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Low and Lord Beaverbrook: The Case of a Cartoonist's Autonomy

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in Politics and International  
Relations

November 1998

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## ABSTRACT

‘Freedom of the press belongs to the person who owns one.’<sup>1</sup>(Doug Marlette)

This thesis analyses Sir David Low’s relationship with Lord Beaverbrook while the former worked for the *Evening Standard* between 1927 and 1950, and it argues that the relationship was different from that which has commonly been portrayed. Low and Beaverbrook made, in their own succinct ways, a substantial impact on the British political landscape throughout the inter-war period and the Second World War. Theirs was a relationship that has yet, rather surprisingly, not been thoroughly examined.

During his lifetime, Beaverbrook was arguably the most politically active, hands-on, newspaper proprietor since Lord Northcliffe. Low was not only widely regarded as the greatest and most imaginative political cartoonist since possibly Gillray, but also, it has been claimed, the most independent cartoonist ever to have worked for a British newspaper up until the late 1950s.

Low had a contract at the *Evening Standard* that gave him complete freedom in the selection and treatment of his subject matter. This was then a unique arrangement between a proprietor and a cartoonist. Low always maintained that Beaverbrook never interfered with his position of absolute independence. This thesis reveals that this was not the case. Whether, for example, in Low’s treatment of Beaverbrook’s friends, or the depiction of Beaverbrook himself, or the issue of Appeasement, the Monarchy, general elections etc., proprietorial constraint was administered when and where it was felt necessary. Low’s independence in reality depended on how far Beaverbrook felt that freedom should go. Low on his part, it is argued, was not only prepared to ignore such blatant infringements to the terms of his contract, but also towed the line to suit his proprietor’s political whims. Such behaviour was persistently and successfully disguised in order to enhance the reputations of both the cartoonist and the proprietor.

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Marlette, *In Your Face: A Cartoonist At Work*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991, Page 164.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### **Due to technical complications:**

- i. the word processor has put a number of footnotes on the following page.
- ii. the line dividing the text from the footnotes occasionally varies in length.
- iii. the text does not always reach the end of the page.

### **Cartoon numbering system**

Due to the quantity of illustrations required for Chapter Three and the second case study in Chapter Five some of the cartoons cannot be shown in the main body of text. These have a number in brackets in front of the title, and can be found in an appendix at the end of each chapter.

### **Quality and layout of the cartoons**

All cartoon titles are in 10pt bold in order for the reader to be able to distinguish them easily. Illustrations in this thesis are from various sources, i.e. either photographed from original artwork, or photocopied from microfilm. The cartoons thus vary in reprographic quality. The layout has been done in such a way as to get them as close to the relevant text as possible. This has led, on occasions, to a cartoon being either smaller or larger than is ideal. Consequently, some of the text within the cartoon can be difficult to read. However, on such occasions, the text is secondary to the importance of the drawing itself.

# THESIS TITLE: Low and Lord Beaverbrook: The Case of a Cartoonist's Autonomy

## Introduction

‘There was a period some years before the war when Beaverbrook threw out cartoon after cartoon, and Low was given an enforced holiday for some months; but he cannot leave him out altogether and so a lot of Low’s cartoons are published.’<sup>1</sup> (R.J. Minney’s testimony to the Royal Commission on the Press in 1948)

‘No hireling, no servile champion of a faction... He was a patriot, but not an uncritical one... and he had daring independence, astonishing impudence.’<sup>2</sup> (Low on James Gillray)

David Low, born in New Zealand in 1891, was indisputably one of the most vigorous and outspoken political cartoonists since the age of Gillray. He arrived in England in 1919, fresh from the *Sydney Bulletin* in Australia where his growing reputation had led the Cadbury family into offering him a position as a cartoonist on the *Star*, a radical evening newspaper. Joining Beaverbrook’s *Evening Standard* in 1927, his reputation grew as his cartoons were syndicated both at home and abroad. His unique style of draughtsmanship set new trends in newspaper cartooning. Low’s uncomplicated oriental brush style influenced many of the leading cartoonists of his time. Many among them, such as Vicky, James Friell, George Strube, Clive Upton and Wyndham Robinson, looked to Low as the master, willing to acknowledge the influence he had had on their own style and imagination.

No cartoonist matched Low for his symbolic allusions, the first in Britain being the two-headed ass, which was followed in 1934 with even greater success by Colonel Blimp, a symbol of stupidity and mixed-up thinking. His last great symbol, the TUC Cart-horse started to appear in the *Evening Standard* during the Second World War.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Gunn to David Low in reference to R.J. Minney’s testimony, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent. Minney had worked for Beaverbrook as a journalist on the *Daily Express*, and had once been the editor of the *Referee*.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Ronald Searle in the *Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1963.

Low was one of the earliest and most consistent commentators to warn of the dangers to peace in Europe from both Hitler and Mussolini. He often prophesied what would happen if a firm stance was not taken against them. During the 1930s, Low's direct opposition to Appeasement made it appear that he was fighting his own private war against the Nazis. In 1937 it led to a meeting between Lord Halifax and Low at the behest of Goebbels, who had complained bitterly that Hitler was frequently incensed by the way Low was depicting him in his cartoons. In 1950, Low left the *Evening Standard*, and joined the Labour-controlled *Daily Herald*. After an unhappy three years there, he joined the *Manchester Guardian* where he drew three cartoons a week up until a few months before he died in 1963 at the age of 73.

This thesis offers a thorough revision of Low's career at the *Evening Standard*, beginning with Beaverbrook's first attempts to lure him away from the *Star* in 1924, and ending with the rather sad way he was ignominiously forced to resign in 1950, after having produced much of his best work for the paper over twenty years.

This thesis does not focus its attention on or attempt to evaluate Low's immense artistic talents or the imagery of his cartoons, except in how it may have affected, over time, his relationship with his proprietor. Nor does it theorise on relationships between other proprietors and cartoonists in comparison with Low and Beaverbrook, either during the period concerned or the present day. Apart from there being insufficient evidence of other proprietorial dealings with cartoonists to refer to, comparing a cartoonist's autonomy today to that of 50 or 60 years ago is fraught with difficulties, both in terms of the role of the proprietor and of the sensitivities of the newspaper readership. How many proprietors in the 1990s interfere in the running of their newspapers in the same way that Beaverbrook or Northcliffe had done in their time? These latter were themselves, as Michael Foot has pointed out, 'super editors' with a firm grasp of what was required in producing a successful newspaper.<sup>3</sup> Unlike many of today's newspaper proprietors, Beaverbrook was consciously aware of what benefits the cartoon brought to a newspaper, and thereby took a strong personal interest in both employing and cultivating his cartoonists, as the *Daily Express* cartoonist, Michael Cummings, noticed:

'Beaverbrook was a great advocate of cartoons, he believed very strongly that they were far more effective than words in getting across a political point. In fact a

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

reader survey once showed that the cartoons were the most popular part of the paper...'<sup>4</sup>

Today's newspaper proprietors appear to be more involved in the financial side of their businesses. For men such as Rupert Murdoch, newspapers may be a large part of their diverse business empire, but they are no longer so fully involved in their day to day operations. Therefore, it is not surprising that few proprietors today have any sort of involvement or interest in their cartoonists. Peter Brookes of *The Times* has stated that during his employment he has never met, or even spoken to, his proprietor.<sup>5</sup> Les Gibbard and Steve Bell have also admitted to never having met the owners of the *Guardian*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Has the Low and Beaverbrook version of events stood the passage of time?**

Until 1985, Low's legendary status as an independent operator while at the *Evening Standard* had remained largely unquestioned in the academic world. In 1965, Lawrence H. Streicher completed a doctoral dissertation on 'Political Imagery in the Caricatures of David Low', which upheld the belief in Low's complete independence at the *Evening Standard*:

'Crucial for Low's status as a commentator was unique freedom. He was privileged and sheltered to speak the truth as he personally saw it, regardless of Lord Beaverbrook's politics and editorial policies.'<sup>7</sup>

When A.J.P. Taylor wrote a biography of Beaverbrook in 1972, having relied solely on Beaverbrook's own papers, it was no real surprise to find, even from such an eminent historian, his total acceptance of Beaverbrook's version of his relations with Low. So, according to Taylor:

'Low had a free run for the best part of twenty years in the *Evening Standard*.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Allen, *Voice of Britain, The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 160.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Brookes interviewed by Timothy S. Benson, May 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Bell and Les Gibbard interviewed by Timothy S. Benson, November 1997 and February 1998. The *Guardian* has no proprietor in the ordinary sense, as it is owned by a trust.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence H. Streicher, *The Political Imagery in the Caricatures of David Low*, University of Wisconsin, 1965, Page 220.

<sup>8</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 216.

Colin Seymour-Ure, writing in 1975, relied on Taylor's own account when he saw that an 'extreme case of a cartoonist with autonomy was Low in his hey-day...'<sup>9</sup> However, ten years later, Seymour-Ure, having had the benefit of seeing and interpreting Low's own papers and correspondence for the first time in researching his biography on Low, was prepared to concede that the cartoonist's independence had not been as complete as he had earlier believed:

'The contract clause "worked" in as much as both parties publicly maintained that it worked. Like many contracts, however, it symbolised a working relationship more than actively sustaining it.'<sup>10</sup>

In the same year as Seymour-Ure's biography of Low was published, Adrian Smith in an article in *Encounter*, proposed for the first time that the relationship between them was not, in effect, as amicable as had previously been suggested. Smith came to this conclusion when he contrasted the evidence of Low's actual correspondence with the editorial staff at the *Evening Standard*, with that of his account in his autobiography. Smith concluded that Low's relationship with Beaverbrook was 'markedly at odds with the familiar image of harmony, common agreement, and only muted adverse editorial comment'.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from Seymour-Ure and Smith, it has been generally accepted that Low, even as a radical left-of-centre cartoonist, was given a virtually free hand by, of all people, Lord Beaverbrook, a proprietor who had a notorious reputation for continually interfering in the running of his newspapers. In 1995, in his book of cartoons on Prime Ministers, Kenneth Baker was of the opinion that 'Low and Vicky were well to the left and he [Beaverbrook] never censored any of their cartoons.'<sup>12</sup> Such an assumption has done much to enhance and prolong Low's reputation as one of the greatest and most independent political cartoonists both in Fleet Street and around the world. On Lord Beaverbrook's part, the notion that Low had complete independence also encouraged the myth that as a proprietor he was unusually broad-minded, allowing other political opinions, apart from his own, in his newspapers:

'Congratulations to Lord Beaverbrook. His Lordship supplies the newspaper vehicles in which Low broadcasts the most biting pictorial satire upon all the cherished delusions, which are industriously propagated upon the pages. One may

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<sup>9</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, 'How Special Are Cartoonists?', *20<sup>th</sup> Century Studies*, December 1975, Page 16.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 47.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Smith, 'Low and Beaverbrook', *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 11.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Baker, *The Prime Ministers, An Irreverent Political History in Cartoons*, Thames & Hudson, 1995, Page 14.

not agree with Lord Beaverbrook, but he undoubtedly exhibits a tolerance of mind which is rare among men.<sup>13</sup>

In 1926, Beaverbrook, in order to acquire Low's services from the *Star* newspaper, had to offer the cartoonist a contract which gave him complete freedom in regard to the selection and treatment of his subject matter for his cartoons. Such independence was unheard of at the time. It sounded all the more improbable, because Beaverbrook, as already mentioned, saw his newspapers as an extension of his own political views. How was the arrangement expected to work? Was not Beaverbrook a hard-nosed financier and businessman, whose die-hard Conservative and strong imperialist beliefs were total anathema to Low, the left-wing humanitarian? Was not A.J.P. Taylor correct when he stated, in his biography of Beaverbrook, that Low 'differed from Beaverbrook over almost everything'?<sup>14</sup>

The evidence contradicts such a belief. It shows that Beaverbrook and Low were far closer on many of the political and social issues of the day than has been believed up to now. Even when Low disagreed with Beaverbrook over certain political issues such as Empire Free Trade, he was prepared to swallow his principles and acquiesce. Nor was Low as left wing as many made him out to be. He was at heart a liberal, while his cartoons at the *Evening Standard* were, up until the 1945 General Election, non-partisan.

Like Low, Beaverbrook was a colonial, and as a result, shared with Low a distaste for privilege and the British class system. Although a Conservative, Beaverbrook's reputation as a fixer and as a coarse got-rich-quick North American meant that he remained both an outsider as well as unpopular with the Tory hierarchy. He was a political maverick who supported many policies, such as full employment and higher wages, which were anathema to his own party.

In order to determine the validity of the hypothesis that Beaverbrook did not allow Low the freedom his contract afforded him, this thesis will demonstrate beyond all reasonable doubt that Low's much-vaunted contract failed on numerous occasions to protect him. Low continually claimed from the day he joined the *Evening Standard* that Beaverbrook scrupulously honoured the arrangement between them. Writing in his autobiography in 1956, Low stated:

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<sup>13</sup> *Forward*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>14</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 216.

‘My apprehensions about Beaverbrook had been groundless and I was gratified to find that the alleged prince of darkness was scrupulous in observing my independence, and even defended it against his friends.’<sup>15</sup>

Low kept to the same line when questioned by the press. Here are just two examples:

‘The fact is that I joined the *Evening Standard* twelve years ago under the expressly contracted condition that I had complete and perfect freedom concerning my material, and that still goes.’<sup>16</sup>

‘My views do not always accord with those of a party newspaper like the *Evening Standard*. I send my work. They print it. If they didn’t, I wouldn’t send it!’<sup>17</sup>

In 1947, Low wrote to the Royal Commission on the Press, and confirmed in writing that his employer had scrupulously respected the terms of his contract and ‘refrained from making unfair use of his reserved right to veto cartoons he did not like.’<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, Low was particularly defensive about journalists such as Hannen Swaffer, then at the *News Chronicle*, who at times questioned his independence. Low always took a great deal of time and effort in defending himself against all such doubting Thomas’s. However, they were few and far between. Most observers came to believe that Low had indeed genuinely secured an unequalled level of independence. The press, both at home and abroad, took what Low and Beaverbrook said at their word. Comments from a selection of newspapers are perfect examples of the unquestioning world-wide press coverage Low received during his time at the *Evening Standard*:

‘It was Australia’s loss and Britain’s gain when the brilliant young cartoonist left Sydney to join the *Liberal Star* in London before moving on to Lord Beaverbrook’s Conservative *Evening Standard* where, with complete freedom of expression, he built himself up into an institution.’<sup>19</sup>

‘There has been no editorial supervision; no one has told him what to draw or what the “leader” in next day’s paper will say; no editor has admonished him, “I don’t think we should touch on that.” He is a completely free man.’<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 195.

<sup>16</sup> David Low to Gordon Beckles, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1940, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>17</sup> ‘*The Greater Art*’, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>18</sup> David Low to the Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>19</sup> Unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>20</sup> Rollin Kirby was one of America’s finest cartoonists, having won the Pulitzer Prize for the best cartoon in 1921, 1924 and 1928. *American Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1946, Page 609, Low Papers, University of Kent.

‘He has strong opinions, conceptions of a strong mind, and above all strongly drawn. He enjoys a privilege bestowed upon few editorial cartoonists in the world to-day. He is not subject to the dictates of his editors, nor can his cartoons, or captions be altered in any way. His cartoons are shaped only to one policy - Low’s policy.’<sup>21</sup>

‘The political and social outlook of Australia is naturally sceptical and irreverent and this land has been the breeding ground of great cartoonists - with Low surpassing them all. He can only flourish in complete independence, as he has told us so often in his prefaces.’<sup>22</sup>

‘The determination with which Low has derided many of the most cherished editorial views of his own newspaper has been a matter for comment for many years. It has been quoted by the Beaverbrook press as an indication of its innate liberalism of outlook and quoted by Low, on the very few occasions he has permitted himself to be quoted, as a sign of his own independence.’<sup>23</sup>

‘The exception today that proves the rule of general dependence is David Low. He is the only contemporary cartoonist who has complete freedom of action, including even the privilege of criticising not only the policy of the paper, but also its owner. The sagacity and power developed by the independence has made Low a world-recognised figure. Editorial prejudice, incompetence or timidity have not emasculated his work.’<sup>24</sup>

Even the *Manchester Guardian*, which had had syndication rights on Low’s cartoons throughout his time at the *Evening Standard*, printed an article in 1949 upholding how successful Low’s contract had been in protecting his freedom from editorial interference:

‘In 22 years not more than two or three of Low’s cartoons have been held out of the *Evening Standard* for any reason.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ian Gall in the *Courier Mail*, Brisbane, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>22</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, undated, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>23</sup> Syndicated article in the *Egyptian Gazette*, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>24</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, undated, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>25</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949.

The *Irish Times* in 1949 thought it not only plausible that Low had been able to maintain his complete independence, but that relations with both the editorial staff and the management at the *Evening Standard* had remained friendly throughout as a result:

‘Although his politics have often been directly opposed to those of the newspaper, he has retained complete freedom to follow his own ideas - a freedom, he told me once, without which he would not work at all - and I am assured that his personal relations with the *Evening Standard* and its staff remain most cordial.’<sup>26</sup>

It was therefore predictable, that when it came to writing his autobiography, Low re-enforced this image of a compliant management set-up at the *Evening Standard* which, according to him, never attempted to inhibit his freedom in the selection and treatment of his cartoons. In words similar to those in the *Irish Times*, Low stated:

‘On the credit side my relations with the *Evening Standard* managers and editors became most cordial.’<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to this cushy view, Arthur Christiansen, Editor of the *Daily Express* during the 1930s and 1940s, hinted that there had been problems with dealing with Low when he first joined the *Evening Standard*. In a letter to Beaverbrook in 1949, in reference to Low leaving to join the *Daily Herald*, Christiansen wrote:

‘Cummings’s work is getting talked about, and the *Standard* would be wise if they tried to steal him in place of Low... He, too, was a great strain to carry in his infancy with us...’<sup>28</sup>

As Adrian Smith has suggested, amongst Low’s own correspondence with the *Evening Standard* management there are many examples of his exasperation with those who ran the paper. Here are three of the best examples that will also be discussed in greater length in later chapters:

(I) In response to one cartoon, which had been refused publication twice, even after having had drastic alterations in order to make it acceptable, Low complained bitterly to the Manager of the *Evening Standard*, Michael Wardell:

‘To me the Blackshirt business seems to be a definite addition to the local political scene and I do not see how it will be possible to keep it out of cartoons now and then in the future. Certainly I think to pretend it does not exist would stultify me as

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Times*, London edition, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949.

<sup>27</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 201.

a cartoonist and cause certain inferences to be drawn harmful to my reputation as a cartoonist of independent views. If the answer to the question above is to be yes, I do not see how I am to continue drawing cartoons for the *EVENING STANDARD*.<sup>29</sup>

(II) When Stanley Tiquet, then Acting Editor of the *Evening Standard*, wrote to Low in 1936 asking him to tone down his cartoons during the period of the Olympic games so that they would not ‘prove detrimental to our friendship with other nations’ (i.e. the Nazis), Low’s response was to write ‘*To hell with Tiquet !!!*’ on the letter.<sup>30</sup>

(III) Finally, R.J. Thompson in 1938, as Editor of the *Evening Standard*, found Low not at all understanding when he informed him that his ‘Topical Budget’<sup>31</sup> would not be published because a small section of it might have proved libellous:

‘I was astonished to see that TOPICAL BUDGET was dropped last Saturday, but I am considerably more astonished by the explanation... I am prompted to say that this feature, which drains me more than two cartoons, becomes an intolerable burden if there is uncertainty about its importance. The only reasons I have been giving myself a nervous breakdown with it is that I supposed it to be necessary to Saturday’s paper. To find it scrapped because of a detail in the smallest drawing gives me a different angle on it.’<sup>32</sup>

As much as Low proclaimed his independence, Beaverbrook equally kept up the pretence over his non-interference. He always claimed that his contributors had complete freedom of expression, and vehemently denied any control whatsoever over his *Evening Standard* cartoonist. On one such occasion in December 1940, Churchill was furious with a Low cartoon. Beaverbrook told Churchill it was a ‘matter of real grief’ that he should be the occasion of such attacks upon ‘my Prime Minister’.<sup>33</sup> However, what is important is what he then told Churchill:

‘I do not know how to deal with the situation. I do not agree with Low. I have rarely done so. I do not interfere with Low. I have never done so.’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>29</sup> David Low to Captain Wardell, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1934, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley Tiquet to David Low, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>31</sup> Low’s Topical Budget was a full page of cartoons published on Saturdays in the *Evening Standard* between 1934 and 1940. It combined both frivolous social and political comment.

<sup>32</sup> David Low to R.J. Thompson, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>33</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Winston Churchill, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1940, Churchill Archive.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Five years later, at an Election meeting in Battersea, in answer to a question over whether he had suppressed Low's cartoons in the *Evening Standard*, Beaverbrook replied:

'I will give you my assurance, that during my 15 or 20 years' association with Low I have never suppressed a cartoon of Low's. I took whatever he gave, good or bad. Nor have I ever suppressed publication of unfavourable or critical opinion of myself.'<sup>35</sup>

Beaverbrook often used his newspapers themselves to emphasise his policy of allowing other political opinions to be published in them apart from his own. One prime example of this can be seen in an article in the *Daily Express* in 1946. Under the title of 'Policy and Purpose No Censorship' the article stated:

'It must be said that the columns of The *Express* Newspapers are open to writers and cartoonists of talent, whatever their political opinions; that no censorship of their views will ever be contemplated and that no attempt will be made to place any limitations on the free expression by contributors and staff of the viewpoints to which they hold. Any other course would be an infringement on the freedom of the Press which no political considerations could justify. And nothing will ever persuade The *Express* Newspapers to interfere in any way with the work of Low, Strube or Giles.'<sup>36</sup>

Beaverbrook even used the myth about his non-interference with Low to attract other journalists and editors to his papers with the implication that they would themselves enjoy similar freedoms. When it was rumoured that James Garvin was about to be removed as editor of the *Observer*, Beaverbrook offered him a job with the same freedom as Low was supposed to be getting:

"Jim if they do this to you, I offer you a place for your article on the *Sunday Express* to write as freely as Low draws for one year at £5,000."<sup>37</sup>

Patrick Balfour (later Lord Kinross) wrote an article on Low in 1950, just after the cartoonist had left the *Evening Standard*. Balfour was in a perfect position to judge for himself how much freedom Low was being given, as he had been a colleague of Low's for many years, having had his own 'Saturday Page' on the *Evening Standard*. Balfour knew

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<sup>35</sup> *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1945.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Express*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946.

both Low and Beaverbrook on personal terms and therefore, one would assume, had an intimate knowledge of both men. However, his article reinforced the myth, while revealing very little that had not already been said:

‘It is characteristic, that Low has established his reputation and influence drawing anti-Tory cartoons for a Tory paper. For the essence of his success is his complete personal freedom. He has never expressed any opinions but Low’s. Before consenting to join the *Evening Standard*, he fought for three years to get this freedom recognised in his contract. Beaverbrook respected Low’s independence, even when a prominent colleague burst into tears in his presence at one of Low’s more merciless caricatures: even when Low, on the eve of the last General Election, drew Beaverbrook as a witch on a broomstick preaching “politics for child-minds”. Of the 4,000-odd cartoons which Low drew for the *Evening Standard*, less than a dozen were suppressed.’<sup>38</sup>

Like most other cartoonists, Low was even asked on occasions to publicise the papers he worked for, by making references to the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Express* in his cartoons. Though his contract allowed him to ignore such advice he usually acquiesced. On one occasion, he was even asked to publicise an event that Express Newspapers were sponsoring at Olympia in 1937. In a letter to Low, Stanley Tiquet wrote:

‘I know that Low is a Law unto himself, but if you find it possible to make some reference to Radiolympia in your Topical Budget on the first Saturday of the show, August 29, it will be greatly appreciated.’<sup>39</sup>

As we have seen in the numerous extracts shown so far, the myth of Low’s complete independence was successfully sustained and embellished by both the cartoonist and his proprietor. Consequently, it has been their version of events that has been presented as the definitive one. In the light of this, it may not be unreasonable to suggest that Low may not have had, or could not in reality have expected, even discounting the possibility of libel, the complete independence that his contract allowed him. So even if the odd cartoon remained out for whatever reason, he still had greater latitude than, any of Beaverbrook’s other cartoonists. Yet, by comparing the other cartoonists employed during Beaverbrook’s

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<sup>37</sup> David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer*, Croom Helm, 1985, Page 278.

<sup>38</sup> Lord Kinross, ‘Puck With A Pencil’, *London Illustrated News*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1950.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Tiquet to David Low, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1937, Beaverbrook Archives. Low was on holiday throughout August so no ‘Topical Budget’ appeared in any case.

lifetime to Low's own position, one finds that Low came under greater scrutiny as a result of several factors. These included:

- (I) Low was the only cartoonist to have been directly pursued and then employed personally by Beaverbrook.
- (II) He was the only overtly political cartoonist not to be a staff artist. He worked independently, drawing just the one cartoon for each day's newspaper.
- (III) Low was also the only radical cartoonist to be employed while Beaverbrook was still in total control of his newspapers.

The factors that differentiated Low from the other cartoonists at Express Newspapers meant that Beaverbrook had a far greater involvement in, and concern for, his work. Katherine Bligh, a former research assistant to A.J.P. Taylor and Archivist of the Beaverbrook Archives, wrote in her brief biography of Beaverbrook, which precedes the catalogue of his papers, the following on Low:

'The socialist cartoonist David Low had to submit his work to be vetted personally by Beaverbrook before publication. He was eventually forced to resign in 1949 after Beaverbrook deliberately and progressively reduced the size and scope of his cartoons.'<sup>40</sup>

As a result, and primarily due to the differences that distinguished him from the other cartoonists employed by Beaverbrook, Low was forced to accept to an increasing extent (as he did not resign over such matters) censorship over his cartoons. With regard to those cartoons that were actually refused publication, Low alleges in his autobiography that there was only ever one that was left out for political reasons:

'Beaverbrook did not always laugh in the right place at my cartoons, and some galled him, but in the twenty-three years of my association with his newspapers I can recall only one cartoon being left unprinted because of a disagreement over its political content - a spirited effort about the situation in Greece in 1945 which was blocked at the request of Churchill in what he held to be in the interests of western democracy.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Katherine Bligh, *Catalogue of the Beaverbrook Papers in the House of Lords Record Office*, HMSO, 1997, Page XXI.

<sup>41</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 197.

The cartoon in question is entitled 'WISE WORDS CLOUDED'. The *Evening Standard's* refusal to publish this cartoon certainly perturbed Low. It led directly to him writing not, as would have been expected, to his editor, but to Beaverbrook personally:

'I am loath to trespass on your national time, but my position on the *Evening Standard* seems to be getting a little tangled. Could I possibly see you for a few minutes sometime?'<sup>42</sup>

Here is clear proof that Low did not appreciate his cartoons being refused publication. According to Rachael Whear, Low's younger daughter, Mrs Low dreaded greeting her husband when he got home from his studio with the news that the *Evening Standard* had phoned to inform him that his cartoon for the next day was not to be published. (He did not have a telephone at work to disturb him.) Such news would often lead to a fit of temper, which often took some time to pass.

Contrary to what Low states in his autobiography, there are many other examples of where his cartoons were turned down or altered for political purposes. Low alleges that the vast majority of them had been left out for reasons of a non-political nature, because of unfortunate circumstance or embarrassing coincidence:

'There were, however, about a couple of dozen left out for other reasons: because of unhappy chance turning into pointless insult, as for instance when a scoop photograph of King George V on the deck of his flagship to review the Fleet was found to be going to press facing a cartoon of Colonel Blimp doing exactly the same thing, but analogically [*sic*], in quite a different connection; because of a sudden illness of a politician figuring in the cartoon; because of the tears of Lord Rothermere at seeing himself caricatured, which made an impossible situation for Lord Beaverbrook since R. had helped B. to finance the purchase of the *Evening Standard*; or because the entire situation had changed between the time of drawing the cartoon and its going to press.'<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, the evidence does not support this explanation, nor do the cartoons quoted by Low as having been left unpublished. If one looks through Low's cartoons held by the University of Kent, as well as the 'Guard Books' at the London School of Economics which hold nearly all of his cartoons cut out of the *Evening Standard*, as well as the unpublished cartoons still held by the Low family, no cartoon of Colonel Blimp on the

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<sup>42</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1944, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>43</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 197.

deck of a ship reviewing the fleet appears to have ever existed. It is, of course, possible that it may now belong to someone else or have been destroyed.

There is in fact actual physical evidence to show that approximately forty Low cartoons were left unpublished.<sup>44</sup> As far as these cartoons are concerned, none of them appear to have been left out for the reasons given by Low, such as, for example, the illness of a politician or an unfortunate coincidence. If this is the case, then one must assume that the couple of dozen which he does refer to, either:

- (I) Did exist and have been lost or given away.
- (II) Did not exist; in which case could Low be attempting to cover up or justify why the ones we now have evidence for were left unpublished?

Of the unpublished cartoons that we have evidence of, thirteen appear to have been left out because they were politically unacceptable to Beaverbrook; nine because they were most probably seen by Beaverbrook as detrimental to the war effort during the Second World War; six because they were unacceptable in relation to the appeasement of Hitler; four because they were anti-monarchist; six because they were possibly seen at the time as in bad taste or just too strong in sentiment; two because of the fear of libel although, Low never cost the paper a penny in damages.

To get a more accurate picture of how many cartoons may have gone unpublished in total during the twenty-three years that Low worked at the *Evening Standard*, rather than just taking into account the unpublished cartoons that have survived, one needs to look at every Low cartoon ever published, with its title and date of publication. The *Evening Standard* published a total of 3,754 Low cartoons. Contracted to draw four cartoons a week, one can approximate, by looking at a database of his cartoons, in which weeks Low failed to meet his quota, thereby assuming from this that a cartoon had:

- (I) Not been drawn because Low may have been away on holiday or suffering from illness.
- (II) Been refused publication.
- (III) The editor had been unsure of the cartoon's suitability and thus had delayed its publication, either to get the proprietor's consent, or to alter the cartoon in order to make it acceptable.

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<sup>44</sup> Evidence of the unpublished cartoons comes from existing originals, facsimiles, and from other documentary sources which show the possibility of their existence.

There are, of course, many factors that have to be taken into account when using this approach. Firstly, one must assume that there were periods when Low was either incapacitated with an illness such as a migraine, a cold etc., or did not work if he did not feel like it, for there is always the possibility that if he felt like taking a particular day off he would do so. Although both these factors can be seen as valid in his defence, they can to a certain extent still be discounted. With regard to being ill, Low appears to have been very fortunate with his health while at the *Evening Standard*. Apart from suffering from influenza in March 1927, seven months before he joined the *Evening Standard*, there is no written evidence to show that he failed to produce his quota of cartoons per week due to ill health, except for two weeks during the 1945 General Election in July, when it was reported that he had gone to the seaside to recuperate from a bad cold.

As far as his missing a day's work if he felt like it, cartooning was more than a vocation to David Low, it was his life. Although it would be incorrect to call him a workaholic, he was both extremely motivated and conscientious about what he did. He had once revealed to Tom Driberg that 'the secret for success is simply hard work'.<sup>45</sup> Low also admitted, both in his autobiography and in an interview with Percy Cudlipp in 1959, that he had occasionally suffered from deep depression due to overwork.<sup>46</sup>

In the summer of 1963, he was forced to give up cartooning for good, due to emphysema. His condition subsequently worsened, and he died only a few months later. In his career he drew more than 14,000 cartoons, illustrations and caricatures. It is unlikely that anyone who could produce that amount of artwork, of which the vast majority was of the highest calibre of draughtsmanship, wit and inventiveness, would have been less than fully committed to what they did. In any case, Beaverbrook expected total commitment from all his employees, especially those on large salaries, and Low was one of the highest paid journalists in Fleet Street.

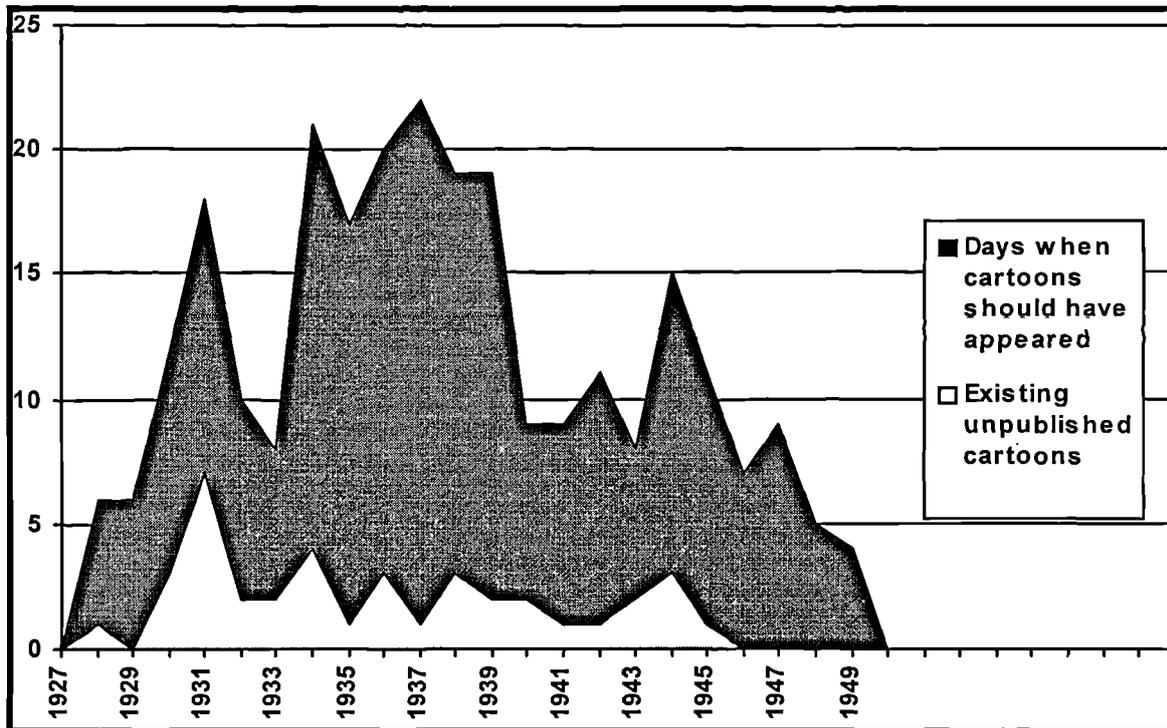
One must also take into account, when considering how many cartoons Low drew a week, the periods when he was on holiday or taking short breaks. For example, he regularly took a month off every summer. Certain events such as the death of King George V in January 1936, when no cartoons appeared during the week of mourning, have also to be noted. As well as this, the period from May 1940 to the end of that year also needs to be discounted as his routine, quite understandably, became erratic due to the war, and as he got used to working from home. Low's cartoons in the *Evening Standard* were usually

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<sup>45</sup> Unidentifiable newspaper article, circa September 1945, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>46</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for '*Wisdom*', an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

published on a regular basis, i.e. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.<sup>47</sup> Although this pattern often changed, it helps enormously in examining when cartoons should have appeared and did not.



Above. Taking into account all the provisos, such as reasons other than censorship for cartoons not being published, this graph indicates how many cartoons may have been refused publication over the period that Low was employed on the *Evening Standard*. It appears from this graph that his cartoons may have suffered from a higher rate of censorship during the Appeasement era and during the run-up to general elections.

Taking all these factors into consideration, around 230 cartoons could have potentially been refused publication. This figure includes the 40 odd cartoons that we already have material evidence of. Even if we then discount by a further third the figure that has been arrived at from the database of Low's cartoons at the *Evening Standard*, so as to allow Low the benefit of the doubt when he may have innocently failed to produce a cartoon, we still come to a very conservative approximation of 164 cartoons having been intentionally left out. At roughly 4% of Low's total output, not including the many cartoons that were altered, this figure seems to undermine the myth that Low had been granted full independence from editorial or proprietorial control.

<sup>47</sup> Between 1934 and 1940, Low's 'Topical Budget' was always published on a Saturday. There is evidence of only two 'Topical Budgets' being left out in that time.

## Chapter One: His Master's Voice

Lord Beaverbrook and his influence on the day to day running of the *Evening Standard*.

'Beaverbrook, as he once confessed, could never remain wholly serious for long, and he got much fun from explaining to his colleagues, including Churchill, how improper it would be for him to interfere with his newspapers, while he was at the time encouraging his editors in their pugnacity and criticism.'<sup>1</sup> (A.J.P. Taylor)



Max, Lord Beaverbrook.

'Often a friend would telephone him in a rage at having been attacked or caricatured; Beaverbrook's answer was always the same: "I have no control over my newspapers." And, I speak from personal observation, a minute later he would be on the telephone to one of his Editors telling him what was wrong with that morning's issue.'<sup>2</sup> (David Farrer)

### **Beaverbrook's background**

Max Aitken, having made his fortune from amalgamating Canada's cement works, decided to leave his native Canada in the summer of 1910 and came to England to start a career in

<sup>1</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 434.

<sup>2</sup> David Farrer, 'Press Lord Extraordinary', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1972. David Farrer worked for Beaverbrook as a 'political secretary', i.e. a newspaper summarizer and ghost-writer, until he became personal secretary to Beaverbrook in May 1940 when the latter became Minister for Aircraft Production.

politics. Within months of his arrival, and with the essential help and connections of his fellow compatriot and friend, the Conservative politician and later Prime Minister Andrew Bonar Law, he successfully fought and won a by-election for the Conservatives at Ashton-under-Lyne. Aitken never shone as a parliamentarian, but his increasing fondness for intrigue made him notorious in political circles. His reputation as a manipulator became legendary when he played a prominent role in the backstairs manoeuvring that led to Herbert Asquith's removal as Prime Minister during the First World War.

Lloyd George, euphoric at having become Prime Minister in place of Asquith, provisionally offered Aitken a seat in the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade in recognition of his efforts. The new Prime Minister, however, quickly realised what the repercussions of such an appointment could be on his own political future. If Aitken's talents for political intrigue had been so effective in bringing down Asquith, could he not conspire against the new Prime Minister, were he to lose favour with the Canadian some time in the future? To compound matters, the Conservatives, who had been in wartime coalition with the Liberals, did not accept Lloyd George's leadership readily. Aitken, although a Tory himself, was also treated with suspicion by many in his own party. His appointment to the Cabinet could therefore have upset Lloyd George's *fragile power base*, which was reliant on Conservative support.

Consequently, Lloyd George broke his pledge, gave Sir Albert Stanley the post of President of the Board of Trade and offered Aitken a peerage instead. A peerage, Lloyd George believed, would remove Aitken permanently from the House of Commons into the relative safety of the Lords. There he could do little to harm his continued leadership of the country.

Aitken was furious when he found out that Lloyd George had gone back on his word. Realising that he was being outmanoeuvred, Aitken knew there was little choice but to accept the peerage. He had no wish whatsoever to enter the Lords, but if he turned it down he would have been made to look entirely ridiculous, as he had already notified his constituency that he was being offered a seat in the Cabinet.

Removed to the Upper House, Aitken took the title of Lord Beaverbrook, knowing that his chances of achieving high office had all but disappeared. Although he had little alternative, he came to bitterly regret the acceptance of a peerage. He believed that his removal from the House of Commons had also taken him out of real political life. 'What

would I not give to be plain Max Aitken again!' he was reported to have said as late as 1937.<sup>3</sup>

This episode deeply affected his psyche and outlook on politics. Beaverbrook looked for another medium to gain and pursue political influence and power. He came to the conclusion that the only way to do this effectively outside of the House of Commons was to acquire a mass circulation newspaper, thereby becoming a 'Press Baron'. Modelling himself on Lord Northcliffe, Beaverbrook believed a newspaper empire would establish him as an independent political force. This would allow him to bring pressure and influence upon whichever party was in power at Westminster. David Low believed he made the *Daily Express* into 'a kind of alternative government'.<sup>4</sup> Many years later, Beaverbrook publicly admitted that he had begun his press activities to propagandise on his own behalf, and in order to establish himself as an independent political force. In 1947, to a surprised Royal Commission on the Press, he stated that he ran his newspapers 'merely for the purpose of making propaganda and with no other motive'.<sup>5</sup>

## **Beaverbrook becomes a Press Baron**

In December 1916, Beaverbrook acquired a majority share holding in the *Daily Express* for £17,500. The paper had been in financial trouble for many years, and was suffering from a rapidly decreasing circulation. Under his proprietorship it would peak, during the inter-war period, at a circulation of over two million. In 1918, Beaverbrook founded the *Sunday Express*, which gave him a seven-day newspaper stable. Yet, he still felt he needed a London evening paper to complete his empire. When, in 1923, the newspaper group E. Hulton & Co. was put up for sale by its owner Sir Edward Hulton, Beaverbrook saw his opportunity. The Hulton Group consisted of numerous provincial papers as well as the *Evening Standard*, a small but exclusive London evening paper for the well-to-do. Lord Rothermere had also been showing interest in buying the Hulton Group to add to his own press holdings. Sir Edward Hulton refused outright to sell to Rothermere, but he did agree to sell to Beaverbrook. So, as a personal favour to Rothermere, Beaverbrook purchased E. Hulton & Co. on his behalf, and subsequently took the *Evening Standard* as commission for his part in the acquisition. Beaverbrook now had 'three papers - a morning, an evening

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<sup>3</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 25.

<sup>4</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 175.

and a Sunday, one or other of them always just published or about to be published'.<sup>6</sup> Beaverbrook was to become much more than just a Press Baron, he was to immerse himself fully in both the running and direction of his newspapers.

The *Evening Standard* was, and would remain, a totally different paper to Beaverbrook's mass circulation *Daily Express*. The *Standard's* circulation was, at the time of its acquisition, limited to the City, West End, and the affluent suburbs of London. According to A.J.P. Taylor, 'the news vendors always knew that the man in the bowler hat would be the one to ask for the *Evening Standard*'.<sup>7</sup> In technical advertising terms, the two *Express* papers aimed at all classes of readers, while the *Evening Standard* was designed mainly for socio-economic groups A and B; approximately the top 25% of London's population. Beaverbrook was determined that it should continue to appeal to readers of a higher income and intellect. It also helped avoid any rivalry with Lord Rothermere's *Evening News*, which attracted more of a mass market. Beaverbrook was particularly sensitive about his rivalry with Rothermere, notably because of the latter's large shareholding in the *Evening Standard*.

The *Evening Standard* was not as politically important to Beaverbrook as his flagship, the *Daily Express*. Arthur Christiansen recognised that with the *Daily Express* 'the policies were Lord Beaverbrook's job'.<sup>8</sup> The *Evening Standard*, on the other hand, was given greater political latitude. To emphasise the unpredictability of Beaverbrook's own character, the content and editorial slant of the *Evening Standard* was allowed to directly contradict that of the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*. This decision was heavily influenced by Beaverbrook's penchant for mischief-making. To James Cameron 'Beaverbrook loved making mischief either in high politics or among his friends and cronies.'<sup>9</sup> At times unscrupulous, even malign, Beaverbrook's influence made sure that the *Evening Standard* became an outlet for sheer devilment. In turn, he undoubtedly enjoyed the controversy that the paper invited. It soon led to his quickly acquiring a diabolical reputation as a Press Lord, which he came to thrive on.

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<sup>5</sup> Beaverbrook's response to the Royal Commission on the Press, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1947, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 216.

<sup>7</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 215.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life*, Heinemann, 1961, Page 144.

## Beaverbrook's colonial attitude towards Britain's social élite

'We're both transplanted Britishers - he was born in Canada - and he's not an orthodox Conservative peer by any manner of means.'<sup>10</sup> (Low on Beaverbrook)

The exclusivity of the British ruling classes during the inter-war years made Beaverbrook, at times, feel like a social outsider. Being a Conservative Peer and prominent newspaper proprietor was no barrier to the abhorrence felt by many towards him even in his own Party. To them he had little breeding, a coarse, uneducated colonial for all his wealth and influence. Such rejection greatly affected his perception of the English upper classes, and resulted in a strong distaste for the idle rich. This had a direct bearing on his classlessness both towards his politics and his newspapers. He expected the same stance from his journalists. According to Michael Foot:

'Beaverbrook was a rampaging individualist. He had an irresponsible detestation for the stuffiness and stupidities and snobberies of the English establishment. He had a contempt for current orthodoxies.'<sup>11</sup>

Beaverbrook bore a constant grudge against the establishment, resenting how others regarded him, even when it was with interest and amusement. To Foot, 'he was an independently minded person who hated the British establishment'.<sup>12</sup> A self-made multi-millionaire with a strong sense of his own colonial upbringing, he was not prepared to support the continuance of the *status quo*.

Consequently, Beaverbrook thought it perfectly acceptable for his newspapers to mock the upper classes, especially when it helped increase circulation. Through this medium, he let it be known that he held a deep dislike of aristocratic privilege, snobbery and inherited wealth. He even favoured the abolition of the hereditary House of Lords to which he belonged, and particularly abhorred the British public-school system. 'Yah! I *hate* Old Etonians!'<sup>13</sup> he was once heard to say. For, according to Beaverbrook:

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<sup>9</sup> James Cameron, 'Beaverbrook's Cartoonists', *Beaverbrook's England 1940-1965*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 11. Cameron became sub-editor of the *Daily Express* in 1939, and resigned from the Beaverbrook Press in 1950. See Dennis Griffiths's *The Encyclopaedia of the British Press*, Macmillan Press, 1992, Page 140.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from an interview with David Low, *The New Yorker*, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1948

<sup>11</sup> Michael Foot, 'The Case for Beelzebub', *Debts of Honour*, Davis-Poynter, 1980, Page 145.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 286.

‘There is a danger that the public school may turn out a boy to type - the individual turns out himself. In the hour of action it is probable that the individual will defeat the type.’<sup>14</sup>

This was a somewhat surprising attitude from a man who sent his own boys, Peter and Max, to Westminster School. Even if it wasn't Eton or Harrow, it was still a very well established public school for the wealthy and privileged.<sup>15</sup> What was also inconsistent in Beaverbrook's perception of the upper classes was his wholehearted support for the monarchy. For was it not the monarchy which was largely responsible for the survival of the class system in the first place? He never allowed criticism or ridicule of the Royal Family in his newspapers. One possible explanation for this contradictory approach is that the monarchy, represented by the King Emperor, was the heart and crown of the British Empire, which Beaverbrook held most dear. Beaverbrook's animosity towards the British upper classes influenced his newspapers. It made his position as a typical Conservative seem contradictory. Low believed he did not conform to any class or party:

‘Beaverbrook did not fit the frame. He dislocated the pattern, ruptured the continuity, pushed traditions and institutions around. He was nobody but himself. His loyalty was placed where and when, in his arbitrary judgement, at any given time, it was deserved. He certainly did not conform to anything.’<sup>16</sup>

Through his newspapers, Beaverbrook attempted to bridge the class system as best he could. Thomas Clarke, an independent observer, noted in the 1920s that Beaverbrook was as ‘conscious of inequality and as sympathetic to the working man as any social reformer I have met’.<sup>17</sup> A cat may look at a king, Beaverbrook constantly reminded his readers. As a result, the *Daily Express* was often described as the closest thing to the classless paper. Its style was not dissimilar to that of North American journalism at the time. Lord Deedes believed that Beaverbrook did more through his newspapers to emancipate British society than any of its pre-war political leaders. Peter Howard in a similar vein noted how

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<sup>14</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Don't Trust to Luck*, Daily Express Publications, 1951, Page 45.

<sup>15</sup> Beaverbrook later regretted giving his sons a public-school education. He told one of his executives, ‘If I had my time again I should send my boys to a Secondary School. Get them into the labour market early. If they don't learn to work before they're twenty they will never work.’ Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 208.

<sup>16</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 174.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Wintour, *The Rise and Fall of Fleet Street*, Hutchinson, 1989, Page 91.

‘Beaverbrook’s newspapers did more to increase wages, improve working conditions, and alter the attitudes of privilege and power than most of his left-wing competitors.’<sup>18</sup>

### Political maverick and intriguer

Throughout his life, Beaverbrook believed himself to be a true-blue Conservative. This was due to his strong belief in capitalism, the Empire, and to his past loyalty to Bonar Law. Yet he never saw himself as a true party man. He never took party politics too seriously, and showed little active support for the Tories except at election time. He hardly ever attended the House of Lords. He was more interested in political moods and intrigues than principles. He remained forever an outsider, an individualist, and was once asked to resign from the Carlton Club. Beaverbrook openly admitted that he had not been a good party man:

‘I have tried to persuade the party to walk in my direction instead of walking with the party.’<sup>19</sup>

All this naturally led to him being seen increasingly by members of his own party as a disruptive and unscrupulous proprietor:

‘Unrestrained, unpredictable, and irresponsible, he was heartily abhorred by leading Conservative politicians - although he considered himself as belonging to their party.’<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Dugdale, editor of the right-wing weekly *Truth*, was fearful of what Beaverbrook might do to the Conservative Party. He described him as a man ‘utterly and completely untrustworthy...’<sup>21</sup> Despite such criticism Beaverbrook refused to be tied to his party’s apron strings. He was determined to protect his independence from party control.

‘Inside the Conservative Party, whether as politician or journalist, I should be prohibited from appealing to popular opinion against the decision of my leaders.’<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 61. Peter Howard was a former England rugby player who wrote a vitriolic political gossip column in the *Sunday Express* for many years.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 196.

<sup>20</sup> C. J. Hambro, *Newspaper Lords in British Politics*, Macdonald, 1958, Page 24.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945*, Pimlico, 1994, Page 231.

When his political mentor Bonar Law, who as Prime Minister, had suggested to Beaverbrook that he should run an official Tory newspaper, the latter had replied:

‘No. In politics I am bound - for no man can really be a politician without submitting to the necessary trammels of the party... In the Press, on the contrary, I am free and can work from the outside... I never mean to hold a public office again except during a period of war.’<sup>23</sup>

Beaverbrook would therefore not allow party loyalties to get in the way of publicising, through his newspapers, his own views and ideas of how the country should be run:

‘The normal attitude of the Press towards the politicians must be one of complete independence. This will take the form of criticism when it appears that the political leaders are going wrong and adopting policies of which the nation does not approve.’<sup>24</sup>

In Beaverbrook’s book, *Politicians and the Press*, published in 1926, he wrote:

‘The *Daily Express*, while its sympathies are undoubtedly Conservative, has preferred to maintain a complete independence and to support or resist politicians in so far as their policies do or do not conform to what it believes to be the public interest.’<sup>25</sup>

When Law died prematurely, Beaverbrook found that his successor, Stanley Baldwin was unpalatable. As a consequence, he had begun to distance himself from the Tory Party by the time the *Evening Standard* was acquired in 1923. However, it was still expected that the Beaverbrook Press would take every opportunity in attacking the opposition; i.e. the Liberal and Labour Parties. The *Evening Standard* also began to find plenty of space for articles denouncing Baldwin and other Tories who attracted Beaverbrook’s displeasure. Even though the *Evening Standard*’s readership was overwhelmingly Conservative, and despite the fact that the proprietor often let it be known that he would far rather be in harmony with than opposed to a Conservative executive, he personally contributed many of the most pernicious attacks on his own party’s leadership.

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<sup>22</sup> Edgar Middleton, *Beaverbrook: The Statesmen and the Man*, Stanley Paul, 1934, Page 196.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 218.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily News*, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1925.

<sup>25</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and The Press*, Hutchinson, 1926, Page 125.

Even so, Harold Nicolson, who joined the *Evening Standard* in 1929, asked for an undertaking that he would never have to write anything that conflicted with his political principles.<sup>26</sup> Beaverbrook reassured him that he was not worried by his beliefs, because he wanted lively journalists more than he wanted good Conservatives. Beaverbrook was as happy to attack Conservatives as Socialists, and thrived on doing so. Politicians of all persuasions were welcome targets for his newspapers. On numerous occasions he would personally denounce all parties. For example, on one occasion, the front page of the *Daily Express* had a statement by Beaverbrook complaining that his 'joy has turned to ashes' and that 'rewards are but shadows' because 'miserable and wretched Governments - Liberal, Socialist and Tory - have brought us to a disintegrating Empire...'<sup>27</sup>

Beaverbrook was not the type of man to commit himself to any political party. C.F.G. Masterman, a distinguished Liberal MP, understood the reasons behind his maverick approach to politics:

'He has no fundamental sympathy with the stupidities and squalors and sentimentalities of a Conservative Party... He hates and despises "Socialism"... he is naturally a Liberal but has little belief in the future of the Liberal Party.'<sup>28</sup>

In January 1949, Beaverbrook let it be known, without any apparent distress, that he had not renewed his subscription to his local Epsom constituency Conservative Association, having told the agent there that he was 'no longer a Tory'.<sup>29</sup>

Considering himself in a position to influence the minds of the electorate, Beaverbrook revelled in the excitement and crisis of politics. His greatest weakness was an overrated belief in his own self-importance, and in the power of his newspapers to influence events in British politics. He was, as James Cameron has written, 'not the great British figure he sometimes thought himself to be'.<sup>30</sup> This belief led him on occasions to believe that he was the only alternative choice as leader of the Conservatives. He thrived in taking on the government, whatever its colour, over what he would later admit were his fleeting obsessions. Harold Nicolson believed that he lived only by opposition:

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<sup>26</sup> Harold Nicolson proved to be no party man and was instinctively drawn to rebels.

<sup>27</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 305.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Pages 192-93.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Page 311.

<sup>30</sup> James Cameron, *Beaverbrook's England 1940-1965*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 11.

'If he cannot find an opposition he creates one.'<sup>31</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor believed that Beaverbrook's ideal was a perpetual Conservative Government with himself attacking almost every detail of its policy. Low noted the bitter rage of right-wing Tories who were not at all assuaged by Beaverbrook's explanation 'that he did not oppose the Government but only the men in it'.<sup>32</sup>

An early practitioner of single-issue politics, Beaverbrook discovered an issue which he believed could bring down Baldwin. He saw the need for what was in reality an outmoded idea, namely, the use of Imperial Tariffs in order to bring an end to Britain's economic decline. In creating the Empire Crusade in 1930, he proclaimed that he was only interested in Empire Free Trade and stated that 'I neither intend nor desire leadership'.<sup>33</sup> He nevertheless behaved as if his true ambition was to destroy Baldwin.

During the Second World War, Beaverbrook's demand for a Second Front was interpreted by some as a Machiavellian manoeuvre to replace Churchill with himself as Prime Minister. At a time when the war was going especially badly, he found a popular cause that could have toppled Churchill, had the Prime Minister lost the confidence of the House of Commons over his running of the war. When Beaverbrook told Bruce Lockhart on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1942, that Churchill would have little choice but to accept the idea of a Second Front, the latter believed he could almost hear Beaverbrook's mind working:

'Winston will fall on this; Eden is not strong enough to be P.M. Therefore I'll run him for the premiership. Then my chance will come. I have always said that Max's one unfulfilled ambition is to be P.M. of England, and, however impossible of attainment this goal may be, Max will try to reach it.'<sup>34</sup>

A.G. Gardiner noted a month earlier, on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1942, that Beaverbrook was 'an intriguer first, last and always, and he is the more dangerous because his intrigues are governed by no principle that I have ever been able to discover - always by personal aims and an insane passion to pull strings'.<sup>35</sup> Beaverbrook enjoyed periods of crisis, political or otherwise, to such a degree that he found alternative periods of stability immensely boring. According to John Elliot, the son of R.D. Blumenfeld, 'If things were going smoothly his

<sup>31</sup> *Harold Nicolson Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, Page 59.

<sup>32</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 175.

<sup>33</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 280.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1939-1965*, Macmillan, 1980.

fingers itched to make them awry'.<sup>36</sup> He needed an outlet for what Michael Foot considered was his 'driving energy'.<sup>37</sup> In the House of Commons it was said that as Minister of Aircraft Production, 'Lord Beaverbrook was at his very best when things are at their very worst'.<sup>38</sup> Harold Nicolson noticed that he had no taste for the slow grind: 'Beaverbrook enjoys a fight but soon gets bored and makes trouble'.<sup>39</sup> Foot also witnessed how quickly bored he became, making him often susceptible to being 'moved by whims'.<sup>40</sup>

In 1928, and after four years of a Baldwin Government, Beaverbrook told Rothermere that his newspapers were boring him. 'I am practically retired', he said 'I do not take any interest in my newspapers.'<sup>41</sup> A year later he was talking about giving up his newspapers entirely, and passing his interest in them to his sons. In June 1930 he issued a formal press statement declaring that he had made a gift of his controlling share-interest in his newspapers to and for the benefit of his eldest son. Nearly twenty-five years on from there, Beaverbrook was to make a gift of the same shares again, if this can be believed. In 1954 the following announcement appeared in the *Daily Express*:

'Lord Beaverbrook has given a block of shares in the *Express* to the Beaverbrook Foundation. The newspaper has passed out of his control.'<sup>42</sup>

Such stories as this one appeared continually over the years, and was often no more than a ruse to distance himself from his papers. Whoever legally owned the shares there could be no doubt that Beaverbrook, during his lifetime, was to remain the one and only boss. No one who worked for him ever took such statements seriously. When E.J. Robertson let it be known at a staff dinner that Lord Beaverbrook had decided to give up his involvement in the running of his newspapers, this statement, he regretted to report, was received with 'general laughter'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Koss, *Fleet Street Radical: A.G. Gardiner and the Daily News*, Allen Lane, 1973, Page 246. A.G. Gardiner had been editor of the *Daily News*.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 344. R.D. Blumenfeld had been the Editor of the *Daily Express* when Beaverbrook took it over in 1916.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>38</sup> C. J. Hambro, *Newspaper Lords in British Politics*, Macdonald, 1958, Page 57.

<sup>39</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, Fontana, 1969, Page 56.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Foot, 'The Case for Beelzebub', *Debts of Honour*, Davis-Poynter, 1980, Page 100.

<sup>41</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 277.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Express*, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1954.

<sup>43</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 249. E.J. Robertson (1892-1960) was born and brought up in Canada, and first encountered Beaverbrook while working as a hotel desk-clerk. Beaverbrook was so impressed by his efficiency that he offered him a job as assistant to the General Manager of the *Daily Express* after he was demobbed out of the Canadian Army in 1918. Robertson was rapidly promoted to General Manager of both the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*. In all, he worked for Beaverbrook for 36 years, ending up as Chairman of the Beaverbrook Group. According to William J. Brittain, 'Little is heard of him, but few big business decisions

## Beaverbrook's enjoyment in employing left-wingers

Himself a combination of political maverick, intriguer, and mischief-maker led Beaverbrook to employ provocative journalists and cartoonists on the *Evening Standard*. They in turn inspired the controversy and discussion amongst the *Evening Standard's* readership that the proprietor required. One journalist who was often advised by him to write articles that were in direct contrast to the opinions of the *Evening Standard's* readership was Peter Howard, who saw in his proprietor 'a joy in antagonism, a love of being odd man out. It was a form of pride of spirit that was a weakness in the man. And from time to time it meant that his delight in defiance warped his influence and wasted his toil.'<sup>44</sup>

Beaverbrook was skilled at spotting those with immense talent and using them for his own ends. He took great delight in employing only the best and the liveliest journalists, cartoonists and editors, making them all his willing slaves. He wanted, and got from them, passion and conviction. Those employed tended to have left-wing or Liberal sympathies. This began Beaverbrook's long flirtation with the Left. 'The Beaver', Arthur Christiansen, the Editor of the *Daily Express* wrote, 'is fascinated by left-wingers'.<sup>45</sup> Their influence changed the *Evening Standard's* outlook. They not only made it much livelier and more topical, but also inadvertently created a constant flow of publicity for the newspaper. Some of those employed by Beaverbrook, such as Tom Driberg, Foot, Bevan, Frank Owen, and Low, were nearly all rebels like himself. They shared his sense of excitement and mischief. Beaverbrook made them feel that he and they were on the same side even though politically they were not. He often sang 'The Red Flag' at his dinner table to the consternation of Conservative politicians and 'earnest transatlantic industrialists'.<sup>46</sup>

The employment of left-wingers was also helpful to Beaverbrook in his insidious attempts to sabotage the moderate leaders of the Labour Party. During the 1950s, it was Beaverbrook who gave Michael Foot a considerable gift of £3,000 to fight a libel writ threatening to put *Tribune* into bankruptcy.<sup>47</sup> (*Tribune*, with its doctrinal approach to Socialism, was at the time a considerable embarrassment to the Labour leadership.)

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and sometimes editorial were made without him being consulted.' In his obituary, Sir Max Aitken wrote 'next to my father he made by far the biggest contribution towards the success of our newspapers'. See Dennis Griffiths's, *The Encyclopaedia of the British Press*, Macmillan Press, 1992, Page 492.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 29.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life*, Heinemann, 1961, Page 252.

<sup>46</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 222.

<sup>47</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 470.

Many of the left-wingers Beaverbrook employed were initially suspicious of him. They distrusted his motives as well as his politics. Some feared that they had been solely employed as professional fig-leaves. Whatever they may have felt at the beginning of their time with Beaverbrook, many soon found themselves exhilarated by writing or drawing for a newspaper which was frequently hostile to its readership's beliefs. Such a policy may have caused continual derision in Conservative ranks, but Beaverbrook took on all incoming flak. He was utterly indifferent to criticism, for nobody loved a row better than he did. It could have been considered inspired anarchy on Beaverbrook's part, but it meant that the impact of these journalists' efforts was often that much greater. They were aware that, as Low later found to his cost at the *Daily Herald*, preaching to the converted was less satisfying and less effective than undermining the enemy at the *Evening Standard*. The majority of *Evening Standard* editors during the 1930s and 1940s, such as Percy Cudlipp, Frank Owen, Michael Foot and Sydney Elliott, felt antipathy towards the Conservatives, and were continually encouraged by Beaverbrook to mock the rich and powerful.<sup>48</sup>

Beaverbrook made sure that all those staff that fulfilled his faith in them were well remunerated, and thus 'in his pocket'. He took great trouble with presents, handing out cheques and free holidays. Most of his closest relationships were affected by money. For example, much of the existing correspondence between Beaverbrook and Michael Foot during the years of the latter's employment at the *Evening Standard* consists of letters of thanks from Foot to Beaverbrook for substantial salary increases or large unsolicited gifts of money:

'Here is a magnificent and splendid private fortune which you may invest in war loan, or some other security, thus establishing yourself for all time in the ranks of the capitalists. It is given to you as recognition of the splendid work that you do in the early mornings in the *Evening Standard*.'<sup>49</sup>

Foot was taken aback by Beaverbrook's generosity:

'I now discover that I have become not merely a capitalist but a bloated capitalist! Thank you for your great kindness to me.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Frank Owen was not a left-winger but was vehemently anti-Tory.

<sup>49</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Michael Foot, undated, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Foot to Lord Beaverbrook, undated, Beaverbrook Archives.

The unsolicited gifts kept on arriving, much to Foot's continued disbelief:

'I have today received a note from you that leaves me breathless. To receive reward in such an exaggerated manner for work which I have so much enjoyed baffles all attempt at thanks.'<sup>51</sup>

Foot realised that receiving such generous gifts from Beaverbrook would over time make him consciously feel more and more beholden to him. Foot increasingly found it difficult to go against Beaverbrook over the political direction of the *Evening Standard*. As the Second World War came to an end, Foot's and Beaverbrook's views on the post-war world widened. Foot realised that if he wanted to espouse his own deeply held political views, he had no choice but to leave for another paper more sympathetic to his own outlook.

### **Burning both ends of the candle**

Allowing the *Evening Standard* to have different opinions on political issues from his own, meant that Beaverbrook often appeared as if he was continually changing his position. This was something that never really worried him. He was quite happy about changing his mind. 'Nothing is so bad as consistency', he once admitted to Charles Wintour.<sup>52</sup>

Beaverbrook, with the help of his two conflicting newspapers, could burn both ends of the candle at once. It gave him the invaluable opportunity of keeping his political options open. Politicians and commentators found it increasingly difficult to accuse him of following a simple line. This, indeed, saved his reputation after 1940, having personally supported Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler in the late 1930s. The *Evening Standard's* stance over Appeasement had been in direct contrast with the *Daily Express*, which called for Britain to remain isolated from European entanglements, as its repeated headline over the period, 'BRITAIN WILL NOT BE INVOLVED IN WAR THIS YEAR OR NEXT YEAR', stated. It was the *Evening Standard's* differing viewpoint that saved Beaverbrook from being labelled an appeaser, which he undoubtedly was. The apparent difference in outlook also helped to support the myth that here was a benevolent proprietor allowing his employees complete freedom of expression.

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Foot to Lord Beaverbrook, undated, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Wintour, *The Rise and Fall of Fleet Street*, 1989, Hutchinson, Page 92. Charles Wintour was Assistant Editor of the *Daily Express* until he became editor of the *Evening Standard* in 1959.

Beaverbrook's vociferous support for Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler in the *Daily Express* was undeniable. Even after war had been declared he still believed that Britain could come to a negotiated settlement with Germany, and avoid all-out conflict. Throughout the 'phoney war' period his newspapers obstructed austerity measures. The *Daily Express* attacked both the Government's attempts to bring in rationing and its introduction of blackouts. Hugh Cudlipp, later a Beaverbrook employee, thought that the *Daily Express* 'bordered on sedition'.<sup>53</sup> Beaverbrook was, as Michael Foot later wrote, 'still sulking in his appeaser's tent'.<sup>54</sup> It was Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister and Beaverbrook's inclusion in the War Cabinet as Minister of Aircraft Production that dramatically led to a diametrical change in the latter's position.

After the dramatic rescue of the B.E.F. from the beaches of Dunkirk, three of Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard* journalists, Foot, Owen and Howard, decided to jointly produce a short polemical book. The purpose of their efforts was to put the blame for Britain's defeat, and the daunting situation that was now having to be faced, firmly on Chamberlain's shoulders and those that had supported him. This, as Foot was to later write, could not be done in the *Evening Standard*. 'Even under the liberal and inspired hands of Frank Owen, the *Evening Standard* could not say everything that they wanted to say.'<sup>55</sup>

They wrote *Guilty Men* under the pseudonym 'Cato' to, as they claimed, deceive Beaverbrook, amongst others. What seemed amazing was that in the book Beaverbrook, although he had shown himself to be one of Chamberlain's leading supporters, was totally absolved of any blame. Beaverbrook was mentioned just three times, all favourably and finding him in effect not guilty. He was specifically praised for his sponsorship of a 'Grow more food' campaign. The book even concluded with a reference to him as one of the country's potential saviours. In block capitals it stressed that with men such as Churchill, Bevin and Beaverbrook now in control:

'WE HAVE AN ASSURANCE THAT ALL THAT IS WITHIN THE RANGE OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT WILL BE DONE TO MAKE THIS ISLAND "A FORTRESS".'<sup>56</sup>

Beaverbrook had been firmly placed in the Churchill camp and not that of the appeasers. Not surprisingly, Beaverbrook loved the book, according to his secretary David

<sup>53</sup> Hugh Cudlipp, *The Prerogative of the Harlot*, Bodley Head, 1980, Page 295.

<sup>54</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 370.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>56</sup> 'Cato', *Guilty Men*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1940, Page 124.

Farrer. Of course, he guessed very quickly who had been responsible for writing it, but had no intention of sacking the authors and took great amusement in their attempts at undermining the credibility of those appeasers still in the government. A.J.P. Taylor even claimed that ‘inspiration from Beaverbrook himself had not been lacking...’<sup>57</sup> Beaverbrook half pretended that ‘Cato’ was himself. According to Tom Driberg,<sup>58</sup> Lord Halifax, then Foreign Secretary, believed that Beaverbrook, ‘with his penchant for making trouble’, had provided Foot, Howard and Owen with material for such a volume.<sup>59</sup> Halifax had at the time asked Beaverbrook how he managed on his ministerial salary, to which the latter had mischievously replied, ‘Ah yes, but I’ve still got my royalties from *Guilty Men*, haven’t I?’<sup>60</sup> This response only reinforced Halifax’s suspicions.

In 1944, Beaverbrook was asked by a reporter to name those responsible for Appeasement. ‘Everybody knows that. Halifax, Hoare, Simon and the dead Chamberlain.’<sup>61</sup> From appeaser to Churchill’s confidant; the transition in just over four years was complete. Michael Foot recently admitted to having let him off extremely lightly. When questioned on why Beaverbrook had been absolved of any blame, Foot explained, in a not-too-convincing manner, that ‘there was a war on and Beaverbrook was now doing a vital and important job as M.A.P’.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Foot did admit that he, Owen, and Howard ‘were extremely solicitous of his views and did not emphasise them at all in the book.’<sup>63</sup> How very honest to say so, albeit fifty years later. According to Foot, Beaverbrook had absolutely no involvement in the writing of *Guilty Men*:

‘Beaverbrook was mystified. We were also spreading as many rumours as we could about how the bloody country had been unprepared for war.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 435.

<sup>58</sup> Tom Driberg joined the *Daily Express* in 1928 where he initiated the famous ‘William Hickey’ column. He stayed there till he was fired in the summer of 1943 for using information picked up in the *Daily Express* office in a speech in the House of Commons.

<sup>59</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 247.

<sup>60</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 435.

<sup>61</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 383.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

## To what degree did Beaverbrook interfere in the running of the *Evening Standard*?

Beaverbrook claimed that the *Evening Standard* was the most independent of his newspapers and that he had no power or influence over his journalists or the paper's content. To a certain extent this was true, as he was rarely troubled by its politics, unlike that of the *Daily Express*. Nevertheless, he reminded his *Evening Standard* editors of his non-involvement, even though he continued to bombard them daily with phone-calls and numerous memos containing specific ideas and meticulous criticisms and directives. He even admitted to William J. Brittain, that 'the way to run a newspaper is to have a young man as editor and an old bird like me on top of him'.<sup>65</sup>

As far as his editors were concerned, he constantly pretended that he had no control whatsoever over editorial decision-making, giving them the impression that the *Evening Standard* and he were entirely unconnected:

'I am not a Director of the *Evening Standard*. I do own 51% of the shares, but I never interfere with the direction or control of the paper by the Board. Wilson is Chairman in name and in fact. I must say as the principal shareholder in the paper, I am determined not to interfere with the editorial direction.'<sup>66</sup>

According to the *Daily Express* cartoonist, Michael Cummings, claims of non-interference were a ploy Beaverbrook used to great effect. In private, 'he would be in complete control of every ha'penny of expenditure and of every full stop and comma of print which appeared in his columns'.<sup>67</sup> Beaverbrook's senior staff fully supported him in his deceit. In 1947, E.J. Robertson, then general manager of Express Newspapers, was called as a witness to the Royal Commission on the Press. He categorically denied any interference from Beaverbrook in the running of Express Newspapers:

'Mr Robertson also stated that from the time Express Newspapers Limited formed its policy committee, Lord Beaverbrook had never made the slightest attempt to override its decisions.'<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 35.

<sup>66</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1928, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Allen, *Voice of Britain, The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 38.

<sup>68</sup> As reported in the *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1947.

Even after writing detailed memoranda to his senior management regarding that day's paper or edition of it, Beaverbrook would finish with a disclaimer stating that he was only giving advice and it was up to them to take it or leave it. Evidence of this is shown in the last paragraph of a memo that Beaverbrook sent to E.J. Robertson in 1929:

'In making these comments, Lord Beaverbrook would make it clear that they are sent for your private information and must not be passed on, although you are free to make use of the material given, but on your own account. His Lordship can only act as a critic of the paper. He cannot and will not take any part in its management or direction.'<sup>69</sup>

It was difficult for Beaverbrook's editors and even managers to disregard, to any large extent, his advice. They knew that if they ignored him, he would phone at the most inconvenient hour and bawl them out for not doing what he had asked them. Even if they were seriously convinced that Beaverbrook was wrong on a matter, the least they felt obliged to do in practice was explain themselves in the form of a detailed reply.

Statements of non-interference or involvement gave Beaverbrook the perfect alibi when it came to being held responsible for anything appearing in his newspapers. He was able to disclaim all responsibility for any article or cartoon published which caused disfavour with either the *Evening Standard* readership or politicians. On one such occasion in December 1940, Churchill was furious about a Low cartoon that had made fun of Arthur Greenwood, then Labour Cabinet Minister without Portfolio. On such occasions Beaverbrook always denied control over Low, stating that it was a 'matter of real grief' that he should be the occasion of such attacks upon 'my Prime Minister':

'I do not know how to deal with the situation. I do not agree with Low. I have rarely done so. I do not interfere with Low. I have never done so.'<sup>70</sup>

Such statements were only a smoke-screen for his continual interference in his newspapers, as, Peter Howard confirmed:

'I did not believe Beaverbrook's statements, repeated time and again for thirty years, that he had nothing to do with the control of his newspapers. The truth is that he played a ceaseless part in their control.'<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to E.J. Robertson, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>70</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Winston Churchill, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1940, Churchill Archive.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 61.

Even when it came to sacking people, especially amongst those he knew well, both Bruce Lockhart and Alan Wood<sup>72</sup> found that Beaverbrook hated doing so. He left it to others even though it was very often at his instigation. It was normally the editor who took the responsibility off Beaverbrook for sacking staff. When it came to sacking editors, Beaverbrook could not even do this openly. R.J. Thompson, having just sacked Winston Churchill on Beaverbrook's orders, was also then fired for showing that he had too much independence of mind to make a satisfactory editor for the likes of Beaverbrook. Thompson, having worked for over seventeen years for Beaverbrook, would have at least expected his employer to tell him the news himself. Instead he was sent a cold official letter stating that his own services were no longer required.

The pretence that he left his journalistic staff entirely alone also gave him a perfect alibi when he was attacked for articles or leader columns, which he had either written or had had written on his behalf. Complete freedom of expression was in fact only tolerated when the article or cartoon was either in sympathy with, or indifferent to, Beaverbrook's own political views and allegiances, thereby causing mischief, or as already discussed, allowing him to keep his options open. The contrary nature of Beaverbrook's behaviour and his continual efforts to burn both ends of the candle helped to give the impression that he allowed his journalists and cartoonists more freedom of expression than they actually had. Richard Crossman noted how 'Beaverbrook always maintained the fiction that the editor was in command. In reality, he kept a strict control on the political content of his papers, while scrutinising his editor's every action'.<sup>73</sup> Not everyone was as astute as Crossman. To many it seemed that the *Evening Standard* had been allowed to go its own way. Edgar Middleton,<sup>74</sup> the first man to write a biography of Beaverbrook in 1934, was one of those taken in by his subject's claims of non-interference:

'For the *Standard*, however, he never shows anything like the close personal interest that he takes in the Express group; being content to leave its destinies in the highly capable hands of Michael Wardell.'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Alan Wood was a war correspondent for the *Daily Express* from 1943, later becoming a leader-writer on the paper.

<sup>73</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, 'Books of the Week', 25<sup>th</sup> June 1972, Page 16.

<sup>74</sup> Edgar Middleton 1894-1939 Journalist/Author/Playwright. He was a frequent contributor to both the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, as well as the *Evening Standard*. A keen supporter of Beaverbrook's Empire Crusade, he wrote a number of books on prominent people including the Prince of Wales (1932) and Beaverbrook two years later. See Dennis Griffiths's *The Encyclopaedia of the British Press*, Macmillan Press, 1992, Page 411.

<sup>75</sup> Edgar Middleton, *Beaverbrook: The Statesman and the Man*, Stanley Paul, 1934, Page 188.

Beaverbrook's control and manipulation of the *Evening Standard* was as total as it was of the *Daily Express*. Charles Wintour describes Beaverbrook's dominance:

'Lord Beaverbrook was the editor-in-chief and, almost daily, he indicated to editors or executives of each of his newspapers the outline of leading articles, diary stories and features, many of which were transmitted to him for approval before publication.'<sup>76</sup>

Beaverbrook, as A.J.P. Taylor has written, imposed his personality upon his papers more than any other Press Lord in history, including Northcliffe. He was even consulted about raising the price of coffee in the *Evening Standard* canteen. It was not surprising, therefore, that on political issues on which he held strong views, such as the Empire Crusade and his vendetta over Baldwin, no *Evening Standard* editor could sanction any article or cartoon that went against the proprietorial line, unless it was with Beaverbrook's consent.

On the whole he expected articles and cartoons to either flatter or support him. Journalists who found that they invariably did not agree with the policies of their proprietor, and there were many, had to keep their own political opinions to themselves. Conflict of opinion on such matters was rarely tolerated. Michael Foot, having been both a journalist and Acting Editor of the *Evening Standard*, before and during the war, later admitted that he had had to suppress his own views while having to write uninspired non-committal leaders.<sup>77</sup>

One such instance in which a journalist's opinions were not tolerated concerned Winston Churchill, who failed to conform to what was expected of him. During the 1930s, he contributed a regular article to the *Evening Standard* every fortnight that concentrated mainly on foreign affairs. At first, Churchill's views on the European dictators were similar to those of Beaverbrook. After Germany's occupation of Austria in March 1938, Churchill realised that Hitler now posed a very real threat to peace in Europe, and decided to rally public support for Czechoslovakia. His call for collective action in order to deter German aggression was very much in opposition to Beaverbrook's 'splendid isolationism'. Eventually, Beaverbrook's determined optimism over Chamberlain's ability to maintain peace in Europe became too extreme to allow the continued employment of Churchill. So Churchill's contract was, as a result, terminated and Beaverbrook gave the *Evening*

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<sup>76</sup> Charles Wintour, *Pressures on the Press*, André Deutsch, 1972, Page 23-24.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

*Standard's* editor, R.J. Thompson, the job of explaining to Churchill why he had been dismissed. Thompson wrote:

‘... your views on foreign affairs and the part which this country should play are entirely opposed to those held by us.’<sup>78</sup>

Churchill wrote back indignantly, noting that while he had been sacked, Low was still gainfully employed by the *Evening Standard*:

‘With regard to the divergence from Lord Beaverbrook’s policy, that of course has been obvious from the beginning, but it clearly appears to me to be less marked than in the case of the Low cartoons. I rather thought that Lord Beaverbrook prided himself upon forming a platform in the *Evening Standard* for various opinions including, of course, his own.’<sup>79</sup>

Beaverbrook would never let others, even celebrated personalities such as Churchill, dictate to him. He had little respect for opinions that conflicted with his strongly held views. He gave Peter Howard this advice ‘Never apologise... Never say sorry. Never admit you have been wrong’.<sup>80</sup> Bruce Lockhart at the *Evening Standard* suffered, for many years, the contradictions of a proprietor who continued to state his non-interference, while in practice doing the opposite when he felt the need to do so. For instance, Lockhart recalled when:

‘he [Beaverbrook] rang me up three times in ten minutes: (1) to ask why my article against the League was not finished (I told Whelan I had difficulty in attuning my views to his and could not go the whole way), (2) to tell me he did not wish me to sign anything with which I did not agree; we all had free expression in his papers! (3) to tell me to drop the whole thing. He had plenty of sympathisers, who agreed with him and who would write the article. I told him his campaign would be unpopular. He was quite inpenitent, said he would get lots of support, that the League was no good, and that attack was good for a newspaper anyway.’<sup>81</sup>

Beaverbrook’s management of his newspapers was almost dictatorial. In a work capacity, Lockhart found him both demanding and autocratic. Osbert Lancaster, the *Daily*

<sup>78</sup> R.J. Thompson to Winston Churchill, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1938, Churchill Archives.

<sup>79</sup> Winston Churchill to R. J. Thompson, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1938, Churchill Archives.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 19,

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 166.

