England had lost its position of international superiority and ingenuity.¹⁴ Historians of science fiction such as I.F. Clarke have explored how the depiction of air raids and enemy invasion in the genre was rooted in fears of mechanical modernity.¹⁵ Several historians have similarly pointed to how uncertainty over new technologies fueled the proliferation of speculative novels.¹⁶ The first air attack targeting civilians in London occurred on 31 May 1915, which killed seven people, injured 35, and caused £19,000 in damages. D. H. Lawrence was unlikely to have been alone in envisioning the Zeppelin as an apocalyptic symbol.¹⁷ By the end of the war, raiding aircraft had dropped 6,000 bombs on Britain, causing 556 fatalities and 1,357 injuries. The creation of the Royal Air Force (RAF) on 1 April 1918 was a response to the heightened role of airpower in warfare and reflected in part the need to defend Britain from aerial marauders.

¹⁴ Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (London: MacMillan, 1986), 64.

¹⁵ Ignatius Frederick Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966). Also see John Gooch, *The Prospect of War: Studies in British Defence Policy, 1847-1942* (London: Frank Cass, 1981).

¹⁶ Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1857-1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Martin Ceadel, “Popular Fiction in the Next War, 1918-1939” in Frank Gloversmith, ed. *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), and Christopher Joel Simer, “Apocalyptic Visions: Fear of Aerial Attack in Britain, 1920-1938,” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1999).

¹⁷ Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, 73, quoting a 1915 letter by D.H. Lawrence.

Because aerial attack was a novel development during the First World War, it provoked a radical rethinking of the role of the civilian in war. Governmental discussion of civil defence focused on the maintenance of public order, while civilians were, not unnaturally, most concerned with physical protection from aerial bombs. The limited experience of aerial attack on London and other British cities, beginning in 1915, raised fears of mass panic as citizens took *ad hoc* shelter in available underground spaces such as the London Tube. Passive civilian defence measures were an afterthought, driven for the most part by public demand.

Interwar discussion of ARP rested largely on the official interpretation of the public reaction to air raids during the First World War, although there was contradictory evidence to support claims of either panic or stoic acceptance of air raids. The official historian of ARP, Richard Titmuss, certainly believed that the problem of civilian morale were foremost in the minds of interwar planners. His account traced an arc between the “lessons of 1914-1918,” the lack of decisive new information on aerial warfare, and the obsessive power that the question of civilian morale exercised over policy makers.¹⁸ The nature of these debates reflects the contradictory way in which the problem of civilian morale was explored. On the one hand, the novel experience of aerial bombardment did produce a certain amount of panic and a rush to underground shelters. The psychological strain provoked by these raids had a profound effect since the random nature of attack could traumatize even the most stoic. As H.G. Wells, an early prophet of aerial destruction, admitted to his friend Arnold Bennett “in air raids he was afraid of going to

¹⁸ London School of Economics, Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add_1/1, June 1946 memorandum.

pieces altogether.”¹⁹ On the other hand, none of these raids produced anything approaching the chaos expected by the most pessimistic, such as the collapse of central government. Convinced that such an eventuality was possible, a plan entitled “Emergency Scheme L” was secretly drafted in the later stages of the First World War to impose military rule in the event of a large raid causing mass casualties and chaos.²⁰ Unable to fully explain the actions of crowds and the ebbs and flows of panic, construals often tended towards essentialism, with interpretations of ideal Englishness serving as a means to explain why civilian morale, though shaken, did not break during the First World War.

The reaction to air raids immediately brought to the fore questions about class and race in the behaviour of the working-class residents of London. It was, for the most part, residents of the East End who utilized Tube stations as shelters, due to the fact that these densely populated and industrial areas were targeted by German planes. Government officials claimed that when the Germans commenced nighttime Gotha raids in September 1917 up to 300,000 Londoners, mostly from these Eastern Boroughs, sought shelter in Tube stations. Race was an important part of these conversations, since there were many European and Jewish immigrants and refugees living in the area. Noel Pemberton Billing, an aviator and independent MP known for his extreme right-wing views, called in the House of Commons for the police to ensure that British women and children were guaranteed primary access to these shelters before they were filled by foreigners.²¹ Class

¹⁹ Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, 76.

²⁰ Brock Millman, “British Home Defence Planning and Civil Dissent, 1917-1918,” *War in History*, 5, no. 2 (April 1998): 204-232.

²¹ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 58-9.

was also a major issue in elite depictions of mass chaos and fears that the large numbers of working-class people who sheltered in Tube stations would not be able to comport themselves in the correct manner that it was assumed middle-class people would. Concern over the behavior of the poor in London's East End coloured interwar government plans and was addressed by the leftist critique. Their counter-arguments regarding the needs of the poor in the East End spoke directly to issues of class, as will be demonstrated in chapter four.

Historians such as Tami Biddle Davis and Barry Powers agree that government officials were extremely worried about civilian morale and the rebellious potential of crowds. Yet they also suggest that worry and frustration, along with anger over the inadequacy of British defences, were erroneously conflated with panic by the press during the First World War.²² Despite some hand-wringing, it was clear that contemporary observers were not unanimous in the belief that mass panic was an immediate danger. Fear, dread, and small-scale bouts of panic did not necessarily correspond to a lack of courage or the fatal collapse of civilian morale. The popular press may well have sensationalistically inflated public fear, both to sell newspapers and to pressure the government for improved civil defence. Terence O'Brien, for instance, pointed to the vague nature of the data from the First World War: at times the British public "had reacted to air bombardment in a mood of indignation; at other times and places it had shown some tendency to panic."²³ Some observers noted that a marked stiffening of resolve and an increased willingness to fight often quickly followed major

²² Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 23, and Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 61-3.

²³ O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 18.

raids.²⁴ Richard Titmuss believed that official commentators were “too remote” from the ordinary people, and that this may have influenced official reporting. He argued that flocking to Tube stations at night was not necessarily a sign of panic at all. Rather than waiting for official ARP measures to be enacted, the population was merely adapting to the dangers and acting in a logical and rational way.²⁵ Similarly Winston Churchill believed that shelters for munitions factories would instill “confidence” in workers, and he denied that such measures would hamper productivity.²⁶

Even though mass disaffection did not occur during the First World War, the public did exert pressure on war strategy, a development that critics perceived as a dangerous precedent akin to “mob rule.” In the aftermath of attacks in June 1917 there were calls for retaliatory raids on Germany. The *Daily Mail* published photographs of child victims of an air raid along with a “Reprisal Map” of German towns.²⁷ There were also demands that existing military aircraft be used primarily for home defence, rather than be deployed in support of land forces on the continent. In March 1916 the *Manchester Guardian*, questioning the state of British air defences, proposed that the nation should have its own fleet of Zeppelins.²⁸ Such examples prompted concern in conservative circles that public fears might completely overtake the prosecution of the war. The *Spectator*, a newspaper catering to conservative and upper middle-class readers,

²⁴ Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 14.

²⁵ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 22.

²⁶ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 60-1.

²⁷ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 55. Demands for reprisal air raids were also featured in letters to the editor in *The Times*, 16 June 1917, 7.

²⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 March 1916, 5.

argued that policy should not be based on public emotion and anger.²⁹ Defence measures were nevertheless equally aimed at satisfying the civilian population as they were designed to produce tangible tactical advantage.³⁰ Aircraft had hitherto been imagined in offensive terms by individuals such as Major-General Hugh Trenchard, Commander in Chief of the Royal Flying Corps, and the force had scrambled to cobble together a series of defence measures.³¹

The literature on British air policy and civilian defence during the First World War lends credence to the argument that government policy on public safety was in fact reactionary and based on acquiescence to public demands.³² Central authorities initially refused to provide air raid warnings or to advise the public of air raid casualties, due to the fear of panic or defeatism. Yet these measures were eventually instituted, perhaps because of a greater concern that the lack of their provision would cause more, rather than less, panic. These official responses, however reluctant, established the precedent of popular action leading to improved civil defence. The critics of the 1930s, no doubt aware of the role public pressure played in instituting rudimentary ARP during the First World War, attempted to muster a similar sense of public outrage in the years preceding the Second World War. As strategic bombing theory came into its own in the interwar years, fears of public unruliness in the face of air attack were foremost in the minds of ARP planners, as was the determination to keep individuals under cover in their own homes instead of in mass public shelters.

²⁹ Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 22.

³⁰ Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 15.

³¹ Scot Robertson, *The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing Doctrine, 1919-1939* (London: Praeger, 1995), 16-7.

³² Robertson, *The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing Doctrine*, 18.

Imagining War: Popular Culture and Extreme Predictions

The legacy of WWI regarding civilian morale was consequently mixed, although fear was the dominant theme that pervaded accounts of aerial bombing. Yet, as David Edgerton argues in *England and the Aeroplane*, hopeful visions of aviation were foremost in the public mind during the interwar years.³³ Certainly the wide circulation of publications such *Popular Aviation*, the *Aeroplane*, and *Popular Flying*, which published the Biggles short stories by W.E. Johns, attests to the allure of flying for the general public. Robert Wohl points out that while most observers expressed a dread of aerial warfare, fear co-existed with the hope that aviation would usher in a new age of international understanding and scientific progress.³⁴

Moreover, some military observers believed that both poison gas and airplane technology might prevent a recurrence of trench warfare and shorten future conflicts. Military commentator Basil Liddell Hart believed that the fear of an attack that might level infrastructure and military capacity in a single raid could serve as a deterrent to prevent nations from going to war. At the very least, these fears might force warring states to negotiate quickly, making warfare more “humane.” He suggested that poison gas was the ideal weapon, citing statistics from the Great War demonstrating that the proportion of deaths to injuries among soldiers who had been gassed was far less than with the use of “legitimate” weapons, notwithstanding the permanent injury that many of

³³ David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (London: MacMillan, 1991), preface, 13.

³⁴ Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination: 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

these victims suffered.³⁵ J.B.S. Haldane also forwarded similar points in a lecture given around the same time.³⁶

Yet these hopeful visions never gained mainstream currency in the interwar years. For both sensationalistic and political reasons, predictions of annihilation through air and gas warfare dominated public perceptions of the next war. Historian Martin Ceadel enumerates at least 80 interwar works of fiction that followed a formulaic narrative of destruction. Although most were second-rate pieces and “just another prophecy about the next war,” they reveal public fears, which in turn influenced policy.³⁷ Most importantly the fear of gas warfare, thought to be capable of obliterating entire cities by aircraft, was reflected in fiction and film. The prospect of gas warfare used on civilians was described with “a host of half-accurate, but pejorative, descriptions and adjectives, [provoking] vivid images of human suffering and agony.”³⁸ In 1926 the second Earl of Halsbury, an air officer in the First World War, published a dramatic novel, *1944*, based on his conviction that chemical weapons might become the weapons of choice over conventional bombs.³⁹ According to Neville Jones, although Halsbury’s novel was both speculative and sensationalistic, his arguments had a “profound influence” on political thinking given that he held the status of an expert commentator on the subject.⁴⁰ The film adaptation of H.G Wells’ *Shape of Things to Come*, released in 1936, represented the

³⁵ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Paris: or the Future of War* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1925), 45.

³⁶ J.B.S. Haldane, *Callinicus: A Defence of Chemical Warfare* (London: Keegan Paul, 1925).

³⁷ Martin Ceadel, “Popular Fiction in the Next War, 1918-1939” in Frank Gloversmith, ed. *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), 161-63.

³⁸ James W. Hammond, *Poison Gas: The Myth Versus Reality* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 14.

³⁹ Earl Halsbury, *1944* (London: Thorton Butterworth, Ltd., 1926), 7.

⁴⁰ Neville Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power: A History of the British Bomber Force 1923-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 41.

most extreme version of events. It depicted a world in which strategic bombing and chemical warfare would reduce humankind to a new Dark Age.

Given such drastic predictions, and the memory of the veterans who had been victims of gas warfare during the First World War, it is not unnatural that initial government plans for ARP focused largely on anti-gas measures. These included recommendations for the construction of “gas-proof” refuge rooms in individual homes. By the time the Home Office created its ARP Department in 1935, the government had already decided on a policy of universal gas mask distribution. Few officials put much stock in the international illegality of employing gas – universally viewed as an “illegitimate” weapon of war.⁴¹ The proscription against the use of gas had been formalized in the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.⁴² A 1920 League of Nations report concluded that the use of gas was no crueler than conventional tactics, but that the use of such weapons against civilians was nevertheless “barbarous and inexcusable.”⁴³ The primary international agreement regarding the use of poison gas was the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which banned the use of chemical warfare, although it said nothing of research, manufacture, and storage.⁴⁴ The British government, along with all the other major powers, continued to test chemical weapons. Interwar treaties and proscriptions

⁴¹ Wyndham D. Miles, “The Idea of Chemical Warfare in Modern Times,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 31, no. 2 (April-June 1970): 297-304.

⁴² Richard M. Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1-3, 15-6.

⁴³ Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo*, 71.

⁴⁴ F.L. Haber, *The Poisonous Cloud: Chemical Warfare in the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 295.

against gas served simply to make its development all the more secretive,⁴⁵ thereby enabling the worst scenarios about its possible use to be peddled by fear mongers.

Gas warfare was used in Abyssinia by Mussolini's forces in 1936, a little-publicized event that nevertheless is notable for the fact that Italian attempts to concoct mustard gas bombs proved quite ineffectual.⁴⁶ Yet given the lack of evidence to the contrary, failed gas attacks could simply be passed off by commentators as faulty attempts on the part of the attackers rather than evidence of the ineffectiveness of a gas attack itself. The products of German chemical science caused graver concern. The British publication of Otto Lehmann-Russbuett's *Germany's Air Force* appeared in 1935, describing German plans for the aerial gassing of Britain.⁴⁷ Sir Norman Angell, Labour MP and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, wrote in 1934 that "the next war will be an affair of widespread gas attacks by aircraft squadrons and gas carrying tanks."⁴⁸

The predictions of military men, novelists, and independent commentators suggest how air warfare was imagined by the authorities and the public. Ex-military commentators detailed the imminent aerial threat to Britain, and their professional qualifications lent *gravitas* to their conclusions. Basil Liddell Hart had, by the 1930s, revised his earlier optimism and suggested in the *Daily Telegraph* that in the event of a severe gas attack 40 percent of London's seven million inhabitants would flee in 48 hours

⁴⁵ Robert Harris and Jeremy Paxman, *A Higher Form of Killing: The Secret Story of Gas and Germ Warfare* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982). The Chemical Warfare Experimental Station at Porton Down, for example, tested gases and developed new civilian respirators. Joel A. Vilensky, *Dew of Death: The Story of Lewisite, America's World War I Weapon of Mass Destruction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 80-5, 98-9.

⁴⁶ Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo*, 101.

⁴⁷ Otto Lehmann-Russbuett, *Germany's Air Force (With an Introduction by Henry Wickham Steed and an Appendix)* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935).

⁴⁸ Norman Angell, *The Menace to Our National Defence* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1934), 61-4.

and 80 percent within the week.⁴⁹ The foremost Marxist military commentator, T.H. Wintringham, believed that massive fires would render London uninhabitable and result in the deaths of several hundred thousand citizens.⁵⁰ Sir Malcolm Campbell, a First World War pilot and land-speed record holder published his account of *Peril From the Air* in the late 1930s. He believed that an enemy could drop 1,000 tons of bombs in London on a single day, and that without greatly improved civilian protection a war could be lost in twelve hours. Uncertain of the fortitude of the masses, he believed that civilian morale came close to cracking in the last war.⁵¹ By the late 1930s, therefore, the optimistic vision that air technology would engender an era of international cooperation appeared outdated and naïve.

The Development of Strategic Bombing Theory and Elevation of the RAF

These fears developed into the doctrine of strategic bombing, which prioritized offensive measures over passive defence. Initial reports on the domestic effects of bombing by the Committee for Imperial Defence following the First World War set the tone for all future civil defence measures, emphasizing the disproportionate negative impact on morale compared with material damage. During the war the Committee had noted that “there is little doubt that in certain parts of the country the zeppelin is now dreaded out of all proportion to what is justified by its past achievements on land.”⁵² Sir Hugh Trenchard,

⁴⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 7 November 1933, 13.

⁵⁰ T.H. Wintringham, *The Coming World War* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1935), 34-9.

⁵¹ Malcolm Campbell, *The Peril From the Air* (London: Hutchinson and Co, [c. 1937]), 48-9.

⁵² Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 22.

Chief of the Air Staff from 1919 to 1930, who served as the high priest of interwar strategic bombing theory, famously calculated the “morale to material” effect of bombing at a “20 to 1” ratio.⁵³ Corelli Barnett has suggested that the erroneous figures of damage per ton dropped in the First World War fit a bit too conveniently with the Air Ministry’s goal of emphasizing the importance of the RAF.⁵⁴

The earliest conclusions about offensive bombing raids on German targets during the First World War mirrored those that had been made in reference to English civilian morale. A postwar survey, published in January 1920, concluded that though material damage done to the German war economy generally had been small, the effect on morale, on the other hand, had been considerable. Observers pointed to the psychological effect induced by constant stoppages in production.⁵⁵ Although the air raids caused comparatively little substantial damage to infrastructure, the effect on the discipline of employees at German factories had been disproportionately severe.⁵⁶ The very unpredictability of such raids, and the presence of constant air warnings, led to critical delays in the production of munitions.⁵⁷ One historian has noted that in total war the shutdown of railways or factories is “tantamount to defeat.”⁵⁸ In 1924 the Committee of Imperial Defence concluded, “It has been borne in upon us, that in the next war it may well be that that nation [sic], whose people can endure aerial bombardment the longer

⁵³ Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A New History of Bomber Command in WWII* (London: IB Tauris, 2001), 9.

⁵⁴ Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, 437.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 57-9, citing the report entitled “Results of Air Raids on Germany Carried out by the 8th Brigade and Independent Force.”

⁵⁶ Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 60.

⁵⁷ NA, AIR 9/69, September 1922 report, citing 1916 sources.

⁵⁸ Millman, “British Home Defence Planning and Civil Dissent,” 220.

and with the greater stoicism, will ultimately prove victorious.”⁵⁹ The possibilities of precision targeting were consequently woven into RAF doctrine, re-configuring the way the future battlefield was imagined and shifting the emphasis from conventional ground and naval tactics to the air.

The RAF had a vested interest in emphasizing the gravity of the air threat, and officers such as Hugh Trenchard commanded the power to elucidate this threat and to secure Treasury funding.⁶⁰ He left the most influential legacy of any senior officer involved in the Great War and exerted “total influence” on strategic RAF thinking.⁶¹ In early 1918, following the formation of the RAF, Trenchard accepted command of the bomber force. He presented himself as a savior of the RAF,⁶² arguing that the aircraft should be viewed primarily as an offensive and not a defensive weapon. “Trenchardian” thinking dominated strategic plans for interwar defence. His calls for offensive strength presented a clear vision for the air force at the same time as army and navy doctrine were ruled by uncertainty and stagnation. Trenchard’s statement to the Parliamentary Committee on Air Power in 1923 remained the guiding principle throughout the interwar years: “It is on the bomber that we must rely for defence. It is on the destruction of enemy industries and above all on the lowering of [enemy] morale caused by bombing that the ultimate victory rests.”⁶³ Michael Sherry has pointed out that ideas about air warfare were not wholly derived from tangible developments; the bomber was

⁵⁹ O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 19.

⁶⁰ The title of one biography captures the image of the man: Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard: Man of Vision* (London: Collins, 1962).

⁶¹ Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 3, and Robin Neillands, *The Bomber War: Arthur Harris and the Allied Bomber Offensive 1939-1945* (London: John Murray, 2001), 23.

⁶² Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 80.

⁶³ Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 14.

“imagined” before it was invented.⁶⁴ Therefore, the prophets of air power were actually strategizing beyond the technology available – aircraft did not adequately evolve to allow for strategic bombing campaigns until the 1930s.⁶⁵

Trenchard’s ideas fused well with the musings of military theorists such as the Italian proponent of air war, Giulio Douhet. An aviation enthusiast and proto-fascist, Douhet commanded an Italian aviation unit in the Great War and “waxed poetic” about the glories of air warfare.⁶⁶ He summarized his grandiose visions in a 1921 book, *The Command of the Air*, in which he outlined ideas that would become the standard doctrine of civilian bombing theory. He argued that civilians were now more vulnerable to attack and that industrial societies could be obliterated with relative ease, perhaps within days. Consequently, civilians would be unable to withstand a brutal bombardment and would quickly force their governments to sue for peace. These notions, furthered by British commentators J.F.C. Fuller and Liddell Hart, had a profound effect on RAF doctrine. The idea of the “knock-out blow” permeated strategic thinking.⁶⁷ After 1938 the example of psychological terror inflicted by German bombers on Barcelona and Guernica provoked further feelings of civilian helplessness and vulnerability.⁶⁸

Historians of strategic bombing such as Uri Bialer and Tami Biddle Davis have focused on the impact this fear of a knock-out blow had on official policy. Bialer, in his

⁶⁴ Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, x.

⁶⁵ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 114-5.

⁶⁶ Azar Gat, *Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Douhet, and Other Modernists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 56.

⁶⁷ Malcolm Smith, “‘A Matter of Faith’: British Strategic Air Doctrine Before 1939,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1980): 423-5. The term “knock-out” blow was used in a general military sense throughout the First World War. Throughout the 1920s it started to refer solely to air power capabilities.

⁶⁸ Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), 39-46, 129.

The Shadow of the Bomber, argues that the dread of a decisive enemy air strike played a crucial part in early debates on rearmament and, by 1935, had resulted in the decision to base armament on air goals.⁶⁹ The literature on the development of the RAF reflects the extent to which the new force, aided by the Air Ministry, tirelessly promoted their strategic role in interwar military policy.⁷⁰ Biddle Davis has charted the importance of the experience of the Great War in determining policy, and illustrates how exaggerated and inaccurate expectations of future aerial destruction pushed the British to invest heavily in strategic bombing capabilities.⁷¹

Exuberance and Pessimism: Conflicting Views of British Air Preparedness

In the years immediately following the First World War the RAF attempted to establish an equal standing with the older services and justify its continued independence. The service did not lack prominent supporters, including P.R.C. Groves, a senior officer with the Air Ministry during the First World War, and a well-known military strategist. He served as British air representative at the Geneva disarmament conference of 1932. As Honorary Secretary-General of the Air League of the British Empire and editor of the magazine *Air* from 1927 to 1929, his ideas were widely disseminated to both popular and specialist audiences. Throughout the 1920s he contributed a column to *The Times* calling

⁶⁹ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 4.

⁷⁰ See H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars* (London: Heinemann, 1976); Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); Robertson, *The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing Doctrine*, and Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power*.

⁷¹ Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*.

for greater attention to be paid to the RAF.⁷² In his most important book, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, he argued that Britain had sacrificed its air power and feared that it was falling prey to a “progressive danger” by failing to keep pace with advances in aviation.⁷³ L.E.O. Charlton, air force officer and aerial strategist, published three books outlining similar themes of neglect and decline.⁷⁴ J.M. Spaight, an influential civil servant at the Air Ministry, was one of the most prolific writers on the subject of aerial warfare and published books with titles such as *Air Power and the Next War*.⁷⁵ These individuals were all intimately connected with the RAF and contributed to its propaganda effort by emphasizing the crucial importance of the air force for future war.⁷⁶

These propagandistic depictions of a weak air force have undoubtedly influenced generations of military historians. Some have begun to revise the themes of neglect, stagnation, and decline that were previously assumed to characterize the interwar British state.⁷⁷ John Robert Ferris argues against viewing British strategic policy in the 1920s through the narrow perspective of a tight-fisted treasury. He suggests, on the contrary, that policy evolved around the valid attempt to co-ordinate a rational military, diplomatic and financial strategy.⁷⁸ In *Warfare State* David Edgerton argues that the RAF represents

⁷² For example, P.R.C. Groves, “Our Disastrous Air Policy; A Defenceless Country, Neglect of Civil Aviation,” *The Times*, 6 June 1922, 15.

⁷³ P.R.C. Groves, *Behind the Smoke-Screen* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1934).

⁷⁴ The most popular of these were, L.E.O. Charlton, *War Over England* (London: Longmans Green, 1936) and *The Menace of the Clouds* (London: William Hodge, 1937).

⁷⁵ J.M. Spaight, *Air Power and the Next War* (London: Bles, 1938). Earlier in the decade he had also published *Air Power and the Cities* (London: Longmans Green, 1930).

⁷⁶ A Major in the RAF, C.C. Turner wrote *Britain's Air Peril: The Danger of Neglect, Together with Considerations on the Role of An Air Force* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd, [nd]).

⁷⁷ See Barnett, *The Decline of British Power*, and Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁷⁸ John Robert Ferris, *Men, Money and Diplomacy: The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-26* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

a prime example of how the British military and war industries were particularly well-funded in the interwar years. If the British army remained small, it was due to re-organized military priorities, and the corresponding emphasis on air power.⁷⁹ The faith placed in the RAF neatly served the myth of the “British way in warfare,” a concept forwarded by Liddell Hart in the early 1930s. He believed that since the sixteenth century continental military engagements had played only a minor role in British policy, and that the First World War was an anomaly demonstrating just how disastrous such commitments could be.⁸⁰ David French argues that the idea that ground engagement was to be avoided has become deeply rooted in the literature of British defence policy, although evidence suggests that the British followed an adaptive strategy rather than any one particular “British way.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, these ideas melded nicely with the defensive policy of the British army and the public desire to avoid the horrors of the Western Front in the next war.⁸²

The positions forwarded by Ferris and Edgerton are important in the consideration of civilian ARP as they suggest that traditional explanations for the lack of air raid preparedness, such as budgetary constraints, should be reconsidered. Civil defence should, therefore, be considered part of a well-considered larger military strategy. The Committee for Imperial Defence believed that it was irresponsible to divert resources towards passive defence measures when it was assumed that offensive measures would be the deciding factor in a future war. As Elizabeth Kier argues in *Imagining War*,

⁷⁹ David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ David French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), xv.

⁸¹ French, *The British Way in Warfare*, xv, 232.

⁸² Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter six.

civilians endorse those military options that best suit current domestic realities and civilian priorities.⁸³ Given the belief in the supremacy of offensive air power, it was only rational to devote resources to air armament rather than passive ARP measures.

The early post-war performance of the RAF lived up to the hyperbolic billing. The new service was considered to be a panacea for an Imperial Government with widespread strategic commitments. In 1920 air power was effectively demonstrated against recalcitrant rebels in Iraq, Somaliland, Mesopotamia and Afghanistan. Politicians such as Winston Churchill, short-lived Secretary for Air, heralded these efforts as a novel means to police an Empire on the cheap.⁸⁴ The campaign in Somaliland against Mullah Muhammed's Dervishes seemed particularly impressive, coming in at a total cost of £77,000.⁸⁵ No less a romantic figure than T.E. Lawrence encouraged Trenchard to send British airships to explore Arabia in 1929.⁸⁶

Due to the successes of the early 1920s the RAF succeeded in carving out an important Imperial role and was rewarded with disproportionate consideration in the military budget. The generally accepted "cost-effectiveness" of aerial warfare ensured that the RAF was viewed as a cure-all for Britain's daunting strategic commitments. Yet many RAF officials were disappointed that the First World War ended before they were able to "prove" what the force could accomplish with a surprise attack on a city such as Berlin.⁸⁷ The promoters of the air force, therefore, felt they urgently needed to justify a

⁸³ Kier, *Imagining War*.

⁸⁴ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 138-140.

⁸⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, 85.

⁸⁶ T.E. Lawrence to H.M. Trenchard, *Letters of T.E. Lawrence*, David Garnett, ed. (London: World Books, 1938), 662-3.

⁸⁷ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 158-60.

continued flow of resources and “manipulated the quest for an offensive doctrine in its crusade for independent status.”⁸⁸ The new RAF ended the First World War well equipped, with over 25,000 serviceable aircraft and another 40,000 planes on order. The need for defensive aircraft was also recognized, in acknowledgement that defensive forces would need to be well equipped to deploy quickly and effectively during a first strike surprise attack.⁸⁹ David Edgerton notes that, consequently, the RAF was completely re-outfitted several times in the interwar years with the newest aircraft.⁹⁰

Yet RAF officials were never entirely satisfied with their allotments and were convinced of the tenuousness of their position as the newest of the armed services. They were therefore quick to point to the weaknesses of British air defence. H. Montgomery Hyde, aide to Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air 1931-35, believed that there were hardly enough squadrons to meet Imperial defence requirements for the Middle East and India alone.⁹¹ Internal Air Staff documents from 1937 reflected the official position – that the RAF was in no condition to go to war and would not be ready for at least two years. Using the threat of German air armament to prod the treasury for increased funding, the Air Staff pessimistically stated, “There is no chance of their reaching equality with Germany in first-line strength... indeed we also stand in grave risk of falling seriously behind that country in the quality of our aircraft actually.” This information was based on an intelligence misapprehension of the strength of the

⁸⁸ Kier, *Imagining War*, 16.

⁸⁹ King’s College London, Liddell Hart Military Archives, PRC Groves Files, 3(f), citing a secret memo from the Chief of Air Staff, 18 November 1918.

⁹⁰ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 43.

⁹¹ Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars 1918-1939*, 491.

Luftwaffe. The Air Staff summarized their position as one of “shocking weakness,” a situation which could be only remedied by an infusion of additional resources.⁹²

Thus officials expressed doubt over the effectiveness of their own highly equipped air force, and at the same time they feared that enemy bombers might nevertheless be able to execute a devastating attack. Home defence was perceived by the public at large as not particularly reassuring. *The Times* aeronautical correspondent reported repeatedly on the relative failure of summer aerial exercises to prevent “enemy” bombers from getting past air defences. The first of these annual exercises was conducted in July 1931.⁹³ The following year, *The Times* noted that the simulated enemy was able to perform even more impressively than the home defence forces.⁹⁴ The large air exercises of 1937 demonstrated that the bombers were still able to meet with disturbing success, despite attempts to remedy problems of earlier exercises. The correspondent expressed hopes that the “erratic British weather” might provide some protection.⁹⁵ Yet there might have been alternative, equally valid, interpretations of the results of the air exercises. For example, the fact that the “enemy forces” – RAF personnel piloting offensive aircraft – were refining their offensive tactics could easily be cited as a positive development.⁹⁶

Black-out tests over the Southern Counties were reported to have gone off without a hitch

⁹² NA, AIR 9/76, File 1, Air Staff memo, 10 September 1937.

⁹³ *The Times*, 24 July 1931, 11.

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 21 July 1932, 14.

⁹⁵ *The Times*, 13 August 1937, 14. Commenting on the same exercises, *Time and Tide* declared them vague and not particularly reassuring. *Time and Tide*, XVIII, no. 33 (14 August 1937), 1087.

⁹⁶ In addition, contemporary observers were unaware of secret developments, most notably that of radar technology. The development of radar was central to the formation of British air policy and Wing Commander E.J. Hodsoll of the ARP Sub-Committee of the CID, and later of the ARP Department at the Home Office, had a strong hand in spurring on the project. Alexander Rose, “Radar and Air Defence in the 1930s” *Twentieth Century British History*, 9, no.2 (1998): 219-224.

in the summer of 1939,⁹⁷ which could also have been taken as a sign that increased levels of readiness were being achieved.

There was therefore tension between a well-funded and supported RAF and the pessimistic public protestations of those who felt that Britain was not adequately “air-minded,” and was falling behind in air power. The Disarmament Conferences of the early 1930s provide an interesting contrast between these two perspectives. Attempts to ensure multi-lateral disarmament coincided, disingenuously of course, with continued armament plans carried out by all the Great Powers. David Edgerton argues that only one British leader, Viscount Cecil, a vocal defender of the League of Nations, truly believed in disarmament. Disarmament in the end mattered little, and the notion that Britain disarmed while other nations did not is inaccurate.⁹⁸ Nevertheless the fears of the Air Ministry over the possibilities of the disarmament talks were doubtless influential in disseminating the appearance of weakness. Lord Londonderry vigorously opposed the discussion at the 1932 Disarmament Conference to ban offensive aircraft and as a consequence became known as “the bomber’s friend.”⁹⁹

Disarmament talks did influence other facets of military preparedness. Uri Bialer has argued that countering this “peril from the sky” played a crucial part in early debates on rearmament.¹⁰⁰ He argues that the British pursued other avenues of international negotiation until 1939, though none of these talks advanced the cause of British national security. The failure of these measures only fueled the pessimism of air commentators

⁹⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1939, 9.

⁹⁸ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 18-9.

⁹⁹ Ian Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry, the Nazis and the Road to World War II* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 68-72.

¹⁰⁰ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, 2-4.

such as Groves, who became convinced that the fear of reprisals was the only deterrent.¹⁰¹ Government ARP was therefore confirmed as subsidiary to offensive aerial policy and its principles based on the notion that passive defence measures were secondary to the safety of the civilian population. Even if politicians and government officials had little faith in disarmament, the definitive failure of international agreement served as one point that stirred many into action. The failure of disarmament, along with the rise of fascism, pushed the government to speed up the preparation and public dissemination of ARP.¹⁰²

The Development of Governmental ARP in the 1920s

The decisions of the Home Office on ARP therefore took place within a series of constraints and assumptions about the nature of war and the vulnerability of civilian populations. Given the limited experience from the First World War, the government felt it had little choice but to place greatest emphasis on the maintenance of public morale. Government planners reflected these generally accepted ideas, because they “were by no means immune from the moods and vague anticipations of the general public.”¹⁰³ Within this pessimistic context the preparations for civilian defence were formulated to address the problem of civil order, and the continued functioning of vital war activity. As

¹⁰¹ Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, 336.

¹⁰² Robin Woolven, “Air Raid Precautions in St. Pancras, 1935-45: The Borough Against the German Air Force” *Camden History Review*, 16 (1989): 20.

¹⁰³ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 3.

secondary considerations, plans aimed to minimize material damage and casualties from air raids.

Peacetime ARP preparation can be divided into two categories. Richard Titmuss summarized the early phase as “speculations running through the 1920s and 1930s.” At this stage, ARP consisted largely of “passive defence” including anti-gas measures, early ideas on removing the seat of government, and preliminary evacuation plans.¹⁰⁴ Until 1935, ARP was carried out in secret by the top strata of the government. It is not surprising that policy evolved slowly and that issues were dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis. The ARP sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence was set up in 1924 with a policy sub-committee added in 1929. It was decided that the Home Office and not the military would be responsible for civilian protection. The Committee’s purpose, however, was to cooperate with military forces in support of strategic aims and to minimize civilian casualties to whatever degree feasible.¹⁰⁵ Given the level of destruction and civilian displacement expected, government officials believed that their primary responsibility was to ensure the continued functioning of the state.

Sir John Anderson became involved in planning for the first time in May 1924 as chairman of the ARP subcommittee in his role as Permanent Under Secretary of State for the Home Office. Anderson has been remembered as an archetypical bureaucratic figure, completely lacking in charisma. Yet it has been argued that he may have been the single individual most capable of undertaking the thankless and much criticized job of heading

¹⁰⁴ Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add_1/1, June 1946 memorandum.

¹⁰⁵ O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 14-15.

up ARP.¹⁰⁶ His colleague Lord Salter praised his ability to synthesize facts into coherent policies, deeming him “the greatest administrator of his age.”¹⁰⁷ His entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* concurs, stating that his contemporaries regarded him as the best administrator of “perhaps any age.”¹⁰⁸ The priorities for ARP that he established in 1924 were never substantively revised.

The first Committee report, issued in July 1925, accepted most of the arguments forwarded by the Air Ministry without consideration of any counter-evidence. While the 1925 report thoroughly considered the main difficulties inherent in providing civilian protection, it exhibited several problems that would haunt planners in the 1930s. For example, the Committee unquestioningly adopted the air raid damage predictions from the Air Ministry, settling on the famous “multiplier” figure of 50 casualties per ton dropped. This casualty estimate had the effect of increasing official fear over public panic, and the Committee agreed that the maintenance of public morale was the most pressing problem of ARP.¹⁰⁹ In addition, they proceeded on the assumption that effective defence against the bombers was unlikely.¹¹⁰ Anderson’s eight areas of concern for ARP were listed as: early warning, prevention of damage, repair of damage, maintenance of necessary services, possible removal of the government, public education, legislative powers, and departmental responsibility for the necessary tasks. Anderson himself made

¹⁰⁶ David Gloster, “Architecture and the Air Raid: Shelter Technologies and the British Government 1938-44” (MsC. Thesis, Imperial College, London, 1997), 6.

¹⁰⁷ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ G.C. Peden, “Anderson, John, first Viscount Waverley (1882-1958),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008.

¹⁰⁹ O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 18-19.

¹¹⁰ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 123.

the decision to confine the ARP Department to the functions for which they would have executive responsibility in time of war, such as organization of the Wardens and Rescue Services, while other departments assumed the planning for their own wartime responsibilities.¹¹¹ This structure remained on paper until European events caused the government to revisit the provision for ARP in the early 1930s.

The Public Face of ARP: The Basis of ARP Policy and the ARP Circulars

The second phase of “official ARP” began with the creation of the ARP Department of the Home Office in 1935 to provide an official basis to hitherto vague policies. Wing Commander E.J. Hodsoll, who had been involved with policy planning since 1929, was appointed Secretary of the Department. Hodsoll had gained the confidence of Committee of Imperial Defence in the 1920s, and his RAF background enabled him to understand the aerial threat. He was also said to possess a “hide like a rhinoceros” in pursuit of his goal of publicizing ARP and attaining the cooperation of local authorities.¹¹² The year 1935 was one of increased concern within both the Air Ministry and the Home Office regarding civil defence. As one official government publication noted, Germany’s reintroduction of conscription in 1935 forced a panicked British Government to work towards increasing the home defence air force to 1,500 aircraft.¹¹³ The Home Office in

¹¹¹ John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson: Viscount Waverly* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1962), 216.

¹¹² T.H. O’Brien, “Hodsoll, Sir (Eric) John (1894-1971),” M.C. Curthoys in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2006.

¹¹³ Central Office of Information, *The Aircraft Builders: An Account of British Aircraft Production 1935-*

particular was aware that policies would need to be implemented and standardized, and that the public would need to be made aware of recommendations for ARP. This stage of preparation involved the detailing of “active defence” plans, including the consultation of experts, the issuing of ARP Circulars to local authorities and the passing of the ARP Bills in Parliament.

Though consolidation under the Home Office was necessary to initiate the official machinery for ARP services, it simultaneously proved problematic. Richard Titmuss noted that “the idea of a single department in control of all civil defence and casualty services was later – as Anderson foreshadowed in 1929 – to prove administratively unsound.”¹¹⁴ There were other structural and theoretical problems for the new Department. Little imaginative thinking on ARP took place between the early 1920s and the late 1930s, a period that otherwise included many strategic and technological developments. Air Ministry staff were so pleased with the original report that it remained the doctrinal document on the subject until 1937.¹¹⁵ These static ideas required radical rethinking when the threat of war forced the Home Office to formulate specific policies and put the force of law behind ARP measures.

The shortcomings of the ARP Department and confusion over policy provided many areas of contestation for government critics. On one hand, the ARP guides left many policy voids, sometimes intentionally in order to leave room for flexibility and alteration. Home Office files make clear there was confusion about many questions late

1945 (London: HMSO, 1947), 9.

¹¹⁴ Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add_1/1, June 1946 memorandum.

¹¹⁵ Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule*, 123.

into the 1930s. Virtually all ARP recommendations were wholesale inventions of a sort, which meant that the minutiae could end up consuming a great deal of official time. The ARP Department was also forced to deal with a daunting array of questions and requests with a limited staff.¹¹⁶ The actual writing of the official history by Richard Titmuss reflects the chaotic nature of interwar planning for ARP and the constraints within which the ARP Department of the Home Office operated. He was forced to negotiate the tricky waters of interdepartmental politics. Former civil servants objected to his implications of inadequate planning by their departments and were keen that the official history should make clear that these plans needed to be formulated in a short period of time.¹¹⁷ Although four years passed between the institution of the Department and the onset of war, in reality most of the crucial work was compacted into the period from 1937 to 1939.

Although fears of aerial attack often arose in public discourse, holding public attention on ARP was another matter. There was a constant tension between public apathy and fear, particularly in the mid 1930s. As Robin Woolven has argued, ARP as a political issue did not really take shape in the public imagination until the Munich Crisis in September 1938, which acted as a spur to both the public and the government to improve ARP provisions. E.J. Hodson later wrote that the Crisis was “a godsend,” which exposed the inadequacy of many provisions and gave the ARP Department time to admit

¹¹⁶ Members of the public often took it upon themselves to acquaint the Home Office with their own misguided schemes for ARP. Some of these stories made their way to the popular press, such as the case of a former army captain and short story writer who applied to the Home Office regarding his “invention” to make bombs explode harmlessly in the air. *Evening Express* (Aberdeen), 19 May 1938, 1.

¹¹⁷ For example, Sir Norman Brook was concerned that drafts of Titmuss’ *Problems of Social Policy* were unnecessarily critical of the Air Staff, heads of the Ministries, and the civil servants in the Home Office. Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add1 7/44, File 4. Terence O’Brien notes that the ARP Department began very small, and did not expand until early 1938, when headquarters staff numbered 120 people, with 240 working outside London. O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 112.

and rectify shortcomings.¹¹⁸ The Crisis also aided in the recruitment of ARP volunteers as the probability of war rose. The central government put out calls for 100,000 volunteers in London alone in early 1938,¹¹⁹ though it would only be after September that adequate numbers of volunteers were listed on government rolls.

Between 1935 and 1939, eight volumes of ARP handbooks were published, some with multiple editions, on subjects ranging from *Personal Protection Against Gas* to *The Duties of Air Raid Wardens*.¹²⁰ The booklets were also offered for sale to the public at the rate of 2d. The volume on gas protection sold the most copies of any of the Circulars, signaling the importance of that specific issue in the public mind in the mid-1930s.¹²¹ The first ARP Circular was published in 1935, when E.J. Hodsoll issued *Anti-Gas Precautions and First Aid for Air Raid Casualties* to local authorities. As suggested by its title, the first Circular placed a disproportionate emphasis on gas, despite later admissions that high explosive bombs posed a far greater threat. Official historian Richard Titmuss noted that preparation for gas warfare outpaced other preparations, partly because the gas statistics compiled from the First World War seemed to provide a scientific basis on

¹¹⁸ Robin Woolven, "London, Munich, and ARP," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 43 (1998): 56.

¹¹⁹ *Eastern Evening News*, 18 March 1938, 1.

¹²⁰ Home Office, *Personal Protection Against Gas* (London: HMSO, 1937); *The Duties of Air Raid Wardens* (London: HMSO, 1938). Other handbooks included *Anti-Gas Precautions and First Aid for Air Raid Casualties* (1935) and *Incendiary Bombs and Fire Precautions* (1939).

¹²¹ Home Office, *Anti-Gas Precautions and First Aid for Air Raid Casualties* (London: HMSO, 1935), which was published in 1935 sold 86,350 copies. This was "Handbook No.2" in the Home Office series. The handbooks were numbered according to when they were planned, not the date of publishing, occasioning some confusion. Handbook No. 1 was initially titled "Air Raid Precautions in the Home" but it was published in 1936 as *Personal Protection Against Gas*. Meisel, "Air Raid Shelter Policy and its Critics in Britain before the Second World War," 304. Home Office records indicate that by 1939, with the treat of war imminent, 700,000 copies had been printed of Handbook Nos. 1-4, and that 15.5 million copies of No. 5, "Fire Precautions in War Time," were due to be printed for mass distribution. NA, HO 45/18207, 1939 Memorandum, ARP Department.

which to proceed with ARP. One official, F. Wormwald, commented on a draft of *Problems of Social Policy* in order to defend his department against charges of “excessive pre-occupation” with gas warfare:

It is easy to make fun of this: but I have always thought myself that there were good reasons for it. It was the business of the ARP Department... to stir up public interest in air-raid precautions – and to do so with the expenditure of very little money. Gas was a threat which easily stirred people’s imagination... It would have been useless at this stage to talk much about the high explosive or the incendiary bomb for the Government were not at that stage prepared to spend the money required [for shelters].¹²²

There was certainly a collective memory of gas warfare from the First World War, and it remained prominent in the public imagination. The Chemical Warfare Research department of the Home Office undertook experiments and instituted plans to distribute 38 million gas masks, which were being manufactured at a rate of up to 150,000 per week by early 1937.¹²³ Anti-gas measures provided a highly visible way to demonstrate that something was being done.

The first Circular advised householders to construct a “refuge room,” which could be accomplished with the use of inexpensive everyday materials such as tape and newspaper. The gas “refuge room” was a way to alleviate public panic, or at least the fear of a poison gas attack. Government officials believed that public fears would be assuaged by stating that it required only “simple means” to render ordinary rooms gas-proof.¹²⁴ This advice relied on the assumption that householders had a spare room that could be

¹²² Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add_1/1, August 1945 Memo, F. Wormwald to Richard Titmuss.

¹²³ NA, HO 45/17196, Draft memo from the Treasury to the House of Lords on the cost of civilian respirators.

¹²⁴ Norman Hammer, *A Catechism of Air Raid Precautions*, 5th ed, (London: John Bale, Sons and Curnow, Ltd, 1939), 11-12.

devoted solely to this purpose, and the leftists picked up on this point in their critique. It could also be easily ridiculed, especially when it became clear, especially from the Spanish Civil War, that high explosive bombs posed a far greater danger. Frederick Montague, the Labour Member for West Islington, mocked the “paste and paper” ARP policy of the government as “the jest of the moment.”¹²⁵

The most important principle outlined in Home Office handbooks was the responsibility of the individual householder to construct his own air raid protection. This “self-help” basis of the government plan clashed with leftist visions of planned public shelters and the right of local authorities to provide their constituents with improved ARP measures, particularly large underground shelters. Sir Samuel Hoare, Home Secretary from 1937 to 1939, made it clear that the Home Office would only sanction the construction of splinter-proof shelters. He believed that cellars and basements could, with reasonable adaptation, be turned into suitable shelters, and a deep trench system in parks surrounded by populated areas would provide emergency shelter for those without house shelters or who were caught on the streets during an air raid.¹²⁶ An internal ARP Department memorandum from 1938 stated straightforwardly that “shelter rooms for householders and shelters in factories are the responsibility of the householder and the factory owner.”¹²⁷

The publication *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids* appeared in 1938. As the name implied, the booklet urged civilians to instigate preparations for their

¹²⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 329 (1937), col. 1937.

¹²⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 335 (1938), cols. 1698-1702.

¹²⁷ NA, HO 45/18802, Memorandum, 16 July 1938.

own protection. It covered five safety points, including the refuge-room, protection against fire, blackout precautions, anti-gas measures and provisions for the evacuation of children.¹²⁸ Except for the evacuation of children, all these issues were assumed to be the responsibility of the individual. Geoffrey Lloyd, MP and Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for the Home Office, believed that the Circular on home protection made householder tasks clear, and that “it must be assumed that householders, in light of this advice, will do what they can to increase the measure of protection afforded by their own homes.”¹²⁹ This policy of self-help, based on property ownership and private resources, highlighted the importance of class in discussions of ARP. The home protection policy cast the class difference over ARP into sharp contrast. On one hand, government policy was aimed to fulfill the requirements of the middle classes, especially residents of suburban areas of London. On the other, the leftist critics argued on behalf of the urban working class, believing circumstances of a modern total war rendered the policy of “self-help” immoral. In addition, working-class areas were more likely to be the targets of enemy bombers, as they had during the First World War.

The question of employer-provided shelters was particularly thorny. The ARP Acts of 1937 and 1939 required that employers provide shelters, and the position of the Home Office also pointed to the responsibilities of employers. However, there was little guidance provided. Official ARP Handbooks discussing large shelter design, including *Structural Defence* and *Bomb Resisting Shelters*, did not appear until 1939, at which point national resources were being secured for military uses, making it difficult to

¹²⁸ Home Office, *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids* (London: HMSO, 1938).

¹²⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 224 (1938), col. 181.

prepare such projects. The Home Office made it clear that such advice was only intended for such shelters to be provided by private employers, not by councils or local governments for the population at large. The state refused to supply public shelters, and the result of supposed “coordination” with large employers to build shelters was vague at best.¹³⁰ As such, the publications provoked the ire of leftist constituencies who believed that modern governments had a duty to protect civilians and insist that employers be held accountable for their standard of shelter protection.