*Express*'s pocket cartoonist, habitually referred to Beaverbrook as 'the old brute'. 'He was a bastard', said Lancaster, 'but by God he knew his journalism'.<sup>82</sup> Beaverbrook insisted on keeping a hands-on approach to the day-to-day, even hour-to-hour, production of the *Evening Standard* and its editions. He once sent 147 separate instructions to his newspapers in one day.<sup>83</sup> Memos to the editor would start with 'Comments by a reader' but would, of course, be followed up by 'Lord Beaverbrook' in brackets. On other occasions he would tease his editor by apologising 'for these criticisms because everything is so excellent in the *Evening Standard* that it seems rather ungenerous on my part to offer any criticism. But here it is just the same'.<sup>84</sup>

On 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1930, a date when Beaverbrook would have presumably been fully preoccupied by his Empire Crusade campaign, he amazingly found time to write memos on each of that day's editions of the *Evening Standard*. These memos exemplify how much and to what degree he interfered with the running of this paper. His memo concerning that day's midday edition contained over 14 separate criticisms and pieces of advice. The editor would be badgered, if not spoon-fed with ideas and questions:

'I see a paragraph about Ray, who is retiring from the Westminster Bank. If this news has not been printed before why not make a good story out of him. He is an interesting fellow. At what age does he retire? What will he do with his leisure? What sort of salary did he get - we have the right to speculate on that? What retiring allowance? How many hours did he work anyway? Why is it that all bankers come from Scotland (if Ray comes from Scotland)? What a lot of questions could be asked about him!!!'<sup>85</sup>

Some of the criticisms he focused on in an edition of the paper related to the tiniest and most unimportant of details. For example:

'How do you like the dotted line between each crosshead? I don't like it at all.'<sup>86</sup>

'Look at the A.A.B. article. It seems the last three paragraphs of it are printed in smaller type. I wonder why?'<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Richard Boston, *OSBERT: A Portrait of Osbert Lancaster*, Collins, 1989, Page 116.

<sup>83</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, Routledge, Third Edition, 1988, Page 50.

<sup>84</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>85</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

‘I cannot see the advantage of giving the name of the motorcycle.’<sup>88</sup>

What was decisive was Beaverbrook’s continual interference and badgering of his editors over what they should write about and how they should go about it. At the same time, he was telling them what subjects they should leave alone and why:

‘I do not approve of cricket as subject matter. Many readers hate cricket. Most of them know nothing about it. The cricket public is limited and dwindling every day.’<sup>89</sup>

‘Your public wants to know more about money. They should like to know about the fortunes men leave behind them. They like to know what diseases men die of - and women too.’<sup>90</sup>

‘Lord Beaverbrook reminds you that the *Evening Standard* is a Capital Punishment paper.’<sup>91</sup>

Beaverbrook scrutinised his editors’ every action continually telling them how to do their job. He was not even satisfied with this level of involvement. On occasions he would also provide the entire diary for the *Evening Standard*. Foot considered him to be a born editor, an ‘autocratic super-editor’, and noticed how on the ball and extremely active he was compared to the more passive proprietors of the time:

‘For each hour he devoted to his business interests he would give ten to every detail of each issue of every paper, stopping only at the sports pages in which he had no interest whatever; there the Christiansens and John Gordons were free to print what they liked.’<sup>92</sup>

Peter Howard believed that Beaverbrook’s attention to detail was meticulous:

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<sup>86</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>87</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>88</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>89</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>90</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Foot, ‘The Case for Beelzebub’, *Debts of Honour*, Davis-Poynter, 1980, Page 91.

‘Features in which he has particular interest he reads line by line, sliding a sheet of foolscap down the printed page to guide his eye. Should he find an inaccuracy or a cliché, he barks a reprimand into the microphone of his voice recorder.’<sup>93</sup>

Beaverbrook had a telephone, later a ‘soundscriber’, at his side. Wherever he went he used it constantly to badger and harangue his editors. They learned to dread his rasping voice instructing them to change this, highlight that or kill the other. Low always knew ‘when Beaverbrook was in town by the exhausted appearance of his editors the next morning’.<sup>94</sup> Osbert Lancaster also noticed how Beaverbrook kept his editors under the most intolerable pressure:

‘He gave his editors hell, as you probably know. He’d phone them at any time of the day or night. Didn’t matter even if they were on honeymoon, as soon as he wanted them they had to jump.’<sup>95</sup>

Peter Howard felt that keeping editors and staff on such a tight rein proved counter productive:

‘He overdid his criticism in his newspapers. Every comma was scanned. Every colon was scrutinised. Every word was weighed. And much of it was wasted effort. It was, as someone one said, “so damned detailed that it dams the flow”. Beaverbrook had to have his pen in every inkpot.’<sup>96</sup>

Beaverbrook continued to exercise ‘his perpetual, erratic, inescapable surveillance over his newspapers’ even when he was out of the country.<sup>97</sup> During prolonged cruises and foreign visits, Beaverbrook still dictated detailed criticism back to London after having received the latest copy of his papers. According to Alan Wood, ‘even his absences on holiday in the South of France would not stop his running commentary on the papers flown out to him’.<sup>98</sup> When Beaverbrook entered the War Cabinet as Minister of Aircraft Production during the Battle of Britain, he somehow still found time to maintain his authority over his newspapers, albeit having to be slightly less concerned about its political line. According to Foot, ‘he had to relinquish the detailed day-to-day supervision over his

<sup>93</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 63.

<sup>94</sup> Scrapbook notes, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Allen, *Voice of Britain, The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 166.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 18.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Foot, ‘The Case for Beelzebub’, *Debts of Honour*, Davis-Poynter, 1980, Page 94.

property which was his normal custom, but telepathic [*sic*] communication was fully maintained'.<sup>99</sup>

As Foot suggests, Beaverbrook continued to harangue his editors and managers in the running of his newspapers throughout the war years. This is borne out by a memo sent on Beaverbrook's behalf to E.J. Robertson in 1941, a month before the Americans came into the war:

'The following comments were made as Lord Beaverbrook scanned the *Evening Standard* of tonight. Meantime he urges you to deal with the boys in charge. That, he says, is the trouble of looking after newspapers. He has had over 20 years of the job.'<sup>100</sup>

Although he never let his control over policy slacken, and though dictatorial, he knew that he had to allow his staff enough scope to avoid disillusionment. It was never his way to exclude differing opinions from his papers completely. Moreover, both his liking for provocation and his instinct for keeping options open required a certain unpredictability. So his very best journalists and cartoonists were kept on a loose enough rein to maintain their motivation and remove any thoughts that they may have had about leaving. 'Like every good journalist he has to be given plenty of latitude to get good work out of him', Beaverbrook wrote of one *Daily Express* cinema correspondent.<sup>101</sup>

This did not mean that at any time his staff could rest on their laurels. Beaverbrook delighted in the thought that he could take on, manipulate, and eventually control the strongest minds and the most rebellious of journalists. He was a collector of people; one of his greatest pleasures being a battle of wits with those he respected most. Foot believed that 'he allowed some of those he liked, if they fought for the right, to say what they wanted in his newspapers'.<sup>102</sup> He did not respect those that cowered before him, only those that fought their corner. He told John Junor: 'If you walk over a man once, you can walk over him as much as you like in the future.'<sup>103</sup> He was not interested in lackeys or yes men, for although he adored praise, he could always detect sycophancy.

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<sup>98</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 210.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Foot, *Bevan*, MacGibbon & Kee, 1962, Page 224.

<sup>100</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to E.J. Robertson, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1941, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>101</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 229.

<sup>102</sup> *Tribune*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1964.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with John Junor, 'Beaverbrook', *Secret Lives*, Channel 4, 1997.

Beaverbrook was a born raconteur. He loved showing off and revelled in being the centre of attention. Those who salved his ego by flattery were always more likely to improve their chances of securing favour with him. Low noticed how he favoured those who looked up to him and doted on his every word:

‘Brilliant youth turning on him for sympathy could always count on him for practical sympathy. On the other hand, independent youth not turning to him didn’t get on with him nearly so well.’<sup>104</sup>

With an ego the size of Beaverbrook’s, it was not a surprise that he did not like being dictated to. He also turned away and was upset by those who showed antipathy towards him. Lockhart noted how disappointed he was with Russia, because of the lack of interest shown in him by the Soviets, after his trip there in 1929:

‘He has returned from Russia with no good impression. The whole thing seems to have depressed him. Mike Wardell says it is because the Bolsheviks did not make enough of him.’<sup>105</sup>

H.G. Wells also believed Beaverbrook disliked contradiction and avoided people who were ‘likely to contest anything that he says’.<sup>106</sup> Nicolson learnt from Lockhart that Beaverbrook was ‘femininely jealous’ of Oswald Mosley because of ‘his rhetoric, his disbelief in immediate success, his disregard of Lord Beaverbrook’.<sup>107</sup>

### **Working conditions at the *Evening Standard***

Beaverbrook’s constant ‘Big Brother’ approach to the running of his newspapers often led to both his editors and journalists becoming increasingly unhappy with their working conditions. The *Evening Standard* offices, which were overcrowded, poorly equipped, and uncomfortable, seethed with discontent. Malcolm Muggeridge<sup>108</sup> noted in his diary how he found starting work at the *Evening Standard* a nightmare:

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<sup>104</sup> Scrapbook notes, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>105</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 106.

<sup>106</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters, 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, Page 71.

<sup>107</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters, 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, Page 96.

<sup>108</sup> The *Evening Standard* diarist from September 1935 to May 1936.

‘There are tables scattered about a room... The *Evening Standard* is pretty grim, revoltingly futile, and yet exhausting. Whenever I say anything to Bruce Lockhart, who edits *Londoner’s Diary*, he says he’s heard it fifty times.’<sup>109</sup>

No one was prepared to confront the proprietor in order to alleviate their problems. Harold Nicolson noted how subordinate his fellow *Evening Standard* journalists were to Beaverbrook, and came to despise them for their lack of ‘any moral or intellectual values’.<sup>110</sup> Nicolson left the paper after only 18 months, because he hated the atmosphere so much. Lockhart envied Nicolson for having escaped from Beaverbrook and the ‘daily humiliations of journalism’.<sup>111</sup> He too dreamed of escaping from his Lordship’s slavery but his extravagant standard of living did not allow it. At the same time, he despised himself for submitting his articles to Beaverbrook’s censorship. Journalists were, on the whole, well paid but Beaverbrook always expected more than his pound of flesh! He had little use for anyone who would not give himself heart and soul to his newspapers. However, he never accepted responsibility, yet again, for those who became ill due to the pressure they were put under. When Lockhart became sick from overwork he wrote in his diary:

‘Max is conscience-stricken at having overworked me and is therefore telling everyone in self-defence that I have ruined my health through sexual excesses!’<sup>112</sup>

Lockhart was able to sum up the pent-up feeling amongst the *Evening Standard*’s staff in his diary:

‘Max makes no effort to understand his staff... His one method is to drive-drive-drive, and in the end the willing horse goes to the slaughter-house.’<sup>113</sup>

A year later, Edward Shanks, a literary journalist on the paper, laid the blame squarely on Beaverbrook ‘for interfering and messing people about until all confidence is destroyed’.<sup>114</sup> Low certainly knew what he was doing when he refused to work at the *Evening Standard* office in Shoe Lane, preferring the solitude of a studio in Hampstead, away from any possible proprietorial interference. This was compounded by his refusal to have a telephone or a front doorbell. Interviewed for American television in 1959 by Percy

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<sup>109</sup> *Like It Was: A selection from the Diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge*, Collins, 1981, Page 141.

<sup>110</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 230.

<sup>111</sup> *Harold Nicolson Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, Page 224.

<sup>112</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 148.

<sup>113</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 124.

Cudlipp, who had been both his editor at the *Evening Standard* and later at the *Daily Herald*, Low stated:

‘Could only produce when left alone “absolutely alone”. And I myself say, after all, editors and people connected with editors (including yourself, if I may say so) are a damned nuisance. And so I used to have some secret hide-away, with no telephone, no communications with the outside world. No one used to come to my studio – no one at all... I got free of everyone.’<sup>115</sup>

## **In Fear of the Proprietor**

Beaverbrook’s senior employees, editors and managers alike, were all terrified of offending him. With the exception of Frank Owen, *Evening Standard* editors rarely asserted themselves. Low observed over many years how those who worked for Beaverbrook became programmed to obey his every word. He was, as Foot said, in full ‘telepathic’ control:

‘The master does not need to crack the whip to have slaves. The eyes and ears of the many are sharp to detect and anticipate his lightest whim of their own accord. Not always from conscious ulterior motives but from sheer habit of mind.’<sup>116</sup>

Beaverbrook was ‘God Almighty’ and those that worked for him rarely went against what he said. Lockhart noted that it was ‘amazing how everyone is afraid of Max’.<sup>117</sup> This, noted Lockhart, also included the Manager of the *Evening Standard*, Michael Wardell, who ‘like everyone else in that office he is afraid of Max’.<sup>118</sup> When Beaverbrook took a personal liking to one of his staff, it put that person in a tremendous position of strength within the Organisation. For a time Harold Nicolson was Beaverbrook’s star and it was Lockhart who noted how it affected others at the paper:

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<sup>114</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 233.

<sup>115</sup> Percy Cudlipp interview with David Low for ‘*Wisdom*’, an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

<sup>116</sup> From a speech Low gave at his farewell dinner from the *Evening Standard* which was held in his honour on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1950. Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>117</sup> In reference to Cudlipp being afraid to print an article, which he feared would be repellent to Beaverbrook.

Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 318.

<sup>118</sup> Kenneth Young, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1933, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973.

‘Gilliat and Toulson are now hopeless. They yield and defer to Harold Nicolson in everything - not because they believe in his judgement - on the contrary - but because they are afraid of offending Beaverbrook...’<sup>119</sup>

When former employees wrote about Beaverbrook after they had retired (but before he died), they all invariably praised him as an employer. Blumenfeld, Brittain, Christiansen, and Low are perfect examples. Beaverbrook’s hold on them remained even after they had left his employment. When David Low came to write his autobiography in 1956, a manuscript found its way to Beaverbrook, no doubt for his approval. Charles Wintour, the then Editor of the *Evening Standard*, had sent with the manuscript a contents list which emphasised every page where Beaverbrook had got a specific mention e.g., ‘201-202 Beaverbrook’s attitude to Labour, 245-249 Beaverbrook’s attitude to Low’s cartoons’.<sup>120</sup> Whether anything was omitted from the manuscript after Beaverbrook had gone through it, we will never know, but there is plainly nothing in the published version which would have given him any reason to complain.

Tom Driberg, who wrote the ‘William Hickey’ page in the *Daily Express* for many years, was one ex-employee who had intentions of writing an unauthorised, no-holds-barred biography of Beaverbrook. Such a project was obviously unacceptable to Beaverbrook, who was determined to acquire full control over the text. Lawyers were employed to put pressure on the prospective publishers. In the end, Driberg had little choice but to comply with the lawyers, who were able to vet any material that the former would have found detrimental to his person. Over 100 passages were suppressed on Beaverbrook’s direct orders. Driberg’s capitulation meant that when published, the book was no more revealing than other biographies had been in the past. Evelyn Waugh wrote to Driberg after reading it:

‘I opened it with eagerness as I had seen it advertised as a “hostile” biography. What do I find? A honeyed eulogy... you give little impression of the deep malevolence of the man.’<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 161.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Wintour to Lord Beaverbrook, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1956, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>121</sup> *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980, Page 467.

## Beaverbrook's personal vendettas

Bonar Law's death from cancer in 1923 had been a dreadful blow to Beaverbrook. Like his removal from the House of Commons, it affected his political *raison d'être*. Winston Churchill understood the impact that Bonar Law's untimely death had on the Canadian. He said that Beaverbrook had sat on a three-legged stool, one leg was himself, the second his newspapers, the third Bonar Law. Now the third leg had gone he could no longer balance himself in politics. Beaverbrook's reply was that never again did he want to sit on the stool of party politics. 'Bonar Law certainly ruined me', he was heard to say years later.<sup>122</sup> It was a time of great despair for Beaverbrook at the loss of his friend and mentor, especially as he had held out such high hopes for Bonar Law as Prime Minister. It was not surprising that he came to resent his successor, Stanley Baldwin. It was indeed ironic that Beaverbrook had been the one to give Baldwin his first big political break, by recommending him to Bonar Law as a 'faithful if stolid' Parliamentary Secretary.<sup>123</sup> There quickly developed a feeling of mutual animosity between the two men as Baldwin recalled some years later:

'I disliked him from the first moment I saw him. Years ago I told some people that I would not put my feet under the same table as Beaverbrook. One of them went off and reported it to him. He has never forgiven me - and I still wouldn't put my feet under the table with him.'<sup>124</sup>

The feud began when Baldwin called a snap election over Tariff Reform in 1923. Beaverbrook saw this as totally unnecessary. It put at risk the Conservative majority that Bonar Law had so recently won at the 1922 election. Beaverbrook's response, along with the help of the Rothermere Press, was to attempt to bring down Baldwin at the forthcoming election, even at the risk of letting the Labour Party into office for the first time. In the event, this was precisely what happened. It was the beginning of a long and personal vendetta against Baldwin. Beaverbrook put the blame firmly on Baldwin's shoulders for having thrown away his beloved Bonar Law's majority in the Commons. Had it not been Bonar Law who had, eight months earlier, led the Tories back to power for the first time since the Liberal Landslide of 1906? Estranged from the inner sanctum of Conservative Party politics, Beaverbrook's newspapers began in earnest a campaign not only to castigate

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<sup>122</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 196.

<sup>123</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 42.

<sup>124</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 225.

Baldwin over having called an election in 1923, which had badly backfired on the Conservatives, but also to remove him as Conservative leader. Of course, Beaverbrook denied such accusations. In a letter to Churchill he wrote:

'I will tell you my exact attitude. I have no personal ill-feeling against Baldwin whatever. I have never felt the slightest rancour.'<sup>125</sup>

Less than a year after his election *débâcle*, Baldwin won the 1924 election after the Liberals had withdrawn their support for the minority Labour Government. The Tories were back with a considerable majority. Beaverbrook was not satisfied, the vendetta was not called off, and his newspapers continued their attack on Baldwin. By 1926, Beaverbrook was blaming the Tory Government's economic policy for being responsible for the General Strike, and by the 1929 election he was accusing Baldwin of having ruined the country while at the same time declaring:

'I deprecate and deplore the appearance of dissension in Conservative quarters. The present bickering seems to me quite unnecessary...'<sup>126</sup>



In July 1929, Beaverbrook launched the Empire Crusade in what was, without any inhibition, a blatant attempt not only to change the policy of the Conservative Party on

<sup>125</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Winston S. Churchill, circa 1925, Churchill Archives.

<sup>126</sup> Low cartoon entitled 'METAMORPHOSIS', published in the *Evening Standard* on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1931.

Tariff Reform, but also to remove Baldwin from the leadership of the Tory Party. 'It is my purpose', said Beaverbrook, 'if we cannot get this policy, to break up the Conservative Party'.<sup>127</sup> Lockhart noted rather perceptively in his diary that 'the whole episode gives the impression that Max is more intent on doing Baldwin down than on getting his policy through'.<sup>128</sup>

Another notable politician to feel Beaverbrook's scorn, as we now know, was Winston Churchill. The two men had always had a stormy relationship with each other. In 1931, when Churchill had written an article on cartoonists in *Strand* magazine, and had referred to Low as a 'green-eyed young Antipodean radical', Beaverbrook appeared furious and wanted revenge, as Lockhart noted in his diary:

'Max up in arms against Winston who has been attacking Low in the *Strand* in an article on cartoons. I do not think the attack is very offensive - not more offensive than is justified, but Max wants to go for Winston at any price.'<sup>129</sup>

As already touched upon, Churchill had been dismissed by the *Evening Standard* because his views on Nazi Germany had contradicted those of the proprietor. Dismissed by the *Evening Standard*, the *Daily Telegraph* was happy to employ Churchill to continue writing in the same vein. This infuriated Beaverbrook, who began a personal vendetta in an attempt to discredit Churchill and the views he was now upholding in the *Daily Telegraph*. He told his editors, even though his friendship with Churchill went back many years, that: 'this man Churchill is a warmonger. He is turning the thoughts of the peoples of the British Empire to war. He must be stopped. Go get him... We shall record his sayings. We shall make a dossier of his public trumpeting about war. Do it now.'<sup>130</sup>

Beaverbrook got his newspapers to spread malicious rumours about Churchill's financial shortcomings; that he was even contemplating selling Chartwell. Sure enough, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1938, the front page of the *Daily Express* ran the headline: 'WINSTON PUTS HIS MANSION UP FOR SALE'. This greatly upset and embarrassed the Churchills, not least because it accurately reflected their finances at the time. Such behaviour on the part of Beaverbrook made Malcolm Muggeridge observe 'that there was something intriguing and even rather wonderful in the mad millionaire egotist using his newspapers to give

<sup>127</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 192.

<sup>128</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 151.

<sup>129</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1939-1945*, Macmillan, 1980, Page 169.

<sup>130</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 349.

expression to his own personal idiosyncrasies and pursue his own private vendettas'.<sup>131</sup> Beaverbrook always vehemently denied that he ever carried out such vendettas, but he once told a journalist on the *Daily Express* to start a vendetta against somebody because in his own words, 'That's the way to get people reading your columns.'<sup>132</sup>

### **Beaverbrook's black-list**

If Beaverbrook was prepared to use his papers to carry out personal vendettas, then it was natural that he would use them to operate some form of black list, that is to say, a list of people who were never to be mentioned in his newspapers.<sup>133</sup> This also covered published cartoons as well as articles, news and editorials. He even admitted the existence of the list to confidants: 'Some people call it a blacklist. In the *Evening Standard* it is called the cautionary list.'<sup>134</sup> However, somewhat comically, the Press Commission in 1947 was unable to discover the blacklist because it had been called a 'white list' to make it sound less menacing. According to the *Daily Express* cartoonist, Michael Cummings:

'He ran vendettas against certain people he disliked and, as you have probably heard, some people who incurred his particular displeasure were simply not referred to in the *Express* at all. It's said, though this may be apocryphal, that he called the list of unmentionables "the white list", that was so that if ever he was accused of running a black-list he could answer truthfully that it was not so!'<sup>135</sup>

An example of Beaverbrook putting his blacklist into operation is demonstrated in a letter written to Rothermere in 1927 in which he explains why he had suppressed news about G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, and the reasons for their inclusion on the blacklist.

'I have given an order to the Express Newspapers that neither G.K. Chesterton nor Hilaire Belloc are to appear in the columns of these papers. They spend so much time in writing articles in abuse of me elsewhere, that I feel they have not got time to do good work for the newspapers with which I am connected. In the *Evening Standard* Diary there was a perfect passion for mentioning the names of

<sup>131</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, 'Robin Badfellow', *Sunday Observer*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

<sup>132</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 323.

<sup>133</sup> They could, of course, be the subject of unfavourable reports or articles.

<sup>134</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 458.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Allen, *Voice of Britain, The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 159.

Chesterton and Belloc. I have cut down the space allotted to advertising them. Now their names seldom appear.’<sup>136</sup>

Other well-known names on the Beaverbrook blacklist were Noel Coward, Douglas Fairbanks Jr, Charlie Chaplin, Claire Luce, Paul Robeson and, most notably, Lord Louis Mountbatten. Beaverbrook had a number of reasons to dislike the latter. The first one being that not only was he jealous that his mistress Jean Norton was attracted to Mountbatten, but that he also believed she had had an affair with him. If this was a cause for complaint, then it was surely hypocrisy on Beaverbrook’s part as he had had an affair with Lady Mountbatten. (On a visit to Moscow in the 1920s, the wife of the Russian Ambassador to London had noted how consumed Beaverbrook was with Lady Mountbatten. Beaverbrook, according to Mrs Litvinov, was ‘purring around her all the time’.<sup>137</sup>)

Another grudge harboured by Beaverbrook was over the film *In Which We Serve*. Shot in 1942, it was based on an account of Mountbatten’s exploits at sea during the early part of the war. In the film, a *Daily Express* newspaper is poignantly shown floating in the water, with the headline of ‘There will be no war this year or next year either’ following the launch of Mountbatten’s ship, HMS Kelly. This was an embarrassing reminder for Beaverbrook of his pre-war devotion to Appeasement.<sup>138</sup> After this episode, Mountbatten was never mentioned in Beaverbrook’s newspapers, unless it was to attack his role in public life, as had been done with Churchill in 1938. According to Philip Zeigler:

‘No holds were barred. He told his journalists to go in and make trouble. Never to miss a hostile story; always to play up anything detrimental to Mountbatten. On no account to give too much emphasis to anything which was favourable to Mountbatten.’<sup>139</sup>

The same year, Beaverbrook also blamed Mountbatten for the disastrous landing at Dieppe which resulted in the deaths of over 3,300 Canadian troops. On one occasion he referred to Mountbatten, who was Chief of Combined Operations for the raid, as ‘a murderer’. Regarding Indian independence after the Second World War Beaverbrook’s newspapers said that Mountbatten, by then Viceroy, was behaving like Santa Claus in

<sup>136</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Lord Rothermere, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1927, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>137</sup> John Carswell, *The Exile: A Life of Ivy Litvinov*, Faber, 1983, Page 124.

<sup>138</sup> Noel Coward, who directed and starred in the film, played the part portraying Mountbatten. This was the reason for his name being added to the blacklist.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Philip Zeigler, ‘Beaverbrook’, *Secret Lives*, Channel 4, 1997.

handing over the country to the Indians. An old imperialist, he attacked Mountbatten as the man who ‘threw India away and was thus by his hasty action and in his failure to define boundaries... responsible for terrible disasters’.<sup>140</sup> Low drew approximately four thousand cartoons for the *Evening Standard*. Mountbatten never appeared in a single one of them, even though he had played such a high-profile role in both the Second World War and as the last Viceroy of India.

### **Beaverbrook the seducer**

Beaverbrook was a controller of people. Women found him attractive, even though they considered him physically ugly. His magnetic personality, his wealth, his reputation as a raconteur and his ability to flatter, meant that his big balding head and impish grin were not an obstacle when it came to the opposite sex. His reputation as a philanderer amongst those in high society was well founded. In a platonic sense he had the same effect on men. He could seduce men as easily as he could the opposite sex. Beaverbrook made people feel important, and could be all things to all people. Peter Howard recognised that ‘he possessed the genius of planting his boot in your pants and at the same time playing a tune with his hand on your heart-strings’.<sup>141</sup>

Many of Beaverbrook’s employees were already fascinated by his larger-than-life aura. In his hands lay the power, not only to control and run his own vast enterprises but on occasions the ability to wield great political power from both within and outside of government. William J. Brittain, a one-time joint Assistant Editor of the *Sunday Express* and former confidant of Beaverbrook, confirms this view:

‘I have met many of the world’s greatest men since and while all have some evidence of super-normal ability I have never noticed that same radiation of power.’<sup>142</sup>

Beaverbrook, with attributes such as those already touched upon, and combined with what he called his ‘oiling can’ (generous doses of flattery and gifts), meant that many of those who worked for him quickly fell under his spell. It happened to David Farrer when Lord Beaverbrook, who was at the time looking for a political secretary, interviewed him:

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<sup>140</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 291

<sup>141</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 21

<sup>142</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 34.

'I felt the magnetism of his personality; and before the interview was over I had received my first dose of his extraordinary power to charm...'<sup>143</sup>

Lockhart also noticed how 'there was something attractive and compelling about him'.<sup>144</sup> Even if you saw his darker side, and many of his staff did, the positive nature of his personality always shone through. Harold Macmillan believed that although Beaverbrook had 'a streak of vindictiveness and even cruelty... he was also capable of great kindness... He sometimes seemed almost a Jekyll and Hyde'.<sup>145</sup>

Many of his staff were indeed spellbound. Lockhart noted how Michael Wardell was devoted to him: 'He (Wardell) is a Max-worshipper'.<sup>146</sup> Other members of staff were quite prepared to express their love for him openly. Beverley Baxter, dining at Stornoway one night in 1933 after resigning his editorship of the *Daily Express*, told Beaverbrook 'I suppose I love you very much'.<sup>147</sup> Michael Foot was to admit years later that 'I loved him, not merely as a friend but as a second father, even though throughout I had the most excellent of fathers of my own'.<sup>148</sup>

Proof of the strength of Beaverbrook's seductive powers can be seen when even such a principled socialist as Foot is still prepared to admit that while he 'loved' Beaverbrook, he accepts that he was also a 'demonic figure, guilty of twisting the news, suppressing inconvenient facts, pursuing personal vendettas, and perpetrating all the morally despicable tricks of the trade'.<sup>149</sup> Here again, Peter Howard, like Foot, knew Beaverbrook for what he was, but could not disguise his love for him:

'Yes - strange, rich powerful, intensely unjust and immensely lonely as he is, I'm prejudiced about the fellow. I love him - I love him warts and all.'<sup>150</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor was another who was totally taken in and seduced by Beaverbrook. One of the greatest and most perceptive British historians this century, he nonetheless came under Beaverbrook's spell. In a letter to Eva Haraszti, who would later become his last wife, Taylor confessed that:

<sup>143</sup> David Farrer, *G - For God Almighty*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969, Pages 12-13.

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 151.

<sup>145</sup> Nigel Fisher, *Harold Macmillan: A Biography*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982, Page 77.

<sup>146</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 292.

<sup>147</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 214.

<sup>148</sup> Michael Foot on Lord Beaverbrook, *Evening Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

<sup>149</sup> Mervyn Jones, *Michael Foot*, Victor Gollancz, 1994, Page 70.

<sup>150</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 214.

‘I have never loved anyone as I love you and have done for ten years past. Oh yes, there was one. I loved Beaverbrook as much or even more, but it was a different type of affection - a mixture of admiration, excitement, gratitude and sadness at his essential loneliness.’<sup>151</sup>

Consequently, Taylor turned out to be an apologist and therefore wrote an unrevealing biography of Beaverbrook in 1973. Making the fatal mistake of only using Beaverbrook’s own papers, Taylor’s love for the man clouded his objectivity and the immense analytical skills of a world-renowned historian. From the start he gave away any hope there may have been of an objective history of Beaverbrook, spelling out in his Introduction, the love he felt for the man:

‘I loved Max Aitken Lord Beaverbrook when he was alive. Now that I have learnt to know him better from his records I love him even more.’<sup>152</sup>

Harold Macmillan was extremely concerned about Beaverbrook’s seductive powers when he found himself appointed to assist the latter when Minister of Supply. Beaverbrook’s reputation as a spellbinder was notorious in political circles. Macmillan noticed how ‘his charm, when he wished to exert it, was proverbial and irresistible’.<sup>153</sup> So Macmillan went to great lengths in formulating a strategy in order to preserve his independence and thereby avoid being compromised by his new chief:

‘I made up my mind that the only way to treat Max was to be very aloof from him. I never went into his room and talked... He tried to trap me... He couldn’t resist seducing men in the way he seduced women. And once a man was seduced by him, he was finished. I’ve seen two or three ruined by it.’<sup>154</sup>

## Conclusion

Lord Beaverbrook was indeed an extraordinary, complex individual. He was a man of many contradictions and weaknesses. Foot noticed how ‘he could combine - almost in the same deed, on the same day - the most staggering misjudgements and the most piercing

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<sup>151</sup> A.J.P. Taylor: *Letters to Eva 1969-83*, Century, 1991, Page 20.

<sup>152</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Introduction.

<sup>153</sup> Nigel Fisher, *Harold Macmillan: A Biography*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982, Page 77.

<sup>154</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 403.

insights'.<sup>155</sup> He was a fantastic mixture of opposites, at times charming and generous, at other times mean and cruel. He could as easily inspire people to love him as he could to hate him. Baldwin noticed as early as 1918 that Beaverbrook was 'a man of strong personality... the magnetism which comes with that personality either attracts or repels'.<sup>156</sup>

Beaverbrook's politics and views on society were often confused, if not paradoxical. He was a political reactionary who courted and often found solace with those on the radical left. He once explained to Winston Churchill that 'my communist friends think I am a fascist, and my fascist friends think I am a communist. I am neither'.<sup>157</sup> James Cameron summed him up as a 'Calvinist Conservative who loved needling the Tories; he denounced the Labour Party while convivially surrounding himself with Socialists like Nye Bevan and Foot'.<sup>158</sup>

As a newspaper proprietor he had a propensity for overworking his staff. He was autocratic, continually meddling and interfering in the running of his papers, while constantly declaring the independence of action of those that worked for him. He bullied and cajoled his staff. If he wanted staff to be disciplined or fired, his managers and editors were always the fall guys. Beaverbrook pulled his editors' and managers' strings while constantly declaring his non-interference in his newspapers. Malcolm Muggeridge later wrote that only by having worked on the *Evening Standard* in the 1930s would one have 'realised the degree to which the whimsicalities and malignancies of its proprietor governed everything that appeared in its columns'.<sup>159</sup>

Why then, in October 1927, did David Low, a cartoonist with a rising reputation on the radical *Star*, and one who greatly valued his independence from editorial control, decide to go and work for Lord Beaverbrook as the *Evening Standard's* cartoonist?

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<sup>155</sup> Michael Foot on Lord Beaverbrook, *Evening Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

<sup>156</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey*, Hutchinson, 1954, Page 486.

<sup>157</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Winston Churchill, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1964, Churchill Archive.

<sup>158</sup> James Cameron, *Beaverbrook's England 1940-1965*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 11.

<sup>159</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, 'Robin Badfellow,' *Sunday Observer*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

## Chapter Two: Court Jester or Trojan Horse?

Why did Lord Beaverbrook employ Low on the *Evening Standard*? Correspondingly, why did Low, who greatly valued his independence and knew the type of proprietor Beaverbrook was, agree to work for him?



'He went around merging for the fun of it, bringing opposites together in incongruous circumstances.'<sup>1</sup> (Low on Beaverbrook)

'In a Conservative newspaper one expected to find Conservative cartoonists. As time passed and it became evident that I was not a Conservative cartoonist, the circumstances took on the appearance of a betrayal. Betrayal by whom? By Lord Beaverbrook, of course.'<sup>2</sup> (Low)

**Why was Beaverbrook so keen to employ Low on the *Evening Standard*?  
To what lengths did he go in achieving this end?**

When Lord Beaverbrook bought a controlling interest in his first newspaper, the *Daily Express* in 1916, he inherited its cartoonist, Sidney Strube, who had joined the paper four

<sup>1</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 174.

<sup>2</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 195.

years earlier. It appears that the proprietor soon became a firm admirer of both the cartoonist and of his cartoons as a popular feature within the newspaper. This is borne out by Strube's retention on the *Daily Express* for a further thirty-two years, and by Beaverbrook's lifelong fascination with cartoonists. Indeed, he valued his first cartoonist so highly that he doubled his salary in 1931 to £10,000 after the *Daily Herald* had tried to lure him away for the same amount.<sup>3</sup> It made Strube not only the highest paid cartoonist in Fleet Street, but also the highest paid employee of any newspaper at that time. This leaves little doubt that Strube was both popular with *Daily Express* readers and highly valued by his proprietor.

When Beaverbrook acquired the *Evening Standard* it did not have, and had never had, a cartoonist. Having taken over the newspaper towards the end of 1923, it is interesting to note that within a very short space of time he was actively attempting to lure David Low away from the *Star* and onto his new evening paper.

After his arrival in England in October 1919, Low was quick both to break new ground and increase respect for political cartooning in Britain. His initial fight with the editor and owners of the *Star* over space for his drawings had led to a decisive climb-down by the latter. Low was well aware of the impact he was having as far as space for newspaper cartoons were concerned:

'It was then the custom for cartoons to occupy a double-column space, and I had to start a one-man revolution to get them moving to such an effect that I got half a page in the *Evening Standard*.'<sup>4</sup>

It was to prove an important victory for both Low and political cartoonists in general. Strube was to later claim that it was Low who had won for the cartoonist what they had always wanted - space. Low's persistence over space had been rewarded with a larger format for his cartoons on the *Star*. Although a far bigger space than any other cartoonist had at the time, it was still not quite the half page he yearned for. It was not until he joined the *Evening Standard* that he became the first cartoonist to have a half-page cartoon in a British paper. At a banquet given by the *Daily Express* to celebrate his twenty-fifth year with the newspaper in December 1937, Strube mentioned the debt he felt all cartoonists owed to Low:

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<sup>3</sup> Beverley Baxter to Sidney Strube, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1931, Strube Papers.

<sup>4</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for '*Wisdom*', an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

‘Talking of space, I would like to say that cartoonists in this country owe a great deal of gratitude to my friend, Mr. Low, who was the pioneer of the half-page cartoon. Without his fight for space, I doubt very much whether I should have increased my cartoon from a paltry three to the four columns of today.’<sup>5</sup>

Low quickly earned a reputation not only as a brilliant political cartoonist, but also as a superb draughtsman. His line drawing and bold brushstrokes were unique to British Caricature. In a few lines he could reproduce the features that would make some character or personality instantly recognisable. To complement this, he also seemed to have a deep intellectual awareness of anything political. It was not surprising that senior politicians at Westminster soon sat up and took notice of how he used his pungent wit to depict them in his cartoons, with what A.J.P. Taylor later called ‘savage realism’.<sup>6</sup> Low took control of this medium like no other contemporary cartoonist. By the early 1920s, he was receiving accolades as the most successful and popular political cartoonist in Fleet Street:

‘As far as British politics are concerned, no cartoonist can equal David Low in portraying the situation in England.’<sup>7</sup>

‘There are several Australians [*sic*] figuring in the British elections, but only one is really outstanding. He is David Low, the well-known cartoonist, whose political drawings in the present crisis have set a new standard and are the talk of the country. For a long while Low has been recognised as the finest artist in his class at work in London.’<sup>8</sup>

At this time, Low’s popularity seemed to be on a par with Tom Webster, the sports cartoonist on the *Daily Mail*, who was not only the highest paid cartoonist in Fleet Street, but was also considered the most popular in Britain:

‘Looking in the great “Mornings” at the caricatures of the two most notable figures in the world reverend *seigneurs* [*sic*] of a generation or two back one cannot fail to deplore the dearth of black and white artists of merit. In nearly every instance ugly distortions ill of line and worse in taste offend the eye. The same

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<sup>5</sup> From Sidney Strube’s speech given at a banquet in his honour on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1937, Strube Papers.

<sup>6</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook’s England 1940-1965*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Stead’s Review*, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1920.

<sup>8</sup> From the special correspondent of the *News-Pictorial*, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1923.

thing applies to the cartoonists. Tom Webster and Low alone rise to anything like genius.’<sup>9</sup>

Low was inexhaustible in invention, especially in the use of real individuals or his own creations to symbolise both institutions and attitudes. His first great allegorical creation in the UK was the two-headed ass which characterised Lloyd George’s coalition government. ‘Without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity’; it was an instant success with the *Star* readership. It is most likely that Beaverbrook, having been duped by Lloyd George in 1916, enjoyed Low’s weekly assaults on the then Prime Minister’s fragile leadership. Beaverbrook loved to be made to laugh, especially if it was at the cost of his political opponents. Low’s rising reputation for satirising top politicians must have constantly struck a chord with Beaverbrook’s own impish and mischievous wit.

It was not long before Beaverbrook made his first appearance in a Low cartoon. Low believed that the Press Barons’ vendetta against Baldwin over tariff reform was an opportunity not to be missed. Lords’ Beaverbrook and Rothermere were as a result depicted as the ‘Plot Press’. This first cartoon entitled ‘**THE BABE IN THE WOOD**’ consisted of two mischievous conspirators in mock-sinister cloaks and hats, with Prime Minister Baldwin drawn as the babe standing in the foreground, trembling at the thought of what the wicked ‘Plot Press’ were up to. With a strong sense of coincidence, the cartoon was published on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1923, just a couple of weeks after Beaverbrook had taken control of the *Evening Standard*. Low recalls how, from this cartoon, the ‘Plot Press’ became popular with the *Star* readership:



‘I tried one or two cartoons in developing the two press lords along from the wicked uncles in **BABE IN THE WOOD** into the ‘Plot Press’. The figures, fat Rother and little Beaver, were such naturals to draw and the newspaper public gave them such popularity that in no time I found myself running a series dealing with their dark doings... The

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1926.

'Plot Press' became one of my major properties and a regular feature of the *Star*.'<sup>10</sup>

Lord Rothermere, who was highly sensitive over any form of caricature of himself, hated Low's depiction of him. This factor would in later years cause a great deal of friction between the two Press Lords. Beaverbrook, however, was in total contrast to Rothermere, who according to Low, took an instant liking to his 'little Beaver'. A.J.P. Taylor believed he knew why Beaverbrook enjoyed laughing at Low's depiction of him:

'Those who marvelled at it did not reflect that perhaps Low's version of Beaverbrook was really how he saw himself - the Puck or Robin Goodfellow (some said Badfellow) of the political world.'<sup>11</sup>

On Low's part, he greatly enjoyed the possibilities Beaverbrook offered as a subject for his cartoons, as will be seen in Chapter Three. The historian and author, Philip Guedalla, puts this down as a possible reason for Low wanting to join the *Evening Standard*. Guedalla posed the question:

"Did Low not forsake one great newspaper for another because of the greater facial possibilities of the proprietor?"<sup>12</sup>

Low admitted in his autobiography that he initially and consciously attempted to make Beaverbrook recognisable to the readers of the *Star*. He did this by exaggerating the size of Beaverbrook's mouth. He may have hoped that by so doing he would quickly bring himself to the attention of Beaverbrook and, consequently, continually drew him with a large smile which was also out of all proportion to the size of his face, despite admitting the fact that:

'[Though] Lord Beaverbrook in private life is as sober and serious as the next man, I continue to draw him smiling. A pandering to expediency. The smile is a successful lie... My version of Lord Beaverbrook is more a fantastic invention than a caricature of the man as he is.'<sup>13</sup>

Beaverbrook so enjoyed this image of himself, that he often requested cartoons in which he appeared as 'little Beaver' in the 'Plot Press'. With equal measure he also enjoyed seeing his political *bête-noir*, Stanley Baldwin, constantly ridiculed by Low. Thus,

<sup>10</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 180.

<sup>11</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 216.

<sup>12</sup> F. Buckley Hargreaves, 'David Low: Cartoonist', undated, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>13</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Page 95.

'Bumbling Stanley Baldwin' became a stock figure of fun.<sup>14</sup> During the 1923 General Election, Low concentrated all his efforts on ridiculing Baldwin. When Low eventually



joined the *Evening Standard*, he continually and relentlessly poked fun at Baldwin until he retired as Prime Minister in 1937.

(Evidence of how much Beaverbrook enjoyed seeing Baldwin caricatured by Low can be seen in a letter from him to the cartoonist soon after he had joined the *Evening Standard* in 1928:

'I liked your Baldwin cartoon last night so much. It is one of the best I have ever seen.'<sup>15</sup>)

In 1924, Beaverbrook commissioned Low to illustrate a booklet that he had written called *Politicians and the Press*. To show just how he revelled in being caricatured as 'little Beaver', he allowed Low to draw him on the front cover of the booklet as a small sinister figure wrapped in a trailing cloak and wearing a feathered hat. Rothermere, as always, also appeared lurking in the background.

A few months later in July the same year, Beaverbrook wrote to Low inviting him to design a menu card for a dinner he was hosting for Dominion editors at the Queen's Hotel in London's West End. Beaverbrook knew that Low would use the occasion to poke fun at both him, the host, and his principal guest at the feast, Lloyd George. Again, he was not let down. A syndicated article in the *Johannesburg Star* was amazed at how Beaverbrook had employed another newspaper's cartoonist just so that he could be ridiculed by him:

'It says a great deal for Lord Beaverbrook's good humour that he should have engaged an enemy caricaturist and a bitter opponent of the 'Plot Press' to do his menu card design.'<sup>16</sup>

Beaverbrook continued to show increasing interest and admiration for Low's abilities as a cartoonist and consciously thought up new ideas that would necessitate using his services. One of these ideas was to ask Low to paint a mural of caricatures of

<sup>14</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956, Page 220.

<sup>15</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1928, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>16</sup> From a syndicated article in the *Johannesburg Star*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1924, Low Papers, University of Kent.

Beaverbrook's friends to go around his dining-room, but on this occasion Low declined his advances, not having 'enough enthusiasm for the idea'.<sup>17</sup>

Was it becoming Beaverbrook's sole intention to use Low occasionally as an illustrator for books and menus, or was there a further motive to his increasing interest in him? Had Beaverbrook not become such an ardent admirer of Low, since he had first witnessed himself as 'little Beaver' of the 'Plot Press', that he was now corresponding with him in order to gain his confidence, and by so doing persuade him to join Express Newspapers. Looking at what happened next appears to support such a theory.

Knowing that Low's contract was up for renewal, Beaverbrook chose this moment to make his approach. He invited Low to dinner and during the meal, offered not only to double his salary of £2,500 per annum, but also tempted him with a half-page for his cartoons if he came to work for Express Newspapers. Low's immediate response was to decline the offer. Apart from probably sounding too good to be true, it appeared that Beaverbrook was not at this stage prepared to give him the freedom of expression that he would have required. According to Low, he had to wait three years till Beaverbrook conceded to his demands for complete freedom in the selection and treatment of his cartoons:

'Beaverbrook gave me complete freedom, but we argued the point three years before I took the job.'<sup>18</sup>

In any case, Low would surely have had grave doubts over whether Beaverbrook could have been trusted to honour his part of any agreement. At Low's memorial service in October 1963, Kingsley Martin recalled how he had resisted offers to join Beaverbrook's employment until he 'really was sure that the *Evening Standard* would give him all the space and freedom he demanded'.<sup>19</sup> Low gave two main reasons for not accepting Beaverbrook's original offer. The first was, that he had 'no particular yearning for any increase in influence that might go with association with Lord B.', while the second was his disinterest in gaining further financial reward, believing that to do so would corrupt both his principles and his way of life.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 178.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted from an interview with the *New Yorker*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1948.

<sup>19</sup> Kingsley Martin, Low's memorial service at the Friends House, Euston Road, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1963.

<sup>20</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 173.

‘My tastes were simple and I was wary of getting myself used to soft living... I was restrained by the tight-lipped caution of my Scottish forefathers from high living and close social entanglements.’<sup>21</sup>

Financial considerations had, in fact, never been a primary concern of Low’s. When he had decided to leave Australia to join the *Star* in 1919, William Macleod, then Managing Director of the *Sydney Bulletin*, was ‘willing to lay his wealth’ at Low’s feet in order to keep him at the paper. Beaverbrook’s determined efforts also came to nothing, but the timing of the offer was certainly convenient for Low, as the cartoonist was in negotiations with the *Star* over the renewal of his contract which was to expire that September. One suspects that Low knew, that Beaverbrook is open touting for his services could only increase his bargaining power with the Cadbury family, owners of the *Star* newspaper. However, it appears that Low was unable to gain any further space for his cartoons and received only a marginal increase in salary of just £500 per annum. This must have come as a great disappointment to Low’s self-esteem, especially after having been offered double his salary and a guaranteed half-page on the *Evening Standard* by Beaverbrook.

As far as not wanting any influence that went with a position on Beaverbrook’s newspapers, this seems rather unlikely. Just take into account how important his standing in the United Kingdom, as well as the rest of the world, was to become to him. According to Adrian Smith’s own research into Low’s relations with Beaverbrook:

‘Low was a progressive who enjoyed socialising with the rich and the influential. Employment on the *Evening Standard* brought a passport to the highest and most sophisticated echelons of inter-War metropolitan life.’<sup>22</sup>

However, it is highly probable that at this stage Low was still accustoming himself to life in England, and had not yet thought of widening his influence in both higher and wider circles. Beaverbrook, unused to ever taking no for an answer, accepted that Low was not quite ready yet to ‘sell his soul’.<sup>23</sup> He may have felt that he had been used by Low, knowing that the latter may have taken advantage of his approach to strengthen his own negotiating arm with the *Star*. Nevertheless, Beaverbrook did feel that he had made a favourable impression on Low, while leaving a very inviting and open invitation at the cartoonist’s door. Low on his part was to be very careful not to do anything that would

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<sup>21</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 201-2.

<sup>22</sup> Adrian Smith, ‘Low & Beaverbrook’, *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ernest O. Hauser, ‘Gad, Sir, Here’s Col. Blimp’s Creator!’, *Saturday Evening Post*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1945, Page 15.

close that door. Should circumstances change at the *Star*, there remained a both promising and rewarding position with Beaverbrook, whatever Low may have thought of the former's motives. Consequently, the proprietor and the cartoonist remained very conscious of each other over the next year or two, as Low later recalled:

'During the next three years I dodged delicately without rupturing the amicable relations thus begun - no easy matter, considering that he shouted this offer of his at me whenever we met, regardless of whoever was present.'<sup>24</sup>

Beaverbrook and Low, whenever the opportunity allowed itself, did their best to impress each other. In February 1926, Beaverbrook asked Low if he would like to have a go at animation with *Pathé News*, in which he had a majority share-holding.<sup>25</sup> In the following month, Low produced his first set of caricatures for the *New Statesman*. Beaverbrook was of course a welcome victim, sitting invitingly for the cartoonist. He must surely have been pleased with the result. Arnold Bennett, who knew Beaverbrook intimately, wrote to Low after seeing the caricature in the *New Statesman*:

'I thought that your version of Max was the best of the *New Statesman* series - so far. It is wonderful and I know that Max will love it.'<sup>26</sup>

What had made Beaverbrook so determined to sign Low up? Firstly, due to the success of Strube at the *Daily Express*, Beaverbrook wanted the best cartoonist available for his new evening newspaper. Secondly, he most probably found Low's cartoons highly amusing. If not, he surely would have soon tired of Low, especially when the cartoons often made fun of both him and the Conservative Party. According to the *Recorder*:

'When Lord Beaverbrook has been challenged on why he prints cartoons which so frequently are not in line with the truth he replies that Low is funny.'<sup>27</sup>

Thirdly, he believed that a cartoonist of Low's talent would almost certainly help boost the circulation of the then floundering *Evening Standard*. Finally, he obviously adored being lampooned by Low. Beaverbrook seemed to really see himself as how Low depicted him, a malignant and mischievous little imp. By employing Low and becoming his proprietor, could he not also cultivate this image, and by doing so increase his own notoriety, while at the same time making money out of it? Alan Wood, a confidant of

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<sup>24</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 182.

<sup>25</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1926, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold Bennett to David Low, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1926, Low Papers, British Library.

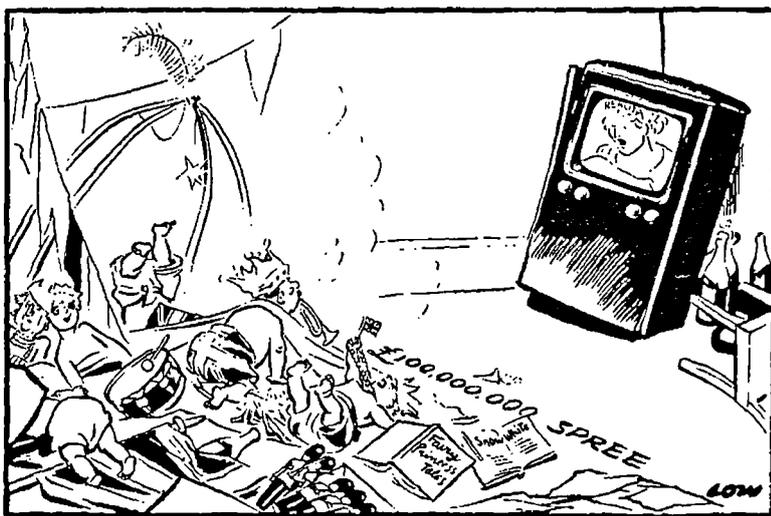
<sup>27</sup> *Recorder*, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1948.

Beaverbrook and a former leader-writer on the *Sunday Express*, had always noticed how the latter had 'never hesitated to use his papers to puff and publicise himself'.<sup>28</sup>

Beaverbrook was also keen, along with Rothermere, to form a cartel of the best cartoonists available. As Michael Foot has stated, he 'simply wanted all the best cartoonists'.<sup>29</sup> If he gained Low's services, he and Rothermere could claim to have the four best cartoonists in the country, Low, Strube, Tom Webster and Poy. Beaverbrook was also astute enough to realise that a radical like Low would ultimately thrive on a Conservative newspaper. Like other cartoonists of his ilk, he would be at his best when he had something to be against and oppose, i.e. the general policy of the paper. He knew that Low would not spare either his political friends or his enemies. That is exactly what he wanted. It was part of the fun and sheer devilment which he so enjoyed. Michael Foot said of Beaverbrook's aptitude for fun that:

'Truly it was his gaiety and his humour which had a special all-encompassing quality. Beaverbrook had a rich comic view of the human species.'<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the more controversial the cartoon, the more Beaverbrook would take delight in it, with the proviso that it did not ruffle his own feathers. A prime example of this can be seen by Beaverbrook's request for Low's extremely controversial drawing the 'MORNING AFTER'. The cartoon mocked the huge expense of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, reminding the country that it was still living in a period of austerity.



'Morning After'

Low was at the *Manchester Guardian* when he drew this cartoon, having left Beaverbrook's employment three years earlier. 'MORNING AFTER' caused a great deal of angry protest from its readership. The *Manchester Guardian*,

'rather oddly apologised for having told the truth too soon, before the public was ready to listen'.<sup>31</sup> Still, Beaverbrook wrote to Low, having no doubt enjoyed the controversy the cartoon had caused: 'I admired

<sup>28</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Preface ix.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Foot on Lord Beaverbrook, *Evening Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

<sup>31</sup> Kingsley Martin, *The Crown and the Establishment*, Hutchinson, 1962, Page 118.

very much your Coronation escapade.’<sup>32</sup> ‘MORNING AFTER’ and the cartoon that followed it, the ‘PRISONER IN THE TOWER’, where Low had drawn himself locked up in the Tower of London for having committed treason, were the only two cartoons that Beaverbrook ever requested from Low after he had left the *Evening Standard* in 1950.<sup>33</sup>

Low fully admitted, in his autobiography, that Beaverbrook’s reputation as a whimsical mischief-maker accounted ‘for his wish to have me on his paper’.<sup>34</sup> This goes some way in answering the question that Low had often asked himself during this period: ‘What lay behind the introduction of a wooden horse into the Tory Troy?’<sup>35</sup>

According to Alan Wood, ‘Beaverbrook thoroughly enjoyed upsetting people’ and was happy when his journalistic staff could do the same.<sup>36</sup> What Beaverbrook told Vicky when he joined the *Evening Standard* in the 1950s held true even then with Low; ‘readers have got to be annoyed’.<sup>37</sup> He believed that when readers became outraged the publicity and notoriety gained thereby would help boost circulation figures. Other newspapers soon caught on to what Beaverbrook was doing by employing controversial journalists and cartoonists on his newspapers:

‘Have you noticed how the *Standard* is exploiting the old technique of building up a storm of controversy around its star contributors?’<sup>38</sup>

The *Evening Standard* would later take advantage of Low’s most controversial efforts by making a prominent feature within the newspaper of the correspondence his offending cartoons had initiated. The published correspondence would always contain both vitriolic attacks against Low as well as those ‘few enlightened souls’ who were always prepared to come to his defence. Low recalled how successful the *Evening Standard* was at making capital out of his cartoons:

‘The correspondence grew and grew, rows over the cartoons became one of the features of the *Evening Standard*, the outside world became aware of a piquant situation. Something new. London sat up and began to take notice.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1953, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>33</sup> Amongst the Low Papers at the British Library is a list of all cartoons given away from 1941 to 1963.

<sup>34</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 174.

<sup>35</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 195.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Wood, ‘The Beaverbrook Bombshell’, *Picture Post*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>37</sup> Russell Davies and Liz Ottoway, *Vicky*, Secker & Warburg, 1987, Page 136.

<sup>38</sup> *Newspaper World*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1947, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>39</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 185.

Low was not unduly concerned about the fuss caused over his cartoons because, as Beaverbrook knew, Low also thrived on controversy. When asked in 1936 what he considered his best type of cartoon, Low replied:

‘Those that have caused the most controversy. The hoots and curses are better than the applause.’<sup>40</sup>

Beaverbrook acknowledged that most of the *Evening Standard*'s readers, like him, would not often approve of the political line Low took in his cartoons. They would, nevertheless, almost certainly enjoy both his humour and his draughtsmanship. Beaverbrook felt that the cartoonist's draughtsmanship and his ability to amuse, were a greater factor in sales of his newspapers than say, the political sermon that Low was trying to put across. To add weight to this argument, an interesting discussion went on between Low and Beaverbrook when they met for the first time to discuss terms. It is believed that Beaverbrook, in reply to Low's reminders that he would not change his political opinions and would not draw to order, replied frankly:

‘Mr Low, I'm not buying your politics. It's your pictures I want.’<sup>41</sup>

As it was widely known that Low's contract was due to come up again for renewal in 1927, how much competition for his services was there from other newspapers at this time? Surely the possibility of acquiring one of Fleet Street's most talented cartoonists would have set other national newspapers racing for his signature. Low must have been aware of his own stature at the time. When joining the *Evening Standard*, he would be referred to on the front page of the newspaper as the ‘world's greatest cartoonist’.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore possible to believe that he saw that his next step, so far as his career was concerned, was an appointment with a leading national daily not a London evening paper.

There is little evidence to suggest that any of the other newspapers actually showed interest in acquiring his talents. The high-brow broadsheets, such as the *Daily Telegraph*, and *The Times*, steered clear of using cartoonists, believing then that their work was not worthy of a place in a serious newspaper. Daily political cartoons were to these papers ‘an alien and undesirable novelty’.<sup>43</sup> It was only the mass circulation newspapers that saw the potential of cartoons, and even amongst these, the *Daily Mirror* and *News Chronicle* did

<sup>40</sup> *South American Journal*, ‘Left or Right in Spain’, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>41</sup> From syndicated article in the *Hindu Madras*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1933, Low Papers, University of Kent

<sup>42</sup> *Evening Standard*, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1927.

<sup>43</sup> H.R. Westwood, *Modern Caricaturists*, Lovat Dickson, 1932, Page 26.

not contemplate using a cartoonist until the coming of war in 1939, when they employed Philip Zec and Victor Weisz (Vicky) respectively.

In his autobiography, Low makes no mention of any other proprietor showing interest in him or his work. Apart from Beaverbrook's newspapers, the only other paper at the time in need of a radical cartoonist would have been the *Daily Herald*, whose cartoonist, Will Dyson, another antipodean, had returned to Australia in 1925. Apart from putting feelers out in 1926, there appears to be little to suggest that the *Daily Herald* really tried to poach Low from the *Star*.<sup>44</sup> (There is, however, some evidence that the *Daily Herald* later tried to poach both Low and Strube from Express Newspapers.)<sup>45</sup> There was definitely no interest from the bulk of Fleet Street's mainly Conservative press. The strictly Conservative *Morning Post* and Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* found Low's work quite abhorrent. George Gilliat, Editor of the *Evening Standard* between 1928 and 1933, discovered, soon after Low had joined the *Evening Standard* in 1928, that as regards syndication 'the Conservative firms were rather afraid of the cartoons'.<sup>46</sup>

Beaverbrook was therefore the only proprietor to show any real interest in the *Star* cartoonist. Having had little success in persuading Low himself, Beaverbrook hit upon a cunning and far subtler plan. He decided to take advantage of the friendships that Low had already built up with fellow antipodeans who were, by coincidence, working for the *Evening Standard*. They were people, Beaverbrook believed, whom Low would most likely trust and therefore listen to. These were the *Evening Standard*'s advertisement manager, an Australian called William Beasley, and Frederick W. Doidge,<sup>47</sup> a fellow New Zealander, and both a director and General Manager of the paper.

It was primarily Doidge who eventually persuaded Low into joining the fold. Beaverbrook knew that he was very close to Low, as both the Doidge and Low families would occasionally spend holidays together in the Mediterranean. Doidge therefore might have a greater chance of persuading Low that coming to work for Express Newspapers would be in his own best interests. According to the Newspaper News World Service:

'While holidaying in the Mediterranean together, Doidge endeavoured to win Low over to the *Standard*, and finally succeeded.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 39.

<sup>45</sup> See page 99 as well as Sidney Strube to Lord Beaverbrook, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>46</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1928, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Later Sir Frederick Doidge, New Zealand High Commissioner to London.

<sup>48</sup> *Newspaper News World Service*, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Low Papers, University of Kent.

It was Doidge's persistence which was largely behind Low's eventual capture, as the former recalls:

'I was always at him to come over to the *Standard*, but got no response until one morning Low telephoned to ask if I was really serious over the offer. My answer was, "So serious that you can have a contract this afternoon."'<sup>49</sup>

The two New Zealanders then had lunch together that same day, with Doidge making arrangements for both of them to go and see Beaverbrook to discuss the terms and conditions under which Low would work. The only mention Low makes of this in his autobiography is 'came the day when through a third party I agreed to discuss a contract'.<sup>50</sup> No mention is made whatsoever of Doidge's involvement. There is little doubt that he was the third party, so why was he not referred to by name? It was Doidge, who as General Manager of the *Evening Standard*, had been instrumental both in convincing Low to join the paper and in handling the negotiations between the cartoonist and the proprietor, as confirmed by the *Sydney Bulletin*:

'Incidentally, it is greatly to Mr Doidge's credit that as a journalist he secured David Low for the paper.'<sup>51</sup>

Could it be that Low wanted to embellish his own reputation by wanting it believed that Beaverbrook alone conducted all affairs to do with his capture? Low's importance as regards both Beaverbrook and the *Evening Standard* would then appear greater than it actually may have been. They came to a contractual agreement on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1926.<sup>52</sup> Low signed a three-year contract just as he had had at the *Star*. He was never prepared to sign anything longer. (When, in 1929, Beaverbrook offered him a five-year contract, he turned it down in a letter preferring again a three-year term: 'I should prefer the new term to be three years instead of five.'<sup>53</sup>) Details of the original deal were then almost immediately leaked to the world's press around 8<sup>th</sup> December 1926:

'David Low has signed a contract at record figures to provide political cartoons for the Beaverbrook Press.'<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> E. Grayland, *Sir David Low Cartoons: a Power in Politics*, Clich, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1967.

<sup>50</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 182.

<sup>51</sup> *Sydney Bulletin*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>52</sup> The original 1926 contract can be found in the Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>53</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1929, Beaverbrook Archives. His contract with the *Daily Herald* in 1949 was also for three years.

<sup>54</sup> *Evening News*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1926.

‘Cartoonists’ politics must be only skin deep, I take it, otherwise my friend Dave Low, of *Billy Book* fame, would scarcely be able to walk straight across from the side of liberal journalism in London to exert his pungent wit on behalf of the folk he has been lampooning for half a dozen years.’<sup>55</sup>

December 1926 was almost a year before Low’s own contract with the *Star* was due to expire. In his autobiography he recalled how ‘the negotiations were no more protracted than those for an international treaty, but not much less’.<sup>56</sup> If we take Low at his word, then it appears most likely that negotiations over a contract were drawn out, stretching over many months beforehand. It is possible that discussions had begun much earlier in 1926, which would have made it only a year to eighteen months since he last renewed his contract with the *Star*. However, this is not what Low leads us to believe both at the time and in his autobiography. We are given the impression that his disillusionment with the *Star* occurred at about the same time as his contract was coming to an end in October 1927. In his autobiography, Low informs us that his primary reason for leaving the *Star* was over the newspaper’s proposal to reduce the space available for his cartoons. He wrote:

‘At about this time I was having the same old fight about space with the *Star*. It was proposed that the size of my cartoons in the paper be cut below what I knew to be the essential minimum.’<sup>57</sup>

‘At about this time...’ was, according to him, ‘three years before Beaverbrook had offered to double my salary’, thus giving the impression that problems with the *Star* had begun during the middle to the end of 1927. Is this just a lapse of memory, or are there other reasons for this inaccuracy? It is possible that Low became disillusioned with his present employer far earlier than we have up to now been led to believe. In the light of this, it is highly possible that Low began discussions with Beaverbrook soon after he had signed a new contract with the *Star*. On reflection, it is quite possible that Low felt let down by the *Star* after the completion of his contract negotiations in 1924. In his autobiography, Low wrote of this time:

‘The unending arguments about presentation, space and position in the paper become wearing. Eternal vigilance palled.’<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Melbourne Sun*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1926, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>56</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 182.

<sup>57</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 173.

<sup>58</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 157.

Low probably believed that under such working conditions he was, as a consequence, not really being appreciated or valued by the *Star*. Had they done so, he would no doubt have been happy to see out his new contract with the paper without approaching Beaverbrook. It can be argued that Low having signed a new contract with the *Star*, regretted not taking Beaverbrook's offer more seriously, and then looked to open negotiations with his Lordship at the very first opportunity. He, of course, does not admit to this fact. To do so would have shown that the *Star* was not treating him in a manner to which he felt his stature deserved, and that he was now having to eat humble pie at Beaverbrook's table, after turning his very generous proposition down just a short time earlier.

Hence, it appears that the combination of the *Star*'s failure to appreciate their cartoonist's needs and wants, combined with Beaverbrook's persistent pursuit, convinced Low that he had a better future with Express Newspapers. Negotiations with Low took place, one assumes, in total secrecy otherwise the *Star* would no doubt have been able to take legal action against Beaverbrook for attempting to poach their cartoonist while under contract.

Beaverbrook now offered Low a salary of £4,500, which was only a 50% increase on the £3,000 a year he was earning at the *Star*. It was half Beaverbrook's original offer of double Low's salary which he had first made in 1924, which at the time would have amounted to £5,000 a year. If he had made Low the same offer as he had originally done, Low would have been on a salary of £6,000 a year, £1,500 more than he was actually now being offered. Even when it came to the renewal of his contract three years later in 1929, Low was only given a salary increase of £1,000, amounting to a total of £5,500 per annum,<sup>59</sup> still £500 short of what he had been offered by Beaverbrook nearly six years earlier.<sup>60</sup> Beaverbrook knew he was in what one might call a buyers' market, and was therefore able to offer Low less than he had originally done in 1924. Nevertheless, he did this in a way that sounded just as generous as his original offer:

'Well, Low, Doidge tells me you are willing to come over to the *Standard*. He says he doesn't know what you are getting, but whatever it is you can have half as much again. That offer stands.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> In his autobiography, Low misleadingly made out that when his contract was renewed in 1929 he found himself 'sailing into the five-figure-income bracket without any particular hankering' on his part. David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 218.

<sup>60</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>61</sup> E. Grayland, 'Sir David Low', *Famous New Zealanders*, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1967.

£4,500 per annum was still a great deal of money, comparable with a salary today of approximately £200,000, possibly even more. It would have then been a record for a political cartoonist, and was second only to what Tom Webster, the sports cartoonist of the *Daily Mail*, was earning. But if it is to be believed that Low was the hottest cartoonist in Fleet Street, why did Beaverbrook offer less than he had done in 1924?<sup>62</sup> Beaverbrook liked to encourage the myth that he was Fleet Street's most benevolent and generous proprietor and for years afterwards he let it be known that he had been so keen to get Low that he had given the orders to 'get Low at any price!'<sup>63</sup>

### What made Low give up the *Star* for the *Evening Standard*?

'I would not accept any terms that did not give me complete freedom to say what I wanted to say in his newspaper, and I do not suppose any other editor I have ever heard would have accepted my demand. A great man. I really do think he is a great man.'<sup>64</sup> (Low on Beaverbrook)

Low claimed that towards the end of his second contract with the *Star*, he was having the same sort of problems over space and quality of reproduction that he had initially encountered when he joined the paper in 1919.<sup>65</sup> Having looked at his cartoons over this period in the context of their size and position within the newspaper, one can see that, by 1925, his cartoons were indeed being given marginally less space. By 1926, they were invariably no longer in their previous prominent position on page 3 and more often than not, found themselves situated amongst a montage of photographs within the centrefold. To add insult to injury, a strip cartoon was also included on this double page called 'Dot and Carrie' by the cartoonist J.F. Horrabin.<sup>66</sup> Such problems during the years 1925-6 correspond with Low's decision to begin negotiations with Beaverbrook much earlier than has previously been believed.

Having shown his loyalty to the *Star* by renewing his contract, Low must have soon felt that this was not being reciprocated, *vis-à-vis* the problems over space and the small increase in salary he had received. He could only have felt that the *Star* did not really value

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<sup>62</sup> 'For a long while Low has been recognised as the finest artist in his class at work in London.' *News Pictorial*, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1924, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>63</sup> From syndicated article in the *Hindu Madras*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1933, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Cannell, 'The Lowdown on Low by Low', unidentified article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>65</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 173.

<sup>66</sup> James Francis Horrabin, apart from being a strip cartoonist for the *Star*, was also the Labour Member of Parliament for Peterborough between 1929-1931.

him. In contrast, Beaverbrook had been continually showing that as a prospective proprietor he was willing to meet all the cartoonist's demands, which were for, 'large space, good reproduction and a completely free hand'.<sup>67</sup> Low reminded Beaverbrook of this when he resigned from the *Evening Standard* in 1949:

'You may remember the talks we had before I joined your paper years ago, when we agreed that a cartoonist needed the exhilaration of novelty and elbow-room to be any good.'<sup>68</sup>

Low was excited over how much more advanced the reprographic facilities were at Express Newspapers. He also found out that Beaverbrook often paid a premium for better quality paper even when newsprint prices were very high. Not surprisingly, Low recalled how 'the technical conditions promised to be grand'.<sup>69</sup>

It seems likely that Low would have noticed how much the *Evening Standard* had improved since Beaverbrook had taken it over. The newspaper, having undergone a complete revamp since 1923, had recruited such men-of-letters as Arnold Bennett, who had established what became an influential literary column. According to Adrian Smith, the *Evening Standard* under Beaverbrook's direct supervision became 'more sophisticated, eclectic and urbane'.<sup>70</sup>

Beaverbrook also offered far greater opportunities for Low's work to be syndicated, which later became very important to the cartoonist. His reputation as the world's greatest cartoonist would only be vindicated if his work was being seen both throughout the United Kingdom and the rest of the world, especially North America. Low's last Editor at the *Evening Standard*, Herbert Gunn, was well aware of how important American syndication came to be for the cartoonist.

'I think Low has a strong feeling that his prestige in America is of supreme importance to him.'<sup>71</sup>

By 1933, Bruce Lockhart had noticed how Beaverbrook's syndication of Low's cartoons had proved a major factor in making him the most famous political cartoonist in the world:

'I [Lockhart] said that Low had a wider world influence than any cartoonist has ever had. Max [Lord Beaverbrook] agreed.'<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 173.

<sup>68</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>69</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 183.

<sup>70</sup> Adrian Smith, 'Low & Beaverbrook', *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 8.

Low was of the opinion that Express Newspapers had been so successful at promoting his work that when he left to go to the *Daily Herald* he continued to allow Beaverbrook to handle the sole rights to the world-wide syndication of his cartoons.<sup>73</sup> It is doubtful, though, whether the *Daily Herald* could have managed this themselves, as they probably did not have such a good syndication service at that time.

If all these factors were not in themselves persuasive, then Beaverbrook's constant charm offensive, as discussed in Chapter One, was very difficult to counter. Christiansen claimed that in the entire 1930s, Beaverbrook's approaches were only twice refused. As a result, the offer made by Beaverbrook must have begun to weigh heavily on Low's mind as he contemplated whether he had made the right decision in staying at the *Star*:

'I could not go on drawing without satisfaction in the published results of my labours. Claustrophobia set in. Desperate, I thought of Beaverbrook.'<sup>74</sup>

Although Beaverbrook valued Low's cartoons much more for their humour and draughtsmanship than for their political line, how could he consider employing Low, whose opinions on the issues of the day were apparently the total antithesis of his? Many commentators had, over the years, marvelled at how Beaverbrook had allowed Low the freedom to voice his own graphic opinions, when they were all the time supposed to be the complete opposite of those held by his proprietor and by the newspapers he worked for:

'One of the enduring tributes to the freedom of the Press in Britain is Low's continuing association with Lord Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard*, with which he disagrees consistently on almost every issue of British domestic politics.'<sup>75</sup>

Did Beaverbrook become extremely tolerant of Low, as most observers believed at the time, or is it possible that the two men were more in agreement than could ever have been imagined? A.J.P. Taylor openly stated that Low 'differed from Beaverbrook over almost everything'.<sup>76</sup> This view was also accepted by Low's biographer Colin Seymour-Ure, who said in 1975 that '...Low and Beaverbrook disagreed on practically everything'.<sup>77</sup> In

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<sup>71</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 276.

<sup>73</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>74</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 173.

<sup>75</sup> 'King of Cartoonists', *Irish Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1949. The *Irish Times* published syndicated Low cartoons from the *Evening Standard*.

<sup>76</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 216.

<sup>77</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, 'How Special Are Cartoonists?', *20<sup>th</sup> Century Studies*, December 1975, Page 16.

reality, during the early 1920s and the period leading up to Low joining the *Evening Standard*, Beaverbrook's views were never substantially different from his:

'Indeed, gad, sir, Lord Beaverbrook was often right. He opposed Churchill's anti-Bolshevik crusade in 1920; and the Black-and-Tans in Ireland. After the First World War he came out for increased taxation on war profiteers. He opposed LI G.'s pro-Greek policy... [and] Baldwin's futile policy of prosperity-through-wage-cuts. He was frequently right.'<sup>78</sup>

The majority of Low's cartoons during this period support Beaverbrook's views on the events and policies of the 1920s, as confirmed above. As will be seen in the following chapters, Low and Beaverbrook saw eye to eye far more often than A.J.P. Taylor or Colin Seymour-Ure have claimed. Either that or Low indulged in a great deal of voluntary censorship. The only way to get an accurate assessment on how Low dealt with the issues closest to Beaverbrook's heart is to analyse his cartoons over this period. This will be the main theme of the next few chapters.

Low and Beaverbrook had a great deal in common. Firstly, they were talented individuals who preferred to operate alone rather than as part of a team. Low worked from his Hampstead studio and in later years from his home in Golders Green, while Beaverbrook (after 1927) never worked from the *Daily Express* office in Fleet Street, but always from either of his two homes, Stornoway House or Cherkley. They were not team players, and thus did not play by the rules of the game.<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, due to their respective colonial upbringings, they shared a bond of kinship which brought them together both socially and, in some ways, even politically. A letter to the *Irish Times*, which published Low's cartoons regularly, picked up on why Low and Beaverbrook had a similar outlook on life:

'It has always seemed to me that one reason for Low's happy situation in the *Standard* was that he had an affinity with Lord Beaverbrook... They were both boys from the "colonies", one from Canada and the other from New Zealand, who made good again in the big city. Both had the same outspokenness and the same devotion to their own opinions.'<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 175-6.

<sup>79</sup> Both Low and Beaverbrook had somehow always avoided team games. Low enjoyed golf, while Beaverbrook preferred tennis. Although an antipodean, cricket was surprisingly of no interest to Low. This he confirms in his autobiography, when discussing his relationship with Clement Attlee: 'Someone had told him [Attlee] I was an Australian, so whenever we met he confined the conversation to cricket, about which I knew nothing.' David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 356.

So as outsiders they shared an irreverence to the traditions of the British establishment. According to Low:

‘When one’s born overseas and comes back here one comes without the reverence or respect that the average born Englishman has for his great figures, you see.’<sup>81</sup>

As colonials, Low and Beaverbrook also felt a mutual contempt for social inequality. The pace of change both on a social and political front was far too slow for them. In their own succinct way, they were very much radical individuals, and showed, as Russell Davies has written of one of Low’s successors on the *Evening Standard*, Vicky, ‘an outsiders impatience with Britain’s slow political metabolism’.<sup>82</sup>

Low and Beaverbrook were thus two frustrated outsiders united in their efforts to seek change and influence events: Low through his cartoons and Beaverbrook by his newspapers and political intriguing. Low, to his surprise, found that when he joined the *Evening Standard*, Beaverbrook would encourage him to become far more ‘pungent in his criticism’ of the Tory Government than he had ever thought possible. His concerns about joining Express Newspapers were therefore never motivated by fear of the proprietor’s political orientation, but by his own demands for space and good reproduction. As Low stated:

‘The reason for this change is not political, but shall we say? - domestic.’<sup>83</sup>

What was it that made Low agree to enter negotiations with Beaverbrook’s *Evening Standard* as early as 1926? The *Evening Standard*’s circulation had been continually running a poor third up against London’s other two main evening newspapers, the *Star* and the best-selling *Evening News*. It was not even as if the *Star* was in decline. Between the years 1923 and 1927, the *Star*’s circulation had gone up by 155,000,<sup>84</sup> while the *Evening Standard*’s circulation between 1923 and 1929 had gone down by 90,000.<sup>85</sup> However, the size of the *Evening Standard*’s readership was not really of prime importance to Low and for two good reasons. Firstly, syndication through the *Evening Standard* would ultimately bring him a ‘combined circulation of probably a million or more in the provinces’.<sup>86</sup> Secondly, and as we will come to shortly, the quality of the readership, rather than the quantity, was far more in line with what Low was looking for.

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<sup>80</sup> *Irish Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949.

<sup>81</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for ‘*Wisdom*’, an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

<sup>82</sup> Russell Davies and Liz Ottoway, *Vicky*, Secker & Warburg, 1987, Page 136.

<sup>83</sup> *Sunday Observer*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1927, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>84</sup> W.H. Belson, *The British Press*, unpublished, Page 13.

<sup>85</sup> W. H. Belson, *The British Press*, unpublished, Page 13. Unfortunately there is no data to show how the *Evening Standard* performed between the years 1925 to 1928.

<sup>86</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 45.

Another question that must be asked, is why a cartoonist of Low's stature, having just entered the Beaverbrook fold, was not fully exploited by being employed on the national mass-circulation *Daily Express*? Surely it sounds logical to put the 'world's greatest cartoonist' on the paper with the 'world's largest circulation'. Low, however, was always destined for the *Evening Standard*. Strube, a gentler observer of the political and social scene, would remain safely on the *Daily Express* until being replaced in 1948 by both the apolitical Giles and the more conformist cartoonist Michael Cummings. No radical cartoonist was ever employed on the *Daily Express*. As discussed in Chapter One, the *Daily Express* was Beaverbrook's political trumpet, and was not open to any divergent voices. (Having said that, in the late 1950s Beaverbrook seemed keen to have the *Daily Worker*'s left-wing cartoonist James Friell on the *Daily Express*. Beaverbrook wrote to the then General Manager of Express Newspapers, Tom Blackburn:

'If you've not got any cartoons in the *Daily* on Saturday you might give Friell the opportunity of doing a weekend in the *Daily Express*. Also, I think you could popularise that fellow if you go about it rightly.'<sup>87</sup>

Beaverbrook's son, Max Aitken, then Managing Director of the *Evening Standard*, wrote back to his father stating that this would not be a good idea for two reasons. Firstly, because it would put Cummings's nose out of joint: 'I do not think we want to upset him by pushing him out for Friell'.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, he also thought that Friell's draughtsmanship was not in any way good enough for the *Daily Express*:

'Keeble and Wintour are also of the opinion that Friell is not up to the *Daily Express* quality'.<sup>89</sup>

It was not so much a case of Beaverbrook having taken leave of his senses, but it was 1958 and he had, in all reality, withdrawn from active politicking. There was no longer the need for the *Daily Express* to be his political mouthpiece. As far as Low was concerned, Beaverbrook may have honestly believed that he was better suited, and would be more appreciated, by readers of the *Evening Standard*. Beaverbrook felt that its readership was of a far higher intellectual level than that of the *Daily Express*. This is supported by the then Assistant Editor of the *Sunday Express*, William J. Brittain, who believed the *Evening*

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<sup>87</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Tom Blackburn, undated circa September 1958, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>88</sup> Max Aitken to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1958, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>89</sup> Max Aitken to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1958, Beaverbrook Archives. However, Friell was employed on the *Evening Standard* in 1958.