Other provisions in the first Circular, which introduced the vague policy of “dispersal,” subtly underlined the concern over civilian morale. Dispersal mandated that individuals should remain in their own homes or workplaces in the event of an air raid and avoid large groups. This policy partially served as a convenient means for the government to abrogate the costly option of building mass shelters along the lines being proposed for continental cities. There was, however, a far more crucial reason for the policy of dispersal, which was the implication for public morale of a mass casualty event. A Home Office memo distributed to members of the ARP Parliamentary Committee laid out these principles, explicitly stating that “specially [sic] strong shelters which are bomb-proof or partially bomb-proof have the disadvantage that, apart from excessive cost, they would militate against the policy of dispersal because people, knowing that they provided better cover, would make for them and leave their own homes.”¹³¹ This statement is extraordinary in that it acknowledges that bomb-proof shelters provide the

¹³⁰ NA, CAB 16/197, The Committee of Imperial Defence Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee decided, with Sir Samuel Hoare, that employers should take “reasonable” steps to make safe shelters for their employees, with the Lord Privy Seal serving as the arbiter of what was “reasonable.” Minutes of the first meeting of the Sub-Committee, 12 December 1938, 1-12.

¹³¹ NA, HO 45/18802, Memorandum by Admiral Taylor, 16 July 1938, 1-3.

best protection but that they should not be made available for precisely that reason. The memo went on to state bluntly that public shelters should only provide protection against blasts and splinters, along with reasonable gas-proofing. The construction of permanent shelters for nightly occupation was considered politically inadvisable. As demonstrated with the furor over the Borough of Finsbury, the Home Office even vetoed schemes entirely funded by local councils if they contradicted the policy of dispersal.

After 1937, when the need for anti-gas measures was eclipsed by the desire to protect against high explosive bombs, there were increasing calls for deep shelter. The most intense stage of pre-war ARP was occasioned by the Munich Crisis in September 1938 and involved the frantic distribution of gas masks, the sandbagging of major buildings in London and the digging of trenches in central parks. The leftist journal *Time and Tide* ran prominent editorials, criticizing the government for continuing to concentrate on the gas threat. In October 1938, the publication also detailed the shortcomings of ARP that had been brought to light during the crisis.¹³² Following Munich the demand for deep shelters, built at least to a depth of 60 feet with bomb-proof capabilities, grew to such an extent that “ministers felt concern at the opening of 1939 at a growing feeling of restlessness on the part of the public over this question.”¹³³ Despite the publicized protestations and alternative plans of left-wing critics and councils, the central government remained firm on the policy of “dispersal” into individual shelters. Sir John Anderson believed that provision of mass bomb-proof shelters was “mistaken

¹³² *Time and Tide*, XVIII, no. 47 (20 November 1937), 1539, XIX, no. 40 (1 October 1938), 1334, and XIX, no. 7 (12 February 1938).

¹³³ O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 191.

and impossible in practice.”¹³⁴ Yet simultaneously the Home Office was experimenting with sectional steel shelters, which would become the prototype for the backyard “Anderson” shelter. The Anderson shelter was a curved corrugated steel structure approximately 6 x 5 x 7 feet, that was to be buried in the ground and covered by at least one foot of earth, hence providing protection from anything but a direct hit.¹³⁵ Though visually unimpressive and flimsy, most technical experts agreed that the Anderson shelter did provide sufficient protection against all but direct hits. The development of this shelter signaled that the government’s ideas on ARP had evolved and that they intended to deal with the problem of protection from high explosive attack in their own way.

Sir John Anderson did, however, make a more conciliatory speech in the House of Commons on 21 December 1938. He attempted to reassure the population that they would be protected against the effect of splinters, blast, and debris. Disingenuously, however, he implied that the provision of heavily protected shelters still remained under consideration,¹³⁶ although all evidence suggests that this was not the case. Once again in February 1939, when pushed to give sanction to local authorities to build shelters which could withstand medium-sized bombs, Anderson equivocated. He claimed that his department was continuously examining the question, but that it was not in a position to make a “fully considered and complete statement on the subject.”¹³⁷ This response represents a fairly patent obfuscation of the question, as the Home Office had decided

¹³⁴ John Gregg, *The Shelter of the Tubes: Tube Sheltering in London* (Harrow Weald: Capital Transport Publishing, 2001), 10.

¹³⁵ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1938-39, Cmd. 6055, Sectional steel shelters: investigation of the standard of protection afforded, 2-8.

¹³⁶ Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, 251.

¹³⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 343 (1939), col. 356.

against bomb-proof shelters long before 1939, though it was planning to relent very slightly on the question of deep shelters for industrial workers. This exception, however, was due entirely to the necessity of persuading these workers to remain at their places of employment, demonstrating the priorities of the central government to maintain war capacity and the obligation of citizens to cooperate with government objectives.

Local Authorities Take Exception to the Extra Responsibility and Cost of ARP

Politicians working in the Home Office, such as Samuel Hoare, were fully aware that their recommendations would prove divisive with local authorities and much care was taken with the distribution of the Circulars and in the drafting of the ARP Bill in the mid 1930s.¹³⁸ Even before the first Circular was published, representatives of the Labour-dominated LCC, the Metropolitan Boroughs and the Lord Privy Seal agreed on the necessity of presenting a “unified whole” for evacuation, shelters, and rescue efforts. Aside from the primary issue of funding, local authorities were also concerned with the administrative and policing aspects of ARP measures and how these might jeopardize their authority. Home Office papers relating to the preparation of the first Circular indicate the organization of wardens had given “political trouble” at the local level.¹³⁹ The vague definition of air raid warden powers was a primary concern of civil rights

¹³⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, 198-9.

¹³⁹ NA, HO 45/18203, Draft 1935 circular.

advocates. There were even suggestions that the air raid wardens might work closely with the Metropolitan police, which did not sit well with many local authorities.¹⁴⁰

In addition to these political considerations, many local authorities were shocked by estimates that in the event of a serious attack three or four million Londoners might suffer “acute panic, hysteria and other neurotic conditions.”¹⁴¹ Local authorities were given virtually no guidance as to how these scenarios might unfold or how they were to provide emergency services. ARP Department meetings in 1939 signaled that panicked communications continued to be received by local authorities, especially from Boroughs in the East End.¹⁴² Therefore, though the LCC had agreed on the need for cooperation, confusion by and conflict with local politicians and civil servants resulted almost immediately. The decision to officially place responsibility for ARP on bewildered local authorities led to a political struggle with the central government over both the financing and control of civil defence.¹⁴³ Local authorities were doubly displeased that they were allowed such little latitude in what type of ARP they provided, given that they were still required to fund civil defence plans.

The ARP Department arranged over 500 meetings with local councils in an attempt to explain the more controversial features, and to engender a feeling that “we are

¹⁴⁰ NA, HO 45/18129, Memo and minutes of a conference held 17 January 1934 between the Lord Privy Seal and the representatives of the LCC and the metropolitan Boroughs.

¹⁴¹ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 20-21.

¹⁴² NA, HO 45/18198, ARP Department Meeting minutes, 7 July 1939, 1-3, and HO 45/18230, draft letter to the Town Clerk of Islington in reference to enquiries regarding deep shelters, July 1938.

¹⁴³ Mass Observation noted in 1940 that the local authorities “had to deal with the considerable confusion caused by the series of orders, often mutually contradictory, which they received from government offices in Whitehall.” Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 152, Report on the War-Work Done By Local Government Authorities, 30 May 1940, 1.

all in this together.”¹⁴⁴ Meetings with local councils continued until 1938, late into the second phase of ARP preparation. These lengthy rounds of consultations were necessary because local councils continued to criticize the conception and handling of ARP – often publicly. The ARP Department in turn presented their policies as fair and reasonable. E.J. Hodsoll sought to downplay local fears, summarizing their responsibilities rather blithely: “Expenditure likely to fall on the shoulders of local authorities will be comparatively slight in nature and will, in effect, amount to the giving of time to the preparation of schemes and making arrangements for a limited number of personnel to attend the civilian Anti-Gas school on duty.”¹⁴⁵ Geoffrey Lloyd of the Home Office represented governmental policy as giving local authorities “as much freedom as possible” for the task of providing ARP.¹⁴⁶

Local authorities, however, did not seem to put much stock in this freedom. Opposition to the government’s ARP demands throughout the LCC was widespread and highly organized. While it was not unusual for the members of the LCC, many of them leftist or Labour, to clash with the central government, they saw ARP provisions as particularly egregious. Members of the LCC wrote to the popular press expressing their disenchantment; one writer to the *New Statesman* demanded an alternative to the government’s “ghastly programme.”¹⁴⁷ Nor was opposition limited to London and surrounding areas. In the industrial centres of the North criticism of government plans

¹⁴⁴ NA, HO 45/17197, October 1935 memo by E.J. Hodsoll.

¹⁴⁵ NA, HO 45/17196, E.J. Hodsoll draft of a circular on financial responsibility for ARP claims, circa 1935.

¹⁴⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 335 (1938), col. 1009.

¹⁴⁷ *New Statesman and Nation*, X, no. 234 (17 August 1935), 218-9, letter to the editor from Mr. Reginald Stamp of the LCC.

focused on the delays and confusion over the requirements placed on local authorities. In 1937 complaints voiced in the *Manchester Guardian* clustered around the burdens placed on local authorities and the lack of central co-ordination. In 1938, following the Munich Crisis, editors expressed concern over the general nation-wide state of ARP preparedness.¹⁴⁸

An outgrowth of their anti-war sympathies, members of the Parliamentary Labour Party had studied the issue of ARP since the early 1930s. Although the Communists later harangued Labour on its “delayed” response to the issue, members of Parliamentary Labour took up the issue early on in the House of Commons. One of these was Herbert Morrison, who spoke on behalf of local authorities and as head of the ARP Committee of the LCC. Critics included Philip Noel-Baker, Labour MP and advocate for the League of Nations, and the lone Communist MP William Gallacher. After the Munich Crisis, Noel-Baker questioned whether the country was ready for aerial attack, and insisted that a deep shelter plan be drafted by the Home Office.¹⁴⁹ Local authorities believed that ARP issues “while not themselves being of a military nature, were intimately and directly related to the whole question of national defence, and that, while Local Authorities were prepared to co-operate with the Government as agents, they considered that the whole of the cost should be borne by the Government.”¹⁵⁰ From the central government’s point of view, an agreement to undertake the full financing of ARP measures would give local authorities a

¹⁴⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 March 1937, 16, 14 October 1938, 12, 27 October 1938, 14, and 11 January 1939, 12.

¹⁴⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 345 (1939), col. 1709.

¹⁵⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 326 (1937), col. 1985.

blank cheque to plan fantastically expensive schemes.¹⁵¹ Both sides felt that their demands were justified, though it was the local authorities that initially had an influential bargaining position – without their cooperation, ARP plans would become a shambles.

As argued by Robin Woolven, finance was at the root of the friction between the local and central government.¹⁵² For Boroughs in poor areas of London, such as the East, this represented a class issue. At least two contemporary commentators believed that the story of governmental ARP was “in the main an account of the protracted negotiations between the Government and the local authorities as to who should bear the financial burden of measures against attack from the air.”¹⁵³ Spearheaded by Herbert Morrison, the local authorities argued that ARP was a national responsibility and should be funded through central government coffers. Representatives of the Home Office were forced into a series of meetings with the LCC.¹⁵⁴ The Association of Municipal Corporations, representing the business interests of local authorities, also pressed the Home Secretary on ARP. The negotiations led to a slight increase in central funding, with the government classifying the local authorities into funding categories. Among London Boroughs some of the wealthiest and least vulnerable areas, such as Chelsea and Kensington were classified at the lowest level, eligible for 60% funding. Poorer Eastern Boroughs like Hackney, Islington, Shoreditch and Stepney, were eligible for 70%, with Bethnal Green

¹⁵¹ T.S. Simey and Mary L. Williams, *The Civil Defence Acts, 1937 & 1939* (London: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1939), xxvi.

¹⁵² Woolven, “Air Raid Precautions in St. Pancras, 1935-1945,” 21.

¹⁵³ Simey and Williams, *The Civil Defence Acts*, xxiv.

¹⁵⁴ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 326 (1937), cols. 1984-5. Reference is made to meetings between Mr. Walter Elliot, the Minister of Health, and representatives of the LCC.

and Poplar classified in the highest category at 75%.¹⁵⁵ Although there was only a small difference between the funding standards, it may have been an attempt on the part of the central government to be *seen* subsidizing poor areas, which were also at greater risk of bomb damage.

The relative success of these negotiations with the local authorities enabled the first ARP Bill to be passed by Parliament in 1937.¹⁵⁶ The Act was the first of two bills, the second passed in 1939, which provided the force of law to ARP policy.¹⁵⁷ The debate in the House during the passage of the 1937 Bill was lengthy. Noel-Baker made a speech citing the destruction caused by air raids in Spain and the impossibility of building a refuge room or other home shelter for millions of Britons. He also emphasized the importance of central funding for public shelters and ARP in private factories.¹⁵⁸ The Acts, meant to clarify ARP policy, only further emphasized difficulties, particularly with local councils.¹⁵⁹ The editors of the *Manchester Guardian* believed that the regulations contained in the 1937 Act were “the sloppiest ever produced.”¹⁶⁰ The Act, which went into force on January 1, 1938, compelled local authorities to cooperate in national ARP schemes, though details remained vague.

¹⁵⁵ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1937-8, Cmd. 5596, Statement showing Classification of Local Authorities for purposes of calculating Exchequer Grant, 2-5.

¹⁵⁶ Robin Woolven, “First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions,” *Hackney History*, 6 (2000): 53-4.

¹⁵⁷ At least three books were published in 1939 to explain the provisions of the 1937 and 1939 Civil Defence Acts in direct language, Felix James Samuely et al., *Civil Protection: The Application of the Civil Defence Act and Other Government Requirements for Air Raid Shelters Etc.* (London: Architectural Press, 1939); Simey and Williams, *The Civil Defence Acts*, and Donald Hamilton, *The Civil Defence Act 1939 as it Affects Employers and Property Owners* (London: Jordan and Sons, Ltd., 1939).

¹⁵⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 329 (1937), cols. 1907-1914, 1963-4.

¹⁵⁹ Some critics charged that the Act did not provide for measures that were truly needed while straining the already thin resources of local councils. *Time and Tide*, XVIII, no. 49 (4 December 1937), 1608.

¹⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 October 1938, 11.

Questions of central and local authority were therefore not entirely settled, although much of the momentum of political pressure that had been initiated by the LCC and the local authorities dissipated. Terence O'Brien suggested that the local authorities became divided and unable to further their financial demands beyond the 60-75% figure.¹⁶¹ Conflict did indeed arise between Morrison's Labour LCC and several of the Boroughs on the tactical approach to address their concerns. Morrison represented a moderate position and he was fully committed to cooperation with the government. The Cabinet's attitude towards Morrison regarding his work in mediating between the local authorities was that he was "not unsatisfactory," and Morrison repeatedly assured E.J. Hodson that he would do his best to attain the cooperation of the LCC and the Metropolitan Boroughs.¹⁶² Labour was praised by *The Times* for their cooperation in ARP; one author hoped that "the Left" would follow Labour's lead and not make cooperation difficult.¹⁶³

Some Boroughs, however, were not as amenable to cooperation, believing that only the threat of non-compliance would ensure that the local authorities attained improved support from the central government. They were also convinced that the financial problems of their areas had not been adequately addressed. Among those "rebel Boroughs" were Finsbury, Stepney, and Hackney – despite the fact that Morrison was the MP for South Hackney. Representatives of the Hackney Borough Council, for example, were adamant that they "could in no way be taken to assent to the proposals" outlining

¹⁶¹ O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 105-6.

¹⁶² Bernard Donoghue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 205, 265.

¹⁶³ *The Times*, 12 January 1938, 11. It is telling that the paper's editors did not seem to consider the Labour Party as part of "the Left."

local duties.¹⁶⁴ The ARP campaign therefore fell along much the same lines as other issues in the 1930s that divided leftist parties and harmed the prospects of the Popular Front. Individuals like Morrison saw cooperation as the most logical strategy, while others, such as the Communists and members of the “radical” councils, viewed themselves as oppressed outsiders. Morrison was insistent that cooperation with the government on ARP did not imply acceptance of the government’s foreign policy or rearmament. In fact, the necessity of instituting ARP revealed the failure of governmental foreign policy. Some members of the Labour left felt that Morrison had decided on this policy without due consultation,¹⁶⁵ but this attitude characterized the Labour approach to the critique of ARP. Issues of class difference were instead taken up by the Communist Party and the scientific critics of government ARP. Further complaints mounted by the local authorities, and backed by leftist and Communist literature, will be explored in the fourth chapter.

National Identity and the Basis of ARP Plans

Supporters of the government position defended the self-help basis of ARP as an especially “British” solution to the problem. One historian of ARP has suggested that the individualist basis of ARP was tailored for the assumed domesticity of the British and an innate suspicion of strangers.¹⁶⁶ The government may well have assumed that its policies

¹⁶⁴ NA, HO 45/18129, Hackney Borough Council to Sir John Anderson, 10 January 1939.

¹⁶⁵ Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician*, 265.

¹⁶⁶ Gloster, “Architecture and the Air Raid,” 50.

would please its middle-class supporters who owned homes in which to shelter or had yards in which Anderson shelters could be placed. And politicians like Sir John Anderson and the civil servants of the Home Office continued to believe that the war would be lost if the nation's citizens ducked into shelters whenever an air raid siren sounded.

Commentators believed that the British, unlike continentals or foreigners in East London, should not take to “funk holes” or neglect essential war work by cowering underground. These ideas depended heavily on implicit notions of how British people should behave in wartime. Yet there was a tension between how the ARP planners believed people should behave and how they suspected they would behave in the case of aerial attack. This “British way” did not, as Home Office files reveal, entail much confidence in the performance of the British people. Officials were concerned that the public would fail to perform their duties under duress. The necessity of continuing war production and keeping the London transport system operational was factored into the policy that forbade the use of Tube stations as civilian shelters. As had occurred in 1917, however, this policy was to be quickly rescinded in 1940 due to overwhelming public demand.

The ethic of volunteerism was also a basis of government policy. Sir John Anderson believed that “we must have an organization comprising a hierarchy of officials working in free collaboration with local authorities, voluntary bodies, and with a vast number of individuals giving voluntary service.”¹⁶⁷ Yet recruitment of volunteers proceeded slowly before the Munich Crisis, perhaps natural given the initial uncertainty

¹⁶⁷ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 336 (1938), col. 2113.

over provisions and local obligations, and the general lack of urgency.¹⁶⁸ The lack of enthusiasm prompted the Home Office in turn to prod the local authorities to try to speed-up recruitment and training at the local level. *The Times* praised the volunteer basis of ARP, maintaining that the best and most innovative ideas came from individuals. They believed that the system of volunteerism could work on a large scale, but that the soundness of expert technical policy should not be sacrificed to the “zeal of the civilian.”¹⁶⁹

There were a variety of complaints about the nature of the volunteer system. The Home Office expressed concerns about both the quality and quantity of volunteers, and the level of instruction. Throughout the 1930s, there were many rank and file volunteers but not enough officers.¹⁷⁰ In peacetime, however, many “public-spirited volunteers” faced time constraints preventing their participation, although, according a government spokesman, they would be only too eager to assist in whatever way possible during wartime.¹⁷¹ Some commentators even believed that an over-zealous execution of ARP duties was unBritish. One Brigadier-General was fearful that the rush to distribute gas masks and institute black-out drills was imperiling the British qualities of “coolness and common sense.”¹⁷²

There were also complex attitudes that fell between the poles of volunteerism and compulsion. Although many citizens favored the voluntary system, by the early stages of the war many believed that compulsion was necessary to force everyone to do their

¹⁶⁸ O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 122-23.

¹⁶⁹ *The Times*, 12 January 1938, 11.

¹⁷⁰ H.A. Sisson, letter to the editor, *The Times*, 26 May 1938, 10.

¹⁷¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 329 (1937), col. 1915.

¹⁷² Letter to the editor, Brigadier-General H. Biddulph, *The Times*, 9 September 1939, 6.

part.¹⁷³ The leftist critics of ARP were not opposed to volunteerism, though their idea of active citizenship differed from the government ideal. Critics took lessons from Spain and applied them to local ARP schemes in Britain, as will be explored in subsequent chapters. The administration of civil defence allowed these individuals to show how leftist patriotism could work in a time of war, and that leftist citizens could contribute to the war effort without compromising their political principles.

The issue of evacuation was particularly wrought with questions of the rights, obligations, and expected behaviour of citizens. As noted, the act of sheltering during the First World War was coloured by ideas of appropriate behaviour for British people, particularly British men. Plans to evacuate the vulnerable “non-essential” British population, which were not substantively addressed until the late 1930s,¹⁷⁴ were also tied to questions of morale. The government was particularly concerned with the signals that a mass evacuation of the capital would send to enemy nations. The Report of the Committee on Evacuation in July 1938 concluded that there should be evacuations of some persons, but not wholesale evacuations that would hamper the war effort.¹⁷⁵ The general guiding principle was that children, along with some invalids and elderly persons, should be relocated from London to designated evacuation zones. The official historian noted that these principles were established by 1938, though there were “many details” to

¹⁷³ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 919, Report on Female Attitude to Compulsion, 16 October 1941, 1. Mass Observation’s total survey on compulsion yielded these results: 52% were in favour of voluntary service, 37% were in favour of compulsion and 11% offered no opinion.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Titmuss noted that Home Office files suggested that virtually no substantial preparation for the evacuation of East London had been undertaken until 1937. Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add1 7/44, File 1, undated notes.

¹⁷⁵ Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, 202.

be sorted out.¹⁷⁶ The approach to the question of evacuation suggests that the government did not consider that the population needed to be informed about the provisions for evacuation much in advance of war. While the leftist critics insisted that specific procedures should be publicized, the government believed that a more “English” *ad hoc* approach would be less alarming.

Sir John Anderson claimed that a fixed idea of Englishness underlay government plans. He elaborated on this view in a speech to the House of Commons in June 1938, in which he contrasted the British approach to “mechanized” German plans:

There are many people who are inclined to say that we with our go-as-you please methods can be at best but a poor match for countries which have at their disposal a close-knit organization, held by authority at every point in an inflexible grip, organizations of whose mechanical efficiency the world has recently had conspicuous and spectacular illustrations. I respectfully decline to accept that view. The elephant is a cumbrous and ungainly creature, and to all appearances singularly ill adapted to the performance of tasks requiring delicacy or precision.... I think that in this country we shall probably never achieve the degree of mechanical efficiency that is possible, for example, in Germany.... For those who believe in free institutions and in individual liberty, it must be a task of supreme importance to prove that in the pursuit of all worthy aims in life a system based upon those principles can at least hold its own against any rival.¹⁷⁷

He went on to state that German plans suited the supposed “idiosyncrasies” of the German people, clearly setting out a contrast in national characters, and a firm reason for the British government to follow a unique path. He insisted yet again that “mechanical precision is not everything; it may even be a positive disadvantage in dealing with

¹⁷⁶ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 28.

¹⁷⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 336 (1938), cols. 2109-2115. Anderson is comparing England to an elephant, emphasizing the nation’s solid immovable character, despite its apparent lack of dexterity and speed in adapting to new circumstances.

conditions which cannot be precisely foreseen.”¹⁷⁸ Given this line of reasoning, the government’s imprecise and flexible approach to civil defence could be justified as a “British way” of ARP preparations. In 1938 *The Times* summarized the country’s civil defence as a “patchwork of schemes.” While “patchwork” could be interpreted negatively, the tone of the editorial clearly suggested that the writers viewed it in a positive light, and that the flexibility of multiple schemes served best for national defence.¹⁷⁹ Writers of letters to the editor in *The Times* reflected similar sentiments. One noted that British ARP had unfortunately been cast in a negative light due to the “energy and drive” of European dictatorships, but that it would be adequate to the task when necessary.¹⁸⁰

As for government insistence that the appropriate “British way” was to shelter at home, a Mass Observation report in 1940 confirmed that for varying reasons, relatively few people utilized public shelters. Only 4% of respondents reported utilizing public shelters, with the majority sleeping in their own homes. The prime reasons for remaining at home or using backyard Anderson shelters were familiarity and comfort. Some wanted to be close to family and neighbours, remarking that they felt more comfortable with their “own people” around. Many expressed a dislike of the lack of privacy in public shelters, and feared crowds and strangers.¹⁸¹ There was a notable feeling of “ownership” associated with the Anderson shelter, confirming the importance to many of staying close

¹⁷⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 336 (1938), col. 2113.

¹⁷⁹ *The Times*, 10 January 1938, 13.

¹⁸⁰ Louis Strauss, letter to the editor, *The Times*, 3 February, 1938, 8.

¹⁸¹ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 436, Shelter in London, 3 October 1940, 4-10.

to home.¹⁸² The notion that “the Britisher is not interested in funk-holes” was also a widely expressed idea that registered with ordinary people. A preference for private rather than public shelters, even though private shelters did not offer deep protection, was also evident even before the war began and people actually used these shelters.¹⁸³ It is evident that at least some of the government’s assumptions about what British people wanted did ring true with the general public.

The tenor of coverage in the most widely-read newspapers reflected an acceptance of the general outlines of ARP as set out by the government. As a rule, the right-of-centre newspapers and populist papers such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* chose not to fundamentally criticize government schemes in the interwar years. They also tended to conflate civilian defence with questions of offensive strength and air force tactics rather than focusing on passive defence.¹⁸⁴ Tabloid press outlets could have plausibly used the lack of shelter preparation as a bullying stick against government ineptitude and shortsightedness. After all, the *Daily Mail* had been prominent in decrying the lack of civilian defence in the First World War. Yet criticism in the press largely related to the implementation of policy, such as gas-mask distribution or the recruitment of ARP wardens, and also reflects the confusion that marked much public discussion on ARP from 1935 onwards. These newspapers represented the bulk of national readership. Even the Labour-controlled *Daily Herald*, which rivaled the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*

¹⁸² Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report A14, Air Raid Shelters, March 1939, 5.

¹⁸³ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report A14, Air Raid Shelters, March 1939, 1, 19.

¹⁸⁴ Examples include C.G. Grey of *Aeroplane* magazine who, in his editorials, combined both open admiration of the Italian and German Fascist regimes with a bullish drumbeat calling for massive British air rearmament. Viscount Rothermere of the *Daily Mail*, also a onetime supporter of the British Union of Fascists, self-importantly publicized his calls for armament throughout the 1930s in his book *Warnings and Predictions* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939).

in readership, refrained from directly attacking the government on the issue of ARP, tending to cover only superficial aspects of the issue.¹⁸⁵ Their editorials of 1937 and 1938 were concerned with war in Spain, but also, significantly, with the failure of the Unity Front and the suppression of communists and socialists in the Labour Party. It is not surprising that Labour publications remained extremely wary of association with the far left criticism of government ARP, even as Labour MPs advocated improved ARP on the floor of the House. The tenuous relationship between Parliamentary Labour, the Labour-controlled LCC, and the far left ARP critique has already been referenced regarding local authorities and the negotiations with the central government. This ambivalence continued, and led to both groups following somewhat different agendas in pursuit of their ARP goals.

The national newspaper of record, *The Times*, published a three-part series in January 1938 on preparations for air raids. The articles dealt with defence against the bomber, the problems local ARP officers faced, and the vaguely termed topic of “things that need knowing.”¹⁸⁶ Though admitting problems, including the lack of preparations for the East End of London, the paper nevertheless praised the “miracles” that the ARP Department had produced, and deemed the basis of government plans to be sound. Striking a partisan tone, it noted, “that will not satisfy the pacifist, Communist, and critical Left-winger, whose suspicions and gibes have made more impression on the

¹⁸⁵ *Daily Herald*, 19 May 1938, 11. The leading national newspapers from the 1931-2 period were the *Daily Express*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mail*, *News Chronicle*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, and the *Morning Post*. Listed in Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), 504.

¹⁸⁶ *The Times*, 10 January 1938, 13, 11 January 1938, 13, and 12 January 1938, 11.

middle-class populations than people think.”¹⁸⁷ The paper therefore seemed to conceive of the “middle-class populations” as a distinctive group that should be predisposed to accept government recommendations. The sole letter published in reaction to the three-part series in 1938 supported the government’s position. It portrayed the policy of dispersal as “common sense,” and insisted that providing bomb-proof shelters could “not [be] capable of economic justification.”¹⁸⁸ The leftist critics consequently forwarded their alternative ideas in a climate that was not particularly receptive to a wholesale questioning of government policy. They were, however, able to intervene on individual points that found some resonance, including the funding of local authorities and the demand that at least some deep shelters be made available for public use.

This chapter has outlined the evolution of ideas regarding civilian bombing and how fears for civilian morale contributed towards the British government’s principles of ARP. Given the widespread rhetoric of massive destruction that modern war would deliver from the air, the obsession with civilian morale is understandable. Critics of government ARP policy believed that a comparison of official provisions with alternative proposals, based on research, expertise, and Continental examples, would naturally sway opinion in favour of the latter. Both the government and the critics held specific ideas regarding the obligations of citizens in wartime and saw their ideas of ARP as an organic whole. The

¹⁸⁷ *The Times*, 10 January 1938, 13, 12 January 1938, 11.

¹⁸⁸ D.C. Burn, “Shelter From High Explosive,” *The Times*, 25 February 1938, 12. The paper also published letters to the editor on a wide variety of subjects dealing with ARP. Many were of a basic informative nature, advising the public of the training courses or new Home Office circulars. The letters that were critical of ARP tended to focus on specific areas of implementation, or were critical of public response.

leftist critics felt that volunteerism could be utilized to achieve cooperative solutions for ARP rather than merely individualist ones.

For the government, the principles of dispersal and an avoidance of communal shelters was easily attributed to the national characteristics of the British. For the leftist critics, calls for central government funding and equitable shelters corresponded to their existing social and national vision. These ideas developed and intersected in unusual ways as the ARP critique took shape following aerial bombing in Spain. For example, the volunteerist ideal integral to the government plans was revised by the leftists, who believed in a model of voluntary, but active, citizenship. By criticizing both the ideological and practical bases of government ARP, they attempted to enforce a positive, “democratic” ideal of a rational and patriotic populace. The official historian believed that the passing of the ARP Act of 1937 itself began to institute the notion of the People’s War, noting “This concept meant, in effect, bringing in the civilian to man civil defence: in other words, standing and fighting with civilian manned forces.”¹⁸⁹ Yet conflict over the meaning and practicality of these ideas continued to be evident, and it would not be until well into the Second World War that confidence in the capabilities of “the civilian in civil defence” was fully acknowledged. The following chapter demonstrates the notions of popular democracy that the left gleaned from the Spanish Civil War, forming the basis of their alternative ARP proposals.

¹⁸⁹ Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add_1/1, June 1946 memorandum.

Chapter Three

The Importance of Spain to the Leftist Constituency:

Observing Modern Air Raids and Alternative ARP

The big thing that I learned in Spain was.... [that] it is possible to make shelters for a whole population which give complete protection against explosive bombs. The Spanish did not believe this in 1936 any more than the British Government does now. But the people of Spain were determined to get protection, and did so, through their municipalities and trade unions. Digging started without any orders from the Government.¹

This account by J.B.S. Haldane in his pamphlet *How to Be Safe from Air Raids* emphasizes one of the lessons that British leftists took from the Spanish Civil War. The bombing of cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, and Guernica proved more than adequate to the task of terrorizing and disrupting the civilian population, though these events did not demonstrate the potential of striking the strategic “knock-out” blow that military planners feared. Newspaper coverage in Britain of the bombing of Spanish cities emphasized the powerlessness of civilians against ruthless aerial attack.² News stories featured pictures of terrified Spanish civilians and the significant structural damage wrought by bombs, and these images startled British observers. Many raids targeted civilians, rather than military installations, confirming the suspicion that future war would involve the killing of innocent civilians with the goal of collapsing enemy morale.

¹ J.B.S. Haldane, *How to Be Safe From Air Raids* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 7.

² A priest’s account of the destruction of Guernica evoked the image of “the sky being black with German aeroplanes.” *Manchester Guardian*, 3 May 1937, 6.

The actions of ordinary Spanish citizens and local authorities in providing air raid protection served as a model for alternative British ARP plans. Spain was crucial to the development of the leftist critique of ARP, not only in solidifying anti-fascist sentiment, but also in its emphasis of protecting British democracy. Leftist combatants and observers believed that the Spanish experience of aerial bombing was a troubling foretaste of the air peril Britain would face in a coming conflict with fascism, and the bombing of Barcelona was viewed as a dress rehearsal for the bombing of London.

The nascent Spanish Popular Front government, elected in 1936, was formed by a coalition of liberal, socialist and communist groups, thus reflecting the ideals of Popular Front politics. The Nationalist rebellion against the new government in July 1936 led to the start of the war. Early rebel victories were halted by Republican government forces, with its forces controlling much of the east of the country. The Nationalists controlled parts of the south and the northwest. The rebellion immediately drew strong condemnation by British leftists as an example of fascist aggression, and international governments also deplored the turn of events. Yet, as Tom Buchanan notes, though agitation to help Republican Spain was prominent, the conflict changed little in British politics. Political conflict did not fall on left and right lines as much as within the British left itself. The Communists, and to a lesser degree the Socialist League and the ILP, used the conflict to challenge Labour domestically.³ The British government was desperate to avoid being drawn into a wider conflict. While remaining officially “neutral,” it persuaded the Popular Front government in France to reach a Non-Intervention

³ Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63.

agreement. Non-Intervention was meant to starve both sides of foreign arms but, in reality, succeeded only in preventing the Republican government forces from buying war *materiale*, while the Germans and Italians supplied the Nationalists with both men and machinery. J.B.S. Haldane later claimed that had the Basques been allowed to import anti-aircraft guns, German plane losses would have been great. Of even greater consequence, he believed that “the failure of the British and French peoples to persuade their governments to keep the Law of Nations is therefore likely to result in the death of very large numbers of [civilians] in a future war.”⁴

Tom Buchanan emphasizes the recurrent conflict between mainstream Labour and far leftist constituencies and the detrimental effects these conflicts had on overall attempts to intervene in Spain.⁵ Jim Fryth also focuses on the failure of the British left to make a broad-based impact with their campaigns, indicating that the events, rallies, and literature on Spain spoke, in the main, to individuals already convinced of the justness of the cause, and therefore did not have a wider impact.⁶ The lack of effectiveness was in large part due to the indecisive position of Labour and the actions of the CPGB. Following a brief period at the beginning of the Nationalist rebellion, during which Clement Attlee as Labour leader had promised “all practicable support to our Spanish comrades,” the Party withdrew and supported the policy of Non-Intervention.⁷ The reasons for vacillating between decisions was complex – deep and long-standing hostility

⁴ J.B.S. Haldane, *A.R.P.* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 50-1.

⁵ Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*.

⁶ Jim Fryth, ed. *The Signal was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain, 1936-39* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986).

⁷ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2007), 142-3.

towards Communists, the opposition of Catholics to the Republican government due to anti-clerical acts in Spain, and pacifist sentiment. Many in the Labour Party feared the consequences of a widened war, and pursued a more muted campaign of public awareness.⁸ The trade unions largely followed the lead of Ernest Bevin, the anti-Communist leader of the Transport and General Workers Union, who opposed intervention.⁹ Nevertheless, many ordinary Labour members supported the Spanish cause in multiple ways, despite the opposition of the Party towards intervention and the proscription against members joining the International Brigades. Given the British position, traveling to Spain to fight in the conflict was an illegal act. Some members attempted a motion of support for the Republicans at the 1936 Labour Party Conference. Finally, in October 1937, Labour reversed its support for Non-Intervention, and Clement Attlee visited Spain in order to observe the militias and praise the volunteers fighting with the International Brigades. The line taken by Labour reflects its hesitancy in dealing with the challenges by the far left. Even following the change of policy in 1937, the division between Labour and other factions on the left did not auger well for the success of the Popular Front in Britain.

The year 1937 coincided with the attempt at the United Front between Communists, the ILP, and members of the Socialist League. The CPGB attempted to court Labour to join the coalition, but were primarily maneuvering for tactical advantage.

⁸ Brian Shelmerdine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 167. The Communists had accused Labour and the Trades Union Congress of failing to understand the danger posed by domestic fascist groups such as Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. The Communists decided to "go it alone," by creating the "Worker Defence Corps." Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 9.

⁹ Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, 142.

The Party that had campaigned for years against the “sham left wing,” had not suddenly discovered a softer conciliatory side. They were willing to exploit Spain and the possibilities of the United and Popular Fronts to the furthest extent possible. The CPGB seized upon the Spanish Cause even before the cautious Soviets decided on intervention¹⁰ and took the opportunity to attack the Labour leadership. Harry Pollitt, the Communist Party secretary, snidely commented on Labour’s position, claiming that the workers of Britain wished to do more than offer “good wishes and expressions of sympathy.”¹¹ In the December 1936 issue of *Left Review* he called on workers to support the People’s Front.¹² Communists sent members to the International Brigades, which had been created with impetus from the Soviets. The ILP, cooperating with the CPGB on the abortive United Front, was active in holding rallies for Spain, raising funds, and taking responsibility for Basque refugee children.¹³

Despite these divisions members of the far left believed that Spain represented the ultimate “just cause.” It became a political rite of passage for British leftist intellectuals to travel to Spain as combatants, writers, and observers. Writer and journalist John Lehmann wrote that it was nearly impossible to convey the impact of Spain to those who did not experience the events of the 1930s. “The pull was terrific: the pull of an international crusade to the ideals and aims of which all intellectuals...who had been stirred by the fascist danger, felt they could, in that hour of apocalypse, whole-heartedly

¹⁰ The Soviets assessed the situation for two months before deciding that they could exploit the conflict by selling arms to the Republican side, paid for in gold. Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006), 151.

¹¹ Communist Party of Great Britain, *Save Peace! Aid Spain* (London, 1937), 14.

¹² *Left Review*, 2, no. 15 (December 1936), 797.

¹³ Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, 76.

assent.” He believed, however, that the sentiments evoked in fighting for Spain uncomfortably echoed the enthusiasm for the First World War. He wrote about the “same almost unquestioning, tragic acceptance” of the absolute nature of the cause that had been in evidence in 1914.¹⁴ The absolutist cast of the conflict was reflected in the first accounts of Spain that were penned by British volunteers. Bill Rust, a prominent Stalinist and editor of the *Daily Worker*, published an account of the war in 1939, intending the tales of heroic sacrifice to serve as instructive propaganda.¹⁵ In the 1960s, the decade’s political turmoil occasioned some of the classic works of the “writers in arms.”¹⁶ Many of the chroniclers of Spain had been participants in the cause, including Hugh Ford and Bill Alexander, author of *British Volunteers for Liberty*,¹⁷ who later served as the Chairman of the British Battalion Association. These accounts depicted events in Spain as the leftists preferred to view them – canonized as a unique moment of leftist camaraderie, intellectual activism and anti-fascist solidarity, even if the black-and-white lines drawn between democracy and fascism did not reflect the complexity of the conflict. The poet Louis MacNeice pointed out that both the right and left-wing press

¹⁴ John Lehmann, *Whispering Gallery: Autobiography I*. (London: Longmans Green, 1955), 274-5.

¹⁵ Bill Rust, *Britons in Spain: The History of the XVth International Brigade* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1939); Tom Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 123.

¹⁶ Examples include Stanley Weintraub, *The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968); Frederick R. Benson, *Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1967). For a compilation and commentary on famous Spanish Civil War writing: Valentine Cunningham, *Spanish Front, Writers on the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), and Hugh Ford, *A Poets’ War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia and Oxford University Press, 1965). The association of poetry and war bore many similarities to the First World War, although the Spanish Civil War poets differentiated between “imperialist war” and the “just cause” of the Spanish Republic.

¹⁷ Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982). Tom Buchanan terms Alexander’s account the “standard modern history of the British volunteers.”

grossly oversimplified the situation to further their political goals.¹⁸ A Left Book Club volume, *The Truth About Spain*, offered a teleological view of Spanish history, claiming that the Republican Army represented the “people’s army” and the march of progress against retrograde forces.¹⁹ This image is highly representative of the model of Spanish resistance to fascism that leftists attempted to apply to Britain.

Few accounts deviated from the “standard formula” of commemoration and most importantly, leftist unity in Spain. Most notable among the dissenting volumes was George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, which shocked leftist circles with its strident denunciation of the Stalinist-backed crushing of the POUM militia. Many otherwise sympathetic figures felt that an insistence on publicizing divisions was both unnecessary and unseemly. The reaction of Communist Party stalwarts was best depicted by the *Daily Worker*’s review, which painted *Homage to Catalonia* as “an honest picture of the sort of mentality that toys with revolutionary romanticism but shies at revolutionary discipline.”²⁰ Such censorious receptions limited the effectiveness of leftist efforts to widen the Popular Front, convincing many that the far left was more concerned with rigid orthodoxies and silencing dissent than with cooperating in the struggle against fascism. The reaction to Orwell’s book demonstrates just how invested most leftists were in maintaining a simplistic narrative of the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

This chapter explores the importance of Spain to the interwar British left, and the lessons gleaned by communist and Labour observers. It will touch only slightly on the

¹⁸ Louis MacNeice, *The Strings are False: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 166, 180.

¹⁹ H.R.G. Greaves, *The Truth About Spain* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938).

²⁰ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 427.

wider British reaction to the Spanish Civil War, the International Brigades themselves, and the Aid for Spain campaign spearheaded by communists, socialists, and Labour left. The primary concern is the contribution of the Spanish experience to how British leftists understood aerial attack and how civilians could defend themselves against it. I will first introduce the scientific left, and how it positioned its mandate to include Spain and the ARP critique. Many of the points raised regarding government civil defence included a strong pacifist element, though the meaning of “anti-war” changed after Spain. The primary instigator of the leftist scientific critique was the Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group (CSAWG), and J.B.S. Haldane, who was not a member of the Group. All these individuals came to the ARP critique with a strong commitment to using science for progressive purposes. Discussing the early “anti-war” rhetoric of the CSAWG provides insight on how they understood the experience of Spain and their role in promoting an egalitarian model of ARP.

The remainder of the chapter explores how the left presented lessons derived from Spain, the implications of these lessons for the provisions of deep shelters in Britain, and the role that local authorities could play in ARP. Reports regarding the impact of air raids on civilians in Spanish cities and the Spanish response to shelter construction laid the framework for a discussion on British deep shelter provisions. The example of local authorities acting to provide emergency shelters was valorized as the epitome of democratic action and was used as an alternative model to British government-sanctioned ARP. The emphasis on local initiative came as a direct result of the reports of Haldane and others regarding the actions of ordinary Spaniards and their local authorities to

ingeniously provide shelter protection. This emphasis allowed leftists to affirm the activist model of citizenship during total war, and insist that “ordinary people,” including the working class, were capable of behaving stoically and rationally during aerial attack. Finally, the chapter will show how the left attempted to shame the British government into providing better civilian protection by depicting Spain as a country that was economically backward compared to Britain and yet was able to construct civilian shelters.

Arising from the absolutist depictions that began in 1930s, historians of British involvement in Spain have viewed the conflict as the singular event that altered leftist pacifism and led to an acceptance that some wars were “just.” Tom Buchanan argues that the Spanish Civil War played a “major role” in changing attitudes towards war and violence,²¹ and Gary Werskey similarly notes that Spain caused the left, in his words, to “de-pacify.”²² Following the pacifist campaigns of the early 1930s, the majority of pacifists were forced to modify their ideas regarding war in the latter part of the decade.²³ For British leftists, however, the roles of the volunteers and militias in the Spanish war itself are only one part of the reluctant acceptance of the necessity of war. Beyond propaganda and the hyperbole of commemoration, attitudes were much more complex. As Miles Taylor has suggested, the British left did not fully embrace the rhetoric of nationalism and actively employ nationalist appeals in political rhetoric until after the

²¹ Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, 226.

²² Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 224.

²³ James Hinton, *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in 20th Century Britain* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 102-6.

defeat in Spain and the unraveling of Popular Front.²⁴ In this chapter I suggest that it was the necessity to protect Britain and British democracy that was the most important factor in this development. A dominant theme of the left was the need to counter fascism before it threatened the rest of Europe and British shores. These appeals, which were in evidence from 1936, became more plaintive after the defeat of the Spanish Republic in 1939. Therefore the crucial rhetorical turn of this chapter focuses on how Spanish air war fears were translated into fears over air attack on Britain and the obligation of the government towards its citizens in a total war in which civilians would play a crucial role.

Intellectuals, Scientists and the Popular Front: Against Fascism and War

The efforts of the Popular Front increasingly involved leftist writers, intellectuals and scientists in overtly political activity. The communist intelligentsia, though small, held disproportionate influence over the British world of arts and letters, and their political efforts became increasingly public and more methodically organized in the 1930s.

Intellectual groups included the International Association of Writers for the Defense of Culture and the Writers' International, formed under the CPGB.²⁵ Leftist writers contributed to journals such as *Left Review*, *Fact*, *New Writing*, *Time and Tide*, and the *Left Book Club News* (later *Left News*).²⁶ The non-aligned Left Book Club was influential

²⁴ Miles Taylor, "Patriotism, History, and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain," *The Historical Journal*, 33, no. 4 (1990): 980-83.

²⁵ See Andy Croft, *Comrade Heart: The Life of Randall Swingler* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), and Andy Croft, ed., *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain* (London: Pluto Press: London, 1998).

²⁶ See David Margolies, ed., *Writing the Revolution: Cultural Criticism from 'Left Review'* (London: Pluto

and reached almost 60,000 members by the end of the decade. David Caute and David Margolies argue that these forums were free from official Communist Party meddling,²⁷ though Marxist thought was strongly represented in these venues. Publisher Victor Gollancz achieved a mainstream status for the Left Book Club, insuring that its volumes were widely publicized and distributed. The Club also created local reading clubs which featured prominent speakers, promoted leftist books, and encouraged members to lobby politicians on behalf of various causes. This insistence on participation and activity, rather than on mere passive reading, reinforced the crusading element of the Popular Front. Julia Stapleton notes that the LBC held a more militant conception of citizenship, equating it with “comradeship.”²⁸ As the campaign for the Spanish Republic became more prominent, the LBC campaign for improved ARP promoted a model of active citizenship. The efforts of the LBC on the issue were anchored by the volumes written by the CSAWG and J.B.S. Haldane – *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack* by the CSAWG, published in 1937, and Haldane’s *A.R.P.*, published the following year.²⁹

Since at least the early 1930s, leftist scientists had been attempting to promote a model for the cooperative and peaceful uses of science. Scientists had a more difficult

Press: London, 1998).

²⁷ See David Margolies’ introduction to *Writing the Revolution*, and David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 171-2. In *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), Stephen Koch proposes that the LBC was how Stalinist opinion was “networked” in England, 192. Kevin Morgan questions whether the CPGB really had strong control over the activities of its members at all. Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Raptures and Continuities in Britain Communist Politics 1935-41* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 13.

²⁸ Julia Stapleton, “Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England,” *The Historical Journal*, 48, no. 1 (2005): 165.

²⁹ Cambridge Scientists Anti-War Group, *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack: Being A Critical Examination of the Recommendations put Forward by the Air Raid Precautions Department of the Home Office* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937) and J.B.S. Haldane, *A.R.P.* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938).

path to political radicalization than did artists and writers, and faced barriers to political activity within their academic disciplines. Convention dictated that nationally prominent scientists in research institutions such as Cambridge should neither popularize their work for mass audiences nor sully their hands with political squabbles. The early 1930s served as the occasion of a secular “Great Awakening” for progressive-minded scientists at Cambridge. The second International Congress of the History of Science and Technology was held in Kensington in 1931, and included a lecture by the Soviet scientist Nikolai Bukharin on the role of scientists in creating socialist culture in the USSR.³⁰ The meeting resulted in the political conversion of several scientists to leftist politics including Haldane who, in an attempt to expunge the sins of his middle-class background, was zealous in taking up his new identity as a credible revolutionary.³¹

This hesitant politicization and a lingering pacifistic concern over the use of science for war purposes led to the founding of the Cambridge Scientists Anti-War Group in 1934. The founding organization included 80 left-leaning scientists including J.D. Bernal, and it charged itself with the purpose of protesting “the prostitution of science for war purposes” and sought “to function as a technical and advisory body to National and International Peace Movements.”³² Their first publication was a June 1934 letter of protest against the militarization of scientific research in the *Cambridge Review*. It was signed by 79 individuals including faculty, research workers and graduate students, but

³⁰ Werskey, *The Visible College*, 139-40.