*Standard* was indeed considered the ‘intelligent’ man’s evening newspaper,<sup>90</sup> and that Low’s cartoons like the paper itself were ‘Beaverbrookian in their punch and sheer brain power’.<sup>91</sup> According to Colin Seymour-Ure, ‘it was the right evening paper for the thinking man’s cartoonist’.<sup>92</sup> The *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, on the other hand, were ‘bright, readable, and entertaining’, avoiding in their articles, editorials and cartoons anything that involved sarcasm, irony, or things that could be easily misunderstood. The cartoonist Sidney Strube was therefore well suited to the *Daily Express*, where its Editor, Arthur Christiansen, believed that ‘there must be no intellectual effort imposed on the reader whatever, and no previous knowledge assumed’.<sup>93</sup> A letter from Lord Barmby to Strube confirms, unless the writer and his wife were complete idiots, that a lot of readers must have found Low’s cartoons difficult to comprehend intellectually when compared to those of Strube:

‘By the way, although comparisons are said always to be odious, I share with my wife, who is an American, an almost nightly annoyance with Low. We feel his products are so often punk, because it takes so long anyhow for a dull English brain to catch the point. In bright American cartoons, the idea always promptly hits one, as in yours.’<sup>94</sup>

Beaverbrook feared that a great deal of what Low offered in his cartoons would go over the heads of *Daily* and *Sunday Express* readers, as it later did when he moved to the *Daily Herald*. Low recalled when leaving the *Daily Herald* in 1952 that there had been ‘no quarrels and there has been no falling out with my Labour friends... I just feel it will be a relief... to go back to a public more appreciative of the fine points.’<sup>95</sup>

There is little doubt that, after the *Star*, Low was looking for a more perceptive and intelligent readership. Having ascribed his own success to ‘intellect rather than inspiration’ he felt he needed ‘a more educated audience more alert to symbolism and analogy’ as well as ‘a slightly higher level of appreciation of the nature of politics as a conflict of ideas rather than of parties and personalities...’<sup>96</sup> Even so, in 1936 Low was complaining that a large proportion of the *Evening Standard*’s readership were still failing to comprehend the *raison d’être* of his cartoons:

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<sup>90</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 36.

<sup>91</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 37.

<sup>92</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 44-45.

<sup>93</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 218.

<sup>94</sup> Lord Barmby to Sidney Strube, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1945, Strube Papers.

<sup>95</sup> *Time*, New York, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1952.

<sup>96</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 184.

‘Today I am never indecent - that is of another age - but I am as caustic as any political critic. I have somehow knocked together a public for biting satire, but the great majority don’t know what I’m driving at. They appreciate the funny figures that’s all.’<sup>97</sup>

Low also personally admitted that he preferred working on a smaller, more sophisticated, type of newspaper like the *Evening Standard*, rather than on a mass-circulation daily like the *Daily Express*, as he explained to an interviewer in 1937:

‘Interviewer: “You do not believe in two million sales?”

David Low: “No! A paper with a very large circulation has to cater for all tastes, including the tastes of half-wits. Naturally, the more you have to cater for, the thinner you have to spread the butter”.’<sup>98</sup>

After initial negotiations during 1926, a draft contract for Low was drawn up in November by Beaverbrook’s lawyers. Beaverbrook agreed to Low publishing four half-page cartoons a week and accepted a clause that allowed the cartoonist complete freedom of expression. In his autobiography, Low recalled how he had insisted upon this clause which he claimed to have drawn up himself, and would not have entertained a contract without it. This he believed would guarantee himself both space for his cartoons and complete freedom to do and say what he liked in them:

‘POLICY: It is agreed that you are to have complete freedom in the selection and treatment of subject-matter for your cartoons and in the expression therein of the policies in which you believe.’<sup>99</sup>

There were, however, limits to how far Beaverbrook would submit to Low’s demands. When Low asked for precise guarantees over presentation, Beaverbrook replied ‘dammit Low, do you want to edit the paper too?’<sup>100</sup> A great deal of mythology has since developed, fuelled by both Low and Beaverbrook from the start, of what was supposed to have been an unprecedented arrangement between a proprietor and a cartoonist. This unique clause was believed to have only been deemed possible because Low’s position at the *Star* had been so strong, and he had been able to drive a very hard bargain with a proprietor who had been so determined to get him. To some degree, the evidence given so far has already discounted

<sup>97</sup> ‘Left or Right in Spain’, *South American Journal*, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>98</sup> ‘The Greater Art’, undated circa 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>99</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 182. See also Page 337 of this thesis.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

this belief. As has been shown, Low's position at the *Star* was nowhere near as palatable as had been believed. Otherwise, he would have not been faced with problems over both reductions in the space for his cartoons, and the continuing failure to get a better quality of reproduction. Another point is that there is little evidence to show that the *Star* made any effort whatsoever to induce Low to stay at the paper, either when they noticed his disillusionment with his working conditions, or when he informed them of his decision to leave for the *Evening Standard*.

What had also been widely overlooked was the fact that Low gained no more freedom than he had had at the *Star*, where his contract was almost identical to that just signed at the *Evening Standard*. So his claim, which he advances in his autobiography, that no staff cartoonist had 'ever enjoyed such free and regular expression' appears to be just another attempt at self-promotion. In any case, Low was a signed contributor, not a staff artist. The latter, unlike the former, would have been expected to liaise with the editor over the subject matter of their cartoons. Low also maintains that no one else on the *Evening Standard* had a contract at all (this was not true), let alone a clause allowing them complete freedom. Whether the clause was worth the paper it was written on will be appraised in later chapters, but why was so much fuss made at the time and then later about the clause? Low, possibly for reasons concerning his reputation and with an eye to posterity, made two glaring omissions from his part of the story as regards this crucial clause.

The first omission, which he conveniently overlooked both at the time and later on, was the fact that there was another clause in the contract which gave the paper the option of not having to publish any cartoon it did not want to. Under the heading 'Liberty to withhold or alter cartoons' it read:

'It is understood and agreed that the Editors of any of the papers referred to in this agreement shall be at liberty at their own discretion to withhold publication of any cartoons you submit, provided always that no alteration shall be made to any cartoon without your approval.'<sup>101</sup>

Does this not in itself dilute the protection that Low felt he had gained in his 'complete freedom' clause? The *Evening Standard* could therefore refuse publication if they felt it was in their interests to do so. If they took advantage of this option, it would mean that there would be no cartoon for the newspaper as Low, unlike other cartoonists, would only produce the one finished drawing. The significance of knowing that the paper could reject

cartoons without valid reason must have undoubtedly had some influence on Low's mind when it came to choosing both subject matter and the treatment of it. It no doubt contributed to a greater degree of voluntary censorship.

Within the same clause as that of having the right to refuse publication was also the right to alter the cartoon if the editor so wished, albeit with the permission of the cartoonist. Does this not also contradict and whittle away at the complete freedom that Low was supposed to have? One supposes it depends largely to what extent the *Evening Standard* took advantage of this clause. Did they effect minor changes because of the threat of libel, or did they alter dramatically the political line or emphasis the cartoonist was making? Whatever the case, Beaverbrook and Low had both made sure that neither had surrendered anything to the other.

The second omission which Low also failed to mention in his autobiography was the last sentence in his 'complete freedom' clause. This clause, which in Low's book appears to finish with the words '...in which you believe', should be followed on by 'and that this fact will be given prominence in all our announcements relating to you when you join the staff of the "Evening Standard".'<sup>102</sup> This has been completely left out. Does it not blatantly show that Beaverbrook wanted to manipulate, for his own ends, the freedom that Low had so ardently insisted upon? Beaverbrook was keen to make much capital out of this so-called unique freedom clause, and did not wish to keep it quiet or confidential. He did not, as some would have assumed, feel humiliated that as a powerful press baron he had been dictated to and forced into surrender by a prospective employee. The opposite was true. Beaverbrook wanted to show Fleet Street and the world that he was, as mentioned in Chapter One, an enlightened proprietor willing to allow his staff the freedom they needed to express their own opinions, even if this meant contradicting the editorial policy of his own newspapers. Express Newspapers took full advantage of the publicity clause in Low's contract. The *Evening Standard* announced weeks beforehand on its front page that Low 'the world's greatest cartoonist' would be joining them shortly. Even the *Daily Express* announced on the day Low started at the *Evening Standard* that:

'Low, one of the two greatest cartoonists in the world - Strube being the other - has joined the *Evening Standard*'.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> A Wilson (General Manager of the *Evening Standard*) to David Low, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1926, Beaverbrook Archives. See Pages 337 - 338 of this thesis for a photostat of Pages 1 and 3 of the 1926 Low / *Evening Standard* Agreement.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> *Daily Express*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1927.

The fanfare focused almost entirely upon Low's 'unique' clause, emphasising the cartoonist's complete independence from editorial control. One could easily be mistaken into thinking that the degree to which the newspaper publicised this fact made it look like nothing more than a publicity stunt on behalf of the *Evening Standard*. It also appears that Beaverbrook, having apparently conceded Low his independence, was at the same time attempting to make the maximum amount of capital out of it. Low became sensitive to such scepticism and, according to his own personal testimony, acknowledged that there were many who doubted whether Beaverbrook could ever allow any new member of his journalistic staff total freedom of expression.

'The *Evening Standard* advertised my coming lavishly. No one took seriously the announcements that I was to express independent views.'<sup>104</sup>

One doubting Thomas was a journalist at Low's old paper back in Australia, the *Sydney Bulletin*:

'If it is true that Dave Low is to be given a free hand as a political cartoonist in his new position on the *Evening Standard*, and will be completely independent of editorial control, a piquant situation must surely arise. Low has always held radical views, so apparently London will be intrigued to see radical cartoons lampooning the Conservative administration in a paper with a Conservative policy. It doesn't sound very workable... Something of the same situation arose in Melbourne recently when a famous cartoonist with advanced radical views accepted an engagement with a big newspaper organisation to whom his politics must be anathema. In that particular case, however, the cartoonist appears to have got away with it by doing a minimum of work, of for the most part, an entirely non political nature.'<sup>105</sup>

Low, no doubt, originally thought that all the pre-publicity about his independence would bode well for the future. However, when friends and even acquaintances warned him about the dangers of working for a man such as Beaverbrook, he privately began to doubt whether he had done the right thing. No one seemed to believe that he would be granted the degree of independence that his contract stipulated:

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<sup>104</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 183.

<sup>105</sup> *Sydney Bulletin*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1926, Low Papers, University of Kent.

‘Free and regular expression by the staff cartoonist was unheard of and incredible. Newspaper comments made it only too depressingly evident that in the general view I had sold out to the highest bidder.’<sup>106</sup>

Clifford Sharp, then Editor of the *New Statesman*, wrote to Low recommending that he sign a five-year contract instead of a three-year one. Sharp felt that Low’s capture by Express Newspapers was of immense novelty value to Beaverbrook, and therefore the arrangement, as it stood, depended on how long that novelty value would last:

‘I think the E.S. offers you wider possibilities than you have had before, but how long oh my Lord, how long? Is it not likely to be just as long as my Lord continues to regard you as an excellent joke?’<sup>107</sup>

Low’s doubts were compounded when many of those that followed his cartoons in the *Star* came to see his move to the *Evening Standard* as purely a sell-out of his political principles to the highest bidder. Distinguished personages also climbed on the bandwagon, with Hilaire Belloc calling Low’s move to the *Evening Standard* ‘a prostitution of his talent’.<sup>108</sup> Low found that the weeks leading up to him starting at the *Evening Standard* were, to say the least, uncomfortable:

‘Many readers thought it as an act of betrayal. I spent sleepless nights before making my début on the *Evening Standard*. What had I let myself in for?’<sup>109</sup>

Apart from the publicity clause, Low forgot to mention the ‘exclusive service’ clause also written into his contract, which by its very meaning gave Beaverbrook complete rights over all his work.<sup>110</sup> Low must have acknowledged that this gave Beaverbrook the authority to limit any outside work he wished to enter into. A concerned Low wrote to Beaverbrook in the hope that the ‘exclusive service’ clause would not prevent him from doing either book illustrations or putting on exhibitions of his work. He added that such projects would be ‘calculated to strengthen, not to weaken, the effect of the *Evening Standard* cartoons’.<sup>111</sup> Beaverbrook found this a not unreasonable request.

As a consequence, Low, during his time with Express Newspapers, produced numerous anthologies of his *Evening Standard* cartoons in book form and was successfully

<sup>106</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 183.

<sup>107</sup> Clifford Sharp to David Low, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1927, Low Papers, British Library.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 147.

<sup>109</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 182.

<sup>110</sup> A. Wilson (General Manager of the *Evening Standard*) to David Low, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1926, Beaverbrook Archive.

commissioned to illustrate books on behalf of authors such as H.G. Wells, MacNeill Weir and Peter Fleming. However, from a political perspective, there were instances when Beaverbrook refused to allow him permission to take on a commission. One instance of this was in the lead-up to the 1929 General Election, when Miss Frances Stevenson, Lloyd George's secretary and mistress, wrote to Beaverbrook requesting permission to have Low illustrate a political pamphlet on behalf of the Liberal Party:

'Another request - Mr Keynes is getting out another Unemployment pamphlet entitled "Lloyd George Can he do it?" or some such title, and he is most anxious for Low to do a small drawing for the cover. Will you let him please? Low himself is quite willing, I believe, if he has your permission, and it would be awfully nice of you if you would give it.'<sup>112</sup>

Beaverbrook immediately wrote back exercising his 'exclusive' right to Low:

'I am so sorry it is impossible for me to accede to your request about Low. I have had similar applications from other quarters and I have had to refuse.'<sup>113</sup>

## Low's Political Orientation

'So far as Low is concerned your papers seems more "Socialist" than even the *Daily Herald* or *Worker!*'<sup>114</sup> (Brigadier-General T.R. Price to the Editor of the *Evening Standard*)

'It has been said of him that he cartoons with his left hand and receives his pay with his right!'<sup>115</sup> (*Melbourne Herald*)

There has been a common misconception about Low's politics which survives even to this day. It is that Low was a left-wing Socialist who by conviction drew cartoons that were always in sympathy with the Labour Party, or even the Communist Party, whilst taking every opportunity to ridicule the Liberal and Conservative parties. With those on the right of the political divide this was a strongly held view. Winston Churchill has been quoted as saying that Low was a 'Communist of the Trotsky variety', while many other Tories

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<sup>111</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>112</sup> Miss F.L. Stevenson to Lord Beaverbrook, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>113</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Miss F.L. Stevenson, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>114</sup> T.R. Price to the Editor of the *Evening Standard*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1934, Low Papers, British Library.

<sup>115</sup> *Melbourne Herald*, undated, Low Papers, University of Kent.

believed him to be a Communist sympathiser.<sup>116</sup> Alternatively, those on the Left saw him firmly on their side. A.J.P. Taylor, one of Britain's greatest left-wing historians, refers to Low in his biography of Beaverbrook as being a 'left-wing Socialist'.<sup>117</sup> In fact Low, who was highly influenced by his middle-class upbringing in the egalitarian and liberal environment of New Zealand and Australia, was more politically in tune with radical Liberalism than with anything else:

'His Leftish opinions must have been the product of his own reasoning, perhaps too the result of the Liberalism in which he was brought up in New Zealand and Australia, for they were not born of poverty.'<sup>118</sup>

If Low had ever shown any active support for any political party, it was at the 1922 General Election where he threw his weight behind the Liberals by drawing a series of election posters for them:

'The *Star* worked closely with Liberal headquarters and we arranged that I would make at least one poster per day... I had this field practically to myself. It was probably the last election poster campaign in Britain.'<sup>119</sup>

During his time at the *Star*, Low was extremely supportive of the Liberals in his cartoons, especially over their agricultural policy. According to the *News Chronicle* in 1949, reporting on Low's resignation from the *Evening Standard*, Low's 'first home in this country was in the columns of the *Star* and if any political label can be attached to him I suppose he should be called a Liberal.'<sup>120</sup> Even the *Evening Standard* recognised that Low was a Liberal at heart:

'Speaking very generally, his orientation is a mildly Leftist Liberalism (not Labour or Socialist), but he follows no visible party line. Leftist Liberalism simply provides the coign of vantage which best suits his strictly personal loyalties.'<sup>121</sup>

It was not until the end of the Second World War, while at the *Evening Standard*, that Low showed the same sort of support for Labour as he had done for the Liberals when at the *Star*. However, he also often displayed as much antipathy towards the Labour Party as he did towards the Conservatives. Michael Foot believed that during these years, far from

<sup>116</sup> Winston Churchill to Lord Beaverbrook, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1940, Churchill Archive.

<sup>117</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 216.

<sup>118</sup> E. Grayland, 'Sir David Low', *Famous New Zealanders*, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1967.

<sup>119</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 158. This was not quite true; Low's cartoons were also produced as posters during the 1923 General Election campaign.

<sup>120</sup> *News Chronicle*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

supporting Labour, 'he was often very critical of it'.<sup>122</sup> Again, according to the *News Chronicle*:

'Low has never hesitated to aim occasional well-deserved bricks at the Labour Party.'<sup>123</sup>

In 1934, Beaverbrook had received praise from the wife of a senior Tory Cabinet Minister, Sir Samuel Hoare, over a Low cartoon which she said 'attacked the enemy' (presumably the Labour Party):

'I hope you will allow me to tell you of my delighted appreciation of Low's cartoon last night and to thank you very gratefully for it. We rocked with amusement over it and enjoyed it to the full. Low's drawing is always brilliant, and when he goes for one's enemies, it is a real joy.'<sup>124</sup>

Lord Beaverbrook wrote back to Lady Maud Hoare pleased that he had received praise in regard to his cartoonist rather than the usual complaints about him:

'I am so very glad to get praise of a Low cartoon from such a distinguished Conservative. My mail usually contains a good deal of criticism of him but I am glad to say that, like myself, he always takes a favourable view of Sam.'<sup>125</sup>

So Beaverbrook felt that Low took a favourable view of Sir Samuel Hoare. Was this because Hoare was a close confidant of Beaverbrook or was Low politically inconsistent? Low's wholehearted support for Labour, which became apparent for the first time during the 1945 General Election campaign, did not last long after a Labour victory had been secured. He was soon ridiculing the new government almost as much as he had done the previous Conservative-dominated National Government during the 1930s. Hugh Dalton, a Labour Cabinet Minister after 1945, was one who showed his dismay at Low's 'disloyalty':

'Low's cartoon showing me and Beveridge arriving with the new fuel-rationing meter at the dumb-founded lady's door, was fine propaganda for the Tories. The Prime Minister, in particular, was much affected.'<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Evening Standard*, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1946.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>123</sup> *News Chronicle*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>124</sup> Lady Maud Hoare to Lord Beaverbrook, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1934, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>125</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Lady Maud Hoare, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1934, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>126</sup> Hugh Dalton, *Memoirs 1931-1945*, Frederick Muller, 1957, Pages 399-400.

Rather like Beaverbrook, therefore, ‘Conservatives thought Low too red while those on the far-left thought him too blue.’<sup>127</sup> This is supported by Lord Kinross, a journalistic colleague of his on the *Evening Standard* for many years, who noticed how the Tories often accused Low indiscriminately of being a Communist, while the Communists referred to him as a ‘tool of capitalism’ and ‘only a middle-class pink.’<sup>128</sup> The Labour peer, Barbara Castle, was also extremely doubtful as to the validity of Low’s left-wing stance, due mainly to his long association with Beaverbrook:

‘I cannot say that David Low ever influenced me in my political views, not least because he worked for Beaverbrook.’<sup>129</sup>

The first cartoonist to replace Low on a permanent basis was James Friell, who under the pseudonym ‘Gabriel’, joined the *Evening Standard* in 1957. Unlike Low, Friell was a left-winger by conviction. In 1938, whilst working for the *Daily Worker*, Friell reviewed a second compendium of Low’s cartoons covering the events of the late 1930s entitled *Low Again*. Friell astutely recognised that Low’s politics were certainly not in sympathy with those on the Far Left:

‘We must not delude ourselves out of gratitude for this good work that he is very much more than an advanced Liberal - this comes out clearer in the last two years than before, even if I myself once mistook him for a “fellow traveller”.’<sup>130</sup>

Friell lasted only five years at the *Evening Standard*.<sup>131</sup> It may have been his strong conviction to left-wing politics that had led to real friction within the paper. Tom Blackburn, then Manager of the *Evening Standard*, relayed his fears over the cartoonist to Beaverbrook in a memo, in which he stated, ‘we are frightened of his Communism’.<sup>132</sup> Ironically, Peter Mellini, having written a paper on Friell, believed that he was ‘pushed aside by the emotionally radical Vicky’, whom many saw as Low’s true heir at the *Evening Standard*.<sup>133</sup>

As at the *Star*, Low expected to continue his same radical and progressive line at the *Evening Standard*. Although a strong upholder of democratic principles, Low, who referred

<sup>127</sup> *Daily Herald*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1949.

<sup>128</sup> Lord Kinross, ‘Puck With A Pencil’, *London Illustrated*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1950.

<sup>129</sup> Baroness Barbara Castle to Timothy S. Benson, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

<sup>130</sup> *Daily Worker*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1938.

<sup>131</sup> James Friell worked at the *Evening Standard* from January 1957 to July 1962 when his editor, Charles Wintour, terminated his contract.

<sup>132</sup> Tom Blackburn to Lord Beaverbrook, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1953, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Mellini, *Gabriel at the Daily Worker 1936-1956*, October 1988, University of Kent, Page 15.

to himself as a Social Democrat, refused to nail his colours to any political mast. To his thinking this was far too narrow a base for him to work. Low saw himself as an internationalist, concerned as much with world affairs as with those at home. This is why he felt it essential to be, so to speak, on a higher level. An article entitled 'Low's Creed' in the *Sunday Observer* in 1936, astutely picked up on how Low transcended the narrow confines of party politics:

'The cartoons might lead one to believe that Low was a Communist - and, in fact, he is regarded as "Left" whenever mentioned in discussion - but I personally suspect him to be much more a pure humanitarian than a man tied down to the narrow confines of any political philosophy. David Low's attitude is international in the true sense of the word.'<sup>134</sup>

Low told reporters at the time of his joining the *Evening Standard* that he 'was a political cartoonist of free non-party views'.<sup>135</sup> He claimed to have little use for political parties, which he felt was a good enough reason for his never having become a member of one, as he explained to his colleague on the *Evening Standard*, Patrick Balfour:

'There's a lot of hoey talked about parties. A good man's a good man and a bone-headed idiot's a bone-headed idiot, whatever party he belongs to.'<sup>136</sup>

To say he did not have any empathy with either the Labour or Liberal Parties would not be at all accurate. He certainly believed in many of the things they said and stood for, but he was just not party-minded. Low in fact, reflected something of each party in his outlook and character. It gave him a wider scope on things politic. He told a reporter from the *Sunday Observer* that:

'The political side of cartooning has always meant a great deal to me - more than you can think. I am a Radical. But no party can lay exclusive claims to virtue. My political cartoons in the *Standard* will be non-party, and as such, they will I feel allow me a wider scope.'<sup>137</sup>

Reviewing Low's first anthology of cartoons published while at the *Evening Standard* in 1931, J.F. Horrabin, a fellow cartoonist as well as being an Independent Labour Party MP, acknowledged the non-party stance that Low had taken:

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<sup>134</sup> *Sunday Observer*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

<sup>135</sup> 'The Greater Art', unidentifiable newspaper article, circa 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>136</sup> Lord Kinross, 'Puck With A Pencil', *London Illustrated*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1950.

<sup>137</sup> *Sunday Observer*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1927, Low Papers, University of Kent.

‘It would be almost impossible looking over this anthology of three years’ cartoons (*The Best of Low*, Cape, 6s.), to guess the politics of the paper in which he appeared... They make just as good a game of Lefts as of Rights...’<sup>138</sup>

Low judged all politicians not only on what they said but also on how they performed, whilst at the same time trying not to close his eyes to subjective dogma or political bias on his part. He did not always succeed. It was stupidity that Low really could not tolerate in politics as well as in life. Politicians who, in his mind, behaved and performed like idiots, were undoubtedly those that suffered most from his penetrating wit. It was his objective and rational stance over politics, rather than a dogmatic one, which made his work that much more effective and wittier. There is, however, still a suggestion that he rather exaggerated the extent to which his objectivity would stretch as far as politics were concerned. This was especially true with statements to the press such as ‘I don’t think artists should take an active part in politics’<sup>139</sup> and ‘one cannot avoid dealing more roughly with the party in power than with the opposition’.<sup>140</sup>

There is nothing particularly surprising about this last comment, as political satire is generally always directed at those in power. Low’s refusal to support any one party, in preference to wanting to attack all parties with equal zest, was made easier for him by his irreverent ‘colonial’ outlook and therefore detached view of the British political scene. An American commentator once said of him:

‘Low was always in a position to look at the political scene from the outside rather than from within, and this perhaps explains the absence of bitterness in his approach to politics and men.’<sup>141</sup>

Low believed that his non-party stance could not but help relations between himself and his new proprietor, who he also realised was, although a Conservative, basically a political maverick.

‘Gad, sir, what could be done with a “Conservative” who thought nothing of trampling a herd of Canadian cattle (politically speaking) over his own party leaders and then blithely resisted the efforts of the Carlton Club either to make

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<sup>138</sup> J.F. Horrabin, ‘The Greatest of Cartoonists,’ *New Leader*, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>139</sup> ‘An interview with David Low’, unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>140</sup> ‘An interview with David Low’, unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>141</sup> E. Grayland, ‘Sir David Low’, *Famous New Zealanders*, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1967.

him resign or to itself resign from him? It would have taken a blacksmith to fix a party label on such a man even in 1920.’<sup>142</sup>

Low’s change of employment from the Liberal/Quaker-based Cadbury family to the quasi-Conservative Beaverbrook was therefore not politically motivated. His cartoons during the entire inter-war period were non-party, and at election times they even became non-committal. Indeed, his most celebrated creation, Colonel Blimp, was not intended, at its conception, to represent the opinions of any one party, but to be a symbol of stupidity in general. Lawrence H. Streicher, who as a Ph.D. student enquired into the sociological relevance of political caricature, confirms this view:

‘Blimp is not Tory, Labour or Liberal Party; nor is he military or bureaucratic. He is all of these and none of them. However, he sums up for Low much of British political thought of the 1930s and comes to represent the same kind of political thought for other nations during and after that decade.’<sup>143</sup>

Yet Blimp was misconceived as specifically ridiculing the die-hard and reactionary attitudes of those held by the Conservative Party. This increasingly irritated Low, who repeatedly attempted to emphasise Blimp’s stupidity:

‘He does NOT represent a coherent reactionary outlook so much as slapdash stupidity.’<sup>144</sup>

The non-party approach was in some ways the only way the arrangement between Low and Beaverbrook could have survived, as it had done with other radical cartoonists joining Conservative newspapers beforehand.<sup>145</sup> His attack on Churchill and the Conservatives during the 1945 General Election was the first break in this pattern. It may be totally coincidental, but from then on the space given to Low for his cartoons began to regularly shrink in size. Unlike the other cartoonists working for Express Newspapers, Low no longer received congratulatory telegrams or letters from Beaverbrook with regard to his cartoons. Four years later, he left the *Evening Standard* primarily for the same reasons he claimed that he had left the *Star*: shortage of space.<sup>146</sup> Express Newspapers, for their part, showed little regret over the matter of Low’s resignation.

<sup>142</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 175.

<sup>143</sup> Lawrence H. Streicher, *David Low and the Sociology of Caricature*, 1965, Chicago, Pages 5-6.

<sup>144</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 94.

<sup>145</sup> See *Sydney Bulletin* quotation on page 81.

<sup>146</sup> According to Low’s daughter, Rachael Whear, ‘space was one of my father’s manias’.

In spite of its overwhelming Conservative readership during the inter-war period, the *Evening Standard*, though nominally Tory, was really an independent organ of Beaverbrook's newspaper empire.<sup>147</sup> Low's non-party approach up until 1945 therefore complemented the *Evening Standard*, and did not disrupt or damage, as many believed, the paper's credibility amongst its readership.

### **Was the employment of Low so different from that of other cartoonists employed by the Beaverbrook Press?**

Beaverbrook's patronage and cultivation of great cartoonists lasted for over fifty years. As a proprietor he had the foresight to recognise what a good cartoonist could do for the popularity and readability of a newspaper. According to *Newspaper World*, people 'purchased the *Evening Standard* especially for the sake of the cartoon, which is always worth more than the price of the paper'.<sup>148</sup> James Cameron soon discovered how the cartoon was an integral part of a Beaverbrook newspaper:

'The curious thing came to be that by and by the customers came to buy the newspapers more for the black-and-white rectangle than for the trivia, the minatory and frequently dry jeremiads of the prose. Oddly, this was not wholly displeasing to the Beaver.'<sup>149</sup>

How different were Low's employment and working conditions compared to those of Beaverbrook's other cartoonists? Apart from Low, there were seven other cartoonists employed by Express Newspapers. They were Sidney Strube, Osbert Lancaster, Carl Giles, Roy Ulyett and Michael Cummings on the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, and James Friell (Gabriel) and Victor Weisz (Vicky) on the *Evening Standard*.<sup>150</sup>

Low was the only one of the aforementioned cartoonists to have been actively pursued by Beaverbrook. E.J. Robertson, as General Manager of Express Newspapers, was questioned by the Press Commission in 1947 over what role Beaverbrook had played in 'the engagement of David Low as cartoonist'. When asked by Reverend M.E. Aubrey, a

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<sup>147</sup> The *Evening Standard* was, at this time, considered to be 'independent Conservative'. David Butler & Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts 1900-1985*, Sixth Edition, Macmillan, 1986, Page 489.

<sup>148</sup> 'Our Busy Cartoonists', *Newspaper World*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>149</sup> James Cameron, *Beaverbrook's England 1940-1965*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 11.

<sup>150</sup> Jak (Raymond Jackson) cannot be included in this list. Although he joined the *Evening Standard* in the 1950s, he worked only as an illustrator, and did not begin drawing political cartoons till 1966, two years after Beaverbrook's death.

member of the Commission, whether the decision to employ Low was ‘decided by Lord Beaverbrook, or by the editor or by whom?’ Robertson had replied:<sup>151</sup>

‘When Low was doing brilliant cartoons for the *Star*, Lord Beaverbrook was almost in the relationship of editor-in-chief of the *Standard*. He was a very active man with a great flair for journalism. Lord Beaverbrook said: “That is the finest cartoonist. You ought to get him.” There were no questions whether he was Left, Right, or centre. We got him. We had consultations with the then editor, and everybody agreed on his engagement. We had been envious of the *Star* having him.’<sup>152</sup>

Apart from Strube, who had been at the *Daily Express* when Beaverbrook took it over in 1916, all the other cartoonists were discovered and employed solely by Beaverbrook’s editors with hardly any involvement on his part. The pocket cartoonist, Osbert Lancaster, was employed by the Features Editor of the *Daily Express*, John Rayner, who recommended he had a go at drawing pocket cartoons for the paper. Lancaster’s first pocket cartoon appeared on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1939 in Tom Driberg’s ‘William Hickey’ gossip column. Its success led later to Lancaster’s pocket cartoon being transferred to a more prominent front-page position. Lancaster’s popularity did in no way rub off on Beaverbrook. According to Lancaster’s biographer, Richard Boston, Osbert was a complete enigma to Beaverbrook. In looking at his pocket cartoon Beaverbrook had been heard to say, by his assistant at the *Daily Express*, George Malcolm Thomson, ‘What is the point of Osbert Lancaster?’<sup>153</sup> David Farrer also noticed Beaverbrook’s lack of interest in Lancaster. According to Farrer, Beaverbrook believed that Lancaster’s pocket cartoon was only there as a sop to the intelligentsia.<sup>154</sup> It is surprising, therefore, that Lancaster, like Low, was not employed on the *Evening Standard*!

Carl Giles was employed by John Gordon, Editor of the *Sunday Express*, who spotted and admired Giles’s cartoons in *Reynold’s News*.<sup>155</sup> Gordon lured the cartoonist onto the *Sunday Express* where he started drawing for the paper from October 1943. Gordon’s strong admiration for Giles can be seen by what he wrote in the preface to the first ever annual Giles book:

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<sup>151</sup> As reported in the *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1947. Robertson was a director of the *Evening Standard* at the time of Low’s employment on the paper.

<sup>152</sup> As reported in the *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1947.

<sup>153</sup> Richard Boston, *OSBERT: A Portrait of Osbert Lancaster*, Collins, 1989, Page 116.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Reynold’s News* was a newspaper to the left of the political spectrum and run by the Co-op. It was the only British paper to have come out against the Munich agreement in 1938.

'I think that in his own particular line of cartoon Giles is without equal in Britain today.'<sup>156</sup>

Michael Cummings was employed on the *Daily Express*, having personally written to Beaverbrook asking for employment. According to the cartoonist himself, who was drawing for *Tribune* under Michael Foot's editorship at the time:

'I was really too right-wing for a socialist paper. The *Express* needed someone to replace Strube and I wrote to Beaverbrook to see if he would offer me the job. I got a reply that was quite typical of him, he said something like, "Mr Cummings, I have arranged for you to meet Mr Christiansen. I am an old gentlemen who wants to sit in the sun". He always used to pretend that he had no say in the running of his papers.'<sup>157</sup>

Charles Wintour, when Editor of the *Evening Standard*, employed both James Friell and Vicky during the 1950s. With the latter cartoonist, Wintour went to great personal lengths to get him to join the *Evening Standard*. Vicky drew his first cartoon for the evening paper on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1958.

As far as the other cartoonists are concerned, Roy Ullyett, who joined the *Daily Express* in 1953, only drew sporting cartoons.<sup>158</sup> Giles and Lancaster were social commentators who depicted and parodied the way the British lived their lives. Their cartoons were therefore on the whole apolitical. In 1949, the then Editor of the *Daily Express*, Arthur Christiansen, confirmed in a letter to Beaverbrook how disastrous Giles was on the occasions he attempted to draw a political cartoon:

'In one of your notes you say that Giles is not developing as you had hoped, and that he has not got the "firm, stern, harsh qualities of Low". I do not think that Giles could possibly compete in Low's field. He is not a political cartoonist. Whenever he tries this line of country, he flops badly. But his humour makes the widest appeal in this country, and there is no sign whatsoever of his losing his grip on the public.'<sup>159</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Peter Tory, *Giles: A Life in Cartoons*, Headline, 1993, Page 145.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Allen, *The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 159. Michael Cummings was already well known to Beaverbrook due to his long friendship with his father A.J. Cummings. During the Second World War, A.J. as he was known, had asked Beaverbrook, in his capacity as a member of the War Cabinet, if he could not get Michael released from being called up to serve in the Army.

<sup>158</sup> Ullyett was very fond of his spot on the back page. 'He once said to Beaverbrook 'If anyone starts at page one of a paper and reads all the way through he deserves a laugh if he gets to the back.' Beaverbrook was not visibly amused by this remark.' Robert Allen, *Voice of Britain, The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 157.

<sup>159</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

No doubt such comments from on high were reported back to Giles in some form or other. Giles surely took notice of what must have been said about his forays into political cartooning, but of course it would have been unlikely that such an eminent cartoonist would have admitted to such a thing. Instead Giles told Robert Allen, when the latter was writing a history of the *Daily Express* in the early 1980s, that he had imposed upon himself a rule that ‘he never draws a cartoon which is primarily political... He has never believed that politics on its own makes good journalism. He points out that if politics sold papers, then the *Morning Star*, which has yet to discover jokes, would be the best-selling paper in the country’.<sup>160</sup> Giles believed that his freedom of expression was never interfered with during his time with Beaverbrook as his proprietor:

‘The freedom they gave me was something I couldn’t have got anywhere else. And they’ve stuck to it right through to today.’<sup>161</sup>

Osbert Lancaster also felt that his independence had never been impaired. In 1961 he acknowledged that:

‘Lord Beaverbrook never in twenty years made any attempt by limit or pressure to curb the free expression of his cartoonist’s opinions, no matter how manifestly they failed to coincide with his own.’<sup>162</sup>

Sir Edward Pickering, who replaced Christiansen as Editor of the *Daily Express*, confirmed that neither he nor his proprietor ever interfered in the work or publication of those who drew the cartoons:

‘In my own experience editing the *Daily Express* in the 50s and early 60s, I had to deal with Giles, Cummings and Osbert Lancaster as a team of cartoonists. At no time in putting their cartoons into the paper did I ever find it necessary to consult Lord Beaverbrook, nor did I ever receive from Lord Beaverbrook any directions about the cartoons.’<sup>163</sup>

These statements of non-interference are no doubt entirely correct, but one cannot compare the level of independence of Giles, Cummings and Lancaster to that of Low’s. For, as already mentioned, Lancaster and Giles were social commentators, not political

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<sup>160</sup> Robert Allen, *The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 173.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Allen, *The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 168.

<sup>162</sup> Richard Boston, *OSBERT: A Portrait of Osbert Lancaster*, Collins, 1989, Page 116.

<sup>163</sup> Sir Edward Pickering to Timothy S. Benson, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1997.

ones. Therefore their cartoons, knowing what we know of Beaverbrook's feelings on the subject, were unlikely to cause his displeasure.

Low, Strube, Cummings, Vicky and Friell were the political cartoonists. Of these five, Vicky and Friell were left-wingers by conviction. Low and Strube (though the latter always referred to himself as an 'independent'), were in a general sense left of centre, while Cummings was to the centre-right and most sympathetic of the politics of the *Daily Express*, as his letter to Beaverbrook in 1964 suggests:

'... as you know, I am always anxious to co-operate with the editorial direction as much as I can.'<sup>164</sup>

Cummings was in total sympathy with the political direction of the *Daily Express*. As far as Sir Edward Pickering is concerned, he worked for Beaverbrook when the latter was no longer politically active and was by all accounts in virtual retirement.

In a letter to Strube's widow, Beaverbrook mentioned how effective Cummings had been to the Conservatives during the 1959 General Election:

'The campaign in the *Daily Express* was very good largely due to Cummings. And I used to say the same thing about George [Strube's nickname] when he did cartoons for us.'<sup>165</sup>

The difference between Low and the other two left-wingers, Vicky and Friell, was that the latter two were employed at a time when Beaverbrook paid very little attention to the political direction of his newspapers.<sup>166</sup> So it was only Strube and Low who had to contend with Beaverbrook when, during the inter-war period, he was at the height of his powers and in full control of his papers. Unlike Low, Strube's cartoons were benign in their approach to politics and politicians, as Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister for the majority of the inter-war years and often their most popular target, appreciated:

'Strube is a gentle genius, I don't mind his attacks because he never hits below the belt. Now Low is a genius, but he is evil and malicious. I cannot bear Low!'<sup>167</sup>

It has also been accepted that Strube was very supportive of both Beaverbrook and his policies, unlike Low who, it has been said, mercilessly ridiculed Beaverbrook. This, as will

<sup>164</sup> Michael Cummings to Lord Beaverbrook, undated circa 1964, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>165</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Mrs Marie Strube, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1959, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>166</sup> He spent most of his twilight years out of the country, mainly at his plantation in the West Indies.

<sup>167</sup> Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life*, Heinemann, 1961, Page 155.

be shown in the next chapter, is an inaccurate assessment in regard to Low. Strube's support for Beaverbrook was little different to that given by Low. It has also been widely overlooked that Strube's warnings over Hitler and the Nazis were just as early, just as consistent, and just as critical as those of Low's cartoons in the 1930s. Vaughan Jones, a *Daily Express* reporter stationed in Berlin during the 1930s, noted that Hitler often took a dislike to Strube's cartoons in the *Daily Express*. On one occasion, due to a Strube cartoon on the subject of the Berlin Olympics entitled 'COMING EVENTS', orders were given that all copies of the newspaper were to be confiscated as soon as they arrived in Germany. According to Jones:

'Nazi officials shuddered with horror as they collected round the paper and looked at the offending drawing. 'Handsome Adolf, the idol of the Nazis. See him jump the symbolic hurdles!' They scarcely dared to look. 'That such a drawing should be possible' a prominent Nazi murmured with embarrassment to me as he looked at my copy. "And Colonel General Goering and Propaganda Minister Goebbels shown that way!", he continued in horror. "And look at Herr Greiser with his thumb to his nose!" He broke off and closed the paper with embarrassment.'<sup>168</sup>



<sup>168</sup> Vaughan Jones, report from Berlin, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1936, Strube Papers.

It has also been forgotten that, as a consequence, Strube's name was to appear with Low's on the Nazi death list. Nonetheless, Low overshadowed Strube during the years they shared the same proprietor, even though the former was on the mass-circulation daily. Today Strube is long forgotten, while Low's work is still held in high esteem. Consequently, Low is generally considered the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest political cartoonist, yet at the time Strube was vastly more popular.

Of the seven cartoonists, only Low and Giles refused to be tied down as staff artists, having signed contracts that allowed them to submit signed contributions only. This enabled them to work away from the offices of their respective newspapers. Low worked from a secluded studio in Hampstead, while Giles would draw his cartoons in the privacy of his Ipswich farm. Not surprisingly, both cartoonists did this partly to avoid any contact or interference from their editors. The other cartoonists were more than happy to work in the office and in tandem with their editors. Working from the newspaper they would produce several ideas or sketches for a cartoon each day, which would then be discussed with, and explained to, their editor. According to Giles's biographer, Peter Tory, they would 'nervously approach the editor's office with a number of rough ideas and hope that at least one might meet with approval'.<sup>169</sup>

Strube would often produce as many as half a dozen ideas for his cartoons as did Vicky.<sup>170</sup> Thus, if the editor was unhappy with the cartoonist's initial idea, he could influence him into producing something more in line with his own views. Vicky, like Strube, was always out to please. Under these circumstances, it was highly unlikely that the newspaper would ever be published without its cartoon. Unlike these other cartoonists, Low and Giles saw no need to discuss their choice of ideas with their editor. Giles once told an interviewer:

'I never submit roughs. I can't work that way - I just sit down and draw the thing.'<sup>171</sup>

Working away from the newspaper made it conveniently impractical for them to discuss their ideas with an editor. Both cartoonists drew four cartoons a week as their contract stipulated, but would only produce the one drawing for any particular day's paper. Low would spend on average five to eight hours a day preparing his cartoon, with the final

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<sup>169</sup> Peter Tory, *Giles: A Life in Cartoons*, Headline, 1993, Page 78.

<sup>170</sup> Vicky would sometimes even draw cartoons for successive editions of the *Evening Standard*.

<sup>171</sup> Robert Allen, *The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 168.

version often only being ready just in time for the messenger to take it away.<sup>172</sup> This is in stark contrast to Lancaster who admitted that it took him no time at all to complete a cartoon:

‘Well, you see the cartoons only used to take about five minutes... no, maybe we’d better say fifteen - don’t want to make it sound too easy! I used to get into the office some time after lunch, do the cartoon and then hang around until about seven when it was time to go out for the evening. There was certainly plenty of time for other activities which interested me.’<sup>173</sup>

In contrast to Lancaster’s cartoons, there was often very little time for any input by the editor as far as Giles’s and Low’s cartoons were concerned. The editor had to decide whether or not their cartoons were acceptable for publication. If unacceptable and beyond alteration, then no cartoon would appear in the next day’s newspaper. This was not so much a problem with Giles, whose style of cartoon was unlikely to cause the proprietor’s displeasure. Low was a different case entirely. As will be seen in later chapters, there is actual evidence of more than 40 instances where the *Evening Standard* had gone without a cartoon because Low’s work had been deemed unsuitable for publication. Interestingly enough, it seems that Low was far more compliant at the *Star*. There, he would do his cartoon a day ahead, as at the *Evening Standard*, but if he had wrongly anticipated an event that was taking place the next day, ‘he would do a fresh cartoon at the breakfast table, his messenger taking it off at 11 o’clock for the 2.30 edition’.<sup>174</sup>

It appears that money, as always with Beaverbrook, played a large part both in the employment of cartoonists and then in maintaining their loyalty to their respective newspapers. Low was offered a far higher salary by Beaverbrook than he could ever have got at the *Star*. Giles also found that he was made an offer he could not refuse when approached by the *Sunday Express*’s Editor, John Gordon:

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<sup>172</sup> Ernest O. Hauser, an American journalist, personally witnessed a day in the working life of Low, at the cartoonist’s home in Golders Green: ‘It takes Low from five to eight hours to produce the day’s cartoon. He usually makes one rough sketch, which he keeps improving until he is ready to transfer the final version upon a clean sheet. By five-thirty in the afternoon, Dennis, the *Standard* office boy, appears to call for the cartoon; he is ushered into the dining-room, where Mrs Low makes frantic efforts to divert him with sweets, tea and sometimes even a movie-ticket, while her husband is still verifying the exact detail of Chiang Kai-shek’s uniform in his large research library.’ Ernest O. Hauser, ‘Gad, Sir, Here’s Col. Blimp’s Creator!’, *Saturday Evening Post*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1945, Page 87, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>173</sup> Robert Allen, *The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 165. David Langdon confirmed that Lancaster took very little time over his cartoons. This according to Langdon, infuriated Strube who took all day to complete a cartoon. Lancaster would waltz into Strube’s *Daily Express* office and complete his cartoon within ten minutes to fifteen minutes. David Langdon interviewed by Timothy S. Benson, July 1998.

‘They bribed me’, Giles recalled. ‘They stuck a cigar in my face and told me what was to be’.<sup>175</sup>

When Strube wrote to Beaverbrook in 1931 saying that the *Daily Herald* had offered him £10,000 a year, Beaverbrook immediately increased his salary to that amount:

‘...as I explained to you yesterday there was an offer pending from another newspaper. This offer, in confidence took the concrete form last night of £10,000 a year for two years. You, Sir, will naturally understand that an offer of this magnitude is really upsetting and as a man with responsibilities it needed careful consideration.’<sup>176</sup>

Three days after writing this letter, Strube, having had his demands met in full, wrote again to thank Beaverbrook:

‘It is impossible for me to express on paper my feelings of gratitude to you for the magnificent way in which you have treated me... My ambition will be to merit your confidence. Believe me.’<sup>177</sup>

Two days later Beverley Baxter, the *Daily Express*’s Editor, confirmed the new arrangement:

‘In accordance with our discussion the other afternoon this letter is to signify the cancellation of the remainder of the contract now existing between you and the *Daily Express*. The new agreement replacing the old will be governed by the same conditions, and is to date for two years from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1931, at a salary of £10,000 per annum.’<sup>178</sup>

Low, like other favoured journalists and cartoonists on Beaverbrook’s payroll, was also occasionally given the odd financial bonus to both reward and maintain loyalty to the newspaper. He wrote to Beaverbrook on one such occasion thanking him for just such a gift:

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<sup>174</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1926, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>175</sup> Peter Tory, *Giles: A Life in Cartoons*, Headline 1993, Page 12.

<sup>176</sup> Sidney Strube to Lord Beaverbrook, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>177</sup> Sidney Strube to Lord Beaverbrook, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>178</sup> Beverley Baxter to Sidney Strube, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1931, Strube Papers.

‘I wish to thank-you for the cheque you were good enough to give me before I left, and to express my appreciation not so much of the intrinsic value thereof, as of the spirit which prompted it.’<sup>179</sup>

Like Strube, Low also received several large salary increases every time it looked likely that the *Daily Herald* wanted to lure him away, as the *Newspaper News World Service* confirmed:

‘The initial deal involved the raising of his salary from £3,000 to £4,500 a year. It was subsequently lifted again because of persistent overtures addressed to him by Lord Southwood, then Mr Elias.’<sup>180</sup>

Esmond Harmsworth, later the second Lord Rothermere, was well aware of the effect that the *Daily Herald's* continued interest was having on Low’s finances, as he commented to Bruce Lockhart at a dinner party in 1933:

‘Max said: “Strube is the highest paid man in the cartoon line - and he knows Tom Webster gets £10,000.” Low does not get as much, but as Esmond said, he gets enough to keep him from the *Daily Herald!*’<sup>181</sup>

It is significant to point out that the *Daily Herald* appeared to be the only newspaper that ever showed any real interest in employing either Low or Strube during their time with Beaverbrook.<sup>182</sup>

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, it is almost impossible to compare Low to the other cartoonists employed by Express Newspapers during Beaverbrook’s lifetime. His position as a cartoonist was a unique one. Low was beyond doubt, as Beaverbrook well knew, both the most inventive and technically gifted draughtsman of them all. Michael Foot, who was Low’s editor at the *Evening Standard* during the Second World War, felt that in spite of his close friendship and admiration for Vicky, Low was the greatest cartoonist he had ever known:

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<sup>179</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives. Low had just gone on his summer holiday to Normandy.

<sup>180</sup> J.S. Elias had a 51% majority share holding in the *Daily Herald*. Reported in the *Newspaper News World Service*, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1950.

<sup>181</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 276.

‘Low was very mild in his personal relations, talked quietly. Didn’t think he had a grip on it, but when he came up with the cartoons, greatest draughtsman of the lot. Wonderful thing to have been his Editor especially at that time. Like Low, Vicky had wonderful political ideas but did not have the draughtsmanship.’<sup>183</sup>

Low’s position at Express Newspapers was also unique in other ways. He was the only cartoonist to have been directly pursued and then employed by Beaverbrook. He was the only overtly political cartoonist who refused to draw more than one cartoon per day for the newspaper, while working independently from a studio in Hampstead. He was the only left-of-centre cartoonist to be employed while Beaverbrook was still in total control and direction of his newspapers. This, as a result, led to Beaverbrook having a greater involvement in, and concern for, Low’s work than, say, any of the other seven cartoonists that were employed on his newspapers during his lifetime. This will become self-evident in later chapters.

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<sup>182</sup> The *Daily Herald* finally got their man in 1950, when Low resigned from the *Evening Standard*.

<sup>183</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

## Chapter Three: Mischievous Imp or Brave Crusader?

Did David Low, as has previously been believed, mercilessly ridicule Lord Beaverbrook in his cartoons while employed at the *Evening Standard*?

‘Besides being a Nero and a Napoleon he was also a bit of a Narcissus.’<sup>1</sup> (Low on Beaverbrook)

‘It has to be said of the late Lord Beaverbrook that he allowed - indeed encouraged - the skilful mockery of his own creed.’<sup>2</sup> (James Cameron)

‘The political cartoonist is a powerful weapon for good or evil and in a righteous cause should be used like a giant.’<sup>3</sup> (Sidney Strube)

### **Why did Lord Beaverbrook want to be continually portrayed in Low’s cartoons as a ‘mischievous imp’?**

‘In some ways Lord Beaverbrook is the ablest publicist in England today. You may laugh at him; but you find that he has already hired David Low, a gifted Australian cartoonist, to do it better than you can.’<sup>4</sup>

‘Lord Beaverbrook has no objection to the artist’s unusual liberties with his personal appearance and even his unidentical political views.’<sup>5</sup>

David Low did not ridicule his proprietor as has generally been believed. Contrary to this misconception, throughout his time at the *Evening Standard* Low greatly flattered Beaverbrook while at the same time overstating his political importance. Beaverbrook was continually portrayed in Low’s cartoons in the very manner the press magnate saw himself: a dynamic force appearing always to succeed over the forces of apathy and incompetence.

<sup>1</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 198.

<sup>2</sup> James Cameron, *Beaverbrook’s England 1940-65*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 11.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Strube, scrapbook notes, undated, Strube Papers.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Scarborough on the British Press, *Daily Express*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1934.

<sup>5</sup> *Evening Standard*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1936.



Beaverbrook had always encouraged his staff to publicise him in his newspapers, instead of directly doing so himself. He, like other newspaper proprietors of his time, knew that it was quite improper to do this personally in their own newspapers. There appeared to be a hidden code, by which modesty forbade them from writing glowingly about their own person. Furthermore, they assumed that self-promotion would be scorned by readers. As this self-imposed restriction prevented them from writing about themselves in their own newspapers, they remained, more often than not, more anonymous than many of their lowliest employees.

This was not the only reason why Beaverbrook steered clear of self-promotion in his papers. He was a surprisingly shy man who actually preferred, in most instances, to remain in the background. He lacked an inner confidence when it actually came to personal confrontation. This is partly the reason why he so often authorised his editors and managers to carry out his dirty work on his behalf, as already touched upon in Chapter One. At the time of Low's appointment on the *Evening Standard* towards the end of 1927, Beaverbrook announced that he was leaving forever his large office on the top floor of the *Express* building. From then on he had little personal contact with staff, communicating mainly by telephone and memo. When Hannen Swaffer once asked Beaverbrook why he did not spend more time at the *Daily Express* office, he had replied: 'I'll tell you a secret. I'm very, very shy.'<sup>6</sup>

Beaverbrook's shyness led him to avoid invitations to dine out, even when they came from Downing Street. Social and even business gatherings, such as dinner parties or luncheons, would always be held in the comfort and security of his own home. He had to remain, as always, king of his own castle. Those that wanted to dine in his company had to resign themselves to accepting his invitation rather than him accepting theirs. Low seemed to understand Beaverbrook's preference for remaining on familiar territory:

'Beaverbrook was too well aware of the advantages of playing on the home ground. Winston tried to spike his guns before introducing his budget by inviting him to lunch at Chartwell, but Lord B. declined. L.I.G. craftily tried to rope him in to breakfast at Downing Street, but unsuccessfully.'<sup>7</sup>

For such an ambitious and egotistical personality as Beaverbrook, who delighted in self-advertisement, professional etiquette and shyness appeared to be something of an overriding handicap. To overcome these obstacles he employed and used talented

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 179.

<sup>7</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 176.

journalists, and cartoonists such as Low and Strube, who would in turn publicise both him and his activities. It took little insight on Low's behalf to appreciate that Beaverbrook was going to thoroughly enjoy being drawn, especially if it both flattered the image he had of himself and constantly depicted him in the company of leading national or international statesmen. As Malcolm Muggeridge observed so astutely, Beaverbrook had a brilliant flair for picking and using men like Low.<sup>8</sup> He was somewhat unusual compared to other press barons in that he encouraged members of his own journalistic staff, as well as Low and Strube, to create and sustain a public image of himself that was larger than life. According to a newspaper article at the time, being a regular feature in his newspapers' cartoons proved an effective way in which to promote himself:

'Lord Beaverbrook had in that way become known to the general public in a manner which he would never otherwise have done, as no newspaper proprietor was likely to print columns of boost and pictures about himself even if he wanted the public to know who he was.'<sup>9</sup>

The Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, later a Cabinet Minister in the 1945-50 Labour Government, thought that because of such coverage Beaverbrook enjoyed 'a curious popularity among people who have never met him and who hate his policies, simply because of the joky little imp into which Low has made him'.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, of his continual depiction in Low's and Strube's cartoons he became known to the general public in a manner in which he would never otherwise have done. *Life* magazine picked up on how Beaverbrook got around the problem of publicising himself by employing talented cartoonists to do so instead.

'Realising that while readers would never believe anything written about him in his own papers, he also saw that they would only resent it if the papers wrote nice things about him. He therefore gave his staff permission to ridicule him in print and picture whenever it saw fit. So far, Low, the brilliant cartoonist of the *Evening Standard*, has made more spectacular use of this franchise than any of his colleagues and never loses a chance to portray his boss, whose spindling figure and face of a sad goblin make him perfect material for caricature as an imp, an insect or a devil.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, 'Robin Badfellow', *Sunday Observer*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

<sup>9</sup> Unidentified newspaper report, circa 1930, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 142.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

Beaverbrook knew that his readers would be suspicious if those contributing to his newspapers wrote about him continually in glowing terms. He appreciated that to avoid such scepticism, all articles and cartoons would have to surreptitiously conceal their true intent, and therefore appear to be critical in their make-up. This would also give the readers the impression that he gave his staff the leeway to publish what they really thought of him and his policies. It killed two birds with one stone. Not only did it encourage the image Beaverbrook had of himself, but it also gave people the impression that he was an unusually broad-minded proprietor. A.J. Cummings, when Editor of the *News Chronicle*, wrote to Beaverbrook in sycophantic tones, astounded at his tolerance in what he saw as Low's continual attempts to pillory his own proprietor:

'I don't believe there is another newspaper proprietor in the world who would have allowed his cartoonist to flout his policy as Low did last week in his Fire Brigade Cartoon. I would have seen him in hell first. The fact is you are a much bigger man than any one of us is candid enough to acknowledge openly. I mean this absolutely.'<sup>12</sup>

A.J. Cummings was not the only member of the press to believe that most people in Beaverbrook's position would have hated being constantly portrayed as a figure of ridicule, as this article from the *Rochdale Observer* observed:

'It is one of the mysteries of Fleet Street how David Low keeps his job, the liberties he takes with his employer's personal appearance would in most cases make his position untenable. But Lord Beaverbrook (to his eternal credit) apparently disregards the liberties taken by Low.'<sup>13</sup>

Thus the belief that Low had full liberty to express his views, even though his proprietor was believed to have been the chief butt in many of the cartoons, appears to have been accepted by both commentators and readers alike. As far as Beaverbrook's own journalists were concerned, any articles that appeared critical of him were often, with his express permission, intentionally and prominently highly publicised by his editors. It created the impression that attacks on Beaverbrook by his own papers happened more often than they actually did. He naturally tolerated such attacks, because they had his blessing whilst reinforcing the image he had of himself. The *Socialist Leader* found it ironic that out of all the proprietors in Fleet Street, it was Beaverbrook who gave journalists and

<sup>12</sup> A.J. Cummings to Lord Beaverbrook, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1934, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>13</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

cartoonists the most freedom of expression, even allowing them to mock their own proprietor:

‘It is a strange quirk of Beaverbrook which has given to the radical movement of this country so many of our leading journalists and our supreme illustrator who delights in depicting his gnome-like employer in compromising situations in the columns of his own paper.’<sup>14</sup>

Like many prominent people, Beaverbrook always preferred attention to indifference, even if that attention was often critical. He could take a joke at his expense, and took pleasure in being ridiculed and pilloried by his own journalists, especially if it assisted circulation figures. In the late 1930s, Beaverbrook found it highly amusing when the staff of the *Daily Express* gave a unanimous ‘No’ to the question, ‘Do you approve of *Express* policies?’<sup>15</sup> *Time* magazine acknowledged how Beaverbrook sustained and enjoyed being ridiculed by members of his own journalistic staff:

‘Evelyn Waugh when he worked for the *Evening Standard* as a reporter repeatedly and maliciously caricatured Beaverbrook as Lord Monomark or Lord Copper of the *Daily Express*. Monomark was a ludicrous egocentric who eats little but raw onions and oatmeal and is continually surrounded by slavish sycophants who toady to his ignorant misconceptions, abuses his distracted underlings and usually triumphs by some absurdly fortuitous accident. In 1930 Lord Beaverbrook sent Waugh to cover the Ethiopian Coronation. Waugh repaid him with a lampooning in *Black Mischief*. Later Lord Beaverbrook sent Waugh to cover the Ethiopian War. Waugh bladdered him again in *Scoop*.’<sup>16</sup>

In 1930, H.G. Wells wrote *The Autocracy of Mr Parham*. It included ten illustrations by Low. The book was a political satire on totalitarianism, with one of the characters, Sir Bussy Woodcock, based on Beaverbrook himself. Sir Bussy ‘had acquired a colossal power of ordering people about’ but ‘had not the slightest idea what on the whole he wanted them to do’.<sup>17</sup> Low assisted Wells by making Sir Bussy easily recognisable as Beaverbrook with the addition of Churchill’s collar and the eyes of Sir William Joynson-Hicks.<sup>18</sup> Michael Foot believed that Beaverbrook was thrilled with the idea that Wells had included him as a character, even if it did show him as a fairly unpleasant millionaire businessman:

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Low Highbrow,’ *Socialist Leader*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>15</sup> From a syndicated article in the *Canadian Globe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>16</sup> *Time*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1938, Page 49.

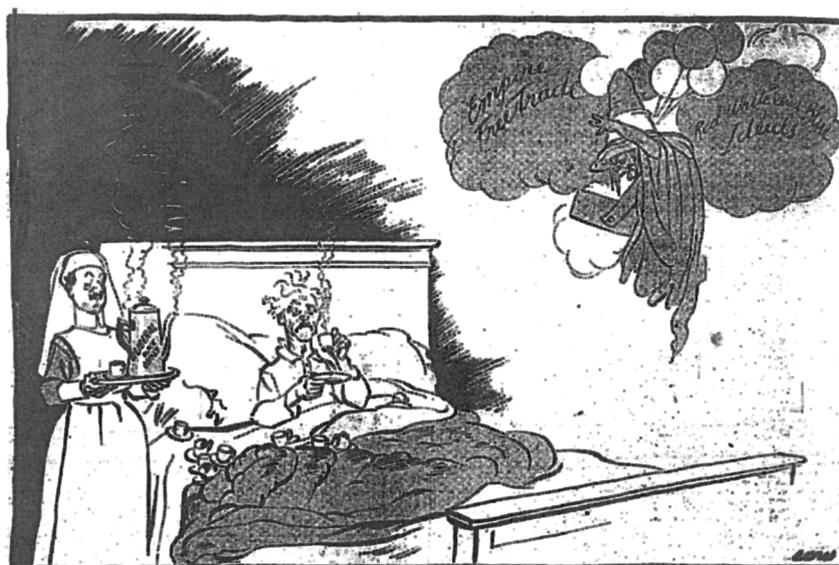
<sup>17</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Autocracy of Mr Parham*, Heinemann, 1930, Page 6.

'Beaverbrook appeared as a thinly disguised character which was quite critical of him. He took it and enjoyed the book. He often told me to ask his guests at Cherkley what they thought of the book and of the character that resembled him, and if they had not read it, why not?'<sup>19</sup>

Beaverbrook adored the attention given to him by such a world-renowned novelist, as Lockhart noted: 'Beaverbrook praised Wells's new book very much.'<sup>20</sup> When journalists from other newspapers wrote about him, more usually in the form of an attack, he warmed to them both for their audacity, and for the attention they gave him, as *Life* magazine astutely recognised:

'In their stories William Hickey, star columnist of the *Daily Express*, and Lord Kinross, columnist for the *Evening Standard*, ridicule their chief whenever possible. Treatment of this sort tickles Beaverbrook so much that he has even showered premiums on outsiders for particularly effective insults to himself. When Beaverbrook made a speech in Manchester during his crusade for Empire trade, an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* sneered at Beaverbrook as a "pedlar of dreams". He hired the author of the diatribe, Howard Spring, to write editorials for the *Express*.'<sup>21</sup>

Low got wind of this and soon after drew Beaverbrook in 'THE PEDLAR O' DREAMS



MEETS AN OBSTINATE CASE OF WAKEFULNESS.'<sup>22</sup> It no doubt thrilled Beaverbrook who quickly requested the cartoon for his own collection. Low's drawing, unlike Spring's article, showed Beaverbrook as a recurrent nightmare for

Prime Minister MacDonald, an enormous exaggeration of Beaverbrook's political

<sup>18</sup> Sir William Joynson-Hicks, Conservative Home Secretary between 1924-1929, later Lord Brentford.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 123.

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

<sup>22</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1931.

influence, especially after his Empire Crusade had just ended in relative failure. The *Socialist Leader* as late as 1953 went so far as to say that Beaverbrook had actually encouraged his journalists to look out for and publish anything derogatory about himself by outsiders. Even bad publicity was good for Beaverbrook:

‘Lord Beaverbrook has another claim to honourable fame. He insists that his journalists shall print in the columns of his own papers each adverse comment upon his name which is uttered by any celebrity. When Low was working for the Beaverbrook group he made a regular practice of poking fun at Beaverbrook policy and occasionally he would use a saucy caricature of his own employer.’<sup>23</sup>

Attacks on Beaverbrook by his own staff were often not altogether what they seemed. He mostly acquiesced in their attacks on him, because as he knew they often carried a hidden agenda that was in his favour. For example, in 1940, during the period known as the ‘phoney war’, Alan Wood, then employed by Beaverbrook as a leader-writer, published a signed attack on the latter and the policies he was advocating in the *Daily Express*:

‘He spends his time sending out continual messages of contempt and derision against his victims, with the impish delight of a small boy squashing flies on a window-pane. And the Government pay far too much attention to him... But I have a high opinion of him as an administrator. Give him a job to do in the Government and he would get things done with... energy and drive.’<sup>24</sup>

This, as can be seen, was not in effect a fully-fledged attack on his patron, but a cleverly disguised statement of support. As we shall see with Low’s cartoons, such statements, while acknowledging the mischievous side of his character, were really emphasising that a man of his stature and enduring energy was being wasted, when it appeared that both the country and the government desperately needed men of his ilk.

Having looked earlier at why Beaverbrook had been so keen to employ Low’s services, it is now apparent that part of his initial interest in the *Star* cartoonist was due to his fascination with how Low depicted him in his daily cartoons. It was Low’s ability of portraying Beaverbrook as he really saw himself, a ‘mischievous omnipotent imp’ that can be seen as one of the primary factors behind the cartoonist’s employment on the *Evening Standard*, as Beaverbrook’s own *Daily Express* noted in 1925:

<sup>23</sup> *Socialist Leader*, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1953, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 250.

‘He is irresponsible and light-hearted, and permeates his papers with his spirit. Low of the *Star*, depicts him as an elfish imp or an impish elf – a dictionary meaning of the one is “a mischievous person” and of the other “a little malignant spirit” – and in his attacks on politicians of his own party he justifies the cartoonist’s gibe.’<sup>25</sup>

Low knew that he would be expected to give his new proprietor a high profile in his cartoons. According to Hugh Cudlipp, Low had been ‘licensed to caricature his Boss’.<sup>26</sup> A sentence from a syndicated article in the *Adelaide News* at the time helps confirm this view:

‘Low’s caricatures of him so tickled Beaverbrook that he engaged Low for his papers. Low then delighted the boss by caricaturing him more than ever.’<sup>27</sup>

In 1939, the Danish cartoonist, Jorgen Bast, also made the connection between Low’s portrayal of Beaverbrook and the latter’s wish to have him on his newspaper:

‘He was originally connected to the liberal *Star* and it was his drawings in this paper which made Lord Beaverbrook take an interest in him, not least his caricature of the noble Lord himself.’<sup>28</sup>

It was no coincidence that Beaverbrook’s sudden interest in Low coincided with the appearance of the Plot Press in December 1923. Edgar Middleton, author of the first biography of Beaverbrook in 1934, understood exactly what it was about Low that appealed to the Press Lord:

‘He [Beaverbrook] has humour; his treatment of Low, the cartoonist, is an example. Low satirises him brutally in his drawings. The more brutal he becomes, the more Beaverbrook smiles. Until he finishes by taking him on at a record salary and giving him an entirely free hand.’<sup>29</sup>

The focal image of Low’s Beaverbrook was always his facial expression. The cartoonist drew him with a large head and an exceedingly wide mouth that was out of all proportion to the rest of his face and body. According to Tom Driberg:

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Express*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1925.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh Cudlipp, *The Prerogative of the Harlot*, Bodley Head, 1980, Page 252. Cudlipp had been Editor of the *Daily Mirror* and was the brother of Percy Cudlipp, Low’s Editor at the *Evening Standard* (1933-37).

<sup>27</sup> *Adelaide News*, undated, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>28</sup> English translation of Danish essay on David Low in *Og Hans Mester Vaerter* by Jorgen Bast, 1939.

<sup>29</sup> Edgar Middleton, *Beaverbrook: The Statesmen and the Man*, Stanley Paul, 1934, Page 233.

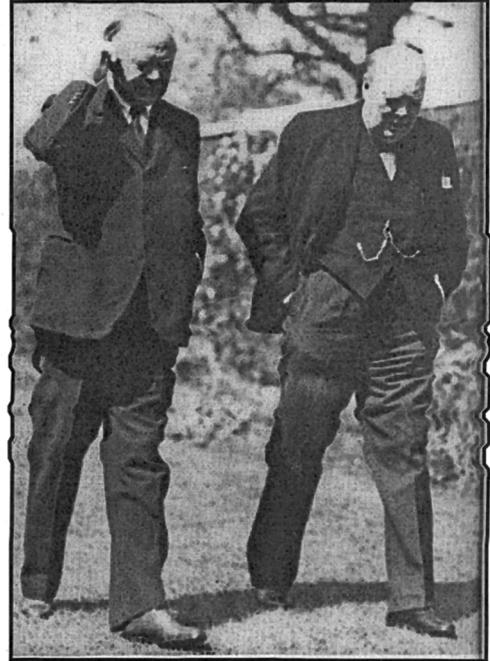
‘The mouth is just as in every cartoon of him by Low or Vicky, a satchel mouth, bisecting the face in an enormous grin.’<sup>30</sup>

The mouth was constantly smiling. William J. Brittain felt the cartoonist’s use of the exaggerated smile helped to soften Beaverbrook’s none-too-perfect public image:

‘Lord Beaverbrook was often pictured as an ogre - despite the grin of the Low and Strube cartoons - and I expected to meet a frightening force when I first went to see him.’<sup>31</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor felt that Low’s caricature of Beaverbrook was the ‘best likeness’ of him, but made the press magnate look ‘misleadingly small’.<sup>32</sup> Taylor is right. At five feet nine inches high, Beaverbrook was no dwarf and was slightly taller than Churchill. Nevertheless, his largish head and seemingly undeveloped body created the impression to those who knew him that he was short, rather like the way William Hague is perceived today. Lord Castlerosse, long-time friend and employee of Beaverbrook wrote in 1915:

‘He was not very tall but sturdy enough. His head was large and round – eyes far apart.’<sup>33</sup>



Above. As can see from this wartime photograph, Beaverbrook was in fact taller than Churchill.

Tom Driberg’s description of Beaverbrook confirms that of Castlerosse:

‘The head is too big for the boots. It is a powerful head, broad, rather flat-topped, bulging – almost as if its contents were pressing the bone-structure outwards.’<sup>34</sup>

Kathleen Harriman, the daughter of Averell Harriman, wrote to her sister in 1941 regarding Beaverbrook’s appearance:

‘Our host looks like a cartoon out of *Punch*: small baldish, big stomach, and from there he tapers down to two very shiny yellow shoes...’<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 1.

<sup>31</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 32.

<sup>32</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 678.

<sup>33</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 128.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 1.

<sup>35</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 404.

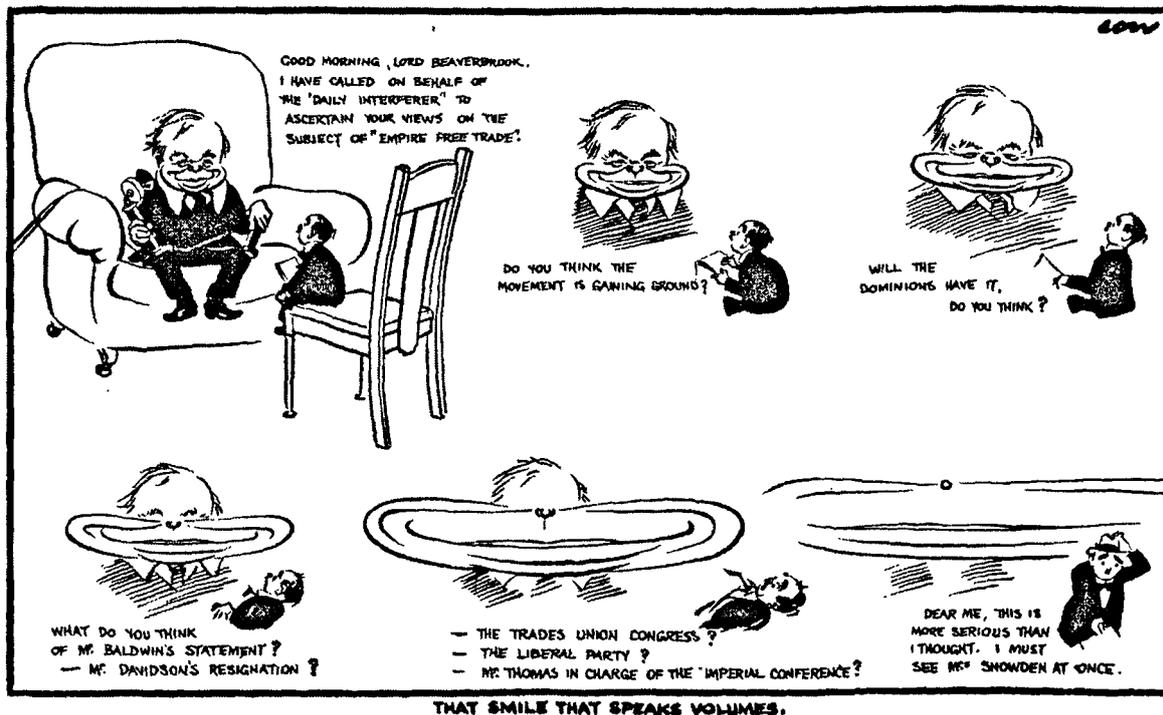
In 1952, Emery Pearce describing Beaverbrook's first television broadcast in the *Daily Herald*, wrote:

'Beaverbrook making an astonishing debut on television – and looking the living image of a Low cartoon.'<sup>36</sup>

If Arthur Christiansen strongly believed that, in all the time he knew Beaverbrook, his general appearance never changed, then Low's version, that of a little man with a large head was, and would have been considered, an accurate enough depiction of Beaverbrook.<sup>37</sup>

When Low drew an almost surreal cartoon called 'THAT SMILE THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES',<sup>38</sup> the editor, George Gilliat - presumably concerned that Low had gone too far with his depiction of Beaverbrook - sent it to his proprietor for approval with a covering letter on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1930:

'I enclose you a proof of the Low cartoon to appear next Monday. I am afraid he shows you no mercy.'<sup>39</sup>



In spite of the editor's concern, Beaverbrook thoroughly enjoyed being the centre of Low's attention. He would not have conceived the depiction of his growing smile as being

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1952.

<sup>37</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 228.

<sup>38</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1930.

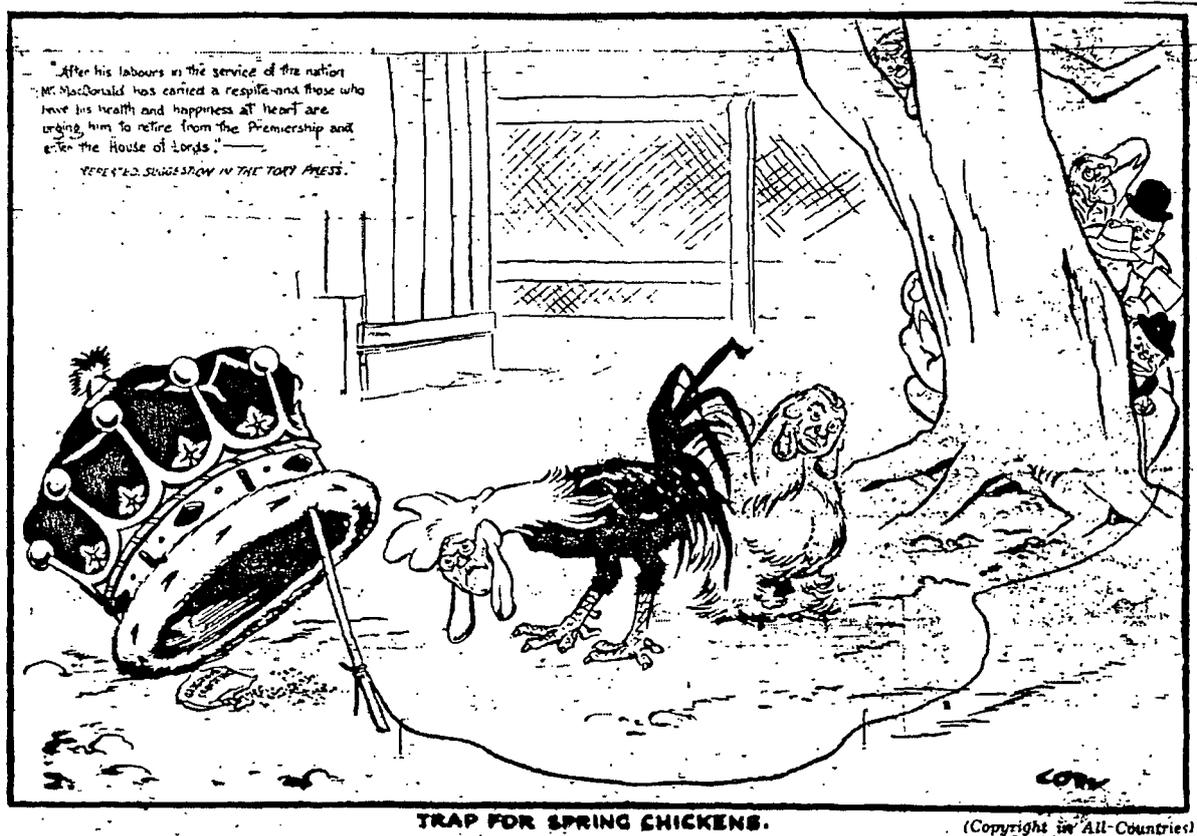
<sup>39</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

derogatory. The underlying allegory of the cartoon is that Beaverbrook's stature and that of Empire Free Trade continues to grow in contrast to the concerns of the then political world which are considered less and less significant. The cartoon, of course, had Beaverbrook's blessing. One of his secretaries immediately wrote back to Gilliat:

'Lord Beaverbrook has no objection to Monday's cartoon. He seeks no mercy.'<sup>40</sup>

Beaverbrook thrived on cartoons that made him appear politically important. When Low drew a cartoon called 'TRAP FOR SPRING CHICKENS',<sup>41</sup> he received immediate praise from his proprietor:

'Warmest congratulations on your cartoon of Monday. I hope you will not mind my saying that your work has reached a pinnacle. I am sure it is not the peak. But it must be very pleasing to you to know that your powers increase year after year.'<sup>42</sup>



Why did Beaverbrook write in such glowing terms to Low on this occasion? One has also to take into account that this was something Beaverbrook did not do particularly often, especially when compared to the amount of times he wrote praising Strube's work. It must be said that, unlike Low, Strube's cartoons were not biting satire, but good-humoured and

<sup>40</sup> A. Whelan to George Gilliat, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1935.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1935, Low Papers, University of Kent.

generally liked by those that appeared in them. Consequently, Beaverbrook probably had constant feedback from eminent personages whose praise for Strube would have in turn stirred him into writing letters of praise to the *Daily Express* cartoonist.