³¹ Haldane insisted on traveling in a third-class railway carriage, for example, to demonstrate newfound distance from his class origins. Werskey, *The Visible College*, 160-1.

³² Brenda Swann and Francis Aprahamian, *J.D. Bernal: A Life in Science and Politics* (London: Verso, 1999), 141, and Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group, *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack*, 9. A few years prior, Bernal and Joseph Needham had helped to revive the Association of Scientific Workers, a trade union which had been originally founded in 1918 but had faltered in the 1920s.

this number represented a tiny minority of Cambridge scientists, and only 12 percent of “pure scientists.”³³ Although Bernal presented the public face of the Group, and was highly visible in organizing events like the first conference on academic freedom at Oxford in 1935, most of the Group’s work was actually organized by Joseph Needham and his wife Dorothy, both Cambridge biochemists.³⁴ An internal memorandum stated that the Group was created by faculty and research students “who were disturbed by the danger of war to civilization, and felt the special responsibility of the scientist in connection with it.”³⁵ For these individuals, Spain later provided technical insights and functioned as a research laboratory for the effects of modern warfare on civilian populations, and shaped their position in Popular Front politics in the latter part of the 1930s.

As the group name implied, pacifist causes were the initial focus of attention. As such they represented a critique of capitalism, imperialism, and war that was very much a product of its time. Although left-wing in political orientation, the CSAWG also reflected a strong mainstream and middle-class pacifism of the early 1930s, typified by the Peace

³³ Gary Werskey defines “pure scientists” as those attached to labs specializing in biology, chemistry and physics, thereby excluding engineers, agricultural scientists and medical personnel. More than half of the “pure scientists” who signed the letter were drawn from only two labs, representing less than a fifth of all these scientists working at Cambridge – a total of 423 post-graduates and faculty members. Only one reader in pure science (Joseph Needham) signed, and no full professors did. Werskey, *The Visible College*, 219-220, 339-342.

³⁴ Nora Wooster later recollected that most of the experimental work of the Group took place after Bernal had left for London, so he was at most marginally involved with the Group. Cambridge University Library, Needham Papers, K.22 (Item 7), undated typescript. The few surviving official records of the Group were held by Needham, later included in his personal papers at Cambridge.

³⁵ Needham Papers K.22 (Item 1), undated. This memorandum declares that the Group was founded in 1932, although secondary sources put the date as 1934, the year of its initial letter to the *Cambridge Review*. It is possible that talks to organize the group dated back to 1932. The chairman was listed as W.A. Wooster from the Department of Mineralogy. Secretary P.A. Jewell was responsible for research into “the biological aspects of atomic and bacterial warfare.” The group included members such as A.S. Maddock from the Department of Chemistry who was responsible for studying “influences determining the attitude of the public to war.”

Pledge Movement. The latter broad-based organization flourished because it appealed to those “shocked into absolutism” by the destructiveness of modern war.³⁶ The leftist scientists were particularly concerned with the stockpiling of chemical weapons and other innovations that reflected poorly on their own professions. In 1927 J.D. Bernal published “The Great Poison-Gas Plot” in *The Communist* under the pseudonym of “X-ray.” He argued that a new scientific expert, the “professional poisoner” had appeared, and that the front line in future wars “would be limited only by the distances to which aeroplanes could fly.”³⁷ They agreed that scientists could work to prevent war by using their research and positions of prestige to influence wider opinion.³⁸

The responsibility of science for the destructive capacity of aerial warfare was a prime source of guilt and concern, and ARP was later a means of attempting to ameliorate the danger to civilians caused by these developments. In the early and mid-1930s, left-leaning scientists were alarmed over the existence of war industry and the potential of destruction from aerial bombing. The CSAWG identified the issue of air defence as one which pertained to their role as scientists. In 1935 the Group objected to the use of an aeronautical-research university endowment by Sir John Siddeley for military research, and the £6 million that was spent on military aircraft annually, while only one-half million was designated for the development of civilian aircraft.³⁹ This suspicion of military aviation was shared by J.B.S. Haldane who argued against the

³⁶ Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 340.

³⁷ Maurice Goldsmith, *Sage: A Life of J. D. Bernal* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 90.

³⁸ Needham Papers, K.29, typescript of May Term meeting of the CSAWG, 1936.

³⁹ Needham Papers, K.28, signed statement 14 October 1935. The file gives no indication of where this statement was sent and whether it was published.

offensive first-strike policy of targeting enemy civilians, deeming it to be “murder.”⁴⁰

These concerns all related to the morality or immorality of aerial attack, and the concerns expressed over ARP by these scientists flowed directly from their professional responsibility for modern war.

One event from 1935 delineates the importance of the anti-war rhetoric and the concern of these scientists for civil liberties, a primary consideration within the ARP debate. Together with the pacifist groups the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Women’s International League and the Cambridge Anti-War Council, they produced a leaflet to be distributed at the annual RAF air exercises at Mildenhall. It protested re-armament and the creation of a civilian war mentality with the headline “Air Display Today – War in the Air Tomorrow.”⁴¹ They objected to RAF armament and to air-raid and blackout drills instituted by the government.⁴² The Group took care to print a header to their leaflet that declared “Not to Be Given to Members of H.M. Forces.” This action reflected the real fear that the leaflets could be taken as cause for prosecution under the Incitement to Disaffection Bill, also known as the Sedition Bill. The Group had protested the passage of this Bill in the *Cambridge Review* under the contention that it would seriously curtail civil liberties, and that scientists would be forbidden from attempting to persuade others to refuse to participate in war preparations.⁴³ One hundred and fifty of the leaflets were

⁴⁰ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 66-76. The Communist military man T.H. Wintringham also felt that offensive air policy would lead to an escalated arms race and a European war. T.H. Wintringham, *Air Raid Warning! Why the Royal Air Force is to be Doubled* (London: The Workers’ Bookshop, 1934), 4.

⁴¹ Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Women’s International League and the Cambridge Anti-War Council, *Air Display Special* (July 1935).

⁴² Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group et al., *Air Display Special*.

⁴³ Needham Papers K.24, May 1934, draft of a letter published in the *Cambridge Review*, June 1, 1934, 451.

seized by the police, which resulted in the CSAWG and the National Council for Civil Liberties undertaking a summons against the police. The judge found in favour of the plaintiffs, charging that the police had overstepped its jurisdictional boundaries.⁴⁴ The events surrounding the Air Display of 1935 demonstrate that the issues surrounding an aerial arms race and civil liberties were never far removed from the minds of leftist scientists.

J. D. Bernal later declared that the Spanish Civil War served as the singular event that drove leftist scientists to action, especially witnessing the aerial bombardment of towns. Even more were jolted out of political neutrality by the Munich Crisis and preparation for imminent aerial attack against Britain.⁴⁵ The mobilization for Spain allowed these scientists fully to reframe their anti-war rhetoric as a struggle against “fascism and war.” Leftist intellectuals who wished to retain their standing as such rushed to defend the Spanish Republican cause, following the example of J.B.S. Haldane. In one outburst during a meeting on Spain, Haldane charged that the Conservative MP for Hampstead, George Balfour, “is one of those responsible for the massacre of the women and children in Madrid.”⁴⁶ Haldane and his fellow leftists were attempting to square differing elements of their political ideology that did not always easily match up, and that were still in tension and fluctuation as the decade progressed. Spain helped to resolve some of these contradictions, and the cause of protecting British civilians would do so to an even greater extent.

⁴⁴ Needham Papers K25, Correspondence, Ronald Kidd (National Council for Civil Liberties) to Needham, 10 July 1935, and K.27, misc. press clippings, 1936. Although W.A. Wooster, the scientist who forwarded the action, had claimed £21 in damages he received only nominal damages of £1.

⁴⁵ Swann and Aprahamian, *J.D. Bernal*, 161.

⁴⁶ *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 20 February 1937, 7.

Following the outbreak of war in Spain, many in the CSAWG felt that their organization should have been called an “anti-fascist” group, as opposed to an “anti-war” group. The name, however, remained and may certainly have prejudiced the reception of its reports on ARP and anti-gas measures. In the mid 1930s the CSAWG co-sponsored a pamphlet with the local Socialist League in support of the Republican cause. They claimed that “the Spanish loyalists are fighting for your freedom not only for their own, for if Fascism wins in Spain France and England will not be safe.”⁴⁷ Support for the Republican cause in Spain allowed leftists to define the “just war.” This had been suggested by the Marxist military man T.H. Wintringham in 1934 when he wrote that “true Communists” were not strict pacifists, but rather supported armed struggle against oppression.⁴⁸ The Group also came out strongly against the government policy of appeasement. In September 1938 the Cambridge Peace Council, including the CSAWG, passed a resolution calling for the recall of Parliament, believing that the Munich Peace agreement increased the danger of war.⁴⁹ These reactions to events in Europe highlight that the British left was searching for ways to combine anti-war and anti-fascist feeling.

The technical observations gleaned in Spain were of particular import to the leftist scientists. Many felt they had at last been given a genuine opportunity to use their expertise in defence of the people, rather than in the service of militarism. In his landmark 1939 book *The Social Function of Science* J.D. Bernal proclaimed that with capitalism in decline a scientific renaissance could only occur in a socialist society that

⁴⁷ Cambridge Socialist League and the Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group, *Why Are They Fighting in Spain?* (Cambridge, c. 1937).

⁴⁸ Wintringham, *War! – And the Way to Fight Against It*, 14.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1938, 4.

preserved liberty against the potential authoritarian tendencies of science and scientists. Bernal declared that “more than anything else the question of science and war has made scientists look beyond the field of their own enquiries and discoveries to the social uses to which these discoveries are put.”⁵⁰ In an earlier article Bernal argued for the necessity of socialism to achieve the constructive possibilities of science, since capitalist society wasted human potential through competition and non-rational production. He declared, “Modern wars are not so much fought with weapons—even scientific weapons, such as tanks and aeroplanes—as by industries and population... If science is to help humanity, it must find a new master.”⁵¹ Through the concept of “Anglo-Marxism,” leftist scientists sought to ameliorate these ills through societal cooperation, rather than hierarchical dictates. This basis for “leftist science” complemented ideas of democratic defence and popular civic action in the provision of civilian defence. It also had a strong nationalist basis, and therefore fit with the nationalist turn the British left adopted the late 1930s. The following sections of this chapter will highlight the lessons of air war that the British left derived from Spain, and how Spain fit into the ARP critique and the Popular Front.

Lessons from the Attack and the Defence of Spanish Towns Against Air Raids

The highest-profile leftist commentator on Spain was J.B.S. Haldane, who traveled to the country as an expert and advisor to the Republican government on the issue of poison gas

⁵⁰ J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science* (London: Routledge, 1939), 186.

⁵¹ J.D. Bernal, “Science and Industry” in Sir Daniel Hall et al., *The Frustration of Science* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), 42-78, 77-8.

protection. He journeyed to Madrid in December 1936 and again in March 1937, yet his time in Spain convinced him that the Spanish had more to teach him on the subject of ARP than vice versa. Spain allowed Haldane to display his sweeping political rhetoric – he claimed solidarity with the Spaniards simply by having experienced an air raid. As he claimed in a BBC broadcast, “If I lived for a thousand years, it might still be my proudest boast that on Christmas day, 1936, I was a citizen of Madrid.”⁵² This affirmation of the heroism of the ordinary civilian and the resilience of communities was as important to the leftist critique of ARP as were the technical observations.

Observing the effects of bombing first-hand influenced the writing of his book *A.R.P.* and his proposals for shelter protection in London. A Professor of Genetics, and subsequently Biometry, at University College London, he had experienced chemical warfare as an officer on the Western front in World War One. Sent to the front lines in 1915, he witnessed the use of chlorine gas in combat and was one of three scientists initially set to work on identifying and helping to protect against gas.⁵³ His father, John Scott Haldane, a physiologist specializing in respiration, also arrived in France to carry out anti-gas experiments on himself and his son. Their findings called for the immediate issue of a higher grade respirator, but this recommendation was not implemented by the General Staff.⁵⁴ Haldane therefore approached the question of air raids in Spain, and later British ARP, as both a chemist and a military man. These combined sets of expertise

⁵² BBC Newscast, “Civil War From Both Sides,” 15 January 1937, cited in Shelmerdine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War*, 126.

⁵³ Donald Richter, *Chemical Soldiers: British Gas Warfare in World War I* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 10. Haldane had argued that brilliant scientists should be used in the laboratory to contribute to the war efforts, rather than be sent to slaughter in the trenches, 226.

⁵⁴ Werskey, *The Visible College*, 59.

made him, in the words of his biographer, “tailor-made for the campaign which the Communists now led.”⁵⁵

Other leftist observers included the progressive architect Fred Skinner, who later participated in the Finsbury deep shelter scheme. Skinner was employed to research public shelter provisions in Barcelona by a progressive professional organization, the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA),⁵⁶ and his first-hand observations were published in several architectural publications. Skinner was also a representative of the progressive group MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group), prominently linked to the Tecton firm, which was soon to draft plans for air raid protection in Finsbury.

John Langdon-Davies, a communist sympathizer, professional architect and writer, also drew conclusions from Spain, though he was initially not as confident about the possibility of deep shelter protection as Haldane. Langdon-Davies was among a community of expatriate Britons who lived in Catalonia throughout the interwar years. Deeply involved in Popular Front politics, he “was seemingly a member of every committee and involved in every campaign.”⁵⁷ His interpretations both complimented and clashed with those forwarded by Haldane. The two commentators disagreed over Langdon-Davies’ contention in his second book on Spain, *Air Raid: The Technique of Silent Approach, High Explosive Panic*, that the “silent approach” of bombers would

⁵⁵ Ronald Clark, *J.B.S.: The Life and Work of J.B.S. Haldane* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 126.

⁵⁶ Andrew Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), 76. Skinner reported on the general effects of different types of bombs on the city of Barcelona, *The Architects’ Journal*, 16 June 1938, 1017-1021.

⁵⁷ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 146.

render shelter preparations useless.⁵⁸ It is important to note that there were differing interpretations of Spanish air raid preparations, but it was the version of triumphal community action that dominated leftist discourse on Spain, given that it was necessary for the leftist ARP campaign. Langdon-Davies and Haldane later jointly advocated British shelters through the auspices of the Left Book Club. Though the Republic lost the Civil War, the “victory” of ordinary civilians against aerial attack was a suitable parable for British leftists to employ in their own plans for democratic defence.

Air attack in Spain began fitfully, soon after the Civil War commenced, with 35 air raids of various intensities on Madrid occurring between October 1936 and January 1937. A variety of ordnance was tested, although incendiary bombs “proved ineffective” at setting fire to cities.⁵⁹ These bombs, however, were relatively effective at setting wheat fields alight as part of a strategy of economic warfare. Aerial attack did not become systematic until September 1937, when the collapse of the Asturian Front and a shift in strategy caused the Nationalists to attack Barcelona. Haldane believed that defenceless cities had served as “test cases” for fascist pilots, and that “this may be regarded as a dress rehearsal for a similar attempt on Britain.”⁶⁰ In a future war, he warned, attacks would be much more devastating, though he made no mention of the defensive measures

⁵⁸ Haldane refuted Langdon-Davies’ idea on “silent approach” in *A.R.P.*, 284-293. In 1937 Langdon-Davies published an eye-witness account *Behind the Spanish Barricades*, which was cited in the House of Lords. In *Air Raid: The Technique of Silent Approach, High Explosive Panic* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1938), 24-5, Langdon-Davies advanced the technically dubious idea that enemy bombers might switch off their engines and glide for hundreds of miles, achieving a stealth raid. He was given a semi-official reprimand by the Home Office. NA, HO 45/18186, letter from Colonel Grinlinton, head of ARP in Essex, 18 July 1938. Grinlinton was concerned about panic due to Langdon-Davies’ radio broadcast of 6 July 1938 advancing his theory of “silent approach,” and the official feared that “educated people” might believe that this was possible. The broadcast was noted in *The Times*, 7 July 1938, 7.

⁵⁹ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 47-8.

⁶⁰ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 51.

that would certainly be in force to protect British cities in wartime. He believed that German pilots had gained confidence through carrying out unchallenged air raids, and might be more likely to attempt to bomb British cities during a future war. Haldane was reflecting general military opinion, such as that of commentator Watson O'Dell Pierce, who argued that the bombing of Guernica was a German experiment on the turn-around time for bombers and the effect of machine gun attack on a panicked population.⁶¹ It was, therefore, a short step towards imagining that aerial attack could only become more intense and destructive as new techniques and strategies were developed.

Observers drew parallels between Britain and Spain, and it was common for the press to translate events in Spain into British analogies to emphasize the gravity of aerial destruction. For example, *The Times* correspondent G.L. Steer noted that attacks on small Basque towns could easily presage the total destruction of smaller British industrial towns, giving the example of Hull in the Northeast.⁶² Others believed that military events in Spain were of direct import for Britain, emphasizing the strategic as well as moral reasons why fascist involvement threatened British democracy.⁶³ The launch of an even greater aerial offensive in the spring of 1938 convinced Haldane that similar tactics might be used, and might prove quite effective, against Eastern coastal towns in Britain. Haldane also raised strategic points, though some may not have been entirely logical. For example, he contended that the enemy might well attack small towns of little or no industrial value to force a dilution of anti-aircraft and other defence mechanisms

⁶¹ W. O'Dell Pierce, *Air War: Its Technical and Social Aspects* (London: Watts and Co, 1937), 110-130.

⁶² G.L. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1938), 258.

⁶³ Henry Blythe, *Spain Over Britain: A Study of the Strategical Effect of Italian Intervention on the Defence of the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 1937).

throughout the country, thus making the great industrial centres even more vulnerable to attack.⁶⁴ He envisioned the possibilities of air power in much the same way as the military planners had, referring to the “knock-out blow” as a tactic to wear down civilian resistance.⁶⁵

There were three primary conclusions drawn by British leftists from the aerial bombing of Spanish towns. Firstly, there were no instances of mass panic to the extent that civil order was in jeopardy. This helped bolster the leftist argument that working-class people in urban areas could rationally and stoically implement their own air raid shelter protection. Secondly, technical observations highlighted the absolute necessity of underground shelters and the inadvisability of using cellars and converted basements for civilian protection. Finally, the ability of local communities to provide for their own shelter was praised, providing a model for spontaneous action that leftist Boroughs attempted to follow in the short time before the advent of war in 1939. Haldane observed the preparation for air raids in Barcelona, and local residents impressed him with their efficiency and the sense of purpose that they brought to these ambitious tasks. In a letter published in *The Times* in February 1938, the Mayor of Barcelona claimed that his city had constructed around 400 shelters of varying sizes, which were capable of housing nearly 350,000 people.⁶⁶ These remarkable preparations provoked many to be concerned that shelter policy had not even been discussed by the British government.

⁶⁴ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 64.

⁶⁵ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 62.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 17 February 1938, 8.

As demonstrated in the second chapter, the fear of panic underlay the principle of dispersal and preparations to enforce civil order. Leftist observers in Spain were at pains to emphasize that raids provoked fear, but that on the whole they were harmless in denting morale. Haldane was most vocal in his praise of Spanish stoicism, arguing that the only instance in which an air raid produced more significant panic was when a large population of refugees, driven from towns with little planning and protection, overwhelmed certain areas of Barcelona. When this occurred, it became impossible to provide bomb-proof shelters for even a fraction of the refugees. Yet a huge effort was exerted to create shelters even in the midst of attack. As he related, “The Government kept its head, and there was no threat of a revolution to end the war.”⁶⁷ Though people availed themselves of the shelters if they were caught on the streets during a raid, in general a “business as usual” attitude prevailed in the city.⁶⁸

Leftist observers agreed that, contrary to general expectations that civilian bombing would quickly destroy morale, the Nationalist bombing of Madrid actually increased the determination and defiance of the population. Most importantly, they believed that adequate deep shelters aided, rather than hindered, the public in the performance of vital war duties. Esmond Romilly traveled extensively through Spain and experienced air raids in Barcelona. Taking shelter in a Metro station with local residents he observed that “the fear of suffocation was stronger than that of the bombs,” and that people calmly left shelters following air raids.⁶⁹ J.B.S. Haldane remarked that he

⁶⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 55.

⁶⁸ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 52.

⁶⁹ Esmond Romilly, *Boadilla* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1937), 194.

expected to find panic in Madrid due to the air raids, but although a few people stayed overnight in the Metro stations, “I never heard of anyone sleeping in a cellar. It simply ‘wasn’t done’ to be frightened... On the whole everyone carried on.”⁷⁰ Curious rather than terrified, many boldly ventured outside, observed the raids and had to be dissuaded by authorities from air raid spectatorship. George Orwell noted that although air raid shelters had been dug all over Barcelona, he suggested that it was “timid” individuals who dived into shelters and cellars.⁷¹ Other British observers reported that, to their surprise, air raids caused them “excitement” rather than fear.⁷²

The resilience of the residents of Barcelona and Madrid was also confirmed by non-leftist sources. The assistant ARP medical officer for the Borough of Battersea, who had been in Spain during air raids, noted that Spanish aerial bombing demonstrated a range of civilian reactions. Some individuals felt most reassured taking refuge under any sort of cover, while others preferred to be out in the open where they could see the sky. He noted that bomb-proof shelters with large signs on the exterior had “a strong psychological value in allaying the fears of the nervous civilians.”⁷³ Ideas of mass psychology still applied, though not necessarily in the way that either the prophets of doom or government planners had assumed. Many observers believed that the populace simply needed assurance that adequate shelters were nearby, even if they did not always

⁷⁰ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 48.

⁷¹ George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, cited in Peter Davison, ed. *Orwell in Spain: The Full Text of Homage to Catalonia with Associated Articles, Reviews and Letters from The Complete Works of George Orwell* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 139.

⁷² Louis MacNeice, *The Strings are False: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 180.

⁷³ G.B. Shirlaw, *Casualty: Training, Organisation and Administration of Civil Defence Casualty Services* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1940), 3. Shirlaw was also an Associate Fellow of the ARP Institute.

utilize them. A special ARP supplement of *Architectural Design and Construction*

highlighted the calm of residents of Barcelona and the effectiveness of shelters:

The deaths occurring in raids less than a year ago were never less than several hundreds in each raid... the casualties to-day are relatively [minor]. It is worth considering for a moment the psychological value of air-raid shelters. Some people are disposed to condemn what they call 'funk-holes' on the grounds that 'pampering' the populace in this way will undermine its morale. This was not the case in Barcelona, where the population remained calm.⁷⁴

The Barcelona correspondent for *The Times* agreed, reporting in March 1938 that enemy air raids did not succeed in bringing the intended "horror and panic" to the civilian population. He claimed to have seen a dying man on a stretcher raise his fist in a defiant anti-fascist salute.⁷⁵ One military commentator believed that other populations would react with even greater calm than had the Spanish, who had been vulnerable to the novelty and surprise of aerial attack. Once civilians accepted air attack as inevitable and prepared adequately for it, fear would mostly subside.⁷⁶ These accounts of the resilience of civilian morale confirmed that civilians could become somewhat accustomed to the psychological strain of unpredictable bombing.⁷⁷

The stoic version forwarded by Haldane and others became cemented in the leftist account of ARP in Spain, and dovetailed with the technical points emphasized by the leftist critics. Leftist observers believed that several significant points were clear from the Spanish experience. These observations directly contradicted the basis of British

⁷⁴ "Special ARP Supplement," *Architectural Design and Construction*, May 1939, 14.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 18 March 1938, 16.

⁷⁶ B.C. Denning, *Modern War: Armies, not Air Forces, Decide Wars* (Hampshire: North Hants Printing Co. Ltd, 1937), 19.

⁷⁷ Tom Harrison, one of the instigators of Mass Observation, made the same point in 1940, noting that the effect of raids on most people's minds is "very slight after the first shock." Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 313, Civilians in Air-Raids, Tom Harrison for Picture Post, 1 August 1940, 1.

government advice on dispersal, the refuge room, and reinforced basements. They refuted the idea that basements would provide adequate protection, and that dispersal was a sound policy. Haldane's compelling observations, and those of other observers, influenced the leftist scientific community, including the CSAWG. Although there is no record that any of the prominent members of the CSAWG traveled to Spain personally, they most likely absorbed the ARP lessons forwarded by their fellow leftists. The CSAWG charged that the first ARP Circular did not straightforwardly depict the true dangers of aerial attack, alleging that it represented "false assurance" for the public. It pointed to Spain to back up these allegations, believing that experience there showed that ARP could not be "limited to brown paper, cellophane and a bucket of sand."⁷⁸ John Langdon-Davies also argued that the bombing of Barcelona "made existing literature on ARP obsolete," therefore necessitating urgent new research.⁷⁹

The CPGB in particular believed that Spain made the dangers overwhelmingly clear, and their observations overlapped to a great extent with those of Haldane. The issue was fiercely taken up by the Communist Party General Secretary Harry Pollitt, in the forward to a CPGB pamphlet, *Defence of the People*. He linked the plight of Spain to the future of his own nation, and asked whether Britain was to be "plunged into a war of the same barbaric and inhuman character as is now being waged in Spain and China?"⁸⁰ The Party also produced a plethora of small pamphlets, some of which had very small print runs. Others, such as *A.R.P. for Londoners*, received more attention in their preparation

⁷⁸ Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts* (London: Fact, no. 13, 1938), 36.

⁷⁹ Langdon-Davies, *Air Raid*, 12.

⁸⁰ Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), *Defence of the People* (London, 1939).

and were more widely distributed. The example of the Nationalist bombing campaigns was cited in order to emphasize the grave danger of bombing for the population of large cities. *A.R.P. for Londoners* featured photographs of bomb damage from Spain, as well as pictures of gas masks and trenches dug to help protect civilians from aerial bombs.⁸¹ The Communist Party used these pamphlets to forward a straightforward, perhaps simplistic, class-based attack on government ARP which will be explored in the following chapter.

One point on which all commentators could agree was the importance of protection against high explosive. *Architectural Design and Construction* noted that all the data from Spain “points to bomb-proof shelters being essential and in Barcelona bomb-proof and not blast-proof shelters are the general rule.”⁸² The Cambridge Scientists believed that the structural damage caused by high explosive bombs meant that most victims were not killed by the blast itself, but by collapsing buildings. The Group believed that persuasive arguments by the Mayor of Barcelona showed that “the only way to provide anything like adequate protection was to build enough underground shelters to house the majority of the population. These must be deep and soundly built; cellars under houses were no use at all.”⁸³ Both Haldane and Skinner concluded from their Spanish observations that basement and cellar shelters were dangerous “death-traps,” and that no sound policy should encourage their habitual use. As Haldane made clear in his book on ARP, he was unequivocally opposed to re-enforced basements and cellars, claiming that it had been made illegal in Spain to use basements this way due to the extreme danger

⁸¹ CPGB, *A.R.P.: The Practical Air Raid Protection Britain Needs* (London, 1938). Other pamphlets included *A.R.P. Act Now!* (c. 1938), and *A.R.P. Safety Now* (1939).

⁸² “Special ARP Supplement,” *Architectural Design and Construction*, May 1939, 14.

⁸³ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 88; 32 citing the *Daily Worker*, 24 February 1938.

they posed.⁸⁴ Haldane, as an ex-military man, also noticed in Spain that straight-line trenches caused unlimited damage to the entire trench in the case of a direct hit – an observation that had been made during the First World War. Trenches needed to be constructed in zigzag patterns to prevent casualties.

These ideas had broad influence within leftist constituencies and formed the moral basis of alternative ARP plans, such as in pamphlets produced by the CPGB.⁸⁵ Communist pamphlets often cited Haldane and the CSAWG as sources of information. Drafting their plans for deep shelters in Finsbury, the progressive Tecton Architect group referenced the studies that had been undertaken by Skinner and Haldane, stating that “the experience of Spain, which has been sufficiently close to us in England... must be regarded as only a very small-scale experiment in bombardment.”⁸⁶ In addition the studies of ARP in Spain were endorsed and given wider audiences by leftist editors, including Margaret Cole, former pacifist and contributor to *Left Review*, who, as editor of the journal *Fact*, published the work of the CSAWG. The following section of this chapter will discuss the importance of Spain to Labour councilors and local ARP officers.

The final significant observation from Spain involved the importance of local authorities and the collective action of the people. As much as British intellectuals valorized the individual heroics of the militia soldier, the role of the collective was equally important. The actions of ordinary Spanish civilians gave the leftist critics a powerful model of radical volunteerism to counter what they perceived as a middle-class

⁸⁴ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead* (London, 1938), 8.

⁸⁵ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, 8.

⁸⁶ Tecton Architects, *Planned ARP: Based on the Investigation of Structural Protection Against Air Attack in the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury* (London: The Architectural Press, 1939), 1. By use of the word “close,” the architects were possibly referring to Spain as the first example of air war in Europe.

and even authoritarian basis for ARP in Britain. They sought to radicalize volunteerism as part of a democratic People's War. Haldane wrote that the Nationalist aerial offensive of 1938 "did not find the Spanish people altogether unprepared.... A vast program of digging was undertaken."⁸⁷ He reported on the precautions that the residents of Barcelona had taken against attack, constructing small communal underground shelters which held 50-150 people. Although built at only a fraction of the depth of a true "deep shelter," they still protected individuals effectively against all but a direct hit.⁸⁸ They were placed at regular intervals throughout the city to ensure uniform protection and to minimize the possibility of chaotic overcrowding in a single shelter. Haldane noted that the impetus for building these shelters had come from local politicians, sometimes in opposition to the central government that was unwilling to direct resources to civilian ends in a time of military crisis. Fred Skinner, having sheltered with local people in Barcelona and observed their preparations, concluded that in modern war "all areas are dangerous," but he was confident that the Spanish example provided a model to protect the population.⁸⁹

Haldane noted that despite the best efforts of the Spaniards, in many places protection was unequal and that the gaps in provisions had implications for the functioning of the entire ARP system. The leftist critics later made standardization a cornerstone of their shelter plans in Britain, partly out of the fear that an *ad hoc* policy endangered the entire system. They believed that citizens in less well-protected areas would flee to areas with better protection and overwhelm them. Some areas in Spain had

⁸⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 52.

⁸⁸ J.B.S. Haldane, *How to Be Safe from Air Raids*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 6-9.

⁸⁹ "Special ARP Supplement," *Architectural Design and Construction*, May 1939, 14.

virtually no protection while others had highly advanced underground shelters that could resist a direct hit from one-quarter ton bombs. Rarely, however, were there enough shelters for the entire population. Haldane made a case study of the Catalan town of Reus which was relatively well-prepared for aerial attack, with underground concrete shelters for 9,000 people, shelters under homes for 11,000 and shelters for 1,200 more under construction. Yet this did not provide for all of the approximately 27,000 residents of the town, forcing many thousands to sleep in the fields.⁹⁰ The Welsh Liberal MP Megan Lloyd George used Haldane's findings to emphasize that although these provisions were incomplete, they were nevertheless impressive. She believed that the construction of these shelters meant that only 3 deaths occurred during an air raid that destroyed 35 buildings.⁹¹

Although the basis of alternate ARP plans involved the construction of large very shelters which could accommodate thousands of people, the example of Spain proved that even small underground shelters had a place in a comprehensive ARP plan, particularly in smaller towns. Architect Serge Chermayeff, one of the Finsbury shelter planners, believed that shelters constructed in the town of Cartagena should be studied, as they could accommodate around 75 people and were built to high professional standards.⁹² The CSAWG noted that smaller surface shelters would protect against all but a direct hit by a large bomb. These structures involved medium-sized underground

⁹⁰ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 52. Haldane clearly discounted the value of basement and cellar shelters throughout the book, but does not explain exactly what type of shelters the town of Reus provided for 11,000 individuals "under houses."

⁹¹ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol 336 (1938), col. 2117.

⁹² Serge Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.: A Practical Policy for Air-Raid Precautions* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 34-5.

compartments which would each hold between 25 and 30 people. The Cambridge Scientists believed that this modest plan to provide protection for some, though certainly not all, of the metropolitan population stood a good chance of success. The Group believed that “because of the high cost involved it would not be practical to make all shelters proof against direct hits from high explosive bombs. In all cases however the shelters should withstand the force of the blast produced by the explosion.”⁹³ These smaller-scale proposals were particularly useful to local authorities, who found their ARP programs constrained due to budgets and regulations imposed by the Home Office.

Labour and the Local Councils Learn From Spain

Leftist local politicians in Britain believed that Spain demonstrated the importance of local action to achieve the demands of civilians for air raid protection. For Labour and local leaders, cooperation with government was set in sharp contrast with the tendency of the far left towards protest and intransigence. Herbert Morrison and Labour councilors learned from Spanish ARP, particularly regarding the influence that local ARP officers could wield. In the Forward to *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, Haldane praised the Labour and Liberal parties for “joining” the Communists to demand deep shelters.⁹⁴ Although there were points of agreement, there were also important divergences between the mainstream and far left approaches to ARP. In addition, members of Labour would likely object to the assertion that they had somehow joined the Communists, when individuals such as

⁹³ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 77-8.

⁹⁴ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, 2.

Herbert Morrison had been pressing the government on the issue since at least 1935 when the first ARP Circular was published.

The repudiation of the policy of Non-Intervention in 1937 meant that Labour leaders could publicly travel to Spain to report on the war, and praise the heroism of the militias and the foreign volunteers. Labour leader Clement Attlee traveled to Spain in late 1937 with Philip Noel-Baker and Ellen Wilkinson, the MP who organized the Jarrow March of unemployed constituents to London in 1936. She later became involved with government shelter provision during the Second World War. The Labour group was well received by the volunteers, and they delivered passionate speeches about the cause and the work the Labour Party was now undertaking on behalf of Spain. In an editorial published in *Left News*, Attlee praised the courage of the International Brigade and the British volunteers in their stand against fascism.⁹⁵ The Labour MP for Finsbury, George Woods, also journeyed to the Spanish Front to observe defence against aerial and ground attack. When he returned to Britain, he proclaimed amazement to hear the government still talking about ARP in terms of “buckets of sand and spades.” He stated “from what I and others have seen in Barcelona, it was obvious that something drastic was necessary if [shelter] security were to be guaranteed to the civilian population.”⁹⁶ Such an issue was particularly relevant in his constituency located in Northeast London; Woods believed crowded Spanish and British cities faced similar dangers.

Labour MPs were particularly prominent in raising the issue of Spanish bombing in the House and calling on the government to devote resources to studying the effects of

⁹⁵ C.R. Attlee “What I Learned in Spain,” *Left News*, no. 21 (January 1937), 645.

⁹⁶ *Finsbury Citizen*, April 1939, 1.

bombing and ARP in Spain. Philip Noel-Baker was one individual who combined a pacifist critique with a call for increased ARP, and he demonstrates the impact of pacifist sentiment on discussions of ARP within Parliamentary Labour. He had long believed that air armament would lead to the destruction of civilization. Therefore he argued that an international police force must be set up to prevent the use of aircraft for military purposes.⁹⁷ In the late 1930s such international cooperation became increasingly unlikely, and Noel-Baker began to use his lengthy speeches to highlight the significance of Spanish bombing to Britain. He used the example of the port areas of Barcelona to insist that evacuation of similar areas in London was necessary.⁹⁸ He also pressed the Home Office to send a delegation to Spain to study the effects of bombing tactics on cities and different types of buildings.⁹⁹

As leader of the LCC, Herbert Morrison used the issue of ARP to enforce his strong anti-communism, preference for moderate policies, and advocacy of “municipal socialism.” He was insistent that local authorities could positively influence ARP, defeating an LCC motion that sought to portray all ARP as a mere “delusion.” He called for bomb-proof shelters and full government funding for local authority ARP plans.¹⁰⁰ Within the ARP Committee Council he was in charge of creating many civil defence services from scratch, and was tireless in his detailed consideration of how various

⁹⁷ Philip Noel-Baker, “A National Air Force No Defence,” in Storm Jameson, ed. *Challenge to Death*. With a forward by Viscount Cecil, (London: Constable and Co, Ltd, 1934), 200-204.

⁹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol 344 (1939), col. 1392.

⁹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 333 (1938), cols. 1354-5, and vol. 331 (1938), cols. 362-3.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard Donoughue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 265-7.

services would interact and overlap.¹⁰¹ His emphasis on augmenting local ARP services convinced individual boroughs to follow suit, involving small-scale cooperation between different factions of the left. Arthur George Bottomley, a Labour councilor, helped to pioneer civil defence in Walthamstow and was joined by the Communist Party in the area. Similarly, the CPGB worked with Labour in Holborn to agitate for increased shelter funding.¹⁰²

Several Boroughs undertook their own surveys, aiming to build shelters along the lines of those constructed in Spain. Hackney was one of the first areas to be involved in intensive ARP planning, largely through the impetus of its town clerk, Dr. Richard Tee, who had been appointed to his position when Hebert Morrison had been mayor of the Borough. Tee had been invited to assist the Committee for Imperial Defence on the subject of gas decontamination in the early 1930s, and was therefore well placed to lead his borough in drafting plans for ARP. Hackney was the first local authority to file a draft scheme with the Home Office in early 1938, though it took many months to receive an answer on the plans. Nevertheless, E.J. Hodsoll of the ARP Department praised Tee's work and his political savvy in dealing with opposition and dissent on the issue of ARP. Hodsoll believed the Borough had proved itself reasonably well prepared for aerial attack.¹⁰³

Officials in St. Pancras were also concerned that their Borough contained decaying housing stock and major railway terminals that would doubtless be a target for

¹⁰¹ Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician*, 206.

¹⁰² Holborn's People's Air Raid Protection Committee, *A.R.P. – A Plan for Holborn* (London, 1938).

¹⁰³ Robin Woolven, "First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions," *Hackney History*, 6 (2000): 54-5.

enemy bombers. They also felt somewhat slighted by the fact that they were only awarded a 60% ARP grant under the terms of the Air Raid Precautions Bill of 1937. The Borough Surveyor and Engineer, Cyril S. Bainbridge, was tasked with preparing the Borough's plan called "The Battle of London," which was presented in March 1937.¹⁰⁴ Bainbridge worked in tandem with Major Noel de Purton MacRoberts, the St. Pancras ARP officer. MacRoberts had traveled to Spain and wrote a technical book entitled *ARP Lessons from Barcelona – Some Hints for Local Authorities and for the Private Citizen*, in which he forwarded the theory that a well-prepared citizenry would actually dissuade enemy bombing.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, he felt that preparing shelters was an essential part of military preparedness, not merely an area in which civilians should be left to fend for themselves. He also called for uniform and centralized executive control of ARP, believing that the dispersal of effort between many local authorities was inefficient. The Communist Party praised Major MacRoberts for his work on ARP and his commitment to fully protect civilians, citing his advocacy of deep shelters that had proved effective in Spain.¹⁰⁶ That effective ARP might need to be undertaken on a local rather than a national basis was therefore an entrenched opinion by the time of the Munich Crisis. These efforts involved coordination between authorities and the cooperation between different strands of the left, who were most invested in changing government plans for ARP.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Allen Newbery, ed. F. Peter Woodford, transcribed and annotated by Robin Woolven, *Wartime St. Pancras: A London Borough Defends Itself* (Camden: Camden History Society, 2006), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Noel de P. MacRoberts, *ARP Lessons from Barcelona – Some Hints for Local Authorities and for the Private Citizen* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1938), 31.

¹⁰⁶ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Londoners*, 6.

The Leftists Claim Unique Knowledge of Spain

Given the level of interest that the left invested in studying Spain, they invariably ended up believing that their observations represented special and exclusive knowledge. Leftist scientists believed that by paying inadequate attention to Spain, British leaders were blind to the dangers that would soon reach home shores. They were eager to redress the balance, complaining that neither the government nor the national press was prepared to do so. Historian Tami Biddle Davis argues that for the most part British planners largely dismissed the lessons of bombing in Spain, and the professional military journals neglected to study aerial warfare in Spain in depth.¹⁰⁷ Yet some commentators believed that proliferation of coverage of Spanish bombing in the press only served to cloud and exaggerate the aerial threat. An article writer for *The Times* charged that misleading analogies had been drawn from the wars in both China and Spain. Those stories had given a gullible public “the most fantastic ideas about the nature of aerial warfare, the dangers of gas, and the futility of resistance.”¹⁰⁸ However, the counter-evidence shows that non-leftists, from government experts to scientists and professional architects, were incorporating data from Spain in their plans for air raid protection in Britain.

Leftist experts charged the government with the deliberate obfuscation and suppression of the facts about Spanish ARP protection. Typically, Haldane was among the most prominent and vociferous voices on the subject. In the forward to a Hampstead

¹⁰⁷ Tami Biddle Davis, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 116.

¹⁰⁸ *The Times*, 10 January 1938, 13.

Communist Party pamphlet he noted, “the Government’s refusal to act is absolutely deliberate. They have not yet even undertaken the preliminary research which might save score [sic] of millions of pounds in shelter design.”¹⁰⁹ In rallies held throughout England to publicize his book, *A.R.P.*, Haldane spoke about the role of leftist scientists in promoting the “truth” about ARP, which he felt was being “kept from the British people.”¹¹⁰ Haldane argued that the government had brought “considerable and effective pressure” on the press to devote as little space as possible to the coverage of ARP in Spain. The leftist writer Cecil Day Lewis, writing in the *Daily Worker*, similarly accused the national press of running a “contemptible campaign of innuendo, falsehood and atrocity-mongering against the Spanish government.”¹¹¹ The Cambridge Scientists argued in a letter to *The Times* that they were “the first to bring to the attention of members of Parliament the work that had been done in this field on the Continent.”¹¹²

The leftist critics felt that their studies were particularly important as so little was known about the capabilities of modern aircraft in aerial attack and Spain was the only European theatre of war in which the effects of air bombardment could be observed. Data collection and the analysis of various shelter provisions in Spain were therefore areas in which the leftists claimed a near monopoly of knowledge. Those who had traveled to Spain felt that the significant accomplishments of the Republican government in providing rudimentary air raid protection in cities were unnecessarily dismissed, and the value of this information was lost to the British public. Haldane also accused the Labour

¹⁰⁹ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, (London, 1938), 2.

¹¹⁰ Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 54.

¹¹¹ *Daily Worker*, 25 August 1936, 3.

¹¹² Cambridge Scientists et al. *The Times*, 11 February, 1938, 10.

Party of being complicit in the suppression of information regarding Spanish air raids by refusing to “understand” the gravity of the issue as the Communist Party did. This level of polemic was unhelpful to building common-cause among leftists, and was the type of self-serving pronouncement that Communists were often accused of making.

The charge that non-leftists “ignored Spain” bears some scrutiny, as there is significant evidence that both the press and the government did study the impact of bombing in Spain. Though much of the press, including the *Morning Post*, *Daily Mail*, and the *Observer*, was decidedly sympathetic to the Nationalists, a variety of papers including the *Daily Herald*, *Manchester Guardian*, *News Chronicle* and *Daily Mirror* supported the Republican side. The *Daily Telegraph* attempted neutrality while *The Times* upheld the official position of Non-Intervention. A few of these newspapers reported on aspects of ARP, as well as the progress of the war and the bombing of civilians. Coverage in *The Times* generated outrage over the bombing of civilians in Spain and the paper gave an important forum to the Mayor of Barcelona to discuss ARP in his city. The correspondent G.L. Steer also contributed unattributed reports on the bombing of Guernica, and his accounts stirred powerful emotions. Steer declared the air raids to be “unparalleled in military history.” It was popular among the British to romanticize the Basque people as a “democratic people,”¹¹³ and Steer proved to be no exception. He believed that “the object of the bombardment was seemingly the demoralization of the civil population and the destruction of the cradle of the Basque

¹¹³ Shelmerdine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War*, 155.

race.”¹¹⁴ W.E. Johns, author of the popular *Biggles* aviation novels, and editor of *Popular Flying* and *Flying*, used his position to pen furious editorials denouncing the policy of Non-Intervention and Nationalist aerial bombing atrocities. Though hardly a radical, he eulogized foreign volunteers who risked everything “fighting for that most hopeless of causes – Freedom.”¹¹⁵ These statements resulted in political pressure on Johns, who was forced to stand down as editor of *Popular Flying*.¹¹⁶

The mainstream architectural press also used the work of experts on Spain like Haldane and Fred Skinner to explain and dissect current ARP plans for Britain. The technical publication *Architectural Design and Construction* featured the report “Lessons of Barcelona in Air-Raid Shelter Design,” recommending the building of tunnels as inexpensive yet useful shelters since they had proved their effectiveness in Spain.¹¹⁷ The Institution of Structural Engineers also hosted lectures on the ARP lessons from Barcelona, though they did not invite any of the leftist experts to speak. One of their lecturers, Cyril Helsby, a structural engineer, discounted the value of trench protection. He informed his colleagues that the Spanish “have no use to-day for trenches in the manner recommended in England.”¹¹⁸ Helsby also tentatively endorsed the notion that shelter provisions must “go deeper” than presently advocated, although he was careful to voice support for Sir John Anderson and the Home Office plans to distribute backyard

¹¹⁴ Unattributed W.E. Johns column, *The Times*, 28 April 1937, cited in Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 23.

¹¹⁵ W.E. Johns, “Seeing Spain Slaughtered,” *Popular Flying*, March 1939, reprinted in Cunningham, *Spanish Front*, 76-77.

¹¹⁶ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 162.

¹¹⁷ Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA), “A.R.P. A Report on the Design, Equipment and Cost of Air-Raid Shelters,” reprint from *Architects’ Journal* (London, 1938).

¹¹⁸ Peter Jones, *Ove Arup: Masterbuilder of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 68.

shelters to individual householders.¹¹⁹ The Anderson shelters were intended to be buried, providing at least a basic level of protection for householders, and represented an evolution in Home Office thinking since the advocacy of the “refuge room.”

There is also evidence that ARP officials in the Home Office did in fact study Spain, though their conclusions may have differed from those derived by the British left. The possibility that individuals such as Haldane do not seem to have acknowledged is that other valid interpretations could be drawn from observing Spain. In March 1938, Geoffrey Lloyd, representing the Home Office, assured Labour MPs that “reliable reports” were being made on the events in Spain, though Lloyd denied that a special delegation was necessary to travel to Spanish cities affected by bombing.¹²⁰ Duncan Sandys, a Conservative MP and the Chairman of the Parliamentary ARP Committee, declared, “those who are responsible for the organization of air raid precautions in Great Britain would do well to study in the minutest detail the technique of air raids in Spain and the measures which the Spanish people [have used] to protect themselves against the menace of the modern bomber.”¹²¹ The Committee did invite the Mayor of Barcelona to relate ARP provisions in his city in early 1938.¹²²

The assertion that Spain was “ignored” by the government ultimately meant that officials did not come to the *same* conclusions regarding the urgency of shelters as the leftist critics did. The government derived different results from the reports of Spain,

¹¹⁹ *The Times*, 23 December 1938, 9.

¹²⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 333 (1938), col. 1354.

¹²¹ *The Architects' Journal*, 7 July 1939, 17. Haldane noted that as a Conservative Sandys was “unlikely to exaggerate facts in such a way as to discredit the value of the precautions taken or proposed by the present Government.” Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 54.

¹²² *The Times*, 17 February 1938, 8.

believing that the British situation was significantly different and that the theory of dispersal was in no way challenged by the experience of Madrid or Barcelona. For example, the Hailey Commission that gathered in 1939 remarked on the call for the British government to institute the same provisions that had been made in Spain. The Commission officials concluded:

In the first place, however, we are satisfied that the degree and extent of the protection there given have often been exaggerated. It seems clear that protection designed to be bomb-proof was available for only a relatively small proportion of the population, and that its bomb-resisting qualities were not effectively tested. In the second place, the conditions of the problem, here in Barcelona, are so different that comparisons are of no great value. Barcelona enjoys a climate very different from ours, and exposure to it by night involved little hardship.¹²³

These practical considerations represent an equally valid perspective on the lessons of the war in Spain. The bomb-resisting qualities of Barcelona shelters were indeed untested from a quantitative scientific point of view. In addition, there remained no means of fully ascertaining how many people were actually sheltered in Spanish cities, and how these shelters affected casualty rates. It is also worth pointing out that Haldane and other leftists who traveled to Spain were inevitably dependent on their Spanish hosts, and fellow observers, for information on raids and the general level of preparedness in the cities. The possibility that foreign governments could simply be putting up a good front in order to reassure their own civilian populations did not seem to occur to the leftist commentators. And yet this was the tactic they accused the British government of using. Such blind spots in pursuit of their larger vision would also be a feature of the critique of

¹²³ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters: Report of the Lord Privy Seal's Conference* (London: HMSO, 1939), 24.

British ARP, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Yet there is little doubt the leftist insistence on studying ARP in Spain forced others, including the Home Office, also to consider the significance of the subject. The ARP critics on the left made Spain “their own” through sheer insistence, and it became central to their understanding of the role of the state and civilians in modern war.

Britishness and National Identity in Spain

Historians of British involvement in the Spanish Civil War have pointed to the role conceptions of British national identity, and Spanish “otherness,” had on how participants and historians alike viewed the conflict. Spain “was still a country about whose politics, history, religion, culture and customs [the volunteers] knew very little. Theirs was an outside view, inevitably a simplification, that filtered out the Spanishness from the struggle, and made it more manageable.”¹²⁴ Tom Buchanan in *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain* argues that the reaction to the Civil War must be understood in the contemporary context, rather than through ideas imposed by later commentators. He notes that both the left and right perceived Spain as an “old” country where tradition and religious institutions predominated.¹²⁵ Pre-conceived notions of the Spanish nation and national character therefore influenced perceptions of the conflict, as did the identity of

¹²⁴ Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier: Julian Bell and John Cornford: Their Lives and the 1930s* (London: Constable, 1966), 313.

¹²⁵ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 14-18.

the British participants. The assumptions that observers brought to Spain were “informed by notions of ‘Englishness’ as much as by any understanding of ‘Spanishness.’”¹²⁶

For all the rhetoric about international solidarity, Spain functioned as a venue to reassert British identity. The prominence of English and British democracy in depictions of Spain facilitated the application of the lessons of the Spanish Civil War to Britain. Many of the volunteers declared pride in their British traditions of freedom and democracy. As a British Battalion commemorative pamphlet stated, “Out of the Proud traditions of Britain’s past they came... Our modern bearers of Britain’s great traditions came forward in answer to the call, ready to give their lives that freedom might live.”¹²⁷ Stephen Lutman’s analysis of George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* argues that his work expresses an “Englishman’s loyalties and experiences,” in Spain, and that his narrative was developed for an English audience in an overtly English manner.¹²⁸ Orwell ended his account of Spain with his return to England and the bucolic comforts of home. Yet he believed that his fellow countrymen remained in ignorance of the threat of fascism – “all sleeping the deep, deep sleep of England, from which I sometimes fear that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs.”¹²⁹ Orwell viewed England as comforting but simultaneously insulating its citizens from the unpleasant

¹²⁶ Shelmerdine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War*, 3. This reflects the English bias apparent in most accounts of the British in Spain, despite the fact that Welsh and Scottish workers were strongly represented in the British Battalion of the International Brigade.

¹²⁷ International Brigade Association. *British Battalion XV International Brigade: Memorial Souvenir* (London: Marston Printing Company, 1939), 7.

¹²⁸ Stephen Lutman, “Orwell’s Patriotism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2, no. 2 (1967): 150.

¹²⁹ George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, cited in Peter Davison, ed. *Orwell in Spain*, 169.

political realities of Europe. In a letter to his friend Cyril Connolly he claimed “before we know where we are we shall be in the middle of another war to save democracy.”¹³⁰

Statements of ordinary volunteers confirm that many participants viewed the defence of Spain as akin to protecting the freedom of Britain. One volunteer returned from the lost cause with an even greater desire to battle fascism: “This was really why many of us went to Spain in the first place – to stop Fascism in Spain, rather than have it come to Britain.” Looking back on the experience, he also declared that he had no regrets about having volunteered, having “tried to do something.”¹³¹ Isabel Brown, a prominent spokesperson and fundraiser for Spanish relief expressed this sentiment: “I’d said in my speeches, ‘It’s Guernica today, it’ll be Paris and London tomorrow...’ And it is my firm conviction that all the anti-Fascist work we did was a victory because it united the whole of the British people.”¹³² The commemorative pamphlet of the British Battalion attested that the volunteers’ sacrifice in Spain was “British democracy spontaneously expressing its abhorrence of Fascism and its appreciation of bravery. These men have made history, by forming part of the greatest international democratic army the world has ever known.”¹³³ John Strachey, writing a eulogy of the Marxist poet and writer Ralph Fox in the *Daily Worker*, lauded him as belonging, much like Lord Byron, to the tradition of English writers willing to fight and die for higher ideals.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ University College London, George Orwell Papers, File G, George Orwell to Cyril Connolly, 27 April 1938.

¹³¹ Ian MacDougall, ed., *Voices from the Spanish Civil War: Personal Recollections of Scottish Volunteers in Republican Spain 1936-9* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 304.

¹³² Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 199.

¹³³ International Brigade Association, *British Battalion XV International Brigade*, 74.

¹³⁴ *Daily Worker*, 5 January 1937, 1.

The retreat to the comfort of British identity was all the more necessary because many veterans felt disappointment that Spain did not live up to prior billing. John Lehmann wrote of “the suspicion of rhetoric that clings to [Spain].”¹³⁵ While the left could bask in the after-glow of solidarity for the romantic yet doomed cause, it was difficult to ignore the fact that Spain had failed to heal the many cleavages between leftist factions. The experiences of George Orwell in the POUM militia, which was crushed on the orders of Moscow, detailed in *Homage to Catalonia*, typify some of the feelings of betrayal on the part of participants who believed they were fighting for freedom or democracy. Some veterans returned home feeling out of step with those who had stayed home in England. One working-class participant felt that the majority of the English left was not worthy of the higher purpose demonstrated by the volunteers. “I never regretted going there, but I regretted the way in which we were treated afterwards. The kind of sacrifice I found in the Brigade wasn’t here in England, it seemed that there were people who were using them from a safe seat in England.”¹³⁶ By 1939, however, it was clear that England might not prove to be a “safe seat” for much longer, and the leftists shifted their emphasis from saving Spain to saving Britain. As the official British Battalion memoir claimed, “our fight for world-peace is carried on now under the flag not of Spanish but British democracy.”¹³⁷

Leftist observers also interpreted events in Spain through the lenses that best suited their goals. They were able to contrast the national resources of Spain and Britain

¹³⁵ Lehmann, *Whispering Gallery*, 281.

¹³⁶ Imperial War Museum. *The Spanish Civil War Collection: Sound Archive Oral History Recordings* (London: Trustees of the Imperial War Museum, 1996), 186.

¹³⁷ International Brigade Association, *British Battalion XV International Brigade*, 80.

to forward class-based accusations against the British government. Civil defence comparisons served as a means of shaming the British government into providing more resources for civilian protection. By emphasizing the “backward” nature of old Spain, the leftist commentators hoped both to inspire local authorities to attempt to build shelters, and to demand improved funding from the central government. They invoked an image of the “impoverished Spanish people” who nevertheless mustered the resources and manpower to construct underground shelters during wartime. There were multiple uses for this rhetoric. For example, commenting on the “laughable” recommendations by Sir John Anderson for two foot deep garden shelters – the Anderson Shelter – the Communist Party commented, “If the Impoverished [sic] Spanish people, in the middle of war, could in a short time build tunnel shelters which give adequate protection, is it impossible for us to do the same in Britain?”¹³⁸ Haldane characterized the shelters in Spain as “crude,” but noted they were nevertheless effective, and he expressed the belief that “if Spain, a poor nation, can protect her people in time of war, then Britain, a rich nation, can do so in time of peace.”¹³⁹ The CSAWG similarly wrote to *The Times* in a letter advocating deep shelters, claiming that

the experience of Spain has shown that it is perfectly possible, even in a poor country in the midst of war, to build effective shelters for the civil population. With the resources and time at our disposal we should be able to do far better. We feel that unless this is done all who support air raid precautions in their present form are effectively perpetuating a tragic deception on the people of this country.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, 9.

¹³⁹ Haldane, *How to Be Safe from Air Raids*, 6, 8.

¹⁴⁰ J.D. Bernal et al., letter to the editor, *The Times*, 11 February 1938, 10.

Comparing Spain and Britain was a tactic that the CSAWG continued to use unapologetically. In the early years of the war the Group contributed to a “Cambridge ARP Exhibition” in which they answered the question of whether improved shelter protection was possible in wartime by pointing to the example of Spain: “If poverty-stricken Spain could build bomb-proof shelters in the midst of civil war, there is surely every reason why a country as rich as this one should do so now.”¹⁴¹ Philip Noel-Baker praised the will of the population of Barcelona to construct 400 shelters and plan for building an additional 800, which would have been able to house almost a million people. He said, “They are spending, at a time when, Heaven knows, they have not much money to spare, great sums upon these shelters... If war should ever strike us we should do it, too. But we should be far wiser to do it now.”¹⁴²

Emphasizing the relative wealth of Britain and the “poverty” of Spain allowed these critics to avoid a contradiction. They extolled the ability of the local Spanish citizens and communities to build their own shelters without funding or support from the central government, yet at the same time were insisting that the British government’s 60-75% ARP subsidy for local authorities was inadequate. By pointing to the far greater wealth of the British state, the very high estimates for deep shelters forwarded by the Communist Party and Haldane could be portrayed as less exorbitant. Leftists argued that if the impoverished Spanish government could commit to constructing such shelters in

¹⁴¹ Needham Papers, K.33, *Cambridge ARP Exhibition* (c. 1941) The Group promoted improved ARP for Cambridge, also publishing a pamphlet, “Memorandum on Air Raid Precautions for the Town of Cambridge” [n.d.].

¹⁴² *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 336 (1938), col. 2105.

wartime, certainly the far wealthier British government could entertain the notion while the nation was at peace.

Spain served to make the reality of air attack more immediate and, in an unexpected way, less fearsome. Leftist combatants and observers in Barcelona and Madrid concluded that civilian protection was possible and that it could be quickly constructed even in wartime. Observers in Spain also presented citizens as active agents preparing their own defence rather than merely as the passive victims of the bombers. In his book *A.R.P.*, Haldane emphasized the efforts of local Spanish authorities to build underground shelters and the lives that had been saved by the courageous actions of ordinary citizens who volunteered to construct these shelters. Examples of civilians volunteering to provide for their own ARP were important in conceiving of a radical volunteer ethic, an idea reflected in the remainder of this thesis. In this chapter I have explored some of the arguments of the leftist constituency who were struggling to reconcile the pacifist impulse with the conflicting, simultaneous desire to build an anti-fascist coalition and reaffirm democratic British identity. The experience of Spain facilitated much of the task of “de-pacifying” the left and providing an ideologically suitable basis for accepting the necessity for an armed struggle against fascism. Yet the leftist critics did not entirely abandon all elements of pacifism – as reflected in their discussion of ARP, they prioritized civilian protection over offensive rearmament and were concerned about centralized authoritarian control.

The lessons from Spain allowed the leftist critics to claim an “exclusive” technical expertise, although it was mostly leftists who analyzed the technical aspects of Spain precisely *because* they already believed in the value of constructing public shelters and promoting “democratic defence.” Most importantly, observations made in Spain gave them an inspirational model to develop small-scale shelters in light of central government inflexibility. As will be demonstrated the leftist critics, especially Haldane and the CPGB, certainly did not abandon all hope for large national schemes, but acknowledged that local authorities might need to devise their own plans independently. Consequently Spain gave the leftist critics coherent technical and ideological points on which to construct their ARP critique, for which they campaigned with characteristic vigor and zeal.

The defeat in Spain also caused many leftists to retreat to their identity as British or English citizens and to work towards guarding democracy at home. Spain provided this group with a basis to reframe their position within the British State. The state of national ARP simultaneously provided them with a topical issue to campaign *for*. Demonstrating their expertise allowed these critics to answer critical charges that they simply opposed abstract ideas such as “imperialist war,” without offering constructive counter suggestions. The following chapter explores the factors and arguments that the far left proposed for British ARP, the difficulties faced in the reception of their critique, the implications for class-based political rhetoric, and the discussion of national identity within British plans. It will examine how these ideas regarding the obligations of government and the requirements of the urban working class progressed domestically.

The model of active leftist citizenship evolved following Spain, constructed around alternative ideas for a national shelter policy.

Chapter Four

Technical Proposals, Class, and Wartime Citizenship:

Criticism of Government Plans and Formulation of Alternative ARP

Following the first instances of aerial bombing in Spain, the CSAWG, J.B.S. Haldane, and the Communist Party quickly applied observations from Spain to critique specific provisions of the government's plans for ARP. These groups and individuals began agitating on the issue of home defence, with the Communist London District Congress declaring its intent to make civilian defence a primary domestic issue. In 1938, following discussions about the foreign policy of the CPGB and its relation to domestic circumstances, the London District Congress decided that ARP was a crucial issue. The representatives at the Congress believed that civil defence might provide a way to mobilize the working class and challenge the government:

We have to lead mass pressure to ensure provision of adequate protection for the people against air attack, at the expense of the Chamberlain Government and to lead mass participation in the work of the ARP wardens and organization so as to prevent it falling into the hands of reactionary military and police officials.¹

This chapter will discuss the central arguments of leftist ARP literature and the basis for their alternate suggestions. The leftist ARP critique evolved to combine technical observations from Spain and theories of deep shelter. As scientists and professionals, the groups and individuals discussed in this chapter had a vested interest in pursuing the approval of their peers in their field of expertise and in forwarding the

¹ Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), "London District Congress 1938 Discussion Statement" (London, 1938).

political goals with which they had become aligned. They also realized the potential of ARP, and the protection of innocent civilians, to be a popular and emotive issue. The discussion over ARP could be tailored to specific issues dear to leftist constituencies, such as class bias, the role of local authorities, and the status of civil liberties.

There were two major facets to the discussion of technical ARP. Firstly, the critics questioned the basis of government recommendations for gas-proof rooms and the lack of deep shelter provisions. The CSAWG took the lead, challenging the technical value of government-issue gas masks and the protective merits of Home Office guidelines regarding “gas-proof” refuge rooms. Though the Group meticulously documented their testing methodology, this first discussion proved relatively fruitless for the leftist advocates. The gas debate was quickly becoming a secondary consideration by the time their work was published by the Left Book Club in 1937.² The second leftist critique, which attacked the government principle of “dispersal” and advocated mass deep shelters, was relatively more successful, garnering a measure of public support that continued into the war. The critics also pointed to continental preparations, particularly those undertaken in Paris as a way of highlighting their arguments regarding the rights of citizenship.

The technical critiques provoked response from the Home Office, and the tone of these exchanges reflect how ARP became an intensely politicized issue. As we have seen, the government emphasized the obligations of citizens to provide their own protection and believed that sheltering at home was the most efficient means of civil defence. They

² Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group, *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack: Being A Critical Examination of the Recommendations put Forward by the Air Raid Precautions Department of the Home Office* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937).

argued that individual citizens could not demand impossible levels of shelter and absolute safety. Citizenship, they believed, required a reasonable exchange of obligations and demands between the government and the people. Naturally, the government and the critics disagreed on the definition of what was reasonable. The government also charged the leftist scientists with political extremism and disregard for the nation to advance their own political ends. Although ARP was doubtless “political” from the beginning, this rhetoric portrayed the critics as undermining military preparedness. In turn, the leftists charged the government with short-sightedness, believing that in the era of total war, quaint notions of “self-help” had changed. The technical debates on gas and shelter plans reflected these opposing political positions that represented differing views of the nation.

The leftist critics partnered their technical plans with a discussion of how government ARP would adversely affect poor constituencies and impact on the rights of the citizenry during wartime. These commentators believed the plans would result in unfair discrimination in favour of the wealthy and were highly inequitable because they relied on individual resources. This, naturally, went to the heart of socialist and communist concerns and was particularly related to its urban constituency. Invoking questions of class bias also facilitated organizing alternative ARP plans at the local level, particularly in poor Boroughs most concerned about the cost and effectiveness of the Home Office measures. This critique combined the rhetoric of pacifism and anti-armament sentiment with the politics of class. Throughout this period the Communist Party’s publication, *Daily Worker*, expressed displeasure with government ARP provisions in these stark terms, highlighting the inadequacy of civilian defences. Its

writers declared that £22 million was being made available for “air attack,” by means of air rearmament, while the population was demanding that these funds be instead allocated towards civilian defence.³ The justification for increased ARP funding played out in different ways, with the Communist Party, scientists such as Haldane, the Labour Party, and local authorities forwarding a series of arguments for their plans.

Lastly, critics emphasized the potential dangers that the ARP Bill of 1937 might pose to civil liberties in wartime. Critics were also wary of how dissent and freedom of speech would be impacted, citing the example of the Defence of the Realm Act and the prosecution of dissenters and pacifists during the First World War. Cognizant of the possibility that they might be unable to prevent war itself, these individuals were at least certain that the institution of a military state through ARP provisions should be prevented. They were particularly concerned with the ill-defined rights to “prevent public panic” that would be accorded to air raid wardens and other ARP workers.⁴ Much of this rhetoric emphasized leftist nationalist claims and their alternative volunteer ethic. Ideas of an active citizenry, as embodied in Republican Spain, played an important role in this vision and were tied to popular democracy. Leftist appeals to the tradition of “British liberty,” delineated in chapter one as part of the new rhetoric of the late 1930s, were also implicit in these debates.

³ *Daily Worker*, 14 July 1938, 3.

⁴ Cambridge Scientists’ Anti-War Group, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts* (London: Fact, no. 13, 1938).

The Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group Takes Aim at the "Gas-Proof Room"

As explored in the second chapter, fear of gas warfare had been prominent in the 1920s and early 1930s, and was the focus of the first ARP Circular. The Cambridge Scientists formulated a project to evaluate preparations for gas attack by testing gas masks and the merits of "gas-proof" refuge rooms advocated by the government.⁵ The preparation and writing of their LBC book dated from 1935, although it was only published in February 1937. National discussions regarding ARP soon drifted from gas to shelter protection, casting the Group's gas test results in an anti-climactic light. The identification of the Cambridge Scientists solely with the issue of gas, and their depiction as anti-war extremists had lasting implications for the success of their ARP criticism. The Home Office was able to portray the Cambridge Scientists as unpatriotic communists whose sole motivation was to undermine confidence in government plans. This rhetoric had an impact on the way future leftist ARP criticisms and plans were forwarded. Though the gas critique was a non-starter, it is an important event that constituted the first attempt at independent verification of the government's ARP claims. The gas room critique gave leftists their first entrée into the issue, and was useful in initiating criticism of other areas.

Given the scant records of the Group, there is little indication of exactly how the critique of government gas advice came about. It seems to have been conceived by members J.H. Fremlin and R.L.M Synge following the government's recommendations

⁵ Home Office, *Anti-Gas Precautions and First Aid for Air Raid Casualties* (London: HMSO, 1935). Wing Commander E.J. Hodsoll of the ARP Department of the Home Office had declared publicly as early as 1936 that gas was "easier to defeat than bombs." *The Times*, 13 June 1936, 11.

that individuals construct “gas-proof” refuge rooms as their primary defence against aerial attack.⁶ The focus on gas also reflected the opinion of fellow leftist groups such as the Socialist Medical Association, and the Union for Democratic Control (UDC).⁷ The Group contracted Victor Gollancz to publish their findings, beginning the ARP crusade spearheaded by the Left Book Club. The researchers conducted at least fourteen separate tests, using the quarters of Cambridge postgraduate students to demonstrate the inadequacy of gas-proof rooms. They concluded that these rooms, constructed according to Home Office instructions, did allow for the passage of gas, perhaps fatally so. Their test methodology involved sealing door and window seams in the room according to the Home Office advice in the First Circular, and subsequently measuring concentrations of gas in the room over time as it seeped *out* of tiny cracks in the structure. The Group was forced to use this methodology since it was all but impossible to simulate the conditions of a possible gas attack and measure gas seepage *into* a building or room. Their technique failed to account for climactic conditions such as temperature and wind and these facts later provided ammunition for government officials to rebut the CSAWG. The Group concluded that under the conditions of a sustained mustard gas attack “it would be possible on an average to remain alive for about three hours in the gas-proof room; in other words the ‘gas-proof room’ is not gas-tight. Completely gas-tight rooms can only be constructed, at great expense, by experts.”⁸ The Group believed that their tests had

⁶ Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 231. One of Bernal’s biographers seems to suggest that it was he who had the idea for the gas mask test. Andrew Brown, *J.D. Bernal: The Sage of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 130.

⁷ The Socialist Medical Association, *Gas Attacks: Is There any Protection?* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, Ltd., 1936), and the Union of Democratic Control, *Poison Gas* (London, 1935), 29, 39.

⁸ CSAWG, *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack*, 70.

showed up serious flaws in government instructions – particularly the absence of advice to paste over cracks in the floorboards and walls.⁹

The Group also tested the quality of government-issue civilian gas masks and chided the British government for refusing to release test figures on their gas masks or to allow them to be subjected to independent tests. They believed that their duty as responsible scientists was to test this essential piece of anti-gas protection. The official historian later noted that they tested the open-market “civilian type” mask.¹⁰ The Group determined that the masks would only work effectively for several hours with moderate to strenuous breathing, and pointed out that there was no provision for children under the age of five.¹¹ They believed that the Germans, French, Swiss and even Russians had stockpiled a higher standard of gas mask that was more comfortable and closer fitting. The French masks even enabled the user to exercise for one half hour, and had strict requirements for the percentage of gas that was permitted to pass through the filter.¹² The scientists cannot have helped their cause with the theatrical series of public demonstrations on gas masks. Even participants and allies voiced some misgivings, such as science writer Ritchie Calder, who noted that during gas-mask demonstrations the wearer was instructed to smoke a cigarette inside the mask, while the audience waited for smoke to appear on the outside. He claimed, “To insure that the demonstration was

⁹ Gary Werskey notes that Home Office pictures of the “cottages” on which the government gas tests had been conducted indicate that they were in fact modern buildings and were located on a plain where gas could easily blow away during the tests. Werskey, *The Visible College*, 230-1.

¹⁰ O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), 81.

¹¹ CSAWG, *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack*, 39-52.

¹² CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 41, 66-8.

theatrically effective, they removed the filters from the masks!”¹³ Though the secret behind the mask demonstrations does not appear to have been known at the time, the general staging of these public demonstrations could be easily depicted as sensationalistic and unscientific.

The results were first published in the Left Book Club volume *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack*. The following year, the scientists again published their findings to answer criticism and present their data in a less technical format. The test results were used prominently in Communist Party publications such as *A.R.P.: The Practical Air Raid Protection Britain Needs*, which cited their statistics on the effectiveness of gas masks.¹⁴ The Group’s work was endorsed by the predominantly leftist Association of Scientific Workers, many of whose members were also affiliated with the CSAWG. The scientific union published an article in *Scientific Worker* calling for further investigations into anti-gas measures.¹⁵

It is important to note that the work of the CSAWG was not uniformly endorsed by leftist scientists. J.B.S. Haldane, in particular, had mixed feelings about the strength of the CSAWG tests. Often erroneously assumed to be a member of the Group, he sought to distance himself from it.¹⁶ Haldane believed that the Group’s conclusions were far too absolute. He was troubled by their complete dismissal of the “gas-proof” rooms –

¹³ Brenda Swann and Francis Aprahamian, *J.D. Bernal: A Life in Science and Politics* (London: Verso, 1999), 157.

¹⁴ CPGB, *A.R.P.: The Practical Air Raid Protection Britain Needs* (London, 1938).

¹⁵ Werskey, *The Visible College*, 230. By 1939 the Association of Scientific Workers had 1,319 members, and had been refashioned in light of the Cambridge Scientific movement under the guidance of J.D. Bernal. Werskey, 236.

¹⁶ To a private gas manufacturer who wished him to recommend their mask to the CSAWG he wrote, “I am not a member of the CSAWG, and, as you see if you read my book ‘A.R.P.’, am not in complete agreement with their conclusions.” University College London, Haldane Papers, Haldane Box 30 1/a, J.B.S. Haldane to British Draeger Co. Ltd, 12 July 1939.

believing that ordinary rooms could be made adequately safe for civilians.¹⁷ Haldane had an unusual perspective on gas, gained through his experience in the First World War and reflected in his conviction throughout the interwar years that gas was not as barbarous a weapon as conventional explosives.¹⁸ He believed that the relative harmlessness of gas had been proved by the ineffective use of liquid mustard gas by the Italians in Abyssinia.¹⁹ Haldane and members of the CSAWG later co-operated on deep shelters, but not on the issue of anti-gas experimentation.

Other scientific and gas experts were overtly hostile to the implications of the Group's work, and emphasized the charge that its members had subversive political motives. The most unflattering review was penned by Major-General C. H. Foulkes. He had been the Director of Gas Services in World War One, and therefore claimed superior expertise on the subject, even if his account of leading the British Special Brigade against German gas warfare was self-justifying and ignored important failures.²⁰ During the 1930s he also acted as a private ARP consultant to factories and businesses, lectured on the subject and wrote a manual reiterating official Home Office positions.²¹ In the journal *Nature* he declared that the Group's book could do nothing but harm, because it was calculated to destroy confidence in Home Office defensive measures and to create panic.

¹⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 20, 63.

¹⁸ Haldane elaborated on these contrarian ideas in *Callinicus: A Defence of Chemical Warfare* (London: Keegan Paul, 1925).

¹⁹ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 44-45.

²⁰ C.H. Foulkes, "Gas!" *The Story of the Special Brigade* (London: W. Blackword and Sons, 1934), critiqued in Donald Richter, *Chemical Soldiers: British Gas Warfare in World War I* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992). Following the First World War, Foulkes advocated using gas against Afghan rebels, believing that gas was now accepted as a fair weapon, and that its use against tribesmen did not fall under the Hague Conventions. King's College, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, C. H. Foulkes Papers, J-60.

²¹ C. H. Foulkes, *Commonsense and ARP: A Practical Guide for Householders and Business Managers* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1939).

He accused the Group of using science for political ends that undermined the nation, turning the fear of “panic” against the critics.

The branding of the Group as possessing a radical political agenda was picked up by the *Daily Mail*, which published refutations of the Group’s findings including a piece in which an expert, Mr. R.K. Law, stated that:

I don’t know what constitutes a Cambridge Scientist, but I know that a scientist is supposed to be somebody interested in one thing only—and that is knowledge and truth... the Cambridge Scientists avow openly that theirs is not a scientific aim but a political one. They are representatives of an extreme Communist body of opinion... These experiments they have done, I am told by the Home Office, are really completely farcical. They made all kinds of most elementary mistakes and ludicrous blunders. The results which they got are, for all practical purpose, worthless...²²

The Home Office likewise emphasized the menace of extremist “Red” politics when the CSAWG began to deride government anti-war precautions through technical experimentation. Geoffrey Lloyd commented on the CSAWG charges several times in the House of Commons. The opening salvo was simultaneously dismissive and censorious: “I am aware that some persons calling themselves the Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group have made some observations on this subject, but it is not clear whether their interests are primarily scientific or political.”²³ He also declared that the Cambridge Scientists did not have actual experience in anti-gas measures, in contrast to over one hundred scientists said to be employed by the government.²⁴ Joseph Needham noted that Group members were particularly affected by the charge of being a “politically

²² Cambridge University Library, Joseph Needham Papers, K.30, clipping of the *Daily Mail*, 26 February 1937.

²³ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 320 (1937), col. 843.

²⁴ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 321 (1937), col. 527.

motivated” minority of scientists.²⁵ They sought to distance themselves from other leftist critics, in particular the Communists, even though most of the CSAWG had close, if unofficial, ties to the CPGB. In their second book they attempted to make clear that their work stood apart from “sensationalist brochures.”²⁶ This broad depiction of all critics of government ARP as extremists greatly troubled the CSAWG, as it had grave implications for the reception of their work.

The ARP Department mobilized their own set of experts to fend off attacks by the CSAWG. Among the ARP Department’s strongest defenders were several chemists and military officials who had previously handled poisonous gases, including C.H. Foulkes who wrote the *Nature* review, J. Davidson Pratt, who had been wounded during the First World War,²⁷ and Professor James Kendall of Edinburgh University – author of the memorably entitled *Breathe Freely! The Truth About Poison Gas*.²⁸ Kendall accused the Group of irresponsible fear-mongering, which adversely affected public safety. He feared that some individuals might give up attempts to construct protective refuge rooms, thus placing themselves at increased risk. He also refuted the Group’s test logic, stating that government gas precautions were not only adequate, but more than adequate for any likely threat.²⁹ Another expert similarly pointed to the irrational fear of gas compared to other forms of warfare, stating that the worst effects could “be averted altogether if the

²⁵ Joseph Needham Papers, K.38, Joseph Needham’s notes citing House of Commons Debates, 18 February 1937 and 16 November, 1937.

²⁶ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 19-20.

²⁷ J. Davidson Pratt, *Gas Defence* (London: British Science Guild, 1935).

²⁸ Werskey, *The Visible College*, 227.

²⁹ James Kendall, *Breathe Freely! The Truth About Poison Gas* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1938). Another primary “anti-hysteria” publication was F.N. Pickett, *Don’t Be Afraid of Poison Gas: Hints for Civilians in the event of a Poison Gas Attack* (London: Simpkin Marshall Ltd., 1934).

Government and people worked to complete the precautions which are now in hand for saving people from injury and from panic.”³⁰ The charge of fear-mongering and undermining public confidence was a particularly difficult charge to refute.

J. H. Fremlin, a Cambridge research student and an initial instigator of the gas tests, was called to address the Gas Sub-Committee of the ARP Department as a representative of the CSAWG on 17 July 1938. He clarified the Group’s position, stating that they did not intend to imply that all Home Office advice on ARP was worthless. He felt it was, however, only fair to note that governmental conclusions contained omissions and were too difficult for ordinary citizens to implement. He expressed “regret” that political arguments had entered into the discussion, claiming that their experiments were purely of a technical and scientific nature. At this meeting the Duchess of Atholl, author of *Searchlight on Spain*³¹ and an anti-fascist campaigner, attacked the Group for publishing their rather dispiriting findings before the government had finalized its householders’ handbook, thus tending “to undermine public confidence and to make people apathetic.”³² The conclusion of the Committee, as expressed in the Home Office report, was that “although [Fremlin] answered very cleverly, the Sub-Committee were not prepared to accept the tests as very significant.” It was also dryly observed that the CSAWG’s assertions that their group was scientific and that their work was purely in the interest of scientific discovery “did not cut very much ice.”³³ The official post-war historian reflected the general opinion that “[*The Protection of the Public from Aerial*

³⁰ Henry Thuillier, *Gas in the Next War* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1939), 88.

³¹ Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1938).

³² NA, HO 45/18802, Report of Meeting of Gas Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Committee, 14 July, 1937, 9.

³³ NA, HO 45/18802, Report of Meeting of Gas Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Committee, 7-8.

Attack's] declared aim of offering a critical examination of ARP measures was faithfully followed, to the exclusion of any positive counter-suggestions.”³⁴ The Group's claims of “non-political” intent were therefore not to pass scrutiny easily, and they consequently found it difficult to refute charges of being unpatriotic.

In addition, the report reiterated the major complaint against the CSAWG – that their tests measured gas seepage *out* of a sealed room, an entirely different prospect than predicting possible gas leakage from the outside in. As Geoffrey Lloyd noted,

The Anti-War movement is, of course, well known to honour-able members. It was condemned as a Communist-inspired movement by the National Executive of the Labour Party, and I do not know that it is necessary to go further than that.... These scientists did not measure the amount of gas which leaked into a room, but they measured the amount of gas which leaked out of a room, and then they tried to deduce by theoretical methods how much gas would have leaked into the room.³⁵

As we have seen, this type of test was the only one that could feasibly be carried out, given the amount of gas that would be needed to attempt to measure the reverse occurrence due to the unpredictability of winds. Of course, these very reasons could be used to discredit the tests. Still convinced of the usefulness of their work, the Group had no choice but to defend its methodology, and insist that the two different conditions were scientifically equal. The Group had attempted to preempt such criticism in their first book, declaring that the principle of “leakage half-time” determined that the two conditions could be equated.³⁶ Needham wrote in his notes that gas flowing out of a room

³⁴ O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 81.

³⁵ CSAWG, *Air Protection: The Facts*, citing a House of Commons Debate of 16 November 1937, 21-2. It is unclear to what condemnation of an “Anti-War movement” by the Labour Party Geoffrey Lloyd was referring to. The Labour Party did not, as far as I am aware, specifically comment on the CSAWG.

³⁶ CSAWG, *The Protection of the Public from Aerial Attack*, 23.

did in fact indicate that gas could flow in. He believed that “since Nature abhors a vacuum, gas would flow in through the pores to fill the vacuum.”³⁷

The CSAWG first published *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack* with a great degree of confidence. J.D. Bernal was sufficiently impressed with the Group’s work to send advance copies to important military and policy commentators such as Basil Liddell Hart. He prefaced the findings with a letter proclaiming that “the results of the investigations seem to dispose fairly conclusively of certain of the Government’s proposals of Air Raid Defence.”³⁸ Before long, however, the Group and its members were forced to defend their tests – and their professional reputations – against charges of political motivation, ineptitude and even fraud. Therefore, the gas critique proved to have limited purchase, despite the counter-defence mounted by those who had participated in the experiments. As much as the CSAWG insisted that their test criteria were sound, it was soon clear that the gas critique could not serve as a basis for a larger campaign. This was partly as a result of their inability to defend fully the technical merits of their work. Furthermore, general discussion of ARP in Britain was moving away from gas to the issue of high explosive.

³⁷ Needham Papers, K.38, undated typescript and notes.

³⁸ Kings College, London, Liddell Hart Military Archives, LH 1/65/1, 6 February 1937. J.D. Bernal to Basil Liddell Hart. Liddell Hart gave Bernal vague assurances that he would read the manuscript, but there is no record to indicate any further support.

The Aftermath of the Gas Critique: Politics and Professional Identity

The first critique of government plans was therefore fraught with difficulties that emphasized several political and professional factors. The debate over “political motive” denoted that ARP was intensely political from the start. The scientists wanted to play both sides, rather implausibly, since it was clear that politics was at the core of their identity as progressive scientists on the left. While they insisted their tests were purely technical and scientific, they were, after all, accusing the government of ineptitude and negligence regarding the safety of the civilian population should a gas attack be launched against Britain. The government and its supporters found that the charge of political extremism was easy to employ, and that accusing their opponents of attempting to undermine national confidence in ARP was an effective criticism due to a general suspicion of Communist agitation in government and the press. From their point of view, it was wholly unfair for the critics to seize on minor elements of plans that were still in the process of being formulated and refined.

In response, the scientists emphasized the importance of expert commentators to justify their gas critique. They presented a professional defence, arguing that despite its failures and oversights their project followed the scientific method, which necessitated early errors in experimentation. The Group pointed to the importance of independent technical experiments in formulating ARP, insisting that a “rational estimate” of proposed ARP measures should be made by experts.³⁹ They believed their gas tests contributed to

³⁹ Maurice Goldsmith, *Sage: A Life of J. D. Bernal* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 91.

this body of knowledge, and argued that it was not their intent to create hopelessness but that “those who persuade the people of Great Britain to believe that they are safe when they are not are inviting panic and worse than panic in the case of war.”⁴⁰ They believed that scientists would be negligent in their moral duty if they accepted claims of which they were not convinced. The scientists also took umbrage that they had published their findings under their own names, risking their professional reputations, but had “been refuted by anonymous Government experts in an unpublished report.”⁴¹

The CSAWG launched this defence in the forums available to them, and sent out further calls for leftist research into other areas of ARP. Responding to Foulkes, they justified their scientific findings in *Nature*, proclaiming that their aim was “to provide some scientific data concerning the published precautions – because no such data had been published and we felt that the unsupported statements of the government spokesmen concerning their efficiency were no substitute for scientific fact.”⁴² They also sent letters of defence to publications such as the *New Statesman and Nation*, highlighting the importance of their scientific findings and appealing for £600 to finance a film calling for “balanced and reasonable action” by the government.⁴³ The Group was defended in the House of Commons by the emotive rhetoric of Philip Noel-Baker, who denied that they were a subsidiary of the Communist Party, and emphasized the importance of additional research rather than relying on First World War data, or on a few experiments done on

⁴⁰ CSAWG, “Air Raid Precautions,” *Nature*, 139 (1 May 1937), 760.

⁴¹ *New Statesman and Nation*, XIV, no. 345 (2 October, 1937), 485-6. The Group also maintained that their tests relied solely on the resources of members and three anonymous benefactors, emphasizing that they lacked financial motive. CSAWG, *The Protection of the Public From Aerial Attack*, 9.

⁴² CSAWG response, “Air Raid Precautions,” *Nature*, 139, no. 239 (1 May, 1937), 760.

⁴³ *New Statesman and Nation*, XIV, no. 345 (2 October 1937), 485-6. The notice listed Joseph Needham as the treasurer, and was signed by Bernal, Waddington, and Needham.

derelict farmhouses.⁴⁴ This line of argumentation emphasized their scientific professional identity and the importance of opening independent discussion on these issues.

Though the CSAWG gas critique was unsuccessful in influencing public opinion, the Home Office and government spokesmen did appear to have taken the challenge of the CSAWG seriously. Though they were publicly labeled as fringe commentators, the ARP Department would not have taken care to address their criticisms if they truly believed they lacked the authority to alter public opinion. On the other hand, it is possible that the government may have inflated the seriousness of the CSAWG threat to public morale to rouse a rhetorical denunciation of the Group. For the scientists, this first campaign following the outbreak of war in Spain allowed them to enter the public forum and to galvanize leftist constituencies to consider government shortcomings in ARP. Following 1937 there were no significant leftist commentaries on gas warfare because the discussion of national ARP had shifted to the question of deep shelters. Naturally, a range of pacifists continued to decry the potential use of gas, but gas-proof rooms ceased to be a major concern. Technical criticisms developed into sustained political attacks against the government based on financial demands and differing views of citizens' rights. This allowed the left to build a domestic issue based on the model of active citizenry they had witnessed in Spain. To emphasize their patriotic credentials critics emphasized that their alternative plans aimed to support morale, thus aiding national preparedness.

⁴⁴ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 329 (1937), cols. 1906, 1910.

J.B.S. Haldane and the Genesis of the Deep Shelter Critique

The call for deep shelters in British cities began immediately following the first air raids in Spain. The CSAWG, realizing this shift, emphasized deep shelters in their second publication, arguing that “the almost complete lack of reasonable protection against high explosive is the main shortcoming of the ARP scheme.”⁴⁵ Similarly, in a February 1938 letter to *The Times* they insisted that the issue of high explosive protection was the most crucial component of civilian defence. Citing government silence, they believed that it was essential for scientists and architectural experts to weigh in on the issue.⁴⁶ The leftist critics were keenly aware of the criticism that they merely derided the government without offering feasible policies of their own, and their shelter plans aimed to provide a program for action. The deep shelter program proposed by Haldane and the Communist Party demonstrates the fruition of the technical lessons from Spain as applied to Britain.

Based on his experience in Spain and enthusiasm for the subject of deep shelters, Haldane was the key leftist in the instigation of this debate. Though he had defended the technical merits of government gas-proof rooms, he nevertheless believed that their widespread use did not constitute a useful ARP policy. Following what he had witnessed in Spain, he stated, “I doubt if gas protection in ordinary houses is worth worrying about in comparison with protection from high explosive.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, he came to believe that the refuge room advice was counterproductive, since it would encourage civilians to

⁴⁵ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 36.

⁴⁶ J.D. Bernal et al, Letter to the editor, *The Times*, 11 February 1938, 10.

⁴⁷ Haldane Papers, Box 30 1/a, J.B.S. Haldane to Lt. Col Harry M. Balfour, 3 November, 1939.

remain inside these rooms within their homes and therefore render them vulnerable to high explosive bombs.⁴⁸ He wrote in the forward to a Communist Party publication,

Six months ago we were to shelter in gas-proof rooms. The Communists were attacked as panic-mongers for saying that these were useless against explosives. To-day we are offered steel shelters, which are a little better than nothing, and propped basements, which are probably rather worse. Six months hence the Government will doubtless admit that propped basements are eyewash, like refuge rooms.⁴⁹

Haldane's approach to the technical aspects of shelter provision was based on a fundamental belief that mass deep shelters were the only morally acceptable way to proceed, as not even the moderately well-off could provide their own shelters. This moral basis denoted leftist and socialist definitions of mutual obligation, in contrast to the individualism promoted by government plans. As such, he led a campaign that emphasized both left-wing social issues and an alternative scientific basis for ARP. Haldane wrote two volumes for the LBC, his book *A.R.P.* and a smaller volume, *How to be Safe from Air Raids*, which was offered to members but not published under the LBC label. *A.R.P.* was published in August of 1938, just one month before the Munich Crisis, and it became one of the most important contributions to the critique of individual and dispersed shelter policy. A LBC agent proclaimed that Haldane was "the greatest living authority in England on this subject" due to the time he had spent in Spain and his dedication to studying the latest developments in aerial attack.⁵⁰ Victor Gollancz declared

⁴⁸ This appears to be at variance with his criticism of the CSAWG for suggesting that rooms could not be made gas-proof. While he *technically* believed that refuge rooms could be made safe against gas, he did not believe that gas would be a danger. Therefore, the emphasis should be placed on high explosive bombs, rendering the entire gas-proof room debate moot.

⁴⁹ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, 2.

⁵⁰ Haldane Papers, Box 30, 1/b, M.S. Wilde to Victor Gollancz, 30 March 1938.

in advance that the immediate political significance of *A.R.P.* would probably surpass anything yet published by the club,⁵¹ emphasizing that the critique of ARP was to serve the larger goals of the interwar left.

Haldane began his critique by focusing on official Home Office publications, particularly the Circular entitled *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids*.⁵² He declared that these pamphlets contained misleading and incomplete technical advice: “There is a good deal of ‘padding’ in some of these documents, which is natural enough, for there is very little substance.”⁵³ He therefore clearly set up his “scientific” ideas in opposition to the vague and flexible plans for ARP, which the Home Office believed was the best way to prepare individuals and local authorities for an uncertain situation that was subject to abrupt change in wartime. Emphasizing the counterproductive nature of most of the government’s prescriptions, he assigned a numerical “protective value” to each suggested government measure, 100 indicating perfect protection – of which there could be none even with deep shelters. In the case of high explosive protection advice he assigned a protection factor of -20 to the government plans, believing that “the emphasis on the gas danger will lead people to stay in their houses in many cases where they might have dug a trench, and will therefore actually increase the casualties from high explosive bombardment.”⁵⁴ While there was no verification provided for the figures in Haldane’s

⁵¹ *Left News*, no. 26 (May 1938), 836. Victor Gollancz explicitly warned Haldane of the potential difficulty of publishing his scientific findings on ARP, suspecting that booksellers had an unofficial barrier to carrying leftist material. Gollancz assured Haldane of a minimum print run of 50,000 copies through the LBC, far more than would be available through any other “leftist” publisher. Haldane Papers, Box 30, 1/b, Victor Gollancz to J.B.S. Haldane, 31 March 1938.

⁵² Home Office, *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids* (London: HMSO, 1938).

⁵³ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 77.

⁵⁴ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 137-138. Haldane does not list any mathematical methodology for the calculation of his

graph, its inclusion indicates the extent to which the leftist critics sought to propagate a scientific and quantifiable basis for ARP. As such, they hoped to contrast their self-described “rational” schemes with government policy based on fear and psychological theories of the mob – hiding the speculative nature of their own figures.

Through use of sarcasm, Haldane sought to portray government policies as inaccurate and ridiculous.⁵⁵ For example, the Circular on home protection devoted two pages to the question of how to prepare against the effect of explosive bombs, advising householders to reinforce walls and windows against splinter damage. Haldane remarked that “in practice people in houses are rarely killed by splinters which penetrate the walls. They are killed because the house is knocked down.”⁵⁶ He also criticized the Home Office’s list of refuge room essentials for including items such as books, cards, and a gramophone – all reflecting a middle class bias. Crucially, however, the guides had neglected to mention the provision of a pickaxe. In Spain, the provision of strong tools had proved essential to escape from houses that had been demolished by a high explosive bombs. He concluded that “the official handbook does not distinguish very sharply between an air raid and a picnic. In Spain the distinction is quite obvious.”⁵⁷

Haldane also took issue with the fact that even when Home Office guides contained mildly positive suggestions the prescriptions were too vague or incomplete to be useful. While he approved of the instructions to build trenches a safe distance from a

figures, though he did tentatively suggest that the refuge room might at least serve the purpose of marginally protecting from splinters and secondary blast damage.

⁵⁵ A reviewer in *The Times* referred to this as “jeering and a pervading flavour of political generalization.” *The Times*, 20 September 1938, 7.

⁵⁶ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 117-18.

⁵⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 119.

structure, he noted that no precise distance was given, nor were individuals advised that it would be hazardous to construct their trenches in straight lines. The only advice the government guides provided was that emergency trenches should be at least an adequate distance “to avoid falling debris,” which he derided as “presumably [the] debris of the refuge-room and those who have taken refuge there.”⁵⁸ He also critiqued the Home Office suggestion that small underground galleries afforded good protection, “provided there is sufficient earth overhead.” He calculated that the actual amount of earth required was 60 feet – the standard accepted depth for deep shelters – whereas the average layperson might assume that three feet was adequate and construct a shelter themselves.⁵⁹

Haldane and the Cambridge Scientists further challenged the government’s theory of dispersal, discussed in the second chapter.⁶⁰ This was a necessary precondition for advancing the idea of mass shelters. Dispersal was fully accepted by supporters of government ARP. As Wing Commander J.N. Fletcher, ARP Officer for Guildford, explained, “Shelters give no better protection than houses, but make it certain that large casualties would occur if a shelter were hit. This happens in Spain. Those who try to reach shelters, and leave their homes for the purpose, are exposed to several additional and unnecessary perils.”⁶¹ His statement highlights that government officials used the example of Spain to draw points diametrically opposed to those of the leftist commentators. Yet the scientists on the left insisted that the effect of dispersal would be

⁵⁸ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 119.

⁵⁹ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 121-22.

⁶⁰ Haldane was given credit, or blame, for first attacking the “dispersal principle” by one of the official historians of civil defence and ARP. O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 190.

⁶¹ Letter to the editor, J.N. Fletcher, “A.R.P. Dispersion In Family Groups,” *The Times*, 15 February 1938, 10. Fletcher prefaced his letter by disputing the CSAWG claim – derived from Spain – that public shelters could be feasibly constructed in wartime.

to increase the possibility that each enemy bomb would find a human target, especially if the majority of the population had no access to deep shelter. Joseph Needham noted that careful statistical analysis demonstrated that

The principle of dispersion per se is valueless. For although more people are killed if a shelter is hit, the chance of its being hit is at least proportionately smaller. It has been calculated that if a one tonne bomb fell in certain parts of Cambridge, 750 people would be killed or wounded in their homes, if they stayed in them. With proper shelters not more than, say, 300 would be killed in one shelter if it were hit.⁶²

Haldane supported this logic, believing that “dispersal within a dangerous area does not reduce the probable number of casualties. Whilst ensuring that no single bomb will wipe out a hundred people in a fraction of a second, it also ensures that almost every bomb will find a human target of some kind.”⁶³ The *Daily Worker* also pointed out that the government advocacy of dispersal would be useless if small bomblets were to be used to blanket a whole area.⁶⁴ The Finsbury planners later believed that dispersal had been discredited by Haldane and his fellow commentators, although government scientists continued to insist that it had a sound mathematical basis.

In *A.R.P.* Haldane analyzed ten different types of shelter including refuge-rooms, steel frame and other strong buildings, splinter-proof rooms, trenches, brick shelters, underground railways, tunnels, and other bomb-proof underground shelters.⁶⁵ In much of this section it seems clear that he is simply setting up “straw men” – clearly inferior shelter schemes such as splinter-proof rooms and trenches, which he could then discredit

⁶² Needham Papers, K.38, Needham typescript on ARP, c. 1938.

⁶³ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 125.

⁶⁴ “London Council’s ARP lead to Britain,” *Daily Worker*, 7 February 1939, 1.