Did Beaverbrook find 'TRAP FOR SPRING CHICKENS' such an amusing cartoon because it was (probably) inspired by a *Daily Express* leader, or because it emphasised that the ailing and rather pitiful Prime Minister was about to be forced out of 10 Downing Street? There are plenty of other examples where Low ridiculed MacDonald's faltering leadership, which did not provoke Beaverbrook into writing letters of praise. So does Beaverbrook's reaction on this occasion have more to do with his own role within the cartoon? Amongst all those other eminent personalities featured, it is Beaverbrook who is about to operate the snare bringing an end to the Prime Minister's reign. As in most of Low's cartoons in which Beaverbrook appears, it is the latter who is always the catalyst in bringing down or humiliating political leaders and their underlings. Even being in the company of Colonel Blimp, which he often was, does not appear to have worried Beaverbrook. However, he kept up the pretence that Low always took an unfavourable view of him in his cartoons. As late as 1953, he said of Low:

'He attacked me most viciously. But then, it was his prerogative.'<sup>43</sup>

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Beaverbrook's insinuation that Low portrayed him 'viciously' was a conscious attempt at sustaining the myth that the cartoonist maintained his complete freedom at the expense of his proprietor's self-esteem. However, Clifford Sharp believed that Beaverbrook would have thoroughly enjoyed the way Low was portraying him in his cartoons.<sup>44</sup> In reference to one of his first cartoons for the *Evening Standard* entitled 'THE IDEAL PRIME MINISTER',<sup>45</sup> Sharp wrote:

'Your cartoon of November 7<sup>th</sup> was a most excellent joke, which Beaverbrook must have loved.'<sup>46</sup>

The cartoon in question was one of a number that Low often drew of himself, as the 'impudent hireling' who has to explain, before his Lordship, why his cartoons were causing offence. Low later appears to have become rather embarrassed about his portrayal of himself as subservient before Beaverbrook. In a letter to a magazine editor in 1940 he wrote:

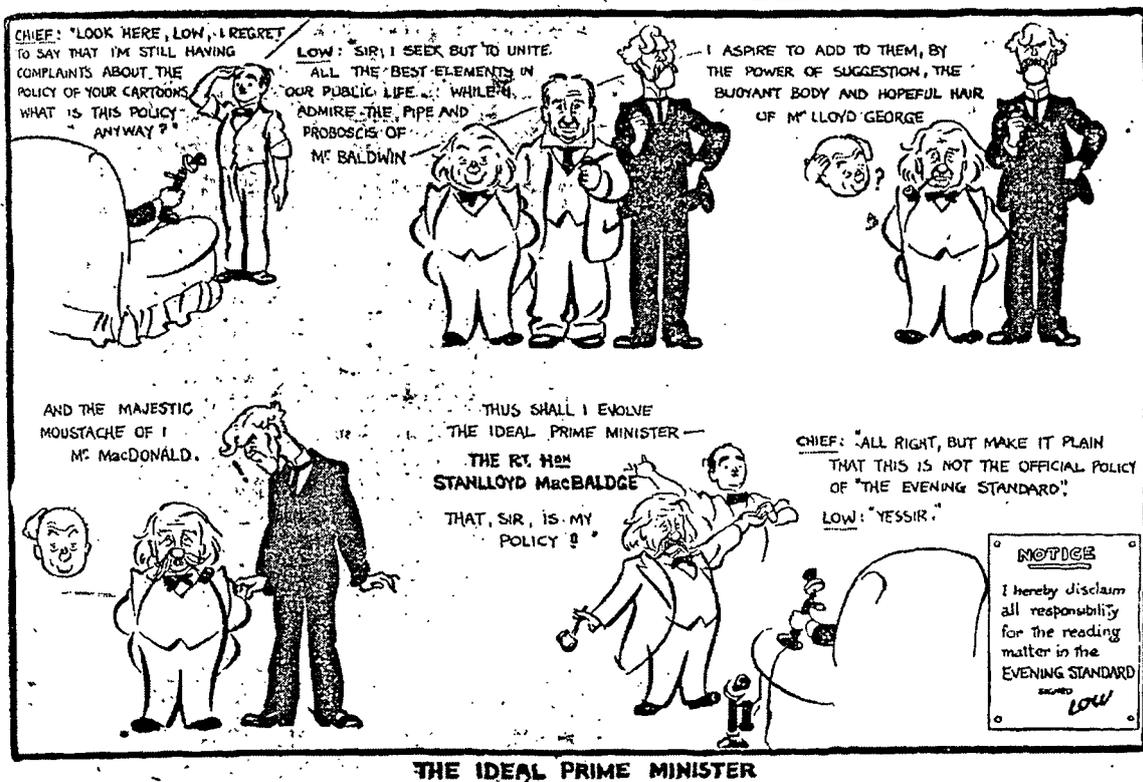
<sup>43</sup> Frank Rasky, *New Liberty*, February 1953, Page 61, Beaverbrook Archive.

<sup>44</sup> Clifford Sharp was then Editor of the *New Statesman*.

<sup>45</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1927.

<sup>46</sup> Clifford Sharp to David Low, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1927, Low Papers, University of Kent.

'The *Evening Standard* people have told me of your letter wanting to reprint a recent cartoon of Lord Beaverbrook. Of course I should be pleased to give you my permission, but NOT WITH THAT CAPTION [sic]. To tell you the truth, I am sick of that old gag representing me as the impudent hireling who is graciously permitted to be rude to the boss.'<sup>47</sup>



Above. The cartoon that Clifford Sharp, then Editor of the *New Statesman*, felt Beaverbrook 'must have loved'.

After many years of friendship with Beaverbrook, Michael Foot was convinced that 'he certainly enjoyed the cartoons of himself'.<sup>48</sup> The *Socialist Leader*, in the year after Low had left the *Evening Standard*, also acknowledged how much pleasure Beaverbrook had got out of it all:

'The genius of Lord Beaverbrook resides in the catholicity of his tastes. He is reputed to laugh with genuine humour at the gnome-like figure of himself which Low has hitherto depicted in many of the best cartoons.'<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> David Low to Gordon Beckles, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1940, Low Papers, University of Kent. What is strange is that the 'recent cartoon of Lord Beaverbrook' with the 'old gag' does not appear in any form around the date this letter is written.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>49</sup> *Socialist Leader*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1950, Low Papers, University of Kent.

Of course Beaverbrook would never openly admit, especially to his friends and political acquaintances, that he enjoyed being caricatured by Low. In a letter to his close friend Lord Birkenhead he misleadingly wrote:

‘The new generation like the Low caricatures. Ask Eleanor. For my part Low enrages my feelings when he makes me crawl out from under the table or peep through the door.’<sup>50</sup>

But one only has to look through Beaverbrook’s own albums, containing nothing else but cartoons in which he appeared, to appreciate how much pleasure he got from being caricatured by cartoonists in general. The collection consists of six large books containing approximately 1800 postcard-size cartoons which have all been reproduced from their respective newspapers. They include those drawn by many different cartoonists outside the employment of Express Newspapers, some of which are quite unpleasant caricatures of Beaverbrook (in 1936 *Tatler* recorded that Beaverbrook was one of the most mercilessly caricatured men in public life<sup>51</sup>). The albums serve to emphasise the greatness of Beaverbrook’s ego and the immense enjoyment he got from being caricatured by both Low and other Fleet Street cartoonists.<sup>52</sup>

Approximately two years after Low had joined the *Evening Standard*, the *Civil & Military Gazette* in India reported how successful the arrangement between Low and his proprietor had turned out; that just as Beaverbrook had hoped, Low was including him in his cartoons at every possible opportunity. This widely syndicated article confirmed what Beaverbrook was expecting from his political cartoonist:

‘Lord Beaverbrook, “the little man with the big smile” has never been so much in the public eye as since he empowered his employee, David Low, to put him into the caricatures of the *Evening Standard*. They say that Low satisfied his breezy independence of mind by stipulating that he should be no respecter of persons, of whatever party. This stipulation suited Lord Beaverbrook to a hair. He saw his chance there and then. The artist was to fire ahead, and the oftener he could bring in his own employer, anywhere and anyhow, the better the latter would be pleased.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to F.E. Smith, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>51</sup> *Tatler*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>52</sup> His collection of cartoons is presently on loan to the Cartoon Studies Centre at the University of Kent.

<sup>53</sup> From a syndicated article in the *Civil & Military Gazette*, Lahore, India, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1930.

A year later, the same newspaper not only reiterated what it had thought earlier, but added that it now saw Beaverbrook as Low's most popular and frequent character:

'Lord Beaverbrook seems more than ever disposed to play down to Low. Low is the cartoonist he employs to keep him well in the public eye, and in a variety of disguises and contortions. The artist shines at this sort of thing, and as we cannot expect high art from such a quarter, Low does his best to make up by his breadth. Broad he certainly is; in fact, the only thing broader is the smile he depicts on the face of his proprietor. Lord Beaverbrook may congratulate himself that he has no greater favourite as a model in the cartoons of the *Evening Standard*.'<sup>54</sup>

Low's image of Beaverbrook in his cartoons was often reinforced in a positive light by the editorials of the *Evening Standard*. By doing this, the readers were constantly given the impression that Low's Beaverbrook, just like the real one, was in reality not only a force to be reckoned with, but also a man with the very best of intentions:

'The familiar cartoon of Low showing Lord Beaverbrook maliciously scheming down a telephone is enjoyed just as much by Lord Beaverbrook as by the public, in that he is so often scheming for some perfectly good end.'<sup>55</sup>

Low had become increasingly defensive over what other newspapers had said about the reasons governing his employment by Beaverbrook. Their prognosis was that he had been hired not because he was the best political cartoonist in Fleet Street, but on the strength of how he depicted and lampooned Beaverbrook in his cartoons. Low explained his frustrations over this anomaly in his autobiography.

'The most worldly-held opinion, however, was that of a number of lesser journals which had it rather confusedly that Lord B. aimed at Downing Street and had hired me: 1) to stop my satirising his efforts to become Prime Minister; 2) to advertise, popularise and aid him to become Prime Minister. In vain did Lord B. refute these speculations and inventions.'<sup>56</sup>

As has previously been pointed out, attempts to stop Low drawing 'Little Beaver' were the exact opposite of what Beaverbrook had had in mind. What annoyed Low were statements in newspapers and journals such as:

<sup>54</sup> From a syndicated article in the *Civil & Military Gazette*, Lahore, India, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1931.

<sup>55</sup> *Evening Standard*, undated, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>56</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 196.

'His political cartoons in the *Standard* will be non-party... This scope, one imagines, will not include caricatures of Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook as brigand leaders of the "Plot Press".'<sup>57</sup>

It would have been highly improbable for Beaverbrook to have employed a cartoonist solely to stop that artist ridiculing him. Rather the opposite was true. Such a theory becomes even more nonsensical when considering how widely Beaverbrook publicised Low's freedom in his newspapers. As far as Beaverbrook's chances of becoming Prime Minister in 1927 were concerned, they were almost non-existent. With Baldwin Prime Minister of a Tory administration with a healthy majority, and Beaverbrook confined to the Lords without any power-base of his own, the chances of becoming Prime Minister could not have seriously entered Beaverbrook's mind.

With regard to the second point, Low is correct in assuming that he had not been employed to improve Beaverbrook's chances of becoming Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the evidence that Low was employed 'to advertise, popularise' his proprietor was far closer to the truth than he wanted others to believe. Low felt that for people to believe this would, in effect, damage his credibility as an independent cartoonist. To his credit, Low did acknowledge that Beaverbrook was well aware of the beneficial effect his constant appearance in his cartoons was having:

'He never protested, partly because he had a genuine sense of fun and didn't care a damn; partly because he was aware of the popular advertisement accruing to a personality much cartooned, well or ill; partly because of the reputation it gave him as a large-minded newspaper-proprietor who gave everybody on his staff freedom to say anything.'<sup>58</sup>

Low openly admitted that it was 'a darned good thing for any politician to get into cartoons'.<sup>59</sup> By constantly portraying Beaverbrook as a politically important and dynamic figure, Low was conscious of the fact that he was popularising his proprietor. In 1939, Jorgen Bast was under the impression that Beaverbrook had been the most successful of all the political characters in Low's cartoons:

'Till this very day Lord Beaverbrook is with his dwarf figure and his shrewd-pious face his best model.'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> 'The Greater Art', unidentified newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>58</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 198.

<sup>59</sup> *Newspaper World*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1947, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>60</sup> English translation of Danish essay on David Low in *Og Hans Mester Vaerter* by Jorgen Bast, 1939.

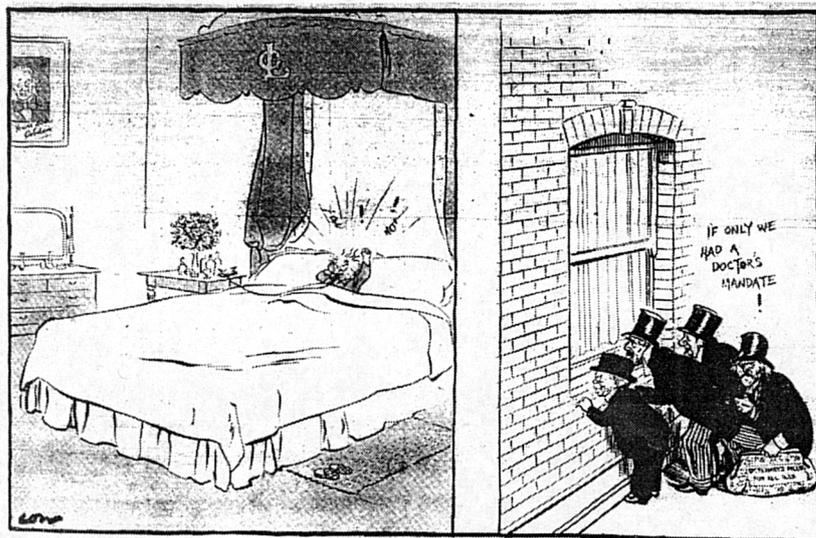
James Agate, reviewing *Low's Political Parade* in the *Daily Express* three years earlier, was also of the same opinion:

'I think, perhaps, I like Lord Beaverbrook best of all.'<sup>61</sup>



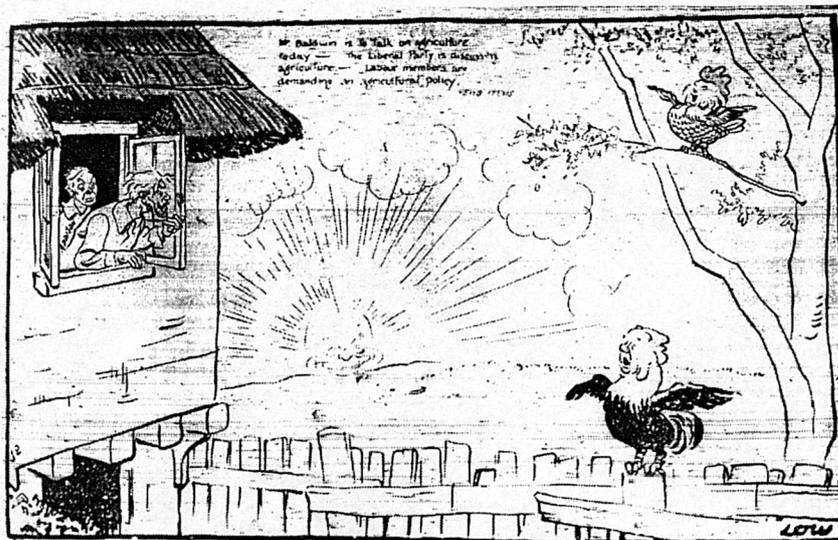
OLD LOW'S ALMANACK-

PROPHECIES FOR 1931



THE LIVELY INVALID.

Illustration by the cartoonist



STATESMAN, AWAKE! AND GREET THE SMILING DAWN.

A favourite ploy of Low's was to draw Beaverbrook continually in the company of the three main political leaders, thereby implying that he was of equal importance politically, as can be seen in the extremely prophetic 'OLD LOW'S ALMANACK - PROPHECIES FOR 1931',<sup>62</sup> and in 'THE LIVELY INVALID'.<sup>63</sup> In 'STATESMAN, AWAKE! AND GREET THE SMILING DAWN',<sup>64</sup>

MacDonald can be seen as the farmer looking out at his poultry, Baldwin and Lloyd George, who are awaiting the sunrise so as to begin their dawn chorus. This allusion by Low to all-party discussions on

<sup>61</sup> 'James Agate on Books', *Daily Express*, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1936.

<sup>62</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1930.

<sup>63</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1931.

<sup>64</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1930.

agriculture, implies that Beaverbrook has somehow forced the three main political parties into acknowledging his own agenda on agriculture. The sun, represented by Beaverbrook, is of course the source of all energy, and without it life on earth could not survive. What greater allegory could Low have produced for his proprietor in relation to the political leaders of the day?

Presumably, regular observers of Low's cartoons found Beaverbrook as much a recognisable personality as that of far more important and prominent politicians such as Baldwin, MacDonald, Churchill and Lloyd George etc. As a result, it became less and less surprising that as time went by Beaverbrook was unable to refute these 'speculations and inventions' as Low called them. However, Low's acquiescence in the raising of his proprietor's profile was soon noticed by William J. Brittain, who appreciated that:

'Low was well aware that his work was being watched and savoured by his proprietor.'<sup>65</sup>

Beaverbrook regularly appeared in a cartoon at least once a fortnight during the first five years of Low's employment at the *Evening Standard*. In June 1930, during the Empire Crusade, Beaverbrook appeared prominently in more than six cartoons in just one month. Low always gave Beaverbrook enormous presence and admitted that because he saw him as a dynamic personality, he drew him as a larger-than-life figure:

'The fact that Lord Beaverbrook talks into the telephone like a man 10 feet high represents an essential quality which in the expression of his real self is of more importance than the actual fact about his height.'<sup>66</sup>

So within the context of Low's cartoons, Beaverbrook is seen as a political catalyst; in visual terms a figure of vibrancy and cunning. According to Adrian Smith, 'Low ensured that his employer was perceived as being a more complex personality than easy targets such as Rothermere'.<sup>67</sup> In Low's own words, Beaverbrook 'dislocated the pattern, ruptured the continuity, pushed traditions and institutions around'.<sup>68</sup> It was unusual for Beaverbrook, when he appeared, not to be the focal point of a Low cartoon. He was often seen as holding the upper hand, dominating the major political figures around him, as for example in 'THE

<sup>65</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 37.

<sup>66</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Page 55.

<sup>67</sup> Adrian Smith, 'Low and Lord Beaverbrook', *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 23.

<sup>68</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 174.

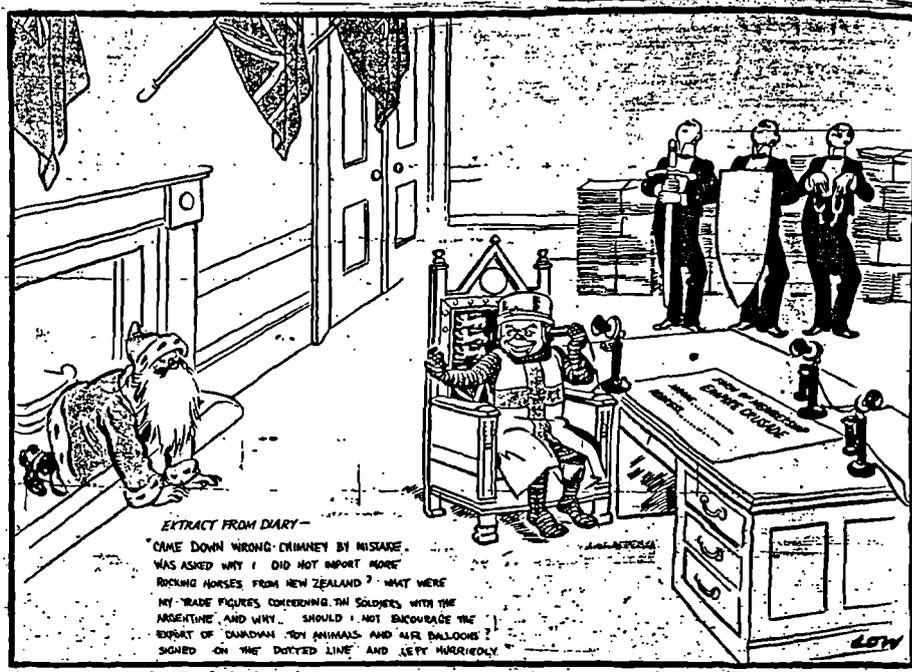
BLIND SIDE.<sup>69</sup> During the Empire Crusade, Low's Beaverbrook looked infallible in contrast to the political impotency of his main opponent Stanley Baldwin. Low's Baldwin,



THE BLIND SIDE.

(Copyright in all countries.)

unlike the real one, appears on every occasion to be outwitted by the far more cunning and dynamic Beaverbrook. Low depicted Beaverbrook in such a way that it



ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS.

NO 5. AT LORD BEAVERBROOK'S.

appears that he had set out, not so much to win favour, but to flatter his proprietor's apparent insatiable ego, as in 'ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS'.<sup>70</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, although somewhat mistakenly believing that Low's

cartoons on the Empire Crusade were critical, appreciated somewhat contradictorily that these same cartoons had a positive role to play as far as Beaverbrook was concerned:

'Beaverbrook never attempted to interfere with him or to censor his work. This was most remarkable in that Low's scathing pencil did not spare Beaverbrook himself. The Empire Crusader appeared in many an odd corner of Low's cartoons as a diminutive figure breathing mischief. No doubt it pleased Beaverbrook to be

<sup>69</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

<sup>70</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1929.

shown, however comically, alongside Prime Ministers, American Presidents, and foreign dictators. There was a deeper reason for his tolerance.’<sup>71</sup>

Low rarely ever depicted Beaverbrook in the way he did his other political victims. At any time during the inter-war period, whether during Beaverbrook’s continual opposition to the Conservative leadership, his Empire Crusade, support for splendid isolation or Chamberlain’s policy of Appeasement, Beaverbrook remained the same energetic, mischievous, omnipotent imp. Even when Low occasionally mocked him, the cartoonist was clever enough not to destroy the image that he had created for his proprietor, while still being able to make the cartoon amusing to both the reader and Beaverbrook personally. The prescribed image of his proprietor remained until Low left the *Evening Standard* in 1950, then changed. It was therefore no surprise that, during the years of Low’s employment on the *Evening Standard*, Beaverbrook appeared far more regularly than his position within the political world warranted. Low, however, insisted in his autobiography that he only drew his employer when the political situation required him to do so:

‘As a “subject” himself, Beaverbrook was uncomplaining, which was just as well since his political importance made it necessary to draw him frequently... the fact was that I drew Beaverbrook only when his political activities warranted it.’<sup>72</sup>

Low also defended his use of Beaverbrook in a letter to a book publishing editor in 1940:

‘I cartoon Lord Beaverbrook, like anybody else, whenever he comes prominently into the political news, not for the “fun” of being rude but because it would be an insult to his intelligence to leave him out.’<sup>73</sup>

The frequency with which Low brilliantly promoted Beaverbrook may have kept the latter happy and massaged his ego but, as already mentioned, it consistently belied his political importance as far as the public were concerned. For most of the period of Low’s employment, the cartoons did not reflect Beaverbrook’s irrelevance to mainstream politics, as noted by Colin Seymour-Ure in his biography of Low:

‘The contrast was all the greater for the frequency (not truly justified by Beaverbrook’s political unimportance in the rest of the 1930s) with which Low depicted his employer in the hostile cartoons.’<sup>74</sup>

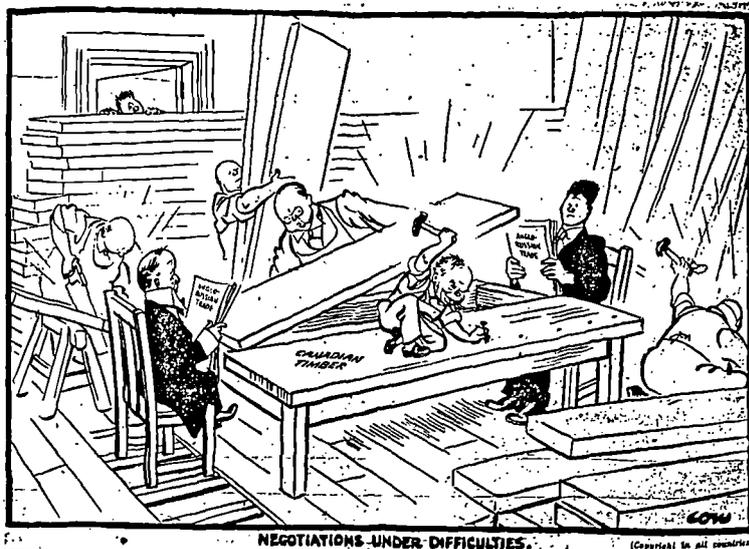
<sup>71</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 216.

<sup>72</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 198.

<sup>73</sup> David Low to Gordon Beckles, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1940, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>74</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 45.

Hence, Low's portrayal of Beaverbrook as a leading national figure was greatly exaggerated. This is highlighted by the following three cartoons drawn during the 1930s, when Beaverbrook's political influence, excluding his role as a newspaper magnate, had been severely marginalised. (1) 'ALICE MEETS THE CHESHIRE CAT',<sup>75</sup> 'NEGOTIATIONS UNDER DIFFICULTIES',<sup>76</sup> and



'"PROTECTION"'.<sup>77</sup> Low's cartoons were also greatly flattering to Beaverbrook. George Gilliat, believed that the 'firm down-to-earth attitude of Mr. B. was so well represented in Low's cartoons...'<sup>78</sup> Hugh Cudlipp acknowledged both the frequency and the positive nature of Low's depiction of Beaverbrook:

'He frequently cartooned Beaverbrook himself, but always (or usually) in a way which was obliquely flattering to the Boss.'<sup>79</sup>



Nevertheless, Low still maintained the impression that he treated Beaverbrook no differently to the other politicians featured in his cartoons. According to his autobiography:

'The problem of free comment and personal relations had solved itself years before so far as we are concerned. How fortunate. Since the political scene would

<sup>75</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1932.

<sup>76</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1934.

<sup>77</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1936.

<sup>78</sup> A direct quote from a speech Low gave at his farewell dinner from the *Evening Standard* which was held in his honour on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1950. Low was rather disparaging about Gilliat's comment. In reference to it he said: 'Aw Rot!' There is a possibility, however, that Mr B. is Baldwin and not Beaverbrook.

<sup>79</sup> Hugh Cudlipp to Timothy S. Benson, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1996.

have been notably incomplete without his busy Lordship, I often had to draw him, and I never insulted him by pulling punches just because it was his newspaper.’<sup>80</sup>

From a more accurate perspective, Beaverbrook, before he became Minister of Aircraft Production in 1940, was probably perceived by the general public as essentially a newspaper-owner rather than an active politician. This view was held by Alan Wood, then leader-writer on the *Daily Express*:

‘Even when he was being caricatured almost daily by David Low and Strube, Beaverbrook’s face remained unfamiliar for all the cartoons and photographs.’<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, Wood believed that Low’s almost daily caricaturing of Beaverbrook in the *Evening Standard* ‘always seemed a kind of private joke between them’.<sup>82</sup> If so, then it would have been unlikely that the *Evening Standard*’s readership would have caught on to this. Low must have enjoyed drawing Beaverbrook in situations that the real Beaverbrook would have found amusing, and he admitted on one occasion that ‘the first essential of Caricature is that it should be a lark’.<sup>83</sup> Low, somewhat cheekily, even let it be known that Beaverbrook increasingly began to behave in the impish way in which he had cast him:

‘As my Beaverbrook grew, with my increasing familiarity with its original, a closer likeness to him, *he* grew more like it.’<sup>84</sup>

In fact, due to Beaverbrook’s continued appearances in Low’s cartoons, many of those who came to work for his Lordship expected him to be just as Low depicted him, as David Farrer found when he first met Beaverbrook:

‘Though I had never seen him in the flesh I thought I knew exactly what Lord Beaverbrook looked like. But my impression had been derived exclusively from the brilliant cartoons of David Low in the *Evening Standard*. Low portrayed him as an almost puck-like character, with an impish grin, a huge head and a tiny body.’<sup>85</sup>

William J. Brittain was another employee influenced more by Low’s Beaverbrook than the real one:

<sup>80</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 280-81.

<sup>81</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Preface ix.

<sup>82</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Preface ix.

<sup>83</sup> F. Buckley Hargreaves, unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>84</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 178.

<sup>85</sup> David Farrer, *G - For God Almighty*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969, Page 12.

'I knew him to be a short man, but what struck me as we talked to him was his smallness, how he could almost lose himself in his big chair, as in Low's cartoon of him.'<sup>86</sup>

Looking at the cartoons that featured Beaverbrook, the impression one gets is of a cartoonist who was appreciative of what his proprietor would or would not find acceptable. He was undoubtedly conscious that Beaverbrook was, above all else, his employer, and in practical terms, a series of derogatory allegorical drawings of his proprietor could lead to a major falling out. Low, as a result, knew that offending Beaverbrook would not have been appreciated:

'I think that a cartoonist who aimed at merely being rude to his boss would be a tiresome fool.'<sup>87</sup>

Fortunately, there did not appear to have ever been any real animosity between Low and his proprietor. In fact, if one can believe the flattery that both men bestowed upon each other, they appeared to have a great deal of mutual respect and admiration for each other. For example, Low reputedly said in an interview given to the *New York Times*: 'I'm very fond of him personally and I think he is of me.'<sup>88</sup> Adrian Smith acknowledged this in his article on the two men in 1985:

'The fact that - unlike Vicky - he genuinely liked the old rogue is quite obvious, even to the casual observer.'<sup>89</sup>

Michael Foot, having been Low's Editor at the *Evening Standard* during the war, still believes to this day that: 'Beaverbrook and Low had a kind of personal friendship; got on well together.'<sup>90</sup> In public, Low's public utterances demonstrated nothing but continual praise for his proprietor, if one is to believe the published statements accredited to him. When asked about Beaverbrook, Low would always give a positive, almost adulatory, reply, describing Beaverbrook as a 'wide-minded man and a good boss',<sup>91</sup> or as a 'most active and liberal-minded man. He is the most significant newspaper-owner in Britain.'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> William J. Brittain, *Leaders of Britain: This Man Beaverbrook*, Hutchinson, 1941, Page 33.

<sup>87</sup> David Low to Gordon Beckles, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1940, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>88</sup> From an interview with the *New Yorker*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>89</sup> Adrian Smith, 'Low and Lord Beaverbrook', *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 23.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>91</sup> *Time*, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1947.

<sup>92</sup> *Newspaper World*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1947, Low Papers, University of Kent.

Even in his autobiography he referred, quite inaccurately, to Beaverbrook as the 'shrewdest of politicians'.<sup>93</sup>

The accepted notion that Low made a mockery of Beaverbrook as well as his policies can therefore be discounted by both close inspection of the cartoons, and by Low's very own public statements on the matter. In one interview he admitted that his portrayal of Beaverbrook was an extremely positive one:

'I have established him as a prominent and rather attractive little figure,' said Mr Low. He went on to say that he had done Lord Beaverbrook's policies a considerable amount of good by caricaturing him.'<sup>94</sup>

This statement is the more surprising when one considers that Low personally found many of the reactionary policies that Beaverbrook promoted unpalatable. He never directed any real anger towards his proprietor. This was true, even over Low's own scepticism of Empire Free Trade, and over Beaverbrook's distaste for the League of Nations and Collective Security which he supported tirelessly in his cartoons.

As touched upon in the introduction, and as has been seen earlier with the cartoon featuring Beaverbrook's smile, there were many instances when the editor was uncertain about a cartoon featuring Beaverbrook being acceptable for publication. There is solid evidence of this, even though Low had supposedly been given complete freedom to draw



WAKE AT THE "MORNING POST" OFFICE

<sup>93</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 160.

<sup>94</sup> Unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

Beaverbrook when and how he liked. Here are a few more examples of cartoons that specifically featured Beaverbrook which the editor, being unsure, sent to the proprietor for his personal approval. George Gilliat wrote to Beaverbrook in reference to WAKE AT 'THE "MORNING POST" OFFICE' (on Page 124):<sup>95</sup>

'I enclose you a proof of the cartoon by Low for tomorrow's *Evening Standard*. We shall go to press with the cartoon page at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. So perhaps you would let me know before that time whether you approve or otherwise.'<sup>96</sup>

Beaverbrook's secretary wrote to George Gilliat in reference to (2)'METAMORPHOSIS':<sup>97</sup>

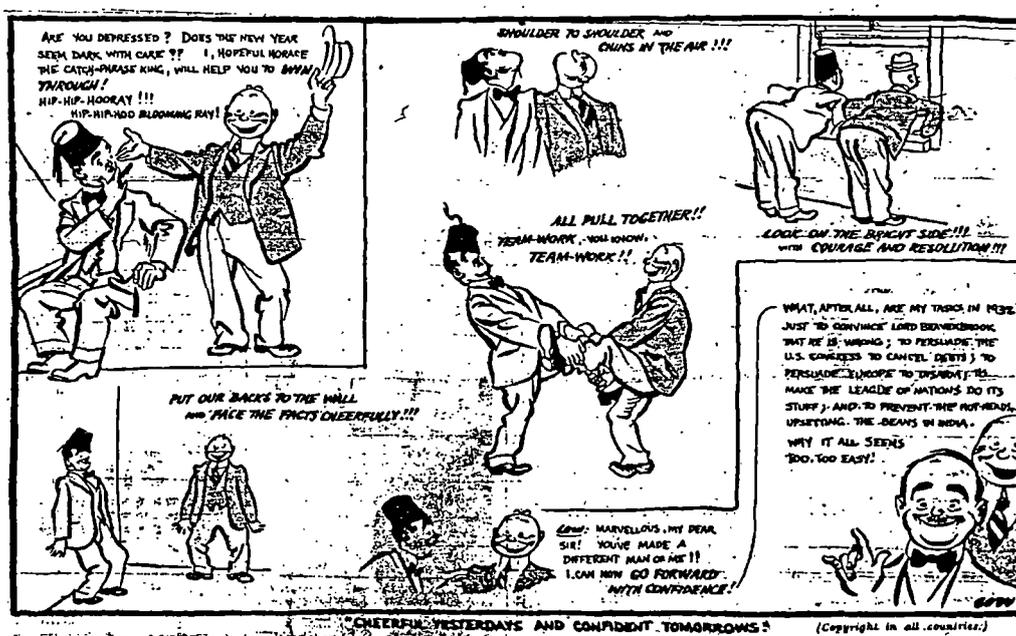
'I return herewith Low's cartoon. Lord Beaverbrook says it is all right.'<sup>98</sup>

Gilliat also wrote to Beaverbrook in reference to (3)'SURGICAL OPERATION':<sup>99</sup>

'I enclose a copy of Low's cartoon for your perusal.'<sup>100</sup>

And in reference to 'CHEERFUL YESTERDAYS AND CONFIDENT TOMORROWS':<sup>101</sup>

'I enclose you a proof of the Low cartoon for Monday next. I am sending it because there is a reference to yourself in the caption.'<sup>102</sup>



<sup>95</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1929.

<sup>96</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>97</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1931.

<sup>98</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>99</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1931.

<sup>100</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>101</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1932.

<sup>102</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1932, Beaverbrook Archives.

And again in the following month over the 'THE BLIND SIDE' (on Page 119):

'I enclose proof of a cartoon by Low to be published in the *Evening Standard* on either Wednesday or Thursday according to space available.'<sup>103</sup>

As can be seen from the penultimate cartoon, it is only the text 'Just to convince Lord Beaverbrook that he is wrong...' that concerns the editor, and not the drawing itself. Does this not suggest that editors were expected to query any form of criticism about their proprietor from any contributor, even, as in this case, it appeared as a frivolous remark in an equally frivolous cartoon? Although the three aforementioned cartoons were all published, it does make clear that Low's cartoons did come under editorial, and in some cases proprietorial scrutiny.

### **Low's portrayal of Beaverbrook and his Empire Crusade**

'Time and again he has poked fun at Lord Beaverbrook, the proprietor, and ridiculed his most earnest campaigns.'<sup>104</sup>

'He's a restore-the-Empire man; I'm not. I wouldn't touch his policies with a pole'<sup>105</sup> (Low)

As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, Beaverbrook, after the Conservatives had been defeated at the 1929 General Election, took part in his sole venture into independent political leadership, that of the Empire Crusade. With the Tory Party in a parlous state after its election defeat, Beaverbrook, in alliance with Rothermere, formed the United Empire Party. Beaverbrook depicted it as a radical new political initiative. With Rothermere's blessing, he proposed to run candidates against official Conservatives at by-elections, if they, in turn, refused to support Empire Free Trade.<sup>106</sup> Many believed it was just a stunt to boost the sale of their own newspapers or, as mentioned in Chapter One, a vehicle to challenge Baldwin's leadership of the Conservative Party.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1932, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>104</sup> *West Australian*, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted from an interview with David Low, *New Yorker*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1948.

<sup>106</sup> On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1930, the *Daily Express* presented Conservative MPs with an ultimatum. It implied that as long as they supported Empire Free Trade, a United Empire candidate would not oppose them. Beaverbrook and Rothermere decided to only fight by-elections in which they felt they had a good chance of winning. This confined them mainly to by-elections in the South.

<sup>107</sup> Stuart Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, Yale University Press, 1988, Page 42.

For two years, the substantial resources of both Express Newspapers and the Rothermere Press were committed to trying to ensure that the Conservative Party accepted the idea of tariff reform within the Empire. It was an event almost unparalleled in newspaper history.

Beaverbrook naturally expected wholehearted support from everyone on his newspapers; from managers and editors to journalists and cartoonists. He told George Gilliat, then Editor of the *Evening Standard*, that where politicians spoke in favour of Empire Free Trade then 'the reporter must stay until the end of the meeting'.<sup>108</sup> In such an atmosphere it would have been difficult for any of those working for Express Newspapers to give anything but a partisan approach to their reporting of events. This was not made any easier by knowing that, apart from the Conservative leadership, both the Labour Government and the Liberal Party found the idea of Empire Free Trade abhorrent. In fact, Beaverbrook did not have the support of any single senior politician. Even the Canadian Prime Minister, Richard Bennett, attacked Empire Free Trade when he attended an Imperial Conference in London during the campaign.<sup>109</sup>

Caught between a rock and a hard place, the staff at Express Newspapers had little choice but to support their master or leave his employment. Low and Strube, as a result, became propagandists for the cause, with little difference between them in emphasis as regards their support for Beaverbrook. Other cartoonists, during the campaign, picked up



on this, and in 'DON QUIXOTE BROOK AND SANCHO PANZAMERE'<sup>110</sup> by George Whitelaw and 'WHEN MAX COMES TO DOWNING STREET',<sup>111</sup> Low is perceived as being nothing more than a part of Beaverbrook's very large propaganda

machine. Both Low and Strube depicted their proprietor as a prominent figure throughout

<sup>108</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 244.

<sup>109</sup> The Imperial Conference took place during October 1930.

<sup>110</sup> Published in *John Bull* on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1930, Low Papers, University of Kent.

the campaign, and at times there were allegories showing him as what could best be described as the country's saviour. Strube, in particular, received many congratulatory



When Max comes to Downing Street

telegrams from Beaverbrook thanking him for his continued support during the campaign. Here are just a few examples:

'Very grateful thanks for your splendid cartoon this morning. It will do our cause much good.'<sup>112</sup>

'Very many thanks for brilliant cartoon. You do as much as anybody for Empire Crusade.'<sup>113</sup>

'I think you do more for Empire Free Trade than anybody.'<sup>114</sup>

'Most grateful thanks for all support you have given Empire Free Trade. I think you have been more successful in putting policy before the public than anybody. Happy is the cause that has a great cartoonist.'<sup>115</sup>

Low does not seem to have received such blatant praise even though, as already mentioned, his cartoons were just as supportive of Beaverbrook as those of Strube. Maybe Beaverbrook did not want to destroy what appeared to be an unspoken consensus between the two men. Such a consensus, in effect, maintained a form of self-censorship on the part of Low as regards his depiction of Beaverbrook. For the proprietor to have acknowledged the cartoonist's support may have in some way dissipated this illusion as far as how Low saw his own position at the *Evening Standard*.

Low was, in any case, personally sceptical about the possibilities of Empire Free Trade. He believed an internal tariff within the British Empire was both unworkable and

<sup>111</sup> Cartoonist unknown, published in *Granta*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1930, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>112</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

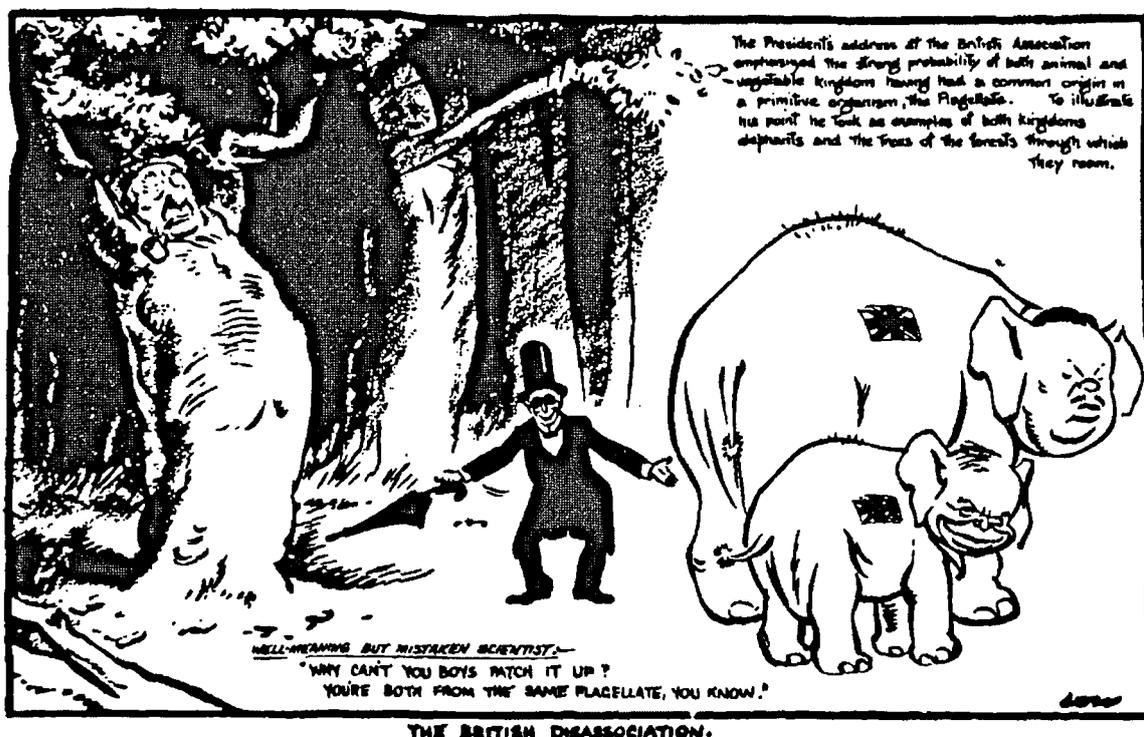
<sup>113</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>114</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

anachronistic. Furthermore he felt that the most effective way to world economic recovery was for greater economic co-operation between the industrial nations. However, he also knew that he would not get away with ridiculing a campaign so very close to his proprietor's heart. He appreciated that any attempt to do so would result in the embarrassment of his work being left unpublished.

Any cartoon which threatened to undermine Beaverbrook's campaign would not be tolerated. One prime example of a Low cartoon which was left unpublished because it portrayed the Empire Crusade in a bad light, is 'THE BRITISH DISASSOCIATION'. George Gilliat wrote to Beaverbrook after receiving the offending cartoon:

'I enclose you Low's cartoon which has been put in hand for tomorrow. I do not think you will want to use it.'<sup>116</sup>



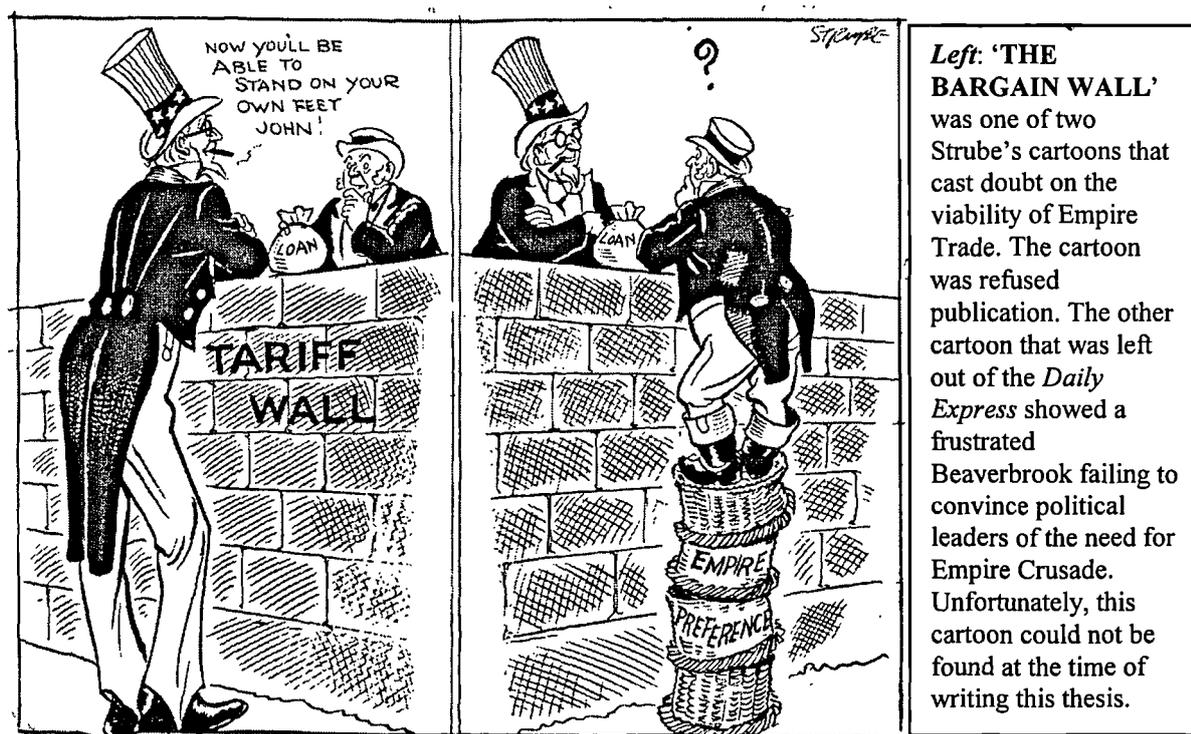
The cartoon and its subtext argued that as Beaverbrook and Rothermere were in essence Conservatives, they should somehow patch up their differences over tariffs with Baldwin and the Tory Party at Westminster. Baldwin, as Low mentioned in Chapter One, was Beaverbrook's *bête-noire*, having both succeeded Bonar Law and having, in his eyes, unnecessarily lost the 1923 General Election. Did not the cartoon highlight Beaverbrook's antagonistic stance towards his own party? Part of Beaverbrook's objective, as far as the Empire Crusade was concerned, was to rid the Tories of its leader. Beaverbrook did not want people to think that he was, in any way, prepared to take part in any form of

<sup>115</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

reconciliation with the Tory leader. For example, the Conservative MP, Leo Amery, had observed at the time that Beaverbrook was vehemently and passionately exaggerating the differences between himself and the party, and that if the circumstances were right, he might have to be the one to replace Baldwin as leader, becoming, as he saw it, the only viable alternative to the then Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald:

‘Beaverbrook stupefied us by saying that, unfit as he was for the job, he might be compelled to be Prime Minister!’<sup>117</sup>

It was no surprise when Beaverbrook ordered the cartoon to be left out of the *Evening Standard*. Thus, any cartoon which the *Evening Standard* editor thought could be perceived by Beaverbrook as detrimental to the campaign was sent to the proprietor for his approval. The cartoon received the same sort of editorial scrutiny as any other report or article written for the newspaper. Remarkably, even Strube produced two cartoons that dared to question the viability of the Campaign. They were, as a result, refused publication in the *Daily Express*.



**Left: 'THE BARGAIN WALL'** was one of two Strube's cartoons that cast doubt on the viability of Empire Trade. The cartoon was refused publication. The other cartoon that was left out of the *Daily Express* showed a frustrated Beaverbrook failing to convince political leaders of the need for Empire Crusade. Unfortunately, this cartoon could not be found at the time of writing this thesis.

R.J. Thompson, on behalf of the editor, sent another cartoon 'CULTIVATING THE SOIL'<sup>118</sup> for Beaverbrook's approval. It depicted Beaverbrook ploughing up the agricultural brains of England, which in the context of the campaign seemed rather harmless:

<sup>116</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>117</sup> J. Barnes and D. Nicholson, *The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, Hutchinson, 1988, Page 73.

<sup>118</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1929.

'At Mr Gilliat's request I am sending to you for your approval a proof of the cartoon by Low for today's *Evening Standard*.'<sup>119</sup>



The cartoon was published, but bringing such a drawing to his proprietor's attention emphasised the degree of over-sensitivity felt by the editor in relation to Low's cartoons on the Empire Crusade. In general, Beaverbrook need not have worried. Whatever Low's personal thoughts may have been over this issue, they did not affect either his support for Beaverbrook in his cartoons or to a lesser extent, his public statements on Empire Free Trade in the Press. These were, to say the least, guarded, as this newspaper interview at the time testifies:

Low: "His Empire policy is dictated, I think, by a belief that there will be another war, and a feeling that the Empire, by holding together, may be able to keep out of it. He wants Empire trade and isolation from European economy."

Reporter: "Do you think he is on a winner?"

Low: "No I don't," was the reply. "Nevertheless, it makes him a very important man in England today, a man who has to be considered, for although the British Government are not ever likely to adopt his policy yet they have to tread carefully."

Reporter: "But Lord Beaverbrook is a clever man."

Low: "He is an astute man and might be prepared to play it as a counter."

<sup>119</sup> R.J. Thompson to Lord Beaverbrook, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

Reporter: "To what extent is Lord Beaverbrook playing politics?"

Low: "I do not think his Lordship has any commercial interest in supporting Empire Free Trade."<sup>120</sup>

Beaverbrook was not interested in the 'commercial viability' of Empire Free Trade, but was attempting to use it in order to become a major force within politics, while destroying Baldwin at the same time. Years later, having left Beaverbrook's employment, and with the benefit of hindsight, Low was far more explicit in his criticism of Empire Free Trade. He later wrote in his autobiography that the only true believer in it was Beaverbrook himself:

'Neither Britain, nor the Dominions, nor the Empire, nor the Commonwealth wanted it. Even the staff at the *Daily Express* didn't want it. Nobody wanted it - except Lord Beaverbrook.'<sup>121</sup>

If Low had really believed this at the time, surely he would have used the occasion to mercilessly make fun of the Empire Crusade in his cartoons, especially as he supposedly had complete freedom to do so! Another admission on Low's part that he took every opportunity to oppose Beaverbrook on this matter in the *Evening Standard* should be noted:

'An idealistic dreamer of the most romantic kind himself, when it came to the Empire... I ridiculed his policy in his paper...'<sup>122</sup>

However, a closer examination of Low's cartoons relating to Empire Free Trade directly contradicts such a statement. These cartoons do not, as Low states, ridicule Beaverbrook's policies in his own newspaper. Quite the contrary, the cartoons unquestionably flatter Beaverbrook, whilst opponents of Empire Free Trade appear to suffer all types of indignities. The main focus in Low's cartoons during the Empire Crusade is the ideological battle between Beaverbrook and the Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin. Surprisingly, Ramsay MacDonald, who was the actual Prime Minister and thus responsible for Government policy as regards Tariff Reform, featured far less in Low's cartoons, even though he held similar views to Baldwin on the subject. Close inspection of the cartoons shows Beaverbrook dominating and bemusing his opponents. Look, for

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<sup>120</sup> Unidentifiable newspaper article, circa 1930, Low Papers, University of Kent.

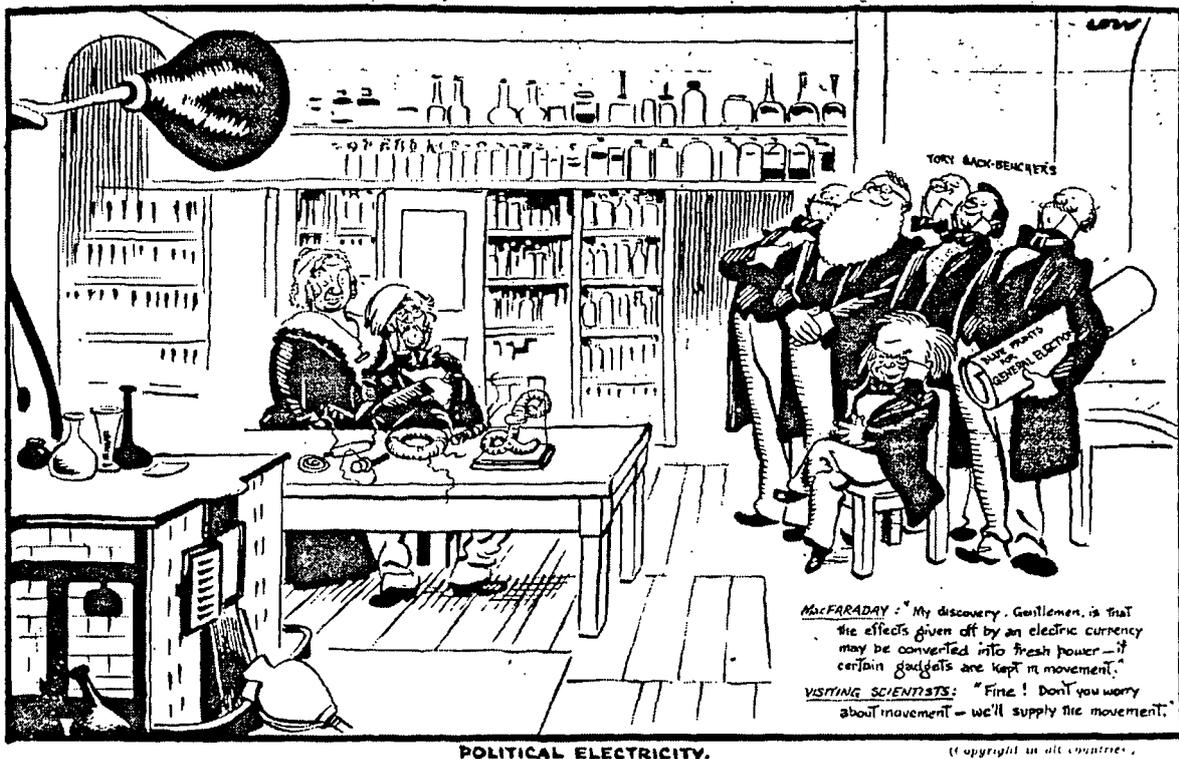
<sup>121</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 176.

<sup>122</sup> Unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

example, at the cartoon 'AT THE POLITICAL ALTAR'.<sup>123</sup> It shows Baldwin and Jimmy Thomas, then Colonial Secretary, losing out to Beaverbrook over the British Empire.



In 'POLITICAL ELECTRICITY',<sup>124</sup> a confident Beaverbrook is seen, with the support of Conservative back-benchers, confronting the apprehensive figures of MacDonald and Baldwin over the coming general election. Low again portrays Beaverbrook as the political dynamo in the face of ineffectualness.



<sup>123</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1929.

<sup>124</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1931.

Many commentators and historians have taken Low at his word instead of having evaluated the cartoons relating to Empire Free Trade for themselves. As a result, they have been misled as to the cartoonist's handling of the situation. For instance, Colin Seymour-Ure in his biography of Low wrote 'Low opposed the Crusade in his cartoons.'<sup>125</sup> Adrian Smith is another who took Low at his word. In his essay on 'Beaverbrook and Low' in 1985 he wrote:

'Low had made plain his views on the absurdity of the "Empire Crusade" at its inception in July 1929. His good-humoured refusal to take seriously the greatest gamble of his employer's political career remained consistent throughout the next two years.'<sup>126</sup>

Even some contemporary cartoonists believed that Low did in fact ridicule his proprietor over Empire Free Trade. One such person was the Danish cartoonist, Jorgen Bast:

'One of his very first drawings under his new contract was one which made great fun of the entire Beaverbrook Empire campaign and presented the Lord himself in an even more ridiculous light than usual. A few hours after the publication of the paper he received a telegram from Beaverbrook saying: BRINGING AN ACTION AGAINST YOU. But legal proceedings were never taken.'<sup>127</sup>

Such stories as this one were probably in jest. Nevertheless, evidence of just how effective Low's support for Beaverbrook's Empire Crusade proved to be was validated by Neville Chamberlain, then Shadow Chancellor, who attempted to stop Low's continual attacks on Baldwin over this issue. In July 1930, Chamberlain, in private discussions with Beaverbrook, attempted to persuade the latter to bring an end to the 'offensive cartoons and articles in the *Evening Standard*' against Baldwin, as part of a compromise deal over Empire Free Trade.<sup>128</sup> Beaverbrook predictably met such a suggestion with indifference.

Gerald Barry, when Editor of the *Saturday Revue*,<sup>129</sup> had let it be known that he thought that Low had been most effective in promoting Beaverbrook at the expense of the Conservatives over Empire Free Trade:

<sup>125</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 45.

<sup>126</sup> Adrian Smith, 'Low and Lord Beaverbrook', *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 9.

<sup>127</sup> English translation of Danish essay on David Low in *Og Hans Mester Vaerter* by Jorgen Bast, 1939.

<sup>128</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 290.

<sup>129</sup> Gerald Barry had refused to let the *Saturday Revue* be associated with Empire Free Trade, even though it was the policy of its proprietor, Lord Rothermere.

'It seems to us the sheerest folly that a man of the practical genius and ability of Lord Beaverbrook should be allowed to drift away from the one party which is the most capable of putting this policy into effect. Only Mr Low, the caricaturist of Lord Beaverbrook's evening paper, could do justice to this image.'<sup>130</sup>

The most accurate way of evaluating whether or not Low promoted Beaverbrook personally during the Empire Crusade is to concentrate on those cartoons in which the latter appeared during the campaign. Low's first cartoon of Beaverbrook, 'THE ADVANCE TO MOSCOW',<sup>131</sup> was drawn even before the Empire Crusade had been officially launched.



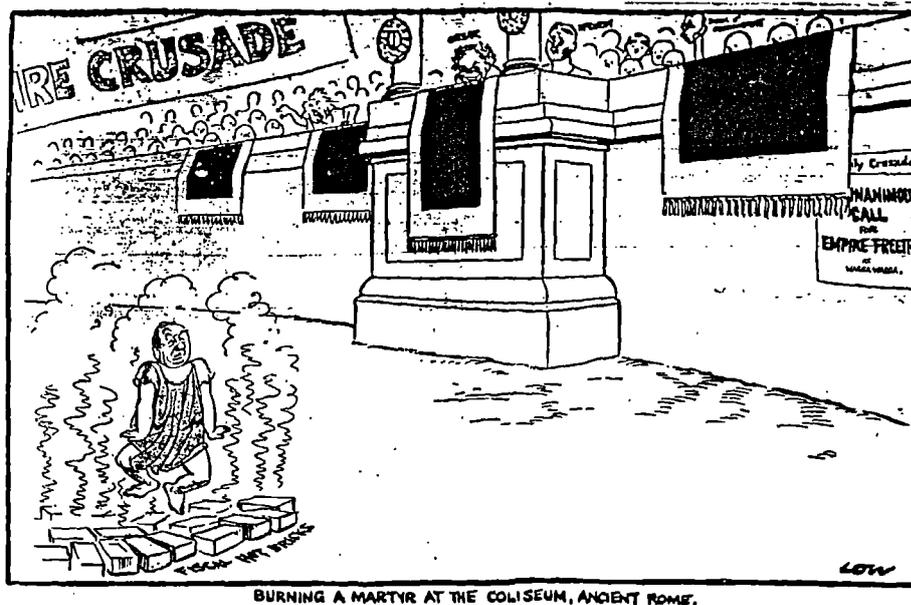
A by-election in Twickenham had coincided with Beaverbrook's visit to the Soviet Union. The Conservative candidate, Sir John Ferguson, was sympathetic to Empire Free Trade. He asked and got support from Beaverbrook, while Baldwin distanced himself from Ferguson and withdrew the assistance of Central Office. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1929 the Twickenham voters, to Beaverbrook's delight, elected Sir John Ferguson as their MP even though the Tory vote was drastically down. The next cartoon of Beaverbrook appeared in (4) 'MEETING OF LOW'S SHADOW CABINET',<sup>132</sup> which mocked the Tory Shadow Cabinet, whilst showing Beaverbrook as a man-eating tiger. Low prophesied that Beaverbrook's ideas on Empire were about to devour the Tories.

<sup>130</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>131</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1929.

<sup>132</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1929.

In February 1930, the Empire Crusade was transformed into the United Empire Party. Low drew a cartoon that was to set the tone for his depiction of Beaverbrook and Baldwin

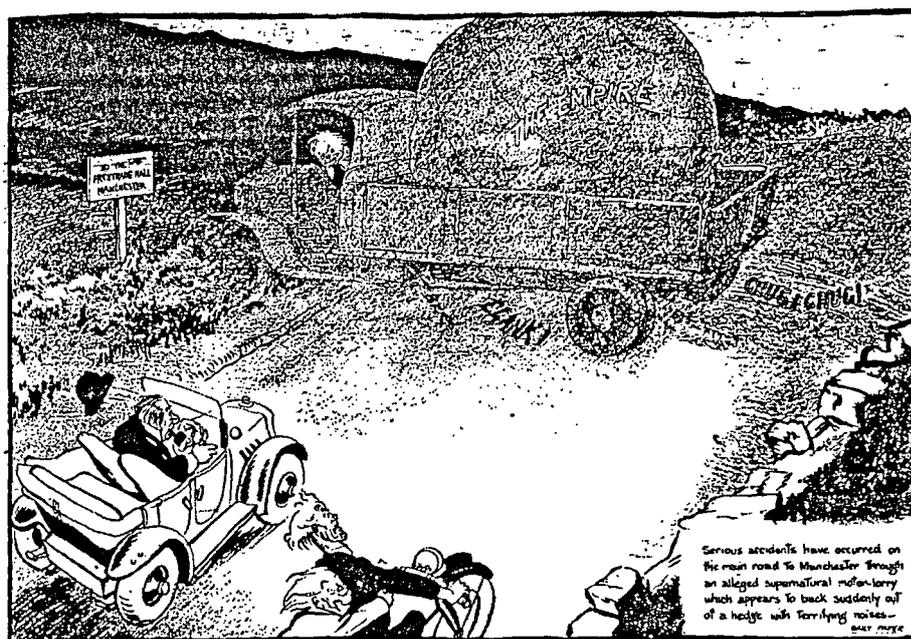


BURNING A MARTYR AT THE COLISEUM, ANCIENT ROME.

throughout the campaign. In 'BURNING A MARTYR AT THE COLISEUM, ANCIENT ROME'<sup>133</sup> Low unrealistically

sees Beaverbrook as the mighty Caesar who no doubt is about to

give the thumbs down to Baldwin's hapless leadership. In 'SERIOUS ACCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED ON THE MAIN ROAD...'<sup>134</sup> Low attempts to show that unlike the other political



leaders,

Beaverbrook is in control of events.

In (5) 'THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON PARTY'<sup>135</sup> Low

pictures

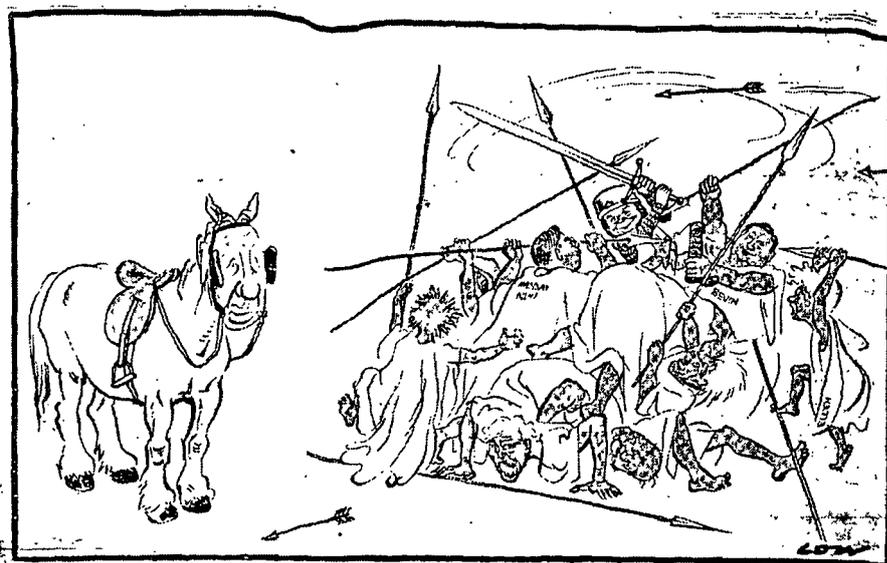
Beaverbrook in the garb of a long-bearded patriarch eagerly

welcoming home a host of Prodigal Sons. The cartoonist happily sums up Beaverbrook's conviction that the Empire Crusade had persuaded Baldwin to introduce food taxes in the interests of freer trade within the British Empire. However, this cartoon was not only pre-emptive of Baldwin's actual decision on the matter of food taxes, but also ultimately wrong. This drawing, amongst many others made during this period, simply shows Low, just like Strube on the *Daily Express*, propagandising on behalf of his proprietor.

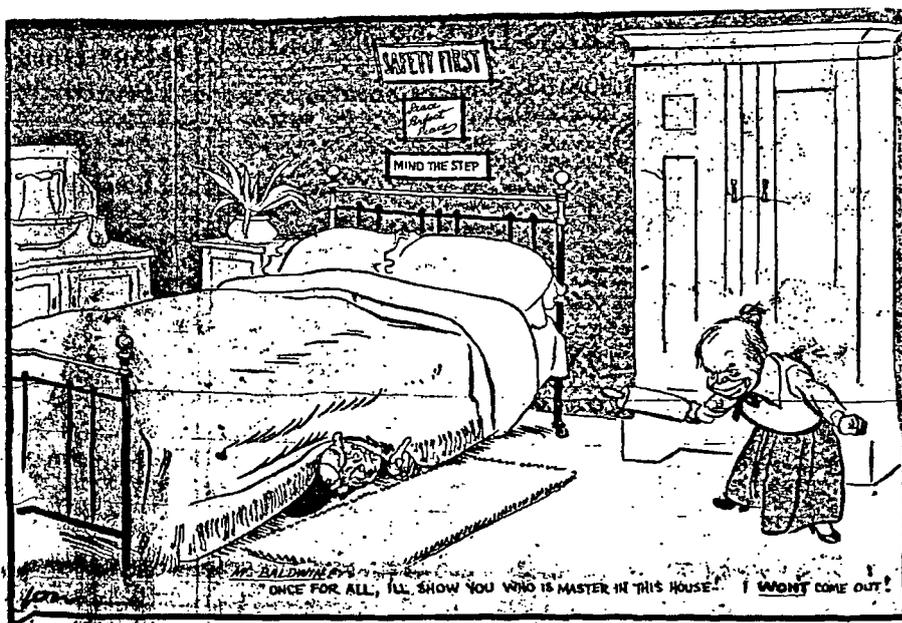
<sup>133</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1930.

<sup>134</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1930.

If one looks at the cartoons of Beaverbrook that appeared in the *Evening Standard* during the first year of the campaign, there is little doubt which side Low was in support of. The following cartoons: (6) 'NAILING THE SKIPPER TO THE MAST',<sup>136</sup> (7) 'HOW DO TH THE BUST LITTLE B - .',<sup>137</sup> 'RICHARD LION-HEART AT WEST FULHAM',<sup>138</sup> (8) 'RESULT OF THE FIRST TEST',<sup>139</sup> (9) 'FISCAL MILITARY TOURNAMENT',<sup>140</sup> (10) 'NAILING THE FLAG TO THE MAST',<sup>141</sup> (11) 'THE INSIDE STORY',<sup>142</sup> (12) 'CARNERA SUSPENDED AGAIN',<sup>143</sup>



RICHARD LION-HEART AT WEST FULHAM.



ASSERTING HIS AUTHORITY.

(Copyright in all countries.)

(13) 'CAESAR HESITATES AT THE RUBICON',<sup>144</sup> (14) 'BENK OLIDAY PREPARATIONS',<sup>145</sup> and 'ASSERTING HIS AUTHORITY',<sup>146</sup> all show Beaverbrook and the Empire Crusade in the most flattering political light. In none of these cartoons does Low appear critical of a political campaign that had little likelihood of success.

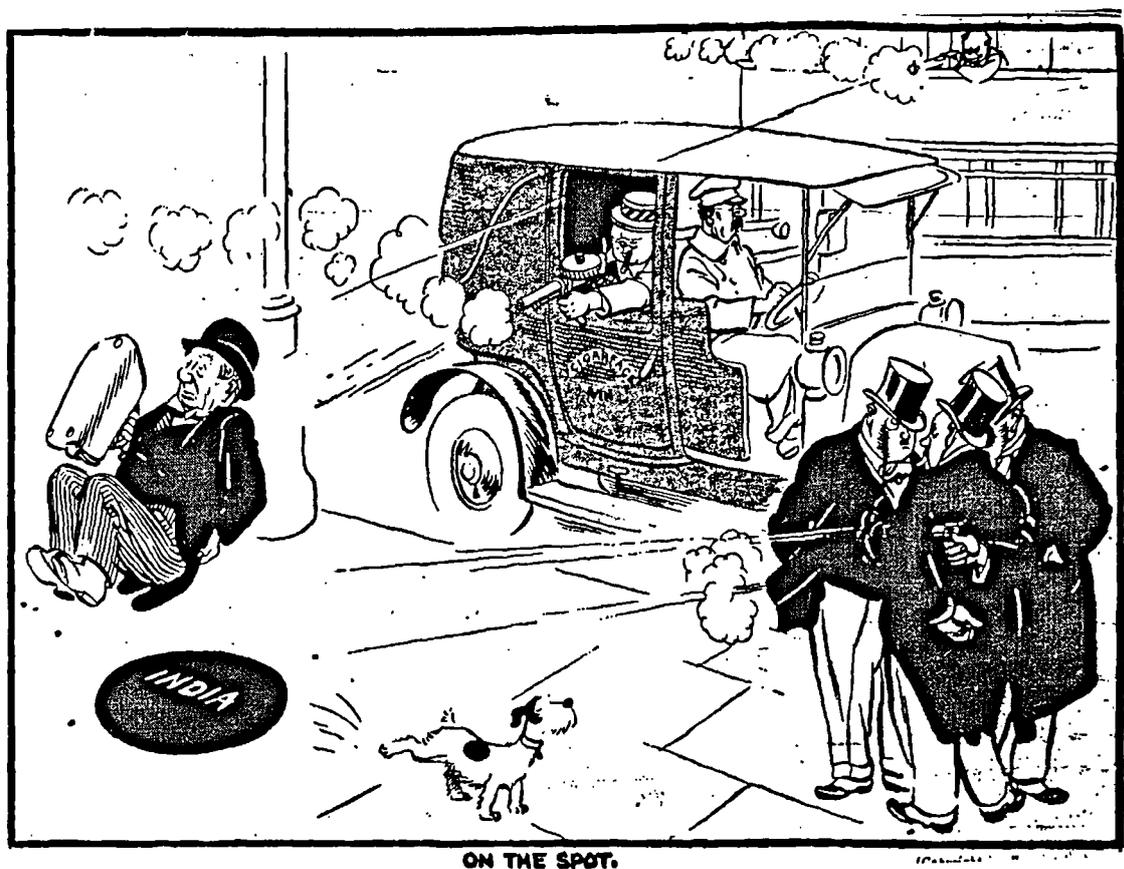
Baldwin, on the other hand, is

- <sup>135</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1930.  
<sup>136</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930.  
<sup>137</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1930.  
<sup>138</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1930.  
<sup>139</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1930.  
<sup>140</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1930.  
<sup>141</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1930.  
<sup>142</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1930.  
<sup>143</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1930.  
<sup>144</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1930.  
<sup>145</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1930.  
<sup>146</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1930.

made to look insignificant, indecisive, bemused and is always easily outwitted by Beaverbrook in the situations in which they encounter each other. Beaverbrook must have been absolutely delighted with Low's work and, in reference to this, Michael Foot believed that:

'Beaverbrook got much more fun out of the whole bloody thing especially when Low was attacking Baldwin.'<sup>147</sup>

In June 1930, Baldwin uttered his fateful words about the 'press barons' exercising 'power without responsibility - the prerogative of the harlot through the ages'.<sup>148</sup> There is, as a result, no doubt that Low was part of this power wielded in order to damage the credibility of Baldwin and his party. These are hardly the cartoons of a neutral commentator, especially from one who had apparently total freedom in the treatment and selection of his subject matter. Days after Beaverbrook's candidate at the St George's by-election had lost to the official Conservative candidate Duff Cooper - which in effect brought an end to the United Empire Party's challenge to Baldwin's leadership - Low still portrayed Beaverbrook getting the better of Baldwin over India in 'ON THE SPOT'.<sup>149</sup>



<sup>147</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>148</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 305.

<sup>149</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1931.

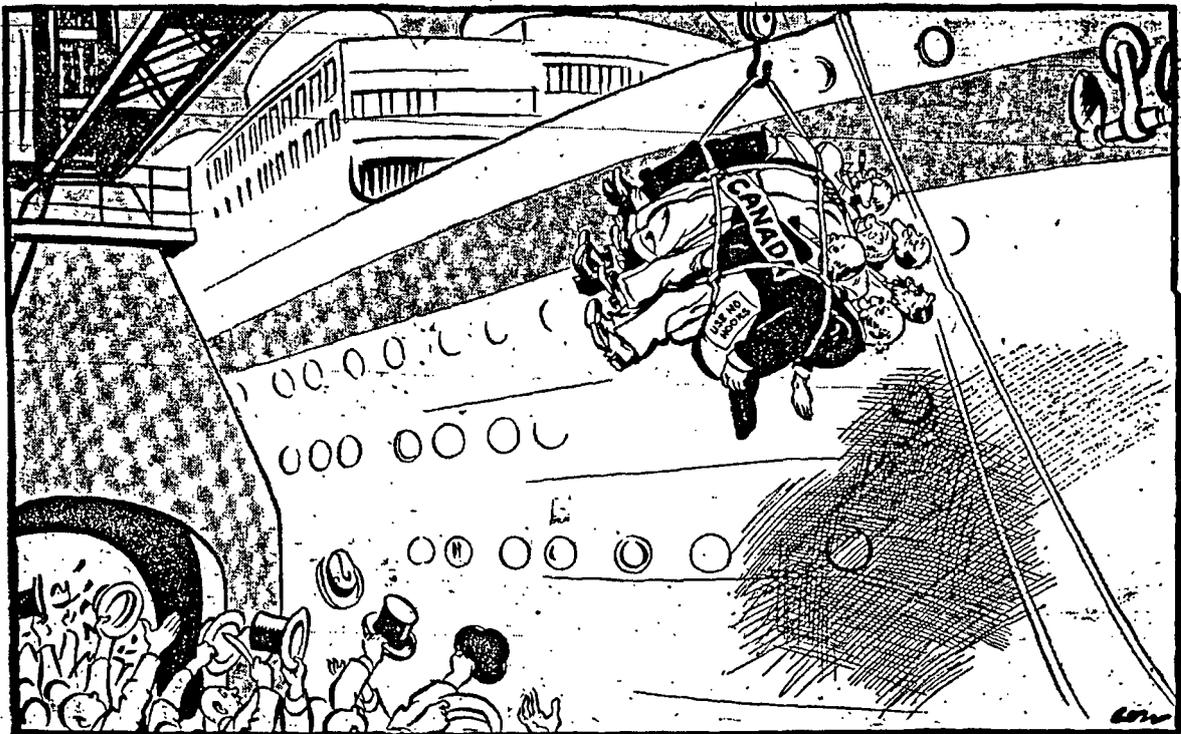
After Beaverbrook had come to a truce with Baldwin in order to end the damaging effect the campaign was having on the Tory Party, as depicted in 'PICTURE-OF-THE-YEAR FOR THE ROYAL ACADEMY',<sup>150</sup> Low still continued to support his proprietor's now ever



PICTURE-OF-THE-YEAR FOR THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

increasingly irrelevant, Empire Crusade. Even after MacDonald had gone to the country as head of a National Government, which had resulted in the Tories becoming the largest single party in the coalition, Low's brazen support for both Beaverbrook and the

Empire Crusade amazingly continued as before as can be seen by the following cartoons: (15) 'UNHOLY COMMERCE IN LIBERALIA',<sup>151</sup> (16) 'AND SO TO BED',<sup>152</sup> (17) "DO WE PACK THE MASCOT, JIM?",<sup>153</sup> 'EMPIRE FREE TRADE - FIRST CONSIGNMENT',<sup>154</sup> and



EMPIRE FREE TRADE. - FIRST CONSIGNMENT.

(Copyright in all countries).

<sup>150</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1931.

<sup>151</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1931.

<sup>152</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1931.

<sup>153</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1932.

<sup>154</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1932.

(18) 'TIFF AT THE PROTECTION MEAT MARKET',<sup>155</sup> Low could be seen, as late as 1938, still depicting his proprietor on the same level as a party political leader. Over Beaverbrook's opposition to the Government's policy on agriculture, Low drew him in (19) 'ANOTHER MATRIMONIAL BUST-UP IN HIGH LIFE',<sup>156</sup> and alongside Attlee and Lloyd George in 'THE SOWERS',<sup>157</sup>



THE SOWERS.

(Copyright in All Countries.)

### Low's portrayal of Beaverbrook during the latter's support for both 'Splendid Isolation' and Chamberlain's Appeasement policy

'Interference in Europe means war for certain... It is a policy which means the break-up of the British Empire...'<sup>158</sup> (Beaverbrook in 1934)

Throughout the 1930s, Beaverbrook advocated 'Splendid Isolation' from European affairs and from 1937 onwards gave Chamberlain's Appeasement policy his unflinching support in the *Daily Express*. Even though this newspaper gave such prominent support to Appeasement with its repeated headline 'No war next year or the year after', Low rarely directed any venom in the direction of his proprietor. Alternatively, one would have thought that Low's attacks on the Nazis in the pages of the *Evening Standard* during the 1930s would have been completely incompatible with Beaverbrook's own stance, and

<sup>155</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1932.

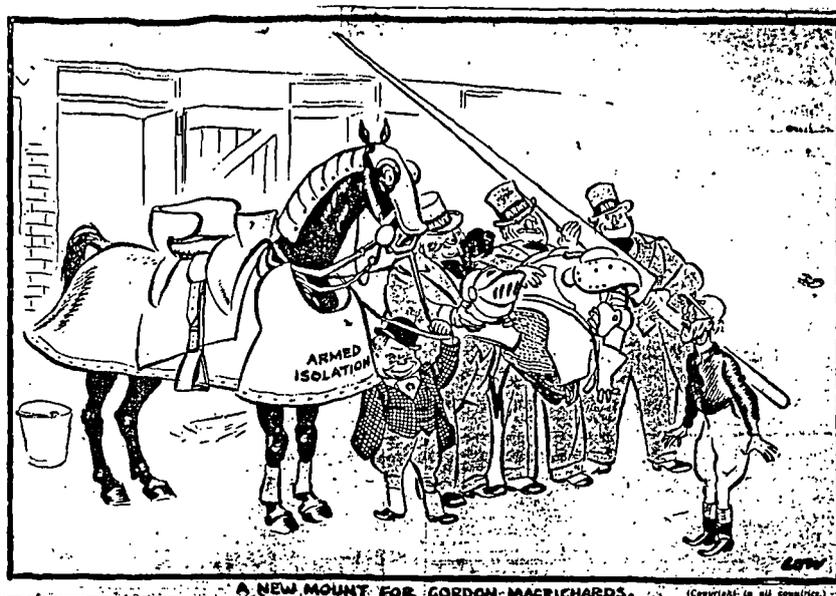
<sup>156</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1938.

<sup>157</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1938.

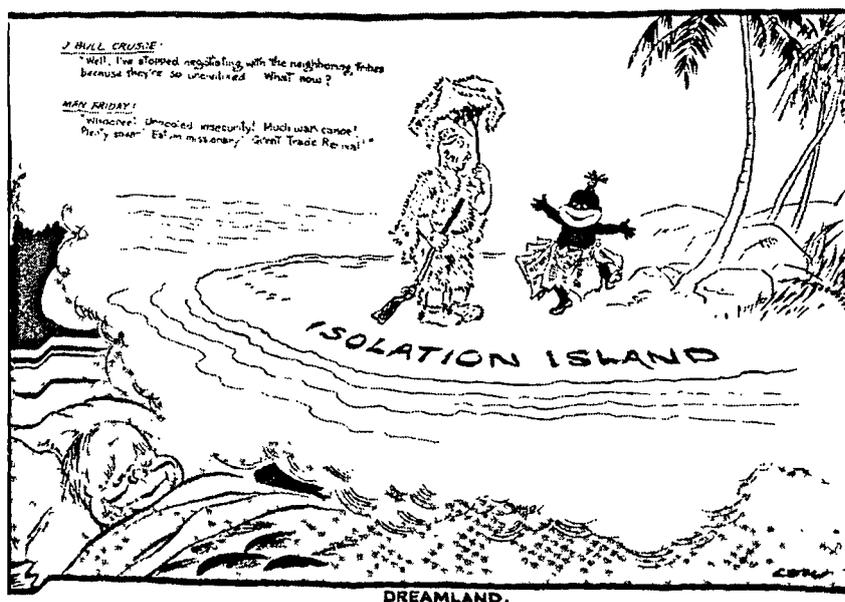
<sup>158</sup> Lord Beaverbrook writing in the *Sunday Express*, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1934.

therefore unacceptable. It was clear that over such a volatile and sensitive matter, in which both men held strong but contrasting convictions, Low understood when and where to draw the line as far as associating his proprietor with what he himself naturally found so abhorrent, the appeasement of Hitler and Mussolini. Beaverbrook, on the other hand, was happy to give Low enough scope on the *Evening Standard* to vent his anger against the dictators as he did with Strube on the *Daily Express*.

Looking through Low's cartoons of the 1930s one finds that he occasionally mocked his proprietor over his isolationism as can be seen in 'A NEW MOUNT FOR GORDON MACRICHARDS',<sup>159</sup> 'DREAMLAND',<sup>160</sup> and (20)'OLD LOW'S ALMANACK - PROPHECIES FOR 1939'.<sup>161</sup> In these cartoons, Low never made a direct reference to Beaverbrook's support for the appeasement of Hitler. Rather, he appears to feel more comfortable dealing



with Beaverbrook in a more benign way as an isolationist. Whatever Low and Beaverbrook's personal feelings may have been about collective security or isolationism, the common denominator between the two of them was that as the 1930s progressed they both saw an increasing need for rearmament. In this they were in unison. Low, having been critical of rearmament during the 1920s and early 1930s, was not a pacifist. He took a 'world view', whereby



<sup>159</sup> Published in *Evening Standard* on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1933.

<sup>160</sup> Published in *Evening Standard* on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1935.

<sup>161</sup> Published in *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1938.

he felt that collective action should be taken by all countries in order to settle international disputes. Low's views were in his own words 'pacific but not pacifist'.<sup>162</sup> In 1960, Low admitted in a letter to Douglas Bader to having never been a pacifist:

'I am not nor ever have been, as you assume, a pacifist...'<sup>163</sup>

It allowed Low to divert and concentrate his attacks on those he held responsible for Britain's lack of moral fortitude as the threat from Hitler increased. Low, therefore, could support Beaverbrook over rearmament which came with the latter's call for no European entanglements. He portrayed Beaverbrook's views on rearmament in a positive light, and gave his proprietor a similarly dominant stance to the one he had had throughout the Empire Crusade campaign.

It is interesting to note that although Low felt strongly about resisting the dictators, in comparison to his proprietor's apparent willingness to turn a blind eye to their ambitions, he only ever drew two cartoons which clearly associated Beaverbrook with Chamberlain's policy of Appeasement. Both cartoons, 'OUR NEW DEFENCE'<sup>164</sup> and 'TIME TO GET UP, RIP!'<sup>165</sup> appeared in the two months after Munich. Even here, Low's contempt is reserved for Chamberlain and Halifax. There is little doubt that in these two drawings Beaverbrook is guilty by association. However, when one takes into account the occasions when Chamberlain and Halifax were ridiculed during this period, it shows that one of the most



OUR NEW DEFENCE

ardent supporters of Appeasement was let off extremely lightly, just as he was again to be in *Guilty Men*. The only reference that Low ever makes to the *Daily Express*'s optimism that there will be no war is in 'OUR NEW DEFENCE', and here the nuance is relatively oblique.

<sup>162</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 242.

<sup>163</sup> David Low to Douglas Bader, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1960, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>164</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1938.

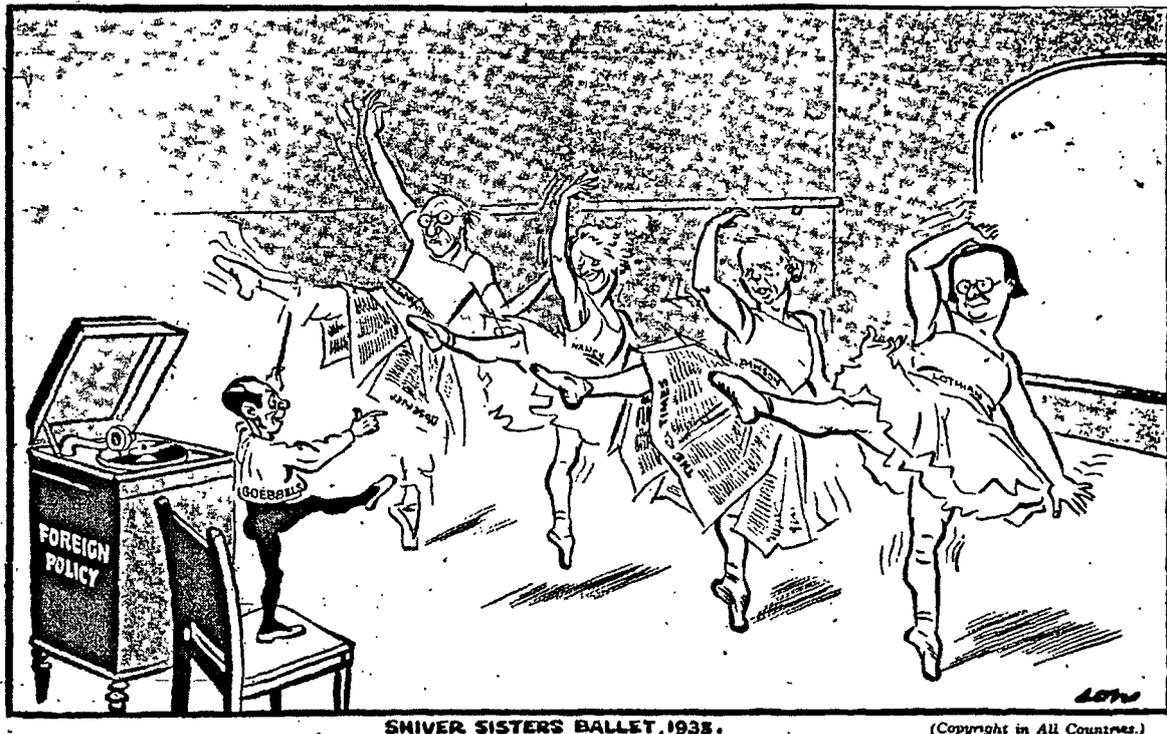
<sup>165</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1938.



One can argue that Low played down or ultimately ignored the utterances of both Beaverbrook and the *Daily Express* when it came to facing up to Hitler's

demands in Europe. It must not be forgotten that the *Daily Express* was in the vanguard of Appeasement. The paper continually derided the League of Nations and opposed Collective Security. As regards the Spanish Civil war, it supported Franco throughout.

One has only to compare the treatment handed out by Low to other newspaper figures who espoused similar views to those held by Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*. For example, J.L. Garvin of the *Observer* and Geoffrey Dawson at *The Times*, were regular targets of Low's brush. They, along with Lord Lothian and Nancy Astor, became known as the Shiver Sisters and appeared in numerous cartoons together. In 'THE SHIVER SISTERS BALLET',<sup>166</sup> we see them dancing to Goebbels' foreign policy, while Arthur Christiansen,



SHIVER SISTERS BALLET, 1938.

(Copyright in All Countries.)

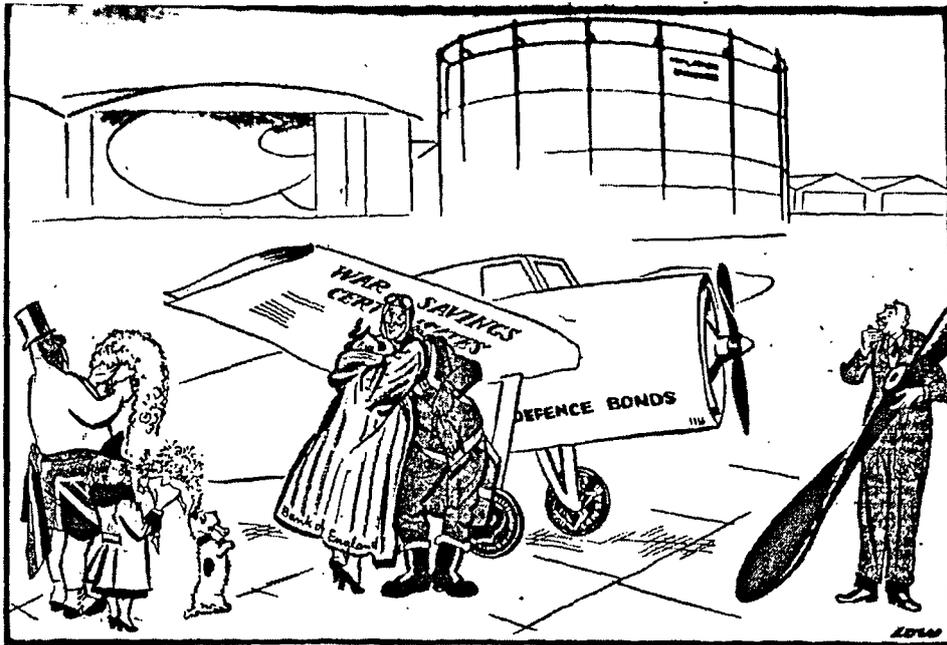
<sup>166</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1938.

editor of the *Daily Express*, does not appear in a single Low cartoon during the late 1930s, even though his editorial line was no different to that of either Garvin or Dawson.

## Low's portrayal of Beaverbrook during the Second World War

'When, during the war, an American journalist in England enquired about Mr Low's equivalent value in terms of armament, he was told: "Low is worth more than a battleship".'<sup>167</sup>

Low's ability to produce wonderfully propagandist cartoons of Beaverbrook was severely



RECKLESS JACK PREPARES TO RAISE THE WIND (Copyright in All Countries.)

tested with the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Beaverbrook was, as Michael Foot has said, 'still sulking in his appeaser's tent'. During the 'phoney war'



### CONSCIENCE TROUBLE AT LORD BEAVERBROOK'S

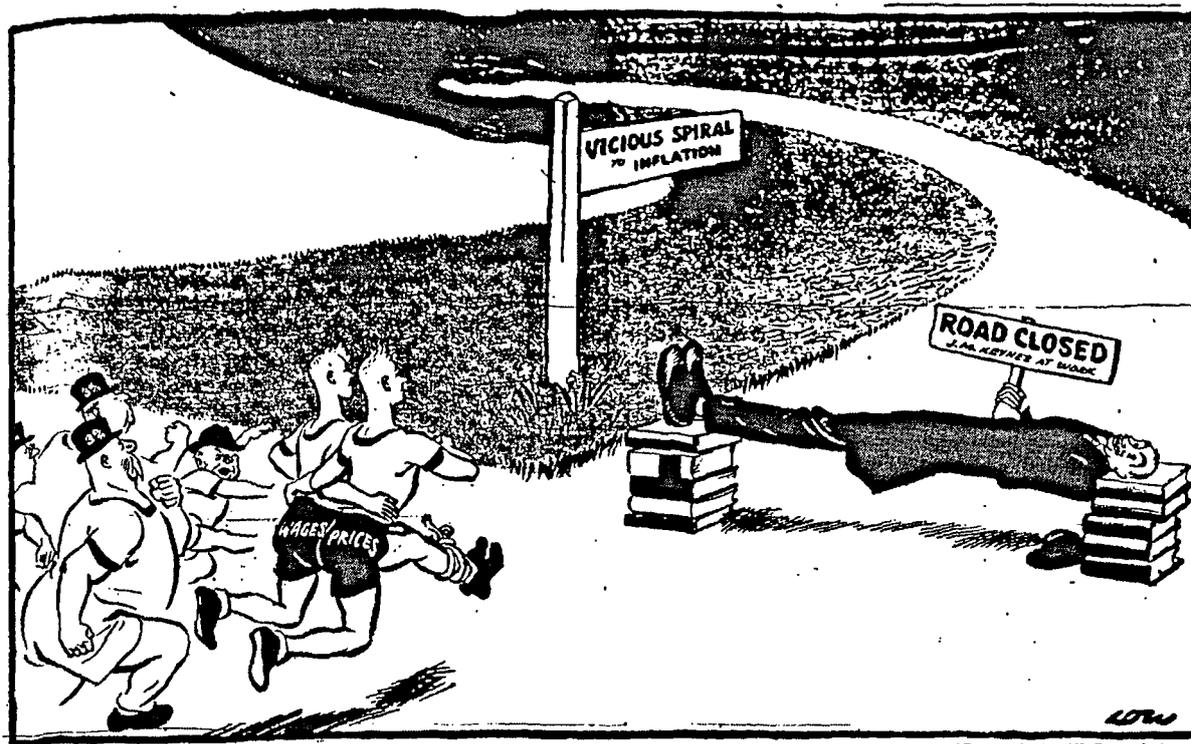
"Until the rationing date I hope people will ration themselves. I place people on their honour."  
says MORRISON

Beaverbrook could not come to terms with the fact that Britain had found itself at war with Germany. The *Daily Express* did all it could to obstruct the war effort by both criticising price-controls and campaigning long and hard against food-rationing. Low must have found his proprietor's stance alarming. It led him to produce an image of Beaverbrook that was at variance with the image he had earlier created of him. Although Low only produced three cartoons of him in 1939, one being part of a 'Topical Budget', they show how far

his opinion of his proprietor had fallen during this period. In 'RECKLESS JACK PREPARES TO RAISE THE WIND',<sup>168</sup> 'CONSCIENCE TROUBLE AT LORD BEAVERBROOK'S'<sup>169</sup> and

<sup>167</sup> *Saturday Night*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

'VICIOUS SPIRAL TO INFLATION',<sup>170</sup> Low ridicules Beaverbrook's inability to take the war seriously. He draws his proprietor once again on the side of Colonel Blimp.



Beaverbrook's attitude changed dramatically when Churchill appointed him Minister of Aircraft Production in May 1940. After the fall of France in June of that year, fighter aircraft were in very short supply and were desperately needed in order to maintain air superiority over Britain and therefore stave off a German invasion. Unlike Chamberlain, Churchill was well aware of Beaverbrook's suitability for the job, most notably his ability to inspire and drive in times of adversity.<sup>171</sup> In the Commons, Churchill stated 'Lord Beaverbrook is at his very best when things are at their very worst.'<sup>172</sup> Churchill also later wrote 'I believed he had the services to render of a very high quality... I needed his vital and vibrant energy.'<sup>173</sup>

What better opportunity for Low to once again promote his proprietor, and help raise morale at the same time. Beaverbrook appeared in a more positive light in Low's cartoons during the war than any other Cabinet minister, running even Churchill a very close second. Adrian Smith noted that from May 1940 Beaverbrook's attitude towards Low

<sup>168</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1939.

<sup>169</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1939.

<sup>170</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1940.

<sup>171</sup> Like Neville Chamberlain, Lord Halifax and Clement Attlee and other high-ranking politicians in the House of Commons, King George VI also distrusted Beaverbrook. In his first letter to Churchill, the King asked the new Prime Minister to seriously reconsider making Beaverbrook Minister of Aircraft Production.

<sup>172</sup> C.J. Hambro, *Newspaper Lords in British Politics*, Macdonald, 1958, Page 57.

<sup>173</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Penguin, 1985, Page 12.

remained unchanged, because of 'the immensely flattering cartoons that appeared over the next 18 months'.<sup>174</sup>

Low exploited Beaverbrook's wartime activities to the full, often to the detriment of other ministers, who were carrying out just as vital a wartime role. According to David Farrer, Low's depiction of the Minister of Aircraft Production was having a very positive effect on his standing amongst the British populace:

'A human dynamo in constant peripatetic action made Beaverbrook the most talked about man, apart from the Prime Minister, in the free world.'<sup>175</sup>

Low depicted Beaverbrook in the way he had invariably always done, by emphasising both his dynamism and the righteousness of his actions, which were at times out of all proportion to the reality of the situation. It was highly likely that those working for Express Newspapers were expected to promote their proprietor's role in the war cabinet. For



example, according to Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie,<sup>176</sup> critics believed that Beaverbrook's 'Pots and Pans' appeal, which was run as a campaign in the *Daily Express* during the Battle of Britain, was designed to boost Beaverbrook more than the war effort. Even though Beaverbrook was often cited as saying 'we will turn your pots and pans into Spitfires and Hurricanes' in his newspapers, there was already a surplus of scrap aluminium available for building aircraft. The campaign was highly successful but totally deceptive. Take Low's own pocket cartoon on the subject, for

instance.<sup>177</sup> It must have helped persuade the likes of Lady Reading into believing that the campaign was valid. In a broadcast in July 1940 she stated:

'We can all have the tiny thrill of thinking, as we hear the news of the epic battle in the air, perhaps it was my saucepan that made part of that Hurricane!'<sup>178</sup>

Although those pots and pans donated to the appeal were never used for aircraft production, it must be said that the campaign did have a beneficial effect in raising the

<sup>174</sup> Adrian Smith, 'Low and Lord Beaverbrook', *Encounter*, December 1985, Page 20.

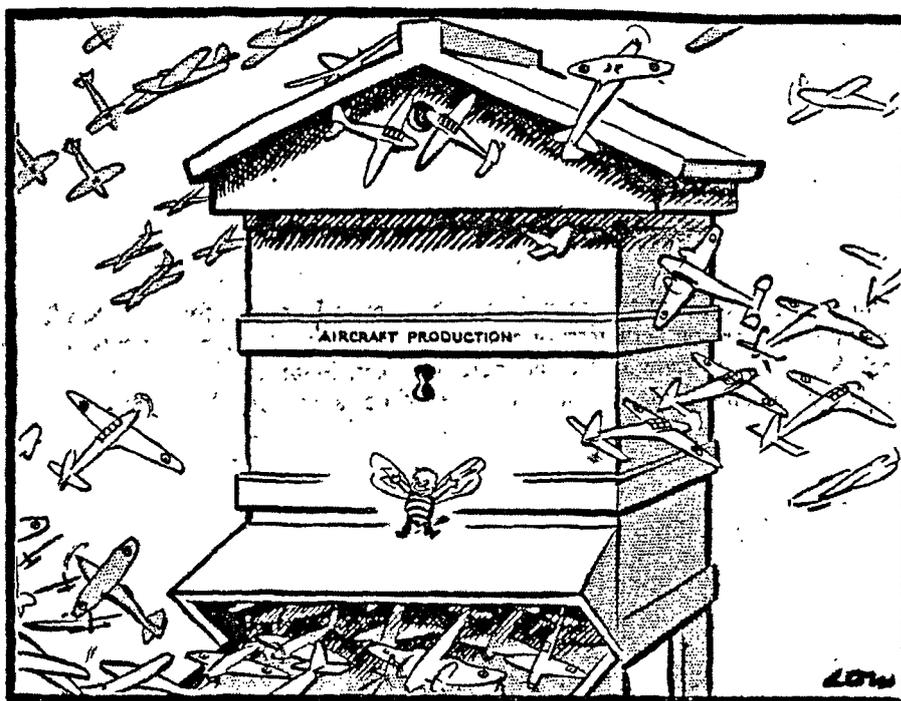
<sup>175</sup> David Farrer, *G - For God Almighty*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969, Page 55.

<sup>176</sup> Authors of *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993.

<sup>177</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1940.

morale of ordinary people as the Blitz wore on. Since the war had begun, many housewives, for the first time, probably felt that they were now directly contributing to the war effort. The campaign for aluminium did Beaverbrook's popularity no end of good. Low certainly played his part in continuing to flatter and bolster his proprietor. On the other hand, he may not have intentionally gone out of his way to boost Beaverbrook. It may have been all quite innocent, with Low producing cartoons that were just effective propaganda in order to help raise morale.

This 'human dynamo', as Farrer described Beaverbrook, helped mastermind the supply of aircraft that were needed by Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. This was perfectly captured by Low in a number of cartoons, the most effective being 'HOW



Beaverbrook  
HOW DOTH THE BUSY LITTLE B

DOTH THE BUSY LITTLE B'.<sup>179</sup> In

this cartoon, Low depicted Beaverbrook as a bee, as he had previously done ten years earlier.<sup>180</sup> On that occasion during the Empire Crusade campaign Beaverbrook had attacked the Tory Party, stinging both

Austen Chamberlain and Stanley Baldwin in the process. This time Low depicted Beaverbrook as the national saviour, producing and releasing the aircraft needed from what appears to be a hive of activity. A delighted Beaverbrook wrote a letter of congratulation to the cartoonist:

'Thank you very much. For the first time I appear as a bee instead of a wasp.'<sup>181</sup>

Another example of a cartoon that also greatly eulogised Beaverbrook during this period was called 'TEAM WORK BY LORD BEAVERBROOK'.<sup>182</sup> Beaverbrook believed he did not have the adequate resources to increase the production of fighter aircraft to the

<sup>178</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 391.

<sup>179</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1940.

<sup>180</sup> The cartoon was also titled 'HOW DOTH THE BUSY LITTLE B' and was published on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1930.

<sup>181</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1940, Beaverbrook Archives.

level he felt was required. No doubt believing that his ministry deserved priority over others, and disapproving of the established way of dealing with shortages, he raided supplies intended for other Ministers without the right authority to do so. All over Britain,



Beaverbrook sent action squads to requisition every spare part or instrument that was deemed necessary. These so-called 'action squads' were described as Beaverbrook's 'inspired brigandage'. Although his taste for piracy came under attack from other ministries who also accused him of using his newspapers to support positions he was taking in Cabinet, Low still felt it a fit subject for caricature.

In cartoons such as these, it is always Beaverbrook and Beaverbrook alone who takes the credit for the success of the Ministry of Aircraft Production, even though there were others who played just as vital a role. Apart from the post-Dunkirk sense of urgency in the workforce which helped increase aircraft production, it was generally recognised that it was Air Chief Marshall Sir Wilfred Freeman who was primarily responsible for this. Beaverbrook was himself the first to recognise this:

'To your vision, more than to any other factor, we owe the victories that saved our country.'<sup>182</sup>

Apart from Freeman's role, aircraft production had dramatically increased by April 1940, and had doubled in the three months prior to Beaverbrook actually becoming

<sup>182</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1940.

<sup>183</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 389.

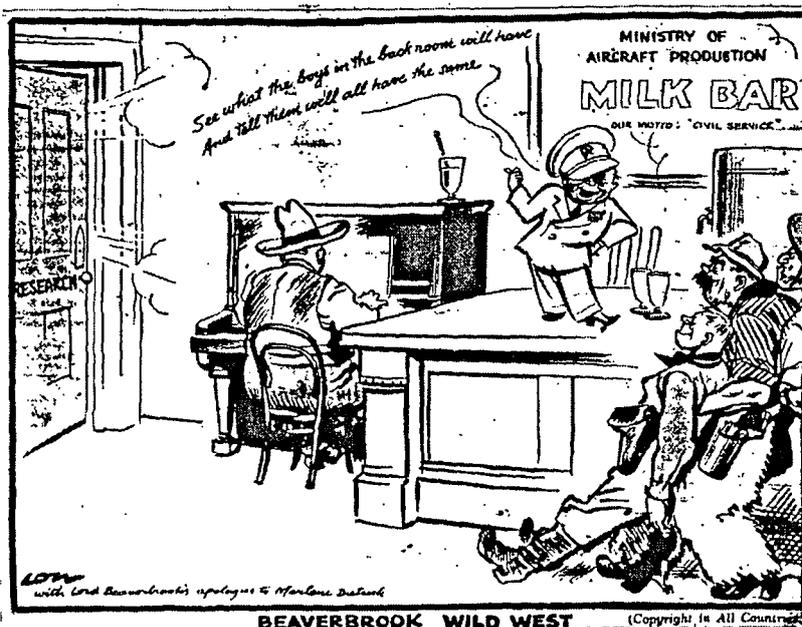
Minister responsible for aircraft production. However, Low, amongst others, helped create the myth that Beaverbrook had been solely responsible for the vast increase in fighter aircraft. To readers of the *Evening Standard*, Beaverbrook came to appear as second only to Churchill as a leader who could win the war. Look at Low's cartoon called 'SERENADE',<sup>184</sup> which shows Churchill, Bevin, and Beaverbrook peering out of the



window of No.10. It bolsters the myth that Beaverbrook, along with Bevin, were the two most important men behind Churchill in the Cabinet and hence were both the power behind the throne and the heirs apparent should Churchill be killed or lose the confidence of the House of Commons. Does this cartoon not conform to what was

expected on the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Express*? The myth is absolute; Beaverbrook relied solely on his friendship with Churchill for his position. Apart from being deeply mistrusted and disliked, Beaverbrook had no political power-base of his own to fall back on. Bevin, on the other hand, was popular both within government and in the country. He also had a strong power-base within the Labour Party and within the trade-union movement. Consequently, he was, unlike Beaverbrook, indispensable to Churchill.

During this period, Low took every opportunity to draw cartoons that his proprietor



would no doubt have found extremely flattering. One cartoon which showed the extent to which he went in order to court favour with his proprietor was 'BEAVERBROOK WILD WEST'.<sup>185</sup> Here we see Beaverbrook repeating the words from the song 'The Boys in the Backroom',

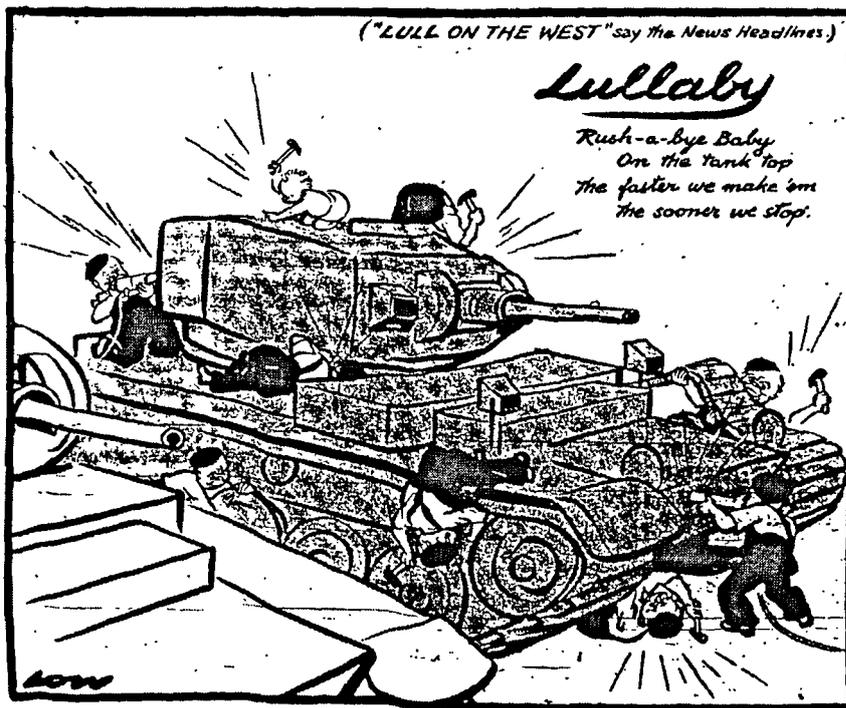
<sup>184</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1941.

<sup>185</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1941.

sung originally by Marlene Dietrich as she danced along the bar counter in the film *Destry Rides Again*. According to Michael Foot it was Beaverbrook's favourite film, especially the part in which Dietrich sings the song in question. Beaverbrook, by all accounts, requested the original of the cartoon rather promptly.<sup>186</sup>

What had prompted this cartoon was a debate over Air Estimates in the House of Commons on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1941. Beaverbrook came in for heavy criticism for continually running roughshod over the Air Ministry, and for holding back research and development within MAP. A.V. Hill MP deplored the neglect of research and the rumoured resignation of Sir Henry Tizard, who had been in charge of research and development and had found it quite impossible to work under Beaverbrook. Austen Hopkinson MP summed the debate up by stating that the 'break-up of the scientific committee' had been 'totally unnecessary and... due to the interference of a certain person who shall be nameless, but who made the conditions under which the committee had to work absolutely impossible.'<sup>187</sup>

So Low's cartoon can be seen once more to promote his proprietor, while at the same time trivialising the serious allegations that had been laid against him. By the spring of 1941, Beaverbrook felt that he had already completed the task he had been appointed to do.



In May 1941, Churchill finally gave in to Beaverbrook's demands to resign his post, and the latter was rewarded with the rather ambiguous and ill-defined post of Minister of State. Two months later he was appointed Minister of Supply. Low celebrated the occasion with a

cartoon called 'LULLABY'<sup>188</sup> which allegorically emphasised Beaverbrook's omnipresence. No wonder Beaverbrook had the cartoon made into a poster to support the war effort. He wrote to Low soon after, congratulating him on such work:

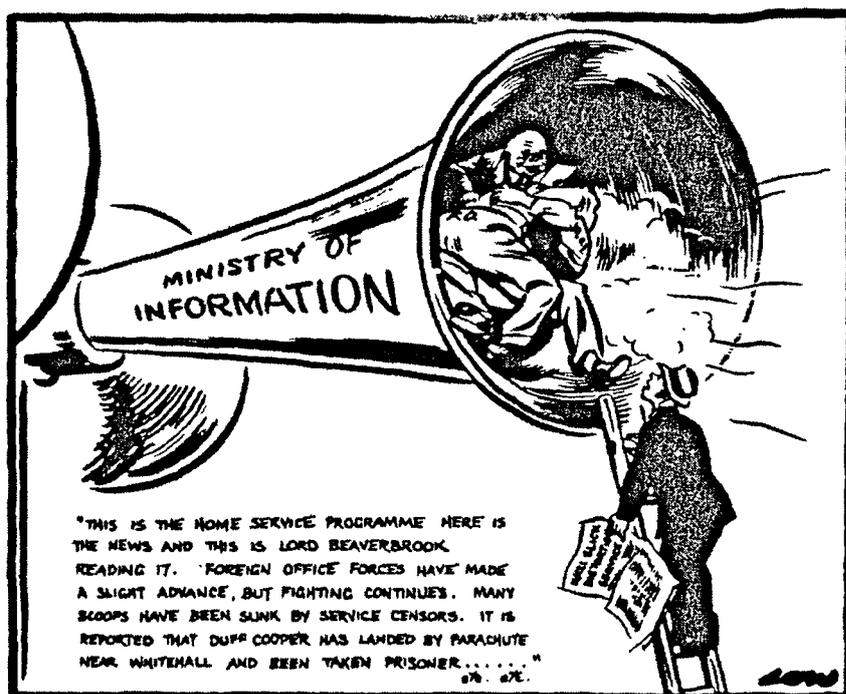
<sup>186</sup> Beaverbrook once said: 'Marlene Dietrich singing "The Boys in the Backroom" is a greater work of art than the *Mona Lisa*.' A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 450.

<sup>187</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 262.

<sup>188</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1941.

'For as comments on contemporary events they stand triumphantly the test of time. Though I have little time to do more than glance at your drawings.'<sup>189</sup>

Low, one presumes, was attempting to put across to his readers the impression that Beaverbrook's impact on his new Ministry would be similar to the one he had had on aircraft production. In fact, this could not have been further from the truth. Beaverbrook was unsure of his new role and, as a result, began to involve himself in areas outside supply. It is well documented that he attempted to interfere both with the Ministry of Labour under Ernie Bevin's control, as well as with that of Duff Cooper's beleaguered Ministry of Information, which had been under attack from Express Newspapers since the latter's appointment. According to Tom Driberg, Beaverbrook's 'jackals' had led attacks on such 'sound men' as Cooper.<sup>190</sup> Beaverbrook, having been Minister of Information during the First World War, had a poor opinion of British propaganda and consequently of Duff Cooper's role as Minister of Information. In the cartoon "THIS IS THE HOME SERVICE PROGRAMME HERE IS THE NEWS..."<sup>191</sup> Low sanctions his proprietor's



interference in the affairs of another Ministry. What is interesting is the fact that Low never drew Beaverbrook in relation to his continual feud with Ernie Bevin over labour. He presumably realised that his proprietor stood no chance of succeeding against Bevin. As

Beaverbrook could not be seen as being anything else but in the right, he attacked the Ministry of Information which was a much softer touch for the cartoonist as Duff Cooper was receiving a bad press. So Low happily acquiesced in supporting the editorial line of Express Newspapers throughout this period. (It was not until Low began reflecting on the post-war world that his portrayal of Beaverbrook changed radically.)

<sup>189</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1941, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>190</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 263.

<sup>191</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1941.

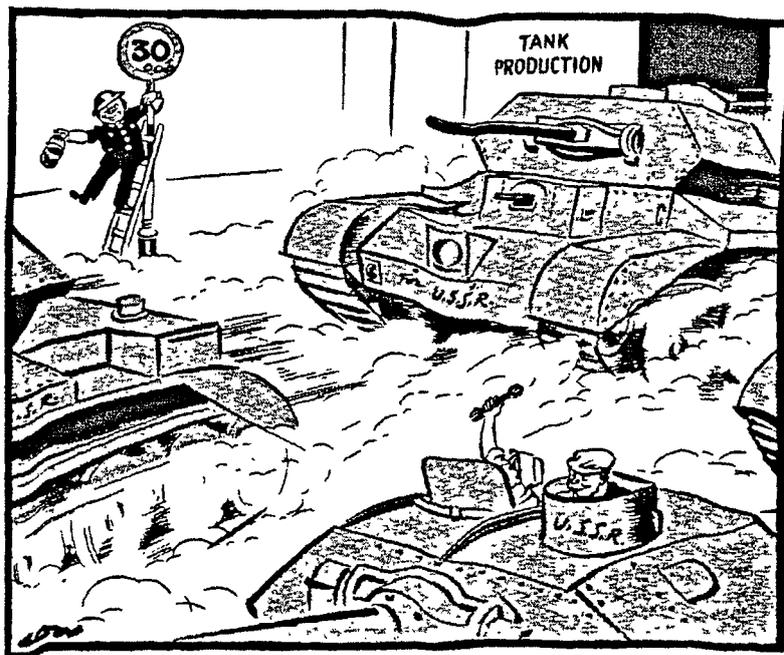
Churchill, who still felt he needed Beaverbrook in Cabinet, but was aware of his penchant for mischief-making and upsetting other ministers, decided to send him, along with Roosevelt's special envoy, Averell Harriman, to lead an Anglo-American supply



mission to Moscow in September 1941. The two men were to negotiate with Stalin in order to find out what military supplies the Russians required in the face of continued German advances. Before leaving for Moscow, Beaverbrook got Churchill to agree to a 'Tanks For Russia' week in order to help his negotiations with Stalin. All

tanks produced in the seven days before Beaverbrook was due to leave for Moscow would, as agreed, be sent to Russia. It led directly to a 20% increase in tank production. However, David Farrer felt Beaverbrook was oblivious to the fact that British troops had urgent need for tanks in the Western Desert.<sup>192</sup>

'COMING DOWN TO EARTH'<sup>193</sup> and 'NEW LIMIT'<sup>194</sup> portray Beaverbrook not only as



Britain's continual saviour but that of the Soviet Union too. Through Low's eyes, there is little that his proprietor cannot do. Low's Beaverbrook, as already mentioned, is a far more dynamic figure than any other Cabinet Minister depicted in his cartoons. Even Low's Churchill, who does not appear as regularly

<sup>192</sup> David Farrer, *G - For God Almighty*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969, Page 99.

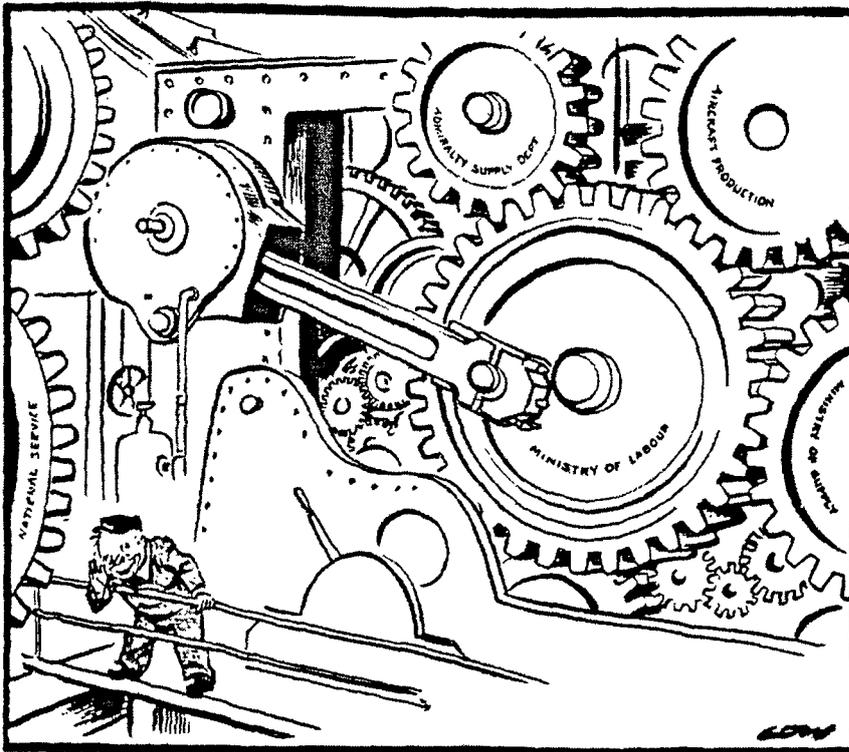
<sup>193</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1941.

<sup>194</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1941.

as one would have thought his position would have warranted, appears stoic, rather than a dynamic symbol of Britain's war effort.

Although Beaverbrook was a rather frustrated and therefore ineffective Minister of Supply, Low kept on drawing him as a dynamic force, as can be seen in his cartoon "BOY! LET HER GO!"<sup>195</sup> Beaverbrook, no doubt appreciating how flattering the cartoon was, later used it in a book he wrote on how to be successful in life. Beneath the cartoon, he wrote:

'Success belongs to those who, by swift improvisation, snatch triumph from catastrophe.'<sup>196</sup>



"BOY! LET HER GO!"

Low, having helped overstate Beaverbrook's war-time role, found that his proprietor made good use of such cartoons when it came to re-enforcing his own war-time image some years later. What is surprising is how the myth developed that Low continually mocked his proprietor

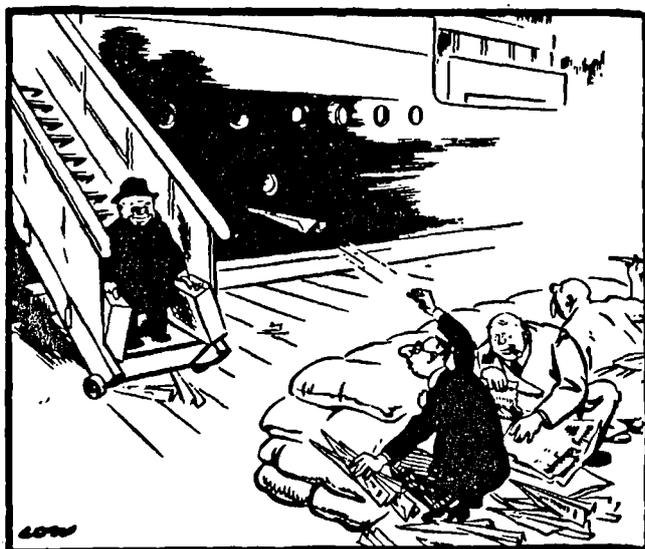
throughout his time at the *Evening Standard*. For example, Lord Kinross, an *Evening Standard* journalist himself, was convinced that as regards the aforementioned cartoon, Low had drawn 'a savage cartoon of Beaverbrook preparing to throw a giant spanner into the works of British war industry'.<sup>197</sup> This is entirely incorrect, the cartoon is anything but 'savage', while there is not a spanner to be seen anywhere. The cartoon is blatantly pro-not anti-Beaverbrook. Such inaccurate judgements by journalists such as Kinross were intended to emphasise Low's independence, rather than state the real nature of such work which was nothing more than blatant propaganda on Beaverbrook's behalf.

<sup>195</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1942.

<sup>196</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Don't Trust to Luck*, Express Newspapers Publication, 1951.

<sup>197</sup> Lord Kinross, 'Puck With A Pencil', *London Illustrated*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1950.

It could be said that one of Beaverbrook's motives in championing the call for a Second Front was that it kept him in the national limelight. Two days after Beaverbrook had returned from New York, having delivered a speech across the whole of the USA in which he called for an Allied invasion of northern France in 1942 to alleviate the pressure on the Russians, Low drew 'SECOND FRONT'.<sup>198</sup> Beaverbrook's demands for a Second



SECOND FRONT

Front had been widely criticised by the British press, most notably in the newspapers of Lords' Camrose and Kemsley, for being both premature and strategically unrealistic. This did not stop Low's partisan approach, associating Camrose's and Kemsley's attitude towards the war with that of Colonel Blimp.

When in 1943 it was agreed that a Second Front would take place in the spring of 1944, Beaverbrook's campaign naturally came to an end. Now appointed Lord Privy Seal, he was given the task by Churchill of negotiating, on behalf of the British Government, an agreement with the Americans over civil aviation routes across the world. At an Empire Conference in London on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1943, Beaverbrook secured an agreement with other members of the British Empire over



CIVIL FLYING

the civil redesigning of military aircraft and the plan to operate a round-the-world air route in partnership with other

Commonwealth airlines. The event was captured by Low in 'CIVIL FLYING'<sup>199</sup> and later again in "CALL YOURSELF A TEST PILOT..."<sup>200</sup> which

<sup>198</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1942.

<sup>199</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1943.

<sup>200</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1944.



showed Beaverbrook up against the forces of reaction, apathy and self-interest. In fact, at the time of this last cartoon, Beaverbrook had fallen out with Adolf Berle, the American civil aviation negotiator, over traffic rights. It was not till Lord Swinton took over that Britain and the United States successfully signed an agreement on bilateral air-traffic rights.

Beaverbrook had, in any case, become bored with the detail of civil aviation and wanted to help Churchill prepare for the pending general election that was likely to take place once the war had been won. With talk of post-war reconstruction, Low's portrayal of Beaverbrook would eventually take a decisive turn for the worse. Low, unlike Beaverbrook, saw the need for post-war social planning and it was not surprising that there



HERE WE GO ROUND THE BLIMPERY BUSH

was a political parting of the ways. However, the break does not seem to have occurred till virtually the end of the war. In 'HERE WE GO ROUND THE BLIMPERY BUSH',<sup>201</sup> drawn in March 1944, Beaverbrook, pictured with Lord Woolton, who was then Minister for Reconstruction, is still depicted in a very positive light by Low.

<sup>201</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1944.

Here, remarkably, we see Beaverbrook championing post-war reconstruction in the face of self-interest represented by the Blimps.

The breach with Beaverbrook does not actually appear to have occurred until the war with Germany was virtually at an end, as can be seen in 'FRESH CALL-UP OF BEAVER BOYS',<sup>202</sup>



FRESH CALL-UP OF BEAVER BOYS

Here, Beaverbrook, for the first time since becoming Minister of Aircraft Production, is the anti-hero. Allying himself with Colonel Blimp once more, Beaverbrook leads a reactionary force against Ernest Bevin, who, as far as Low is concerned, represents the Labour Party's support for social planning.

### Low's post-war portrayal of Beaverbrook



THE JOLLY MILLER

Even after the 1945 election *débâcle*, which many Tories held Beaverbrook personally responsible for, Low continued to feature his proprietor prominently, albeit with less frequency. Beaverbrook was still being portrayed as a politically important figure within the Tory

Party, which was by now certainly not the case. Beaverbrook spent most of the period from 1945 until 1950 (when Low left the *Evening Standard*) at his plantations in the West Indies

<sup>202</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1945.

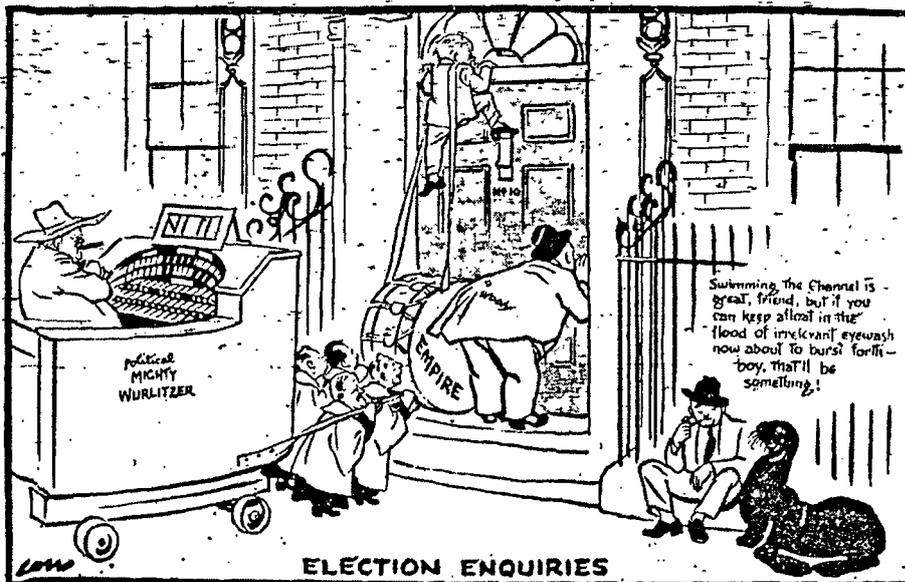
or at his villa in the South of France. In (21) 'TEMPORARY DRIVER',<sup>203</sup> 'THE JOLLY MILLER',<sup>204</sup> 'WINTER WEAR',<sup>205</sup> and (22) 'I FORBID THE BANNS!',<sup>206</sup> Beaverbrook



WINTER WEAR

seems not to appear in as flattering a light as he had done in Low's cartoons prior to 1945. However, he still emerges as a prominent member of the Conservative Party or, at times, as the sole protector of the British Empire. Each cartoon, in effect, promotes the utterances of a man who was not only by then politically isolated but also living in virtual retirement. A letter from Beaverbrook on Britain's economic crisis published in the *Daily Express*, for example, sparked off 'WINTER WEAR'. Beaverbrook wrote of his confidence that some Elijah or Elisha will arise to save the British Empire. Low suggests that his proprietor's prayers had been answered in the name of Ernest Bevin. For Low to suggest that Bevin would have taken any notice of Beaverbrook at this juncture was indeed wishful thinking.

In 'ELECTION ENQUIRIES',<sup>207</sup> his penultimate cartoon of Beaverbrook before leaving the *Evening Standard* in 1950, Low shows Beaverbrook peering through the windows of



ELECTION ENQUIRIES

No.10 Downing Street alongside Churchill and the Tory Party Chairman Lord Woolton. This cartoon sums up Low's whole approach towards his proprietor

<sup>203</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1946.

<sup>204</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1946.

<sup>205</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1947.

<sup>206</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1948.

<sup>207</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1949.

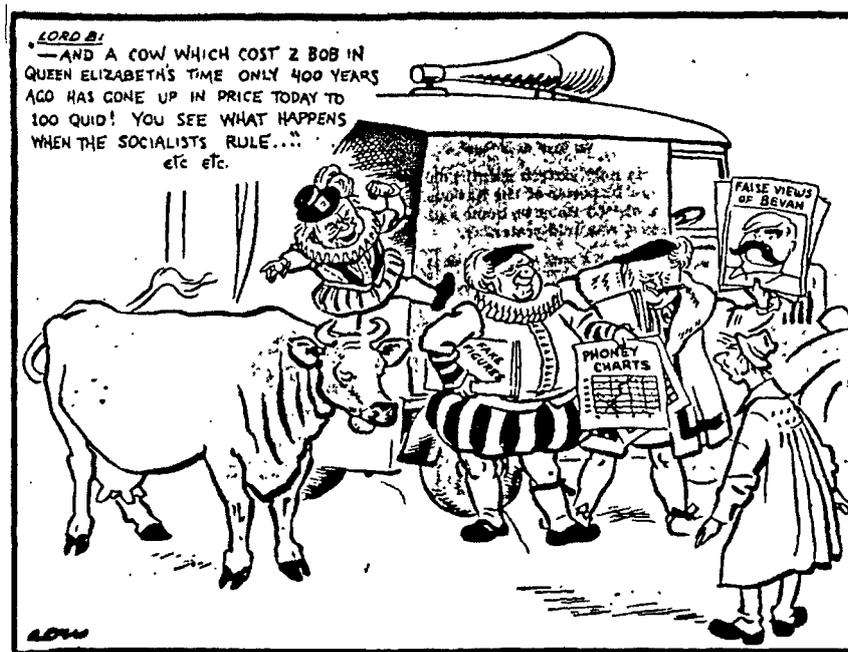
since joining the *Evening Standard* in 1927. At the time the cartoon was drawn, Beaverbrook's views on Empire were even more of an anachronism than they had been years earlier, while his importance within the Tory Party, excluding his position as a newspaper proprietor, was also at its lowest ebb. This is not the impression that one gets from this cartoon.

It is interesting to note that when Low joined the *Daily Herald* in 1950 his perception of Beaverbrook changed considerably. Not only does Beaverbrook make fewer appearances in his cartoons but he appears in a far less flattering light, as one can see in



**WORKING OVERTIME**

(Copyright in all countries.)



**ECONOMICS, TORY-STYLE**

(Copyright in all countries.)

two *Daily Herald* cartoons entitled

'WORKING OVERTIME'<sup>208</sup> and

'ECONOMICS, TORY-STYLE'.<sup>209</sup> In

'WORKING OVERTIME', Beaverbrook appears as a clown, and for the first time as a Tory Press Lord rather than as a political figure. And in

'ECONOMICS, TORY-STYLE' he appears as

just a deceitful propagandist for the

Tory cause. One cannot imagine Low getting

away with such a portrayal of

Beaverbrook when at the *Evening Standard*. There

is no longer the contrast between Beaverbrook

and other political

<sup>208</sup> Published in the *Daily Herald* on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1950

<sup>209</sup> Published in the *Daily Herald* on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1951.

figures. Now in the enemy camp, he is just another stock character to be exploited and ridiculed. Later, at the *Manchester Guardian*, Beaverbrook's ever-diminishing appearances in Low's cartoons were again only in the guise of a Press Lord, as can be seen in 'B D C'<sup>210</sup> and 'FREE CRITICISM IN FLEET STREET'<sup>211</sup>



B D C



FREE CRITICISM IN FLEET STREET

## Conclusion

'And there is Low, who libels his employer, Lord Beaverbrook, constantly. Does Beaverbrook get angry? he merely says, mid hearty laughter: "That was a grand cartoon of yours today, Low. May I have the original?"'<sup>212</sup>

<sup>210</sup> Published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1954.

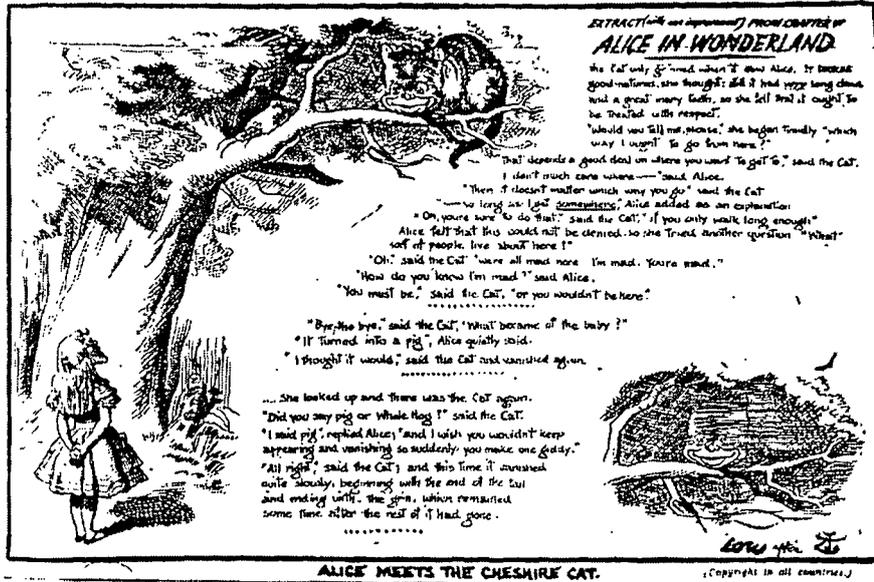
<sup>211</sup> Published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1955.

<sup>212</sup> Trevor Allen in the *Sunday Referee*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1935, Low Papers, University of Kent.

The misconception that Low got away with consistently ridiculing his proprietor in his own newspaper, and to the latter's displeasure, can now be shown to have been inaccurate. Beaverbrook greatly enjoyed being caricatured and, as has been seen, it served him well. In spite of his own protestations, Low appeared to promote his proprietor in not too dissimilar a fashion to Strube at the *Daily Express*. One can now argue that in the light of the evidence, that Low would not have been able to depict his proprietor as he did his other political victims, or as he depicted him later at the *Daily Herald*, in spite of the 'complete freedom' clause in his contract.

Maybe it is not entirely unreasonable for a cartoonist to promote his own proprietor, but Low promoted him not as a newspaper magnate, but as a leading politician and potential political leader. During the late 1920s and 1930s, Low held Beaverbrook on a political par along with Prime Ministers and Party Leaders. He not only consistently exaggerated his proprietor's importance, but also supported him throughout the Empire Crusade even though he personally did not believe in tariff reform. During the late 1930s, Low virtually ignored Beaverbrook's association with the appeasement of Hitler and Mussolini, whilst taking every opportunity to include his proprietor in his cartoons after he had joined the War Cabinet in May 1940. Even after the 1945 General Election, Low still portrayed Beaverbrook as a prominent figure within his own party. It was not until he joined the *Daily Herald* and later the *Manchester Guardian* that a more realistic, and therefore far less flattering portrayal of Beaverbrook appeared.

(1)

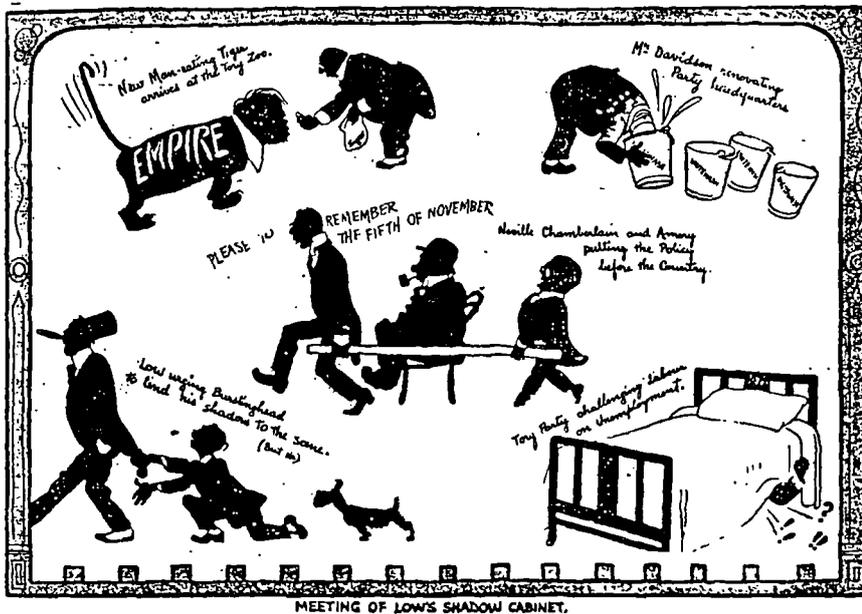


(2) Cartoon can be seen on page 47 of this thesis.

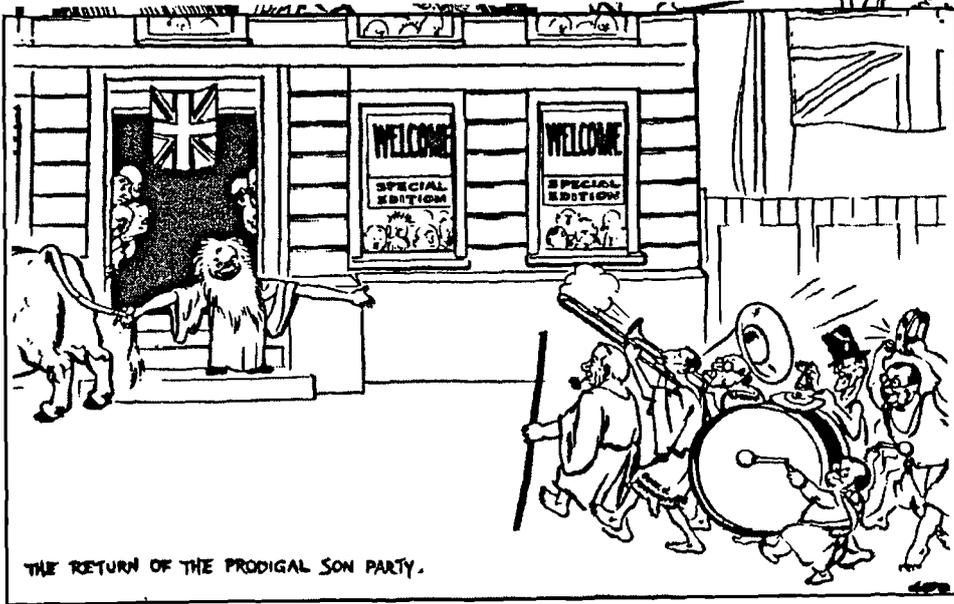
(3)



(4)

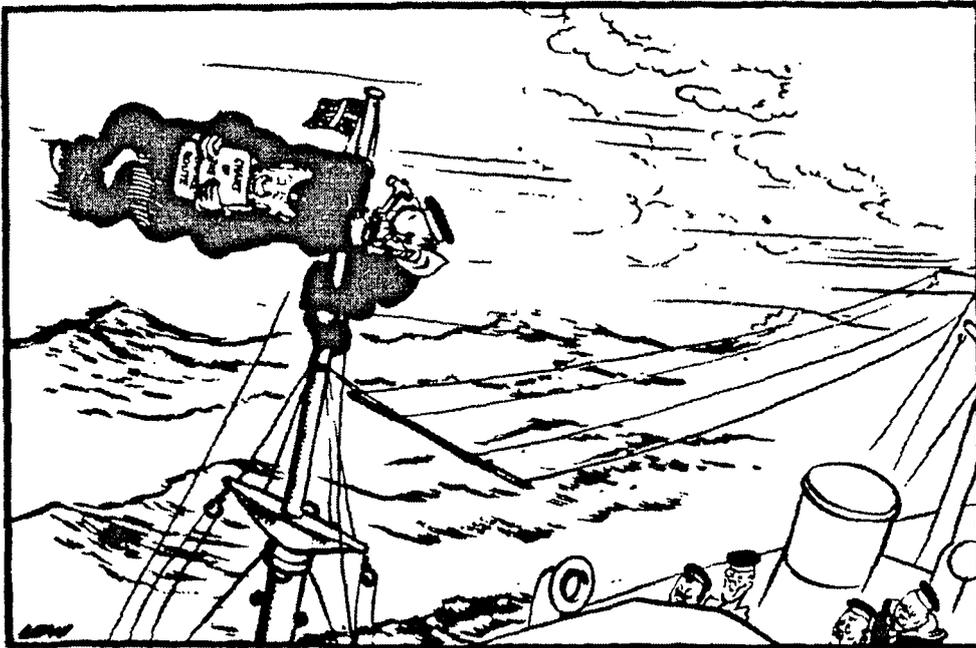


(5)



THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON PARTY.

(6)



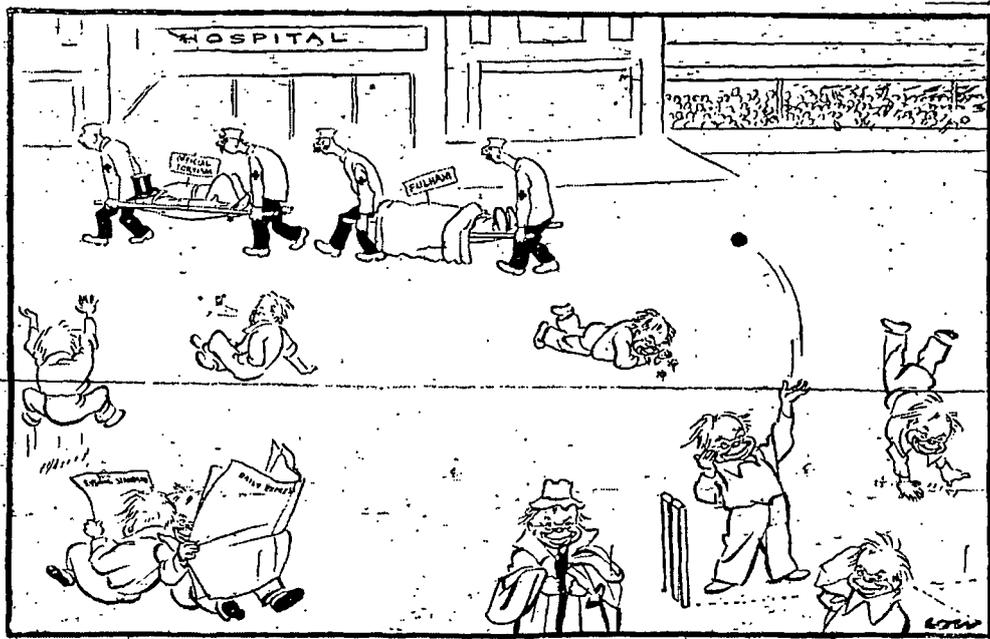
HAULING THE SKOPPER TO THE MAST.

(7)



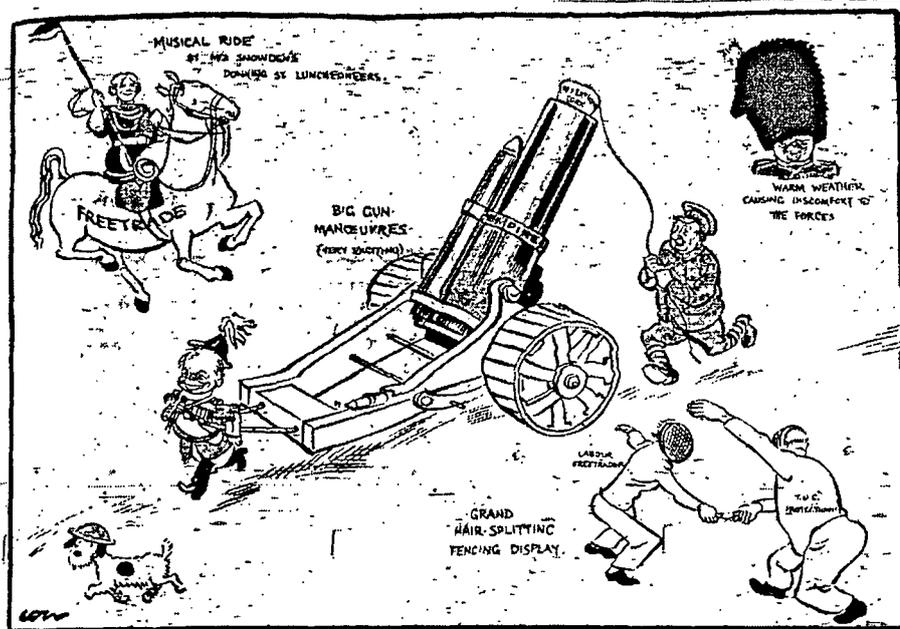
"HOW DO TH THE BUSY LITTLE B —"

(8)



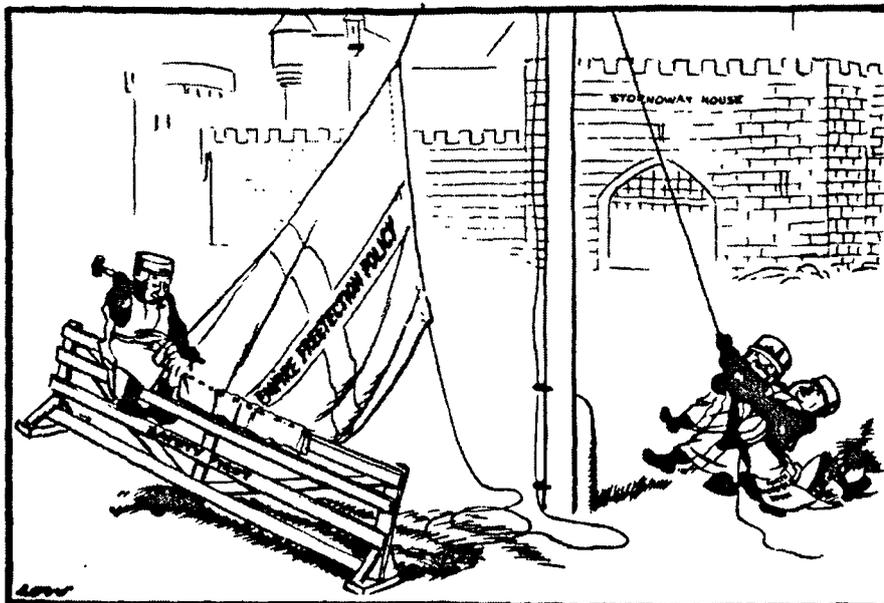
RESULT OF THE FIRST TEST.

(9)



FISCAL MILITARY TOURNAMENT.

(10)



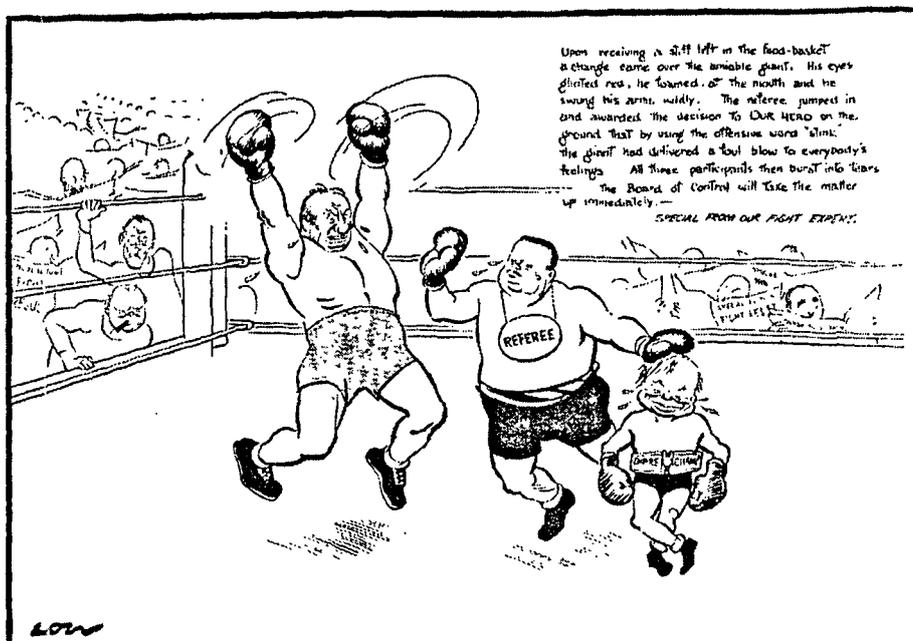
HAULING THE FLAG TO THE FENCE.

(11)



THE INSIDE STORY.

(12)



CARNERA SUSPENDED AGAIN.

(13)



CAESAR HESITATES AT THE RUBICON.

(14)



BENK OLIDAY PREPARATIONS.

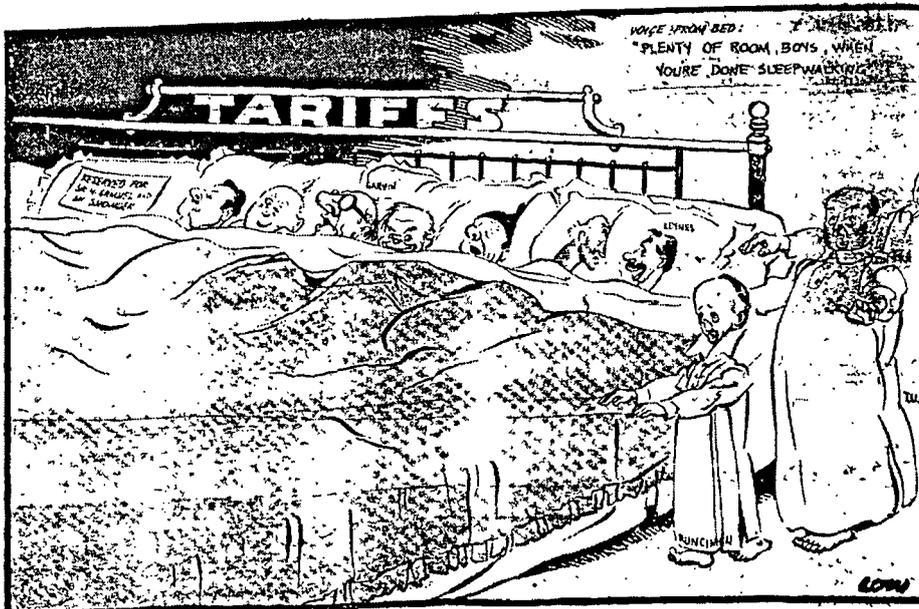
(15)



UNHOLY COMMERCE IN LIBERALIA.

(Copyright in all countries.)

(16)



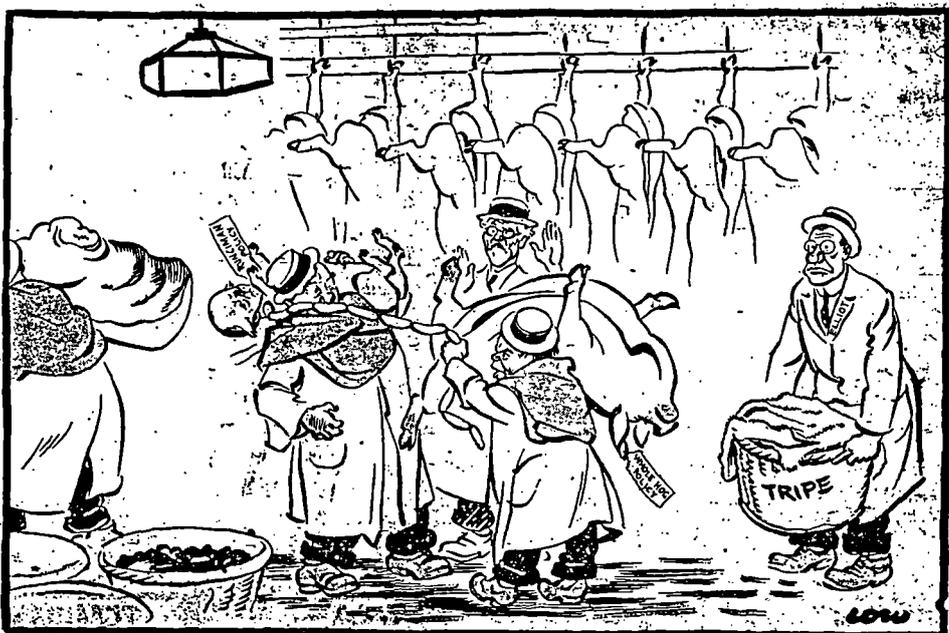
AND SO TO BED.

(17)



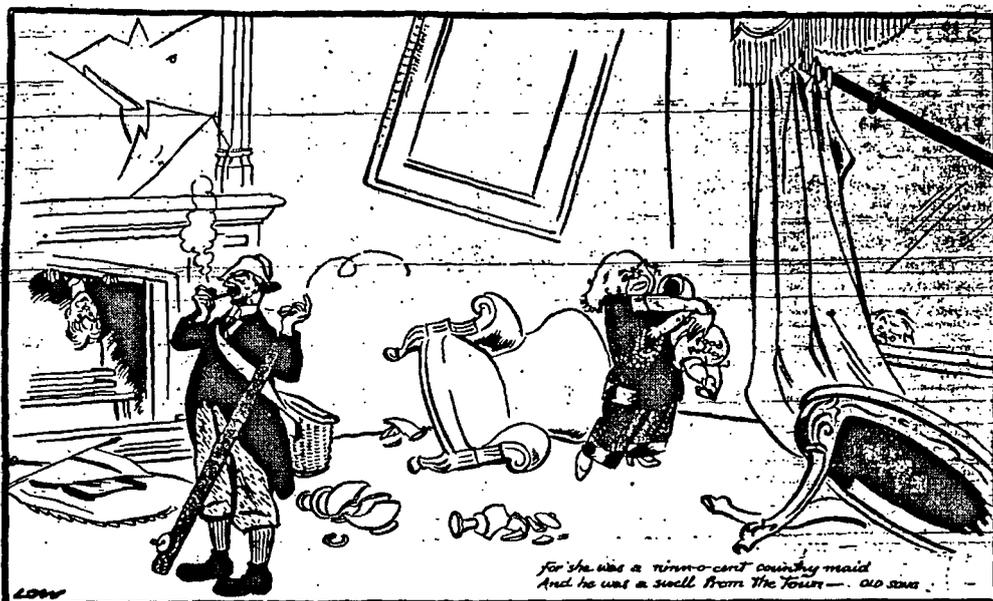
"DO WE PACK THE MASCOT, JIM?" (Copyright in all countries.)

(18)



TIFF AT THE PROTECTION MEAT MARKET. (Copyright in all countries.)

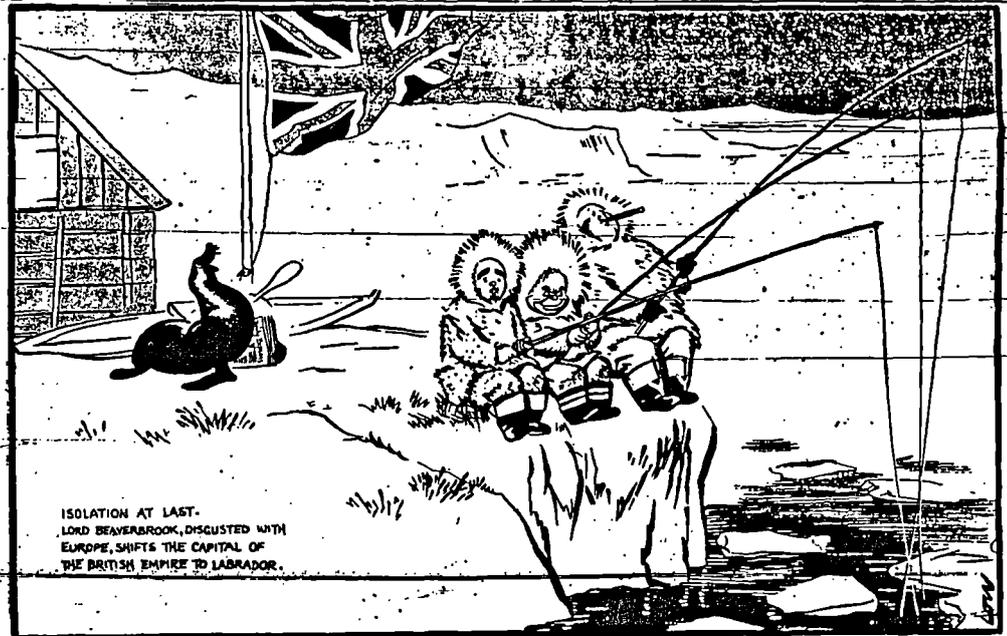
(19)



for she was a firm-o-cert country maid And he was a swell from the town - old saw

ANOTHER MATRIMONIAL BUST-UP IN HIGH LIFE. (Copyright in All Countries.)

(20)



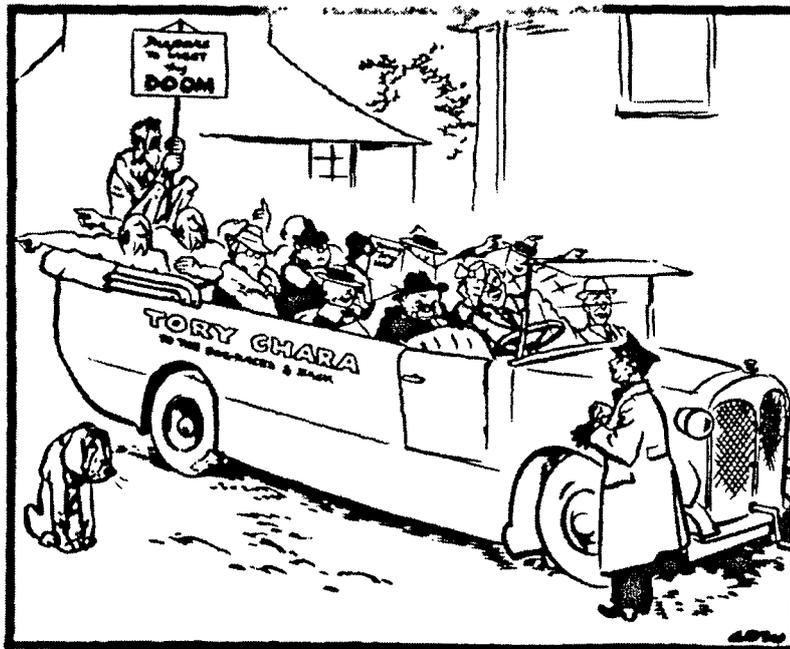
ISOLATION AT LAST.  
LORD BEAVERBROOK, DISGUSTED WITH  
EUROPE, SHIFTS THE CAPITAL OF  
THE BRITISH EMPIRE TO LABRADOR.

OLD LOW'S ALMANACK

(Copyright in All Countries.)

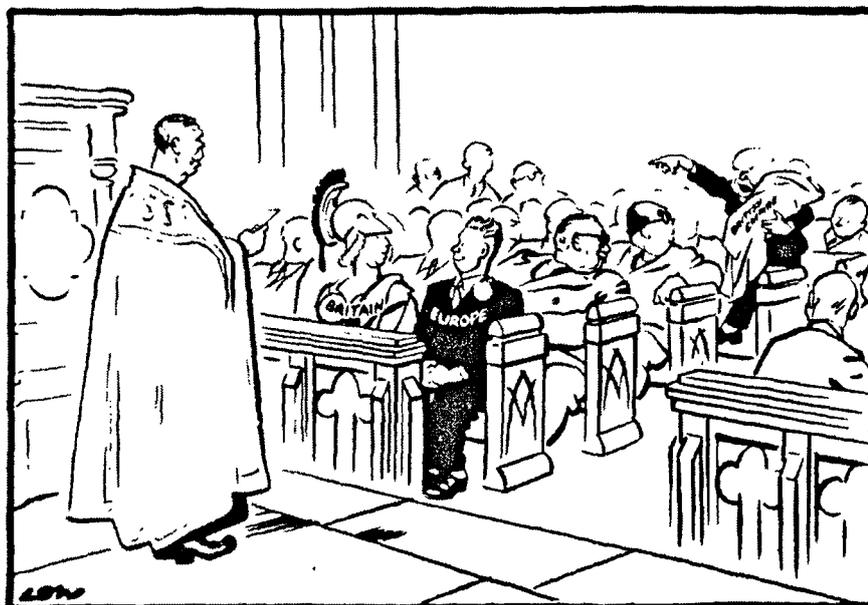
PROPHECIES FOR 1939

(21)



TEMPORARY DRIVER

(22)



"I FORBID THE BANNS!"