⁶⁵ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 143.

in favour of his desired deep shelter plans. He dismissed the conversion of large buildings to ARP shelters as ineffective, and also believed that private rooms would provide only the most limited of protection. Nor did he hold much store in vague assurances that new buildings would be reinforced and be fitted with underground shelters, since these measures would do nothing to provide immediate protection. In fact, Haldane expressed general skepticism over many plans for shelters being advertised in the architectural press. He believed that “on the principle that most theologies are untrue, we can conclude that most of it is worthless, because the different statements disagree with each other.”⁶⁶ He was also initially skeptical about massive underground structures that could serve as parking garages in peacetime – an idea that became the core of the plans for the Borough of Finsbury drawn up by Berthold Lubetkin and his architectural firm Tecton the following year.⁶⁷ Haldane believed that a large roof span could not withstand pressure as effectively as a small span, and he was uncertain if other technical elements would make these plans practically or economically sound.⁶⁸

Haldane’s own comprehensive plan for London was grand in scope if not in detail. He advocated the use of underground tunnels, Tube lines and other existing structures as deep shelters. In addition, he believed that new tunnels could be dug in areas such as Paddington, and that properly-designed trenches in London Parks could provide additional shelter. He projected that “in London the shelters would consist of 1,400 miles

⁶⁶ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 173.

⁶⁷ Tecton Architects. *Planned ARP: Based on the Investigation of Structural Protection Against Air Attack in the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury* (London: The Architectural Press, 1939).

⁶⁸ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 178-9. It is unclear whether Haldane consulted with engineers informally when writing *A.R.P.* In his Left Book Club pamphlet *How to be Safe From Air Raids*, he noted that “my own scheme is probably not so good as the others [he cites the plan by the AASTA]. I am not an engineer.” Haldane, *How to Be Safe From Air Raids*, 37.

of brick-lined tunnels at a depth of about 60 feet, with multiple entrance tunnels sloping down to them, and a system of ventilation which would ultimately render them gas-proof.”⁶⁹ Soils in various areas would need to be surveyed to decide on the best construction methods, and he insisted that shelters be deep enough to be bomb-proof, ventilated, and have at least three or four separate entrances.⁷⁰ Acknowledging that in practice some civilians would be forced to use backyard shelters, trenches, or even in their own homes, he nevertheless insisted that they must be given the best advice and scientifically sound information regarding these options. Haldane’s *A.R.P.* was admittedly short on technical details, leading to some professional criticism. *Keystone*, an architectural journal, editorialized that “Professor Haldane is disappointingly weak in his technical detailments.” The journal’s editors believed that some of his statements would cause architects to “squirm.”⁷¹ This review reflects that Haldane’s work was short on reference to other professional sources, and it is uncertain whether he consulted engineers or architectural experts.

His plan was nevertheless picked up by the Communist Party and detailed in the pamphlet *A.R.P. for Londoners*.⁷² Communist pamphlet writers and ARP campaigners used many of his statements verbatim, and Haldane was asked to write the forward to many of these publications, a measure of his status amongst this constituency.⁷³ Various versions of tunnel plans became popular with local leftist and Labour officials, although experts acknowledged that a great deal of conversion work would need to be done to

⁶⁹ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 254.

⁷⁰ Haldane, *How to be Safe from Air Raids*, 38-9.

⁷¹ Haldane Papers, Box 30/4 Clipping of *Keystone* article, October/November 1938.

⁷² CPGB, *A.R.P. for Londoners*.

⁷³ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*.

make existing structures serviceable for the public, not least of which was the need to provide safe entrances to prevent the possibility of stampedes at narrow points. Aware that his plan would constitute an enormous undertaking, Haldane suggested that it should be carried out in two stages, one to be instituted immediately with the remainder requiring two or three years to complete. His administrative plans included the appointment of a Minister of Civilian Defence, the re-organization of ARP on technical rather than political grounds, new guidelines for air raid wardens, and provisions for evacuation including road-widening schemes.⁷⁴

Haldane, however, did not seem to understand the difficulty of making such enormous administrative changes, even if they had been instated over a period of many years – a point noted by his detractors. *The Times* published a mixed review of *A.R.P.*, criticizing the “left bias” and obvious political slant of the book. The reviewer believed that Haldane demonstrated “next to no appreciation of the training and organization problems which even small schemes of protection raise,” though he believed that Haldane’s personal experience was valuable, and that the emphasis on deep shelters was the correct one. The reviewer concluded that the book was “most valuable material for critics and supporters of ARP,”⁷⁵ a vague statement perhaps suggesting that all parties could find elements to bolster their own position in the book. The supporters of government ARP could use it as example of irresponsible politicking, and critics could point to a scientific basis for deep shelters.

⁷⁴ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 202-210.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 20 September 1938, 7.

The Air Raid Protection Institute, a mainstream, non-political “professional body versed in ARP,”⁷⁶ lent qualified support for Haldane’s scientific findings. A review of Haldane’s book by the Institute emphasized that the Left Book Club ARP books were being read in professional circles, and that the expertise of individuals such as Haldane was held in high regard. The Institute noted,

Let it be said at once that if one could have eliminated the author’s political confusion this could have been by far the most authoritative and complete pronouncement on the subject to date. Dr. Haldane is probably, apart from the structural engineering aspect, the most scientific exponent on the problem. He has studied every ramification continuously since he assisted his famous father in the Great War.... One could wish, however, that he had confined his attention more specifically to pure science, and less obviously to political viewpoints. One cannot help feeling that the scientist in him has had to take second place to the politician seeking his main conclusion... It remains to emphasise [sic] that, even though many readers will differ from the author, this is a most important publication on ARP... and the sooner the various points are taken up by those responsible, the sooner will the man in the street, to whom this book is dedicated, feel that his interests are being adequately studied.⁷⁷

The members of the Institute consequently felt that Haldane’s intervention on the subject of deep shelter was of value, though again political affiliation provoked questions of motivation. Yet politics was interwoven with Haldane’s approach, and his work could not have existed without the political tinge of his pronouncements and his desire to shame the government over ARP. There is little indication of whether the government or non-aligned experts such as those represented by the Institute regarded the leftist critics as a “bloc.” Certainly different factions of the left voiced their ARP concerns in particular ways, and commentators from Herbert Morrison to the communist critics could all be

⁷⁶ *Journal of the Air Raid Protection Institute*, 1, no.1 (December 1938), 1. The Institute was founded in 1938, working closely with the Home Office but also consulting a wide variety of experts from the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Institution of Civil Engineers, and continental experts.

⁷⁷ *Journal of the Air Raid Protection Institute*, 1, no. 2 (February 1939), 126-29.

accused of political motives in various circumstances. Some leftist experts on ARP were accepted as expert commentators within the wider circles of ARP discussion. For example, members of the Air Raid Protection Institute included local Labour politicians such as Dr. Richard Tee from Hackney.⁷⁸ In the late 1930s, therefore, there was already a limited recognition of the expert contributions of the leftist critics, though not nearly to the extent that occurred after the outbreak of the war. For the most part, leftist critics still advocated “democratic defence” from the sidelines.

In general *A.R.P.* was primarily reviewed by the technical community and friendly leftist publications. Sympathetic publications and organizations, such as the Peace Pledge Union, endorsed it, believing that Haldane’s warnings about the danger of high explosive attack were grimly realistic.⁷⁹ The Communist publication *Labour Monthly*, edited by the leading Marxist intellectual Rajani Palme Dutt, stated that *A.R.P.* “could not have been published at a more opportune time.”⁸⁰ The *New Statesman and Nation*’s Kingsley Martin praised the book although he simultaneously feared that it had come “two years too late.”⁸¹ Close to 60,000 LBC members received copies of each month’s book selection, though most of these members were of course already converts to the far left. It is difficult to know how many of these copies would have been read by non-subscribers, or even how many subscribers themselves read the book in great detail.

The Left Book Club conducted an extensive campaign on the issue of ARP following the publication of the books by the CSAWG and Haldane, using these works as

⁷⁸ Dr. Tee lectured the Institute on the organization of ARP in his Borough. Robin Woolven, “First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions,” *Hackney History*, 6 (2000): 56.

⁷⁹ Roy Walker, letter to the editor, *New Statesman and Nation*, XV, no. 375 (30 April 1938), 725-6.

⁸⁰ *Labour Monthly*, 20 (1938), 711.

⁸¹ Kingsley Martin, “A.R.P.,” *New Statesman and Nation*, XVI, no. 395 (17 September 1938), 405-6.

primary texts of the movement. The technical critiques were intended to form the basis of an integrated campaign to raise awareness of the issue as one of grave national importance. A May 1937 issue of *Left News* announced the formation of Peace Councils through Left Book Club groups in order to forward alternative ARP.⁸² Haldane and John Langdon-Davies also cooperated on the issue of deep shelters through the auspices of the LBC, although they had earlier clashed over interpretations of air warfare in Spain. They co-authored an article in *Left News* calling for bomb-proof shelters in London, increased protection for the vulnerable, and a clearer evacuation policy.⁸³ John Strachey, a founder of the Left Book Club, along with Victor Gollancz and Harold Laski, wrote in a 1938 Club leaflet that “Haldane’s *A.R.P.* is the most practical book that the Club has ever issued,” and he urged readers to form a campaign for the government to adopt its recommendations.⁸⁴

Perhaps one measure of the reach of the Left Book Club’s ARP campaign was that the Home Office ARP Department catalogued issues of *Left News* in its own library, noting that they were to be read in conjunction with Haldane’s *A.R.P.*⁸⁵ Home Office records indicate that literature by the Cambridge Scientists, along with Haldane and the communist critics, constitute at least one-third of the items listed in the catalogue of the ARP Department.⁸⁶ This may have been due to the necessity of “knowing the enemy,” but to the extent that the government felt obliged to respond to criticisms they were

⁸² *Left News*, no. 13 (May 1937). The fact that they were called “Peace Councils” reflected the continued resonance of pacifist thought in leftist reader circles.

⁸³ *Left News*, “Special A.R.P. Number,” no. 28 (September 1938), 967.

⁸⁴ Left Book Club, *This Month’s Book: A.R.P.* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938).

⁸⁵ NA, HO 45/18194, “A.R.P. Department Catalogue of Books, Publications, etc.” [no date].

⁸⁶ NA, HO 45/18194, “A.R.P. Department Catalogue of Books, Publications, etc.” [no date].

addressing those of the Communists and the leftist experts. Though the public statements by officials tended towards the blithely dismissive, the government was sufficiently worried about the critics to devote a great deal of time to refuting their claims.

Biographers of J.D. Bernal have, rightly, noted that the CSAWG's "intervention in the controversies raised about civil defence was to have immediate and durable effects."⁸⁷

Haldane was cited repeatedly by both supporters of deep shelter and supporters of the government. Sir John Anderson later accused Haldane of being the instigator of agitation on the issue of deep shelter, and as the Left Book Club was his primary publishing venue we can only conclude that his books were widely read by both opponents and supporters of the issue, if not the general public. Thus, the larger campaign of the LBC was responsible at the very least for prompting the government to be concerned over the influence that the leftist critics might be wielding. Yet prominent agitation does not necessarily correspond to a significant transformation of public opinion in favour of leftist ARP, a factor that dogged the efforts of the critics throughout the 1930s.

Mass Observation records provide one means of accessing the complexities of the public reception of these ideas. A survey of attitudes towards shelters before the war revealed that while there was certainly a demand for some deep shelters, respondents felt most comfortable with backyard Anderson shelters, which were thought to be familiar and close at hand. Brick shelters, the goal of the smaller shelter building schemes launched by many local authorities, prompted a great deal of hostility and there was an

⁸⁷ Swann and Aprahamian, *J.D. Bernal*, 162.

evident unwillingness to use these structures.⁸⁸ A report into efforts to construct brick shelters in Hampstead in the first year of the war emphasized this antipathy, and the ambivalence with which campaigners were treated. It noted that opposition to government ARP was “middle-class intellectual” at its base. This was a true representation of the background of the prominent critics, although they believed that they spoke on behalf of the working class against middle-class bias in government plans. The Mass Observation report writers believed that

At sporadic intervals, these undercurrents have broken out into organized local campaigns: the response to which was almost invariably one of polite sympathy: enlivened something by the tripping over of some local red tape, and the resulting squabbles. On no occasion has there been any thing that could be described as a real mass response, with real drive and feeling behind it.⁸⁹

The report mentioned J.B.S. Haldane’s campaign in Hampstead, and the mixed reaction to it among local people, concluding that the gathering of a requisite number of signatures calling for increased shelter provision did not indicate that any real enthusiasm had been roused.⁹⁰ Residents may have been too polite to turn down the earnest campaigners’ requests for signatures, but at the same time felt no attachment to these shelters and did little to maintain them or improve their amenities.

The public remained aloof from the campaign to build additional brick shelters, partly due to the fact that local officials appeared in “a manner hurried, confused, and bristling with impersonal officialdom.”⁹¹ These ambivalent feelings towards shelters made it difficult for the leftists to stir real emotion on the issue, and doubly hard for both

⁸⁸ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report A14, Air Raid Shelters, March 1939, 2-13.

⁸⁹ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 291, 20 July 1940, 2.

⁹⁰ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 291, 20 July 1940, 10.

⁹¹ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 291, 20 July 1940, 7.

the government and the campaigners to differentiate between polemic and real dissatisfaction with present arrangements. Mass Observation noted that the *feeling* of safety was important to the general public, but there were other points to consider such as to what extent the public was willing to pay higher tax rates or leave the comforts of home to utilize these shelters.⁹² It remained unclear in the pre-war period whether citizens would be prepared not only to institute mass public schemes, but also commit to their staffing and upkeep for an indefinite period of time. The following chapter will reflect on how these contradictory feelings played out in the public and professional response to the deep shelter scheme in Finsbury.

British ARP and Continental Comparisons

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the leftist critics idealized Spain and the preparations made against air attack in Spanish cities. The use of nationalist language allowed them to make a financial appeal for the British government to increase ARP funding based on the example of “backward Spain.” They also forwarded national comparisons with other continental preparations, particularly those in France.

Highlighting continental ARP allowed leftist critics simultaneously to advance their professional scientific identity, while at the same time demonstrating the value of a leftist national government. Since France was under the direction of the leftist Popular Front government, which lasted until early 1938, pointing to the supposed superior scheme

⁹² Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report A14, Air Raid Shelters, March 1939, 18.

forwarded in Paris emphasized the importance of a leftist political turn for the welfare of the citizenry. Leftist critics felt that the French approach to ARP represented a rational and equality-based approach, and believed that English people would be equally desirous of large shelter plans. They tied comparisons with France to an emphasis on left-wing nationalism and the benefits it could provide to the citizenry.

The case of German ARP provides an interesting contrast with the discussion of France. German preparations were widely discussed, yet they were treated with caution by all observers; concrete information remained vague and contradictory. Parliamentary ARP Committee members went to study French and German preparations for air raids in early 1938. Sir Samuel Hoare praised the “courtesy” of the host governments, and remarked, “While the different conditions in different countries necessarily result in different methods of dealing with air raid precautions, it will, I think, be agreed that in making our own preparations we should not ignore what can be learnt from methods which are being adopted elsewhere.”⁹³ The report of the visit in the House provoked Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander sarcastically to ask if the Home Secretary was satisfied that German civilians were adequately protected against British Air Raids.⁹⁴ At this time the many British diplomats were still attempting to retain positive relations with Germany, and the visit was doubtless an opportunity for valuable information gathering – though the findings remained secret.

Most experts were loathe to compare German preparations to those of the British for political reasons. There was factual reference made to Germany; for example, the Air

⁹³ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 331 (1938), col. 361.

⁹⁴ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 331 (1938), col. 361.

Raid Protection Institute investigated the basis of German preparations, and noted that homeowners were refunded 60% of the cost of reinforcing household cellars as bomb shelters.⁹⁵ Ove Arup, involved in the Finsbury project, also made a study of a German report, “Splinter and gas-proof concrete tube shelters,” on bomb-proof shelter policy. He felt that in the absence of British technical information, critics had to rely on foreign sources.⁹⁶ Yet very few commentators wished to be seen even slightly praising the war plans of a fascist dictatorship. The government, as has been demonstrated, publicly dismissed the “mechanical” German plans as having little relevance to the British situation. Nor would leftists have been interested in extolling the preparations made by a fascist power, even for the purposes of arguing that a free country should protect its citizens better than an authoritarian one. It was more productive to point to democratic countries such as Republican Spain and France.

For example, Liberal MP Megan Lloyd George praised evacuation policies in Paris, along with plans to build tube shelters to house 350,000 people as the proper work of “a free country.”⁹⁷ These efforts reflected the hagiographic depiction of the ordinary people of Spain. Cooperation among French authorities in building shelters reflected ideas of citizen involvement and democratic defence that the leftist critics wished to see instituted in Britain. The CSAWG made a study of French preparations for their second book, and noted that by the mid 1930s “the partial evacuation of Paris in case of war is a settled matter of policy in France. Plans for orderly evacuation of two and a half to four

⁹⁵ “The Organization of A.R.P. in Germany,” *Journal of the Air Raid Protection Institute*, 1, no. 4 (June 1939), 267.

⁹⁶ Peter Jones, *Ove Arup: Masterbuilder of the Twentieth Century* (Yale: New Haven, 2006), 73.

⁹⁷ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 336 (1938), cols. 2119-2120.

and a half million population in the first few weeks of mobilization have been drawn up, and it is not expected that the efficiency of either industry or defence should suffer.”⁹⁸

The policy on evacuation was depicted as the orderly plan of a *rationally* planned ARP scheme in contrast to the vague public assurances of the British government that plans were in place to remove vulnerable persons from London. The Group also praised the French for their superior gas masks, and above all the provision of bomb-proof, communal shelters. They also claimed, “there can be no doubt that foreign methods, relying largely on bomb-proof shelters, by paying more attention to the dangers of high explosives, and by supplying a relatively efficient, if expensive, mask, are likely to be more effective than the British.”⁹⁹

Provisions for ARP in Paris also attracted the attention of the government and the experts from the Air Raid Protection Institute who studied both German and French preparations and sent their own experts on fact-finding trips to France. Jean W. Partridge, Inspector General of Public Works in Paris read a paper at an Institute general meeting, apparently to great acclaim.¹⁰⁰ The Cement and Concrete Association dispatched members to review the conversion of Metro stations into air raid shelters and reported on their structural soundness and efficiency.¹⁰¹ Geoffrey Lloyd traveled to Paris under the auspices of the Parliamentary ARP Committee to observe air raid precautions, which were completely funded by the central French state. The account of the visit published in *The Times* pointed out that “the average [Parisian] householder pays little, if any,

⁹⁸ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 66.

⁹⁹ CSAWG, “Air Raid Precautions,” *Nature*, 139, no. 239 (1 May 1937), 760 and CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 74.

¹⁰⁰ *Journal of the Air Raid Protection Institute*, 1, no. 3 (April 1939), 140-164.

¹⁰¹ Peter Jones, *Ove Arup*, 67.

attention to good advice about storing gas-masks, shovels... but is grateful for the address of the nearest shelter, to be sought ‘without haste but without delay.’”¹⁰² The Conservative MP Oliver Simmonds, Chairman of the Parliamentary ARP Committee proposed that new buildings should be required to be resistant to air attack, as was the policy in France.¹⁰³ This point was raised by various ARP experts, though it was generally agreed that it would do little to accommodate the majority of the population of London who would be using existing structures for shelter. By this point, many in the government were of the opinion that the issue of deep shelters would need to be addressed, and many, such as Simmonds, held more moderate views on the subject than official policy would suggest. Yet they still were unwilling to embrace a Parisian-style program, and their visits to France remained of a cursory interest. From the government’s point of view, though French ARP provoked interest it did little fundamentally to alter the “British way” of civil defence that had become entrenched in policy.

In contrast to the government position, the leftist critics made much of the scientifically advanced approach taken on the continent, and emphasized that instituting similar positions in Britain was simply a matter of political will and providing the requisite funds. Leftist scientists agreed with commentators who placed Britain five years behind the continent in technical shelter construction.¹⁰⁴ Emphasizing the perceived dearth of British innovation increased the apparent significance of the leftist critiques. The critics could use these contentions in order again to emphasize their expertise derived

¹⁰² *The Times*, 25 January 1938, 11.

¹⁰³ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol.333 (1938), col. 1357.

¹⁰⁴ *New Statesman and Nation*, XVI, no. 402 (5 November 1938), 347.

from Spain, and the importance of their theories and experiments. This line of argumentation completed a self-enforcing circle which advanced the credentials of the leftist scientists. The leftists also valued the image of citizen-driven civil defence they perceived occurring in Spain and France. It provided a concrete example of the form a popular twentieth century *levée en masse* might take and how citizens could retain rights and liberties in an era of total war.

These commentators, however, had no first-hand knowledge of the details or feasibility of plans on the continent. As mentioned regarding their gas critique, the CSAWG cited the superior properties of German, French, Swiss, and Russian gas masks, although they do not appear to have carried out tests on these models. Nor did they acknowledge that foreign plans could also be aimed at assuaging the civilian morale of their own populations. In their haste to point out gaps and contradictions in Home Office plans, these scientists may have taken the claims of foreign governments too closely at face value. The proclamations of the Mayor of Barcelona or the ARP officials in Paris aimed to please their domestic citizenry as much as they were for foreign consumption. After all, critics argued that the British provision of gas masks and paste-and-paper refuge rooms were simply reassuring gestures that would do little to protect the population. In their eagerness to praise foreign preparations, the leftist observers did not always take a critical look at the information they propagated. They were primarily interested in highlighting the mere existence of shelters in Paris or Spain in order to make political points regarding the priorities of the British government. These arguments related to the rights of all citizens in wartime, as explained in the remainder of this chapter.

Arguments Regarding the Class Bias of Government-Sanctioned ARP

Issues of class and the financial obligations of the government to its citizens were at the core of the leftist ARP critique from its inception. As we have seen, the “self-help” basis of government plans was evident in the titles of Home Office Circulars such as *Make Your Home Safe Now*. The unwavering message of ARP was that the householder should be responsible for the defence of his family in his own home. The CSAWG pointed out that a large percentage of the population simply did not have a spare room at their disposal which could be set aside for gas-proofing. They therefore charged that the government plans were biased against the urban poor, those very civilians who were at the greatest risk from aerial warfare. British leftists were particularly riled by the appearance of preferential treatment for the well-connected, and “self-help” for ordinary citizens. For example, it came to light that the armed forces would receive the highest quality gas masks, and that deep shelters were being constructed under Whitehall for government officials. Near Windsor similar shelters were being constructed for the protection of the Royal Family,¹⁰⁵ while no shelter provision was made for the people. The British Movement Against War and Fascism and the Union of Democratic Control both concluded that government officials, military personnel, and essential workers would

¹⁰⁵ Reported in *Reynolds News*, April 1938, cited in John Gregg, *The Shelter of the Tubes: Tube Sheltering in London* (Harrow Weald: Capital Transport Publishing, 2001). In light of the special preparations made for the Royal Family, members of the House of Lords in February 1939 asked whether the public should not be allowed to shelter in the Tubes. Peter Jones, *Ove Arup*, 70.

be provided with prime shelter provisions, gas masks and protective clothing for free, while all others would only have the best protection they could afford.¹⁰⁶

The leftist critics made several points regarding both the inequality of present ARP arrangements, and the necessity to devote extremely high levels of the national budget towards civilian defence. Their arguments centered on equality and the rights of citizens. The technical critique of gas precautions and deep shelters necessarily entailed discussions of national finance and government distribution of ARP resources. The leftist critics decried the economic biases inherent in government provisions. They believed that the Home Office ARP policy only exacerbated the economic disparity between the rich and poor, and between wealthy and impoverished Boroughs – especially since the burden of communal ARP costs would disproportionately affect poorer areas. The communists deployed traditional Marxist rhetoric to decry the inequities they saw as inherent in government ARP, and appeal to ordinary Britons to support their cause.

The leftists firstly targeted their appeals to the urban householder who would likely find the Home Office advice difficult, if not impossible, to undertake. Haldane cited a statement by Conservative MP Duncan Sandys to drive home the point that the present government had no intention of helping the urban working class: “The Home Office should abandon its hesitant attitude and tell the public plainly that, wherever it was reasonably possible, and within the limits of their means, it was the duty of every individual to provide protection for himself and his family.”¹⁰⁷ The CSAWG prominently

¹⁰⁶ British Movement Against War and Fascism, *Behind the Gas Mask: An Exposure of the Proposed Air Defence Measures* (London, c. 1935), 5-6, and Union of Democratic Control, *Poison Gas*, 193.

¹⁰⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 228

emphasized issues of class inequality in both their publications, believing that the recommendations were unsuitable to the urban poor. The Group charged that the poor would “get the least protection and pay relatively the most for it. To permit and advise people in the building of protective shelters instead of providing state shelters on an equal basis for all is to deprive the poor of shelter to the advantage of the rich.”¹⁰⁸ They also took the Home Office to task for advising householders to remove flammable material from top floors of buildings in order to protect against fire. They pointed out that a sizable segment of the population actually lived on the top floor of buildings. The Group also found the government advice on constructing one-foot thick walls to protect from splinters to be alarming, since virtually no homes, and certainly not those of the poor, conformed to this standard. They concluded, “This means in practice that the inhabitants, unless they are well off, will have no effective protection even against splinters.”¹⁰⁹

Even some non-leftist commentators pointed to the class inequality inherent in ARP recommendations. H. Montgomery Hyde, secretary to the former Secretary for Air, Lord Londonderry, acknowledged that the lack of resources available to construct gas-proof rooms for the majority of the population constituted a major social problem. He suggested, somewhat naively, that the wealthy should volunteer to shelter other citizens in their own accommodations.¹¹⁰ The leftist commentators, however, were not content to hold out hopes of such private generosity. The Communist Party demanded that air raid shelters built for the rich should be brought under municipal control for the benefit of all

¹⁰⁸ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 18.

¹⁰⁹ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 35.

¹¹⁰ H. Montgomery Hyde and G. R. Falkiner Nuttall, *Air Defence and the Civil Population* (London: The Cressent Press Ltd., 1937).

citizens and that offices and factories should have gas and bomb-proof shelters built at owner expense.¹¹¹

The subject of evacuation was also intimately entwined with economic deprivation. Leftists argued that children in the poorer areas of East London would be in greatest danger and in need of evacuation during war. Demanding immediate evacuation plans, they used the tactic of shaming the government to allocate more funds to “defend British women and children.” As noted in chapter two, the groundwork for evacuation plans dragged on well into 1938. Though there was much public discussion of evacuation, including in the House of Commons, the exact details of how it would be implemented remained largely secret.¹¹² Haldane insisted that evacuation must be orchestrated from above to prevent it from becoming an unorganized option only for those who could afford it.¹¹³ The CSAWG analyzed the contents of the first Home Office Circular, which suggested that children, invalids and the elderly from large towns should be sent to stay with family and friends in the country “if this is possible.” The Group charged that “the phrase ‘if this is possible’ implies that those with money enough to get away and stay away are advised to do so,” while others would be required to fend for themselves.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ This provision was actually the official policy of the government, though there remained little regulatory power to enforce these laws, even after the ARP Acts of 1937 and 1939 were passed. See Donald Hamilton, *The Civil Defence Act 1939 as It Affects Employers and Property Owners* (London: Jordan and Sons, Ltd., 1939). Policy makers were cautious not to offend business interests by implying that business should be made to pay for ARP provisions that might “assume astronomical proportions.” NA, CAB 16/197, Minutes of the first meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, 12 December 1938, comment by Sir Samuel Hoare, 16-18. It was agreed that large employers should take “reasonable steps” to assure ARP, leaving companies with wide latitude to interpret these regulations.

¹¹² Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: HMSO, 1950), 28, and John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson: Viscount Waverly* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1962), 199-202.

¹¹³ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 80.

¹¹⁴ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 18.

The *Daily Worker* also focused on the economic aspects of government ARP policy, appealing directly to the “bread and butter” issues of the urban working class. An article entitled “Skin Flint Attitude of the Air Raid Chief” charged that civilian protection was subordinated to military needs. The paper believed that the welfare of schoolchildren, the most vulnerable civilians, was not being adequately considered. Despite the assurances of the Head of the ARP Department, Wing Commander E. J. Hodsoll, that school protection was a government priority, the paper believed that “he is anything but anxious to spend money in affording the necessary protection.”¹¹⁵ Anti-war rhetoric therefore was fused with anti-capitalist arguments. Bernal expressed an even more extreme view of the situation, possibly borne out of frustration at the government’s intransigence when he stated, “the public cannot be protected without enormous cost and the abolition of all rights of private property. This is something no capitalist government has any intention of doing.”¹¹⁶ Haldane, more moderately, pointed out that one of the primary functions of the capitalist state was to “preserve the existing class structure.”¹¹⁷ This tendency needed to be strongly opposed by those who valued equality. The leftist critics believed that the structure of government ARP reflected all the class inequalities of British society that they sought to transform.

Leftist commentators objected not only to the obligations on the individual householder, but to the demands on local councils as well, particularly in poorer areas. Christian pacifists agreed with the leftist critics on this point – objecting to the fact that

¹¹⁵ *Daily Worker*, 8 January 1938, 1.

¹¹⁶ Cambridge University Library, J.D. Bernal Papers, B.3.21, clipping of J.D. Bernal, review of “Air Defence and the Civil Population” by Hyde and Nuttall, *Reynold’s News*, 29 August 1937.

¹¹⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 243.

ARP would involve a serious restriction of social services that were already overstretched in poor areas.¹¹⁸ The Communist Party noted that the money available for ARP per head varied widely between rich and poor areas. In Westminster £16 3s. were available for protection per individual, with the prosperous areas of Holborn and Richmond rating at £9 0.5s. and £4 7s. respectively. In areas such as Walthamstow, Bethnal Green, Camberwell, and Lambeth this amounted to less than £2 per individual.¹¹⁹ The CSAWG argued that the poorer areas of the East End needed more protection than wealthier areas such as Kensington where structures were more solidly built and where there were few strategic targets.¹²⁰

Local Communist Party organizers also published pamphlets that specifically discussed local ARP needs. Activists in Hampstead¹²¹ and Holborn were particularly prominent in demanding improved ARP for their local areas. Since it was assumed that enemy bombers would target not only industrial centres but also transport networks such as railways, almost any area could plausibly claim to require emergency ARP provisions. The local Communist Party branch in Sheffield argued that the great industrial facilities of the North were vulnerable to attack, while the CSAWG in relatively isolated Cambridgeshire made elaborate use of maps to demonstrate that the county's rail lines might prove to be an irresistible target to enemy planes.¹²²

¹¹⁸ E. Leighton Yates, *A Christian Attitude Towards Air-Raid Precautions* (London: The Fellowship of Reconciliation, c. 1938), 7-8.

¹¹⁹ CPGB, *A.R.P. For Londoners*, 15.

¹²⁰ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 57-9.

¹²¹ Hampstead was a centre of (largely middle class) radical activity in the 1930s. See Camden Arts Group, *Hampstead in the Thirties: A Committed Decade* (Camden Arts Council, 1974).

¹²² CPGB Sheffield Branch, *A.R.P.: A complete plan for the safety of the people of Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1938); the Holborn's People's Air Raid Protection Committee, *A.R.P. – A Plan for Holborn*, (London,

Local councils resented being forced to fund an ARP program some felt to be of dubious merit and over which they had little control. An editorial in the *New Statesman and Nation* stated that opposition to government ARP demands by local authorities was well founded because they were being asked to foot the bill for a scheme whose general efficiency was much in doubt. In return for increased rates, the populace deserved more than sub-standard gas masks and inadequate shelters.¹²³ Another editorial on the release of the 1935 Circular claimed that it turned “horrific fantasy into a close and appalling reality,” and criticized the government for allowing the costs of shelters to fall on individuals and local councils.¹²⁴ Even W.E. Johns editorialized in *Flight* magazine that because ARP was a national issue “the municipalities have some justification for demanding that the Government should bear the whole cost of air raid precautions.”¹²⁵ Complaints were still voiced after Herbert Morrison and the LCC had negotiated for a higher supplement from the central government. The far left felt that the only truly equitable solution was a fully subsidized program which would spread the costs among all citizens, whether they lived in remotest Cumbria or in East London. They were convinced that since ARP was vital to the survival of the nation as a whole, it was by default a national and not an individual or community responsibility.

1938); CSAWG, *Cambridge ARP Exhibition* (Cambridge, c. 1941), “Memorandum on Air Raid Precautions for the Town of Cambridge” (Cambridge, [n.d.]).

¹²³ *New Statesman and Nation*, XIII, no. 321 (17 April 1937), 623.

¹²⁴ *New Statesman and Nation*, X, no. 234 (17 August 1935), 211.

¹²⁵ *Flight*, XXXII, no. 1508 (18 November 1937), 1.

The Leftist Critics Justify Their ARP Estimates

The monetary figures that J.B.S. Haldane, the CSAWG, and the Communist Party arrived at were very large indeed. The financial estimates devised by Haldane were the most important forwarded by any leftist critic, and his ideas were picked up almost verbatim by others, particularly left-leaning councils. He concluded that his two-part scheme would cost approximately £400,000,000 to institute – with a high estimate of £600,000,000 for an even more comprehensive plan.¹²⁶ This figure represented slightly more than half of total government expenditure during these years. Haldane envisioned that the cost would be spread over a period of two or three years at a rate of around £11 per head, although the annual figure would still constitute a large percentage of total government spending at peacetime rates.¹²⁷ These exorbitant figures did not pass unnoticed by his critics. One such anonymous critic scoffed at the idea that Haldane “who is neither engineer nor architect” could promise “absolute protection for a trifle of from £400,000,000 to £600,000,000.”¹²⁸ Haldane proposed a combination of a capital levy on property and a

¹²⁶ The review of *A.R.P.* in *The Times* noted that this figure was slightly below the “present scale of rearmament expenditure.” *The Times*, 20 September 1938, 7.

¹²⁷ Stephen Broadberry and Peter Howlett put the government expenditure for 1938 and 1939 at £781,000,000 and £1,261,000,000 respectively. “The United Kingdom: ‘Victory at All Costs’” in Mark Harrison, ed. *The Economics of WWII: Six Powers in International Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Of the total figure, around one-third constituted defence expenditure, which was around £254,000,000 in 1938-9. If instituted over two years, the Haldane ARP plan would have equaled the amount spent on all rearmament during this period. See figures in David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

¹²⁸ “Martian,” *A.R.P.: A Reply to Professor J.B.S. Haldane, F.R.S., The Royal Institute of British Architects and Some Others, Including the British Government* (London: John Bale, Sons and Curnow, Ltd., 1938).

“civilian defence loan,” offered to the public much like a war bond, to fund his program, though he did not provide much detail as to how these schemes should work.¹²⁹

The Haldane estimates became the guiding marker for other leftists. The Communist publication *A.R.P. for Londoners* ended with the rhetorical question: “Is it too much to ask that these wealthy people should find out of their abundance the £11 per head needed to save the people of London and the women and children from horrible death?”¹³⁰ The Communist Party figure of £11 per head entailed 60 foot deep shelters with entrances no more than 200 yards apart in central urban areas.¹³¹ The principle of closely-spaced entrances became an important component of the Tecton plans for Finsbury. The Communists asked for nothing less than tunnels for the entire population of Greater London, which constituted eight million people. The CSAWG figures came in at considerably less than those proposed by Haldane or the Communists. They estimated that their recommendations for a modest system of smaller reinforced brick shelters would cost only £2-3 per person – compared with a present rate of less than five shillings per person – if carried out over a period of five years.¹³² The Group believed that protection could be afforded by semi-surface shelters distributed throughout the city. These shelters would be shallowly placed underground, covered with a thin layer of concrete or earth, and lined with light steel sheets. Therefore, they would not be bomb-proof, but would protect more thoroughly from falling debris than protective rooms.¹³³

¹²⁹ Haldane, *How to Be Safe From Air Raids*, 51.

¹³⁰ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Londoners*, 15.

¹³¹ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, 11.

¹³² CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 82.

¹³³ Mass Observation Reports noted a widespread illogical antipathy towards brick shelters. They were considered flimsy, possible aerial targets, and enthusiasm for constructing them was mixed. Mass

This £2-3 plan constituted the minimum effort that the state should devote towards the protection of the public, but they believed that a larger scheme could easily be instituted at the cost Haldane had indicated.¹³⁴

Given the scale of the figures, the critics needed a persuasive argument as to why these expenditures were not exorbitant for the state, and they suggested possible sources for funds. The Communist Party literature presented a simplistic class-based argument, calling for increased taxation of business and the very wealthy. Both the Communists and the leftist scientists attempted to rationalize the sums as only a fraction of the combined expenditure on armaments over a period of years. This argument allowed them to access the latent pacifist and anti-war feeling that many on the left still shared. Finally, the scientists attempted to present their proposals as cost-effective and beneficial to the national economy as a whole. They pointed to the value of scientific standardization, believing that this approach would lower total costs while providing a higher standard of protection for less.

The Communist pamphlets took a standard Marxist “soak the rich” perspective in justifying plans for ARP. They pointed to the huge profits of large national businesses, public companies, landlords, as well as armaments manufacturers. Their combined profits amounted to hundreds of millions per year, and the leftists attempted to make a moral argument about the duty of the rich to assist poorer members of the community. They pointed out that even a tiny tax surcharge on large business – which they believed would

Observation Digitized Archive, File Report A14, Air Raid Shelters, March 1939, 8-10, and File Report, File Report 291, 20 July 1940, 5-7.

¹³⁴ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 82.

hardly be noticeable to such enterprises – would adequately provide the resources required for the Haldane project. They also objected to war-profiteering – as Communist Party organizers in Hampstead alleged, “The tax-payer is being sucked dry, while huge profits are piled up. Not a single penny should be made from profiteering. The Government must tax the firms who are pocketing the people’s money, and thus get all that is needed for ARP.”¹³⁵ By contrast, ARP shelters would be an entirely public amenity, free from the danger of profiteering if constructed through the aegis of government and the trade unions. Haldane even went so far as to charge that “the fact that no vast fortunes would be made from bomb-proof shelters is one reason why we have not got them.”¹³⁶

The comparative financial argument revealed the continuing resentment against the armaments industry and war preparations. The phrase “against imperialism and war,” demonstrates that elements of the pacifist critique were still strong impulses on the left. Though Spain caused a shift of rhetoric and a moderation of pacifism, the anti-armaments sentiments and resentment of war profiteering was evident in the discussion over financing the costly schemes proposed by leftist critics. The anti-armament campaign had peaked in the early 1930s, and organizations such as the Union of Democratic Control produced many anti-armament pamphlets throughout the interwar years, drawing connections between government, industry, and war. In their much-cited book, *The Secret International*, published in 1932, they listed the war profits of British firms such as Vickers and de Havilland. Utilizing a common anti-armament argument, they depicted

¹³⁵ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Hampstead*, 15.

¹³⁶ Haldane, *How to be Safe from Air Raids*, 44.

government ministers as a “war investment class” who held an interest in provoking war scares.¹³⁷ The UDC also submitted testimony to the 1935 “Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms” in an attempt to outlaw the private arms trade. They suggested that the arms industry, including heavy arms, chemicals, and aircraft production, should be nationalized.¹³⁸ They remarked, “There is no remedy for these evils unless the whole industry is taken out of private hands. The abuses are inherent in the system itself.”¹³⁹ The Labour Party was also vocal on the subject, producing pamphlets such as *The Sky’s the Limit! Plain Words on Plane Profits*, *Who’s Who in Arms*, and *The Hawkers of Death* by pacifist campaigner Philip Noel-Baker.¹⁴⁰

In the late 1930s this critique was utilized in reference to ARP to produce a moral contrast between the profits accrued by the “merchants of death” and the vulnerability of the innocent civilian to aerial attack. Haldane pointed out that his sum was only a “fraction” of the amount spent annually on armaments, and would average out to about £10 per head over the duration of his two-part ARP program, a figure that might seem more palatable than the larger combined figure.¹⁴¹ The leftists believed that their ARP figures represented far less than what the nation was prepared to spend on offensive military preparation to kill equally innocent enemy civilians. The Hampstead Communist

¹³⁷ Union of Democratic Control, *The Secret International: Armament Firms At Work* (London, 1932) and Union of Democratic Control, *An Exposure of the War Machine*, (London, 1933).

¹³⁸ London School of Economics, Papers of the Fabian Society, J36/5, Item 1, S.45, Verbatim report to the Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms.

¹³⁹ Papers of the Fabian Society, J36/5, Item 1, S.45.

¹⁴⁰ Labour Party, *The Sky’s the Limit! Plain Words on Plane Profits* (London, c. 1934) and *Who’s Who in Arms* (London, 1935). These publications were part of the UDC’s presentation to the Royal Commission on Arms in 1935. Papers of the Fabian Society, J37/1. Philip Noel-Baker, *Hawkers of Death: The Private Manufacture and Trade in Arms* (London, 1935).

¹⁴¹ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 251-254. In his pamphlet *How to Be Safe from Air Raids*, he estimated the cost at £480,000,000, or £12 per head.

organization accused the government of spending £800,000,000 on weapons and aeroplanes, while ARP was made “the Cinderella of the defensive services.”¹⁴² The CSAWG likewise compared the £6 per head that was devoted to armed forces expenditure to a few shillings that were allocated for civilian defence.¹⁴³

The proponents of alternative ARP also proposed that the preparations should employ thousands of unemployed men, who were currently drawing money on the dole, at trade union rates. Much of ARP would therefore “pay for itself,” and the labour requirements for ARP construction programs would immediately benefit thousands of presently unemployed men, contributing to the national economy and ameliorating living conditions in poor areas. In the years 1937-38 the numbers eligible for insurance benefits fluctuated from around 600,000 to one million.¹⁴⁴ Setting at least some of these men to work on ARP would therefore help to reduce this large social expenditure. Herbert Morrison believed that it was a national scandal that two million men were out of work when they could be utilized for ARP.¹⁴⁵ The Communist Party believed that a tunnel network could be constructed for £150,000,000 at trade union rates and would have the added benefit of greatly reducing unemployment.¹⁴⁶ They contrasted these societal benefits with the current expenditures on armament manufacturing which only profited wealthy shareholders, not the poor and unemployed.

¹⁴² CPGB, *Communist Plan for Life in Hampstead* (London, c. 1937), 10. The basis of this figure is unknown, though at peacetime rates it represented several years of expenditure.

¹⁴³ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 82.

¹⁴⁴ Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen-Thirties* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 341.

¹⁴⁵ Bernard Donoughue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 261.

¹⁴⁶ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Londoners*, 13.

The leftist scientists and architects also forwarded more subtle arguments regarding the value of quality scientific ARP plans. Haldane cited the fact that other technical plans had projected the cost of effective shelters at between £20 and £50 per head. He professed no great confidence in any of them, proclaiming that “some of them were obviously drawn up by people who either wished to make profits out of them or to prove their impracticability.”¹⁴⁷ These plans, however, were intended for individual factories or large buildings of flats. Therefore, their costs would necessarily be higher per head, and were not comparable to the large-scale plans that Haldane proposed. One argument in favour of ambitious plans was that the national economy of scale would make the most effective use of scant national resources, rather than piecemeal schemes that tended to waste resources. Haldane’s conclusions on the economically sound basis of deep shelters were taken up by some architectural professionals. The *Architects’ Journal* commissioned a report on ARP and the possibilities of deep shelters in 1939 and it endorsed his contention that “fully bomb-proof shelters” at a depth of 50 feet could be built at a cost of around £10 per head.¹⁴⁸

The financial justification of deep shelters consequently represented the political and professional biases of the various participants. The Communist Party’s position of “full protection at any price” was unsurprising, as was their call for a levy on business and wealth. The hundreds of millions of pounds proposal by Haldane represented ideals of equality, but a close reading of his text indicates that he realized that “full protection”

¹⁴⁷ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 178.

¹⁴⁸ *The Architects’ Journal*, 7 July 1939, 15. Haldane was asked to write the forward to the article and he noted, “I confess that [I would] willingly pay £12 to be at a depth of 60 feet, instead of 50.”

was highly unlikely to be realized. At the very least he believed the most unsafe precautions – converted basements and cellars for instance – should be outlawed. The approach of Herbert Morrison, Labour and the local councils represented an even more practical approach to financing ARP. As they began to realize that only small, piecemeal local solutions were liable to be implemented, and that central government financing was unlikely to move past the 60-75% figures, they largely bypassed the arguments about national finance, certain that citizens would willingly pay higher tax rates for increased shelter protection.

ARP and Wartime Citizenship

There are only two types of control suitable to the large-scale organization and movement of millions of people which will be required to give the warning, occupy the shelters, maintain observation and make the all-clear arrangements. There can be a military-police control in which people are subject to the dictatorship of officers. Or there can be the democratic method, whereby the people obey, with a voluntary and intelligent discipline, the decisions of their representatives... only the democratic form of control would work, because it alone would command the confidence of the people.¹⁴⁹

This Communist Party statement reflected a fundamental suspicion among leftists of government authority and the arbitrary powers that might be granted to ARP officials. Although the campaign for alternative ARP entailed expanded services and shelter provisions to be provided by the central government, leftist commentators were unwilling to allow the same government iron control over these services – a contradiction that they

¹⁴⁹ CPGB, *A.R.P. for Londoners*, 11.

attempted to solve by advocating on behalf of local control. This element of their ARP critique represented the full evolution of the leftist conception of a free and active citizenry and their radical volunteer ethic.

Their plans for democratic defence, however, were difficult to articulate, especially given that they acknowledged the difficulty of local councils even to provide for basic ARP. Consequently, it did not seem logical to imagine that the highly complex task of administering the hierarchical structure of ARP could be entrusted entirely to these authorities in a time of war. This section will demonstrate the concerns surrounding this question, and the role of moderate Labour in promoting cooperation with the government as a necessary evil. The leftist critics used the issue of ARP volunteers to the model of citizen involvement that they had observed in Spain. This sentiment led to a specific vision of active volunteerism that led into the People's War.

The provision of ARP was, as demonstrated, dependent on millions of volunteers to perform various wartime tasks. The ideal of volunteerism envisaged for the ARP scheme was, from the government's point of view, along the lines of the traditionalist ethic of the Victorians. The leftists, after witnessing the experience of Spain, had their own notions of what a popular and socialist volunteer ethic would encompass. This idea of the active citizenry clashed with government ideas that focused on passive duty, and the issue of control was a central concern. The leftist vision of ARP included a strong pacifist bent, and a distrust of some of the motives behind government ARP. While most leftists believed that ARP was necessary, they still bristled at the attempts to discipline the citizenry that they saw as evident in air raid drills. They also believed that the

hierarchical structure of the air raid warden system, and its affiliation with the police, posed a danger to public freedom.

At this time secret government plans were being drawn up to suspend normal democratic government and institute emergency powers should the domestic wartime situation deteriorate. Though these were top secret, many suspected that these contingency plans were in place, similar in scope to “Emergency Scheme L” drafted during the First World War and conceived to deal with any serious breakdown in civil order. The new preparations by the Home Office were entitled “Scheme Y,” and civil defence formed a large part of its mandate. Planners were concerned with “making arrangements as necessary for reinforcing the local ARP services in any area where a breakdown is threatened.”¹⁵⁰ Air raid provisions would be highly regimented, with Regional Commanders filtering instructions down a chain of command to individual ARP Wardens. Regional Commanders would be wholly responsible for passive defence if war broke out. Yet as was the case with other provisions, their actual powers were only defined in brief, general terms.¹⁵¹ These were worse-case contingency plans, and the government was in no way as eager to impose authoritarian control as the far left imagined. Yet fear about government’s intentions could easily be roused and manipulated to appeal to pacifist and radical constituencies.

The lingering distrust of militarism also filtered into fears about the predicted wartime loss of civil liberties. Some refused to condone ARP at all, since they believed

¹⁵⁰ NA, HO 45/18124 details Scheme “Y,” the contingency plan to impose military rule in wartime. It involved two stages, a “precautionary stage” and a “war stage.” Also NA, HO 45/18152, August 1938 report for the CID.

¹⁵¹ Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, 204-5.

doing so indicated support of war and a belief in its “inevitability.” For example, the Union of Democratic Control and the British Movement Against War and Fascism were ambivalent about the very existence of ARP, believing that such measures would simply encourage war. The Peace Pledge Union professed that “pacifists should refuse to take part in practice black-outs and gas drill.... [during peacetime these are] preparations for war, and it is the duty of pacifists to protest, not only in words, but also in actions, against such preparations.”¹⁵² This sentiment, however, was held by a relatively small minority by the late 1930s. The critics who are the subjects of this study did accept the necessary role of ARP for the protection of civilians. Yet it did not mean that pacifist attitudes were simply jettisoned; rather, they were expressed in different terms within the ARP critique.

The issue of civil liberties was not only a concern for the left, although leftist opposition was most vociferous. All commentators drew on the bitter experiences of the First World War and the institution of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). They feared that a similar suppression of pacifist and dissenting opinion would recur under autocratic ARP legislation. The CSAWG classified the ARP Act of 1937 in the same category as DORA, and they feared that its full measures might not be realized until after the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁵³ The *New Statesman* reflected the belief that ARP was merely a device for public control, stating, “The only aim of so-called ‘defence’ is to postpone panic until after the war can be won, hence the key of the Circular is the word

¹⁵² Peace Pledge Union, *Are You Prepared to Support or Sanction Another War? If you are, do you Realise that ‘Modern War Means War from the Air.’* (London, 1937).

¹⁵³ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 52-7.

‘discipline.’”¹⁵⁴ Many community groups were critical of measures that might lead to the creation of a war mindset that was incompatible with democracy. For example, when gas drills were introduced in Southgate, the Wood Green Women’s Arbitration Committee protested that they would “have a harmful effect upon the plastic minds of children.”¹⁵⁵ The Union for Democratic Control had concluded as early as 1935 that government proposals were, in their analysis, “deceptive,” in that they did not offer true protection, and simply prepared the population for “total war.”¹⁵⁶

Few phrased their suspicions quite as strongly as Bertrand Russell, who gave a series of peace lectures around England in 1938. He stated, “There is, I think, a certain element about air-raids precautions that is extremely sinister. It is creating a war mentality in the country.”¹⁵⁷ Yet even committed pacifists found it difficult to hold to unmoderated views in a situation where the civilian population would be targeted. Russell, for example, labeled ARP “sham and lies,” on his national peace tour in 1938 and stated that pacifists should refuse to take part in such preparations.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, however, he acknowledged that in the event of actual war no one would deny gas masks to children or fail to do all that was possible to protect the innocent.¹⁵⁹

A prominent theme in leftist critiques of government ARP was the suspicion that ARP was not intended actually to protect the population but rather to keep civilians from revolt while the military waged war. The CPGB General Secretary Harry Pollitt believed

¹⁵⁴ *New Statesman and Nation*, X, no. 234 (17 August 1935), 211.

¹⁵⁵ Philip Ziegler, *London at War: 1939-1945* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), 12.

¹⁵⁶ Union of Democratic Control, *Poison Gas*.

¹⁵⁷ *Yorkshire Observer*, 18 May 1938, 5.

¹⁵⁸ *Yorkshire Observer*, 18 May 1938, 5.

¹⁵⁹ *Yorkshire Observer Budget*, 21 May 1938, 21.

that the population was being encouraged to place their faith in mechanisms that could not ultimately provide security, and that ARP bulletins merely gave the illusion of public safety.¹⁶⁰ There were, however, contradictory opinions regarding how this control mechanism would work. At times critics believed that the government would attempt to keep the population in a constant state of fear and “panic,” so that they would not oppose government actions. On the other hand, some viewed ARP merely as a “public relations” measure aimed to keep the population docile. Frequently the same commentators expressed both opinions, depending on their audience or the subject of their ARP comment. The commonality of these interpretations was the belief that the government sought to manipulate rather than protect its citizens in wartime, and it was an ideological belief that was not always fully thought out by those expressing this suspicion.

Leftists were ever mindful of the supposed patriotic frenzy with which the Great War had been welcomed. In their 1935 *Air Display Special* leaflet the CSAWG had insisted that the real purpose of ARP drill was “to prepare people’s minds for war, to regiment the civil population for war, and bring it under the control of the military authorities. It is a first step towards conscription.”¹⁶¹ In their second book they maintained, “One cannot but challenge the conferring upon the Home Secretary of unlimited power to make Regulations and to control the content of schemes.”¹⁶² They charged that these measures were farther reaching than had been officially admitted, and would become both compulsory and coercive. The Group made a presentation to the

¹⁶⁰ CPGB, *Defence of the People* (London, 1939). Harry Pollitt voiced similar sentiments in his pamphlet *I Accuse Baldwin* (London, c. 1938).

¹⁶¹ CSAWG et al., *Air Display Special*.

¹⁶² CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 51.

Cambridge Borough Council claiming that present precautions served only to engender a “state of war-mindedness,” enriching special interests without providing any true protection.¹⁶³ The British Movement Against War and Fascism published a pamphlet that dealt significantly with dangers to civil liberties, insisting that “the population is to be kept in a state of continued alarm by propaganda, by constant gas mask drill, mock raids and black-outs. The whole atmosphere of war time is to be made permanent.” This internalization of “gas discipline” would inevitably lead to police control, government stifling of criticism, and the imprisonment of pacifists.¹⁶⁴ J.B.S. Haldane even went so far as to suggest that the government, if taken over by rightist elements, might engage in “Police Bombing” to subdue the population.¹⁶⁵ Haldane and fellow critic John Langdon-Davies called for a clearer government policy on civil policing should persistent raids threaten to shut down the capital.¹⁶⁶ Fifty years later, leftist historians would continue to believe that Home Defence measures were simply an arm of civil control intended to deal with public disorder, including strikes and insurrections that might occur in wartime.¹⁶⁷

Pacifist criticism of the militarized state persisted, voiced by those who feared that ARP plans were instituted merely to ensure that mass panic did not hamper the operations of the armed forces.¹⁶⁸ The CSAWG noted that “fear of panic is the dominant note of all speeches of Air Raid Precautions officials. Seldom do they fail to mention that panic is

¹⁶³ Needham Papers, K.32 Draft for CSAWG presentation to the Cambridge Borough Council (c. 1939).

¹⁶⁴ British Movement Against War and Fascism, *Behind the Gas Mask*, 5-6.

¹⁶⁵ Haldane, *How to be Safe from Air Raids*, 54-5.

¹⁶⁶ “Special A.R.P. Number,” *Left News*, no. 28 (September 1938), 962.

¹⁶⁷ Duncan Campbell, *War Plan UK: The Truth About Civil Defence in Britain* (London: Burnett Books, 1982).

¹⁶⁸ Yates, *A Christian Attitude Towards Air-Raid Precautions*, 7-8.

the greatest danger which they fear.”¹⁶⁹ As has been noted, there was indeed a strong “public order” element to ARP, alongside the mandate to protect life and property. A doctor commented in the *British Medical Journal* that he had been told his duty would be to prevent panic, reassure gas casualties, and “to get it into people’s heads that whether they have gas-proofed rooms or not the important thing is to be under cover in their own houses.”¹⁷⁰ With the civilian population kept docile within their own homes, editorial writers for the *New Statesman and Nation* believed the RAF would be free to destroy abroad “without the embarrassment of panic at home.”¹⁷¹ By reiterating these claims regarding the threat to democracy posed by ARP measures, the left sought to position themselves on the side of “the people.” They also emphasized that ordinary people would respond to the truth and to “voluntary and intelligent discipline” rather than to coercion.

Leftist commentators were concerned not only with the more extreme and coercive dangers of the ARP Bill but also its structural intent. They were suspicious of a centralized, hierarchical structure that would be replicated down to the lowest level. Any large organization necessitated a hierarchical structure, including the Communist Party itself. Yet local Party organizations, including the prominent Hampstead group, insisted that “democratic control” of all ARP was essential to the success of plans in greater London.¹⁷² Their notion of “democratic control” corresponded strongly to the way in which Spanish ARP had been organized. It meant that local councils should be in charge of controlling ARP wardens, and that those wardens should be carefully chosen on the

¹⁶⁹ CSAWG, *The Protection of the Public from Aerial Attack*, 37-8.

¹⁷⁰ Dr. Duncan Leys, letter to the *British Medical Journal*, 22 May 1937, quoted in CSAWG, *Air Protection: The Facts*, 60.

¹⁷¹ *New Statesman and Nation*, XIV, no. 352 (20 November 1937), 823.

¹⁷² CPGB, *Communist Plan for Life in Hampstead*, 10.

basis of ability and their potential to cooperate with their fellow citizens, rather than to command them. The prospect of unqualified wardens with broad police powers was particularly troubling. The Cambridge Scientists believed that “air raid wardens armed with ill defined powers to ‘prevent panic,’ could also be instructed to prevent any kind of publicly voiced opposition to war as ‘dangerous to the morale of the public.’”¹⁷³

The leftist critics also made nationalistic arguments in favour of de-centralized control of volunteers. For example, Haldane was concerned with how resentment against air raid wardens might impact the entire structure of ARP, essential to the wartime survival of the country. Believing that raising these questions denoted a justifiable patriotic concern, he stated that:

The air-raid wardens are being given a duty which may well prove impossible, and for this reason many people are refusing to become wardens. I think this is a mistake. We must do what we can to protect one another. But some Air Raid Wardens actually believe much of the propaganda which is being put over in lectures... They are adopting a tone with their neighbours which democratically elected officials would hardly do. It is perfectly clear that after a single air raid such people will lose their authority which they may now possess with their neighbours.¹⁷⁴

Yet he also believed in the ultimate rationality of the people, stating that the majority of wardens would resist the temptation to take such an attitude. He appealed to democratically minded people to enroll as air raid wardens even though existing schemes were inadequate and that the lectures given to wardens were full of untruths, simplistic thinking, and propaganda.¹⁷⁵ Objecting to the trumpeting of government propaganda

¹⁷³ CSAWG, *Air Raid Protection: The Facts*, 19.

¹⁷⁴ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 129.

¹⁷⁵ Haldane, *How to be Safe from Air Raids*, 34-5.

without due deliberation, he believed that wardens who openly acknowledged the gaps in official advice would be more likely to retain the confidence of their neighbours in wartime than those who simply parroted the official, and sometimes simplistic, government line.¹⁷⁶ By encouraging the constituency represented by the Left Book Club to join the ranks of the air raid wardens, he was attempting to promote left-wing patriotic service and to establish a cadre of volunteers who would represent democratic interests. In this way “democratic defence” would be ensured by the people themselves.

By encouraging active participation, critics such as Haldane hoped to demonstrate that individuals could simultaneously criticize government policies yet still be patriotic and contribute to improving their local ARP situation. It was also hoped that the involvement of progressive people in sufficient numbers could result in nation-wide policy changes. This ethic echoed the democratic actions thought to have been undertaken by ordinary Spanish citizens. Haldane’s 1938 pamphlet *How to Be Safe from Air Raids* focused on direct action and called for individuals to contact their MPs, housing estate owners and other officials, and to demand full ARP shelters at their workplaces. He believed that “if the people of Britain knew the facts, they would turn out any Government, regardless of its political views, which did not promise them full protection, and act on the promise.”¹⁷⁷ Calls for local and individual involvement in ARP were an important facet of leftist strategy especially from 1938 onwards, after it had become clear that neither the example of Spain nor the claims of expertise represented by the Cambridge Scientists or Haldane would move the national government position on their

¹⁷⁶ Haldane, *A.R.P.*, 130.

¹⁷⁷ Haldane, *How to Be Safe from Air Raids*, 8.

determined policy of “self-help” regarding ARP. The grassroots strategy became essential for leftist hopes for shelters and a suitable air raid warden policy.

Yet the far left was often blind to the fact that the notion of “British freedoms” and “democracy” did not only appeal to leftists. A majority of British people were equally opposed to “meddling,” and much of the self-help and volunteerism inherent in government plans acknowledged that antipathy towards control was commonplace in British society. The critics were often too quick to suspect the government of hidden motives that did not play out as they imagined. Mass Observation records provide some evidence that the populace received the general prospect of ARP wardens with a fair degree of skepticism and some observers even ventured that most wardens would “cower at home” in the event of an actual raid.¹⁷⁸ This sentiment reflects the suspicion of fellow citizens “getting above themselves,” or becoming wardens due to a desire to exert control over others. This fear was not necessarily aligned to leftist politics, but rather corresponded to traditional ideas of Englishness, including an intense dislike of being controlled and a suspicion of neighbours wielding undue authority. There was mixed opinion regarding compulsion to perform war duties with many respondents agreeing that although the voluntary system was preferable, compulsion was necessary if other attempts at securing war workers were unsuccessful.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, most wartime ARP service was done on a voluntary basis and the leftist intellectuals believed that their model of volunteerism best suited national interests.

¹⁷⁸ Mass Observation, “Sociology of A.R.P.”, *New Statesman and Nation*, XVI, no. 402 (5 November 1938), 717-9.

¹⁷⁹ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 919, Report on Female Attitude to Compulsion, 16 October 1941, 2.

While the far left represented a reflexively hostile position towards air warden policy, Parliamentary Labour and the LCC held a more conciliatory attitude towards the central government. The position of Herbert Morrison over a plan to place air raid wardens under the control of the Metropolitan Police emphasizes the gap between the rhetoric of vague concepts such as “democratic defence,” and the acknowledgement of how events would actually unfold in practice. The Labour Party was more willing than the Communists to accept the reality that the wartime organization of air raid workers needed to be hierarchical. Philip Noel-Baker, for all his criticism of government ARP, also acknowledged that the organization of ARP volunteers was in essence a “military” one. He did not object to this fact, but insisted that civilian local authorities have control over the process of recruitment and that all volunteers be trained to a central standard.¹⁸⁰

Under the guidance of Herbert Morrison, the government plan for the control of air raid volunteers and coordination with the Metropolitan police was supported by the LCC, and the Metropolitan Boroughs Standing Joint Committee (MBSJC) – a group which represented the Boroughs in an attempt to balance the power of the LCC. Yet there was still friction between these factions and the “hard-left” Boroughs.¹⁸¹ As demonstrated in the second chapter, the moderate and far left Boroughs fell into disagreement over the issue of central government funding, and the division adversely affected negotiations. There were still some “rebel Boroughs” in the MBSJC who objected to the police control provisions. Morrison was among those who tried to smooth over these differences,

¹⁸⁰ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 344 (1939), col. 1390.

¹⁸¹ Robin Woolven, “London, Munich, and ARP,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 43 (1998): 55.

believing that infighting between the Boroughs was unhelpful in achieving their joint goal of improved ARP. Morrison worked with Alderman Charlie Key of the Borough of Poplar to persuade the rebel Boroughs that they had no choice but to cooperate. The various parties reached a compromise solution by which local councils recruited and trained their own wardens, but coordination for control of the warden system was made with a “Principal Warden” appointed by New Scotland Yard.¹⁸² Morrison was politic enough to hold a series of meetings with the rebel Boroughs, allowing them to express their concerns, but was firm in his conviction that the Boroughs had nothing to fear by cooperating with the government on the subject of air raid wardens. As such, Morrison and the LCC demonstrate the divide between the far left and the centre left on these ideological questions. Ultimately, however, it was the moderates who held the most tenable position, and they reflect the “middle way” of leftist integration into the state.

This chapter has explored the development of the leftist critique of British ARP plans following observations of aerial bombing in Spain. It has suggested how both the technical and social critiques took shape, and how the critics framed their points to appeal to traditional issues of left-wing constituencies and depict ARP as an issue of social welfare and the rights of citizens. The left framed the issue as one of democracy and the rights of the civilian population to adequate protection when their governments went to war. Demonstrations of technical excellence, economic value, and the productive use of materials were intended to cement the leftists’ claim to unique professional status. As will

¹⁸² Woolven, “First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions,” 54-6.

also be demonstrated in the following chapter, the respect and approval of professional peers was an important consideration in presenting alternative ARP to the public at large. Not all of the critics advocated the same provisions, though there was a common basis for most recommendations. The essential points highlighted included that ARP shelters should be public, deep underground, funded entirely through central taxation, and instituted democratically. This meant that provisions should be equitable and directed by local authorities who best understood the ARP needs in their specific communities. The critics also emphasized how their provisions represented true patriotism. By criticizing the government's volunteer plan, particularly in reference to air raid wardens, critics hoped to promote the type of citizen involvement in ARP that they had observed in Spain.

The Cambridge Scientists found that charges of alarmism and political motive were difficult to deflect. In fact, their depiction as extreme political malcontents was effective, since much was made of the idea that ARP should ideally be “non-political” – though this was demonstrably untrue on all sides. The leftists argued that the government's ARP provisions were inherently political, since they favoured the middle and upper classes at the expense of the poor. The CSAWG experts admitted that their political views were left-leaning, but felt that their scientific findings should stand on their own merits. As the debate continued, the question of patriotism was particularly thorny.

The leftist critics refused to concede that they were harming national morale, or that mass shelters were “funk-holes” for the cowardly. A broad range of political actors disputed Home Office claims that deep shelters would encourage the population to adopt

a “shelter mentality” and neglect war work and other essential duties. The term “funk-hole” was often deployed as one of derision that carried the stigma of cowardice but also denoted a lack of patriotism. The individual who desired such an arrangement was one who would not pull their own weight in wartime, and thus endangered their fellow citizens. Critics such as Haldane believed that their measures, on the contrary, would make all citizens equal participants in a war. This corresponded to leftist nationalism and the ideal of the People’s War. Local councils began searching for ways to circumvent the central government’s refusal to provide public shelters, the subject of the next chapter on the Finsbury project.

Chapter Five

The Finsbury Deep Shelter Project:

A Pre-War Clash of Leftist and Government Perspectives on ARP

Until 1939 the critics of government shelter policy had been dismissed by officials in a piecemeal fashion, but an event in that year forced the Home Office to reject publicly alternative local deep shelter plans. A project undertaken by the Borough of Finsbury in 1938-9 provides a case study of practically all the political and technical issues surrounding “the British way” of ARP. The architectural firm of Tecton, headed by the architect Berthold Lubetkin, was commissioned by the Finsbury Borough Council to build underground shelters that could house up to 13,000 people each. It brought the experience of Spain and the left’s deep shelter critique into conflict with the political preferences of the Home Office on the issue of ARP. Both sides argued over the degree of protection that urban Londoners should expect, with the central government promoting their particular “British” protection schemes involving a preference for home and familiar surroundings. Finsbury reflected a mass scientific scheme intended to be instituted by local councils for the urban working class. Rather than mobilizing the rhetoric of anti-armaments or taxation of the wealthy, the Finsbury Council emphasized the financial value of their plans, and the willingness of ordinary residents to pay for the scheme. A study of Finsbury therefore encapsulates the leftist and governmental arguments regarding what the “British way” of civilian protection entailed, and suggests the direction that local shelter protection would take in the Second World War.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, leftist critics questioned the assumption that mass deep shelters represented un-British “funk-holes.” To the contrary, they argued that systematic shelters, used by an informed populace, would enable the population to better perform patriotic duties. The more astute leftist commentators sought to affirm that they were as concerned as the government with questions of civilian morale and the successful prosecution of a national war. They believed that their ideas were superior both technically and ideologically, but reached an impasse with the government over irreconcilable versions of how “British” air raid shelters should be provided. This chapter demonstrates the tone of opposing views of national character as demonstrated through the Hailey Commission, the Home Office’s response to the Finsbury plan. The political and moral arguments for deep shelter were paired with the professional expertise of progressive architects. On the other hand Sir John Anderson believed that the British people had not been given a fair estimate of why Home Office plans for defence were best suited to British conditions.

Joseph Meisel, who has written on the Finsbury project, portrays the episode as a conflict between the political imperatives of the government and the scientists’ and architects’ views of activist citizenship and social commitment.¹ The Tecton architects, Haldane, and others were positioned outside the circles of scientific expertise that the government utilized in the pre-war period. Meisel also believes that the technical expertise utilized by the government remained “amateur at best.”² Both scientific

¹ Joseph S. Meisel, “Air Raid Shelter Policy and its Critics in Britain before the Second World War,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 5, no. 3 (1994): 300-319.

² Meisel, “Air Raid Shelter Policy,” 315. Christopher Lawrence and Anna-K. Mayer also identify the persistence of the “amateur” and voluntary tradition into the 1930s, the years that preceded the supposed

expertise and the role of government in addressing social concerns were an important part of this episode, and this study supports the view that Finsbury represented a clash of ideals between the narrow dictates of bureaucracy and rebel critics who were unable to breach the professional circles called upon by Whitehall. Yet apart from differences of politics and science, and the social activism of the critics, Finsbury furthermore represents a clash of differing ideas about what the “British way” of ARP should constitute. I will focus on how these factors manifested in Finsbury, the reaction of the press, and the Borough’s battle with the Home Office.

The press campaign for the deep shelters was waged in the popular press and in professional architectural journals. I will explore how these publications responded to the Finsbury plan. Newspapers across the political spectrum gave the plan favourable coverage, at the very least believing Tecton’s massive Borough survey to be a valuable exercise and worthy of careful consideration. However, there was still a difference between positive press attention, and the conversion of the public, or of professional colleagues, to the cause of pressuring the government for deep shelters. This mixed view of the plans leads into discussion of the Home Office response. The government believed that the call for deep shelters was based on the “mistaken conception that widespread provision of deep shelters was a practical possibility.”³ Sir John Anderson, now the Lord Privy Seal, felt that the agitation for deep shelters needed to be definitively addressed, and so convened a Commission to do so in early 1939. The Hailey Commission (also

technocratic and professional welfare state. Lawrence and Mayer, *Regenerating England: Science, Medicine and Culture in Inter-war Britain* (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2000), 2.

³ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting of the sub-committee, 14 April 1939, 93.

called the Hailey Conference), affirmed that the public should expect no more than reasonable protection from blast debris. The government portrayed its policies as compatible with the British temperament of preferring the private comforts of home and disliking public shelters and being among strangers. The Tecton architects emphasized what they considered to be different facets of the national character – modern scientific design and the equality of citizens.

The Council investigated several means of building multiple mass shelters regardless of government objections, including the idea of designing dual-use structures that would be built by private companies. On the eve of war in August 1939, the socialist newspaper *Finsbury Citizen* published an article on the Borough's mass shelter project with the headline "Borough Council Defeats the Government: Finsbury's Sensational Victory." Council spokesman Alderman Harold Riley, who had helped initiate the Tecton project, declared, "There is nothing the Government can now do to stop us building [our deep shelter]. We have not even got to ask the Government whether we may build it, or in any way seek its opinion."⁴ The events of September 1939, however, overran these efforts, and wartime ARP provision in Finsbury was limited to providing smaller surface and shallow underground shelters on an *ad hoc* basis. Wartime experience demonstrated the importance of local councils to provide rudimentary ARP, though the grand ideas acquired by leftists in Spain had to be dramatically downsized.

⁴ *Finsbury Citizen*, August 1939, 1.

Background to Finsbury

The Borough of Finsbury was, as described earlier in this study, one of the “rebel Boroughs” that battled with Herbert Morrison over cooperation with the government on the “coercive” elements of ARP. As a local authority, it was also responsible for drafting its own ARP plan, and its leadership intended to reflect the “democratic defence” advocated by the leftist critics of ARP. The Council appointed an ARP Committee as early as 1935 and its officials had been party to the frustrating and inconclusive ongoing government discussions with local authorities. At the time the Borough of Finsbury covered areas that now comprise parts of Islington and Clerkenwell. The area had an extremely high population density, and contained only one Underground station, Farringdon, which was not even wholly underground. This put the area in sharp contrast to surrounding Boroughs which at least had deep Underground Stations, such as those on the Northern and Piccadilly lines, within close reach.

The Borough was dominated by Labour, and the Mayor, commonly referred to as “Alderman” Harold Riley, was predominantly concerned with improving social and living conditions in his Borough. Along with the LCC, which represented the interests of the 28 metropolitan Boroughs, local authorities such as Finsbury implemented LCC policies, and were in charge of administering many social programs on their own. This system allowed many reform-minded local politicians to practice progressive public policy on a small scale, and the Finsbury Council believed strongly in this ethic. The councilors also had prior experience with the Tecton firm in constructing the Finsbury

Health Centre. The decision to investigate mass shelter possibilities seriously was a direct product of the Munich Crisis of September 1938 and the unpreparedness that came to light as a result. Alderman Riley later recalled that “with the crisis over, the Council immediately concentrated on methods to be adopted for protection of the whole of the population in the event of war.”⁵ The minutes of Finsbury Council meetings note that on 4 October 1938 it voted to employ “Messrs. Tecton” at an estimated cost of £250 to conduct a survey of the Borough, with a view to build deep shelters for residents.⁶

The Council had grown increasingly concerned over the lack of public ARP facilities and that existing – and in their view ineffectual – ARP requirements added significant costs to the already overstrained local budget. Alderman Riley later claimed in a press statement that it was obvious that government shelter provisions would serve only a small percentage of the population, “and that in such a congested area as Finsbury, to provide trench shelter for all would be impossible.”⁷ The primary argument of the councilors was that government insistence on individual household protection was completely impractical for densely packed urban areas that lacked private outdoor spaces. The Council may well have been troubled that in the ARP Bill of 1937, they had been classified as receiving only 65% central funding for ARP, along with Boroughs such as

⁵ Victoria and Albert Museum, RIBA British Architectural Library, Berthold Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/5, copy of the Press Release by Alderman Harold Riley, Chairman of the Finsbury Borough ARP Committee, February 1939, 1.

⁶ Finsbury Reference Library, ARP Committee, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 39 (4 October 1938), 417.

⁷ John Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the Tradition of Progress* (London: Royal Institute of British Architects, 1992), 353.

Hammersmith, Lambeth, and Woolwich, while nearby Boroughs such as Islington and Hackney were to receive 70%.⁸

Finsbury was hardly alone in attempting to expand ARP services in their areas beyond what the Home Office was already prepared to provide. Simultaneous plans for deep tunnels were proposed by the London Federation of Peace Councils, and were being considered in Marylebone, Lambeth and St. Pancras.⁹ Hackney and St. Pancras had both set up ARP Sub-Committees in the mid 1930s. St. Pancras made a survey of cellars in 1938, although experts such as Haldane were advising against the conversion of basements and cellars into shelters.¹⁰ By May 1938 at least 21 Boroughs had lodged ARP schemes with the Home Office, but the bureaucratic system proved slow in approving proposed plans.¹¹ In the House of Commons Labour MPs questioned the government over the glacial speed of approving local council applications. Labour member F.W. Pethick-Lawrence complained that plans submitted by the Borough of Holborn simply to dig trenches had been acknowledged but not approved. He believed that the delays were causing disquiet among the population and endangering morale. A fellow MP from Camberwell in Peckham similarly pointed out that there was much confusion and local authorities were unsure whether they should sanction the building of underground shelters and dual-use car parks. In response to these inquiries, Sir John Anderson pointed to the need for proper technical advice and close examination of the projects. He believed

⁸ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1937-8, Cmd. 5596, Statement showing Classification of Local Authorities for purposes of calculating Exchequer Grant, 3-4.

⁹ Robin Woolven, "Playing Hitler's Game from Fitzroy Road NW1: JBS Haldane, the St. Pancras Branch of the Communist Party, and Deep-Shelter Agitation," *Camden History Review*, 23 (1999): 24.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 23 February 1938, 20.

¹¹ Robin Woolven, "First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions," *Hackney History*, 6 (2000): 53.

that decisions could not be made “without proper consideration.”¹² Despite the frustrations of the local councils, such a position by the Home Office was not unreasonable, given that their assent to any project would hold them at least partially liable for mistakes or disasters. Even prior to the outbreak of war, an accident or cave-in of an officially sanctioned shelter would be politically disastrous for a government and certainly would not help to shore up civilian morale. Consequently, there was conflict between the urgency expressed by the local authorities, and the conviction held by the government that deep shelters had not been proven to be safe or effective.

Progressive British Architecture and the Left in the Thirties

The tradition of progressive architecture and urban planning played a central role in the conception of deep communal shelters and the rights of urban citizens. The architects involved with the plan held distinct ideas about national civil society and the role of professionals in ameliorating the ills of modern life. Many saw twentieth-century planning as a way to remedy the evils of the nineteenth-century industrial city.¹³ English planners reflected long-standing fears of the nineteenth-century metropolis, the spectre of the “satanic mills” of the industrial city, and the desire to create new and modern forms.¹⁴

The Tecton architects, and the organization MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group), which included the Spanish observer Fred Skinner, were therefore part of a

¹² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol 345 (1939), col. 1709 and vol. 347 (1939), col. 2486-7.

¹³ David L. Pike, *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 281.

¹⁴ Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), 10.

coterie of experts who forwarded a “progressivist ideology” of urban planning and design.¹⁵ In the words of one architectural historian, “they had the confidence to think that an advanced industrial society could create an urban environment worthy of its highest values.”¹⁶ Form and design were invested with almost magical powers to express and encourage progress. The ideals of the progressive architects were predicated on “scientific principles” interpreted for the realities of British life. Such ideas contributed to the aesthetics of their architecture, but also to the philosophy of projects such as health and community centres, and air raid shelters.

Interwar Britain featured many important modernist projects, even if the modernism of London did not correspond to the continental notions of the Bauhaus masters or Le Corbusier. Architectural historian Gavin Stamp argues that views of 1930s architecture have tended to follow the stark dichotomies of the age – fascist or communist, modernist or traditionalist, old or young. Yet there were far more connections between English and continental design than have been reflected in the accounts of design historians.¹⁷ But while British interwar architecture may not have been aesthetically conservative, it was too politically conservative for the tastes of many progressive and activist architects. Consequently, British modernist architects imagined themselves as rebellious and heroic figures, battling an unfriendly architectural establishment. Much like their colleagues on the scientific left, they formulated their goals with social planning in mind, believing in slogans like the “architect was a planner

¹⁵ Bill Luckin, *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in Inter-War Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 2.

¹⁶ Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*, xii.

¹⁷ Gavin Stamp, “Introduction – Britain in the Thirties,” *Architectural Digest*, Profile 24 (1980): 2-25.

and the planner was a socialist.”¹⁸ Many of these modernist architects were European émigrés who had come to practice their profession in England from the early twentieth century through to the interwar years. Their status as foreigners no doubt impacted their relationship to the British architectural scene in differing ways, as will be demonstrated with the contrasting view of Berthold Lubetkin and his colleague Ove Arup.

The vision of the Tecton architectural firm and its allies was as important to the project as was the Finsbury Council. The firm was founded in 1931 by émigré Berthold Lubetkin, whose aesthetic sense was shaped in post-revolutionary Russia. Having apprenticed in Berlin, he worked in Warsaw and then in Paris where he studied under Auguste Perret, an early master of the re-enforced concrete building, a staple of modernist design. As an émigré, he greatly admired British toleration, but disliked the moderate political status quo that had replaced the radical promise of the 1920s. He viewed his role as an outsider in the British architectural scene as a means to bring social reform through the exercise of his profession.¹⁹ As such his ideas corresponded to the social citizenship ideals at the heart of the leftist philosophy of ARP.

Other contributors to the project shared Lubetkin’s background, though not necessarily his political views. Lubetkin collaborated with the architect Serge Chermayeff, a fellow Russian émigré who viewed modernist architecture as “the expression of an earnest desire of intelligent and highly trained people to change the living conditions in proportion to the immense strides made in general education,

¹⁸ Anthony Jackson, “The Politics of Architecture: English Architecture 1929-1951,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 24, no. 1 (March 1965): 103.

¹⁹ Peter Jones, *Ove Arup: Masterbuilder of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 56.

medicine, and applied technique.”²⁰ The famous engineer Ove Arup also contributed to the plans, although he was not entirely in agreement with the political motives of his fellow architects. He was much less tolerant of Communist politicking and was somewhat critical of the Tecton architects for not taking as “sober” a line in their pronouncements as he would have liked.²¹ Unlike Lubetkin, he was wary of making any statements on British politics, and at times seemed less certain of himself among the British than did his colleague. Nevertheless, he cooperated with Tecton in a professional capacity and shared a warm relationship with Lubetkin.²²

Tecton contributed many important designs to British interwar modernist architecture, including the famous Penguin Pool at the London Zoo, the Highpoint housing towers, a TB patient housing project in East Ham, and the Finsbury Health Centre, completed in 1938. Under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 local councils were able to exercise aesthetic control over development projects. The Health Centre was renowned for its design, combining social medicine with slogans such as “fresh air night and day.”²³ As such, the Centre was not merely a modernist triumph, but also a precursor of wellness thinking in architecture. Fred Skinner later commented in a letter to Haldane on how the Health Centre prepared Tecton for the task of deep shelter design. He explained that “although it was not designed with ARP in mind, it is nevertheless a very interesting building, architecturally, constructionally, and

²⁰ Alan Powers, *Serge Chermayeff: Designer, Architect, Teacher* (London: RIBA Publications, 2001), 97.

²¹ Jones, *Ove Arup*, 56-71. Jones alleges that Arup could not abide the “blind faith in Communism” of Haldane, 68.

²² Jones, *Ove Arup*, 133.

²³ David Dean, *The Thirties: Recalling the English Architectural Scene* (London: RIBA Drawings Series, 1983), 86.

sociologically.”²⁴ The social and civic aspects of architecture were of primary importance to the Tecton architects.

The Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS) was founded by Lubetkin and fellow architects such as Morton Shand, Maxwell Fry, and Francis Yorke in 1934. Associated with the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM), it was founded to represent Britain at international design events. Its stated goal was to unite those in the architectural professions by the “common realization of the necessity for a new conception of architecture and its relation to the structure of society today.”²⁵ Their bold, indeed hubristic, proposals had their apogee in the 1938 “Plan for London,” a scheme based on “garden city” planning ideals that advocated razing much of the city and replacing the old road patterns with “rationalized” radial roads.²⁶ In the age of high-minded and earnest political statements and manifestos, this assortment of British-based architects, engineers and planners believed they were in a position to challenge the professional establishment.

The group organized a West End exhibition in 1938 to showcase some of their ideas for civic planning in London, which attracted over 7,000 visitors in two weeks. Yet despite the seemingly impressive attendance, the exhibition produced a deficit that had to

²⁴ University College London, J.B.S. Haldane Papers, Box 30, File 1/a, F. Skinner to Haldane, 18 October 1938.

²⁵ RIBA British Architectural Library, Ove Arup Papers, ARO/1/1, April 1934 statement. A predecessor group to MARS had been The Twentieth Century Group, of which Serge Chermayeff and the prominent architect Wells Coates, had been members. Dean, *The Thirties*, 112.

²⁶ Andrew Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), 76. In 1942 the Royal Academy Plan for London advocated much the same “rationalized” measures to reorder London. Stamp, “Introduction – Britain in the Thirties,” 5.

be covered personally by the executive committee of MARS.²⁷ Lacking significant financial resources,²⁸ the architects created small discussion groups and committees to address specific areas of concern – subjects such as legislation, schools, propaganda, and housing. These small groups, however, served largely as a forum for the exchange of ideas, and the group was unable to publicize their ideas for a wider audience.²⁹ The group also faced various organizational problems and conflict within its membership over creative direction and the degree of political involvement. MARS therefore did not progress beyond its role as a discussion forum to become an effective pressure group.³⁰

Given the organizational weakness of MARS, political activity was overtaken by the professional unions. The architectural unions served the same organizational role as the Association of Scientific Workers had in awakening political feeling among the Cambridge Scientists. The Architects' and Technicians' Organisation (ATO) was more overtly politicized than MARS. Individuals such as Lubetkin and Fred Skinner, who believed that the profession must be seen in a more radical context, joined the ATO in the mid-1930s.³¹ Lubetkin was involved with the ATO housing exhibition, held in 1936 with the goal of recruiting fellow architects to participate in social architectural projects.³² Members of the union included engineers, surveyors, clerks, construction workers, and others, such as Harold Laski and the Communist intellectual Rajani Palme Dutt, who

²⁷ Dean, *The Thirties*, 114.

²⁸ MARS was never a well financed organization. It was funded mainly through individual subscriptions of £2 2.5, and in 1937 had a credit balance of £35 12.7. Ove Arup Papers, ARO 1/1, financial statement.

²⁹ MARS had contact with groups as diverse as the New Homes for Old Committee, the Westminster Housing Group, the Socialist Medical Council, RIBA, the Ministry of Health, and various British universities. Ove Arup Papers, ARO 1/5, assorted letters.

³⁰ Dean, *The Thirties*, 113.

³¹ John Allan's biography of Berthold Lubetkin notes that he remained a "fully paid up" member of MARS until the end of 1938, but a shift in his allegiance occurred four years prior. Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 322.

³² Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 132.

were enlisted for specific projects.³³ Bernal and Haldane were consulted on ARP and war preparation issues; thus some members of Tecton might have been exposed to their civil defence ideas prior to the Finsbury project. The ATO was closely identified with the Popular Front, and was involved in the *Aid for Spain* campaign, but refrained from official political party affiliation. Lubetkin felt that the CPGB was too doctrinaire and he himself was a “non-joiner,” even if a committed socialist, so this progressive but non-partisan union likely suited him politically.³⁴ Yet another professional union, the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA), though less political than the ATO, became a centre of political activity by the late 1930s. It had been established in 1919 and was represented on many professional committees of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Fred Skinner was sent to Barcelona under its auspices, and the union’s call for improved ARP did much to make the subject respectable in professional circles.³⁵

The link between modernist architecture and radicalism is a tenuous one, since these individuals represented a minority of professionals in the field, and their political “radicalism” was more a matter of conjecture than fact.³⁶ They were more concerned with achieving their aesthetic vision of national life rather than altering British politics. For all their self-conscious representation as rebellious iconoclasts, the modernists associated with MARS, the ATO, and Tecton were remarkably integrated into the

³³ Malcolm Reading and Peter Coe, *Lubetkin & Tecton: An Architectural Study* (London: Triangle Architectural Publishing, 1992), 18-9.

³⁴ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 322-23.

³⁵ Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, 76.

³⁶ Arts Council of Great Britain, *Thirties: British Art and Design before the War* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum Committee, 1980), 60.

mainstream of their professions and were hardly marginalized radicals. Given this position, they were able to provide a reformist and broad-minded professional base for innovative projects that gained the attention and approval of their peers. In addition, their professional ideals were intertwined with issues such as economic cost-effectiveness, and their deep shelter plans were drafted on this basis. This background gave the Finsbury project an element of professional *gravitas* which their colleagues on the scientific left did not enjoy.

The Finsbury Borough Council and the Tecton ARP Survey

Given the strength of the ARP issue in the minds of Finsbury Council members following the negotiations between the Boroughs and the central government, councilors wasted little time after the Munich Crisis pushing forward with their plans. In light of the casualties that were expected, the Council found it more sensible to attempt to prevent death rather than fund mortuaries. At the outset Alderman Riley also sought to reframe the issue of deep shelter as one of true “protection,” rather than simply “accommodation,” or temporary protection from blast and splinter. Their project, he believed, would be the first comprehensive analysis of the “relative protective value for money spent” of mass deep shelters versus backyard and individual schemes.³⁷ Labour MP George Woods also supported the idea of deep shelters for the people of his

³⁷ Berthold Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/5, Copy of the Press Release by Alderman Harold Riley.

constituency, arguing that a shelter policy which did not encompass the majority of the population could not form the basis of a sound ARP plan.

Finsbury Councilors might have also felt that the tide of public opinion was swinging in their favour. In January 1939 Sir John Anderson had been forced to defend the Home Office against charges that they were merely “muddling” ARP plans for the nation without clear direction, especially on the question of shelters. Anderson reiterated the official position that steel surface shelters were being mass-produced and would soon be installed around London.³⁸ This interrogation in the Commons was a sign that the Home Office believed that their ARP message was not fully understood by the public. Although it does not necessarily indicate a potentially mutinous dissatisfaction with proposed arrangements for civil defence, the Home Office consideration of some deep shelter implementation did represent acquiescence to public demand. It was also a reflection of vulnerability to public dissatisfaction in the minds of Home Office officials, an important factor that led to the Hailey Commission and an attempt to explain the value of the “British way” of ARP.

The Tecton firm was well placed to draft air raid shelter plans, given its affiliation with the ATO and the AATSA, both of which had studied civil defence questions and Spanish ARP. Their previous social and community projects also give credence to the notion that design should serve the welfare of the citizenry. There is no record of early conversations between the Borough Council and Tecton. The architects remained in the background of the project, for the most part refraining from making political statements

³⁸ *The Times*, 10 January 1939, 9.

on the nature of the project. Lubetkin was particularly careful with his public comments, limiting himself to the advocacy of the technical merits of professionally designed deep shelters. Alderman Riley dealt with the press and questions of Home Office policy, and the leftist press, such as the local newspaper *Finsbury Citizen*, stoked fiery rhetoric over the issue.

The “scientific” basis for the Finsbury Plans was the primary point emphasized by the architects and Finsbury officials. The professional outlook of the Tecton firm also reflected Haldane’s famous dictum that “the problem of ARP is three-quarters technical and one-quarter administrative.”³⁹ Serge Chermayeff, who was involved in designing the Finsbury project, expressed the prominent view by declaring:

[ARP] cannot be solved by haphazard and unco-ordinated measures. Only a body of scientific workers and technicians is capable of formulating proposals that will satisfactorily meet all the difficulties we are likely to encounter... But to achieve all this we require the systematized help of a whole array of statisticians, surveyors, architects, town-planners, engineers, chemists, hospital authorities, physiologists, and so forth.⁴⁰

The Tecton plan dovetailed with a separate survey of ARP policy undertaken by Chermayeff, which he published in 1939. His report was “an attempt to draw together in a systematic form all that has so far been established *scientifically and technically* about the subject of air-raid protection.”⁴¹ He had similarly drawn on studies by Haldane and the AATSA, concluding that the proscription of deep shelters by the Home Office was deeply misguided.⁴²

³⁹ Serge Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.: A Practical Policy for Air-Raid Precautions* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 14.

⁴⁰ Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.*, 5.

⁴¹ Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.*, 6.

⁴² Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.*, 6. Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants

Politics and the Tecton Survey of Finsbury

The official Tecton report was presented with great anticipation to the Council on 1 February 1939, and members expressed satisfaction with the contents. The estimated cost of the proposed measures was £1,388,860, and the estimates were quickly forwarded to the Home Office for approval. Aware that the cost might appear prohibitive, the Council determined to discuss issues of finance with the central government, relying on their self-funding argument to carry the day.⁴³ The Council had already made provision for the theoretical shortfall in central funding to be financed through a 4d. rate increase,⁴⁴ which most believed would be overwhelmingly accepted by ratepayers. Tecton's findings were published in a book that accompanied a public exhibition at the Town Hall which attracted approximately 7,000 visitors. Interestingly, these attendance figures were similar to the MARS exhibition of the previous year. It is quite possible that many supporters of progressive architecture attended both exhibitions, although the MARS exhibition would have been of less interest to members of the general public, and charged an entrance fee.

(AASTA), *A Report on the Design, Equipment and Cost of Air-Raid Shelters* (London, 1938).

⁴³ Special ARP Committee Meeting, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 39 (1 February 1939), 802, 849.

⁴⁴ *Finsbury Citizen*, February 1939, 1.

The Finsbury exhibition was opened by Herbert Morrison as part of his campaign for improved ARP measures under the LCC.⁴⁵ Politically, the endorsement of Morrison also placed Finsbury within the “moderate” camp of leftist calls for ARP, despite the Borough having previously exhibited some “rebel” tendencies regarding cooperation with the central government. Yet Finsbury should not be depicted as solely cooperative. The basis of their plans demonstrated friction with the government, and was a challenge to official policy. The Tecton architects, however, did frame their arguments in largely scientific terms, and the project was an example of the local action for which Morrison and others were calling.

The final recommendations forwarded by Tecton were bold in scope, involving circular structures and concentric circles superimposed on a map of the Borough. The physical study entailed two areas of investigation. Firstly, the architects conducted a full statistical survey of the Borough, including 20 maps that detailed data such as day and night population densities, business distribution, existing basements and open spaces, heights and structures of buildings, geological formations, surface water, tunnels, telephone wires, sewage and gas, and electricity [Figures 1, 2]. This work was coordinated by A.L. Downey, the Borough Engineer,⁴⁶ and was more extensive than any such previous study undertaken in the Borough. Secondly, Tecton architects, with the assistance of concrete engineer Ove Arup, made a detailed report of the effects of direct hits by large bombs on various types of shelters including basements, tunnels, steel shelters, trenches and surface shelters.

⁴⁵ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 370.

⁴⁶ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 354.

This study bore many similarities to, and borrowed heavily from, the work of Fred Skinner for the AASTA and some of the mathematical calculations devised by Haldane from observations in Spain. Tecton's Finsbury report suggests that the firm had already accepted Haldane's conclusions that the steel underground shelters proposed by the government would increase casualty figures. The architects assigned a "danger coefficient" to specific areas, with the largest such coefficient being given to the basement shelters that had been set aside for purposes of ARP in a block of offices in Pentonville Road, due to their poor, shallow construction and wide surface area.⁴⁷ With diagrams and mathematical calculations they sought to demonstrate that deep shelters provided the most cost effective means of protecting the population. Serge Chermayeff believed that his Tecton colleagues had effectively disproved dispersal as a serious professional theory by calculating the effect of a blast radius and various patterns of population distribution.⁴⁸ The architects therefore felt justified in ignoring the official government publication for contractors that advised that no more than 50 persons should be in any given building used as a shelter, or purpose-built shelter, during an air raid.⁴⁹

The massive scale was designed to accommodate the entire population of the Borough, ensuring that most residents were only 100-300 yards from the nearest shelter and could reach these shelters within seven minutes – the accepted warning time before a raid. [Figure 3] This necessitated multiple entrances for the shelters and the construction

⁴⁷ Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.: Based on the Investigation of Structural Protection Against Air Attack I the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury* (London: The Architectural Press, 1939), 31-71. The Pentonville area was also in close proximity to the King's Cross and St. Pancras railway yards, likely to be a target of enemy bombers.

⁴⁸ Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.*, 16.

⁴⁹ Home Office, *Air Raid Precautions for Government Contractors* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1934).

of at least four tunnels to allow underground movement and relieve congestion in areas which were likely to experience large amounts of foot traffic during the day.⁵⁰ The calculations for concrete and steel were undertaken by Ove Arup, and Alderman Riley explained that the design provisions of the shelter would ensure against panic: “The shelters are approached by two wide roads, allowing 40 people a second to enter a shelter. There is no possibility of people trampling one another to death in a panic.”⁵¹ The shelters themselves were circular in shape, with a wide spiral ramp that would allow many people to move downwards towards lower levels, filling the shelter quickly and safely. [Figure 4] The shelters, reinforced on the surface with concrete, could house between 7,000 and 15,000 people, depending on the particular size of each shelter, and a total of 15 shelters were proposed for the Borough.⁵²

The architects were careful to frame their plans as representing national efficiency and practicality. They addressed the government’s psychological concerns, and contextualized their financial figures in terms of cost-effectiveness. Firstly, they suggested that the psychological basis of the dispersal principle was a mere smokescreen to preclude debate on the shelter issue. As they stated in their book *Planned A.R.P.*:

To screen oneself behind such ambiguous phrases as ‘maintenance of productive efficiency’ and worries over ‘mob psychology’ is merely to evade the issue. All these mysterious and terrifying conceptions may well be found to melt away in the light of dispassionate technical analysis.⁵³

Tecton made further claims for the patriotic value of their plan, noting that the government’s reaction to the crisis of September 1938 had done absolutely nothing to

⁵⁰ Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 113-125.

⁵¹ *Finsbury Citizen*, February 1939, 1.

⁵² Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 38-41.

⁵³ Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 95-6.

help the situation of civilian morale. In fact, the “haphazard” nature of ARP services had undermined public confidence to a great extent. “Indeed the civilian morale [issue] was so seriously endangered that nothing short of a complete technical clarification of the situation will now have any value in restoring it.”⁵⁴ The architects believed that the national embarrassment of the ARP crisis of September 1938 demonstrated that the nation did not have a “rational policy” for ARP. They charged that “The present chaotic state of this country’s ARP is due to the fact that there has been no *planned* policy, but rather a spontaneous growth.”⁵⁵

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, advocates of leftist ARP used a variety of justifications for the cost of their programs. Tecton presented their plan for Finsbury as scientific and standardized, thus providing the most efficient use of national resources. They were fully convinced that their ARP propositions were justified on economic grounds. The architects also emphasized the post-war utility of the plans. Although the shelters were to be designated solely for ARP purposes for the immediate period in which war was anticipated they were also designed to be easily converted to underground car parks. The architects’ ideals of communal shelters and scientific precision were in sharp contrast to the Home Office view of the vaguely defined and flexible “British way” of civil defence. The tenor of the discussions that followed reflected a clash of differing views of the national interest and character, and affected the provision of deep shelters by local authorities.