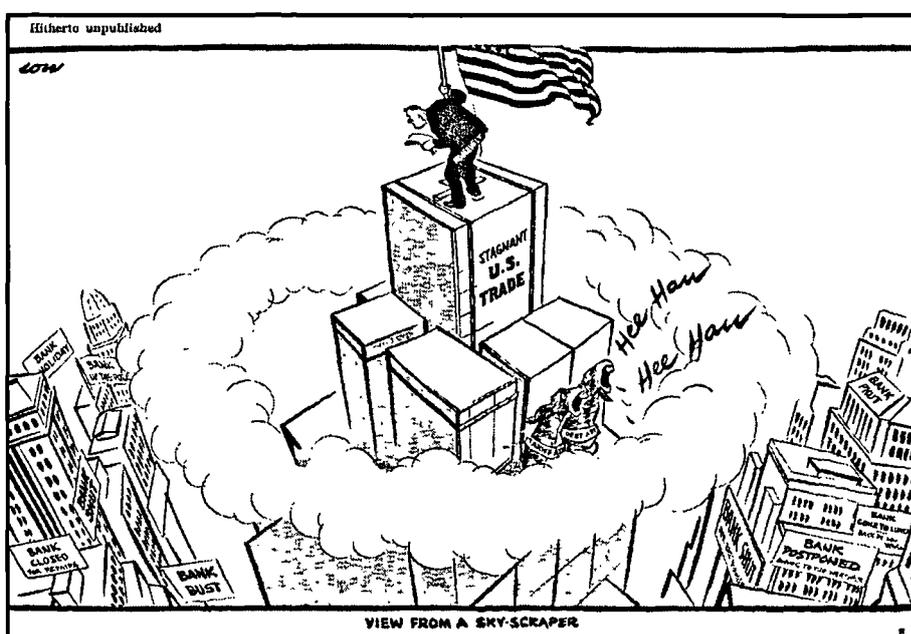
## Chapter Four: What Was Off-limits to Low?

Taboo subjects; bad taste; against the policy of the paper; and cartoons that were considered too strong in their sentiment.

‘I was determined to see that the crucial clause in my contract was observed to the letter or bust. Any jiggery-pokery and I would wreck the joint.’<sup>1</sup> (Low)

There are few subjects, or the treatment of them, that the political cartoonist of today cannot reflect or comment on compared to when Low was at the *Evening Standard*. Just contrast how the Monarchy is mercilessly treated today with cartoons of 50 or 60 years ago. The Monarchy was then, unless treated with great deference, taboo just like homosexuality, religion, disability and the private lives of politicians and celebrities. Added to that, Beaverbrook had his own personal taboos, which were strictly adhered to by his papers. During the early part of the 1930s, when America was in the throes of a severe economic depression, which was also having a knock-on effect in Europe, Beaverbrook would not accept any cartoon of Low’s that insinuated the possible downfall of the Capitalist system. When Low produced two cartoons on the subject, ‘VIEW FROM A SKY-SCRAPER’ and ‘AN OSTRICH’S-EYE VIEW’, they were refused publication.

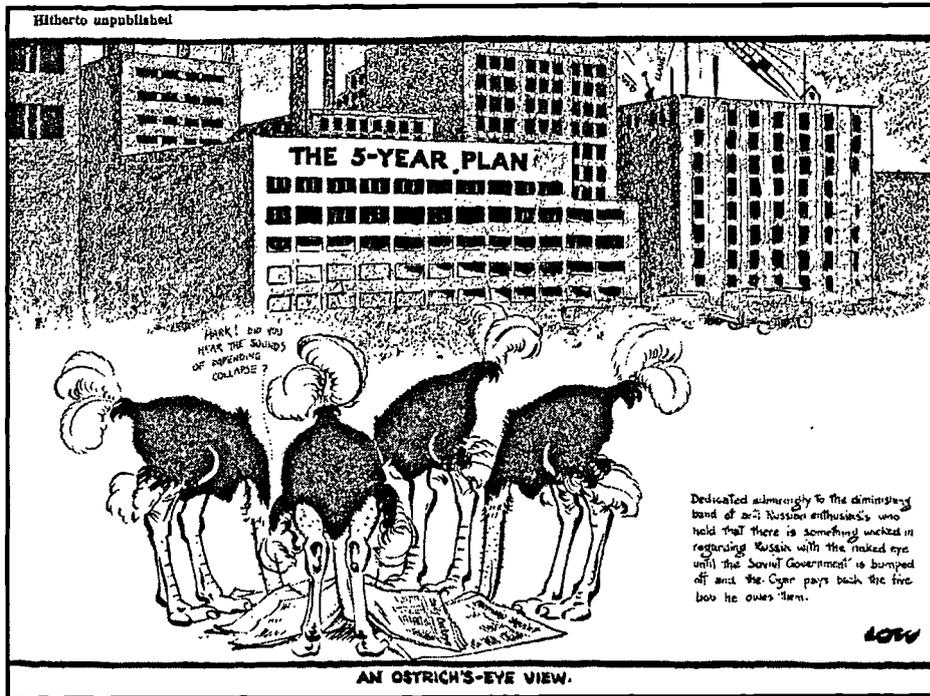
These unpublished cartoons did, however, appear in an anthology of his cartoons in 1936 entitled *Low’s Political Parade*. As there was no date of publication, they were just



referred to as ‘Hitherto Unpublished’. Of course, because Low was believed to have had complete freedom over his work, many were amazed that inside this anthology of

<sup>1</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 183.

cartoons were some that had been refused publication. It caused a stir, as will be seen later, with the journalist, Hannen Swaffer. Low must have felt that such an embarrassing oversight could only have caused damage to his reputation. So when he brought out a second anthology in 1938 entitled *Low Again*, which featured another unpublished cartoon



entitled 'CELEBRATION DINNER', it was not referred to this time as 'Hitherto Unpublished', but was misleadingly given the date it was drawn on; thus giving the impression that it had indeed been published. This

deception can only be seen as a deliberate attempt on Low's part to protect his standing as an independent cartoonist.

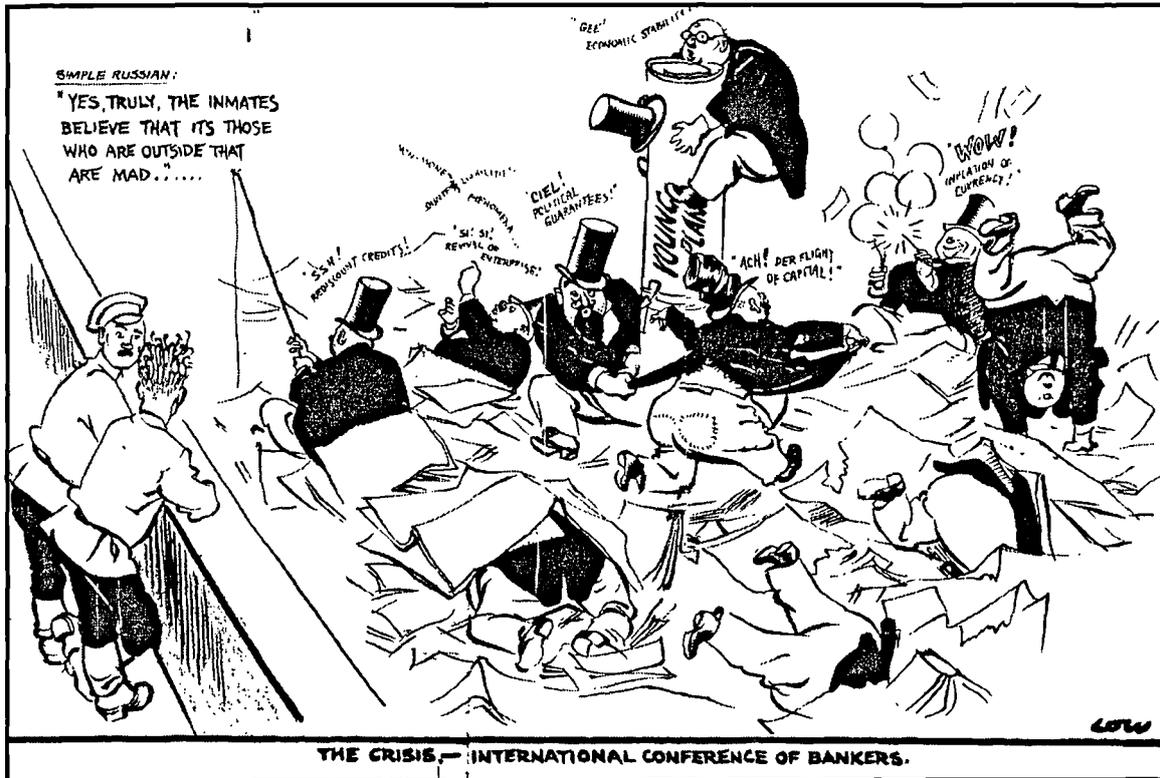
A.J. Cummings, Political Editor of the *News Chronicle*, saw 'AN OSTRICH'S-EYE VIEW' in the 1936 anthology, and, like many others, was amazed that a Low cartoon had been refused publication. Cummings felt that this had had much to do with Beaverbrook:

'The drawing is "dedicated admiringly to the diminishing band of anti-Russian enthusiasts who hold that there is something wicked in regarding Russia with the naked eye until the Soviet Government is bumped off and the Tsar pays the five bob he owes them". Why did this cartoon not appear in the *Evening Standard*? One should be sorry to think it was because Lord Beaverbrook considered it too dangerously Bolshevik.'<sup>2</sup>

Another cartoon on the theme of the failures of Capitalism in the face of Soviet Communism, 'THE CRISIS – INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BANKERS', appeared in the first edition of the *Evening Standard* on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1931, but did not appear in later editions. The *Newspaper World* later reported what had happened:

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Cummings in the *News Chronicle*, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

'Low's famous cartoon a couple of months ago on the International Conference of Bankers duly appeared in the *Glasgow Evening Times*, but was published only in the lunch edition of the *Evening Standard* in London and then suppressed.'<sup>3</sup>



James Friell, cartoonist for the *Daily Worker* under the pseudonym of 'Gabriel', had also noticed that the cartoon had been taken out of later editions, and felt that, like Cummings, this was as a result of the 'anti-Soviet campaign of the Beaverbrook Press'. Friell was astonished that Low, of all people, had been censored:

'Thus does the Capitalist Press stifle and repress even the most distinguished of its contributors if, by a rare chance, they let the truth about capitalism peep through.'<sup>4</sup>

Low's cartoons were also turned down when they were either considered too hard-hitting or dwelt on subject matter, and the treatment of it, that at the time may have been considered by the *Evening Standard* (more likely Beaverbrook himself) inappropriate for ridicule in a cartoon. Here are a number of prime examples, in chronological order, of occasions when, for the reasons already given, cartoons were not published.

In 'TAKING THE SALUTE', drawn on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1930, Low depicts himself showing his disgust at the cost to the taxpayer of that year's war-service estimates. Low's mocking of the three service chiefs was probably either seen as being in bad taste or just too strong

<sup>3</sup> *Newspaper World*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.



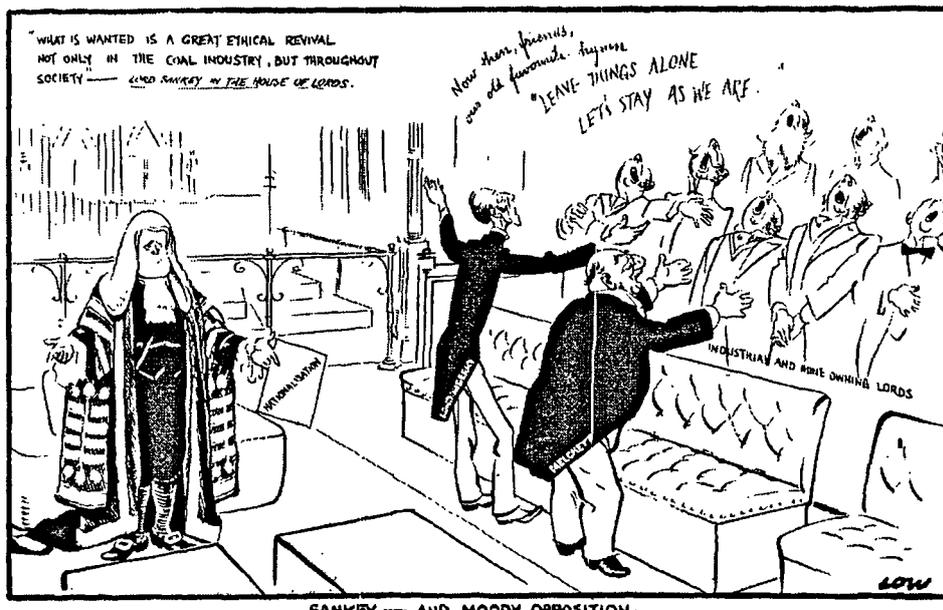
TAKING THE SALUTE.

in emphasis. Maybe the cartoon was felt to be misleading, for although Air estimates were up for that year, Army and Navy estimates were in fact down. Consequently, the cartoon did not appear in the paper.

'SANKEY - AND MOODY OPPOSITION'<sup>5</sup> was drawn on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1930, and based on Lord Sankey's maiden speech as Lord Chancellor on the future nationalisation of the coal industry. On the second reading of the Coal-Mines Bill, Sankey had declared:

'I have not changed my mind. I still firmly believe that nationalisation is the only solution for the difficulties of the coal industry... There will be a majority in the near future for nationalisation, I do not doubt.'<sup>6</sup>

In his closing appeal to the House of Lords, Sankey said the country, not the coal



SANKEY - AND MOODY OPPOSITION.

industry alone, needed a great ethical revival. Such a proposal was heavily criticised by those Lords appearing in Low's cartoon.

Lord Londonderry

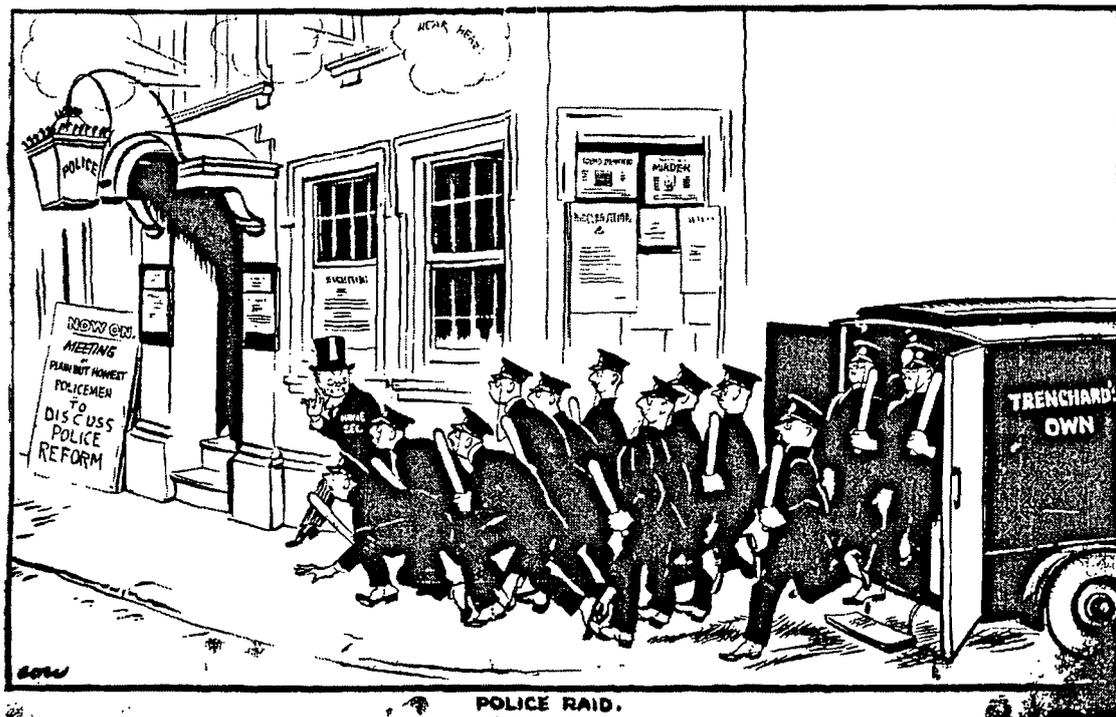
<sup>4</sup> James Friell in the *Daily Worker*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1931.

<sup>5</sup> Ira Sankey and Dwight Moody were American evangelists. They made extended evangelical tours in Britain towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their mass revivals preached the 'old-fashioned gospel' which denounced both the 'higher criticism' of the Bible, and the theory of evolution. Sankey, a hymn-writer, made a notable contribution to the growth of the 'gospel hymn'.

<sup>6</sup> As reported by the parliamentary correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1930.

(then one of the largest owners of mines and mining royalties), and Lord Melchett (then chairman of a coal company and of a coal-consuming concern), were vehemently critical of Sankey's sentiments. Lord Linlithgow denounced such plans and 'was perfectly sure that when the time came for their Lordships to take a step which would lead to the fall of the Government, they would not hesitate to do their duty.'<sup>7</sup> Low's emphasis on ridiculing the reactionary nature of Conservative peers to the possibility of nationalisation was probably seen as too critical and too implicit for the cartoon to have been published, especially as Beaverbrook would have also found the idea of nationalisation abhorrent.

'POLICE RAID', drawn in October 1931, was in reference to the Home Secretary's approval of a meeting at the Royal Albert Hall for members of all police services 'to consider matters which seek to affect police pay and conditions of service'.<sup>8</sup> This had been brought about by rumours that police pay was about to be cut.<sup>9</sup> The cartoon was rejected, so Low made a number of alterations in order to make it more acceptable. In its original form, the police van has written on its side 'Trenchard's Clowns' which, as can be seen,



has been cleverly edited in order to make it inoffensive.<sup>10</sup> On the billboard outside the police station, the words 'Meeting of Plain But Honest Policemen' were originally followed by 'To protest against wage cuts and to express dissatisfaction against several

<sup>7</sup> As reported by the parliamentary correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1930.

<sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1931. J.R. Clynes was then Home Secretary.

<sup>9</sup> Pay reductions in policemen's wages did in fact take place the following month in November 1931.

<sup>10</sup> Lord (Sir Hugh) Trenchard was at the time Commissioner of the Metropolitan London Police and held that post between 1931-1935.

matters.' This was obviously too explicit, and as can be seen was considerably toned down. Gilliat sent the altered cartoon back to Beaverbrook for his approval:

'I enclose a copy of Low's cartoon for your perusal.'<sup>11</sup>

Beaverbrook obviously still found the cartoon unacceptable; the image of the police about to take the law into their own hands may have been deemed distasteful.

'Mr GANDHI DOESN'T LIKE OUR INDIAN SUMMER' was drawn on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1931, the day after Gandhi had met Lord Sankey, Chairman of the Federal Structure



Committee, who was in discussions with the Indian leader over the coming Round Table Conference on the future of his country.

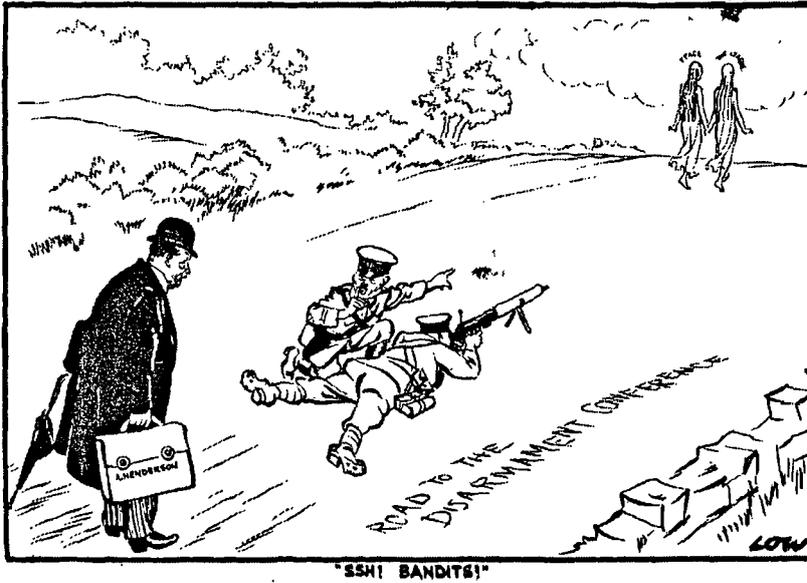
However, in the absence of a Hindu-Moslem agreement, Gandhi was pessimistic over the coming talks. (2<sup>nd</sup> November was a Monday, Gandhi's day of silence) This was reflected in the following day's *Daily Herald* headline: 'ROUND TABLE FATE IN BALANCE: Vital meeting with Gandhi today.'<sup>12</sup> The cartoon may have appeared too negative at such a critical and fragile stage in Anglo-Indian negotiations and was thus considered unsuitable for publication.

The World Disarmament Conference, which had begun on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1932, was being overshadowed by events in Manchuria. By this time, the Japanese, who had invaded the country in September 1931, were launching offensives on Nanking and Shanghai. Yet in spite of this, the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Henderson, who was chairman of the Conference, refused to contemplate even the possibility of failure in his inaugural speech:

<sup>11</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

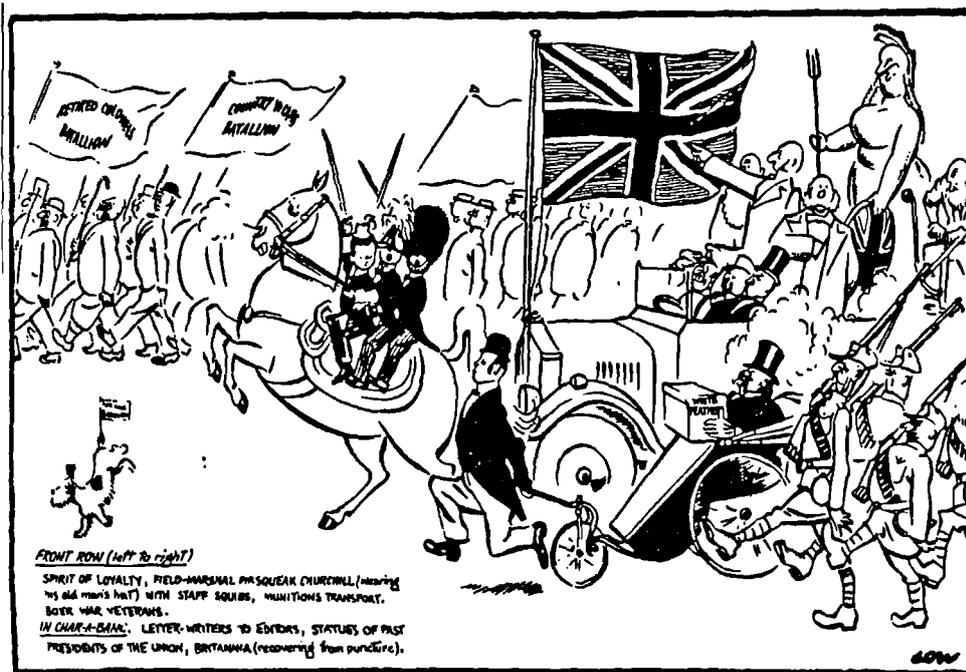
<sup>12</sup> *Daily Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1931.

'If we fail, no one can foretell the evil consequences that may ensue.'<sup>13</sup>



Low must have believed that action rather than words was needed, and that anything Henderson may have said in his address would not have had any effect on the Japanese. This is brought out in his cartoon, “SSH! BANDITS!”<sup>13</sup>, drawn on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1932. However, the image of a Japanese machine-gunner about to shoot in the back the female figures of ‘Peace’ and ‘The League’, would have probably been too abhorrent and therefore not acceptable.

‘ON TO THE NEW PRIDE’S PURGE AT OXFORD’ was drawn on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1933, after Randolph Churchill had gone up to Oxford in order to put forward a motion that ‘the present pacifist resolution of 9<sup>th</sup> February be expunged from the society’s records’.<sup>14</sup> This relates to the famous Oxford Union resolution, passed a week earlier, that had stated that



under no circumstances would the Union fight for King and Country. Winston Churchill spoke out against the resolution, making both his and his

<sup>13</sup> Edwin Jenkins, *From Foundry To Foreign Office*, Grayson & Grayson, 1933, Page 249.

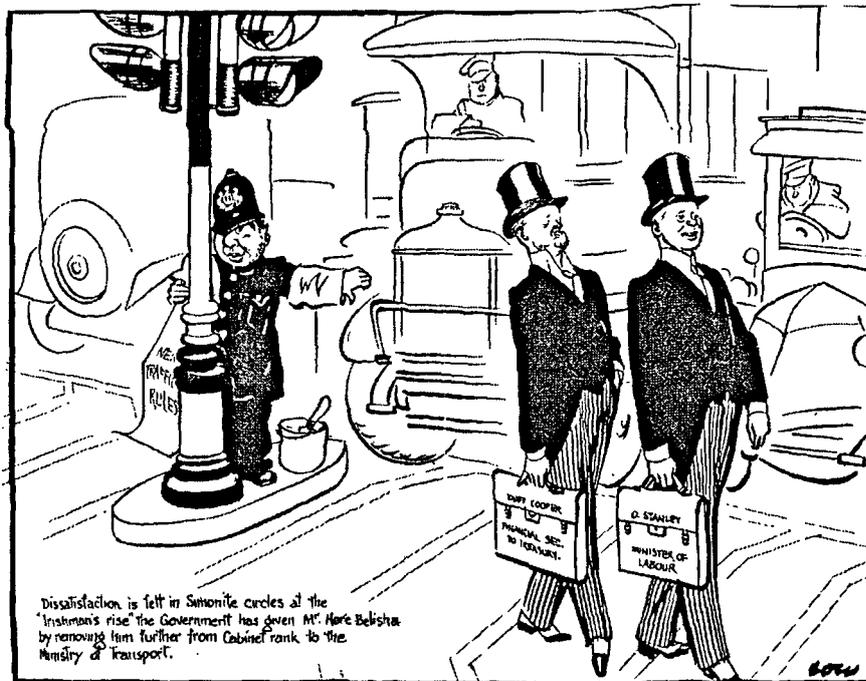
<sup>14</sup> *The Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1933. Randolph's motion to expunge the verdict failed on 20<sup>th</sup> February by 702 against and only 138 for.

son's feelings plain:

'That abject squalid shameless avowal was made last week by 275 votes to 153 in the debating society of our most famous university. We are told we ought not to treat it seriously. I disagree. It is a very disquieting and disgusting symptom.'<sup>15</sup>

Although the cartoon was left unpublished, it is more difficult to comprehend the reasons why it may have been left out. Seymour-Ure suggests that it might have been possibly just 'too strong to publish'.<sup>16</sup> However, it may have been more to do with Beaverbrook's relationship with Churchill at the time. Beaverbrook might have felt that it was one thing to make fun of Winston, another to ridicule his son who was still only twenty-two.

'PASSING BY' was drawn on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1934 after the National Government's ministerial reshuffle. Of the three political figures in the cartoon, Oliver Stanley had been moved from Minister of Transport to Minister of Labour,<sup>17</sup> Duff Cooper had been moved from Financial Secretary to the War Office to Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and Leslie Hore-Belisha had been moved from Financial Secretary to the Treasury to Minister of Transport.<sup>18</sup> Low implies that because Hore-Belisha had been effectively demoted, (the 'Irishman's rise') while Stanley and Cooper had been promoted closer to Cabinet rank, the 'Simonites', i.e. the National Liberals, were unhappy that they were being squeezed out of



PASSING BY

the Government by Conservatives. Apart from the strong political connotation of the cartoon, it may have displeased Beaverbrook because he was a great admirer of John Simon's role as Foreign Secretary. This can be seen from a letter that

<sup>15</sup> *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1933.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 131.

<sup>17</sup> According to the *Daily Herald* on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1934, 'Stanley had been promoted because of the "skilful way" in which he had piloted the Road Traffic Bill through Parliament.'

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Herald*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1934.

Beaverbrook wrote in 1931:

'We have got a first-rate head of the Foreign Office in Sir John Simon. If his character equalled his cleverness, he would be bigger than God.'<sup>19</sup>

Simon was not only the leader of the National Liberals in the Government, but also at that time the only one in the Cabinet. The cartoon, therefore, may have embarrassed Beaverbrook with its implication that the National Liberals were being removed from what was becoming increasingly seen as a purely Conservative administration.

'ON THE SOUTHPORT POPULAR FRONT', drawn in May 1939 at the time of the Labour Party conference in Southport, seems at first glance a pretty innocuous cartoon.



Beaverbrook would not have had any qualms over the subject matter which ridicules the Labour Party's rejection of the Popular Front. One plausible explanation for it being refused publication is the effeminate garb and gase of *the Labour*

leaders. Pre-war attitudes may have found this representation too distasteful even for caricature.

Low found to his cost that nudity in whatever guise was not looked upon kindly. In a newspaper article entitled 'Not So Low!', the writer of the piece had been to Low's home and commented on a cartoon he had seen hanging up there which had been refused publication because the figures in it, although in silhouette, were stark naked:



<sup>19</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Roy Howard, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

'On Low's walls, among his caricatures of J.H. Thomas, is a picture that has never been published. It depicts a large number of people whose clothes have suddenly vanished. As the scene is in silhouette it is not so indecent as it sounds. And the caption reads: "Nightmare of man who saw all his clothes fall off the guests and did not know whom to nod to and whom to treat with contempt".'<sup>20</sup>

Low also drew other unclothed figures in a number of separate drawings for his 'Topical Budget' as can be seen, and these too were left out presumably for reasons of decency. When Low drew a cartoon based on Royal Academy paintings, which included a naked Stanley Baldwin holding a strange-shaped vegetable and two unclad females in a parody of 'Susannah and the Elders', a nervous editor sent the drawing for Beaverbrook's consent:

'I enclose a proof of Low's cartoon to appear on Monday. I think we can publish it, but I thought it desirable to let you see it. The caricatures, of course, are modelled on Academy paintings.'<sup>21</sup>



The cartoon was published, possibly because it imitated art. However, the caption 'LOW AND THE ACADEMY' was added, not by Low but by the paper, so as to make it clear what the cartoon related to, in case readers should get the wrong impression.

As has been seen, cartoons were refused publication because they were both unacceptable to Beaverbrook and beyond alteration. There were, however, cartoons that

<sup>20</sup> Unidentified newspaper report, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>21</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

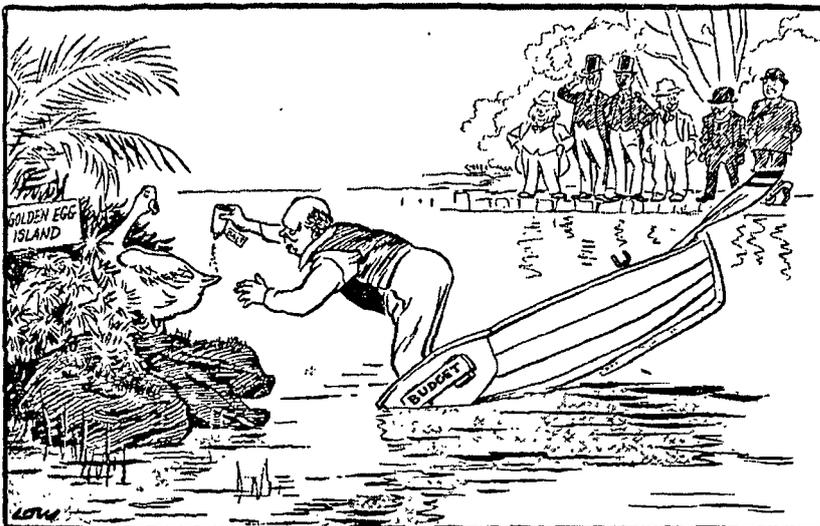
were altered in order to make them acceptable for publication. A good example of this can be seen in a rather harmless drawing which was based on an actual reported incident in



Tuesday, April 21, 1928

THE EVENING STANDARD.

Sun. Rise tomorrow 5.46. Sets 6.11.



TO-DAY'S BALANCING FEAT.

which Winston Churchill fell into the lake at his country home, Chartwell, while trying to catch a goose. In his original drawing Low included a caption within the cartoon explaining what had happened to Churchill:

'Mr Churchill when trying to catch a goose at his country estate fell out of his boat into the lake. News item.'

The cartoon was thus self-explanatory

and this probably explains why the original had no title. However, the editor no doubt decided that the caption made the cartoon too demeaning to Churchill who was at the time Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was then not the done thing to publicly laugh at the actual physical misfortune of such a senior and high-ranking cabinet minister. Was this just not plain bad taste? So the caption, as can be seen, was excluded from the cartoon and instead a title was given to it 'TO-DAY'S BALANCING FEAT', which not only changes the complexion of the cartoon, but also takes us away from the artist's original concept.



Mary P. Water for Circles to horses

In this excerpt from Low's 'Topical Budget', even using the mildest of impolite terms such as the word 'nitwit', could be deemed indecent

or offensive for the editor to publish. Today the general public would be unlikely to give such words a second glance.

Low had gained a reputation for contradicting the *Evening Standard's* editorial in his cartoons. If this was the case, then why did the editor continue to trouble Beaverbrook with cartoons he felt went against the policy of the paper, as in the case of "WELL, WHAT'S IT TO BE, BOYS? UNITED STATES OF EUROPE OR EUR'OPLESS?" In a letter to Beaverbrook, Gilliat wrote:

'I did not give today's cartoon because I thought it was against our policy. It could be given tomorrow if you have no objection, though I don't think it is very good.'<sup>22</sup>

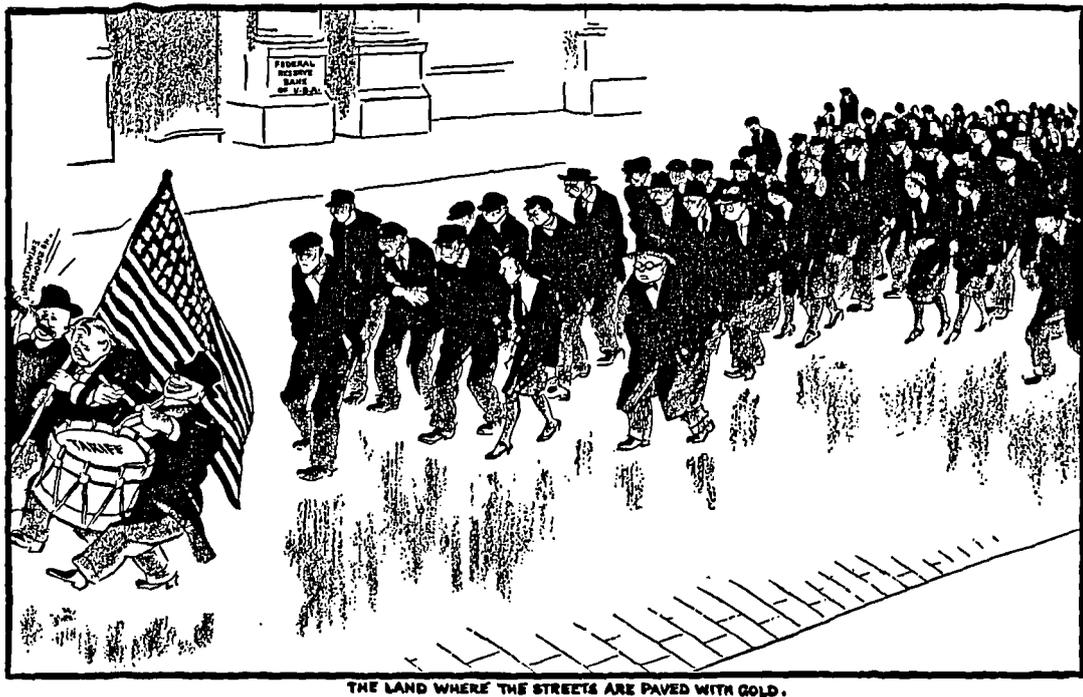


Beaverbrook allowed it to be published. However, as can be seen, the cartoon was intentionally given less significance by reducing it to half its normal size, and making the readers doubly aware that this was Low's view on Europe, and not the paper's, by putting in the heading 'Low on European Depression'.

<sup>22</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

Another instance when the editor contacted Beaverbrook over a cartoon that clashed with the policy of the newspaper was regarding 'THE LAND WHERE THE STREETS ARE PAVED WITH GOLD':

'I send you Low's cartoon for tomorrow (Saturday). The cartoon seems to cut across our policy in two ways. First, it is anti-tariff, and, secondly, anti-American. It would, of course, be possible to obliterate the word "tariff" from the drum, but in that event the cartoon will still be a gibe against American poverty. I know you think Low should be given a fairly free hand, but I do not think this cartoon would do us any good.'<sup>23</sup>



THE LAND WHERE THE STREETS ARE PAVED WITH GOLD.

The cartoon was published unaltered. Gilliat, according to then Editor of the *Daily Express*, Arthur Christiansen, was a man who interfered as little as possible in the work of journalists, and he refers to the fact that Beaverbrook thought Low should have a 'fairly free hand'. Is not 'fairly free' somewhat different to being 'completely free' as set down in Low's contract? It denotes a degree of interference, especially at the hands of a proprietor who, as has been seen, was deeply involved with the content of his papers. C.M. Vines<sup>24</sup> once overheard Beaverbrook stating the rights of cartoonists employed by his newspapers:

'Our principle is that our cartoonists should have freedom. But that freedom can be tempered with **kind advice** on occasion!'<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Beaverbrook's last personal secretary.

<sup>25</sup> C.M. Vines, *A Little Nut-Brown Man*, Leslie Frewin, 1968, Page 160.

'Kind advice', coming from Beaverbrook, was plainly a euphemism for being told what to do. Beaverbrook expected his staff to act upon his advice, those that ignored it did so at their peril. Michael Foot, writing in *Tribune* in 1946, implied that Low was 'suppressed when he's really awkward'.<sup>26</sup> Here, then, are three separate incidents which in themselves cast doubt on Low's complete independence at the *Evening Standard*.

If Low did have complete freedom, one would have expected all his cartoons to have been published without any need for consultation with the proprietor, except that is for libel or in cases of extreme bad taste, which the editor, under normal circumstances, would have dealt with on his own. It is therefore quite surprising how many times Beaverbrook was consulted by the editor over Low's cartoons.

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Foot, *Tribune*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1946.

## **Chapter Five: The Autonomy of a Cartoonist:**

### **Four Case Studies**

As has been seen in the last chapter, Low's position as an independent operator at the *Evening Standard*, free from editorial control, was challenged if not compromised by Beaverbrook, as cartoons on occasions were either altered or refused publication. As a consequence, Low found that his treatment and selection of certain subjects had to be dealt with differently to the way he possibly may have wanted. This chapter specifically examines the main events and most controversial circumstances of Low's time at the *Evening Standard* in order to gauge to what extent he was compelled into either fighting for his right of free expression or submitting himself to self-censorship. In order to assess to what degree and in what fashion this went on, this chapter has been broken thematically into four case studies under the following topic headings:

#### **I. Low's Portrayal of the Monarchy**

#### **II. Low's Coverage of British General Elections from 1922 to 1959**

#### **III. Low's Portrayal of Lord Beaverbrook's Friends and Political Acquaintances**

#### **IV. Low, Appeasement and the Second World War**

## I. Low's Portrayal of the Monarchy

### Was the British Monarchy off-limits to Low as a subject for his cartoons at the *Evening Standard*?

'There were many subjects upon which the touch of the cartoonist was pronounced deplorable. Royalty or the institution of Monarchy, for example.'<sup>1</sup>  
(Low)

'...in England there has been a gentlemen's agreement – no law – that the Royal Family cannot be caricatured except with the greatest dignity. "We may cartoon them in the Dominions, but no one has done so in England since the beginning of Victoria's reign".'<sup>2</sup> (Low)

Before David Low left Australia to come to England in 1919, he had never felt any qualms about including, as well as ridiculing, the British Monarch in his cartoons. His first full-time job as a political cartoonist was with the *Christchurch Spectator* in New Zealand where he openly chided King Edward VII when, in his own words, 'he seemed to need it'.<sup>3</sup> Years later, Low made reference to this in an interview with Hannen Swaffer:



Above. Two Low cartoons from the *Christchurch Spectator* featuring Edward VII.



Unusually Cordial Relations.

<sup>1</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 193.

<sup>2</sup> *The Nation*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

'I used to have a bit of fun with Edward VII in the New Zealand papers.'<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen, Low continued to make fun of the reigning British Monarch even after he had joined the *Canterbury Times*, and then again three years later at the *Sydney Bulletin* in Australia. The Monarchy was considered by Low to be a worthy subject for ridicule.<sup>5</sup> Even during the First World War, Low, due to his antipodean sense of irreverence towards



A selection of Low's cartoons which featured George V while he was at the *Sydney Bulletin*.



<sup>3</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 39.

<sup>4</sup> From an interview with David Low by Hannen Swaffer, *People*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1950.

<sup>5</sup> George V took a dim view of cartoonists who ridiculed both him and his family in their cartoons. In fact, during the First World War, the King actually tried to put pressure on the *Daily Herald* cartoonist, Will Dyson, in order to stop him ridiculing both the British and German monarchies. Peter Grosvenor, *'We Are Amused': The Cartoonists' View of Royalty*, Bodley Head, 1978, Page 10.

the British Monarchy, showed little patriotic fervour towards the sovereign in his cartoons:

‘At the time of the First World War I gave Kaiser Wilhelm a sound talking to. I was telling King George V how he should behave too.’<sup>6</sup>

Circumstances were bound to change for Low when he arrived at the *Star* in the autumn of 1919. For it was not the ‘done thing’ in England for a cartoonist to ridicule the Royal Family, as the *Daily Mail* cartoonist, Leslie Illingworth, noted much later still:

‘You seemed to put your top hat on when you drew Royal cartoons. I did very few of them and wished I could have avoided it... It was not like today when people can be very rude. I am an old, old man, and in those days your editor and your readers expected solemn treatment of Royalty.’<sup>7</sup>

Upon his arrival at the *Star*, Low also found that his perception of the Monarchy differed substantially from the one that he had held back in Australia. George V had witnessed, during his own time as King, the downfall of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian thrones. He was therefore determined, unlike his father and grandmother before him, that the Crown would not come into conflict with the British public by embroiling itself in party politics. By so doing, George V ‘succeeded in a time of great political turbulence in creating a sense of serene continuity’.<sup>8</sup> Low was probably not interested in treating the Monarchy in Illingworth’s ‘solemn’ manner. What he wanted was the opportunity to be controversial in his cartoons, and to flatten the egos of those in the limelight. On both counts this naturally excluded George V. Under such circumstances, Low felt that the King did not offer the opportunities he usually looked for in a subject, as he explained in his autobiography:

‘If the satirist of 1930 refrained from laying pen upon monarchical or spiritual affairs, it should not be because his touch might appear unseemly, but because these affairs did not in these times obtrude into public business.’<sup>9</sup>

The above quotation, in reference to Low personally, appears to ring true as far as his work at the *Star* is concerned. Apart from drawing a couple of cartoons featuring Edward, Prince of Wales, it is evident that he had abstained from depicting the Royal Family in his

<sup>6</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for ‘*Wisdom*’, an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Grosvenor, ‘*We Are Amused*’: *The Cartoonists’ View of Royalty*, Bodley Head, 1978, Page 11.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Baker, *An Irreverent Cartoon History of the British Monarchy*, Thames & Hudson, 1996, Page 148.

<sup>9</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 194.

cartoons.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in reference to his time at the *Evening Standard*, and the period in question (i.e. 1930), can it not be argued that the reasons given in his autobiography for not including the Monarchy in his cartoons appear to be a convenient excuse for not having been allowed to do so? There are a number of documented instances when Low found that his cartoons were refused publication because they either depicted, or alluded to, the Monarchy or were in essence anti-monarchist. The first of these instances is explained by Low in his autobiography, and from a chronological standpoint, appears in the book just after the cartoonist had joined the *Evening Standard*:

‘I did their Majesties the justice of drawing them, with diplomatic restraint, as real people not waxworks. My nervous editor feared for his head and when I wasn’t looking sent his most diplomatic lieutenant with the drawing along to Buckingham Palace for approval before printing it. I knew nothing of what was going on until it was relayed to me through a network of smooth voices that Queen Mary was greatly diverted by Mr Low’s extremely amusing drawings, loved my dog, but asked me to consider that in Britain we did not put the monarchy into cartoons. There was room on that point for argument, but I was already disarmed and pink with compliments.’<sup>11</sup>

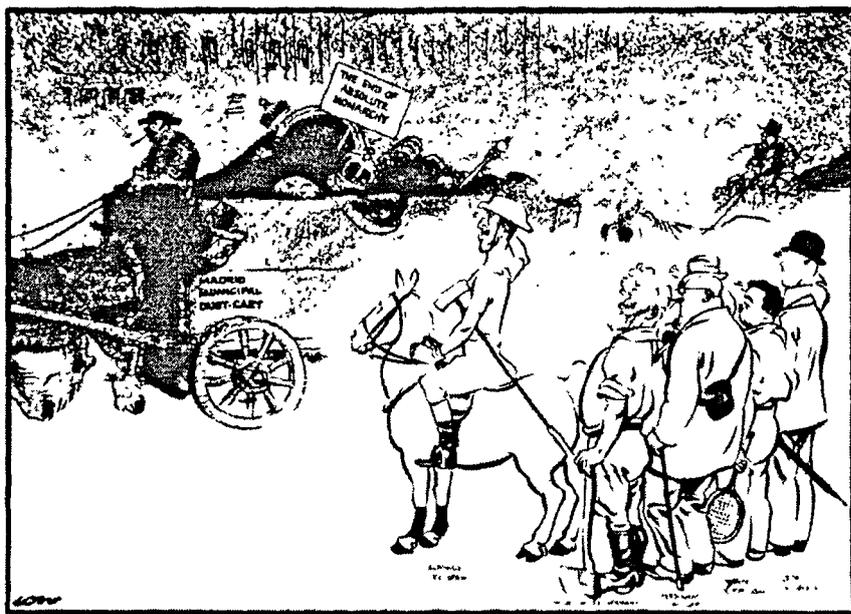
It sounds improbable that an editor of the *Evening Standard* would have got in personal touch with the Queen or even her secretary or member of staff, just to see if a cartoon of her was acceptable for publication in that evening’s paper. What would have been the ‘network of smooth voices’ that told Low the cartoon was unacceptable? If the editor had sent the cartoon to the Queen without Low’s consent, it would presumably have been the editor who would have informed him of its unacceptability. The cartoon in question has surprisingly not survived or been published. How could a radical and controversial cartoonist such as Low, who later reportedly fought off attempts by the Third Reich to censor him, be stopped in his tracks by some third-hand flattering remark which Queen Mary may or may not have said? Does not the whole story sound rather far-fetched? Once again it appears that Low has created a poetic ruse to deflect from the real truth, which probably was that this specific cartoon, as well as other cartoons featuring or alluding to the Royal Family, were refused publication because they were unacceptable to Beaverbrook.

The next three examples offer irrefutable evidence that cartoons by Low which did not even mention the Monarchy directly but only alluded to it, were in each case refused

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, one has to take into account that there is no documentary evidence to the contrary, as no *Star* archive and none of the original Low cartoons from that newspaper have survived.

publication. In a letter to Beaverbrook in 1931, the *Evening Standard's* Editor, George Gilliat, explained why he had left out 'THE LAST SALUTE' - featuring King Alfonso XIII



of Spain - out of that day's newspaper.<sup>12</sup> In the cartoon a horse-backed Alfonso, and Europe's other deposed Monarchs are all seen saluting the last vestiges of absolute monarchy. Gilliat, having not cared for an earlier Low cartoon of Alfonso, which had the

previous day produced 'shoals of letters from readers objecting on the ground of taste', decided to leave 'THE LAST SALUTE' out of the *Evening Standard* primarily because he thought it was anti-monarchist:

'I held out today's cartoon because I thought that it was republican in tendency and that depicting Alfonso merely as a polo-player would cause another outbreak of criticism. I do not think I shall give this cartoon tomorrow unless you favour it.'<sup>13</sup>

Such a cartoon was obviously 'not favoured' by Beaverbrook as it was never published. The next example, 'THE FAVOURITES IN GOOD FORM AT ASCOT', was refused publication because it was perceived by Gilliat as an attempt to make fun of the Royal Family. In another letter to Beaverbrook, Gilliat wrote:

'I did not use the Low cartoon today, because I felt that it attacked the question of privilege at Ascot in the wrong way, amounting to a gibe at the Royal Family. Low while accepting my decision said "in a very friendly way"<sup>14</sup> that he would like you to see the cartoon. I said, of course, that I did not in the least object to this course.'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 198.

<sup>12</sup> King Alfonso III had just abdicated from the Spanish throne.

<sup>13</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>14</sup> It appears that this was hand-written by Gilliat after the letter had been typed.

<sup>15</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.



‘When the Labour Party comes to power we must act rapidly and it will be necessary to deal with the House of Lords and the influence of the City of London. There is no doubt that we shall have to overcome opposition from Buckingham Palace...’<sup>16</sup>

The phrase about Buckingham Palace led to an outcry from politicians on both sides of the House of Commons, as well as from the national press.<sup>17</sup> Cripps tried to back down. When he was pressed by journalists to explain what he had meant, he was reported to have said in his defence:

‘I most certainly was not referring to the Crown. The term “Buckingham Palace” is a well known expression used to describe Court circles and officials and other people who surround the King at Buckingham Palace.’<sup>18</sup>

This explanation did not appear to help Cripps as far as the *Evening Standard* was concerned. It was certainly vociferous in its criticism of his comments; its editorial referring to Cripps as a: ‘Middle Temple Trotsky’ whilst implying that he was a political opportunist:

‘He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword. He who makes his way by violent language must perish at last of excess of it. Sir Stafford’s latest venture, his attempt to call in question the impartiality of the Crown, has been for him, the least fortunate... For in what way could Court officials hamper a Government save by persuading the King to abandon his constitutional impartiality?’<sup>19</sup>

Though Low was lauded so often for contradicting the editorial stance of the *Evening Standard* with his cartoons, there is some doubt as to whether this was permitted when the subject for discussion was the Monarchy. ‘**DOUBLEGUARD AT THE PALACE**’ appears to be in support of Cripps, whilst mocking royal advisors within the gates of Buckingham Palace.

Unlike Low, other cartoonists seemed to have had few problems with their editors or proprietors when it came to drawing, or alluding to, the reigning monarch in their cartoons. For example, in Strube’s *Daily Express* cartoon, ‘“CONGRATULATIONS, SIR!”’,<sup>20</sup> or in

<sup>16</sup> As reported in the *Morning Post*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Cripps’s speech did not go down well with the official Labour Party either, who felt he had gone against the party’s rejection of republicanism which it had accepted at the Party Conference in 1923.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1934.

<sup>19</sup> *Evening Standard*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1934. Beaverbrook personally disliked Cripps, and often referred to him as a ‘hypocritical strait-laced, teetotal, vegetarian’.

<sup>20</sup> Published in the *Daily Express* on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1935.



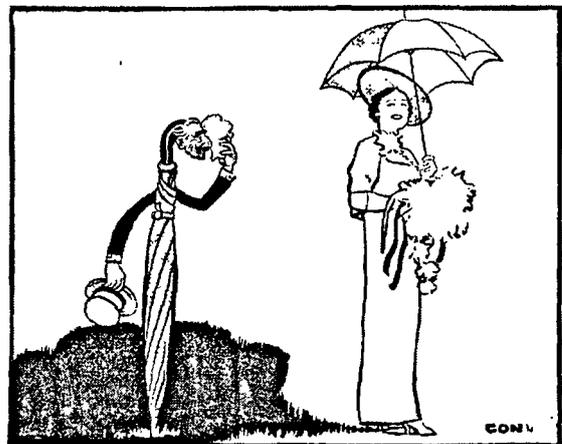
"CONGRATULATIONS, SIR!"

Con's *Daily Sketch's* cartoons 'FAMILY REUNION' and 'I AM THROWN IN THE SHADE BY YOUR MAJESTY', editors appeared happy to publish cartoons on the Monarchy. However, perhaps this had much to do with the benign and deferential manner in which these cartoonists

treated their subject matter, which often reached, as can be seen, the point of sycophancy.



FAMILY REUNION



I am thrown in the shade by your Majesty

After the abdication of Edward VIII, Low seems to have realised that, as far as the Monarchy was concerned, he could now only make the most oblique of references to it if he was going to get his cartoon past his editor. Look at 'ANOTHER CORONATION DAY',



ANOTHER CORONATION DAY.

(Copyright in All Countries)

which appeared on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1937, three weeks before the actual coronation of George VI. Low uses the occasion, not as an opportunity to make a comment on the Monarchy, but in order to ridicule Neville Chamberlain's Budget. The next cartoon to make any

sort of reference to the Monarchy was more than ten years later with the wedding of

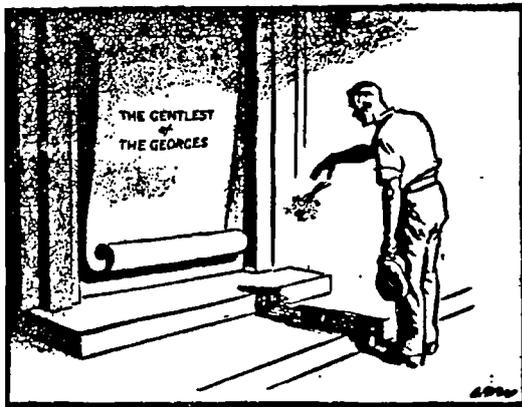


was drawn before Low left the *Evening Standard* in 1950. However, he still maintained, even up to his last year at the *Evening Standard* that he was free to include any subject he liked in his cartoons:

'Someone has said solemnly, "A joke ceases to be a joke when it touches the holiest matters of the national life"... I do not agree. I do not believe that any matters of our daily life should be shielded from humorous, witty or satirical comment. I am a political caricaturist. I am *all* direction; controversy, argument, faction, prejudice, bigotry, hate, passion - these we are told are the attributes of politics and, as a political caricaturist, I must of necessity partake of them, I suppose.'<sup>22</sup>

When Low left for the *Daily Herald* and then, in 1952, the *Manchester Guardian*, he alluded to the Monarchy in a way he had never been allowed to at the *Evening Standard*,

WORLD'S PRESS NEWS, February 13, 1952



This moving cartoon by Low appeared in the "Daily Herald" on Thursday morning of last week.

even though he never actually drew the reigning monarch. When George VI died on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1952, he drew a compassionate cartoon entitled 'FROM ONE MAN TO ANOTHER' as a tribute to the late King. When the previous King, George V, had died on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1936, Low appears not to have been given the opportunity, at the *Evening Standard*, to pay a similar tribute.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, no Low cartoon appeared at all in the

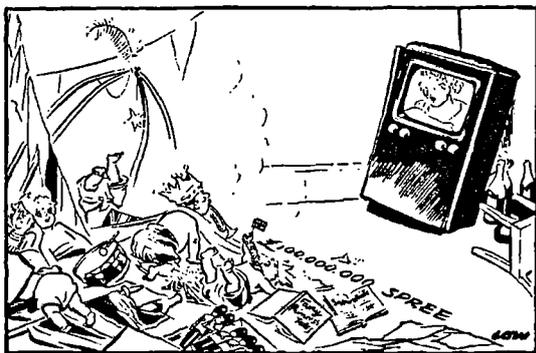
<sup>21</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1947.

<sup>22</sup> 'David Low Discusses How The Political Caricaturist Can Be Misunderstood', *Newspaper World*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>23</sup> Although this was sixteen years after the last King had died, the Monarchy was still being treated with similar deference by the press.

week that George V died, probably because cartoons were, at the time, deemed critical entities and thus inappropriate in a newspaper at a time of national mourning.

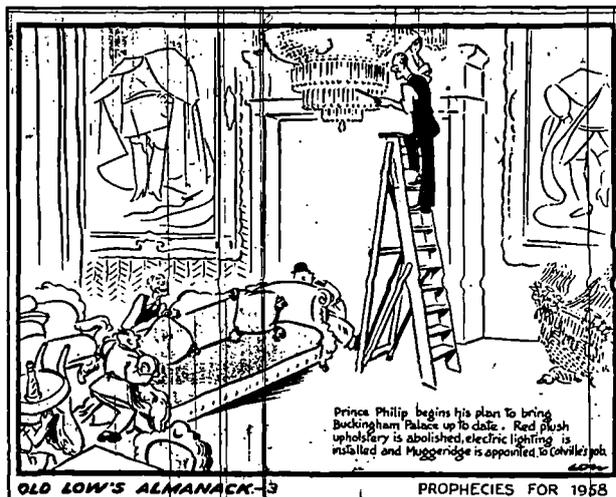
At the Coronation of Princess Elizabeth, Low's apparent frustrations at having been unable to comment freely on the Monarchy while at the *Evening Standard* were fully



'Morning After'

unleashed. In a somewhat negative response to the gaiety and extravagance with which Britain celebrated the Coronation after the long post-war years of austerity, Low's cartoon 'MORNING AFTER'<sup>24</sup> was designed 'to bring the sublime down to earth with a bump'.<sup>25</sup> Even in the liberal-minded *Manchester Guardian* the

cartoon aroused controversy. The paper's reaction was, rather oddly, to feel the need to justify itself, while 'apologising for having told the truth too soon, before the public was ready to listen'.<sup>26</sup>

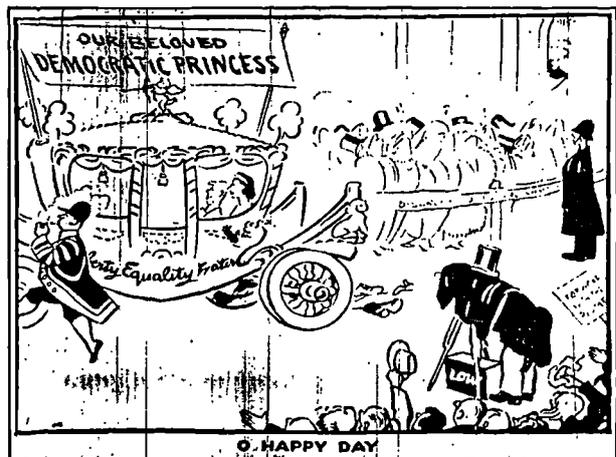


Prince Philip begins his plan to bring Buckingham Palace up to date. Red plush upholstery is abolished, electric lighting is installed and Muggenidge is appointed to Colville's job.

OLD LOW'S ALMANACK-3

PROPHECIES FOR 1958

After the Coronation, as at his time at the *Star*, Low found that Queen Elizabeth II conducted herself in a similar manner to George V, and thus offered little scope for caricature. This did not stop him from drawing other members of the Royal Family in his cartoons, something he had not done at the *Evening Standard*. Maybe by the late 1950s, he had become to think that times had changed so as to make this acceptable. As can be seen in 'OLD LOW'S ALMANACK' and 'HAPPY DAY', he not only alluded to the Royal Family, but also included members of them in the cartoons, those in question being Prince Philip and Princess Margaret respectively.<sup>27</sup>



O. HAPPY DAY

<sup>24</sup> Published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1953.

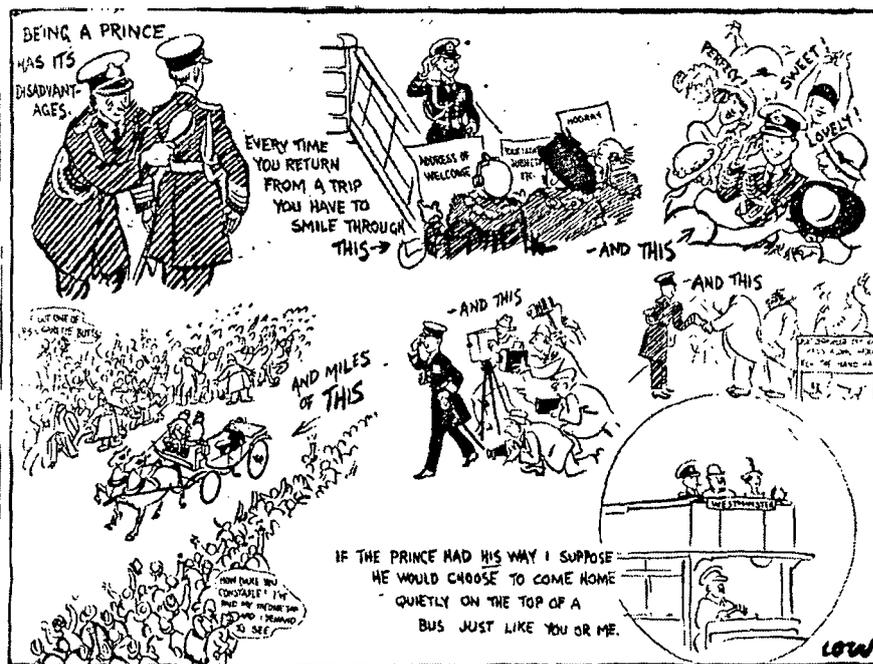
<sup>25</sup> Kingsley Martin, *The Crown and the Establishment*, Hutchinson, 1962, Page 118.

<sup>26</sup> Kingsley Martin, *The Crown and the Establishment*, Hutchinson, 1962, Page 118.

<sup>27</sup> 'HAPPY DAY' is in relation to the wedding of Princess Margaret and Anthony Snowden, while 'OLD LOW'S ALMANACK' refers to criticism of the Royal Family by Malcolm Muggenidge, who in 1957 had stated that the Monarchy had become 'a sort of substitute religion' and 'a focus for sycophancy.' Michael Wynn Jones, *A Cartoon History of the Monarchy*, Macmillan, 1978, Page 164. Prince Philip was also caricatured by Low for *Picture Post* in 1953.

## Low's frustrations over his fascination with Edward, Prince of Wales, as a subject for caricature.

The way Prince Edward conducted himself in public was in marked contrast to his father, George V. Edward behaved in a manner deemed unsuitable by traditionalists, but his playboy image and his willingness to say what he felt on social issues made him, by all accounts, a popular figure with the general public.<sup>28</sup> Low also appears to have been enamoured by Edward's wish to generally ignore royal protocol. In June 1922, he depicted the Prince in a cartoon called 'THE PRINCE COMES HOME' after enormous attention had



The Prince Comes Home.

been focused on his arrival at Southampton from a Royal Tour abroad. This cartoon, which appeared in the *Star*, was the first that Low had drawn of a member of the Royal Family since his arrival in Britain. He was captivated by the potential the Prince,

unlike George V, offered as a subject for caricature. In 1925, whilst on holiday in France, Low spotted the Prince playing golf. It gave him an idea for a project featuring the Prince as the major character:

'In the Spring of 1925 I had spent a family holiday at Biarritz. The Prince of Wales was there, a beautiful piece of character in his golf-suit, getting persistently in my line of vision, set up invitingly as a model for me. Why not use him as a peg upon which to hang a pageant of London life at the time, in all its variety, with all its personalities and characters? I planned it there and then, walking under the trees. But it was not until 1933 that I got to work on a series of twelve colour plates.'<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Possibly comparable with the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

<sup>29</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 289.

Although Low had planned to produce twelve colour drawings, he first of all, included the Prince in his first series of caricatures for the *New Statesmen*, no doubt using the sketches he had drawn in Biarritz. The caricature, as can be seen, is an extremely favourable one. It is not the sort of royal caricature one would expect from one of today's cartoonists. Compare Low's Prince Edward to say Gerald Scarfe's or Steve Bell's exaggerated and grotesque caricatures of Prince Charles in recent years. Even so, by 1926 standards, Low came under some criticism for his efforts, as he explained in 1935:

'When a few years ago I published a faithful caricature of the Prince of Wales there were the usual squeaks of "Bolshevik"...'<sup>30</sup>



Low must have felt that such criticism was vastly unfair as he had drawn the caricature with the very best of intentions:

'There are many loyal British subjects who pronounce the touch of the caricaturist bad-taste upon the persons of royalty, for example. If caricature were essentially a destructive art their views would be justified.'<sup>31</sup>

Low was bemused and certainly irritated by those who felt that his style of caricaturing the Royal Family was disrespectful. Although he was criticised in some quarters for having drawn Prince Edward, Low discovered that when he did another royal caricature, this time of the King himself, George V, it was impossible to find a publisher for it. Such a rebuttal seemed to increase Low's antipathy towards the British Press because of the way it adulated the Monarchy:

'I cannot regard it as a triumph of loyalty, but only of sycophancy, that no periodical in England will publish my caricature of the reigning monarch... No close season for kings, commissars, or dukes, please.'<sup>32</sup>

He was even more mystified why other cartoonists in the past had also been unable to get their caricatures of the Royal Family published as, for example, the efforts of Max Beerbohm:

<sup>30</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Pages 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Page 32.

‘It is no matter for national congratulation that a collection of royal caricatures by one of our greatest masters rests upon the walls of a private house, to be appreciated by a privileged few instead of by the world at large.’<sup>33</sup>

Low believed that the British Press were, and had been in the past, ‘faint-hearted’ for not publishing what the best cartoonists of their day had to offer when it came to caricaturing the Royal Family. Here we see something of a contradiction in the way that Low, on the one hand, felt that the Monarchy no longer offered a subject for his cartoons, while criticising the press for not publishing his work in their newspapers and magazines.

It was, according to Low, not until 1933 that he began the project he had conceived years earlier in Biarritz. He had decided to base his drawings of the Prince on Hogarth’s *Rake’s Progress*, getting Rebecca West to write a witty text to go along with the drawings. Having worked at the *Evening Standard* for going on seven years, he had now been made aware that including or even alluding to any member of the Royal Family in his cartoons was not acceptable. He seems to have also found, which caused him further angst, that caricaturing the heir to the throne for a book was also deemed inappropriate:

‘Unfortunately, when it came to the point, inspiration would have been cramped and publication impossible had the figures, especially the central figure, been too readily identifiable; so I had to tone down the likeness and scramble the situation.’<sup>34</sup>

Despite Low’s protestations, apart from the Prince the other characters certainly are easily recognisable. It is true that the Rake is not a totally accurate representation of the Prince, but as Colin Seymour-Ure has suggested, ‘a touch of the prince’ in the Rake has certainly remained throughout the series of drawings. Low cheekily wrote in the introduction to *The Modern Rake’s Progress* that the characters were all purely imaginary, whilst implying at the same time that the ‘Rake and his friends’ were indeed who you thought they were:

‘But the principal actor and all those involved discredibly in his Progress are purely imaginary. No, ladies. The Rake and his friends are most emphatically NOT intended to be the persons you think they are.’<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Page 32.

<sup>33</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Page 32.

<sup>34</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 289.

<sup>35</sup> David Low in his introduction to *The Modern Rake’s Progress*, Hutchinson, 1934.

It is interesting to note that Beaverbrook wrote to Low stating that he was glad that the Rake did not look like anyone he knew.<sup>36</sup> Beaverbrook no doubt enjoyed Low's little ruse, but why was the former relieved that the Rake did not look like the Prince of Wales, especially as the drawings did not appear in the *Evening Standard*? It was probably a jest on Beaverbrook's part, carrying on Low's own pretence, that he said the character had no counterpart in reality, whilst at the same time it probably confirmed Beaverbrook's dislike of the Monarchy being portrayed in caricature.

### **Low's handling of the 1936 Abdication Crisis.**

'Primed with instructions from Russia – to get rid of the King – Mr Baldwin has had a busy week – backwards and forwards - backwards and forwards – several times a day to hold a pistol to the head of the King, crying, “Do my will – or – abdicate”.' (Lucy Houston in *Saturday Review*)<sup>37</sup>

In the autumn of 1936 there were increasing rumours within the Establishment over Edward VIII's romance with the twice-married American divorcee Wallis Simpson. The British public knew nothing of the relationship. Beaverbrook, along with other newspaper proprietors, had agreed, in what became a conspiracy of silence, to play down the affair and not to publish anything that would alert the public to the royal romance. Subsequently, the staff at Express Newspapers, were probably told by their respective editors not to mention or imply anything in their articles, or in Low's case cartoons, in relation to the affair. For example, the *Daily Express* went so far as to remove Mrs Simpson from a photograph showing her standing alongside Edward VIII on board the Royal Yacht. Even readers of American newspapers and magazines, who bought them at local bookstalls, and not directly by mail from America, were surprised to find passages relating to the romance cut out of some issues with scissors.<sup>38</sup> There was, therefore, absolutely no likelihood, even with the 'complete freedom' clause in his contract, that Low would have been allowed to depict the King and Mrs Simpson as a subject for his cartoons during this period.

It was correctly assumed in America, where the general public were fully informed about the romance, that the British Press, unlike that of their own, had been subjected to a highly competent form of self-censorship. Beaverbrook blatantly admitted to having

<sup>36</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1934, Low Papers, British Library.

<sup>37</sup> Kingsley Martin, *The Crown and the Establishment*, Hutchinson, 1962, Page 102.

<sup>38</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 229.

played a primary role in persuading Fleet Street to keep silent.<sup>39</sup> When questioned on his role in suppressing the news, Beaverbrook, who at the time of the crisis was in direct contact with the King, said in a similar vein to his response to Churchill about not interfering with Low in 1940:

‘I know nothing about any censorship. I know nothing about Mrs Simpson.’<sup>40</sup>

On 13<sup>th</sup> October the King himself got in touch with Beaverbrook, through Wardell, who was a personal friend. He asked Beaverbrook if he would help suppress the news that Mrs Simpson’s divorce hearing had been fixed for 27<sup>th</sup> October at the Ipswich assizes. Beaverbrook immediately got in contact with other newspaper proprietors such as Lord Rothermere and Sir Walter Layton who all acquiesced to the King’s wishes.<sup>41</sup> Thus, following the King’s intervention, ‘Mrs Simpson’s divorce received only brief formal reports’ in the *Evening Standard* and ‘went through unnoticed by the public’.<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, there were no cartoons from Low as the romance reached its crisis point, as he had gone on a trip to both North and South America and was away from the *Evening Standard* from 5<sup>th</sup> September till 12<sup>th</sup> November 1936. However, in his autobiography, written twenty years later, he gave the misleading impression that he had ignored the crisis, and had instead concentrated on events taking place abroad:

‘...I ought to have been stimulated when there arose in 1936 the domestic crisis which culminated in the abdication of King Edward the Eighth. But in the intervening few years I had become too deeply interested in the development of affairs abroad to find this crisis inspiring.’<sup>43</sup>

Allowing for the possibility of hindsight or forgetfulness on Low’s part writing about the event twenty years later, such a quotation could be conceived as an attempt to save face over his lack of independence during the abdication crisis. For Low was reported to have actually said during the trip that he ‘deplored the fact that he cannot thrust his rapier-like pen into some cartoons on the subject’, even though we know he later said he had no interest in the subject.<sup>44</sup> If Low was uninterested in the crisis, why was he later to draw, in the week the abdication took place, a cartoon which depicted him locked in a steam-room

<sup>39</sup> After the romance became public, the *Daily Express* did confess that it ‘had been mistaken in so long suppressing the news of former King Edward’s friendship for Mrs Wallis Simpson’. Unidentifiable newspaper article, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>40</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Pages 230-31.

<sup>41</sup> Esmond Harmsworth was the son of the 1st Lord Rothermere and, at the time, in charge of the *Daily Mail*. Sir Walter Layton was a director of the *News Chronicle* and in a similar position to Harmsworth.

<sup>42</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 369.

<sup>43</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 289.

<sup>44</sup> Low in the *Nation*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

being told that he would not be let out until he promised not 'to do any cartoon about the crisis'?<sup>45</sup> The contradictory nature of what Low said at the time and what he wrote later in his autobiography possibly explains why he tried to cover up in his autobiography the lack of complete independence which he always insisted he had had.

Low was probably in the know about the romance well before he left for America, and of course when he arrived there, especially in New York, it was the subject on everyone's lips. Consequently, at nearly every interview he was asked his opinion on the romance. Even though Low later said in his autobiography that he had been uninterested in the whole affair, he seemed very keen to talk about it. According to the *Nation*, Low 'delighted his American interviewers by plunging of his own accord into the Simpson affair'.<sup>46</sup> Low's prediction, which proved to be wholly wrong, was that the King would get away with marrying Mrs Simpson without having to give up his throne.<sup>47</sup> He also, astonishingly, predicted that the marriage would be politically acceptable to the British Government! According to the *New York Herald-Tribune*:

'...Low said that King Edward had always been a "fairy tale character" and "any kind of romance will be popular." There is, he said, "a section of the aristocracy which has always regarded the King as its own property, and will object to the marriage, but I think when the King does decide to marry Mrs Simpson it will be popularly approved, not only romantically but politically. The *fait accompli* is everything, and England wants a Queen".'<sup>48</sup>

As Low returned from the United States, Beaverbrook left for New York on 14<sup>th</sup> November, hoping to go from there to Arizona so as to find relief from his asthma. Two days later, the King went to see Baldwin, and brought the crisis to a head by telling the latter that he intended to marry Mrs Simpson. Baldwin was firm in his conviction that if the King did so he must abdicate. According to Beaverbrook, the King had intended to 'barter the threat of abdication against government acknowledgement of the morganatic marriage'.<sup>49</sup> After his abdication, the King was heard to say to a personal friend: 'I always thought I could get away with a morganatic marriage'.<sup>50</sup>

By forcing the issue, and making Baldwin contact the Dominion Governments for their opinion on a morganatic marriage, the King literally sealed his own fate by putting

<sup>45</sup> From the caption in the cartoon 'DIFFICULT DAYS FOR LOW', published in the *Evening Standard* on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1936.

<sup>46</sup> Low in the *Nation*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>47</sup> Low's daughter, Rachael Whear, believes that 'he would have considered a morganitic marriage a sensible and humane solution'. Rachael Whear to Timothy S. Benson, August 1998.

<sup>48</sup> The *New York Herald-Tribune*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>49</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 225.

<sup>50</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 225.

himself in a corner. When the answer came back unanimously that this would be unacceptable, Edward's bluff had been called. The only options open to him now were either to abdicate or abandon his plans to marry Mrs Simpson. Beaverbrook left for England on 20<sup>th</sup> November at the King's request, having just arrived in New York. By the time he arrived back in Southampton on 26<sup>th</sup> November, the King had already made up his mind to abdicate. Beaverbrook pleaded with the King to delay his decision; saying that the situation could yet still be saved. When the story finally broke, Express Newspapers were to remain stubbornly optimistic right up to the time the abdication actually took place. The King, much to Beaverbrook's continued astonishment, had no wish to either delay or create a constitutional crisis as his heart was firmly set on marrying Mrs Simpson. As Beaverbrook said to Churchill: 'Our cock won't fight.'<sup>51</sup>

The mounting crisis was brought out into the open when on 1<sup>st</sup> December the Bishop of Bradford openly criticised the King over 'his need of Divine grace'. The following day 'the flood of publicity broke in London' and the crisis became public news.<sup>52</sup> Beaverbrook, forever the opportunist, felt that Baldwin and his Government could still be embarrassed and possibly politically damaged if it could be shown that the Prime Minister was forcing the King off the throne. He thus threw the weight of his newspapers, together with that of Rothermere's, behind the King. It would be to no avail as Baldwin had the full support of the Cabinet, as well as the majority of the Commons, the Dominions, *The Times* and the *Telegraph* and the majority of the other national and provincial newspapers. Public opinion, which initially showed sympathy for the King, quickly came to see the Beaverbrook campaign on Edward's behalf as 'mischievous and irresponsible anti-Baldwinism'.<sup>53</sup>

The Rothermere and Beaverbrook papers took every opportunity to suggest that the Prime Minister was using rash coercive tactics to get Edward off the throne. On 4<sup>th</sup> December, Bruce Lockhart thought that Beaverbrook had finally seen his chance 'of using the King issue to beat Baldwin with. We are becoming more Royal than the Royalists'.<sup>54</sup> Beaverbrook's attacks on Baldwin were seen by other newspapers as grossly offensive: The *Daily Telegraph* in its leader on 12<sup>th</sup> December wrote:

'Unhappily these days saw a recrudescence in the organs controlled by Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook of that personal propaganda against the Prime Minister which has failed in the past on political issues and was revived in the infinitely delicate matter of the Throne. Charges of "indecent haste", of rushing

<sup>51</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 341.

<sup>52</sup> John E. Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times*, Hutchinson, 1955, Page 348.

<sup>53</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 342.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1939-1945*, Macmillan, 1980, Page 359.

the King into a decision, of pressing him to abdicate, and of “coercive propaganda” to that end were recklessly made.’<sup>55</sup>

Under such circumstances, could Low really have been expected to follow an independent line, even if he had wished to? In fact, at the first opportunity to draw a cartoon following the disclosures in the press, Low may have produced ‘THE WALLACE COLLECTION’. This cartoon, apart from appearing to be in bad taste according to the traditions of the time, made fun of both the King and Mrs Simpson, thus going totally against the Beaverbrook line. Low’s daughter, Dr Rachael Whear, felt that such a cartoon ‘would have been considered extremely bad taste at the time, much more shocking than it would be now’.<sup>56</sup> Blanche Dugdale, the niece of Arthur Balfour, was informed of the cartoon by her brother, Lt. Col. Oswald Balfour. She wrote in her diary on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1936:

‘Oswald told me Low had done a cartoon which was thought a bit too much, so it never appeared. Three portraits of men, hanging on a wall – Mr Spencer, Mr Simpson and HM Edward VIII. Labelled “The Wallace Collection”!!’<sup>57</sup>

The cartoon was not published. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of the actual artwork. Consequently, there are those who feel that the cartoon was never in fact drawn. Rachael Whear, after reading the above extract from Dugdale’s diaries, felt that her father did not do ‘gag cartoons’ such as this would have been. She also felt that her father would have ‘considered it especially vulgar to portray a woman in this way’.<sup>58</sup> Michael Brander, an historian who knew both Oswald and Blanche Dugdale and their relationship to each other, believes that Oswald most likely ‘invented the entire story and took great pleasure in pulling Baffy’s leg on the subject. He would also have much enjoyed the fact that she had included it in her ‘Diaries’.’<sup>59</sup> Brander therefore puts the origins of the cartoon down to ‘Oswald’s somewhat mischievous imagination.’<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, there appears to be sufficient circumstantial evidence to make one believe that the cartoon did actually exist. Firstly, Oswald Balfour, according to his sister’s diaries, appears to have had close contact with Beaverbrook and the *Evening Standard* hierarchy. According to Brander, Oswald frequented the same gentlemen’s clubs as

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1936.

<sup>56</sup> Rachael Whear to Timothy S. Benson, August 1998.

<sup>57</sup> Nick Rose, *Baffy The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale 1936 -1947*, Valentine Mitchell, 1973, Page 35.

<sup>58</sup> Rachael Whear to Timothy S. Benson, August 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Brander to Timothy S. Benson, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1997. Brander is the brother-in-law of the present Lord Balfour.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Brander to Timothy S. Benson, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1997.