⁵⁴ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 358.

⁵⁵ Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 3.

The Response of the Popular and Professional Press

Following the presentation of their report to the Finsbury Council in February 1939, the Tecton architects understood that they would have to enlist public support to realize their plans. Ove Arup worked in the background to persuade officials to consider the Finsbury scheme. General G.S. Collins, Director of Fortifications and Works, an army role, thought the proposals worth pursuing and offered to intercede with Sir John Anderson, although it is uncertain how much influence he actually had. Arup apparently also received supportive responses from Dr. Oscar Faber, a prominent concrete engineer, Sir Henry Japp, director of the John Mowlem civil engineering firm and, unsurprisingly, J.D. Bernal.⁵⁶ Alderman Riley produced a press release to drum up excitement for the scheme. Given its unprecedented scope the plan attracted popular and professional attention. A variety of newspapers deemed the Tecton efforts worthy of study and consideration, and none openly attacked either the idea behind mass, bomb-proof shelters, or suggested that the technical basis of the plans was unsound. Although levels of enthusiasm varied, reception of the plans gave the Council reason for optimism that their proposals could not be rejected as the work of marginal left-wing cranks.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Ove Arup*, 72.

General interest, however, did not mean that there was support to undertake the practical or sacrificial steps necessary if the shelter plans were to be realized. Although the press devoted much positive coverage to Finsbury, it was not enough to make a strong argument that deep shelters were in the national interest. As Mass Observation demonstrated regarding brick shelter construction in Hampstead, apparent support did not always translate into enthusiasm. A secondary theme of press coverage was the continued concern over “political motive,” especially in the professional press. Though there was support for the professional merit of the Tecton plans, few publications that were not aligned with the far left were willing to editorialize on the necessity of government action. Consequently, the Finsbury plans, though they garnered some support, did not gather the critical mass that might have forced the Hailey Commission to consider permitting them or to force the government to otherwise change its policies.

Unsurprisingly, the radical left press, including the *Daily Worker* and the *Finsbury Citizen*, devoted a great deal of column space to the events in Finsbury. The *Daily Worker* believed that the Council had provided a “lead to Britain,” and that Finsbury proved that “you can get 100 per cent protection; you can get it in the form of deep shelters, useable as car parks in peace time; you cannot get it by way of Sir John Anderson’s hoax schemes.”⁵⁷ The monthly socialist *Finsbury Citizen* featured prominent reports throughout the spring and summer of 1939 on the progress of talks with the Home Office. Its February 1939 issue featured full details of the plan, dismissing official blast and splinter-proof bomb shelter specifications as “futile.” The *Finsbury Citizen* also

⁵⁷ *Daily Worker*, 7 February 1939, 3.

emphasized that although the cost of the shelter scheme was large, the Borough's ratepayers were prepared to shoulder a disproportionate tax burden to see the shelter constructed, which would amount to £340,000.⁵⁸ Throughout the debate Alderman Riley emphasized the willingness of the citizens of Finsbury to subsidize their own protection. This represented a different tactic than the arguments put forward by Haldane, the CSAWG, and the CPGB on financing deep shelter. The question of finance, however, mattered little to the final verdict, since financial cost was to be a minor factor in the official Home Office rejection of the Finsbury plans.

Mainstream, broadly liberal newspapers, such as the *News Chronicle*, also supported the Finsbury scheme, as they had backed the Popular Front to aid Spain. Immediately after the presentation to the Council, the paper declared to its readers: "You ought to know about Finsbury," arguing that the Borough represented the ideal of local ARP initiative. Its correspondent believed that "the scheme is vigorous, scientific, exciting. You should see [the exhibition]. And I sincerely hope Sir John Anderson will pop out of his steel shelters and examine it very thoroughly."⁵⁹ The paper later claimed that the strength of the Tecton plans demanded an alteration of the present "haphazard" policy.⁶⁰ They believed that the architect's unwillingness to accept the official line on shelters would be appreciated by every potential air-raid victim. The paper also bolstered the case for deep shelters by citing public-opinion surveys demonstrating "an

⁵⁸ *Finsbury Citizen*, February 1939, 1.

⁵⁹ *News Chronicle*, 7 February 1939, 10.

⁶⁰ *News Chronicle*, 22 March 1939, 10.

overwhelming vote in favour of deep shelter.”⁶¹ The *Manchester Guardian* also supported the Finsbury plans, stating that the survey was notable for its thoroughness.⁶²

Centrist and right-leaning newspapers also found some merit in the Finsbury plan, and even demonstrated some mild enthusiasm. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that the scheme would provide “uniform protection for all.” Their architectural correspondent also analyzed the technical aspects of the plan and deemed it to be sound. He believed that the technical and economic drawbacks of constructing such an enormous underground cylindrical space had been overcome by the engineering genius of Ove Arup.⁶³ The *Standard*’s reporter defended the principle, economic cost, and technical merits of the Tecton plan, claiming that Whitehall “has never shown the imagination needed to deal with the problem.” They pointed out that the provision of steel shelters advocated by the government had “already been condemned in Barcelona.”⁶⁴ Given this irrefutable fact, and considering total government expenditures for the military and ARP, the *Evening Standard* writers believed that the associated costs should be considered more than feasible.

The architectural press represented a secondary forum in which the Tecton plans were debated. As has been demonstrated, some elements of the profession were receptive to the work of the AASTA and the technical insights they offered in shelter development. It immediately became evident that the work done by Tecton was serious and well-researched, in contrast to Haldane’s proposals which had been criticized within the

⁶¹ *News Chronicle*, 22 March 1939, 10.

⁶² *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1939, 10.

⁶³ *Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 1939, 15.

⁶⁴ *Evening Standard*, 8 February 1939, 6.

architectural profession. Berthold Lubetkin had berated his colleagues for being slow to study ARP shelters,⁶⁵ but this professional indifference changed suddenly in 1938 when the issue became more publicly prominent. The Royal Institute of British Architects organized a special conference on ARP in June 1938 and reported extensively on the proceedings in its official journal.⁶⁶ To this end, many architects and engineers contributed to the Air Raid Protection Institute, which tasked itself with filling the “serious gaps” in knowledge regarding ARP shelters.⁶⁷ Following the Munich Crisis, the editors of *The Architect and Building News* argued that the problem of ARP could not be shelved, and that the “ludicrous inadequacy of the eleventh hour scramble,” did not bode well for the future.⁶⁸ Given the potentially vast and lucrative private market in air raid shelter construction, the subject flourished in the architectural press. A glance through any architectural publication from that period reveals a plethora of advertisements for suppliers and designers of air raid shelters. Between the Munich Crisis and the start of the Second World War between one-third and one-half of advertisements in *The Architects’ Journal* addressed some aspect of ARP.⁶⁹ Many of these plans were, as Haldane suggested, of dubious quality. There was, however, some effort made to address the problem of regulating industrial standards in the professional architectural press.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *The Architects’ Journal*, 4 May 1939, 722-24.

⁶⁶ “Report on the Conference of Structural ARP held at RIBA, 13-15 June, 1938,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 45, no. 16 (27 June 1938), 779-832.

⁶⁷ *Journal of the Air Raid Protection Institute*, 1, no.2 (February 1939), 59.

⁶⁸ *The Architect and Building News*, 21 October 1938, 57-8.

⁶⁹ David Gloster, “Architecture and the Air Raid: Shelter Technologies and the British Government 1938-44” (MsC. Imperial College, London, 1997), 23.

⁷⁰ The lack of “authoritative standards” was lamented in the forward to the “Special ARP Supplement,” *Architectural Design and Construction* (May 1939), 2.

The writers of an ARP supplement to *Architectural Design and Construction* used Tecton's arguments extensively in their own findings on ARP. They agreed that the architects had proven dispersal to be a "mathematically demonstrable fallacy."⁷¹ The publication's editorial board was also uncertain that the "blast and splinter" protection code being so forcefully pushed by the government was the most technically sound course of action. They published and endorsed the view of the AASTA on the subject:

Adequate protection against possible air attack is fast being recognized as an urgent national necessity. Architects, engineers and surveyors, with their specialist knowledge of design and construction, have a particularly important part to play in this work in applying their technical knowledge to the solutions of problems upon which there is as yet all too little information available.⁷²

The Institution of Structural Engineers endorsed the opinion that basements, whether re-enforced or not, were likely to be the most dangerous type of shelter to advocate.⁷³ *The Architects' Journal*, in one of its regular reports on ARP, stated that the Finsbury Council was "taking its defence responsibilities seriously." According to this journal, the Council's ambitious plans to compile data, conduct an aerial survey and "protect the civil population, as much as the civil population can be protected," represented a sensible and commendable attitude.⁷⁴

The Architect and Building News also featured extensive coverage of the Finsbury Town Hall exhibition, including long extracts from the Tecton report and maps of the proposed shelter [Figure 5]. Giving professional sanction to the technical findings of Tecton and their refutation of government principles, the publication's editors wrote,

⁷¹ "Special ARP Supplement," *Architectural Design and Construction*, 23.

⁷² *The Architects' Journal*, 7 July 1939, 17.

⁷³ Institution of Structural Engineers, *Report on Air Raid Precautions* (London, 1939).

⁷⁴ *The Architects' Journal*, 13 October 1938, 596.

The Government's attitude in this matter has never been inspiring, but anybody who wishes to preserve a vestige of confidence in the official ARP measures should be careful to avoid the exhibition at present on view at Finsbury Town Hall, where a brilliant series of sketches and captions sets forth with unmistakable clarity the truth of this matter. Which is, of course, that real protection can only be provided by a scientifically planned scheme or permanent structural shelters.⁷⁵

In the following issue of the journal the editors claimed that the Finsbury scheme constituted a challenge which could not be ignored. The publication also declared that if good reasons for opposing the construction of deep shelters could not be proven, the Tecton policy "should have the force of Government co-ordination, authority and action behind it."⁷⁶ This call for action, however, was more unusual, as most publications limited themselves to discussion of the technical aspects of the plan.

The response of the architectural press to the Tecton proposal was supportive on the whole, and as had been the case in the popular press, no architect or publication published any technical criticisms of the plan, although there were certainly some who disagreed with the political overtones of the Finsbury Council. According to these professionals, the project was too connected to radical left-wing politics. The Finsbury plans, despite the discussion of scientific principle and local funding, were still inherently political. Fred Skinner had bluntly informed Haldane that "[Finsbury] is probably a very important development politically speaking, as the Borough intends to publish the scheme and demand grants from the government for putting it into effect."⁷⁷ The political point that Skinner was referring to was that the leftist critics wished to provoke a public

⁷⁵ *The Architect and Building News*, 10 February 1939, 179.

⁷⁶ *The Architect and Building News*, 17 February 1939, 209.

⁷⁷ J.B.S. Haldane Papers, Box 30, File 1/a, F. Skinner to Haldane, 18 October 1938.

clash with the Home Office, forcing the government either to acquiesce, or publicly to reject deep shelter plans. Either position, they felt, would persuade more members of the public to support the left on the subject of deep shelters.

To the chagrin of Finsbury supporters much of the architectural establishment remained suspicious of the political motives of Tecton and Finsbury. Despite praise for the Tecton plan itself, professional resentment of the AASTA and left-leaning architects manifested behind closed doors. Associations such as MARS and the ATO had been formed as a reaction of younger progressive architects to feelings of exclusion from a professional ethos that was still Edwardian in many respects. As such, many “acrimonious arguments” over the subject of deep shelters raged within the profession, although these rows were not reflected in the professional press.⁷⁸ As architectural historian David Dean puts it, some older architects had their feathers somewhat ruffled by what they regarded as a young and brash “motley crew with unattractive political motives.”⁷⁹

There was also a suspicion among some elements of the profession that too much fuss was being made over the technical aspects of ARP and that architects and engineers might appear ridiculous imposing their findings in the public arena so insistently. Omissions of coverage may be as noteworthy as praise, since the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* failed to report on the Tecton plans. Granted, the official publication was much more concerned with the business of the Institute, but there were certainly members who felt the subject of architectural involvement in ARP should be

⁷⁸ Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture*, 76.

⁷⁹ Dean, *The Thirties*, 140.

treated very carefully. An unnamed but “well-known” architect wrote to the President of RIBA derisively describing engineers who “do a little random reading and thinking and think they have discovered something which no one else has yet thought of.”⁸⁰ Some may have feared that claims that shelters were “bomb-proof” might prove irreparably harmful to the profession if such a shelter was breached by a bomb, resulting in mass casualties. Oliver Bernard, writer of a column on ARP and camouflage for the publication *Building*, reviewed Serge Chermayeff’s book and declared it a largely unnecessary project. Downplaying the importance of expertise, he maintained that shelters were most certainly not an architectural matter, but rather a “straightforward problem in much shifting [of earth] at a requisite depth.”⁸¹ Chermayeff, in turn, replied in letters to the professional press, claiming that all facets of ARP, including evacuation and shelter construction, were part of an “organically whole problem” that was primarily a technical issue.⁸²

Within the profession there was consequently some support for the technical merits of the Tecton plan, though many held reservations over the political bias of Tecton and the Finsbury Council. In addition, there may have been unexpressed indifference within the profession to the Finsbury plan and the implications of advocating deep shelters. Although the government never did disclose the names of most of its technical experts, including architects, there were certainly many who felt that Tecton may have been using their professional credentials to create public unrest and harm national morale. Though no substantial professional criticism of the Tecton plans appeared in the press, a

⁸⁰ Dean, *The Thirties*, 140.

⁸¹ *Building*, March 1939, 118.

⁸² Serge Chermayeff, letter to the editor, *The Architect and Building News*, 24 February 1939, 240.

close reading of press reaction demonstrates that an expressed desire for deep shelter was not the same thing as active campaigning on the issue. There was consequently a recurrent tension between enthusiasm and indifference which did not bode well for a movement that required broad-based demand that shelters be made a national priority.

The Genesis and Findings of the Hailey Commission

The Hailey Commission was convened in response to plans by the Borough of Finsbury and a general agitation for deep shelters. The official historian of civil defence believed that the government felt the weight of public pressure over the question of deep shelters following Munich, especially given the fact that the Labour and Liberal parties had both adopted deep shelters as a “long term” policy goal.⁸³ The government hoped to demonstrate how their policies were based on the peculiarities of the British situation and that they would best suit the national character and the desires of ordinary citizens.

Finsbury Council members were initially optimistic regarding approval of, and funding for, the scheme. Alderman Riley suspected early on that the Home Office might try to stall Council plans. Even before the Tecton report had been officially released, government officials had sent the Borough a letter claiming that the gist of the forthcoming provisions went beyond anything that had yet been contemplated. It gave no

⁸³ Terence O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), 190-1.

guidance or indication of what level of cooperation the Borough could expect to receive. Alderman Riley later remarked that he hoped “the Home Office will jerk itself out of its dictatorial sulks in time to make some comment before war actually breaks out.”⁸⁴ Sir John Anderson and the Home Office did indeed stall the process of giving an official answer to the Finsbury Council. It is clear that they had no intention of granting funds or approval for the scheme, while at the same time they were aware that there was some popular and professional support, as the positive reports circulating regarding the technical aspects of the Tecton plan indicate. Delaying their response gave the Home Office time to allow the initial furor to die down, and to marshal their own experts to poke holes in the technical plans. At the end of March Sir John Anderson commented on the progress of evaluating the Finsbury plans, at the prompting of Philip Noel-Baker. Anderson claimed that “the scheme has been found to require very close examination in its technical aspects,” but there would be no “avoidable delay in completing the examination.” The “revolutionary” engineering proposition of the Finsbury Council necessitated that the Home Office receive the best advice before sanctioning the plans.⁸⁵

Some background to the Hailey Commission is necessary to understand the government’s mindset in the months immediately following the Munich Crisis. Throughout early 1939 the Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence met to discuss the handling of the deep shelter issue.⁸⁶ It is clear from

⁸⁴ *Daily Worker*, 7 February 1939, 3.

⁸⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 345 (1939), col. 1710.

⁸⁶ The Sub-Committee, chaired by the Lord Privy Seal, included members such as the Hon. Oliver Stanley, President of the Board of Trade, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, Sir Horace Wilson, Earl De la Warr, and the MP Geoffrey Lloyd of the ARP Department, who had been responsible for refuting the claims of the Cambridge Scientists.

Cabinet papers that Sir John Anderson and ARP officials never intended to consider deep shelter plans of any local authority on their own merits. Less than two weeks before the public unveiling of the Tecton plans for Finsbury, the Sub-Committee met to discuss what they believed to be “growing restlessness” on the part of the public for deep shelters.

The political motive of the critics was, again, a reason for suspicion directed towards alternative technical plans. Anderson claimed that those who demanded deep shelters could not have “taken account of the relevant considerations” and must have been mislead by Professor Haldane who “had no real knowledge of the problem.”⁸⁷ During these meetings the Committee voiced the customary fears, such as creating a “shelter mentality” and the necessity of continuing war work. The Committee decided that a policy of deep shelters for all persons at risk, the principle behind Finsbury, was unjustified due to the impracticability and scale of such provisions. Winston Churchill was among those who dismissed the principles behind the Tecton plans, telling his private secretary that the proposals were inherently political in nature and that they “wish to exaggerate the danger of air attack and to emphasise [sic] the futility of basement protection in the interests of some particular scheme.”⁸⁸ He fully believed the contention of Sir John Anderson that properly reinforced basements would give an adequate measure of protection.

⁸⁷ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, 25 January 1939, 47.

⁸⁸ Letter from O. Harrington, Winston Churchill’s private secretary at Chartwell, 20 March 1939, cited in Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 361.

Concerns over wartime patriotism and morale were evident in the discussions over shelter protection for critical works. The Home Office decided that shelters could be provided for “essential employees” of government and industry to stem the tide of public criticism. The tone of these discussions, however, simply demonstrated the degree to which issues of morale and maintaining war production weighed on the minds of officials. The purpose of “critical works” shelters was to ensure that these employees remained at work, rather than fleeing to the (relative) safety of household or community shelters.⁸⁹ The Committee bluntly stated that such shelters would be provided not so much for protection of the physical person as to relieve employees from “strain” and thus enable them to perform their work more effectively. This policy was in keeping with Anderson’s intent that the main purpose of protection “must be reconciled with a paramount necessity of maintaining the productive efficiency of the nation in time of war.”⁹⁰

The leftist critics had made the class provisions and needs of the urban working class primary issues, and the government sought to prove that they were not insensitive to public reception of these issues. Some politicians were particularly concerned over the appearance and wording of certain statements. How, for example, would they indicate that some “essential workers” would be eligible for deeper and stronger shelters than others?⁹¹ Because civilian casualties would cause demoralization, particular care needed

⁸⁹ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, 14 April 1939, 91.

⁹⁰ Sir John Anderson quoted in *The Architect and Building News*, 24 February 1939, 240.

⁹¹ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, 89-91, 103. A memo by the Lord Privy Seal, 24 January 1939, 155, emphasizes the need to give the press a “carefully worded statement” on shelter policy.

to be taken to disguise any inequality of protection. They believed that morale would suffer if it became clear that an area that had suffered high casualties had been afforded an inferior standard of protection.⁹² They were therefore deeply concerned over inequalities in shelter protection, but for very different reasons than the leftist critics.

Members of the CID were consequently concerned about maintaining the *appearance* of equality, an acknowledgement that they understood that it was an important consideration in the public mind. Many officials and politicians seemed particularly obsessed over the wording of public statements to prevent the dissemination of vague and confusing information on shelters. Oliver Stanley, Conservative MP for Westmorland, believed that a clear and definitive refutation of deep shelters should have been made in early 1938, before the Munich Crisis caused greater agitation for them. He believed that it was most unfortunate that “the idea had been allowed to grow that bomb-proof shelters were both desirable and practicable, and public opinion had now got completely out of hand.”⁹³ While he believed it was important to not appear too intransigent on the issue, it was equally important “not to use words which would commit the Government to any general extension of the more limited policy,” that is, to provide only a few critical shelters.⁹⁴

Strangely enough, however, the Sub-Committee indicated that the Home Office was not yet in a position to put together detailed plans for these shelters. Their technical experts were still “at work,” despite technical plans having been floated by a variety of

⁹² NA, CAB 16/197, draft of the Hailey Report, 239.

⁹³ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, 52.

⁹⁴ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, 55.

individuals in professional publications for at least one year.⁹⁵ In 1936 the Home Secretary had appointed a committee under Sir Arnold Wilson to work on structural protection against air attack, but little investigative work was done on this front. Perhaps the government had not been serious in their commitment to study the various plans that were submitted to them. Alternatively, they may have been too ideologically resistant to even consider the discoveries of government critics and whether any element of their plans could be adopted for official use. Consequently the government suffered from similarly self-imposed, political constraints as the leftist critics did at times. Neither side was really willing to make an objective estimate of the opposing rationale for ARP.

The Hailey Commission functioned as a public relations exercise in conveying to the public the justifications for the “British way” of ARP. Sir John Anderson appears to have been particularly attuned to the role of the press and how ideas were moulded among the populace. Anderson feared that the issue of deep shelters might be “prejudged in the public mind,” and that only one side of the argument, the side of the critics, was being aired in the press. He believed that supporters of the government policy simply “did not display the same zeal” as the highly motivated and vocal critics. The critics, he charged, “write for the most part as if the problems of underground shelters were essentially an engineering problem. Actually, a balanced view must take into consideration mass psychology and the probable strategy of enemy air attack.”⁹⁶

Anderson therefore conceived of the Hailey Commission to respond to Finsbury in particular, and to permanently settle the deep shelter issue. The Commission was

⁹⁵ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, 92.

⁹⁶ NA, CAB 16/197, Memo by the Lord Privy Seal, 24 January 1939, 153.

presented as an impartial technical survey, but a memo penned by Anderson, even before the public appearance of the Tecton plans, confirms that he was planning a public relations event to convene “a body of representative outside opinion” to tout government conclusions. He perhaps had in mind something along the lines of the Air Raid Defence League, which posited the same conclusions as the government. Anderson believed that the League’s public statements were “written in a constructive and helpful spirit,” in contrast to the extreme platform offered by the leftist critics.⁹⁷ His preliminary draft memo for the conference included a variety of individuals who would presumably lend credence to the proceedings. They were to be representative figures of the “nation,” and enforce the conclusion that British ARP policy represented a consensus that reasonable persons should accept. These participants should include an engineer, a scientist (both noted in the singular though several were consulted), an accountant, a representative of commerce and industry, a representative of Labour, and “a woman,” preferably a medical doctor.⁹⁸ These individuals represented a broad-based liberal ideal of citizenship and consensus. They were professionals, not politicians, and their inclusion was likely designed to confirm their representative status on behalf of ordinary citizens.

Exactly one month following the memo from the Lord Privy Seal, the Hailey Commission was convened on 24 February 1939 and reported to the government on the unfeasibility of deep shelters. Even at the time there was no illusion that Lord Hailey, a retired colonial administrator and chairman of the Air Raid Defence League, and the government scientists and experts, were independent of the Home Office. Lord Hailey

⁹⁷ NA, CAB 16/197, CID, Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, 92.

⁹⁸ NA, CAB 16/197, Memo by the Lord Privy Seal, 24 January 1939, 153.

reported to Sir John Anderson personally, who then endorsed and officially submitted the report. Along with the representative middle-class individuals, the conference also included members of the Air Staff, technical advisors to the Home Office, and “distinguished engineers, scientists, and public men.”⁹⁹ Tellingly, it also included Commissioners of Police, underlining the public control aspects of ARP policy – the very aspect the leftist critics feared. There is no record of what tests or investigations the government experts undertook, but the final White Paper disposed of Tecton’s plans, ten weeks after they had been presented to the Finsbury Council and the general public.

The Report affirmed the government’s fears regarding morale and the theory of dispersal. It presupposed that Tecton’s refutation of “dispersal” was not valid. The familiar objections were once again raised, including the possibility of mass deaths if a single bomb were to breach a large shelter, and the potential for a stampede to reach these shelters during air raids. Lord Hailey stated that “mass catastrophes have a far greater effect upon the public mind than a similar number of isolated casualties.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, the government acknowledged that surface shelters and other ARP recommendations might not necessarily prevent more loss of civilian life than deep shelters, but at least those deaths would be “dispersed” and thus less likely to garner sensational public attention than one notable and tragic large-scale incident.

Indeed, the report’s authors were not reticent in pointing to psychological fears as the basis of their concern, and they stated at the outset that the government’s first priority

⁹⁹ NA, CAB 16/197, draft of the Hailey Report, 237.

¹⁰⁰ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters: Report of the Lord Privy Seal’s Conference* (HMSO: London, 1939), 17.

was to safeguard activities that were essential to the successful prosecution of the war. Officials were concerned with the maintenance of the nation's industries and services, and that believed that widespread shelters "might involve dangers such as those of creating a shelter mentality, of interrupting the process of essential production, or of unduly diverting national effort from other measures of defence."¹⁰¹ The official historian, Terence O'Brien, believed the fear of creating a shelter mentality and war work grinding to a halt in London were the primary concerns of the Hailey Committee.¹⁰² One critic believed that the government was most concerned about the "massive dislocation of civil life" that would result from the provision of deep shelters.¹⁰³

The Commission also made arguments regarding the prioritization of national resources and the patriotic duties of citizens. The authors of the report felt that civilians should not demand additional resources which might shift labour and materials from military preparedness. In this vein, they felt justified in recommending that stronger protection should only be made for vital industrial undertakings, but not the protection of the general public. The availability of resources was a legitimate government concern, especially by 1939 when many feared that a general war could not be far off. For example, previous experience in the construction of the London Underground demonstrated that it would take approximately two years to build 16 miles of tunnel, which would protect only 160,000 people.¹⁰⁴ In fact, this fear did turn out to have a solid basis. Air raid shelter tunnels excavated in Northeastern London during the war took

¹⁰¹ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters*, 6.

¹⁰² O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 192, and Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters*, 6.

¹⁰³ *Time and Tide*, XIX, no. 46 (12 November 1939).

¹⁰⁴ O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, 192.

much longer to construct and cost more than had been anticipated.¹⁰⁵ The leftist critics, on the other hand, believed ARP to be an essential component of national readiness which should have been made a significant portion of the government's military budget since the mid 1930s. They were therefore not inclined to be swayed by arguments of national resources which they believed to have been chronically mismanaged.

The Commission further considered the question of how British people would ideally choose to shelter. The members raised doubts about how people would actually utilize these public shelters, if they were even inclined to leave their homes at all. The report, citing the presumed preference of the British for home and hearth to justify their policy of home shelters, implied that the decision not to build deep mass shelters reflected the inherent preferences of the British people, especially their antipathy towards strangers and physical crowding.¹⁰⁶ The Hailey Report stated

But we believe that most British citizens would prefer to count upon a less effective protection at their homes, even though this may make no pretence of warding off direct or near hits of bombs, if they can be safeguarded against the one danger which must loom largest in their minds, namely that of being themselves, or seeing their families, buried under fallen roofs or masonry. We believe that if they pause to reflect that on occasion they may fail to hear the warning signal, and that the first indication of a raid in progress may be the dropping of bombs within earshot, the advantages of having some shelter close at hand will be still more apparent to them.¹⁰⁷

Thereby they implied that the proponents of mass air raid shelters did not understand the English or British national character, or the probable reaction of Londoners to being forced out of their homes. The British people themselves would

¹⁰⁵ Woolven, "Playing Hitler's Game from Fitzroy Road NW1," 25.

¹⁰⁶ Gloster, "Architecture and the Air Raid," 50.

¹⁰⁷ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters*, 20.

understand the value of sheltering at home if they had the facts properly presented to them. As we have seen, these ideas also subtly reflected the notion that deep shelters were un-British and cowardly. In contrast, George Woods, who had observed ARP in Spain, denied that deep shelter represented either of these negative ideas, believing that the British people would responsibly use deep shelters and wished for their widespread availability.¹⁰⁸

The members of the Hailey Commission further sought to demonstrate that mass centralized shelters were simply unworkable, and that dispersed household shelters had the advantage of providing protection that was readily at hand in a moment's notice.¹⁰⁹ Time would be of the essence during an air attack, especially given that people were likely to fall prey to some degree of panic, and hence be unable to perform many otherwise ordinary tasks. They outlined the practical steps necessary for individuals to reach these shelters in the short time offered by air raid sirens. For example, a nighttime air raid would necessitate awakening family members in the night, finding and putting on clothing, jostling on the street in the blackout to find the shelter, and then efficiently entering the shelter. All of these steps would need to be completed within seven to ten minutes, and those who successfully reached the shelters would be "packed amongst a mass of strangers, some of whom will be temperamentally less stable than others."¹¹⁰ The Commission believed it was only fair to depict the practicalities of shelter usage, and also point out that such activities would need to be re-enacted night after night. These were

¹⁰⁸ *Finsbury Citizen*, April 1939, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters*, 20-2.

¹¹⁰ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters*, 19.

not unreasonable arguments given the logistics of thousands of people attempting to converge on a single location in darkness. The Home Office consequently believed that any policy that encouraged the removal of large numbers of people from their homes was fundamentally unsound.

The Tecton Architects Defend their Plans

Government experts also wrote a highly damaging summary of the technical aspects of the Finsbury drafts, charging that the plans were technically unsound, in a way that revealed the same clash of scientific principles as did the rest of the Report.¹¹¹ Joseph Meisel notes that the Hailey Commission ultimately relied on argumentation rather than scientific or engineering principles in upholding the government's policy."¹¹² The Tecton architects responded to each of the technical points raised by the government experts, and their response was presented to the Finsbury Borough Council on 25 April. Berthold Lubetkin also wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times* on behalf of Tecton. He refrained from any attack on the Home Office or Sir John Anderson, and indeed proposed that his firm would be able to comply with any standard which the government laid down for

¹¹¹ The Finsbury architects defended their plans, answering each technical point raised by government experts, Finsbury Council Special Meeting, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 39 (25 April 1939), 74-82.

¹¹² Meisel, "Air Raid Shelter Policy," 313.

shelter construction.¹¹³ Lubetkin was careful not to leave himself or his firm open to charges of political radicalism or undermining national morale at a sensitive time.

The Hailey Report claimed that Tecton had reduced official policy to two simple principles – that the level of congestion in the area made steel backyard shelters unfeasible, and that the principle of strengthened basements, with the provision of alternate exits, was unsound. Tecton replied that the government's own figures showed that only three percent of houses in the area could be equipped with the proposed steel (Anderson) shelter.¹¹⁴ On the second point, the architects believed that the Hailey Commission was evasive. By highlighting the many unknowns of aerial bombardment, the government experts placed the architects in an impossible position since there was no means to "prove" that any bomb shelter was entirely bomb-proof. The best refutation Tecton could muster was that the shelters could be made to resist any specified bomb weight by altering the thickness of concrete. They also pointed out that they had appealed for assistance from the Home Office in determining such technical figures, but had received no guidance whatsoever.¹¹⁵

The architects then responded quite trenchantly to the assertion that they were merely proposing a mass death-trap, or that bombs would bury the entrances. Tecton maintained that such arguments were completely irrational and ridiculous coming from a government that continued to advocate haphazard steel and trench shelters which had actually been proven fatal in Spanish cities.¹¹⁶ Alderman Riley complained that the

¹¹³ Berthold Lubetkin, letter to the editor, *The Times*, 24 April 1939, 8.

¹¹⁴ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (25 April 1939), 74-82.

¹¹⁵ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (25 April 1939), 80-82.

¹¹⁶ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (25 April 1939), 75.

government refused “to supply particulars requested by Finsbury in order that the protection to be afforded could be beyond question.”¹¹⁷ Given that no information was forthcoming, they took the worst possible scenarios as the basis for their plans. This assertion, however, was inadequate to persuade the Home Office that the plans provided as near “perfect protection” as was possible.

The majority of the Hailey Commission criticism focused on the short warning time for civilians to reach the safety of the shelter, and the problem of preventing panic at the approach and entrance to the mass shelter. The Commission commented on the width of the entry ramps and their ability to deal with the volume of people expected to be hurriedly rushing to the doors, pointing out that several thousand people would need to move into the shelter within minutes. The government believed that panicked citizens would stop their descent into the shelter upon reaching a position of safety, creating a bottleneck and endangering those behind them. Tecton’s architects replied that they had previously worked out all these mathematical calculations, and had taken into account these factors given a “warning time” of ten minutes before an air raid.¹¹⁸ The series of tunnels and shelters would help the greatest number of people to reach shelter in the least amount of time by, for example, eliminating the need to cross major thoroughfares. Furthermore, they claimed to be able to meet *any* set of standards forwarded by the Home Office.

¹¹⁷ Berthold Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/5, Copy of the Press Release by Alderman Harold Riley.

¹¹⁸ Finsbury Borough Council Meeting, vol. 40 (25 April 1939), 82.

Architectural historian John Allan believes that Berthold Lubetkin and Tecton answered all the Home Office criticisms sufficiently.¹¹⁹ Lubetkin also pushed for the Home Office to publish the technical evidence for their counter-claims, yet no response was forthcoming. The deep shelter question had been concluded in the minds of officials, and there was therefore no requirement to put themselves at extra pains to satisfy the press and the “misguided critics.” The AASTA continued to support deep shelters, and defended the Tecton plan with a pamphlet attacking the official shelter policy for its mistaken principle of dispersal.¹²⁰ A “technical man” writing to *The Times* also disputed the notion that deep shelters were unfeasible and that problems such as multiple entrances and depth requirements could not be solved through diligent study. He believed that Sir John Anderson was ill-advised in summarily rejecting plans that could “hold the people harmless from the effects of impact and explosion.”¹²¹

The tone of the Hailey Commission and the technical criticisms of the Tecton plans revealed contrasting ideas of what the government and critics expected a national ARP plan to provide. The arguments surrounding “critical works,” dispersal, mass psychology and the proclivities of the English citizenry all reflected a certain view of how ordinary people should comport themselves, and the limits of what provisions they should expect from government. The Committee of Imperial Defence, unsurprisingly, endorsed the recommendations as “highly satisfactory” and claimed that the report

¹¹⁹ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 361.

¹²⁰ For example, AASTA, “What is Wrong With Official Shelter Policy?” *Municipal Journal*, April 1940, cited in Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 361.

¹²¹ Letter to the editor from C. Helsby, *The Times*, 2 January 1939, 10.

provided the “strongest justification for present Government policy.”¹²² Following the publishing of the Hailey Commission, the Home Office did not forward any further technical information to the Borough of Finsbury, because they no longer felt the need to deal with the local councils on the issue of shelters, and knew that the Boroughs would have little recourse. The Finsbury Councilors, however, were not finished with their attempt to create alternative shelters for their residents. They insisted that deep shelters were patriotic and what their citizens desired. Their small-scale provision of communal shelters during wartime would echo the actions of local authorities in Spain and the socialist ideals the “People’s War” as the left envisioned it.

Local Activism: Finsbury and the Aftermath of the Hailey Commission

The aftermath of the rejection by the Home Office in Finsbury demonstrates the application of the “democratic defence” model of Spanish ARP in which the people had provided for their own shelters, even in light of central government opposition. Supporters of the Tecton plans believed that they had demonstrated the economic superiority of underground shelters and the efficiency of modern British design. The Finsbury Council stated that “none of the criticisms of the Home Office and their advisors has been directed to fundamental principles.”¹²³ The plans emphasized the principle of “uniformity,” arguing that it was necessary to keep all shelters as standardized as possible in terms of their protective value. A scheme that provided

¹²² NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the Fifth Meeting, 90.

¹²³ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (25 April 1939), 82.

protection for 50 percent of the population while leaving the other 50 percent with no protection, or a mixture of shelter types, would not reduce casualties in proportion to expenditure per head.¹²⁴ The architects believed that the case for their shelters was so strong “that it cannot be swept aside by such light-hearted and ill-considered interpretations of the truth.”¹²⁵ They were, therefore, hardly heartened by Sir John Anderson’s letter in which he declared the hope that the Finsbury Council

would not regard these unfavourable conclusions as implying that the work [was wasted]. The survey which was carried out will be of great value in the formulation of further proposals, and in addition the report has served a valuable purpose in assembling and focusing issues, even though its conclusions cannot be regarded as acceptable.¹²⁶

Other local Labour leaders were particularly galvanized on the question of deep shelter following the drafting of the Finsbury plans. These individuals emphasized the continued importance of equality and standardization in ARP provisions. Herbert Morrison called the official shelter provisions “a collection of odds and ends” falling short of a comprehensive policy, especially for the chief danger zones.¹²⁷ Finsbury’s plans directly inspired the Hampstead Council to employ Dr. Oscar Faber, who had been in communication with Ove Arup, to make a report on the provision of deep shelters.¹²⁸ The *Manchester Guardian* reported on the events surrounding Finsbury, believing that the failure of their plan to convince the Home Office did not merely have implications for residents of London.¹²⁹ George Woods wrote in the *Finsbury Citizen* that Sir John

¹²⁴ Berthold Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/5, Copy of the Press Release by Alderman Harold Riley.

¹²⁵ Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 135.

¹²⁶ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (25 April 1939), 76-7.

¹²⁷ O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, 195.

¹²⁸ *The Architect and Building News*, 10 March 1939, 291.

¹²⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1939, 7, and 21 April 1939, 14.

Anderson had inadvertently let slip that the Tecton shelters were “too good for the people,” stoking the class resentment that leftists felt over ARP.¹³⁰

The report of the Hailey Commission did not quiet the vocal demand for deep public shelters among activist citizens in Finsbury, and the Council was unwilling to concede defeat. In the spirit of “democratic defence,” Borough officials believed that they could still obtain their shelter through indirect means. In what was later deemed an “ingenious scheme” in the press,¹³¹ the Council negotiated a temporary lease of an underground shelter that was to be constructed by a private company. Cooperating with private business was quite a turn of strategy for a Council that advocated socialist principles. The shelter, amended from their original plans, became known as the “Busaco Street” project. The company pledged to build the space for dual-purpose use, as the architects had originally intended.¹³² There were even plans to construct two more underground rental shelters in commercial areas such as the Finsbury and Charterhouse Squares.¹³³ The government had contemplated such an eventuality, and was prepared to do their utmost to prevent such privately owned dual-use spaces being used as mass public shelters. The Hailey Report concluded that the same concerns voiced over the technical flaws of single-use deep shelters would apply to dual-use shelters.¹³⁴ This provision put yet another obstacle in the way of innovative local councils.

¹³⁰ *Finsbury Citizen*, July 1939, 1.

¹³¹ *Daily Express*, 18 July 1939, 1. The *Manchester Guardian* also commented favorably on the plan, 18 July 1939, 12.

¹³² Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (17 July 1939), 311-313.

¹³³ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (25 July 1939), 329 and vol. 40 (11 August 1939), 340.

¹³⁴ Office of the Lord Privy Seal, *Air Raid Shelters*, 18-9.

The *Finsbury Citizen* reported on the continued efforts of the Council to institute deep shelters, emphasizing class issues. Alderman Riley was quoted as saying, “Finsbury is determined to see that bomb-proof shelter accommodation is forthcoming, whether the Government likes it, or whether they do not.”¹³⁵ He believed that if the government was entitled to build elite “funk-holes” for its own officials, Finsbury was entitled to provide protection for the people. The rhetoric of the “funk-hole,” along with being a charge of sedition, was also a mutable epithet and a criticism that both government and critics used against their political opponents. The government believed that mass shelters were funk-holes that would damage national morale, while the leftist critics maintained that elite shelters were indicative of the preferential treatment that the privileged would enjoy in wartime. The leftist critics believed they had successfully linked nationalism with the goal of equality, particularly equality in wartime. This harkened back to the “social patriotism” discussed in chapter one, and its proponents emphasized that citizens merited government protection in return for performing patriotic duties.

Plans for the Busaco Street shelter had barely begun when the private company contracted to build it invoked the war clause to sever their obligations to complete the shelter. Finsbury’s rejoicing over finding a means of “driving an express train through the law” was therefore short-lived.¹³⁶ The Council was even levied a surcharge for the monies already expended on the project. Alderman Riley had further offended the Home Office through his vitriolic attacks on the ARP Department in the *Finsbury Citizen* and

¹³⁵ *Finsbury Citizen*, May 1939, 1.

¹³⁶ *Finsbury Citizen*, August 1939, 1.

his ostentatious boycott of a national flag ceremony,¹³⁷ meaning that no *rapprochement* between the warring levels of government would be forthcoming. In light of the failed mass shelter scheme, three days after the outbreak of war the Finsbury Council planned to construct rather more modest “surface shelters” and trench systems in King Square, Spa Fields, and Spa Green – some of the scant few spaces available in the crowded Borough.¹³⁸ Tecton’s original study had encompassed the possibility of surface “wall shelters” with reinforced concrete on the sides, protecting definitively against blast damage and debris although not direct hits.¹³⁹ These greatly scaled-down plans were revisited and instituted as far as was feasible. The Finsbury Council continued to make public shelter provision a priority, notwithstanding the continued government insistence that basements and private backyard structures should provide the bulk of shelters.

The reactions of the leading principals, Berthold Lubetkin and Ove Arup, again reflected their varying approaches to politics and professional identity. Ove Arup lent his engineering expertise throughout the early years of the war, maintaining his advocacy for deep shelters and working with the Home Office and its engineering staff. He viewed his work as a purely professional endeavor. Berthold Lubetkin and Tecton, however, ceased to be involved in the debate over dispersal following the rejection of their proposals in April 1939. Unlike his colleague Arup, Lubetkin believed he had answered government criticisms, and that since his points had been met with government silence, his involvement with the government on deep shelter schemes had ended. Since he had a

¹³⁷ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 360.

¹³⁸ Finsbury Borough Council Minutes, vol. 40 (6 September 1939), 366.

¹³⁹ Berthold Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/7, Pre-report of the “Report on the Design, Cost, and Relative Safety of Air Raid Shelters,” presented to the Finsbury Council 6 February 1939, 33–40.

greater investment in radical politics and saw it as part of his professional identity, the rejection of the Finsbury project may have affected him on a deeper level. He did, however, continue to lecture on his ideals for shelter policy and worked as a part-time technical consultant for the provision of smaller underground shelters that collectively provided protection for 27,000 in the Borough.¹⁴⁰

Historian John Allan deems that the Finsbury “ARP saga” had a particularly 1930s tinge with high-minded moral pronouncements and extreme positions claimed by dueling sides. The Finsbury planners were wholly convinced of the justness of their proposals and unwilling to compromise. Convinced that the government had been purposefully unhelpful all along, they saw no reason why they should give up their principles regarding civilian protection just as civilians would actually require wartime advocacy. The Home Office was concerned about agitation for deep shelters, but fairly confident that there was nothing the critics could do save to stir up minor discontent. Following the Hailey Commission and the acceleration of plans to distribute Anderson shelters, it appeared that a critical mass to demand public shelters would not be reached. Yet the idealism behind the plans continued to be advocated by leftist critics who believed they represented the interests of the people.

The architects were attempting to change the terms of discussion to ones that favoured their goals, that of mass efficiency and an active citizenry. The Tecton plans were thus based not only on moral imperatives, but also on the conviction that deep,

¹⁴⁰ Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin*, 362. Allan cites a Lubetkin lecture in early 1940 at Kingsway Hall, reported in *Keystone* magazine, 371.

standardized plans could provide far greater protection than the same resources being spread in a haphazard way. As Lord Baker, a government engineer, noted decades later, the bureaucratic process ensured that the “technician armed with new knowledge” was unable to introduce new ideas.¹⁴¹ An editorial in the *New Statesman and Nation* certainly believed that these ideas were operational in the government’s attitude towards Finsbury. It declared,

Sir John displayed a quite unreasonable suspicion of technical innovations, such as the Finsbury scheme, which he seemed to regard as a patent medicine. This stubborn opposition to scientific research and to new ideas in engineering and architecture seems to be widespread not only in the cabinet but among official experts.¹⁴²

The government held the position that their view of ARP was scientifically sound, particularly, their concept of dispersal, and the belief that no shelter could ever be “bomb-proof.” Therefore, they too could call on experts and scientists who would affirm the justness of governmental policy. In the end, the terms of discussion came down to questions of patriotism, morale, and British national character, rather than simply those of technical feasibility.

This chapter has explored the final evolution of interwar leftist criticism of ARP, revealing the ideological divide between both sides on questions of politics and the demands of the citizenry. One Cabinet report on the implications of the Hailey Commission stated that it would satisfy “reasonable persons,” though not those holding extreme views.¹⁴³ Sir John Anderson stated that he did not “abandon all hope that even

¹⁴¹ Lord John Baker, *Enterprise Versus Bureaucracy: The Development of Structural Air-Raid Precautions During the Second World War* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1978), ix.

¹⁴² *New Statesman and Nation*, XVII, no. 420 (11 March 1939), 347.

¹⁴³ NA, CAB 16/197 CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, 93.

advocates of the extreme policy, many of whom were well disposed but misguided, would modify their views when all the relevant considerations were placed before them.”¹⁴⁴ The Hailey Commission, with its cross-section of British expertise, was aimed to confirm a national consensus regarding appropriate ARP. The Commission served as the final expression of the government’s idea of national character and the “British way” of civil defence.

A particular view of British national identity was embedded in the Home Office’s vaguely enunciated ideas about privacy, home, and the dislike of strangers. As participants such as Ove Arup noted, however, these ideas easily transmuted into other deeply held prejudices, for example, the ever-present problem of class identity in Britain. He expressed the opinion that the “desire for privacy is especially pronounced amongst the people with higher incomes or of certain social strata, and some of these can afford to pay for a more expensive private shelter, or are, at any rate, willing to face an increased risk from bombs to ensure privacy.”¹⁴⁵ Class as well as British identity was implicit in these the discussions of privacy, shelter, and the issue of crowds and morale. The architects’ plans envisaged a different society, particularly for poor urban areas such as Finsbury, based on mutual cooperation for the common good. These ideas represented the fruition of the leftist notion of “social patriotism,” discussed in the first chapter. This idea was first galvanized by the First World War, and leftists hoped that another war would accelerate social, political, and economic change. Ideas regarding the communal good were at the basis of the People’s War, although there were as many conflicting ideas of

¹⁴⁴ NA, CAB 16/197 CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, 53.

¹⁴⁵ Ove Arup, *London’s Shelter Problem* (London: D. Gestetner Ltd, 1940), 10.

what this entailed as there were proponents. The conclusion that follows reflects on the legacy of the campaign for ARP by the left and how its impact was mixed during the Second World War.

Conclusion

At the outbreak of war in 1939 military planners widely assumed that a bombing campaign against London would be imminent. It is almost banal to note that aerial destruction was not as destructive as predicted. As Mass Observation noted, the Phoney War proved to be a major letdown for the population: “Had not statesmen and thinkers said that it would be ‘the end of civilization?’ It was mixed in people’s minds with the end of the world, in the supernatural as well as in political events, and the ultimate chaos of the *Shape of Things to Come*.”¹ Winston Churchill complained that all concerned had been “greatly mislead by the pictures that they [the Air Staff] painted of the destruction that would be wrought by Air Raids.”² Yet Churchill himself had made liberal use of these predictions, demonstrating that the use of fear as a political tool was a powerful tactic. The leftist critics also accepted doomsday scenarios, all the better to argue that deep shelters were a crucial necessity for the people of Britain.

Civil defence administrators formulated their policies from these predictions without knowing the extent to which they might occur. Government priorities were based on the maintenance of morale and war capacity, but also on the idea that flexibility was essential to adapt to changing wartime circumstances. The leftist critics insisted that government plans represented a highly individualized version of citizenship that was unsuited to modern society and the impositions of total war. They viewed communal

¹ Tom Harrison and Charles Madge, eds. *War Begins at Home: By Mass Observation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1940), 40.

² Neville Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power: A History of the British Bomber Force 1923-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 34-5.

participation, as they had witnessed in Spain, as the only sensible way for citizens to cooperate in civil defence. They also believed that government interventionism to better the lives of its citizens was feasible, as demonstrated during the First World War, and that the failure to fund more comprehensive ARP plans was class-based and endangered the civil population.