Michael Wardell, the *Evening Standard's* Manager, and therefore possibly got the story off him. Secondly, it was reported in a magazine, five months later, that a Low cartoon on the abdication had been refused publication. This surely must refer to the cartoon in question. According to *Cavalcade*, in which the comment appeared:

'Low is allowed to take his own line in politics, often goes against the *Standard's* Conservative policy, but there are limits and some of his cartoons - one of them on the abdication - were killed.'<sup>61</sup>

Finally, if one studies the *Evening Standard* during the week the abdication story broke, one notices that only three Low cartoons appear, instead of the customary four. In fact, prior to that, the last time that only three cartoons appeared was two weeks earlier, when on 24<sup>th</sup> November the cartoon 'THE JAW IS THE JAW OF MUSSO. BUT-' was refused publication. A Low cartoon on foreign affairs appears on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, the day the relationship was first reported in the newspapers. 'THE WALLACE COLLECTION' would therefore have most likely been drawn for Friday 4<sup>th</sup> December, as Low's cartoons at that time ran Monday Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and no cartoon appeared either on the Thursday or Friday of that week.

With the *Evening Standard* editorial stating firmly on 4<sup>th</sup> December that 'the country unitedly deplores abdication as a solution' Low was not allowed to contradict the line the paper followed.<sup>62</sup> Knowing that he had to tow the line or face the embarrassment of further cartoons being refused publication, he seems to have accepted Beaverbrook's theories on Baldwin with two damning cartoons. However, according to Low's autobiography:

'My contribution to the matter was only three or four cartoons about Baldwin's rebuff to cupid, a midnight scene of mysterious figures getting away with the throne, crown and sceptre, and a romantic piece celebrating a new addition to the world's great love stories.'<sup>63</sup>

No mention of 'THE WALLACE COLLECTION' is made, although he does refer to doing three or four cartoons on the crisis. We can account for only three. Neither of Low's 'Topical Budgets' on 5<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> December made any reference whatsoever to the royal romance or the abdication, which probably in itself shows a high degree of self-censorship, or alternatively, self restraint on Low's part. If he includes 'THE WALLACE COLLECTION' in his list of cartoons on the abdication, then it must be the fourth one. He also, in error, makes references to two cartoons which were one and the same. Thus 'Baldwin's rebuff to

<sup>61</sup> *Cavalcade*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>62</sup> *Evening Standard*, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1936.

cupid' and 'the world's great love stories' both refer to 'ROMANCE COMES TO DOWNING STREET' which was published on 8<sup>th</sup> December. This cartoon which most probably follows



directly on from the one refused publication is certainly anti-Baldwin. The Prime Minister appears as a Victorian, no doubt emphasising Victorian values and a prudish and hence reactionary attitude towards the royal romance. As can be seen,

he is unable to understand the romantic nature of the moment. Even Cupid fails to fan a little bit of passion into him.

The other anti-Baldwin cartoon appeared on 11<sup>th</sup> December, the day after the abdication. Entitled 'SECRETLY, IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT' Low intended to show how the King had been railroaded off the throne by Baldwin, who pictured here with faceless members of the Establishment, secretly carries away the King's throne and crown, while public opinion is not allowed to voice its opinion on the matter. The cartoon is pure propaganda. Low knew perfectly well that it was the press barons and not Baldwin who had for so long kept the public ignorant of the developing crisis until it was too late to have done anything about it. Kenneth Baker, in his book of cartoons on the Monarchy, holds



that this Low cartoon reflected 'the view of his proprietor, Lord Beaverbrook, that the establishment, led by Baldwin, had knocked the King off the throne against the wishes of the country'.<sup>64</sup> *The Times* believed it was

<sup>63</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 290.

<sup>64</sup> Kenneth Baker, *An Irreverent Cartoon History of the British Monarchy*, Thames & Hudson, 1996, Page 158.

certainly wide of the mark:

‘This paper, which closely reflects Lord Beaverbrook’s mind, printed on Friday night a cartoon by Low entitled “Secretly, in the Dead of Night.” It represented the transfer of the Throne and Crown by a procession of silk-hatted morning-coated figures... It will be a misfortune if this cartoon is reproduced abroad for it utterly misrepresents the action of the Prime Minister and the response to it of public opinion. I am astounded that Lord Beaverbrook, if he saw the cartoon, allowed such a dastardly attack. Such a silly one too. How can the abdication be said to have been carried out secretly in the dead of night?’<sup>65</sup>

Compare ‘SECRETLY, IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT’ with Strube’s ‘“GOD SAVE THE KING”’ which appeared in the *Daily Express* on the day after Low’s cartoon. Unlike Low, Strube has not attempted to make mischief. In contrast, he puts across a positive image that the Monarchy remains undamaged by the abdication and that the public, including Edward, now Prince Edward, show their support for the new reign of George VI. The Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, was one of many who appreciated the tone of Strube’s cartoon, as she mentioned in a personal letter to the cartoonist:



‘I sat through all the blah in the House of Commons thoroughly sick of the whole show, and feeling that Edward was a bit of a damned fool anyway. Your cartoon simply got under my skin. It was the one human decent thing that said all there was to be said. I hope he saw it.’<sup>66</sup>

Low would no doubt have found Strube’s sentiments in ‘“GOD SAVE THE KING”’ anathema, and was surprised at how the general public could switch its allegiance so quickly:

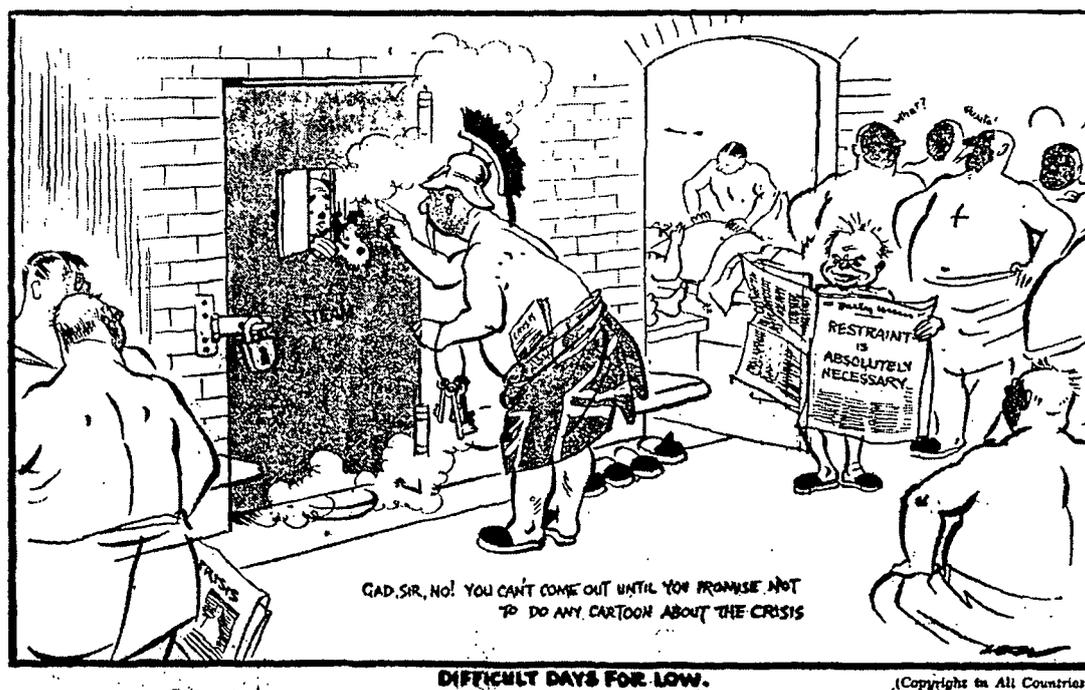
<sup>65</sup> *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1936.

<sup>66</sup> Ellen Wilkinson to Sidney Strube, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1936, Strube Papers.

'There was for me some personal disillusionment. I had not so far lost my overseas simplicity as to doubt that 'Our Smiling Prince' really had had the affection of the populace. I was slightly shocked to find it was only skin-deep. There was something revolting in the revelation of insincerity about "demonstrations of love" for royal individuals which could be turned on and off like water from a tap, according to an official steer.'<sup>67</sup>

It appeared that unlike Strube, Low did not reflect public opinion in this matter. Instead, he showed total empathy with Beaverbrook in his attacks on Baldwin as the guilty party. In his book *The Abdication of King Edward VIII* which was published in 1966, two years after his death, Beaverbrook claimed that cartoons such as the two Low ones just described had been highly effective in undermining Baldwin's honest-broker image.

Low produced three cartoons in the week of the abdication, two of which have just been discussed. The other, which has already been touched upon, was published between the dates of the first two on 9<sup>th</sup> December. 'DIFFICULT DAYS FOR LOW' has Low locked



in a steam bath by Beaverbrook, whose newspaper has the headline 'restraint is absolutely necessary'. Beaverbrook had also 'issued instructions that no cartoons on personalities involved should be published', except of course for the Prime Minister.<sup>68</sup> This cartoon may be about the crisis, but it is plainly a tease on Beaverbrook and an admission that the latter had attempted to constrain him. In this cartoon, just as in the *Daily Express* headline, Low restrains from relating specifically to the Monarchy.

<sup>67</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 290.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Wynn Jones, *A Cartoon History of the Monarchy*, Macmillan, 1978, Page 174.

Thus it seems that Low's cartoons were only acceptable if they were anti-Baldwin. This is blatant censorship by the *Evening Standard* on one of the great issues of the 1930s, and gives little credence to Low's independence. It was not the case either that all cartoonists were restricted in this way on other British newspapers or magazines. James

Friell, at the *Daily Worker*, and Bernard Partridge and Ernest H. Shepherd, at *Punch*, were three good examples of cartoonists who put across their own feelings on the abdication in their cartoons at the time. Why would someone like Low imply in a cartoon that restraints had been put on him during the crisis, when he was supposed to have complete freedom anyway? If 'THE WALLACE COLLECTION' did exist, then it is possible that 'DIFFICULT DAYS FOR LOW' was a response to that, in a way only Beaverbrook and the management of the *Evening Standard* would have understood.



Above. Bernard Partridge and E.H. Shepherd seemed quite happy to portray the Prince of Wales in their *Punch* cartoons during the abdication crisis, albeit with the greatest of deference. **Top Right.** Gabriel, alias James Friell, at the *Daily Worker* appeared to be the only cartoonist to truly ridicule the monarchy during the crisis. One cannot imagine Low being allowed to produce such biting satire on the Royal Family at the *Evening Standard*. **Bottom Right.** Gabriel takes the opposite view to Low over Baldwin



EDWARD AND THE LION.

## II. Low's Coverage of British General Elections from 1922 to 1959

'Conservatives in Britain held that Low's cartoons played a big part in the party's greatest defeats in 1929 and 1945 - but although his work has undoubtedly helped the Left in Britain, David Low is impatient of all parties and has never given allegiance to any.'<sup>1</sup> (Rohan Rivett)

'The impish humour of Beaverbrook gave us Low as a regular companion and commentator, and it would be interesting to learn whether Low has ever incurred his serious wrath by his undisciplined guying of Toryism and his unbridled Radical effervescence.'<sup>2</sup> (*Socialist Leader*)

Low arrived in Britain a year after David Lloyd George's 'coupon' election victory in December 1918. Until he retired in the spring of 1963, he was to cover eleven British general elections in total from the viewpoint of four different newspapers. Of these eleven, four were covered while he was at the *Evening Standard*, these being the 1929, 1931, 1935 and 1945 elections. Low's coverage of British elections at the *Evening Standard* was in marked contrast to that of the other newspapers he worked for. At the *Star*, *Daily Herald* and *Manchester Guardian*, his cartoons reflected the political philosophy of the paper, while at the *Evening Standard* they remained consistently non-party-political at election time.

The main intention here is to gauge the degree to which Low came under voluntary or indeed mandatory censorship in his coverage of general elections while at the *Evening Standard*. It was all very well for Beaverbrook to allow his cartoonist free range to jibe at the Conservatives in the normal course of events, but what about when it really mattered, such as at election time? As touched upon in Chapter One, Beaverbrook rarely conformed to what was expected of him by the Tory Party, and as a consequence he also required his staff to show little loyalty to his paper's political beliefs. He did, nonetheless, always give his full support to the Conservative Party at election time, if not always to its leader. Beaverbrook expected his newspapers to do the same. Those who were tempted to stray from the editorial line during or leading up to an election often found that they were either

<sup>1</sup> 'A Nuisance Dedicated to Sanity', *Adelaide News*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1957, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Low Highbrow', *Socialist Leader*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

put under pressure to conform or were forced to leave. As a Tory Press Lord, Beaverbrook did not allow Low to make fun of the Conservative Party at a time when the electorate may have been readily influenced by his cartoons. Low conveniently followed a strictly non-party line up until the 1945 General Election. When he left the *Evening Standard* to go to the *Daily Herald* and then on to the *Manchester Guardian*, he became supportive of the Labour Party in a more explicit way than he had ever attempted previously.

## The 1922 General Election



The 1922 General Election was Low's first at the *Star*. The Conservatives, who had for some time been showing signs of growing uneasiness with Lloyd George's premiership, withdrew their support from his coalition government and thereby forced an election which was, for the first time since 1910, to be fought on strictly party lines. Low had played his own small part in damaging Lloyd George's government by ridiculing the coalition in his cartoons with his constant

use of his own symbol for it, the 'two headed ass'. 'Without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity', the ass represented what Low saw as the *incompatibility between Liberals and Conservatives* together in government.<sup>3</sup> He probably had mixed feelings about the coalition coming to an end. Not only would he no longer have any use for his 'two-headed ass', but also here he was at his first general election without having yet experienced normal party politics in Britain.

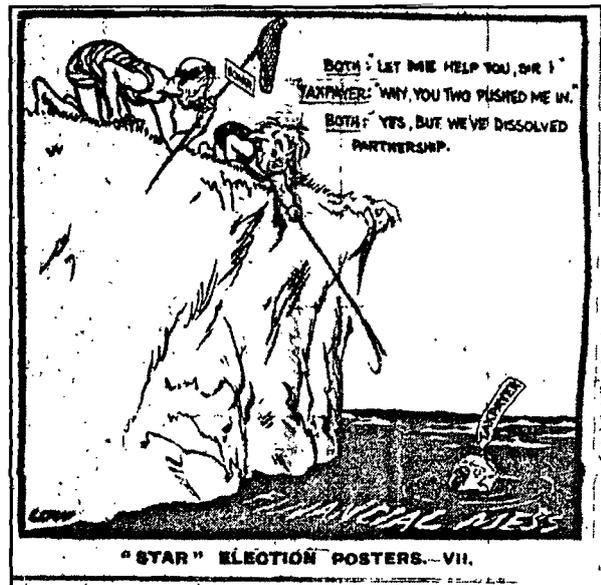
In his autobiography, Low described his participation in the 1922 election as 'just a trial spin'.<sup>4</sup> Yet he produced eighteen election cartoons, the majority of which appeared prominently on the front page of the newspaper. Entitled *Star* Election Posters, many of them were indeed made into election posters for the Liberals. Low appears to have followed the strict Liberal line at this election, that of ignoring the rise of Labour whilst attacking both Lloyd George and the Conservatives with equal venom. It was a confused election as far as Lloyd George was concerned. He was still the most famous political figure in Britain, but was making no clear political appeal to the electorate. Consequently, although Lloyd George still considered himself a Liberal, he 'found himself proscribed as

<sup>3</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 94.

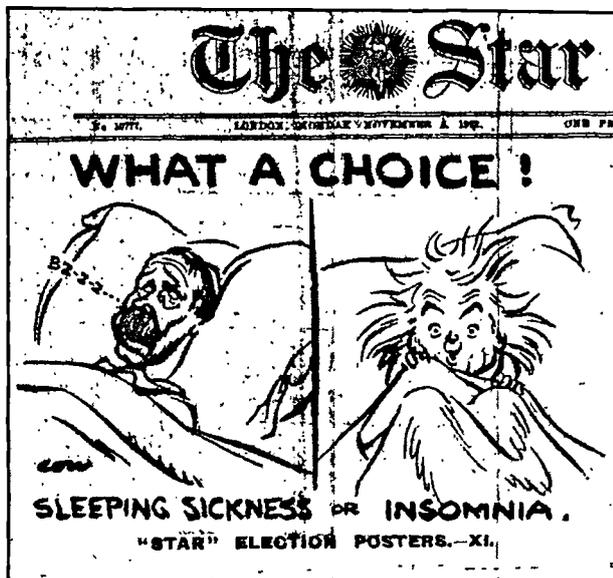
<sup>4</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 158.

an alien by most Asquithians'.<sup>5</sup> Low, not surprisingly, focused equally both on the Conservative leader, Bonar Law, and Lloyd George. In his election cartoons, he seems to have tried to emphasise that there would be little difference between a Conservative Government under the premiership of Bonar Law and that of the old Coalition under Lloyd George. Beaverbrook astutely recognised what the likes of Low were trying to insinuate during the election:

'The orthodox liberals and socialists were busy trying to get votes by tarring the official Conservatism of Bonar Law with the Coalition brush and saying that there was no difference between the two successive administrations.'<sup>6</sup>



As can be seen by Low's 1922 General Election cartoons, he emphasised that there would be little difference between the previous Lloyd George Coalition and a Bonar Law-led Conservative Government.



<sup>5</sup> Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939*, Blackwell, 1990, Page 229.

## The 1923 General Election

‘1924 was my first British general election. I put other things aside and threw myself into it.’<sup>7</sup> (Low)

The quotation above is from Low’s autobiography in 1956. Unfortunately, he seems to have become confused between the 1923 and 1924 elections, as 1924 was certainly not his first election.<sup>8</sup> He is definitely referring to the 1923 election. Again, as in 1922, the *Star* worked closely with Liberal headquarters, with yet another poster campaign based on Low’s election cartoons in the *Star*. With a revived and, for the first time since 1910, united Liberal Party, one would have thought that Low would have focused either on them or on the Labour Party, which had since the last election become the official Opposition with 138 seats. Remarkably, during the whole of the election period, Low did not refer at all to either party but instead focused all his attention on Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative leader.

According to Low, Baldwin at the time was ‘virtually an unknown personality to the public’.<sup>9</sup> On reflection, it seems that Low had made it his task to change that situation as far as the readership of the *Star*



was concerned. He admitted to focusing mainly on Baldwin’s self-promoted image of the ‘I-am-just-a-plain-ordinary-man’ which the cartoonist felt he overplayed, and in ridiculing his decision to introduce a protective tariff if the Conservatives were returned at the polls.<sup>10</sup> The resulting barrage must have greatly impressed Beaverbrook who would have thoroughly enjoyed such cartoons. Beaverbrook’s already growing admiration for Low’s

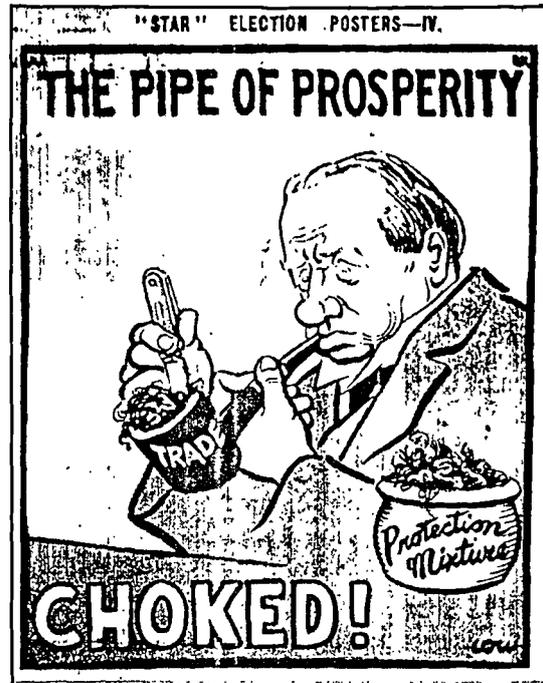
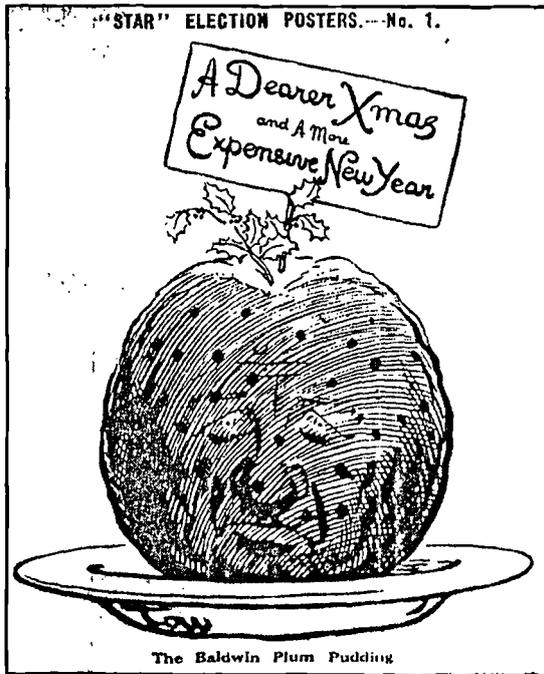
<sup>6</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and The Press*, Hutchinson, 1926, Page 56.

<sup>7</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 158.

<sup>8</sup> Low probably got confused because, as a result of the 1923 election, no party had an overall majority over the other. The House of Commons was by this time in recess for the Christmas holidays, and the Tory Government could not be removed until the House of Commons sat again six weeks later. It was not until January 1924 that Labour took office for the first time.

<sup>9</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Pages 158-9.

<sup>10</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Pages 158-9.



work would have been enhanced during the election because of his intense dislike for Baldwin over his decision to call what Beaverbrook saw as an unnecessary election.<sup>11</sup>

## The 1924 General Election

This was the third election Low was to experience in less than three years. His cartoons no longer adorned election posters and he seemed to play the whole election in a lesser key. After only eight months, a minority Labour Government, which had surprisingly come to power after the 1923 election, had themselves been forced into calling an election.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the election the Tories continually relied upon identifying the Labour Party with Bolshevism by running scare stories in the Tory Press, culminating in the *Daily Mail's*

<sup>11</sup> The Conservatives had a large majority in the House of Commons, and were less than a year into government when Baldwin called an election.

<sup>12</sup> The Labour Government, which had relied on Liberal support, had had no choice but to call an election once that support had been withdrawn.

publication of the forged 'Zinoviev letter'. At no time during the election did Low make

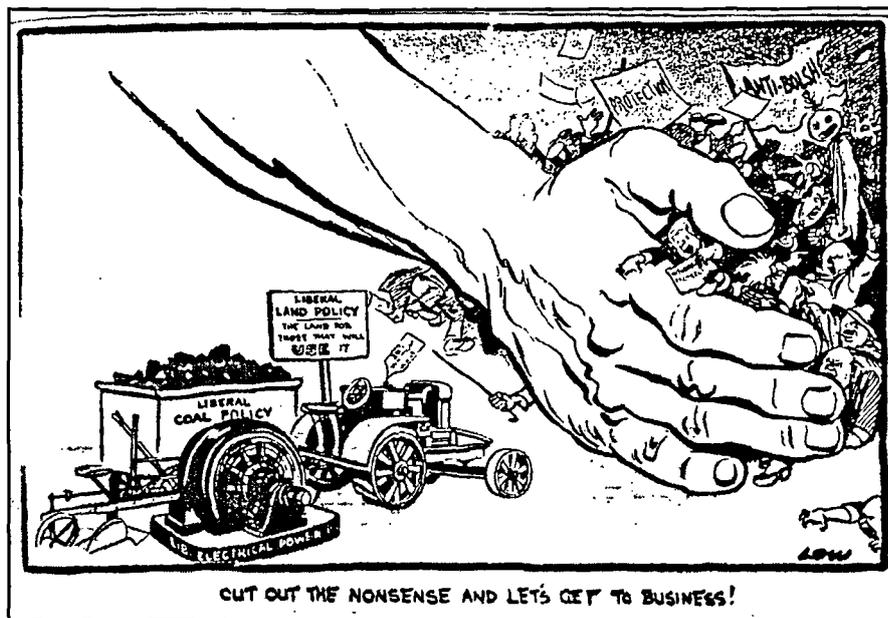


any allusion to the Labour Government. Instead, he emphasised his support for the Liberals, as can be seen in "DON'T YOU KNOW ME, KNOW ME,

DEAR? YOUR LITTLE SOUL-MATE?',<sup>13</sup> 'A LIVE TIGER IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN A DEAD ONE',<sup>14</sup> and 'CUT OUT THE NONSENSE AND LET'S GET TO BUSINESS!'.<sup>15</sup>



To Low, the election seemed to be more about the defence of Liberalism and



everything it stood for. Writing about it 30 years later, Low had forgotten what little support he had given Labour at the time:

'Their innocuous sojourn

<sup>13</sup> Published in the *Star* on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1924.

<sup>14</sup> Published in the *Star* on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1924.

<sup>15</sup> Published in the *Star* on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1924.

entered after a general election which I distinguish from other elections as The Disgraceful Election. Popular elections have never been completely free from chicanery, of course, but this one was exceptional. There were issues – unemployment, for instance, and trade... In the event these issues were distorted, pulped, and attached as appendix to a mysterious document subsequently held by many creditable persons to be a forgery, and the election was fought on ‘red’ panic (The Zinoviev Letter).’<sup>16</sup>

## The 1929 General Election

Low had to wait eighteen months for his first general election at the *Evening Standard*. This took place at the end of a full term for the Tory Government in May 1929. The Tories decided upon ‘Safety First’ as their slogan, which seemed to signify to the electorate a complacent attitude, considering unemployment had risen to 10% of the workforce.<sup>17</sup> Lloyd George, now firmly back in control of the Liberals, pledged his party to lowering unemployment by a programme of extensive public works.<sup>18</sup> Low’s sympathy for such a programme inspired him to draw ‘ACTION WANTED’<sup>19</sup> which showed the Liberal Party’s willingness to deal with the problems facing the country, unlike the Conservatives, and to a lesser extent, the Labour Opposition. ‘ACTION WANTED’ in its original state was refused publication, because it squarely blamed the Tories for being complacent over unemployment. Beaverbrook was prepared to admit in private that Lloyd George was offering the only creative policy as regards unemployment, but could not bring himself to say so publicly because of his support for his own party:

‘Lloyd George is making all the running of the election, and he alone has persuaded the electors that he has a definite scheme for the cure of unemployment, which is the one and only issue.’<sup>20</sup>

What happened as a consequence of Beaverbrook’s wish to keep such opinions out of his own newspapers, appears to have been a complete violation of Low’s independence as regards to the treatment of his subject matter. The rationale behind Low’s original idea for

<sup>16</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Pages 160-61.

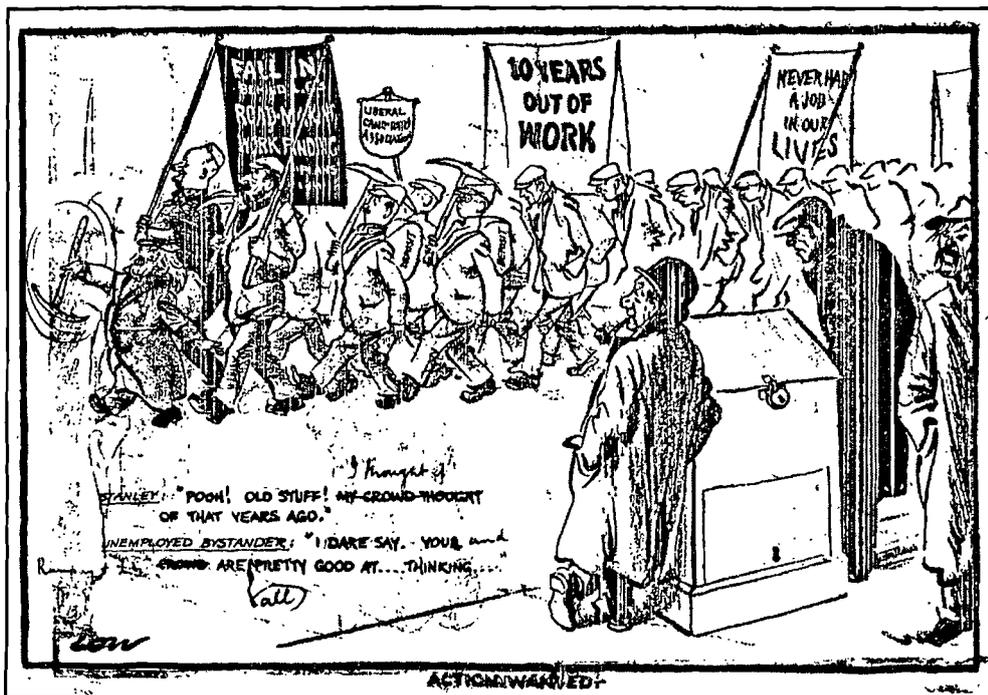
<sup>17</sup> Baldwin spent a good part of the election campaign explaining that ‘Safety First’ meant caution and not complacency.

<sup>18</sup> The Liberals had produced a detailed plan with the help of the economist Maynard Keynes. This was laid out before the electorate in a pamphlet entitled *We Can Conquer Unemployment*.

<sup>19</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* in its altered state on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1929.

the cartoon was drastically changed by the alterations done to it. In its altered state the cartoon no longer puts the finger of blame for unemployment solely on the Conservatives, but on the shoulders of the three, apparently complacent, party leaders. The alterations achieve this aim. The correction is not even made by Low himself but by the Editor. Gilliat, having obviously discussed the cartoon earlier with Beaverbrook in its original and therefore unacceptable form, wrote back to his proprietor having made it congenial to the political line the paper was following:

'I enclose copy of the cartoon showing the altered caption. Low wanted to have some comment by the bystander and I have agreed.'<sup>21</sup>



*Left.* Here is the original cartoon 'ACTION WANTED' with alterations by the editor as well as the published version beneath it. Look at how the emphasis of Low's original has been drastically altered. The grammar of the unemployed bystander is, as a result, also rather awkward.



<sup>20</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sir Robert Borden, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

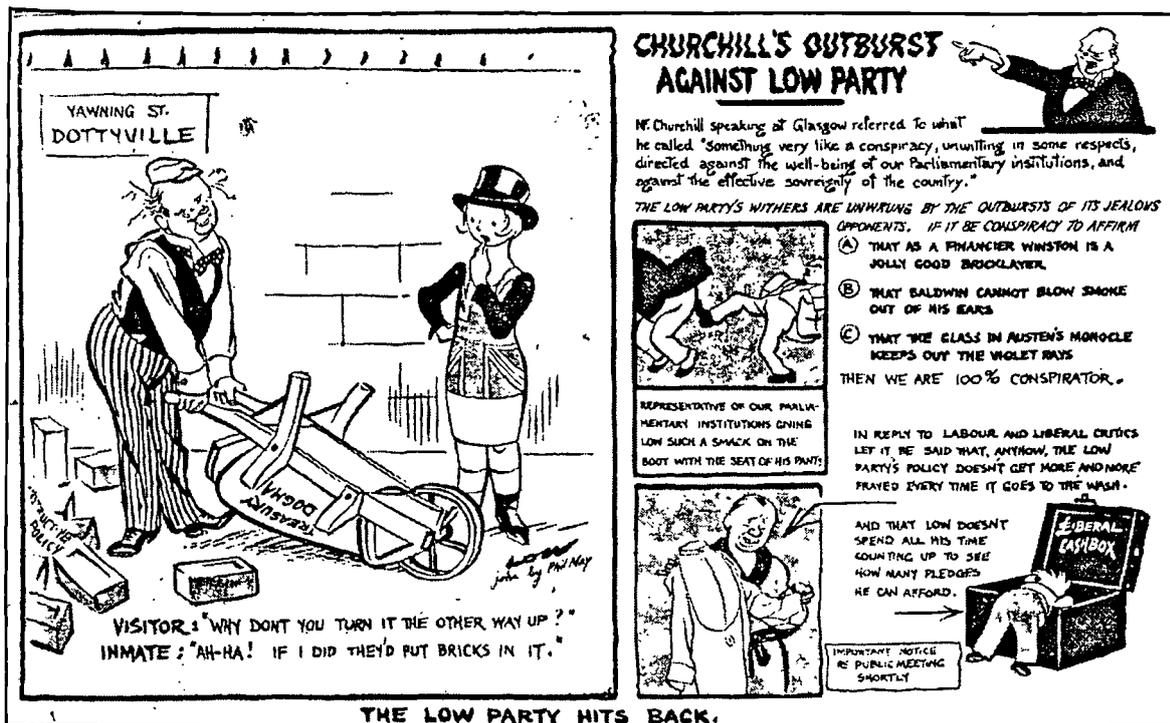
<sup>21</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook 11<sup>th</sup> March 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

Low would probably have been unhappy over such a flagrant disregard of his independence as had just taken place. It may have led Beaverbrook into treating his cartoonist sensitively by writing a letter reassuring him that his work was still being appreciated. Beaverbrook's secretary wrote a fortnight later:

'Lord Beaverbrook who is in the country, telephoned me and asked me also to say to you that he is very happy about your work.'<sup>22</sup>

Such letters of reassurance, as far as surviving correspondence is concerned, do not seem to have occurred very often. Maybe it was the case that they were not often needed. Nevertheless, as the election came closer, Gilliat appeared ever watchful over Low's output. For example, in another letter to Beaverbrook two weeks before the election, Gilliat wrote regarding a cartoon entitled 'THE LOW PARTY HITS BACK':<sup>23</sup>

'I enclose you a proof of the Low cartoon for tomorrow's *Evening Standard*. It is rather daring, but he gets a dig at all the parties. I propose to use it tomorrow, but I thought you might like to see it first.'<sup>24</sup>



The emphasis on having 'a dig at all the parties' is all-important. Any other approach, one assumes from this letter, would not have been tolerated. The cartoon itself, 'THE LOW PARTY HITS BACK', relates to an idea Low had had for setting up his own mock party.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>23</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1929.

<sup>24</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

Thus the satirical Low Party was created in order to emphasise the need for a change in political and economic thinking. The Low Party, with ‘a policy of hollow mockery pointed at the futility and frustration of what appeared to be the common national policy, as things were going’, would no doubt have rung a bell with Beaverbrook’s own train of thought. In fact, Beaverbrook somewhat mischievously wanted Low to actually stand as a candidate in the election.<sup>25</sup> Having his own pretend party meant that while Low could appear non-committal, he could also continue to have a dig at the three traditional parties. Moreover, and with some credence, Low had by now found that both Labour and Conservative had little new to offer; that a change in government did not necessarily mean a change in policy any longer. Thus, Low had come to ambivalently believe that:

‘One had exchanged Ramsay Baldwin with Stanley MacDonal, so to speak.’<sup>26</sup>

As a consequence, Low discovered that, as a cartoonist, there seemed little to choose between the main political parties:

‘The uniform helplessness with which all three established parties confronted a situation which was degenerating day by day towards danger level had, in fact, created somewhat unsatisfactory conditions for a cartoonist. One needs one’s contrasts. One can be against something, but to be effective one must also be for something.’<sup>27</sup>

At the 1929 election, and as can be seen by what happened with the cartoon ‘ACTION WANTED’, Beaverbrook supported the Conservatives but not at any time its leader. Beaverbrook became elated when news came through of Baldwin’s defeat at the polls:

‘I rejoiced in Baldwin’s downfall. I wanted the defeat of the Government because I believed it was bad.’<sup>28</sup>

Evidence of how Beaverbrook allowed Low to ridicule Baldwin but not the Tory Party can again be seen in “‘TAKE YOUR SEATS, PLEASE!’”.<sup>29</sup> Five days before the election, an ever-attentive editor wrote to Beaverbrook with concern over this cartoon:

‘I enclose you a proof of the cartoon for today. I am keeping this out of the first edition in order to give you the opportunity of seeing it first, as Mr Baldwin is the central figure.’<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 199.

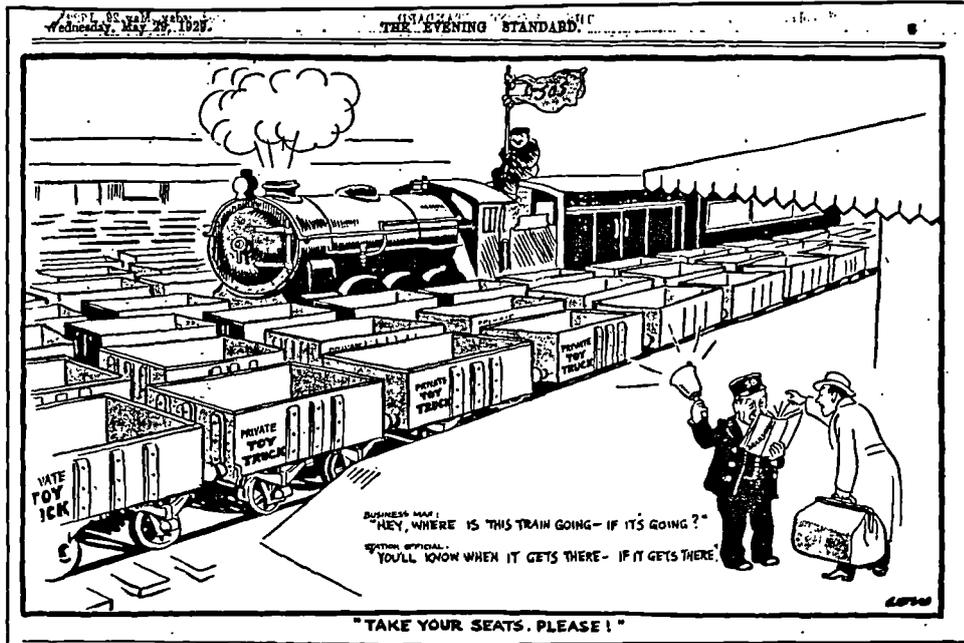
<sup>26</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 161.

<sup>27</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 199.

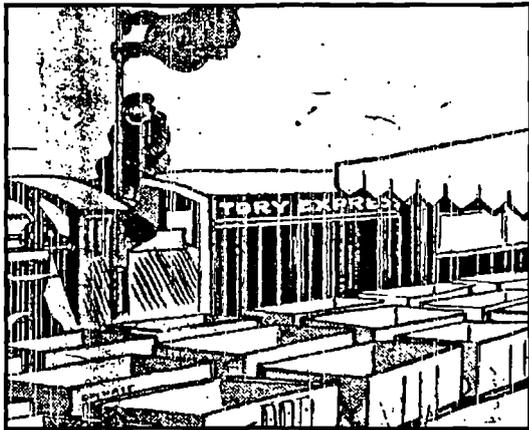
<sup>28</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to F.E. Smith, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

Hand-written by Gilliat at the bottom of the letter was the sentence: 'The words "Tory Express" could be cut out, if desired.' Beaverbrook wrote back the following day having decided that:

'On reflection I see no reason why the cartoon should not be used before the Election. It is good. Cut out "Tory Express."<sup>31</sup>



Here we have yet again actual proof of Beaverbrook refusing to let Low make any direct correlation in his cartoons with the Tory Party. Nowhere



Compare the published cartoon above, to the detail from the original cartoon on the left. In the original the words 'TORY EXPRESS' can be seen written on the railway wagon which has been rather crudely edited out of the published version.

can there be found any reference to, or attack on, the Tory Party in any of Low's election cartoons. Interestingly enough, and in regard to "TAKE YOUR SEATS, PLEASE!",

both the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard* concentrated on a campaign for larger railway wagons during the election.<sup>32</sup>

No one on the right in politics who commented on Low's cartoons during the 1929 election failed to see that the cartoonist concentrated his attack on Baldwin's leadership

<sup>29</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* in its altered state on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1929.

<sup>30</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

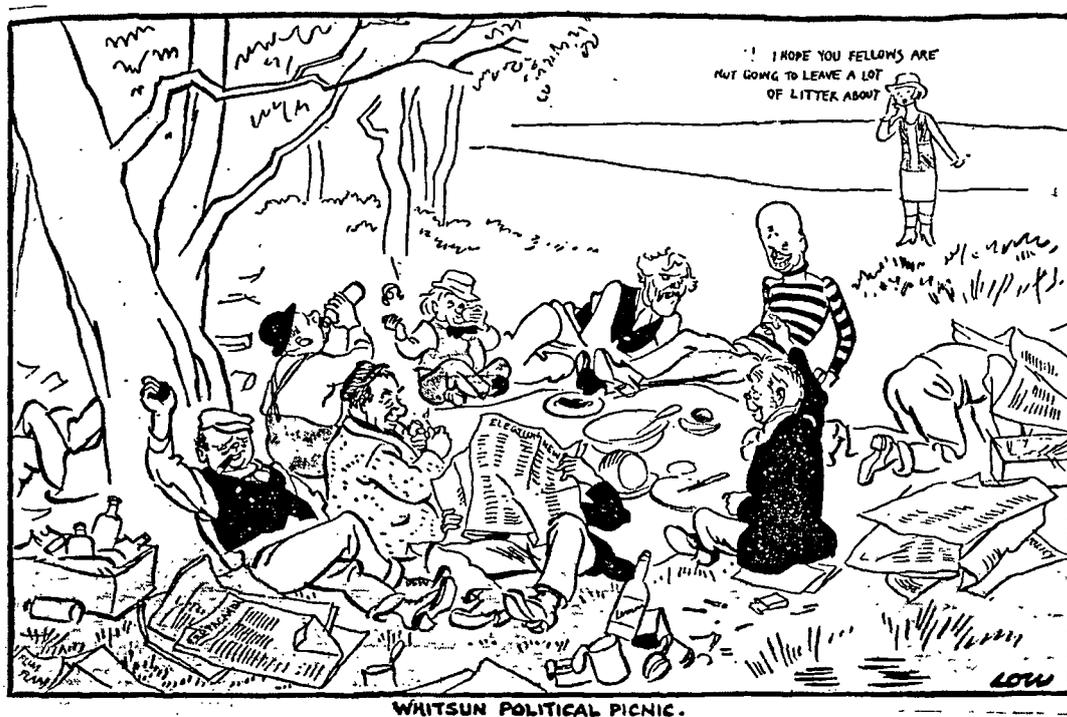
<sup>31</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>32</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 260.

and not on the Tory Party itself. The *Morning Post* was just one paper that failed to comprehend and appreciate how Low was of benefit to his proprietor. The right-wing Press totally misinterpreted Beaverbrook's motives over the use of Low in their editorials. In 1929, the *Morning Post* described the election defeat:

'The *Evening Standard* which week by week published cartoons whose whole intention was to hold up the Conservative leaders to ridicule and contempt with a malicious mockery not equalled in modern times. They were the work of a brilliantly gifted cartoonist whose political sympathies were amply revealed during his connection with the Radical Press, from which Lord Beaverbrook enlisted him, and it is sufficient criticism of the cartoons in the *Evening Standard* to say that their artist made no capitulation at all of his political sympathies. Nothing so minimal appeared in the Radical or Labour Press as the poison which Lord Beaverbrook thus purveyed. Everyone is entitled to change his opinions, but what should be said of a man who, exercising such great influence, uses it all for the frustration of the opinions which he still professes to hold.'<sup>33</sup>

They were wrong. Beaverbrook did not seem to allow Low the freedom to attack the Conservatives directly, restricting him to focusing his attention on the three main political leaders, particularly Baldwin.



*Above.* The cartoon is an example of Low's non-party, non-committal, approach to the 1929 General Election. Here the leading politicians of the day can be seen without any emphasis given to the main issues facing the electorate.

<sup>33</sup> *Morning Post*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1929.

## The 1931 General Election

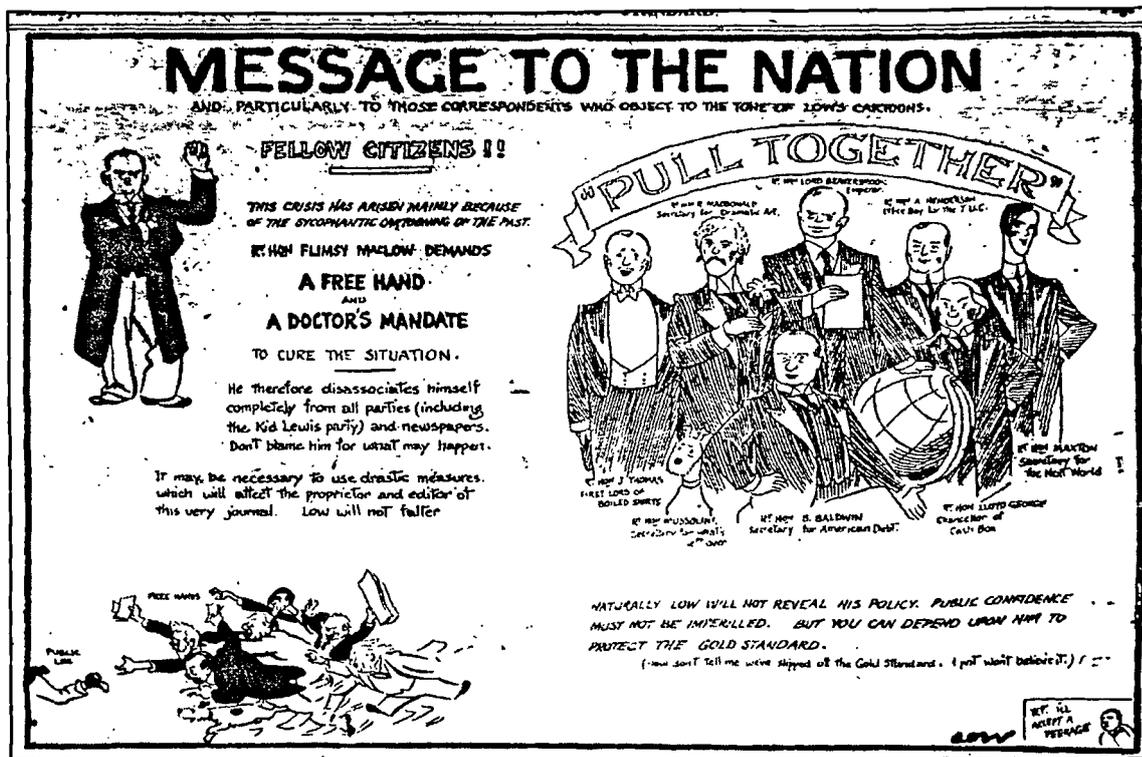
'By then, allegiances had become, as they remained, less straightforward. David Low's graphic assaults on party and proprietorial policy were cunningly tolerated.'<sup>34</sup> (A.J.P. Taylor)

Ramsay MacDonald, having formed a multi-party National Government after his Labour Cabinet had refused to sanction cuts in public expenditure that were deemed necessary in order to obtain foreign loans, called an election for October 1931. This election would be the pinnacle of Low's non-party approach as the following two quotations made in the press during the election verify:

'Throughout the elections he [Low] has been poking fun at all the parties.'<sup>35</sup>

'David Low has also been very witty, taking liberties with the features of all the combatants, no matter on which side they were fighting.'<sup>36</sup>

Gone were any signs that Low had supported the Liberals, whom he had so stoutly defended in his cartoons at the *Star*. True, the waters had been muddied by the advent of another coalition government, but Low felt no compunction to support either the Liberal or Labour Parties in their opposition to MacDonald's National Government. In fact, one could



<sup>34</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 273.

<sup>35</sup> The London correspondent of the *Natal Advertiser*, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.

say the opposite was true. During the election, Low mocked those outside the National Government for having no policy whatsoever. Beaverbrook's newly found support for the Government meant that, as in 1929, Low concentrated not so much on the domestic issues important to the electorate, but on ridiculing the party leaders. Beaverbrook's views on Empire Trade also meant that he got as much coverage from Low as did the major party leaders and in a more flattering and benign light, as can be seen in 'MESSAGE TO THE NATION'<sup>37</sup> and 'LOW'S WAR DISPATCHES NO. 7'.<sup>38</sup>



Nevertheless, two cartoons were mysteriously left unpublished in the week before the election took place. Low did a series of election drawings entitled LOW'S WAR DISPATCHES, which numbered from one to eight. However, No.6 and No.8 never appeared. The *Newspaper World* astutely picked up on the fact that No.6 had not been published:

'His recent series of "War Dispatches from the Election Front" caused much comment. So much so that No.6 never appeared at all.'<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> 'Our Busy Cartoonists', *Newspapers World*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>37</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1931.

<sup>38</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1931. This cartoon was originally numbered No. 8, but was presumably changed to No.7 in order to cover up the fact that the original No.7 had been refused publication. The *Evening Standard's* readership was therefore unaware that there were eight of Low's 'War Dispatches' in total.

'LOW'S WAR DISPATCHES No. 6', which was drawn on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1931, has survived, unlike that of the original for 'LOW'S WAR DISPATCHES No. 7'. One cannot therefore comment on No.7, except to say that it was probably also left out for political reasons. The *Evening Standard* even attempted to cover up the loss of one of these cartoons by renaming No.8 No.7 as can be seen on page 212.

No.6, unlike the other cartoons during the election, blatantly ridicules MacDonald and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden. Low emphasises the degree of bitterness with which they had attacked former Labour colleagues in their election broadcasts on radio.<sup>40</sup>



MacDonald led the way in vitriol towards his old party. On one election platform, he stuffed his pockets with German million-Mark notes, the result of hyperinflation, and produced them dramatically to illustrate what would happen to the British Pound if Labour were returned.<sup>41</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> October, ten days before polling day, Snowden broadcast what became one of the most vindictive, bitter and highly effective election speeches ever made on radio:

<sup>39</sup> *Newspaper World*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1931.

<sup>40</sup> The cartoon also implies that after the election MacDonald and Snowden would, no doubt, persuaded by their Tory masters, be removed to the House of Lords. Snowden did in fact go to the House of Lords in the following month, November 1931.

<sup>41</sup> Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden*, Barrie & Rockliff, 1966, Page 318.

‘In front of me as part of the wireless arrangement is a red light, a red light is a warning of danger to be avoided: I am going to give you this warning tonight... I hope you have read the election programme of the Labour Party. It is the most fantastic and impractical programme ever put before the electors... This is not Socialism. It is Bolshevism run mad.’<sup>42</sup>

Emanuel Shinwell thought the election a ‘shabby masquerade’. To him, the ex-Labour leaders were ‘outvying their Tory friends in denigrating the Labour Party’.<sup>43</sup> The *Daily Herald* was obviously horrified by Snowden’s behaviour.<sup>44</sup> Its headline the day before Low’s cartoon had been refused publication, was as follows:

‘Snowden condemns himself. Mr Philip Snowden with his eyes on the House of Lords and his back turned upon everything he stood for...’<sup>45</sup>

Low seems to have been in total sympathy with, if not following directly, the political line of the *Daily Herald*. Not surprisingly, anything as critical as this cartoon at election time was not acceptable at the *Evening Standard*. Maybe the cartoon was just too strong in what it implied. Certainly the words ‘Tory newspapers report heavy losses’ would have also been unacceptable to Beaverbrook, if what had happened at the previous election was anything to go by. Such a phrase, therefore, seems to be incompatible with what was acceptable at election time. With the failure to produce the aforementioned two Low cartoons in the last week of the election, the *Newspaper World* concluded, albeit somewhat incorrectly, that:

‘For some weeks past Fleet Street has been intrigued over the position of David Low. It seems as if Low’s incisive sarcasm and thinly disguised contempt for all politicians regardless of party is a little too much for the management of the paper, even with the “free hand” to which Low is entitled by his contract.’<sup>46</sup>

The fact was that the *Evening Standard* was quite happy with Low’s ‘incisive sarcasm and thinly disguised contempt for all politicians regardless of party’, except when it

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<sup>42</sup> Viscount Snowden, *An Autobiography*, Nicholson & Watson, 1934, Page 1039.

<sup>43</sup> Emanuel Shinwell, *The Labour Story*, MacDonald, 1963, Page 140.

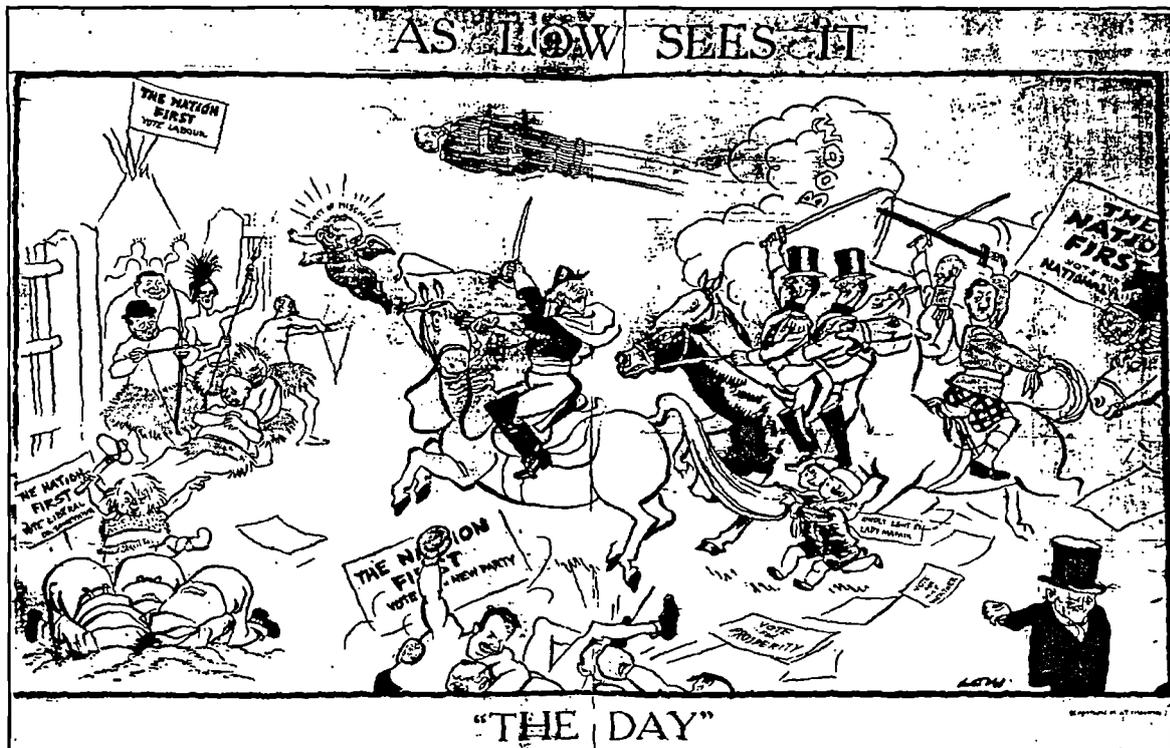
<sup>44</sup> A young Harold Wilson witnessed the bewilderment Snowden’s behaviour caused in his own constituency of Colne Valley. ‘... I saw the Valley almost flooded with the tears of those who a month earlier would almost have died for Snowden, and I saw those tears gain a new bitterness as Snowden attacked his colleagues in those acid election speeches and broadcasts.’ A. J. Davies, *To Build A New Jerusalem*, Abacus, 1996, Page 134.

<sup>45</sup> *Daily Herald*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1931.

<sup>46</sup> *Newspaper World*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.

appeared to implicitly attack the party or leader that Beaverbrook approved of. Such work, as we have seen, was either altered or refused publication. Low's cartoon "THE DAY",<sup>47</sup> published on the day of the election, shows the futility to which the power of his brush had reached at the *Evening Standard*. The innocuous nature of this cartoon would have probably found great favour with Beaverbrook, especially as he appears in it as the 'Spirit of Mischief' transcending the political mêlée around him. Is it coincidental that after the lunch edition this cartoon was increased in size and advertised publicly throughout London that day? The *Newspaper World* commented:

'But most unusual was the *Standard's* treatment of his cartoon of Tuesday, "The Day". In the lunch edition it was the usual size of half a page. In all other editions it was enlarged and filled two whole pages in the centre, and a great display of contents bills was made in London calling attention to it.'<sup>48</sup>



## The 1935 General Election

'Beaverbrook at previous elections had been disapproved of on all sides.'<sup>49</sup> (Tom Driberg)

Express Newspapers supported the National Government during the 1935 election, even though Beaverbrook remained aloof throughout the campaign. He had, by this time,

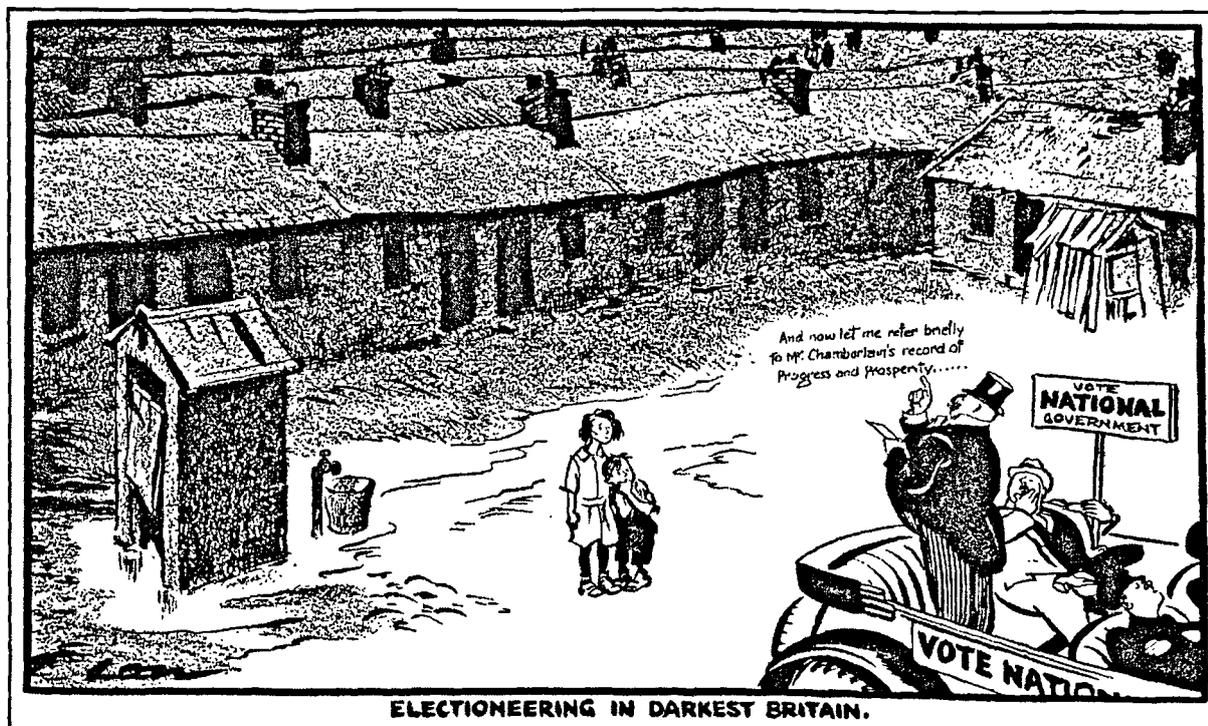
<sup>47</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1931.

<sup>48</sup> *Newspaper World*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1931, Low Papers, University of Kent.

alienated himself from the Tory hierarchy as a result of past attempts to topple Baldwin. The only person within that hierarchy that was on good terms with Beaverbrook was Samuel Hoare,<sup>50</sup> as the former explained in a letter to Hoare's wife:

'I am bound to say there is another reason why I am devoted to Sam. He is the last friend I have got in the old gang of Tory rulers. All the rest of them have written me off and I suppose, with good cause.'<sup>51</sup>

Low continued, as he had done before, to make fun of the same old political leaders without showing any signs of support for either the Labour or Liberal Party. He did nonetheless hit the National Government hard in one bitter cartoon focusing on Neville Chamberlain's efforts as Chancellor of the Exchequer entitled 'ELECTIONEERING IN DARKEST BRITAIN'.<sup>52</sup> Although Chamberlain does not appear in the cartoon, and there is



no mention of the Tory Party, the emphasis is totally different from any other published election cartoon Low had produced since joining the *Evening Standard*. Maybe the fact that it was published had something to do with the way Beaverbrook now felt about Chamberlain and other senior Tories. Another reason for its publication could be that Beaverbrook appreciated that the National Government had little or virtually no chance of losing the election. Possibly, he simply missed the cartoon or was too concerned with other matters. Otherwise, Low's election cartoons were, as ever, very tame. His two 'Topical

<sup>49</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 303.

<sup>50</sup> Beaverbrook, in fact, subsidised Hoare to the tune of £2,000 per annum from 1938-40 in the hope that he would eventually replace Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister.

<sup>51</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 328.

Budgets' published just prior to the election, both made innocuous comments but were completely free of both party politics or even political personalities.



Left. As can be seen from this last 'Topical Budget' before the 1935 General Election, there is a total absence of party political interest.

Even so, it was unusual that such a politicised cartoon as 'ELECTIONEERING IN DARKEST BRITAIN' should be published at election time. Low's 'RISE IN EMPLOYMENT FIGURES (Official)' drawn on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1935, three days before the election took place, was refused publication. This cartoon was yet again probably inspired by a *Daily Herald* front-page story. On 4<sup>th</sup> November, the Ministry of Labour for obviously political reasons, published its quarterly employment figures earlier than usual so as to show that unemployment had dropped by over 40,000. With a headline entitled 'HOW WORKERS COUNT WAS ARRANGED', the *Daily Herald* put forward the hypothesis that the Tories had in reality created short-term employment so as to manipulate the unemployment figures for electoral gain:

'Unemployment figures to be issued tonight will show a reduction of over 40,000 as compared with September, but there are facts which should make the electors suspicious of the Tory attempt to make capital out of this reduction. Word went

<sup>52</sup> Published in *Evening Standard* on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1935.

round in the middle of October that a General Election was pending and that employers who sympathised with the Baldwin Government should make every effort to see that as much work as possible was put in hand so as to influence the count which was taken on October 21<sup>st</sup>.

Some employers took the cue, and it is the fact that in several industries works became active in making goods for stock. That means, of course, that, after the General Election, there will be a corresponding set-back in those industries unless there is real - and at present unforeseen - revival in demand.

Mr Chamberlain also without a scrap of evidence suggested that if Labour were returned "these progressive decreases in the unemployment figures" would not continue. In these circumstances, the Baldwin Government is wholly unjustified and extremely unwise to try to drag the unemployment figures into the arena of Party politics.<sup>53</sup>



Was 'RISE IN EMPLOYMENT FIGURES (Official)', just like the 1931 cartoon 'LOW'S WAR DISPATCHES No. 6', refused publication because it followed directly the *Daily Herald* line, which was, of course, unacceptable to Beaverbrook? Here we see Colonel Blimp at an election for the first time, talking through his hat. There seems little doubt that he stands as an allusion for Tory dishonesty. Both unpublished cartoons contrast vividly with the vast majority of Low's non-party, non-committal work at election time.

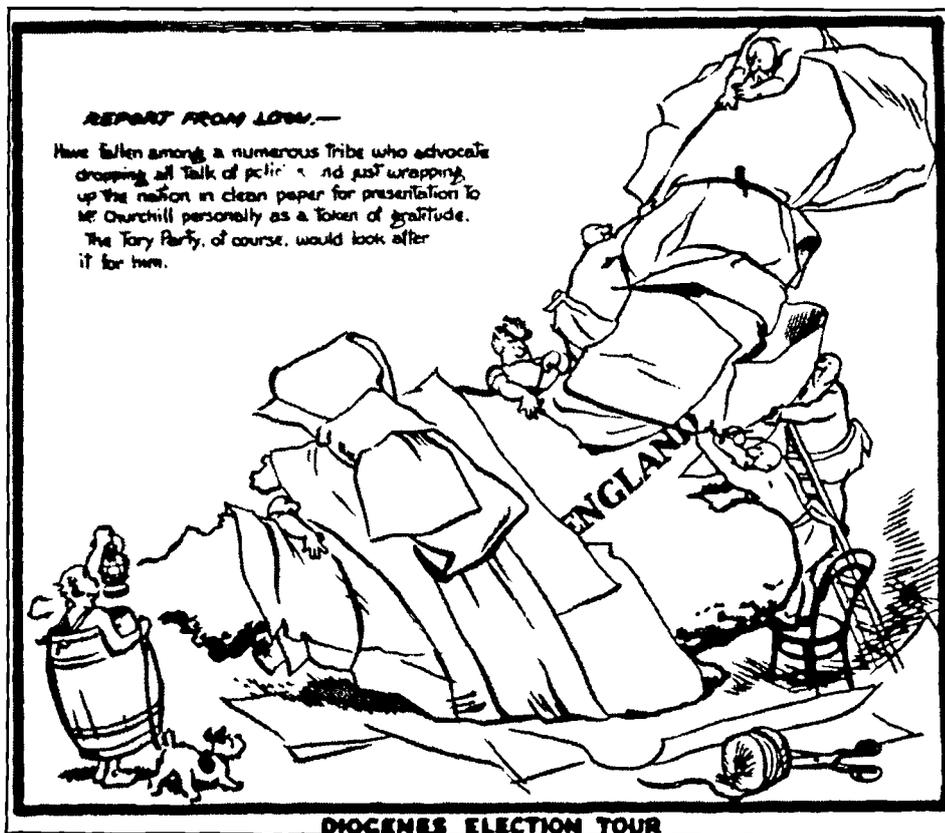
<sup>53</sup> *Daily Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

## The 1945 General Election

The defeat of Germany in May 1945 led to the peak in Churchill's popularity. Unfortunately for him, such a tidal wave of support was personal and did not extend to the Conservative Party. The decision by the Labour Party to leave the coalition government before victory over Japan had been achieved also forced him into becoming, for the first time, a party leader rather than a national one. According to Low:

'The Conservative Party has not a policy but it has Churchill... Mr C. is universally loved. The general view is that he won the war, and on that account most people would like to clear away the Nelson monument from our best site to make room for a statue of Winston on the top of a 500-foot-high stone cigar.'<sup>54</sup>

From the outset, Low emphasised for the first time his full freedom to comment on an election by drawing himself in a barrel. This was in reference to the Cynic philosopher Diogenes, who lived in a barrel and was allowed a considerable degree of comment and rebuke by ancient Athenians. Low thought it ridiculous that the Tories should attempt to fight the election on just the strength of Churchill's war leadership. In 'DIOGENES ELECTION TOUR'<sup>55</sup> Low shows Britain being wrapped up and presented to the Prime Minister as a gift for winning the war. Churchill's personal popularity was enormous,



which was confirmed by the huge crowds that cheered him at every point on his election tours. However, the Tory Party, as Low probably appreciated, was deeply unpopular, remembered for its attempts to

<sup>54</sup> David Low, *New York Times Magazine*, 'Clues to an understanding of Britain', 30<sup>th</sup> October 1949.

<sup>55</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1945.

appease Hitler and its inability to deal with the high unemployment of the 1930s. The electorate, therefore, as A.J.P. Taylor recorded, cheered Churchill and voted against him. Beaverbrook, for one, did not appreciate the fact that Churchill's popularity was largely based on his success as a war leader:

'His (Churchill's) immense prestige will be worth, of course, very many votes.'<sup>56</sup>

To Beaverbrook's chagrin, that personal popularity would not influence the way the electorate perceived the Tory Party in 1945. Beaverbrook had been looking forward with relish to a renewal of party strife, and had tried to pressurise Churchill into calling a snap election a month before the end of the war with Germany. With Churchill having set a date for the election, Beaverbrook proposed to take full editorial control of his newspapers. Churchill in turn replied that the leaders and layout of the *Daily Express* and *Evening Standard* had indeed been admirable. Beaverbrook was extremely confident that the Tories would win. This over enthusiasm would be reflected in the election coverage of his newspapers, which would continue to make wild broadcasts of electoral victory, whilst simultaneously failing to gauge the mood of the electorate. The *Evening Standard's* political commentator, William Allison, declared that 'electioneering experts of mature experience [unnamed] predicted a comfortable majority for Churchill and his team'.<sup>57</sup> Even on the day before the election the *Evening Standard* forecast a 100 seat majority for Churchill.<sup>58</sup>

Not content with controlling his newspapers, Beaverbrook insisted that the incumbent Tory Party Chairman, Ralph Assheton, was inadequately aggressive and decided that he would personally direct the election campaign, which with Churchill's backing meant he had in effect become party manager. Beaverbrook's election strategy, which had Lord Woolton's whole-hearted support, was to base everything on Churchill's name:

'The mixture we want is Churchill the war-winner, Churchill the British bulldog breed in international conferences, and Churchill, the leader of a government with a programme of social reform.'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 561.

<sup>57</sup> *Evening Standard*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1945.

<sup>58</sup> Today this attitude seems surprising. The Conservatives had been behind in the polls since 1943, although during the election campaign voters began to swing back to them. The Gallup polls showed a Labour lead of 16% on 28<sup>th</sup> May, 9% on 18<sup>th</sup> June and 6% on 4<sup>th</sup> July. Of course this did not take account of the Services vote which proved to be heavily supportive of the Labour Party.

<sup>59</sup> Lord Woolton to Lord Beaverbrook, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1945, Beaverbrook Archives.

This was no ordinary general election. It was to be the first one in Britain for over ten years and followed directly on from nearly six years of total war. Low appeared to have moved sharply to the left during the course of the war. This was probably as a result of both an appreciation of the actual benefits there had been from wartime social and economic planning, and the memory of the Conservative-dominated National Government's complacency to deal with social degradation in the 1930s. Low's wholesome support for the Labour Party's proposals for post-war planning, and its belief in the need for a welfare state, meant that for the first time since his arrival in Britain in 1919, he supported the Labour Party wholeheartedly in its attempts to win an election, albeit without promoting them directly. In 1947, *Time* magazine confirmed Low's fully held conversion to Socialism:

'Low calls himself "non-party but not non-partisan". But he is enough of a socialist to favour the nationalisation of Britain's basic industries. Under the controls of Labour's ordered society, he is sure that personal liberty - which he has always fought for - can survive.'<sup>60</sup>

Bravely Low, no doubt still feeling secure at the *Evening Standard*, decided to stay at the paper and fight his corner. However, both Michael Foot and then Sydney Elliott had both felt compelled to resign as editors of the *Evening Standard* because their overt support for Labour would have been both unacceptable and anathema to Beaverbrook. Under such conditions, the cartoonist was at last prepared to be consistently at total odds with his proprietor throughout an election. Nonetheless, Low wrote in his autobiography that this new situation had no bearing on his professional relationship with his proprietor:

'Beaverbrook and his newspapers had loyally upheld Churchill and the Conservatives and I had consistently supported the Labour Party and ridiculed Churchill's attempt to make the prominent Socialist Professor Laski the bogey of a scare campaign. Not for the first time the *Evening Standard* and I had been in flat opposition. Yet, as should be in a civilised community, that made no difference to personal relations.'<sup>61</sup>

On the surface it does look like the 'personal relations' had indeed remained cordial between the cartoonist and his proprietor. Apart from Low mysteriously disappearing in the middle of the election due to illness, there is no actual evidence that any of his cartoons

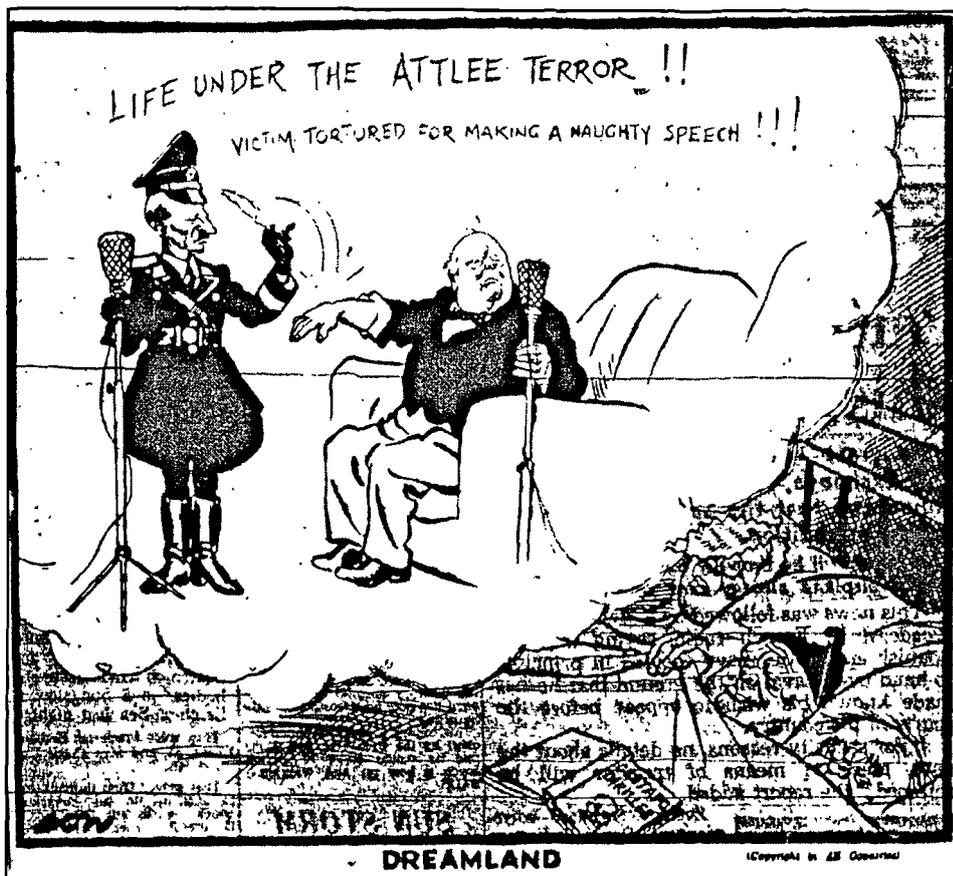
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<sup>60</sup> *Time*, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1947.

<sup>61</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 354.

were refused publication or altered during the election, however much he had gone against the editorial line of the paper.

Low concentrated virtually all his energies on ridiculing Churchill's leadership as well as his and Beaverbrook's attempts to scare the electorate into voting Tory. The cartoons that followed, which mercilessly ridiculed Churchill's attempts at winning the election, seemed to confirm Low's complete freedom in the selection and treatment of his election cartoons. He took full advantage of the Conservatives' rather negative election strategy, especially Churchill's first election broadcast in which he insinuated that the Labour Leader Clement Attlee would, if elected, have to fall back on some form of Gestapo in order to create a Socialist State. In 'DREAMLAND'<sup>62</sup> Low depicted Beaverbrook, Bracken



and Churchill dreaming of a rather meek-looking Attlee in the uniform of an SS Officer punishing Churchill with a feather. *Tribune* believed Low's 'fantasy on Churchill's broadcast was worth a dozen retaliatory broadcasts'.<sup>63</sup>

Beaverbrook always denied categorically that he had anything to do with the 'Gestapo' broadcast, although it was in tone with the general campaign he was running in his newspapers. The linking of Attlee to Hitler was, of course, absurd. Like Low, Leo Amery also believed that Churchill had been wrong in jumping off his pedestal as a world statesman so as 'to deliver a fantastical exaggerated onslaught on Socialism'.<sup>64</sup> Here was the trap that Low had seen for Churchill. The electorate judged him on his performance as a party political leader during the election campaign, and not on what had gone on before.

<sup>62</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1945.

<sup>63</sup> *Tribune*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1945, Low Papers, University of Kent.

The *Daily Express* followed Churchill's rather repugnant line by dubbing Labour the National Socialists, a direct reference to the Nazi Party.<sup>65</sup> There were plenty of other articles and editorials in the same vein from the Beaverbrook Press throughout the election. Charles Fenby in *Leader* magazine wrote:

'The tactics employed by Lord Beaverbrook seem to be based on one idea – that, by marshalling all that is ignorant, prejudiced and irrational in the country, it is possible to sail to victory on a stream of impenetrable muddiness.'<sup>66</sup>

There were many in the Tory Party who felt that such tactics as Beaverbrook was employing would ultimately prove both ineffective and counter-productive. There was general agreement amongst many Tory MPs that, if Labour won the election, it would owe much to the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard*, whose propaganda was considered harmful to their own cause.<sup>67</sup> Beaverbrook did indeed get most of the blame for Churchill's 'Gestapo' speech. Attlee, for one, was certainly convinced that Beaverbrook had put Churchill up to it. In a radio broadcast the following day he retorted:

'The voice we heard last night was that of Mr Churchill, but the mind was that of Lord Beaverbrook.'<sup>68</sup>

The same tactics as had been used by the Beaverbrook Press on Attlee were applied to the equally harmless Professor Harold Laski, then Chairman of the Labour Party.<sup>69</sup> The *Daily Express* reported that at one election meeting Laski had said that if Labour could not have socialist policies by fair means then violence would have to be used to obtain them. The *Daily Express* headline was 'LASKI UNLEASHES ANOTHER GENERAL ELECTION BROADSIDE: SOCIALISM, EVEN IF IT MEANS VIOLENCE'. Laski denied everything and issued a writ for libel against the *Daily Express*. He assured Percy Cudlipp, now Editor at the *Daily Herald*, that the story had been totally fabricated by the newspaper. Even so, the Laski scare-story ran all the way up to polling-day.

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<sup>64</sup> J. Barnes and D. Nicholson, *The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, London, 1988, Page 1046.

<sup>65</sup> One must not forget that the Nazi death-camps and the full horrors of the Holocaust had been discovered only months before.

<sup>66</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 302.

<sup>67</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> June 1945, *Harold Nicolson Diaries and Letters, 1930-39*, Collins, 1966.

<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Harris, *Attlee*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995, Page 256.

<sup>69</sup> Laski was not, as the *Daily Express* omitted to point out, leader of the Labour Party.



cartoons, unlike during previous elections, were not refused publication.<sup>75</sup> Low, however, turned out to be a better judge of the mood of the British voter than his proprietor.

Nevertheless, Low strangely disappeared for almost a fortnight in the middle of the election. After the hard-hitting 'DREAMLAND' on 7<sup>th</sup> June, which we have just discussed, he produced only two more cartoons in a period of 18 days. He did not start producing his regular quota of cartoons again until 25<sup>th</sup> June, only ten days before polling day:

'As luck would have it, two prominent Labour cartoonists, Low in the *Standard* and Vicky in the *News Chronicle* were ill during the campaign, their pencils temporarily stilled.'<sup>76</sup>

Was it just chance or had it been a deliberate response to Low's hard-hitting election cartoons on behalf of Express Newspapers? The *Evening Standard* told its readership that Low needed time off to rest:

'REST FOR LOW: Today's cartoon is the last from my colleague Low for a fortnight or so. His health has compelled him to take a rest by the sea. I hope he will bring his vigorous pencil back into the election fray before polling day; he will miss being in the battle as much as others will miss his lively contributions to it.'<sup>77</sup>

Tom Driberg thought it suspicious that Low should vanish from the *Evening Standard* 'to get some "sea-air"'.<sup>78</sup> It was remarkable, to say the least; Low missing the first general election since 1935, one which also offered the electorate the chance to decide who would rebuild Britain. Other left-wing cartoonists felt it was an opportunity of a lifetime, and as a result threw themselves into it. Philip Zec at the *Daily Mirror*, for example, 'worked overtime' during the election.<sup>79</sup> According to Hugh Cudlipp, then editorial director of the *Daily Mirror*, Zec was as a result the 'most potent political cartoonist of the day'.<sup>80</sup> It was no surprise that a great deal of suspicion grew that Low had in fact been removed for political reasons. *Tribune* voiced the widespread suspicion that political heat had got to Low. On 27<sup>th</sup> June 1945, the *New York Herald* declared that:

<sup>75</sup> Another possible explanation is that Beaverbrook may have been just too busy running the Tory election campaign to bother worrying about Low's cartoons.

<sup>76</sup> W. Harrington and P. Young, *The 1945 Revolution*, London, 1978, Page 173.

<sup>77</sup> *Evening Standard*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1945.

<sup>78</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 302.

<sup>79</sup> Hugh Cudlipp, *Publish And Be Dammed*, Andrew Davies, 1953, Page 232.