Both the government and the critics emphasized the importance of British democracy to the smooth functioning of ARP. Yet, as Ross McKibbin indicates, “democracy” meant different things to different constituencies in interwar Britain.³ E.J. Hodsoll later remarked on the difficulty of preparing for a war directed against the civilian population on one hand, and on the other protecting the democratic institutions they were fighting to preserve. He believed that “thanks to the British genius for improvisation and compromise, these provisions worked remarkably well given the good will and determination to defeat Hitler at all costs.”⁴ This reflected the government’s view of the superiority of the “British way” of ARP. The leftists also believed that their plans reflected true democracy. Nationalism and citizenship were therefore divided along these lines, although both sides used the same vocabulary and appealed to British ideals – admittedly construed in differing ways.

As has been demonstrated, the influence of the critics was hampered due to blanket identification with the far left, whether they actually were or not. The blatant politicking practiced by some critics allowed the government to portray all opposition as

³ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), 533.

⁴ Robin Woolven, “Air Raid Precautions in St. Pancras, 1935-45: The Borough Against the German Air Force,” *Camden History Review*, 16 (1989): 25.

the work of extremist rabble-rousers. Geoffrey Lloyd later characterized the local authorities as “Socialist-controlled” and non-cooperative.⁵ The war changed the political terrain for the left. Along with reordering the priorities of national civil defence, the war altered many of the political factors that had affected the debate. The sudden disappearance of the CPGB from the anti-fascist movement, with the alignment of the Soviet Union with Hitler’s Germany, is of primary importance to the left. At the declaration of war the Communists followed Moscow’s lead and declared the war to be an “imperialist conflict” in which workers had no interest. This decision was opposed by many, including General Secretary Harry Pollitt who resigned his post. It provided proof for those who had charged that the “independence” of the CPGB was an elaborate sham. The Communists’ position was helped only by the forced entry of the Soviet Union into the war in 1941. By this time the *Daily Worker* had been temporarily banned by the new Home Secretary, the Labour ARP organizer Herbert Morrison, and Party activities were subject to minor harassment by the police.⁶ Many prominent members and fellow travelers broke with the Party, although remaining stalwarts continued to demand improved civilian ARP, staging protests such as an occupation of the Savoy Hotel during an air raid in September 1940. Angus Calder believes that their “clamor” helped continue

⁵ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th ser., vol. 478 (1950), cols. 41-4.

⁶ The ban, instituted in January 1941 was not lifted until August 1942. Yet Calder argues that suppression measures against the Communists were of limited effectiveness. Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 83-4. Both Angus Calder and Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975) refer to the relative toleration of the Communist Party during the war, even prior to Soviet entry into the war. On the CPGB’s reaction to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Peter Clarke notes that “Propagandists in Soviet Russia were not wholly implausible when they characterized this at the time as an ‘imperialist war,’” given the imperial ambitions of the participants. Peter Clarke, *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire*, (London: Allen Lane, 2007), xvi.

to publicize the issue, leading to a *de facto* recognition of the London Underground as shelter.⁷

The sidelining of the Communists, and the general requirements of wartime cooperation, forced a suspension of overt politicking and led to the predominance of moderate opinion on the left. Labour's position during the war echoes their moderated position before the war began – demonstrated by Herbert Morrison's position. It remains to evaluate the performance of government plans and wartime ARP, the position of the British left within the national polity, and how their ARP politics factored in the developing idea of the People's War and national identity. Though there were wide-ranging meanings to the People's War, the ideals behind "democratic defence" and equitable ARP echoed the notion of a civilian struggle.

Hindsight Evaluations of Government Policy and the Psychology of the Crowd

Unlike the First World War, the Second was greeted with quiet resignation due to the expectation of aerial attack against civilians and the grim memories of soldiering in the trenches on the Western Front. The final entry in George Orwell's pre-war diary captures this feeling well:

Air-raid practice this morning immediately after the proclamation of state of war. Seems to have gone off satisfactorily... believed of many people to be real raid. There are now great numbers of public air-raid shelters, though most of them will

⁷ Robin Woolven, "Playing Hitler's Game from Fitzroy Road NW1: JBS Haldane, the St. Pancras branch of the Communist Party, and Deep Shelter Agitation," *Camden History Review*, 23 (1999): 25; Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 83-4. Helen Jones maintains that the CPGB's agitation had strength beyond the number of its members and advocates. Helen Jones, *British Civilians in the Front Line: Air Raids, Productivity and Wartime Culture, 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 47.

take another day or two to complete... no panic, on the other hand no enthusiasm, and in fact not much interest.⁸

As noted, the inaction of the Phoney War proved something of an anti-climatic let-down. Some observers even expressed “relief” following the first air raid, feeling that the worst had finally arrived after the tension of expectancy and the hyperbolic rhetoric. The first air raids produced much confusion – false air raids sounded and ARP Wardens were unsure how to perform their duties. Much “muddling” occurred in these first months, though evidence suggests that people quickly learned how to act during a raid.⁹

Mass Observation provides particular insight into how the psychological predictions of the experts and government officials regarding air raid sheltering were manifested. In 1940 Mass Observation noted that “on practically every restriction brought in that affects the civilian population, the Government have had to retreat or recant.”¹⁰ The suspicion expressed towards Air Raid Wardens and the regulation of local ARP demonstrates that, as the Communist ARP pamphlet had predicted, voluntary action and not compulsion proved to be the only means of proceeding.¹¹ Yet grumbling was not equitable to widespread opposition, and Mass Observation also suggests that feelings of unjust compulsion regarding war measures were negligible.¹²

This thesis has demonstrated the interaction between the government and critics, and how the prejudices and mandates of both parties influenced the discussion of ARP.

⁸ University College London, George Orwell Papers, Item E/2, Diary Entry, 3 September 1939. It is unclear precisely what type of shelters he is referring to, perhaps trenches, converted basements, or sandbagged cellars which, as in September 1938, were once again hastily constructed.

⁹ Harrison and Madge, *War Begins at Home*, 49-55.

¹⁰ Harrison and Madge, *War Begins at Home*, 72-3.

¹¹ *New Statesman and Nation*, XVI, no. 402 (5 November 1938), 717-9.

¹² Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report 919, Report on Female Attitude to Compulsion, 16 October 1941.

From the governmental point of view decisions regarding ARP were neither insensible nor insensitive, for they aimed to preserve the very survival of the nation if widespread panic should ensue. While government officials, such as those who wrote the Hailey Report, could be accused of using “panic” as a mere excuse to dismiss the plans forwarded by Finsbury and other councils, this certainly was not their only motive. While the critics insisted that their proposals represented a modern “rational” approach, government officials felt their policies could equally be labelled rational. Anticipating hundreds of thousands of dead, and millions of refugees and psychological casualties, it was not inconceivable that society could break down, rendering expensive “rationalized” shelters all but unusable and ripe for transformation into a lawless subterranean world.¹³

The idea of irrationality was, however, a mutable concept. Joanna Bourke, discussing “Civilians Under Attack” during the Blitz, points to the changing rhetoric of air war between the First and Second World Wars. She argues that the “terrified Londoners” who had dashed underground at the first sign of bombardment in 1915 were rhetorically transformed into the “stoic Londoners” of the Blitz.¹⁴ Part of this was due to the rhetoric reflected by the press and the government in reference to the People’s War. On the other hand, the population did not revolt, retreat into “funk-holes,” or demand that the government sue for peace. Helen Jones’ analysis of workplace morale in the Second

¹³ Fears over the subversive possibilities of underground worlds had been prominent since the late nineteenth century with the advent of underground transport. See David L. Pike, *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800-1945* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005), 222-254.

World War demonstrates that social cohesion prevented mass panic through the feeling of mutual aid, though air raids continued to hamper factory production during the war.¹⁵

Yet there were some instances of panic arising at mass shelters, most particularly the Bethnal Green Tube stampede disaster of 1943 in which over one hundred people perished. It provides one example of a true “mob panic,” since it did not even occur during a raid but due to a fright caused by the testing of anti-aircraft batteries. This incident occurred in the East End, which may speak to the class biases and mob fears of government planners. Yet existing overcrowding in the East End may have contributed to these incidents, and overcrowding was less of an issue in middle-class areas of London. Such events demonstrated that these catastrophic events could occur in crowds, even if other Tube stations were used without incident.

Ad-Hoc Shelter Policy and the Performance of Government Plans

Following the official Home Office rejection of deep shelter plans, the relationship between the central government and local councils was characterized by inertia and a certain amount of “muddling through.”¹⁶ “Muddling through” was regarded as a positive concept, in opposition to the charge of “muddling” that Sir John Anderson faced in 1939

¹⁵ Jones, *British Civilians in the Front Line*, 29-30.

¹⁶ John Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the Tradition of Progress* (London: Royal Institute of British Architects, 1992), 362.

when deep shelter agitation reached its pre-war apex.¹⁷ Local Councils such as Finsbury were forced to provide rudimentary and piecemeal shelters as became feasible.

Following the war Geoffrey Lloyd defended the interwar planning and wartime performance of the ARP and civil defence services. He believed that the government, by taking a calm and measured approach and by conducting research and training, alighted on the correct methods of defence. Their approaches to incendiary bombs, shelters, and gas-mask provisions were sound, even though the latter proved unnecessary. The Home Office had been mocked for their “sand bucket and shovel” advice regarding the extinguishing of incendiary bombs. The official suggestion was to fill at least two buckets of water and have two buckets of sand readily available “if there should be a threat of war.”¹⁸ Lloyd recalled that jokes were “spread over the country when all the clever gentlemen found it wise to make fun of Sir Samuel Hoare and Sir John Anderson when they first proposed that the incendiary bomb could be dealt with... with the aid of buckets, sand and shovels.” Yet he believed that when the war commenced these plans proved their value.¹⁹ Herbert Morrison reflected in his autobiography regarding his predecessor as Home Secretary, “Considering the paucity of facts about air attack at the time, Sir John had produced a pretty clear resume of the possible situation.”²⁰

In addition, the evacuations of the Phoney War period did run relatively smoothly, given the scale of removals. One and a half million people were relocated from cities to “reception areas,” including half the schoolchildren in cities designated as evacuation

¹⁷ *The Times*, 10 January 1939, 9.

¹⁸ Home Office, *Fire Precautions in War Time* (London: HMSO, 1939).

¹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 478 (1950), col. 43.

²⁰ Herbert Morrison, *Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography by Lord Morrison of Lambeth* (London: Odhams Press, 1960), 206.

areas. Angus Calder suggests that problems that arose with the evacuation of London schoolchildren to the countryside tended to be the result of existing social tensions rather than the scheme itself.²¹ The historian Sir Keith Hancock, responding to drafts of *Problems of Social Policy*, stated curtly that insinuations of ARP Department negligence or lack of planning on subjects such as evacuation were unfair and that plans did unfold as well as could be expected.²²

Deep shelter was the one point on which the Home Office was forced partially to recant. Participants in the Hailey Commission in April 1939 believed that “a number of individuals” might obtain protection in the Tubes. However, Anderson believed that publicly stating that such actions contravened government policy would deter many individuals and thus limit the number of people actively seeking shelter.²³ By 1940 Anderson’s refusal to provide deep shelters was thrown into question, although he was initially backed by the War Cabinet. Deep Underground stations were used as shelters, although as Mass Observation reports indicated, many individuals never ventured into one. Whether citizens used these shelters or not, Anderson’s handling of ARP became increasingly unpopular. In the words of one Mass Observation report, “probably no Cabinet Minister has a lower public appeal, as far as our investigations show. His rather formal and uncompromising manner has never infused into the machinery for which he is responsible any warmth, humour or general sympathy likely to appeal to the many.”²⁴

²¹ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 60-4.

²² Richard Titmuss Papers, Titmuss_Add1/7/44, 17 March 1949, Memo, Sir Keith Hancock to Richard Titmuss.

²³ NA, CAB 16/197, CID Civil Defence (Policy) Sub-Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, 102.

²⁴ Harrison and Madge, *War Begins at Home*, 119.

The appointment of Herbert Morrison as replacement Home Secretary was one way for the government to stem this tide of criticism, given Morrison's long record of ARP advocacy. The government also appointed Dr. David Anderson, who was Joint Consulting Engineer of the London Passenger Transport Board, to provide advice on deep shelters and constructing extended tunnels to accommodate additional persons. Government officials were also forced to accept the inevitable and provide sanitation, water, and canteen food for those sheltering underground.²⁵

Nevertheless, official policy continued to emphasize dispersal and household protection, emphasized by the scale of the Anderson shelter program. Originally planned in 1938-39, the outbreak of war hastened the production of these backyard shelters. The Anderson shelter, and later the Morrison indoor version which was larger and aimed to provide greater levels of comfort, provide evidence that the government was forced to address questions of inequality and demands for at least rudimentary shelters. David Gloster, in a technical study of shelter provisions, argues that the means testing that accompanied the Anderson shelters excluded some 20,000,000 people, mostly from the lower middle class and middle class, from the free issue scheme. The income cut-off was £250 income per annum for the Anderson shelter and £350 per annum for the Morrison.²⁶ Yet the means test figures were set to respond to the class-based criticism of official plans. The program demonstrates that the Home Office was willing to make adjustments to official policy to deal with concerns of poorer families, but that officials firmly

²⁵ Peter Jones, *Ove Arup: Masterbuilder of the Twentieth Century* (Yale: New Haven, 2006), 78-9, and John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson: Viscount Waverly* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1962), 253-5.

²⁶ David Gloster, "Architecture and the Air Raid: Shelter Technologies and the British Government 1938-44" (MsC. Imperial College, London, 1997), 16.

believed that the principle of dispersal remained the soundest policy for air raid protection.

The first Anderson prototype shelters were produced in February 1939, at the same time as the Hailey Commission was called. By the start of the war in September 1939, 1,500,000 had been delivered, estimated to hold up to 6,000,000 people, and the rate of production had reached 50,000 per week.²⁷ The Anderson shelter had profound psychological benefits for the families who were able to obtain one. Joseph Meisel notes that the shelter provided families with an “illusion” that they could be protected against the effects of modern war.²⁸ This statement mirrors the Mass Observation findings that the “feeling” of safety was important to respondents who favored the provision of Anderson shelters.²⁹

At the same time the Home Office was slowly adopting the view that there was a limited role for deep underground shelters within official policy, especially in the crowded areas of central and eastern London. Even those who had an Anderson or other household shelter admitted that they would be at greater ease knowing that public shelters were available if they were caught away from home during a raid. The government made plans to adapt eight underground shelters throughout London to facilitate public sheltering, although seven of these shelters – some of which could hold up to 14,000 people – did not open until 1944, at which point few people took shelter in them. These structures took longer than expected to construct, and surpassed their original budget,

²⁷ Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, 223.

²⁸ Joseph S. Meisel, “Air Raid Shelter Policy and its Critics in Britain before the Second World War,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 5, no. 3 (1994): 317.

²⁹ Mass Observation Digitized Archive, File Report A14, Air Raid Shelters, March 1939, 18.

partially justifying the Hailey Commission's conclusion that the "time factor" for constructing deep shelters precluded the commencement of a mass scheme when war appeared imminent.

The question of deep shelters overlapped with the mandate of local authorities to provide air raid accommodation and, as demonstrated, the attempt to build brick shelters was met with a mixed reaction since people did not believe they provided an adequate level of safety. Indeed, some of the first bombs that fell in Finsbury destroyed a Farringdon Road brick shelter. Other authorities in Islington, Richmond, Brentford and Chiswick, and Ramsgate took steps to initiate deep shelter plans though these areas were also only able to provide brick shelters to residents.³⁰ One Borough councilor, who expressed a personal dislike of public shelters, affirmed that people desired some provision of both personal and communal shelters to be available for their use. He believed that citizens felt safer knowing that shelters were in close proximity, and were proud of corporate efforts made to install shelters. He had witnessed a rush for shelters following the first raids, and felt that further raids would doubtless increase demand.³¹

The use of London Underground stations as shelters demonstrates one area in which the government was forced to accede to public demand as they had during the First World War. For the critics, this popular action was illustrative of the people acting democratically in obtaining their own civil defence, with or without the approval of the Home Office. Nevertheless, reaction to Tube and public sheltering shows a wide range of

³⁰ Serge Chermayeff, *Plan for A.R.P.: A Practical Policy for Air-Raid Precautions* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 50-1.

³¹ Harrison and Madge, *War Begins at Home*, 119-20.

emotional reactions to the physical circumstances of sheltering, and justifies many of the government principles regarding dispersed shelters. It is doubtful whether, for example, thousands of Finsbury residents would have continued to use the mass shelters night after night, nor is it clear how mass usage would have played out sociologically. The numbers of those habitually using shelters remained small, and those who turned into “Tube Dwellers” was even smaller. The records kept by Mass Observation put the number at several thousand individuals who had, to some extent, taken to living on the platforms of Tube stations, continuing this activity until at least 1943.³² The government, as demonstrated in the Home Office background discussions to the Hailey Commission, was eager to avoid the appearance of inequality between areas. Increasing efforts to blunt the lack of provisions for crowded areas was evidenced by the belated construction of public brick shelters, distribution of Anderson shelters to lower income earners, and toleration of limited sheltering in Underground stations.

The Leftist Critics: Integration into the State

Although the suggestions proffered by the leftist critics were not adopted by the government in the interwar period, the critics themselves were invited to advise the wartime state on ARP. The former critic to attain the highest office was Herbert Morrison, who was appointed as Home Secretary in 1940 after Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. Morrison continued to espouse a moderate approach to questions

³² Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan, eds. *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 101-18.

of ARP after he entered the Cabinet. In 1940 for example, he refuted the notion that complete bomb-proof protection was a feasible goal by stating, “We have to beware of looking for 100 per cent safety for the civil population... If we hide ourselves and are unwilling to take any risks... the striking force of the enemy will be increased and we will be whacked.”³³ Reflecting on the role of the LCC in civil defence at the start of the war, he declared that ARP was a “triumph for democratic public administration and for the public spirit of the people.”³⁴ As the war progressed he believed that it would be obvious that dictatorships were inferior to British democracy, and this freedom would lead the British to victory.

Morrison used his new position to champion public shelters and the improved functioning of ARP services within the bounds of national military requirements. The Home Office had already acknowledged gaps in provisions, including the lack of any public shelters. Morrison took over the large task of reorganizing civil defence services, which was completed in the summer of 1941. Recognizing that there was not enough steel and cement available for deep shelter construction, he nevertheless believed that a public announcement of at least limited shelter construction would serve as an important morale booster. Under his aegis, the Boroughs of Hampstead, Holborn and St. Pancras all benefited from the decision to grant requests for the construction of new tunnels. By the end of 1940, he was able to boast of accommodation for 200,000 persons in well organized shelters.³⁵ This co-operative effort with local councils was likely an outgrowth

³³ Helen Jones, *British Civilians in the Front Line*, 49.

³⁴ *The Times*, 18 November 1939, 8.

³⁵ Bernard Donoughue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 267-289.

of Morrison's continued belief in the value of local government and the LCC. As Home Secretary he was insistent that the structure of local democratic government should be maintained to the greatest extent possible during wartime, since the nation was fighting to protect those very values.³⁶

The scientific left was also integrated into the state as advisors and consultants, an acknowledgment of their observational expertise from Spain and study of the ARP issue – despite their numerous dust-ups with the Home Office in the 1930s. In 1939 J.B.S. Haldane was asked to stand as a Labour MP for Cambridge, but turned down the offer because of his unofficial political activities, and because he was convinced he would be needed for government work in the upcoming war.³⁷ His war work was indeed prodigious. Haldane acted as a private consultant on ARP fielding professional enquiries, including those from private gas mask manufacturers who hoped to gain official approval of their products. He also served on the Labour Party's Air Raid Protection Committee and continued to do so under the Conservative coalition government as part of the "National ARP Coordinating Committee," contending that only a general national movement on non-party lines would save Britain. Robin Woolven suggests that Haldane was a "political schemer" who was "playing Hitler's game" from Primrose Hill, due to his involvement in Communist politics. As evidence he uses the recollections of Haldane's wife Charlotte and the association of both Haldanes with Communist Party members.³⁸ Even if the central government harbored serious suspicions about his

³⁶ Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 268.

³⁷ Ronald Clark, *J.B.S.: The Life and Work of J.B.S. Haldane* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 127.

³⁸ Woolven, "Playing Hitler's Game from Fitzroy Road NW1," 25.

political loyalties, it is probable that his service to the nation during the First World War, his class, and his professional status superseded other considerations.³⁹

Haldane was also a member of a Home Office Committee concerned with the maintenance of public morale. The work of the Committee reflects the ideas of the People's War – consciously created by the government, newspapers, and filmmakers. The Home Office advised the Committee that the population should be constantly informed that "this is a civilian's war." If people felt that they were being "taken into the Government's confidence as never before," they would better understand and participate in the war.⁴⁰ Taking the people into the government's confidence required treating all citizens as equal citizens, the position that the leftists had always favoured. It was also an admission that an active model of citizenship was required for the duration of the war, and that citizens needed to feel that their interests and contributions were vital. It is not coincidental that many of the enduring images of cooperation and stoicism in the face of the Blitz came from London's East End, the very area that had provoked so much concern over mass chaos.

Haldane's official activities in wartime highlight the fine line between far left political activism and the moderate Parliamentary Labour model. Cooperation between various leftist experts on wartime ARP continued to be tinged with internal political squabbling. One prominent attempt at joint agitation was instigated by Haldane who founded the ARP Coordinating Committee, consisting of fellow professionals, including

³⁹ Officials for the most part found it difficult to imagine that middle class Communists could be anything other than harmless dilettantes. A prime example is Kim Philby and the Cambridge Five spy ring, who failed to arouse suspicion due to their class affiliation.

⁴⁰ NA, HO 199/434 "Air Raids Memorandum on the Preservation of Civilian Morale," 1939 memorandum, 1-8. Haldane was a participant along with other physicians and scientists.

architects, surveyors and engineers. In the summer of 1939 the Committee floated a scheme for a system of tunnel shelters in St. Pancras,⁴¹ and in December of the same year submitted their design for a “heavy protection” air raid shelter to Sir John Anderson. Each compartment could hold between 50 and 80 people, with extra protection added in stages as necessary – similar to shelters that had been constructed in Spain.⁴² The Committee accomplished very little as a pressure group, since politics continued to divide its members. Ove Arup joined in 1939 but soon resigned due to political conflict with the hard left line taken by Haldane.⁴³ Ultimately many of the leftist critics may have been more amenable to cooperation with the state than with each other, as reflected in their wartime national service.

Arup remained involved in ARP consultation while Berthold Lubetkin drew back, following the rejection of his plans by the Home Office. Lubetkin’s sense of frustration over missed opportunities was long lasting. Looking back on the 1930s in the late 1970s, he expressed the view that “these buildings [Tecton’s projects] cry for a world which has never come into existence.”⁴⁴ In October 1940 Arup wrote that the demand for deep bomb-proof shelters had come to the fore in the press, meaning that insofar as the subject was discussed, the necessity of Tube and tunnel shelters predominated.

⁴¹ The official historian of civil defence, Terence O’Brien, mentioned this project in *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), 190, though I was unable to find any other record of it. Robin Woolven does not mention tunnels in his article on ARP in St. Pancras, though work was undertaken to accommodate approximately 10,000 people in trench accommodations in Regent’s Park and Primrose Hill. It is highly unlikely that these trenches were used by even a fraction of this number due to technical problems and the difficulty of reaching the shelters. Technical surveys were also undertaken to reinforce basement shelters for 60,000 people in St. Pancras. Woolven, “Air Raid Precautions in St. Pancras, 1935-1945”, 22.

⁴² *The Builder*, 22 December 1939, 852-854.

⁴³ Jones, *Ove Arup*, 68. Jones alleges that Arup could not abide the “blind faith in Communism” of Haldane.

⁴⁴ David Dean, *The Thirties: Recalling the English Architectural Scene* (London: RIBA Drawings Series, 1983), 139.

Trenches and brick shelters received little press attention, despite the efforts of local councils to build more brick shelters, such as in Hampstead.⁴⁵ He lamented official policy in a letter to his friend Lubetkin in 1940, stating “there seems to be no question of increasing the standard of safety. On the contrary, they are now prepared to lower the standard and have expressly said so in Circulars issued to the Boroughs.”⁴⁶ Arup designed over 80 private and civic shelters, and aided “Red” Ellen Wilkinson. She worked with Herbert Morrison at the Home Office and was responsible for air raid shelters, but unlike many of the leftist critics, defended the principle of dispersal. Believing the policy had prevented large-scale tragedies, she also called for the distribution of Morrison shelters to individual householders.⁴⁷ It might have been the case that, as Sir John Anderson argued, it was easy to poke holes in official provisions as a critic but rather harder to radically change policy in a position of governmental responsibility.

In the early years of the war the locus of the scientific left shifted from Cambridge to London, although members of the CSAWG who remained in Cambridge continued their advocacy work for local ARP, producing pamphlets and organizing an exhibition in 1941.⁴⁸ By the late 1930s J.D. Bernal, ostensibly the head of an organization originally opposed to the use of science in war, had reconciled himself to the inevitability of war against fascism. He sent a memorandum to prominent military and government commentators seeking advice on “the means by which the most useful contribution of

⁴⁵ Ove Arup, *London's Shelter Problem* (London: D. Gestetner Ltd, 1940), 1.

⁴⁶ Berthold Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/8 Ove Arup letter to Berthold Lubetkin, 6 November 1940.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Ove Arup*, 84-6.

⁴⁸ Cambridge University Library, Needham Papers, K 33, *Cambridge ARP Exhibition* (c. 1941).

science and the work of scientists can be made to national defence.”⁴⁹ He believed that “the full utilization of scientific workers” for war aims and ARP was desirable. Some objections were raised to Bernal working in an official ARP capacity due to his radical political connections, but Sir John Anderson personally approved his appointment citing the urgency of present circumstances.⁵⁰

Moderate Labour ARP critics and local politicians were also employed by the government, both before and during the war. E.J. Hodson, who was knighted and became Sir John Hodson in 1944, later praised the assistance of the Dr. Tee, the Town Clerk of Hackney who had proved invaluable to the ARP Department of the Home Office.⁵¹ The AASTA and progressive architects also continued to press for changes to official shelter policy. Reiterating that the lack of uniformity and the wide variance of quality standards in shelters posed a major problem, they believed that technical standards should be addressed by qualified experts.⁵² Due to the structure of ARP and the local administration of services, individuals and groups such as these could have a significant impact on the provision of neighbourhood shelters.

Gary Werskey asserts that the inclusion of the leftist critics into government planning demonstrated not only the astuteness of politicians such as Anderson, but also

⁴⁹ Liddell Hart Military Archives, Liddell Hart Papers, LH 1/65/3, memorandum from J.D. Bernal to Basil Liddell Hart, c. October 1938.

⁵⁰ Andrew Brown, *J.D. Bernal: The Sage of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 134-5.

⁵¹ Robin Woolven, “First in the Country: Dr. Richard Tee and Air Raid Precautions,” *Hackney History*, 6 (2000): 52.

⁵² Lubetkin Papers, LUB 3/8, A report by the ARP Committee of the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA), “What is Wrong with Official Shelter Policy,” 1940. In 1941 they published a mass-distribution pamphlet entitled *Safe shelters – now!*

the success of the scientific left in the ARP debate.⁵³ Yet the level of leftist “success” can be read in multiple ways. As was evident with J.D. Bernal, the war forced the leftist critics to adapt to government imperatives rather than vice versa in order to demonstrate their patriotism. On the other hand it is fair to note that the scientific expertise of the critics was urgently needed. Though many non-leftists studied the issue, including members of the Air Raid Protection Institute, professional expertise was limited, and the state required the counsel of the best experts. Yet the advice they were able to offer government departments was still limited by official policy regarding dispersal and the sheer lack of purpose-built public shelter. Their inclusion in ARP Committees did not signal a significant reversal of policy; rather, the use of the prominent scientific left was a professional courtesy and a validation of the left’s study of ARP in the interwar years. For the leftist scientists, their service to the state reflected the necessity for pragmatic nationalism born out of the political situation of the 1930s.

Conclusions on the Left, Democracy, and War

This thesis has demonstrated how politics defined civil defence provisions from the government’s point of view and also coloured the content and reception of the critics’ assertions. In this work I have linked the growth of the ARP political campaign to ideas of social patriotism, the relationship of the individual to the state, and mass democracy. The claims that can be made regarding the effects of the left’s campaign are necessarily

⁵³ Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 233.

narrow, especially given the failure of their interwar political ambitions as a whole and their inability to dent the National and Conservative governments of the day. The aim of this analysis of ARP criticism has been to reflect on the role of this issue to the fortunes of the Popular Front and leftist politics in the 1930s. The fissures between Parliamentary Labour and the moderate critics, and the Communist far left, are evident throughout the ARP debate. While there was frequent cooperation between leftist groups to agitate for improved ARP, the larger context of conflict over the Popular and United Fronts was difficult to overcome. At the start of the war it was the “Herbert Morrison” version of moderation that triumphed, and the far left critics who were incorporated into state planning acknowledged this fact as an exigency of war.

A primary historiographical issue impacting on this thesis has been the development of “social patriotism” and how leftist ideas concerning volunteerism and citizenship evolved in the early twentieth century. These concepts became particularly relevant, and increasingly politicized, following the advent of the first “total war” in 1914. The adoption of these ideas by the left from the early twentieth century demonstrates that the belief in evolutionary and integrationist change was long-standing among British leftists. The events of the late 1930s only confirm this trend, and the People’s War can be viewed as the embodiment of many of these ideals. On the eve of war, the Labour economist, writer, and co-founder of the Left Book Club, Harold Laski, wrote a Labour Party manifesto for the future which expressed the hope for a socialist Britain following the defeat of Hitlerism.⁵⁴ Laski was reflecting the broad Labour and

⁵⁴ Harold J. Laski, *The Labour Party, The War and the Future* (London: Labour Party Publications, 1939).

leftist view that the sacrifices that would be made by civilians and soldiers alike should correspond to state benefits of citizenship. Citizenship entailed active participation by both individuals and the government alike, and in the interwar period the collective ideal was embodied by the “municipal socialism,” of Herbert Morrison, the LCC, and local councils in London. Yet the emphasis on local politics was meant only to be an intermediate stage on the road to a national progressive policy.

The volunteer ethic was not a novel concept, and corresponded to earlier ideas that had crossed left-right political boundaries. Mass Observation records indicate that individuals who joined up as ARP wardens or volunteers did so for a variety of reasons. There were differences between class and political identification in the reasons given for volunteering. A sense of duty and patriotism was most commonly cited as the primary motive of the upper class and readers of right-wing newspapers. Among other classes and the readers of left-wing newspapers, a desire to “help” was cited as a primary motive.⁵⁵ The desire to “help” echoes some of the ideas of popular cooperation and community action that the leftist ARP critics had advocated. Yet there may be a mere semantic difference between the two motivations, showing a lesser gap between differing ideals of citizenship, at least in wartime. It is safe to say that many citizens saw themselves as “active” participants in the wartime state. Nevertheless, the leftists imagined a specific version of volunteerism to bolster their view of citizen-driven ARP. The sources of this ethic, such as the experience of Spain, aid in understanding the relationship between the left critics and the British nation as the war began.

⁵⁵ Harrison and Madge, *War Begins at Home*, 106.

An additional inquiry throughout this thesis has been the claims to British identity inherent in governmental plans and the alternative proposals of the critics. I have suggested that a specific view of national character underlay government plans, though it did not imply any one characterization of British identity. This depiction was subtle and often contradictory. The idea of “muddling through” was in some measure a source of pride to ordinary Britons during the war. For example, the image of the “democratic” and “resourceful” Englishman served as an antidote to the pre-war malaise represented by the downtrodden “little man in the suburbs.”⁵⁶ The evacuation of Dunkirk was depicted in this heroic light, and the stoicism of Londoners during the Blitz was used as another affirmation of English exceptionalism. Angus Calder maintains that the much-vaunted stoicism of the Second World War demonstrates “the myth of British or English moral pre-eminence” as an essential national trait.⁵⁷ Conventional aerial attack has never been proven to break civilian morale in any nation, so the performance of the public was not due to any inherent “Englishness.” As the leftist observers had noted, Spanish people also acted with equal calm and stoicism during air raids and scenes of panic were rare.

Yet in the pre-war period the British government was of two minds concerning the irrationality or “stoicism” of its citizens, illustrating the difficulty of using this rhetoric to explain any “true” state of national identity. Joanna Bourke has noted that many preferred to “wallow in fanciful notions of ‘British bulldog courage.’”⁵⁸ For all the government’s portrayal of the “British way” of ARP, perhaps the most interesting facet

⁵⁶ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 192.

⁵⁷ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 2.

⁵⁸ Bourke, *Fear*, 242.

this thesis has touched on was the constant doubt on the part of government officials. Their evocations of the stoic Englishman were intended in order to preserve the individualistic, and admittedly inexpensive, provisions for ARP that the government had decided on. It is clear that they held only a tenuous confidence in the performance of the British people, and even less confidence in the working-classes masses in areas that would be subject to the full force of enemy bombing raids. As the governmental ARP Committee which included J.B.S. Haldane emphasized, repetition of the idea that it was truly a People's War was intended to strengthen morale and minimize the danger of mob revolt.

For the left the question of patriotism and national identity was also difficult and contradictory. As Kevin Morgan suggests, preparing for a People's War necessitated that communists accept the people "as they were." Miles Taylor rightly argues that the left did not fully embrace the rhetoric of nationalism until the very late 1930s, after the Popular Front had failed and the danger fascism posed to Britain became more immediate. This thesis has illuminated one element of how and why this occurred. I have argued that the experience of the British left in the Spanish Civil War should be understood primarily in terms of national identity and the protection of Britain. This vocal embrace of British democracy, combined with the repatriation of air war fears from Spain to Britain, allowed the left to identify with the idea of a People's War.

Yet the left was only one group that contributed to the People's War myth, even if some elements of it were closely aligned with leftist ideas. For example, the Home Guard was one way to involve the civilians in war, and leftists such as George Orwell viewed it

as the basis for a “People’s Army,” based on the model of the Spanish militias. As he wrote to Victor Gollancz of the LBC, “when the pinch comes the common people will turn out to be more intelligent than the clever ones.”⁵⁹ Leftist ARP critic John Langdon-Davies made his farm in Sussex available to the government for training purposes. The Marxist military theorist, T.H. Wintringham, who directed training of the Home Guard during the Second World War, expounded the theory that “free men will often overcome in battle, even against considerable odds, men relatively less free,”⁶⁰ and believed that the British army needed to develop a “democratic” military model which prized individual initiative rather than the blind obedience. Like Spain, the ideas of the People’s War allowed the vast majority of leftists to support a “just cause” which was compatible with their ideology.

There is no simple line that can be drawn between ARP, Spain, the People’s War, and the welfare state initiated by Labour after 1945. Many left-leaning individuals were unable to reconcile their conflicting ideologies. The picture of leftist civil defence is, like leftist politics in the 1930s, often confused. All the personalities in this thesis were, or became, reformists rather than true revolutionaries. Insofar as these individuals criticized government policies, it was as a type of “loyal opposition,” committed to gradualism and evolutionary change. This represented their “British way” of leftist political thought that was integrationist and moderated. The politics of the Popular Front and the Spanish Civil

⁵⁹ University College London, George Orwell Papers, File G, George Orwell to Victor Gollancz, 8 January 1940.

⁶⁰ T.H. Wintringham, *Armies of Freeman* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1940), viii.

War, ostensibly the epitome of the far left, actually had the effect of sidelining far left voices.

Joseph Needham's claim that the ARP experiments conducted by the scientific left had posed "a challenge to people in high places"⁶¹ provides an indication of how these scientists and critics perceived their role to question, challenge authority, and forward their ideas of social democracy. The unfolding of the ARP debate, and the reaction of the Home Office to critics such as J.B.S. Haldane and the CSAWG, demonstrate that achieving a significant role in mainstream politics remained a challenge for both Parliamentary Labour and the far left. The People's War may have been best represented by the populism of J.B. Priestley or the exuberant Englishness of George Orwell, but leftist activists such as J.B.S. Haldane and Herbert Morrison were equally eager to demonstrate through their war work that they also represented the interests of the People.

The idea of the People's War, broad as it was, and the movement towards the centre by the critics, allowed them a foothold into a populist national rhetoric. The Spanish Civil War provided a model for active citizenship, and depicting the masses as heroic citizens was facilitated through discussions of ARP. The deep shelter critics and Finsbury proposals should how these ideas might be applied to Britain. Addressing the needs of the urban poor in wartime provided one way for leftist intellectuals to prove their common cause with the People. While the sentiment of "democratic defence"

⁶¹ Cambridge University Library, Joseph Needham Papers, K.31, clipping from *News Chronicle*, 12 February 1937.

certainly fit well with the ideal of the People's War, the benefit to leftist constituencies was mixed. The issue of civilian defence nevertheless provides an important and unique understanding of leftist politics, failings, and ideological development in the interwar period.

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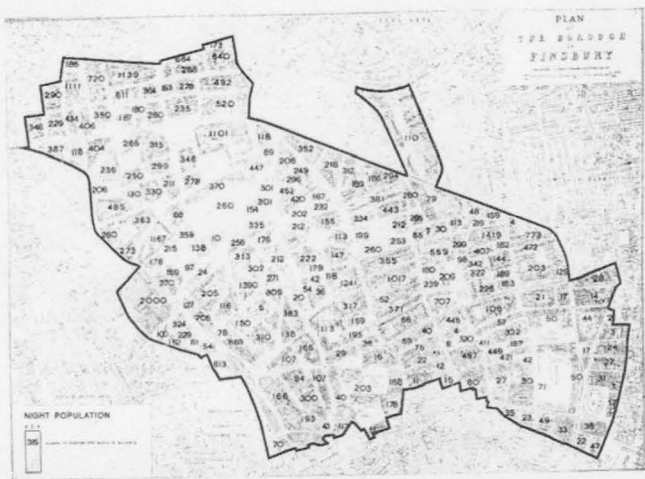
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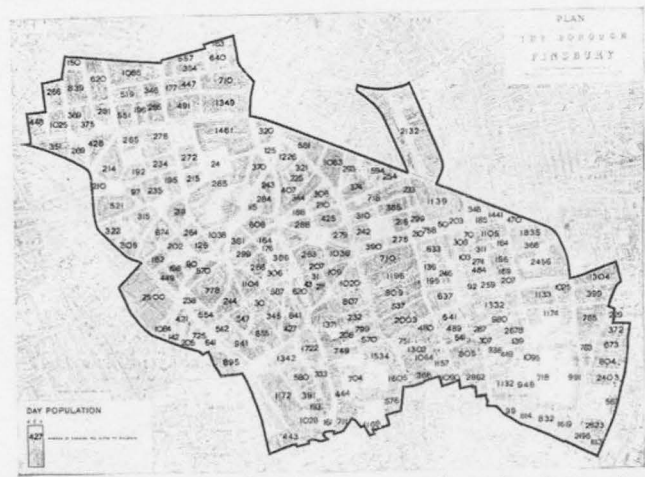
Appendix – Figures

Figure 1

Sample Map, Day and Night Populations of the Borough of Finsbury, Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 113.



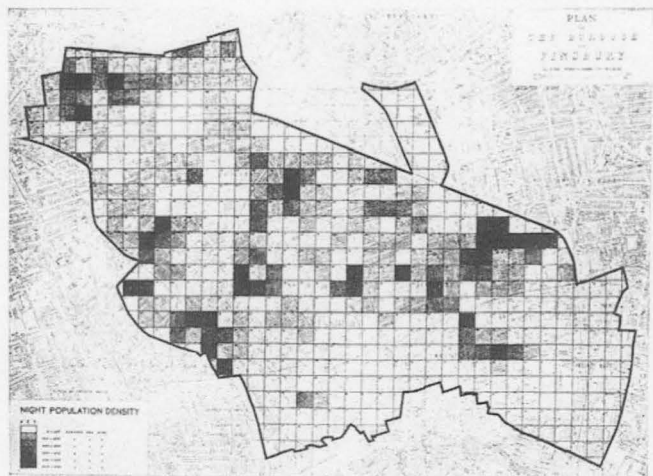
Map 1. Night Population. Each figure represents the number of persons in a block of buildings.



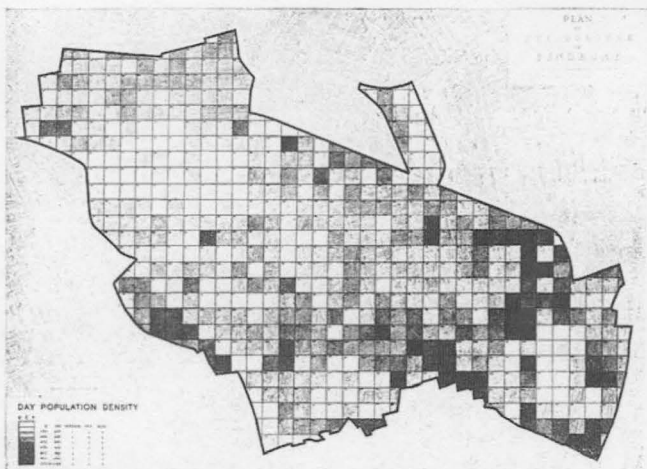
Map 2. Day Population. Each figure represents the number of persons in a block of buildings.

Figure 2

Sample Map, Night and Day Population Density of the Borough of Finsbury, Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 114.



Map 3. Night Population Density. Each square represents one acre ; density is graded from 100 persons per acre to 750.



Map 4. Day Population Density. Each square represents one acre ; density is graded from 100 persons per acre to 1,000 and over.

Figure 3

Final map of the Tecton Proposal for the Borough of Finsbury, Cylindrical shelters indicated with black dots, with concentric circles demonstrating the time necessary to reach shelter entrances. Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, Fold-out map.

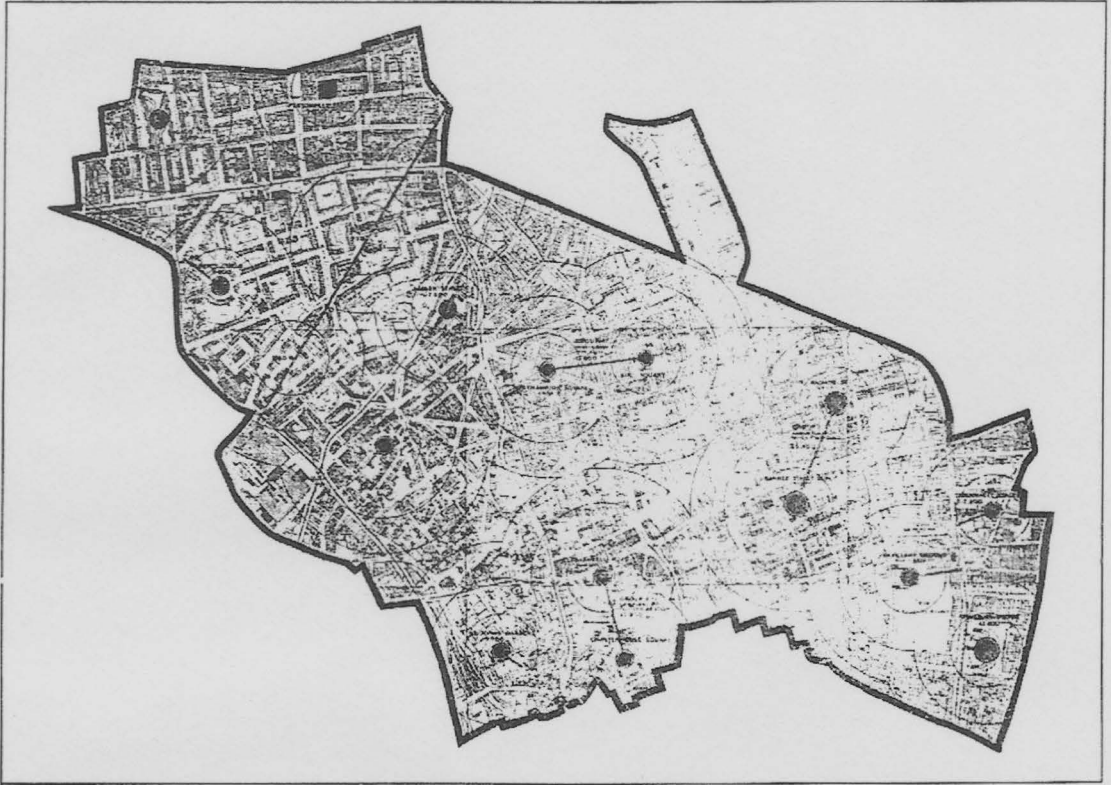


Figure 4

Sectional View of a Shelter for 7,600 People, Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P.*, 81.

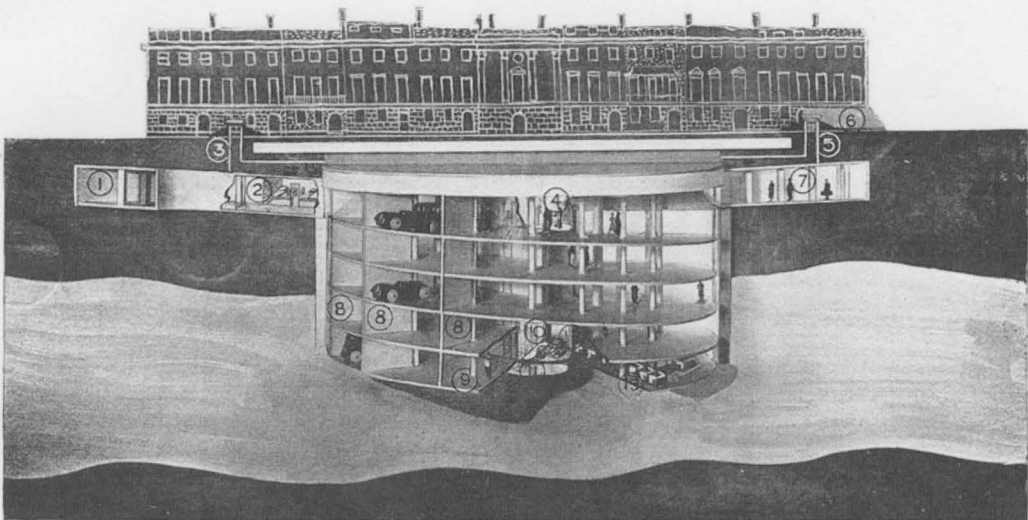


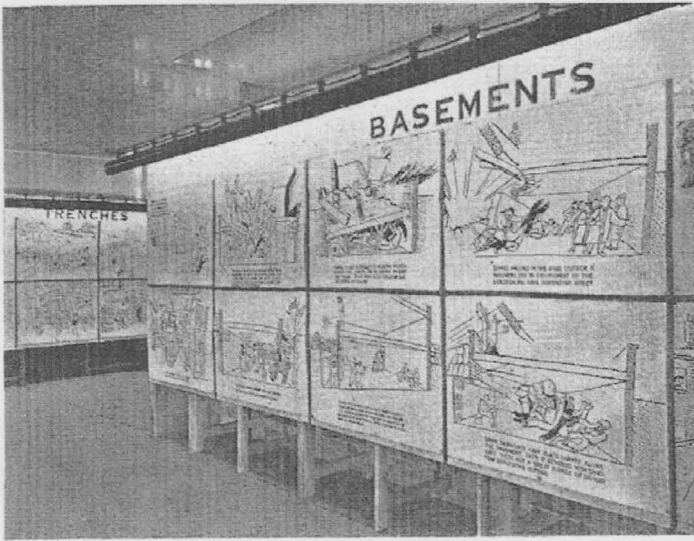
FIG. 28.—SECTIONAL VIEW OF A SHELTER FOR 7,600 PEOPLE.
(1) Entrance ramp. (2) Air-lock and first-aid post. (3) Air extract (peacetime) or intake (wartime). (4) Lift for garage use in peacetime. (5) Air intake (in wartime for use in emergency only). (6) Entrance to ramp from street. (7) Ramp. (8) Baffle walls. (9) Storage space. (10) Lift motor. (11) Water sump. (12) Ventilation fans and water pump. (13) Maginot line poison-gas filters.

Figure 5

The *Architect and Building News* cover, Finsbury ARP Exhibition, 10 February, 1939.

The ARCHITECT and Building News

FEBRUARY 10, 1939



THE BOROUGH OF FINSBURY A.R.P. EXHIBITION

At the Finsbury Town Hall, Rosebery Avenue, a public exhibition is being held illustrating a scheme of complete air-raid protection by structural means. The process of criticism and elimination which led up to the final theory are illustrated in a long series of sketches, some of which are seen above. Further illustrations appear on the next page.