<sup>80</sup> Hugh Cudlipp, *Publish And Be Dammed*, Andrew Davies, 1953, Page 232.

'Low disappeared from the *Evening Standard* several weeks ago after portraying Beaverbrook and other Conservatives in unkindly lights. This coincides with Beaverbrook's electioneering in the closing weeks of the campaign.'<sup>81</sup>

The *St John's Evening Telegram* of Newfoundland on the same day reported that: 'Low returned today with one of his most biting attacks on the policies of Lord Beaverbrook. It was suggested that he had been suspended because his works in the early days of the General Election Campaign, when he pictured himself as Diogenes searching for the truth, were too critical of the Tory campaign led by Lord Beaverbrook.'<sup>82</sup>

As he had always done before, Beaverbrook flatly denied ever having interfered with Low. For example, at an election meeting in Battersea during the period when Low was supposedly away ill, one man in the gallery asked Beaverbrook why he had suppressed Low's cartoons. Beaverbrook's response, which is remarkable for its lack of candour, was published in the *Evening Standard*:

'I will give you my assurance, that during my 15 or 20 years' association with Low I have never suppressed a cartoon of Low's. I took whatever he gave, good or



<sup>81</sup> *New York Herald*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1945.

<sup>82</sup> From a syndicated report in the *St. John's Evening Telegram* of Newfoundland, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1945, Low Papers, University of Kent.

bad. Nor have I ever suppressed publication of unfavourable or critical opinion of myself.’<sup>83</sup>

The newspaper then added:

‘Low is, of course, away at the seaside at present, having been ordered by his doctor to take a rest.’<sup>84</sup>

No doubt aware that there were those in the Press who believed that he had indeed been censored, Low produced ‘FULL EXPLANATION’<sup>85</sup> upon his return from illness. Maybe he hoped that in producing such a cartoon the whole episode would be laughed off. Indeed, Low was always sensitive, maybe over-sensitive, to allegations of having been being censored. When Labour won their biggest ever election victory in the following month, Beaverbrook became the Tory Party’s number-one scapegoat, as leading Conservatives blamed him for their disastrous electoral performance. Beaverbrook became even more unpopular within the Tory Party. ‘I believe there is no man living’, said one defeated Conservative MP, Sir Derrick Gunston, ‘more detested throughout the political world than Lord Beaverbrook’.<sup>86</sup> To Tories like Gunston, Beaverbrook’s employment of prominent left-wingers like Low had done untold damage to their cause. Another deposed Tory, Spencer Summers,<sup>87</sup> was reported to have said that Beaverbrook’s impact on the party had been disastrous:

‘He charged the Fleet Street gadfly with paying big money to Leftist writers, such as Frank Owen and Michael Foot, and progressively minded cartoonists like David Low and Strube, to misrepresent, undermine the Tory Party.’<sup>88</sup>

Ralph Assheton, who as earlier mentioned, had been displaced by Beaverbrook in the running of the election campaign, wrote to the latter accusing him of having ‘employed a brilliant propagandist such as Low’, amongst others, ‘over a period of years, no whirlwind campaign of a few weeks can undo the long term anti-Conservative work of these men’.<sup>89</sup> To Assheton, therefore, responsibility lay with Beaverbrook for having paid too high a political price by employing left-wing propagandists over the years. Beaverbrook’s lame

<sup>83</sup> *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1945.

<sup>84</sup> *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1945.

<sup>85</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1945.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945*, Pimlico, 1994, Page 261.

<sup>87</sup> Former Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade. He lost his Northampton seat in the 1945 election.

<sup>88</sup> *News Review*, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1945, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>89</sup> Ralph Assheton to Lord Beaverbrook, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1946, Beaverbrook Archives.

defence was that Low's 'cartoons are always valued on their merits and not on the opinions they illustrate'.<sup>90</sup>

### After the *Evening Standard*: The 1950, 1951, and 1955 General Elections

As a consequence of having been blamed for the defeat of the Tory Party in 1945 by fellow Conservatives, Beaverbrook may have been relieved that by the next election, that of 1950, Low had left his employment. As will be seen in the next chapter, Beaverbrook may have forced Low into resigning, as a partial result of what had gone on at the 1945 election. Even though a year's notice had been required, Low was allowed to leave within a month of giving in his notice, probably so that he would not be around for the forthcoming election. E.J. Robertson wrote to Beaverbrook stating that both he as General Manager and Herbert Gunn, as Editor, were keen to let Low go before the election at the end of January 1950, probably in memory of his performance at the previous election:

**Haig** DAILY HERALD FEB 23 1950 THE  
No. 10597 ONE PENNY

# THINK OF TOMORROW VOTE LABOUR TODAY

## Attlee: Use your X for Victory

**By The Editor**  
CLEM ATTLEE gave me last night his final impression of the General Election campaign—and his message to YOU for today, Polling Day.

The Prime Minister and Mrs. Attlee had paused for a cup of tea during their eye-of-poll tour through West Walthamstow, the constituency which Attlee is contesting in this Election.

They were enjoying it at 57, Hillcrest-road, London, E.11—the six-room yellow-brick home of Val McEacche, the veteran Socialist who was first elected for West Walthamstow in 1922 and is now retiring.

My question to Clem was: "How are we doing?"

He replied: "We are doing well. The spirit of our people is wonderful. Throughout the campaign, wherever I have travelled, I have found a thorough understanding of the good things the Labour Government has done, and an appreciation of the difficulties against which we have been battling."

**Cannot be misled.**  
"I've been greatly impressed by the thoughtful quiet-

### CALL TO FOUR MILLION

THE Executive Council of the Transport and General Workers' Union put out this message today:

"We urge the 1,200,000 members of the union, their wives and those of their families who are entitled to vote to present a nearly 1,000,000 electors to write and vote solidly for the Labour candidate in this momentous General Election."

"We regard it as of prime importance to the working men and women of the country, and to the people."

**"I'M DEPENDING ON YOU TO STAY THERE, FRIEND"**

'Gunn and Rowley are entirely in favour of that proposal. Gunn in particular is of the opinion that Low might be a very considerable embarrassment to us during the General Election campaign, and I agree with him.'<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Ralph Assheton, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1946, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>91</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.





Left. Here are three cartoons, mentioned on the previous page, that were drawn by Low after he had left the *Evening Standard*. Notice how these cartoons are far more explicit in their criticism of the Conservative Party at election time than those he drew at the *Evening Standard*.



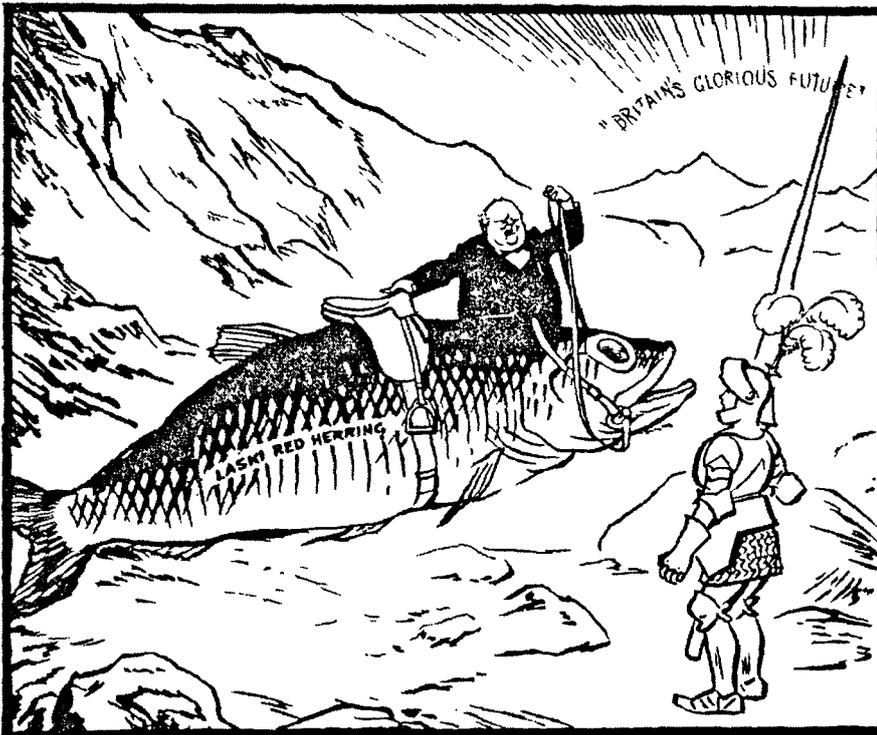
<sup>95</sup> Published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1955.

(1)



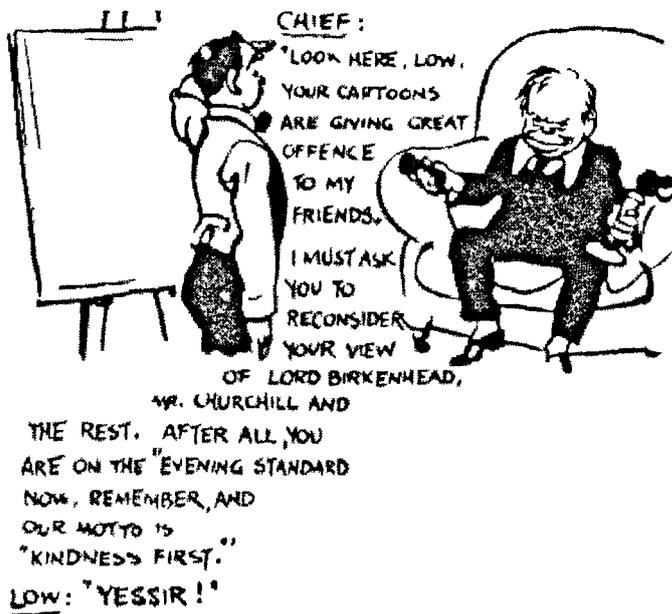
WE WON'T NEED THAT. THIS ISN'T AN ELECTION TOUR

(2)



"St. George, the steed awaits!"  
Evening Standard  
July 4th 1945

### III. Low's Portrayal of Lord Beaverbrook's Friends and Political Acquaintances



'On scores of occasions Lord Beaverbrook himself and his closest friends and colleagues were mocked teased or derided by the cartoonist's devastating pen.'<sup>1</sup> (Rohan Rivett)

'When criticism of his journals became an embarrassment (such as when it came from

political colleagues with whom he did not wish to fall out in public) he would stick his tongue firmly in his cheek and exclaim with an air of injured innocence, that although he was the principal shareholder, he would not, of course, interfere with the complete freedom of his editors.'<sup>2</sup> (Michael Cummings)

One of the major reasons behind Beaverbrook's employment of Low had been because of the cartoonist's genius in making political figures, such as Baldwin and MacDonald, look both foolish and inept in his daily cartoons. The maverick and mischievous manner in which Beaverbrook ran his newspapers meant that Low soon became a valuable asset. However, how did Beaverbrook react to Low caricaturing his closest friends as well as those whose support he needed who, in turn, may have been sensitive to such treatment? To get a better understanding of what Beaverbrook was prepared to tolerate, three such people have been selected for closer examination: Lord Rothermere, Lord Birkenhead and Lady Diana Cooper. They have been selected because of the documentary material which directly points to problems for Beaverbrook arriving from Low's inclusion of them in his

<sup>1</sup> Rohan Rivett, 'David Low, A Nuisance Dedicated to Sanity', *Adelaide News*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Allen, *Voice of Britain: The Inside Story of the Daily Express*, Patrick Stephens, 1983, Page 38.

cartoons. Two of these three figures, Rothermere and Birkenhead, particularly disliked being the subject of Low's machinations.

### **Harold Harmsworth, Lord Rothermere**

Rothermere gave Beaverbrook the *Evening Standard* for helping him acquire the newspaper group E. Hulton & Co. in 1923. Although Beaverbrook owned a majority shareholding of 51%, he did not own the *Evening Standard* outright. Rothermere, through the Daily Mail Trust, retained 49% of the shares with an option to purchase Beaverbrook's shares up until May 1933.<sup>3</sup> For some reason, Beaverbrook did not realise that Rothermere held such an option, until the latter actually mentioned it to him:

'Daily Mail Trust have an option, which I did not know they had, to buy the *Evening Standard* and will not surrender it without some considerable consideration.'<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, every time Beaverbrook proposed either selling the *Evening Standard*, or transferring control over it to one of his children, the Daily Mail Trust sought to enforce its option and the idea was always abandoned. Rothermere was also able to put pressure on Beaverbrook whenever there was the possibility of the *Evening Standard* printing anything that could either embarrass him or cause personal angst. An example of this occurred in April 1932, when Beaverbrook received a request from Rothermere to keep out of the *Evening Standard* the news that his niece's husband and baby had jumped off Hammersmith Bridge. Beaverbrook immediately instructed his editor that 'all mention must be kept out of the paper. Confirm that this will be done.'<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is of little surprise that until Beaverbrook eventually bought the remaining shares in May 1933, he was forced to keep a watchful eye on the way Low depicted Rothermere in his cartoons. For Low would occasionally make fun of Rothermere in a somewhat similar vein to the way he had previously done at the *Star*. In his autobiography, Low admitted that cartoons of Rothermere had been refused publication because of the former's involvement in the *Evening Standard*:

'There were, however, about a couple of dozen left out for other reasons:  
...because of the tears of Lord Rothermere at seeing himself caricatured, which

<sup>3</sup>A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 214.

<sup>4</sup>Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here The Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 283.

<sup>5</sup>Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, file note, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1932, Beaverbrook Archives.

made an impossible situation for Lord Beaverbrook since R. had helped B. to finance the purchase of the *Evening Standard*.<sup>6</sup>

When Beaverbrook began his Empire Crusade in February 1930, he was ever more conscious of Rothermere's feelings, as the latter was also giving the Empire Party his full



support, both financially and in his newspapers. A few months into the campaign, Ernest Outhwaite, then Editor of the *Daily Mail*, spoke to Rothermere about a cartoon entitled 'FASCISM IN ENGLAND',<sup>7</sup> in

which Rothermere appeared in the guise of Mussolini. In a letter to Beaverbrook, Outhwaite wrote:

'Will you forgive me if I call your attention to the cartoon in today's *Evening Standard*. Lord Rothermere, Ward Price and myself have been discussing cartoons generally, and think it would be better if you and Lord Rothermere did not figure in political cartoons at all at the present time.'<sup>8</sup>

Beaverbrook had an entirely different attitude towards the cartoon about which Outhwaite was complaining. This was also probably partly due to Baldwin coming off worst as usual. Beaverbrook wrote back, no doubt hoping to smooth over the situation:

'I myself ordered the cartoon on Lord Rothermere by telephone from Newmarket. I must say I choked with laughter when I saw it. I will at once tell the *Evening Standard* not to do any cartoons on Lord Rothermere, but I do think we should take the opposite course.'<sup>9</sup>

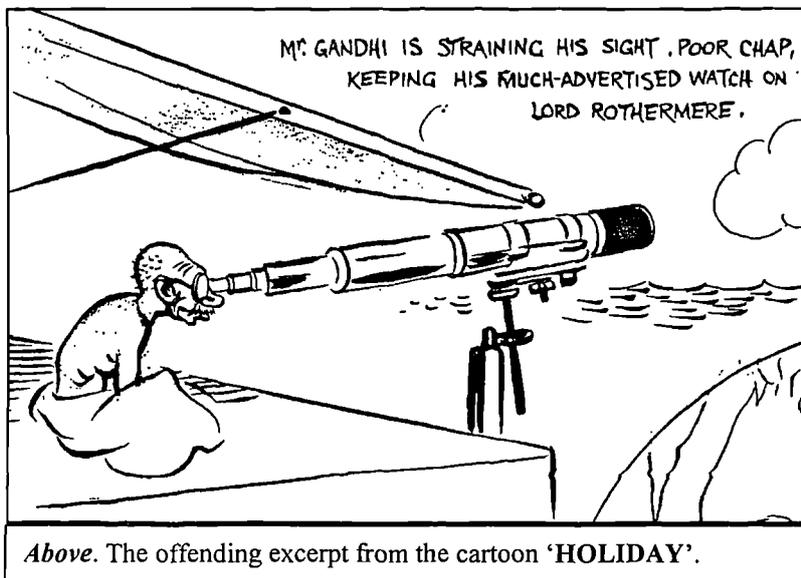
<sup>6</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 197.

<sup>7</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1930.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Outhwaite to Lord Beaverbrook, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1930, Beaverbrook Archives. Ward Price was the chief reporter for the *Daily Mail*, and a Fascist sympathiser who was a close friend of Oswald Mosley.

It looks as though Beaverbrook did not, in fact, stop any other cartoons of Rothermere from appearing, as Low continued to feature Rothermere but, it must be said, in a lower key. It was not until April 1931, when Beaverbrook entered negotiations to purchase the remaining shares in the *Evening Standard* from the Daily Mail Trust, that he seemed to impose his authority on Low more than ever in order to restrain him from depicting Rothermere in his cartoons. Now, all of a sudden, Beaverbrook became understanding of Rothermere's sensibilities. Evidence for this can be seen in 'HOLIDAY'<sup>10</sup> where Low does not even portray Rothermere but only makes reference to him. In a letter to Gilliat, Beaverbrook wrote:

'With reference to Low's cartoon of April 4th, I think you ought to discourage Low on this. At the same time when a newspaper proprietor shows that he is sensitive he should be left alone.'<sup>11</sup>



Low became rather indignant after Gilliat had asked him, on Beaverbrook's orders, not to depict or mention Rothermere again in his cartoons. Low felt that as a public figure, especially one who was quite happy to criticise others in public life

through his newspapers, Rothermere was a valid target:

'Personally I think it strange and slightly shameful that one who serves his opponents so roughly should want immunity for himself from comment in any medium.'<sup>12</sup>

Gilliat informed Beaverbrook that Low had taken his advice, but only under protest:

'I have seen Low this afternoon and asked him to keep Lord Rothermere out of the captions as well as the figures of his cartoons. He said he had borne in mind my previous remarks, but he also considered Lord Rothermere's speech in which

<sup>9</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Ernest Outhwaite, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1930, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1931.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>12</sup> David Low to Michael Wardell, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1934, Low Papers, University of Kent.

he said that neither Mr Baldwin nor anyone else engaged in public life should be thin-skinned. Anyway, I do not think you will have any further trouble in this respect.’<sup>13</sup>

Low certainly appears to have been annoyed about being told to leave Rothermere out of his cartoons. Although he acceded to his editor’s wishes, and left him out after ‘HOLIDAY’, it appears that he did not let the subject rest. For, two weeks after having asked Gilliat to tell Low to leave Rothermere alone, Beaverbrook felt it necessary to write again to his Editor, reminding him why Rothermere should be continually excluded from Low’s cartoons:

‘Lord Rothermere objects to being caricatured. Have we a right to cartoon a newspaper proprietor who objects? I think not, for there is a principle, of long standing in journalism, that dog does not bite dog. That does not apply to me, for I do not mind being eaten.’<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, the letter had much to do with Beaverbrook’s sensitive negotiations with Rothermere over the *Evening Standard*, as the former had never really been so concerned before over such matters. For as in ‘FASCISM IN ENGLAND’, Beaverbrook greatly enjoyed seeing Rothermere caricatured. In fact it appears that there was little love lost between the two press barons. According to another press proprietor and Tory MP, Brendan Bracken:

‘Rothermere does not like Max, but is afraid of him, and that Esmond<sup>15</sup> positively hates him.’<sup>16</sup>

Their relationship was by all accounts amicable but was most likely strictly a professional one. Beaverbrook, apart from being determined to shake off Rothermere’s involvement in the *Evening Standard*, was also intent on making the *Daily Express* the best selling newspaper at the expense of, and replacing, the *Daily Mail*. As Beaverbrook stated in 1928:

‘I shall go back to New Brunswick and retire a failure if I don’t succeed in killing the *Daily Mail*.’<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>14</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to George Gilliat, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Esmond Harmsworth, the son of Lord Rothermere. The latter had lost his two other sons in the First World War.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1939-1965*, Macmillan, 1980, Page 275.

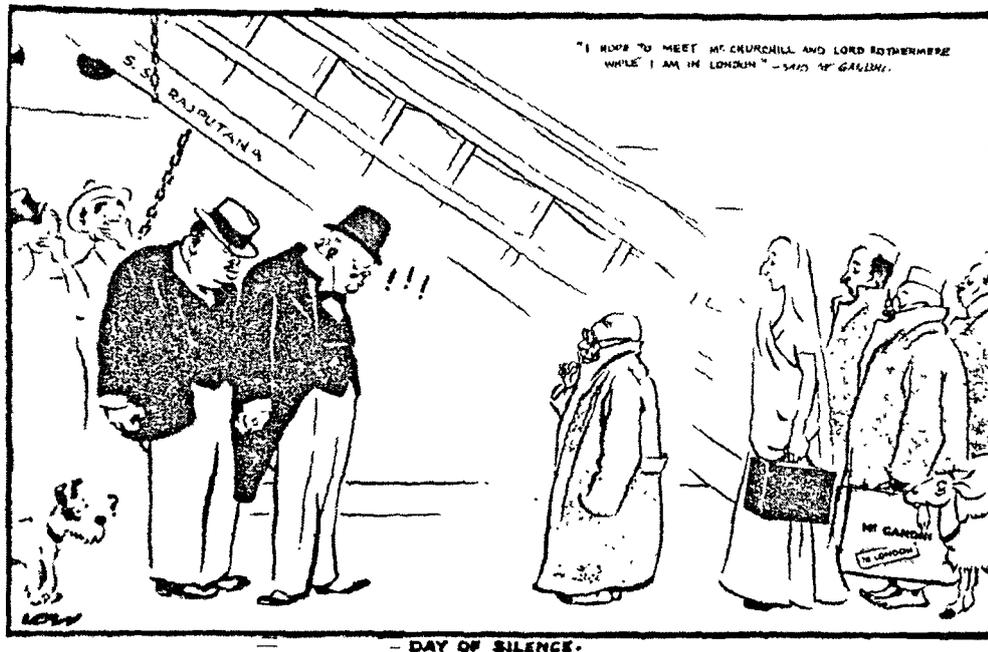
<sup>17</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to J.C.C. Davidson, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1928, Beaverbrook Archives.

Low, in writing about Beaverbrook's stipulation that 'dog does not bite dog' twenty-five years later, tried to play the whole incident down. He implied that he had ignored such requests to leave Rothermere alone, and that the warnings had not in fact come from Beaverbrook but from one of Rothermere's own entourage:

'Lord R. was much incensed and complained bitterly. "Dog doesn't eat dog. It isn't done", said one of his Fleet Street men, as though he were giving me a moral adage instead of a thieves' wisecrack. "You forget old boy", I replied, "I'm a moa".'<sup>18</sup>

Low did go on to caricature Rothermere again, albeit far less frequently and less pointedly than he had done prior to April 1930. How was Low able to do even this? It appears that Beaverbrook resolved the matter by personally obtaining Rothermere's permission to publish any cartoon in which the latter appeared. When Low depicted the embarrassing moment when Rothermere and Churchill met Gandhi in 'DAY OF SILENCE',<sup>19</sup> Gilliat wrote to Beaverbrook:

'We published a cartoon today in which Mr Churchill and Lord Rothermere figure. I should like to point out that we obtained Lord Rothermere's concurrence.'<sup>20</sup>



*Left.* This cartoon was sent to Rothermere for his approval.

There is further evidence of another Low cartoon being sent to Rothermere for approval when Gilliat was absent from the office, as this file note from the Beaverbrook Archives records:

<sup>18</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 150.

<sup>19</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1931.

'As you were away Gilliat, Captain Wardell had the cartoon sent to Mr. Esmond Harmsworth who said he would show it to his father. He telephoned Captain Wardell later to say it was all right.'<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the file note was undated, so it is not possible to gather which cartoon it referred to. Even though the *Evening Standard* got permission for such cartoons, on occasions the editor still reminded Low to leave Rothermere alone, as can be seen in a letter from Gilliat to Beaverbrook in January 1932, regarding the cartoon "H'M...HARDLY THE CAST I SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN MYSELF...."<sup>22</sup>:

'I enclose you a copy of a cartoon for tomorrow. I am sending it because of the caricature of Lord Rothermere. Low consistently "forgets" the request not to caricature him. The cartoon is so good, however, that I think it would be a pity to alter it.'<sup>23</sup>



The cartoon was published unaltered, but it is difficult to understand now what the fuss was over, as Rothermere only appears as the extremely innocuous figure entitled 'Genie'. However, the practice of gaining Rothermere's permission for a cartoon in which he

<sup>20</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

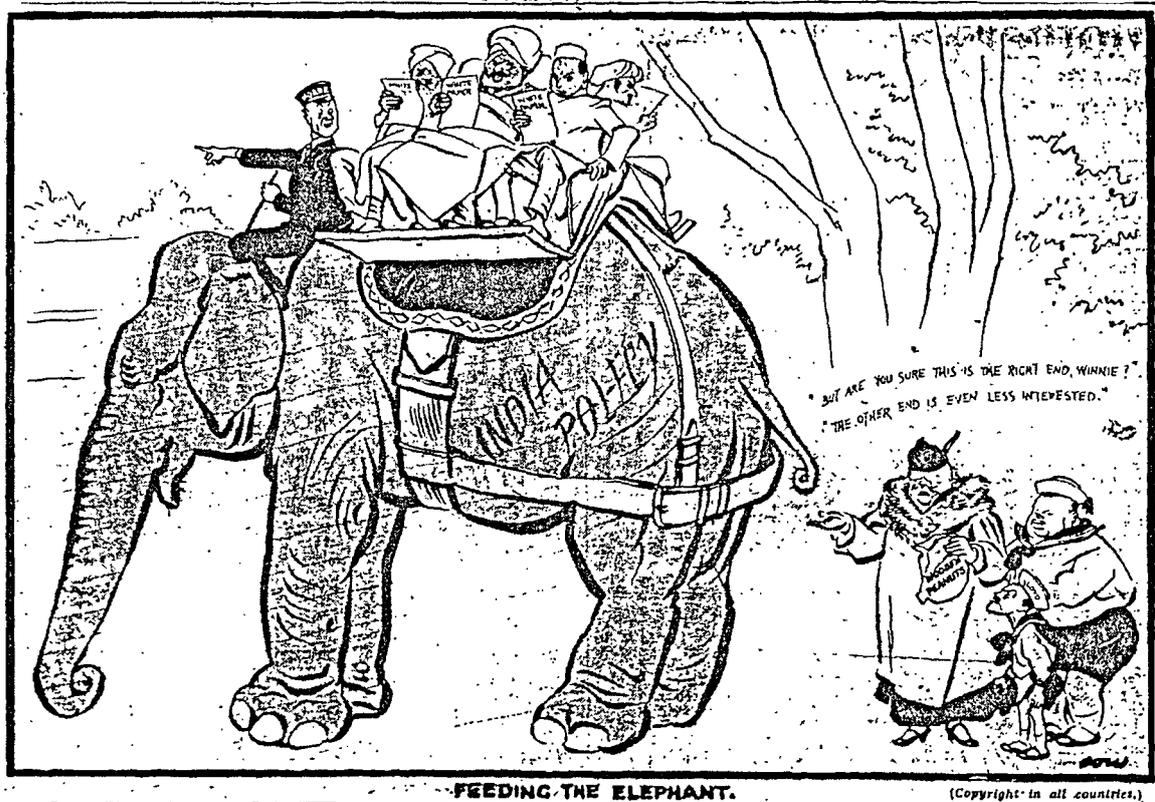
<sup>21</sup> A file note, date unknown, circa 1932, found in the *Evening Standard* file at the Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1932.

<sup>23</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1932, Beaverbrook Archives.

appeared was continued. In October 1933, the following letter was written to Rothermere about the cartoon 'FEEDING THE ELEPHANT':<sup>24</sup>

'Lord Beaverbrook asks if Lord Rothermere has any objection to the enclosed cartoon, which it is proposed to print in the *Evening Standard* tomorrow.'<sup>25</sup>



Again this is a rather harmless depiction of Rothermere, which was eventually published unaltered. Possibly there was concern from the editor over Rothermere's stance as regards his opposition to the Government's White Paper on Indian self-rule.

Even after Beaverbrook had eventually purchased Rothermere's shares for £275,483 in May 1933, and taken complete control over the *Evening Standard*, Rothermere still appeared to be off-limits to Low.<sup>26</sup> For example, in 1934 Rothermere decided to give Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists his financial and editorial support. This was symbolised by an article Rothermere had written in the *Daily Mail* headlined 'Hurrah for the Black-shirts' on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1934. Low felt the need, more than ever, to ridicule what he saw as Rothermere's folly in supporting the Fascists. According to Low's autobiography:

'A British Fascist Party grew up overnight; and the *Daily Mail*, then Britain's biggest popular newspaper, approved it. With some zest I added the first Lord

<sup>24</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1933.

<sup>25</sup> Lord Beaverbrook's office to Lord Rothermere, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1933, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>26</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here The Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 283.

Rothermere, its proprietor, to my cast of cartoon characters. He made up well in a black shirt helping to stoke the fires of class hatred.<sup>27</sup>

What Low tells us is incorrect. Rothermere was already a character, and had been so since his *Star* days. Secondly, although Rothermere is seen dressed as a black-shirted Fascist in the cartoon 'FASCISM IN ENGLAND' drawn in 1930, he only appears once during this period in such garb, and is not at all recognisable as the nanny in the cartoon "—BUT WHAT HAVE THEY GOT IN THEIR OTHER HANDS, NANNY?"<sup>28</sup> It looks as if Low has attempted to make Rothermere appear as obscure as he could get away with, in order to get the cartoon past Beaverbrook. Although the shape of the face is the same as Rothermere's, the nanny has no moustache, or eyebrows, and the line of the cheeks and chin are noticeably different. He is also for the first time wearing glasses, as if they were meant to be in some way a disguise. In fact, as will be seen, Low admitted that he followed orders and refrained from drawing Rothermere during this period. So perhaps this is why Rothermere was depicted in such an oblique way.

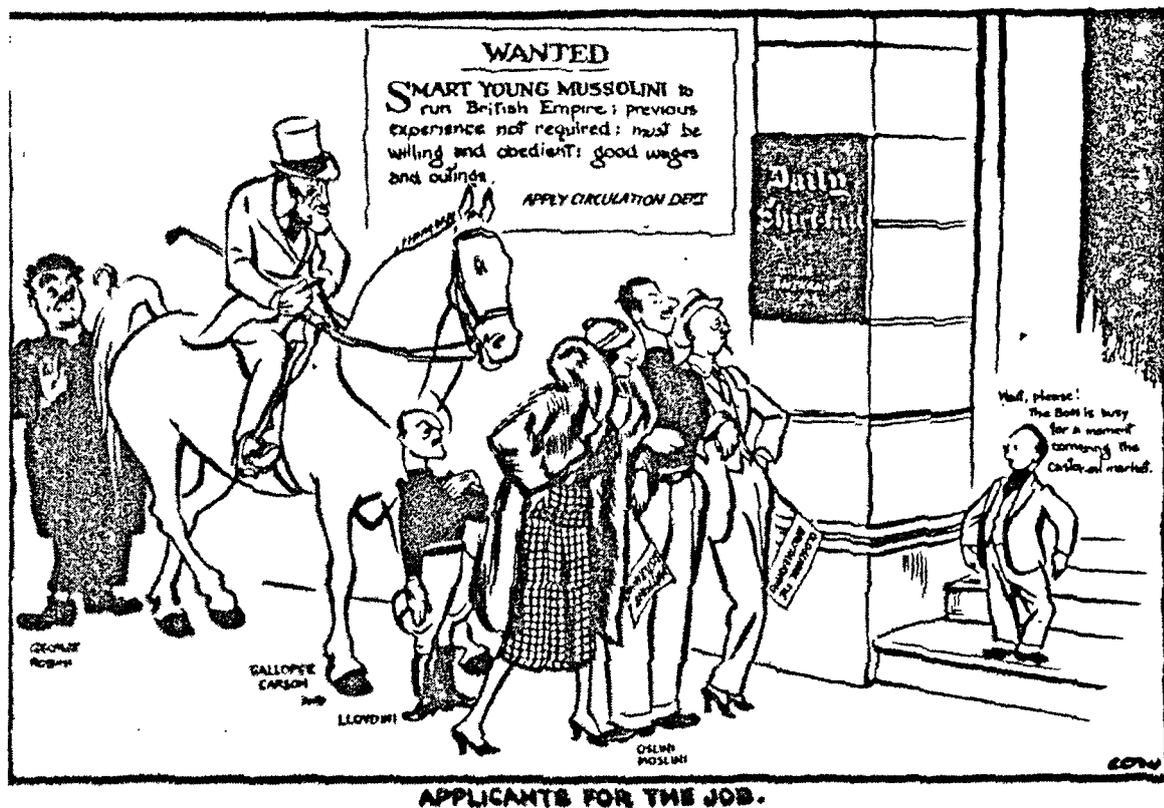


— BUT WHAT HAVE THEY GOT IN THEIR OTHER HANDS, NANNY ?

<sup>27</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 150.

<sup>28</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1934.

Low also forgot to mention in his autobiography that his first response to Rothermere's decision to support the British Union of Fascists - the cartoon 'APPLICANTS FOR THE JOB' - was refused publication even after he had made a number of alterations to it. Low



was not happy when he found that the cartoon had been initially refused publication. He took the matter up, not with the Editor, Percy Cudlipp, who being an anti-fascist would most likely have been sympathetic to the publication of the cartoon, but with the Manager of the *Evening Standard*, Michael Wardell. In the form of an official protest, Low openly admitted that he had held back from drawing Rothermere and was prepared to continue to do so in the future. However, he felt strongly that it was unreasonable of the paper not to let him even allude to Rothermere over his blatant support for Mosley:

'The question arises as to just how far my cartoon treatment of current affairs in which Lord Rothermere is concerned is to be affected by consideration for his tender feelings. I know he dislikes seeing his person caricatured, and I have refrained from drawing him on many appropriate occasions in order to avoid difficulties such as you spoke of.

My cartoon for Friday to which you took exception did refer to Lord Rothermere's announcement of the new policy of his newspapers and made mention of 'his Lordship'. But it did NOT depict him nor even mention his name. Is it to be considered unfeeling or inexpedient for a cartoonist to make an oblique reference in this vague way to one who widely advertises himself as a leading

protagonist of a sensational political policy? After all, there are several 'his Lordships' in Fleet Street. It appears to be a short step to declaring it unfeeling or inexpedient to refer to all of the policies which he invents or adopts, which is obviously absurd.

I suggest therefore (A) that it should be enough to preserve domestic harmony that I refrain from drawing Lord Rothermere or specifically mentioning his name, all the policies and performances of his anonymous and invisible 'Lordship' being as fair game for cartoons as anyone or anything else; (B) that the cartoon APPLICANTS FOR THE JOB, altered as to Mosley's companions, should be published as usual. Otherwise in view of the political possibilities of the near future, I feel an extensive and unreasonable restriction is implied which justifies me in making a protest.<sup>29</sup>

Low appeared to be quite justified in complaining about the restrictions placed on him, especially when one takes into account the 'complete freedom' clause in his contract. He also made several alterations to the cartoon, as Wardell had been concerned about two women Low had originally drawn holding onto Mosley, one being noticeably Lady Diana Guinness, suggesting, as far as Wardell was concerned, that Mosley was having numerous female relationships. Low altered the female figure to the left of Mosley into a man, but one can still witness the feminine poise of that figure; the high-heeled shoes being something of a give-away. It appears that after the alteration the connotation for Wardell would have probably been made worse not better, i.e. Low now suggesting that Mosley was having a homosexual relationship. Although Wardell did not refer to the changed figure, he was still unhappy about the remaining female, as can be seen in another letter from Low to Wardell:

'I cannot see how the woman's figure, plainly labelled as a symbol of 'Mayfair Sisterhood' could possibly be interpreted as referring to Mosley's sexual relations with any lady friend. This is, however, a minor point and I should be willing to alter the figure to a man if that were all that prevented publication.'<sup>30</sup>

Low also agreed to make further alterations to the cartoon in order to remove even the most oblique reference to Rothermere. The 'boy' on the steps had originally said 'Wait, please! His Lordship is busy for a moment...' Low changed that to 'The Boss is busy...'

<sup>29</sup> David Low to Michael Wardell, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1934, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>30</sup> David Low to Michael Wardell, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1934, Low Papers, University of Kent.

Apart from that alteration, some other text had been physically removed from the 'wanted' poster, and in its place had been put 'apply circulation Dept.' Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell what the original wording was, as all evidence of it has been scraped off by the cartoonist. Even though Low had done what he had been told to do, the cartoon was still considered too explicit. For one thing, the *Daily Shirt-tail* (rhyming slang for the *Daily Mail*) was probably unacceptable. The cartoon was again refused publication.<sup>31</sup> A furious Low seemed to have had enough, and appeared on the point of resignation. In another letter to Wardell he wrote:

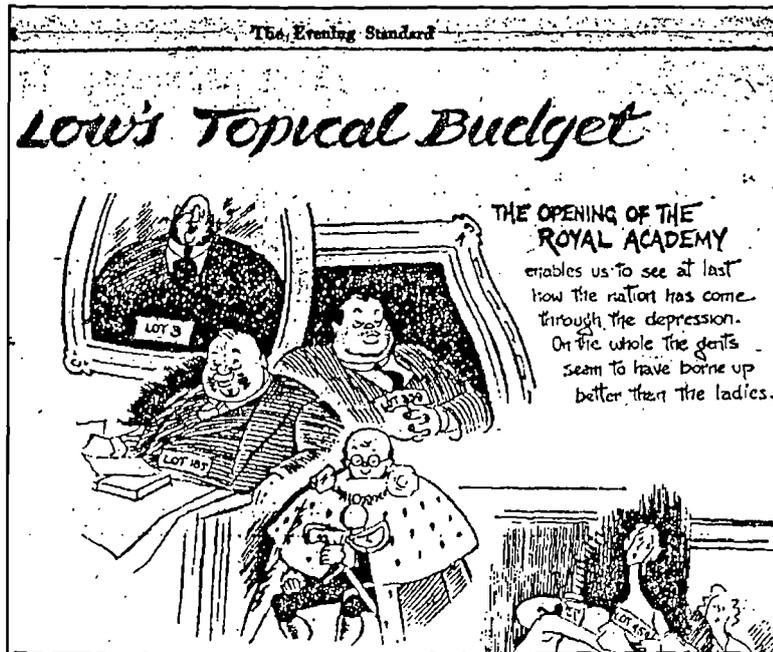
'I was surprised to hear that despite my having made the modifications we agreed upon as sufficient, the cartoon APPLICANTS FOR THE JOB is still considered unsuitable for publication in the *Evening Standard*... I am more deeply perturbed to hear that the cartoon is still objectionable because it might displease Lord Rothermere. I cannot think this is because it bears any personal reflection, because so far as he is concerned it is completely impersonal. His Blackshirt announcement was an event of first-class importance, headlined in the newspapers, talked of everywhere and cartooned at home and abroad. If my cartoon were published now it would be at the tail of the procession instead of at the head where it might have been.

I should like to clarify this matter by asking if it is to be understood in future that not only (A) Lord Rothermere himself, but also (B) his newspapers, and (C) his Blackshirt policy are to be taboo subjects? To me the Blackshirt business seems to be a definite addition to the local political scene and I do not see how it will be possible to keep it out of cartoons now and then in the future. Certainly I think to pretend it does not exist would stultify me as a cartoonist and cause certain inferences to be drawn harmful to my reputation as a cartoonist of independent views. If the answer to the question above is to be yes, I do not see how I am to continue drawing cartoons for the *EVENING STANDARD*.<sup>32</sup>

The cartoons that appeared in the *Evening Standard* over the next few months showed that the answer to the above question was yes, but Low did not resign. Apart from an unrecognisable Rothermere as a nanny in the cartoon that followed, Rothermere or references to him were avoided by Low whenever he focused on Mosley and the Black-shirts. However, Beaverbrook was more than happy for Low to attack Mosley himself, as it

<sup>31</sup> Low's cartoon after 'APPLICANTS FOR THE JOB' referred only to the *Daily Shirt*, leaving off the 'tail'.

<sup>32</sup> David Low to Michael Wardell, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1934, Low Papers, University of Kent.



did not damage the circulation of the *Evening Standard*, and the *Daily Mail* was in fact losing circulation because of its support for Mosley.<sup>33</sup> Low did draw the odd cartoon in which Rothermere appeared, but they were very innocuous efforts which Beaverbrook, now in full control of the *Evening Standard*, appeared to enjoy. An appearance by

Rothermere in a 'Topical Budget' dated 5<sup>th</sup> May 1934 seemed to impress Beaverbrook greatly. In a letter to his cartoonist he wrote:

'I'm off to France. Before leaving I'd given instructions to send me the Saturday *Evening Standard* with your page. And may I say that there never was a better page of cartoons than the ES page of last Saturday. You are the most talented man of genius, and so few men of genius have talent.'<sup>34</sup>

Rothermere eventually lost interest in the Black shirts, but his enthusiasm for Hitler did not dim until the outbreak of war in 1939. However, Low now left Rothermere well alone. On the only other occasion in which Rothermere again appears in a Low cartoon,



"WHAT MAKES MY BLOOD BOIL AT THE REDS IS THAT THEY'RE ANTI-CHRISTIAN",<sup>35</sup> he is not referred to by name and is standing with his back towards the viewer, presumably so that he cannot be instantly recognised.

<sup>33</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 366.

<sup>34</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1934, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>35</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1936.

## Lord Birkenhead

‘The victims of Low have not all exhibited the same pleasure. It is said that the late Lord Birkenhead felt far from happy on seeing his features (and cigar) repeatedly in Low’s distorting mirror.’<sup>36</sup>

‘I resent the kind of attack made on Lord Birkenhead as lowering to the standard of British journalism. I would never tolerate in any newspaper of mine the slightest aspersion on the character of a public opponent – man or women.’<sup>37</sup>  
(Beaverbrook)

F.E. Smith, who became Lord Birkenhead in 1919 was, along with Winston Churchill, one of Beaverbrook’s most intimate friends. Birkenhead’s rise to prominence in the political/legal world had been swift. The man Beaverbrook called ‘the cleverest man in the



Above. This is the way Low depicted Rothermere and Birkenhead whilst at the *Star*.

kingdom’ became Attorney General in 1915, and then in 1919 the youngest Lord Chancellor since Judge Jeffreys. As with Churchill, Beaverbrook’s friendship with Birkenhead was also an uncertain one, which had its predictable ups and downs. According to a recent biography of Birkenhead by John Campbell, ‘their relationship had always been a prickly one, subject to suspicion and to sudden quarrels’.<sup>38</sup>

By the time Low joined the *Evening Standard* in 1927, their relationship had suffered from a rift in April of that year.

Birkenhead and Beaverbrook had in any case been seeing less of each other by the late 1920s, because the former had become Secretary of State for India in 1924, and a loyal member of Baldwin’s Government. Birkenhead had also become increasingly upset over Beaverbrook’s failure to support the government in his newspapers, and in 1929 openly blamed Beaverbrook for the Tory Party’s election defeat. Low’s own role, therefore, as

<sup>36</sup> Robert Lynd, article and date unidentifiable, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>37</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and The Press*, Hutchinson, 1926, Page 104.

<sup>38</sup> John Campbell, *F.E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead*, Pimlico, 1991, Page 697.

political cartoonist for one of Beaverbrook's newspapers, would not have escaped Birkenhead's attention, especially when he found he was often appearing in Low's cartoons. If anyone ever bore a grudge against a cartoonist it was indeed Birkenhead. He was the only prominent British politician to have ever really despised Low for the way he caricatured him. Unlike most other politicians, Birkenhead took it as a personal attack. Winston Churchill had noticed this as early as the 1924 General Election:

'Now look at his [Low] cartoon dealing with the election of 1924. There is not a figure in it that is not instinct with maliciously-perceived truth. Really it is a masterpiece. When it appeared in the *Star* I was so tickled with it that I wrote and offered to purchase it. So they sent it me as a handsome gift. I showed it to Lord Birkenhead. He had not seen it before. I said cheerfully: "It's astonishing how like you are to your cartoons." F.E. took up the picture, all beautifully framed, and gazed at it pensively, rather a solemn look coming over the grave and charming lines of his face, and handed it back to me with the remark: "You seem to be the only one flattered." I thought this very good.

Afterwards he [Birkenhead] began to resent Low's cartoons of him. Certainly the loathing and contempt which our Australian radical put into his pencil were obvious; and when the cartoons extended to deriding the entire Smith family without respect of age or sex, he had good grounds for complaint. He never forgave the insults.'<sup>39</sup>

Birkenhead must therefore have felt let down by his so-called friend, when Beaverbrook went and employed Low's services in 1927. To him such an action seemed inconsistent with friendship. Low continued to include Birkenhead in his cartoons at the *Evening Standard*, which must have added to the distrust the latter felt about the way Beaverbrook used his papers not only to disloyally attack the government, but also to have fun at his own friends' expense, as Winston Churchill had also noticed:

'Winston likes Max, but resents the way in which, through his power in the Press, he digs his friends in the back.'<sup>40</sup>

It was not long until Birkenhead made his feelings about Low plain to Beaverbrook, obviously unhappy with the way the cartoonist was portraying him. In fact, he even sent

<sup>39</sup> Winston Churchill, *Thoughts and Adventures*, Odhams, 1932, Page 16.

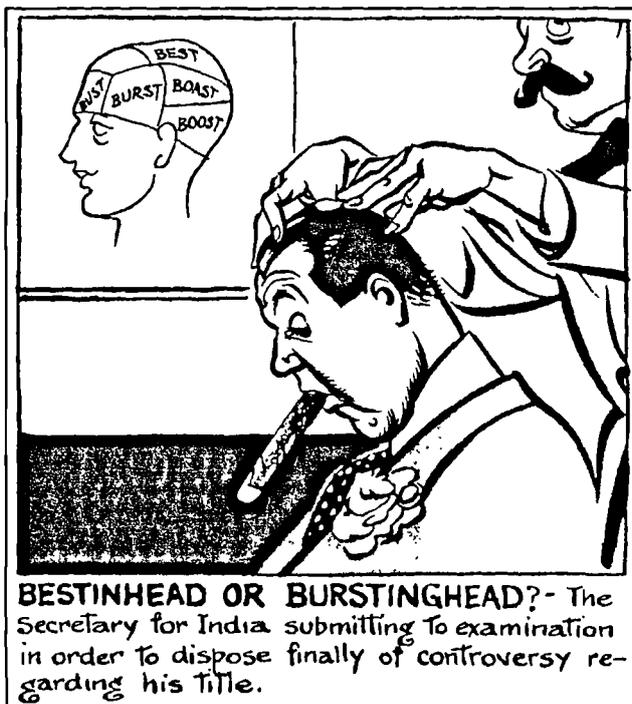
<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 237.

Low a photograph of himself so as to show him what he really looked like. According to Low:

‘Lord Birkenhead, on the other hand, showed some resentment, which was rather odd, considering that he himself was a master of invective who did not scruple to deliver the most bitter and cutting wit at anybody’s expense. He gave Beaverbrook a beautiful photograph of himself to pass on to me as a guide to his own personal configuration, from which might be deduced a considerable susceptibility to flattery.’<sup>41</sup>

Low loved to shoot down self-opinionated politicians, especially those who seemed to suffer from an over-inflated ego. Birkenhead was therefore a perfect model because of his conceited genius. For he not only let others be fully aware of it, but also used it as a weapon to attack his political foes. Low, consequently, tried to convey this in his caricature of Birkenhead: ‘[I] never sought to conceal the possession of superior brains by rechristening him “Lord Burstinghead”.’<sup>42</sup>

After the first few cartoons featuring Burstinghead, a number of letters were published in the paper, no doubt from the victim’s friends and admirers, stating how unjust Low was being in calling Birkenhead by that name. The paper even published the story that a number of these people had requested that Low rename him with what they saw as a more apt description, Lord Best-in-head. Birkenhead for the first and last time, appeared to approve



of being re-named Best-in-head. For, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1928, Low asked the question in his cartoon “THE NEWS IN PICTURES”<sup>43</sup>, ‘BESTINHEAD OR BURSTINGHEAD?’ On that very same day, Birkenhead wrote to Beaverbrook thanking him ‘for the growing and friendly refinement of your Radical cartoonist.’<sup>44</sup> It was the last time that Birkenhead spoke in such terms about Low, who continued to refer to him as Burstinghead in future cartoons.

<sup>41</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 186.

<sup>42</sup> David Low, *Ye Madde Designer*, Studio, 1935, Page 29.

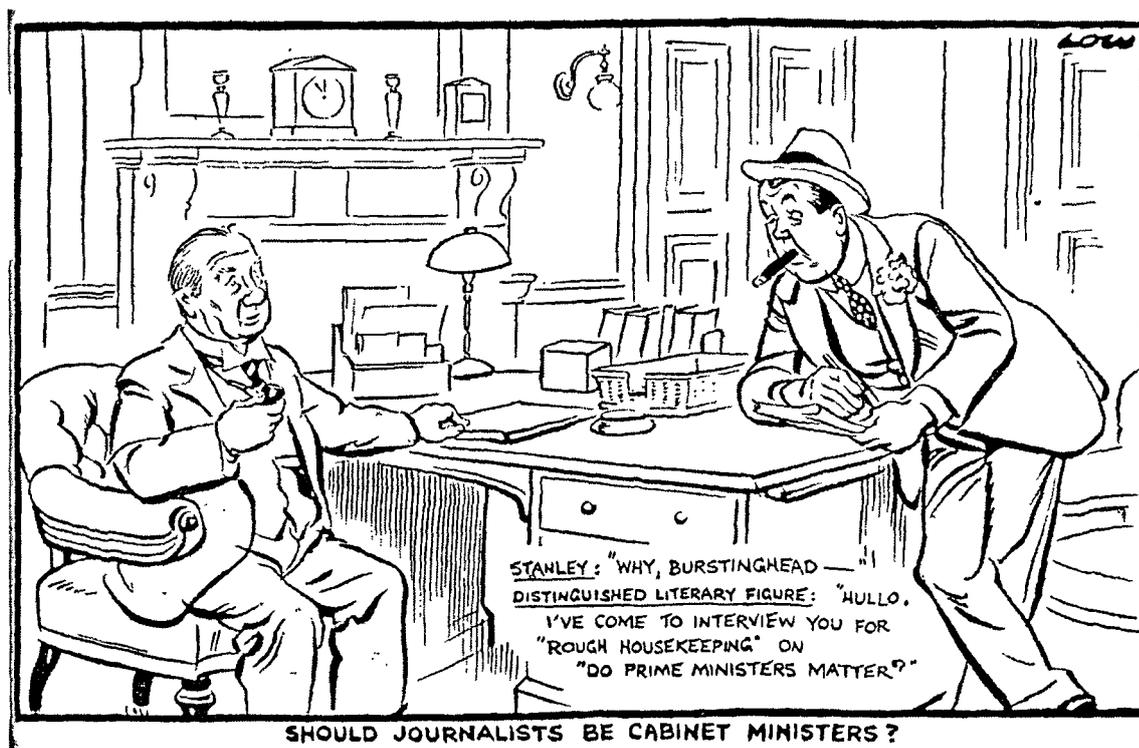
<sup>43</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1928.

<sup>44</sup> F.E. Smith to Lord Beaverbrook, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1928, Beaverbrook Archives.

According to John Campbell, Birkenhead became increasingly 'infuriated by Low's cartoons of himself as "Lord Burstinghead" which Beaverbrook, showing a lack of proprietorial control inconsistent with F.E.'s idea of friendship, permitted to be published in the *Evening Standard*.'<sup>45</sup>

Apart from Churchill, there were others who also believed that Low appeared to 'hit below the belt' as far as his depiction of Birkenhead was concerned. At about the time Low joined the *Evening Standard*, Birkenhead had begun to spend an increasing amount of time writing articles for newspapers and periodicals, even though he was Secretary of State for India. A number of his articles which appeared in *Good Housekeeping* were considered to be a violation of the pledge given by Baldwin to stop Government Ministers from contributing to current journalism while in office. In the House of Commons Baldwin had to defend Birkenhead, and in his defence stated that the latter had intended his articles to appear later in book form which would, as a result, make them literature and not current journalism.<sup>46</sup> As a consequence, Low drew 'SHOULD JOURNALISTS BE CABINET MINISTERS?'<sup>47</sup> The *Beckenham Journal* found the cartoon amusing but rather cruel on Birkenhead:

'I cannot recall in any daily journal a cartoon so daring as that which appeared on Monday in the *Evening Standard*. The portraiture of Lord Birkenhead as the interviewer of the Prime Minister was very funny, and yet it seemed brutal in its characteristics. David Low was using a heavy bludgeon...'<sup>48</sup>



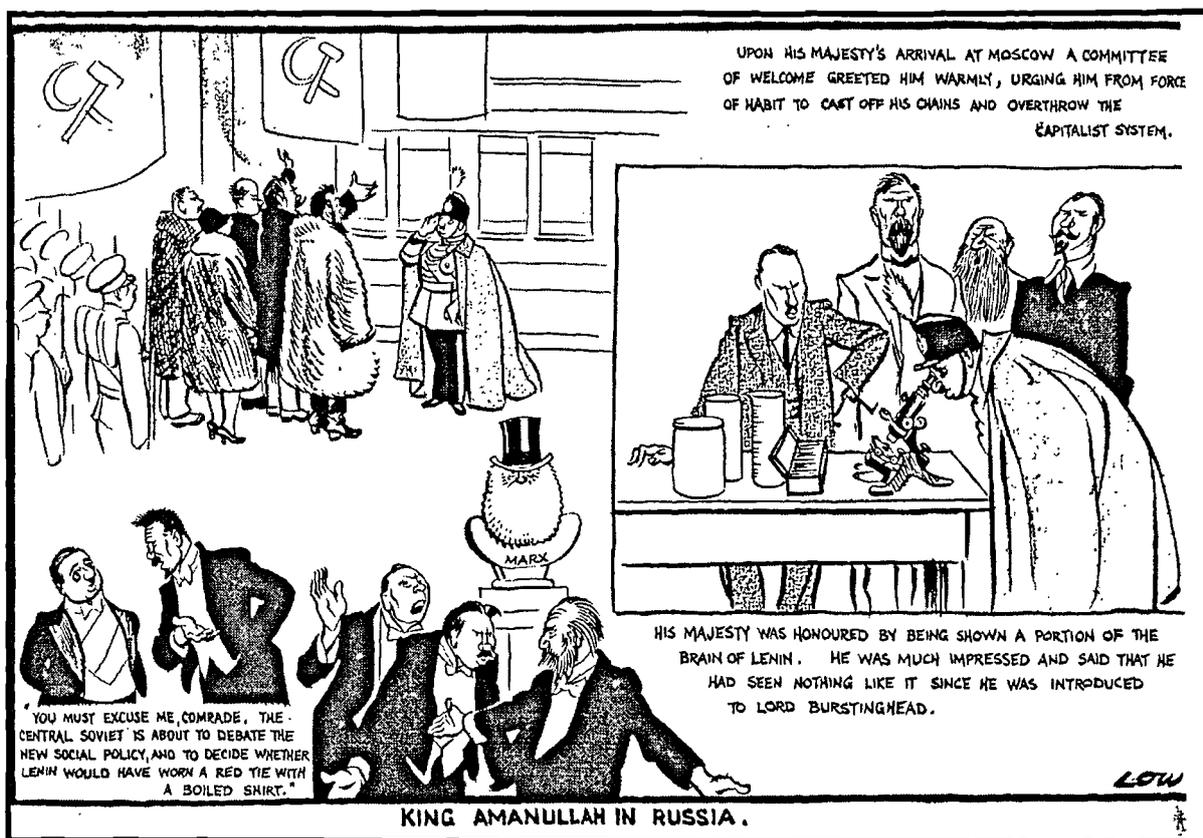
<sup>45</sup> John Campbell, *F.E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead*, Pimlico, 1991, Page 698

<sup>46</sup> David Low, *The Best of Low*, Jonathan Cape, 1928, Page 49.

<sup>47</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1928.

There only seemed to be one occasion when Beaverbrook felt that Low had gone too far. Incredibly it did not relate to a caricature of Birkenhead, but only to an allusion to him in the text of 'KING AMANULLAH IN RUSSIA'<sup>49</sup> which was the first Low cartoon ever to have been refused publication. Possibly the reference to having 'seen nothing like it since he was introduced to Lord Burstinghead' may have been seen as just bad taste.<sup>50</sup> King Amanullah of Afghanistan had been touring Europe and had met Birkenhead while visiting England. It had been the latter's responsibility to entertain the King. Birkenhead had arranged for Amanullah to receive an honorary degree from Oxford, as Birkenhead recalled:

'In case you have not seen it in the Press, I enclose a copy of the speech I delivered; the King made a short, and not very colourful reply in which he expressed his gratitude and his appreciation of the value of a visit to so renowned a centre of learning...'<sup>51</sup>



From England, Amanullah spent a fortnight in Russia in May 1928, where he was well received by the Soviet Government, as portrayed in Low's cartoon.

<sup>48</sup> *Beckenham Journal*, Penge, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1928, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>49</sup> Drawn in May 1928.

<sup>50</sup> Alternatively, it is also just as likely that the cartoon was refused publication because of its reference to the overthrow of the capitalist system, a taboo subject as discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>51</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Birkenhead, *F. E. Smith*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965, Page 517.

The animosity that Birkenhead felt for Low seemed to have reached its apex by June 1929, the month after the Tories had been defeated at the general election. Birkenhead's resentment began to spill over. In a letter to Beaverbrook he wrote:

'While during my political career you have often shown me great friendship and very valuable support, you have often caused me deep mortification and done me great injury. Your cartoonist over a long period of time published filthy and disgusting cartoons of me which were intended and calculated to do me great injury. He did not even spare my family after one of the most pleasant weekends which I have ever spent with you as your guest.'<sup>52</sup>

It may have been just the drink talking. Birkenhead was indeed a renowned alcoholic and by 1929 was consuming more alcohol than ever. He was to die from cirrhosis of the liver a year later, entirely due to his heavy drinking. In response to Birkenhead's wrath over Low, Beaverbrook felt that he was 'out of touch with the times' and held the view that 'a caricature cannot give good ground for complaint'.<sup>53</sup> Such words failed to pacify Birkenhead. His pent-up bitterness against Low can be clearly seen in the follow-up letter to Beaverbrook:

'As to your filthy cartoonist I care nothing about him now. But I know about modern caricature and I never had cause for grievance until you, a friend, allowed a filthy little Socialist to present me daily as a crapulous and corpulent buffoon.'<sup>54</sup>

Beverley Baxter seemed to think that Low had indeed hit below the belt as far as his treatment of Birkenhead had been concerned, and accused him of making fun of a great man in his decline:

'Low of the *Standard*, is a genius with his irony and his perfection of line, but he makes his victims squirm. There has been nothing more cruel in caricature than his treatment of Birkenhead in the declining years, when that statesman thought to extract the secret of living by taking from life instead of giving to it. Strube's hand cannot draw an unkind line.'<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> F.E. Smith to Lord Beaverbrook, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to F.E. Smith, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>54</sup> F.E. Smith to Lord Beaverbrook, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Beverley Baxter in 'Strange Street', *Great Thoughts*, November 1935, Low Papers, University of Kent.

## Lady Diana Cooper

One of Beaverbrook's most favoured female acquaintances was Lady Diana Cooper, daughter of the Duchess of Rutland and wife of the Tory politician Alfred Duff Cooper (later Viscount Norwich).<sup>56</sup> Diana Cooper and Beaverbrook had had a soft spot for each other since mixing in the same social circles during the First World War. Their friendship would go on to last almost fifty years. Beaverbrook was also to become godfather to John Julius Norwich (née Cooper), the Coopers' only child.<sup>57</sup> He, for his part, was captivated by her beauty and her 'adventurous spirit' while she, on the other hand, was attracted to him by what she saw as this 'strange attractive gnome with an odour of genius about him'.<sup>58</sup> Beaverbrook often supported Diana financially while regularly presenting her with lavish gifts. By all accounts, tears rolled down his face during the ceremony when she married Duff Cooper.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout their friendship, they wrote to each other in nothing but fulsome terms. For example, he wrote to her as 'My first and last love', or 'My beloved' and even 'My Lovie my dovey my duck and my dear'.<sup>60</sup> In turn, she responded by addressing him as 'Max darling'<sup>61</sup> and on another occasion more explicitly 'My darling I'll always love you'.<sup>62</sup> A.J.P. Taylor diplomatically called Diana Cooper one of Beaverbrook's 'closest friends'. Although Diana's son John Julius Norwich believed the relationship was close but purely platonic, Michael Foot believed that 'Beaverbrook had certainly had an affair with Diana Cooper'.<sup>63</sup>

Beaverbrook was extremely protective over Diana, especially regarding the reporting of her, or at times her husband, in his newspapers. 'Do you love your wife?' he was said to have asked a *Daily Express* journalist who had produced some anti-Duff Cooper copy: 'Well, I love Cooper's wife, so lay off him.'<sup>64</sup>

Alfred Duff Cooper and Beaverbrook did not like each other, and were at odds politically over Baldwin's leadership. When Diana asked Beaverbrook to support her husband in the 1929 election, he did so grudgingly. Express Newspapers consequently gave Duff Cooper an easy time even when his views were diametrically opposed to those of

<sup>56</sup> The Duke of Rutland was not Diana's father. She was conceived while he was abroad.

<sup>57</sup> John Julius Norwich to Timothy S. Benson, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 163.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, Page 165.

<sup>60</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Diana Cooper, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1932, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>61</sup> Diana Cooper to Lord Beaverbrook, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1932, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Diana Cooper to Lord Beaverbrook, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1937, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Foot and John Julius Norwich in discussion with Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Zeigler, *Diana Cooper*, Hamish Hamilton, 1981, Page 164.

Beaverbrook.<sup>65</sup> Duff Cooper was, however, unsuccessful, and had to wait for a by-election at St George's, Westminster, in 1931 for another chance to gain a seat in the House of Commons. Circumstances had by then changed, and Beaverbrook was fielding his own Empire Party candidate, Sir Ernest Petter, against Duff Cooper who was the official Tory one. Consequently, Express Newspapers took every opportunity to attack Duff Cooper, though they 'did not go overboard because of Beaverbrook's feelings for Diana'.<sup>66</sup>

Social class proved an important issue at St Georges, where there was a large deferential vote amongst the domestic staffs of Mayfair and Belgravia. Duff Cooper therefore tried to insist on the use of his full name as Mr Cooper v. Sir Ernest Petter did not quite help in giving the right impression to the electorate. The *Daily Express* had called him Mr A. Cooper. When he protested, the *Daily Express* unkindly said that 'the rejected member for Oldham took exception to the *Daily Express* referring to him as Mr A. Cooper'. At the time, Diana was probably better known in social, and some would have said political, circles than Duff was. Picking up on both issues, Low drew an apt cartoon entitled 'ARRIVAL OF ST GEORGE'.<sup>67</sup> Gilliat, concerned about the reference to 'Mr Diana Cooper', sent a copy of the cartoon to Beaverbrook:

'I enclose you cartoon by Low on the St George election for tomorrow's *Evening Standard*. I am not raising any query. There is perhaps, rather a bitter touch in the description "Mr Diana Cooper" but I think it is justified by being funny.'<sup>68</sup>



Above. From the original cartoon, with the words 'Mr. Diana Cooper' quite visible. Left. The published version with the omitted words.

<sup>65</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 266.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Zeigler, *Diana Cooper*, Hamish Hamilton, 1981, Page 172.

<sup>67</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* in its altered state on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1931.

<sup>68</sup> George Gilliat to Lord Beaverbrook, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1931, Beaverbrook Archives.

Unfortunately there is no evidence of Beaverbrook's response, but there seems little doubt, as the editor felt that the description was 'justified', that Beaverbrook personally ordered the words 'Mr Diana' be removed before publication, seeing it probably as a personal slight on Diana. Two weeks later, after Duff Cooper had won St. George's for the official Tory Party, Low drew 'A DAY OFF',<sup>69</sup> which featured an array of political personalities including a harmless caricature of Duff and Diana Cooper with their baby son, John Julius. Diana immediately fell in love with the cartoon and wrote to R.D. Blumenfeld, then Editor of the *Daily Express*, requesting it. Blumenfeld then wrote to Low on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1931:

'Lady Diana Cooper tells me that she is dying to possess the original of your cartoon last Saturday in which her baby appears. She has asked me if I will plead with you to send it.'<sup>70</sup>

Low's response would not have been what Blumenfeld would normally have expected. Apart from Duff Cooper, who had been making derogatory remarks about him in public, Low may have still been smarting from having had his cartoon of the politician altered, probably without his say-so. In a somewhat begrudging tone, Low replied to Blumenfeld's request:

'Dear Mr Blumenfeld,

With reference to the cartoon original desired by Lady Diana Cooper; I am delighted, as you know, to oblige you in any way, but in this instance my enthusiasm for the proposed presentation is dimmed by the knowledge that Mr. Duff Cooper recently characterised some of my work as 'offensively vulgar' from a public platform. But, since the request has not come to me directly, so to speak, I will communicate with Mr. Gilliat, who will probably send it discreetly (without my compliments).'<sup>71</sup>

In May 1936, Low drew a cartoon entitled 'THE PRICE OF "SOUND" GOVERNMENT',<sup>72</sup> which appeared unaltered in the first edition of the *Evening Standard* with a depiction of Diana Cooper on an army recruitment poster. Duff Cooper was at the time Minister of War, and the slogan 'Lady Diana calls YOU' leaves no one in doubt as to who the figure is. Those who purchased later editions of that day's evening paper found that Diana had been

<sup>69</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1931.

<sup>70</sup> R.D. Blumenfeld to David Low, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1931, Low Papers, British Library.

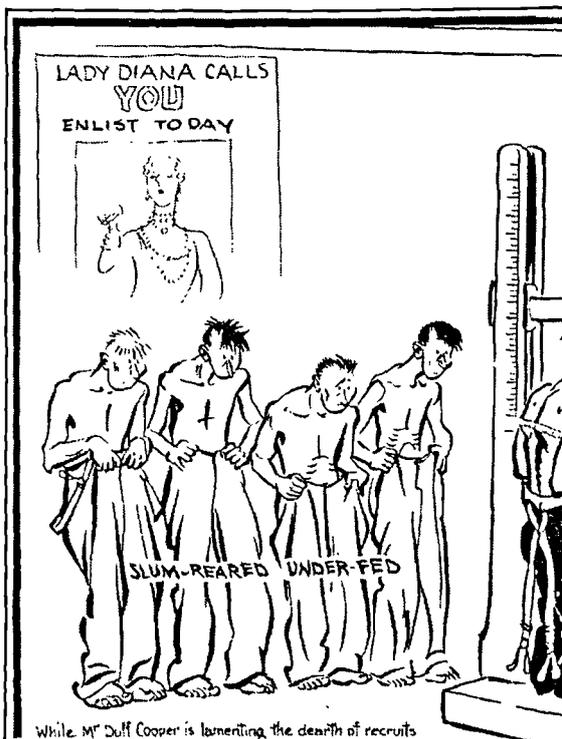
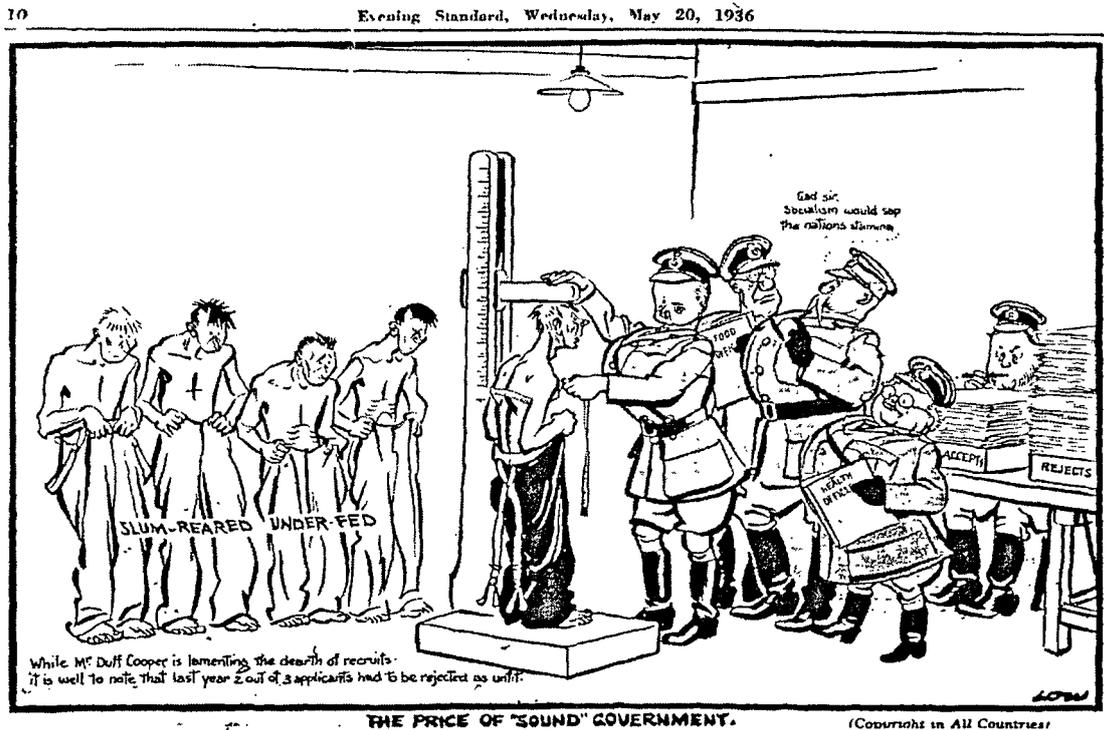
<sup>71</sup> David Low to R.D. Blumenfeld, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1931, Low Papers, British Library.

<sup>72</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1936.

omitted from the cartoon. Who would have sanctioned such an action at the paper? As it only appeared in the first edition, it could only have been Beaverbrook, whose feelings for Diana may have led him into thinking that such a depiction of her was unacceptable. An eagle-eyed *New York Herald* picked up on what had happened. The next day, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1936, it reported that:

‘London Newspaper Censors, Deletes Low’s Caricature of Lady Duff Cooper’.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> May, the *Newspaper World* also noticed Diana’s disappearance from Low’s cartoon, whilst thinking Low’s ‘entire idea was cheap’. This could well be how Beaverbrook had perceived it.



*Above.* The published version with Lady Diana omitted. *Left.* The portion of the original artwork with the offending poster of Lady Diana in it.

## IV. Low, Appeasement and the Second World War

### Appeasement

‘The League of Nations is now a greater danger to peace than the armament makers... Tear up the ballot paper. Throw the pieces in the waste-paper basket. Turn away from Europe. Stand by the Empire and Splendid Isolation.’<sup>1</sup> (The *Daily Express*’s verdict on the peace ballot in 1934)

‘His craftsmanship is undoubtedly great, but he is a man without love, without admiration, without enthusiasm, without forbearance. A dangerous, obstinate, adversary... It is needless to add that Low is not one of Germany’s friends.’<sup>2</sup> (The *Westdeutscher Beobachter*)

Low is probably best remembered today for the way he mercilessly made fun of the dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, in his cartoons during the 1930s. History has recorded that Low was the cartoonist who most got under the dictators’ skin. His strong determination to oppose them from the moment they rose to power seemed to set him apart from his contemporaries. Michael Foot, who was Acting Editor on the *Evening Standard* during the late 1930s, felt that Low’s attacks on the dictators met with considerable success:

‘Low contributed more than any other single figure and as a result changed the atmosphere in the way people saw Hitler and Mussolini. Other cartoonists did not have such a long-standing record.’<sup>3</sup>

The *Evening Standard* was duly prohibited, alongside other British newspapers, in both Italy and Germany for daring to ridicule or point a critical eye at Mussolini and Hitler. However, although Low directly got the *Evening Standard* banned, it is highly unlikely that this would have troubled Beaverbrook, as any ban in these countries would not have had any direct effect on circulation figures. In fact, as was the normal practice of the *Evening Standard*, far from being disheartened, it made much capital out of the ban by developing a storm of controversy around any offending cartoons. This had often been done earlier as a

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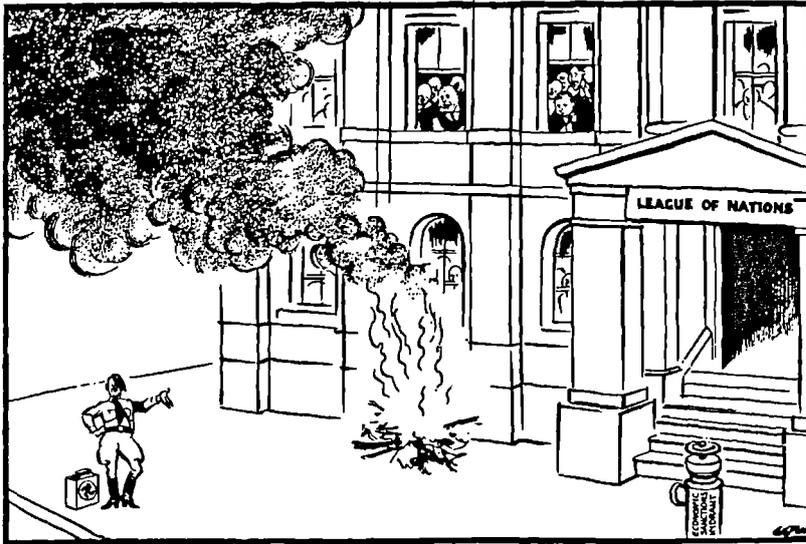
<sup>1</sup> *Daily Express*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by the London correspondent of the *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

publicity stunt on the occasions when Low produced a cartoon that some readers found disreputable, as the cartoonist recalled in his autobiography:

‘The *Evening Standard* published the creme of the letters intermittently and at such length as the circumstances of the day demanded. After all, the management had an investment to protect and publicise. I played up and answered back in both cartoons and prose.’<sup>4</sup>



The cartoon that got the paper banned in Germany was a response by Low to Germany’s decision to withdraw from the League of Nations. Letters were invited from readers both for and against, and these were then published under the heading ‘Readers’

Opinions on Low and his Hitler Cartoons’:

‘Further selections from letters to the Editor of the *Evening Standard*. The controversy was aroused by the cartoon depicting Herr Hitler standing near a bonfire outside the League of Nations building with the inscription: “It worked at the Reichstag - why not here”?’<sup>5</sup>



Two years later, a cartoon entitled ‘THE GIRLS HE LEFT BEHIND HIM’,<sup>6</sup> which suggested that ‘Hitler wanted Mussolini involved in the Abyssinian gamble so that he, Hitler, would then be free to appropriate

<sup>4</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 185.

<sup>5</sup> *Evening Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1933.

<sup>6</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1935.

Austria, which would have brought him altogether too close to Italy for comfort',<sup>7</sup> led to the *Evening Standard* being banned also in Italy:

'We are informed that the circulation of the *Manchester Guardian* and the London *Evening Standard* has been prohibited in Italy. The reason for the prohibition, it is understood, is Low's cartoon which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* of May 11<sup>th</sup>.'<sup>8</sup>

Low acknowledged that the banning of his cartoons in Germany and Italy did 'more good than harm' to his reputation within Britain and the rest of the world.<sup>9</sup> After Beaverbrook had travelled to Germany in order to get the ban on all his newspapers lifted, the Nazis told him that the *Evening Standard* would remain banned as long as Low was its cartoonist. According to the *Morning Post*:

'Shortly after Lord Beaverbrook had left Berlin yesterday it was announced that the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Express* might be sold again in Germany. The two newspapers were banned indefinitely with the *Evening Standard* 18 months ago. The *Evening Standard* apparently, is to be further prohibited, probably because of Low's cartoons.'<sup>10</sup>

In 1937, the Nazis even tried to put pressure on the British Government to restrain Low from portraying Hitler in his cartoons. After the war, it became public knowledge that Low's name had been placed on the Nazi death-list.<sup>11</sup> Should the Germans have ever succeeded in invading Britain, Low's chances of survival would have been slim. Such circumstances helped to bolster Low's reputation as an independent operator, especially when it was well-known that he worked for a proprietor who gave the impression that he was not only an admirer of Hitler's so-called achievements in Germany, but also a staunch supporter of Chamberlain's Appeasement policy.

<sup>7</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 253.

<sup>8</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1935. By some coincidence, in the same month, a Will Dyson cartoon also got the *Daily Herald* banned in Italy.

<sup>9</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 277.

<sup>10</sup> *Morning Post*, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1935, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>11</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1945.

## Beaverbrook and the Nazis

‘Britain will not be involved in war. There will be no major war in Europe this year or next year... Provide us with aeroplanes, anti-aircraft guns, and ammunition.’<sup>12</sup> (*Daily Express* headline, 1938)

With Beaverbrook demanding Britain’s isolation from European entanglements during the late 1930s whilst at the same time running a full-scale campaign in support of Appeasement in the *Daily Express*, it seemed on the face of it unlikely that he would have allowed Low to ridicule those very same beliefs in his cartoons. The fact that Beaverbrook seemed to allow Low continually to do so, surely showed the *Evening Standard* readership the degree of freedom to which the cartoonist had been given over his work. Low has stated that his cartoons of the dictators ‘hardly fitted the Beaverbrook line, but went into the paper without a word, except after publication’.<sup>13</sup> The evidence on numerous occasions, as will be seen, often told a conflicting story.

Beaverbrook disliked the idea of war as much as Low probably did, but neither of them were pacifists. Beaverbrook’s reasons for wanting to remain outside any future European conflict were clearly logical, especially from his own vantage-point. For example, take into account that Beaverbrook remembered seeing Canadians dying in Flanders during the First World War, and the fact that his two sons were both of fighting age, one of them a pilot in the RAF Volunteer Reserve, and the other in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and would most likely have been called up immediately if war did come.<sup>14</sup> Finally, and probably most importantly, Beaverbrook was aware that Britain was at the time unprepared for war, and as a consequence he became a strong advocate through his newspapers for rapid rearmament:

‘With the policy of isolation there comes the need for adequate defences... The price for our safety will be high. We should prepare to pay it.’<sup>15</sup>

Beaverbrook, therefore, believed that if Britain had to go to war, it should be from a position of strength, not weakness. As the country was in a state of military weakness, he felt that Britain should avoid a European war at all costs. Although his belief in isolation

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Express*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1938.

<sup>13</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 280.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 243.

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Express*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1938.

rather than in the policy of collective security seemed to contradict such a belief, one should take into account that alliances with other European states such as Russia, Poland, or France, as it was to prove, were seen by Beaverbrook as more of a burden than a blessing if Britain ended up at war with Germany. He had been consistently critical of successive Prime Ministers, i.e. MacDonald and Baldwin, who he felt had left the British Army unequipped for war and in need of rapid modernisation. At the time, Beaverbrook's belief in making the country strong enough to defend itself and the Empire whilst remaining in isolation, probably appeared more sensible than those on the Left in politics who believed in Collective Security while opposing both increased expenditure on armaments and the introduction of conscription.

So here, as well as with his calls for rearmament, were the reasons why Beaverbrook was so intent on giving his full support to Chamberlain in his efforts in appeasing Hitler. It is, as a consequence, not surprising that Beaverbrook's main organ, the *Daily Express*, appeared sympathetic to both Hitler and the Nazis. Beaverbrook's visit to the Olympic Games in 1936, where Germany's Ambassador to London, Von Ribbentrop, openly courted him, appeared to give the impression that Beaverbrook was, or could be, a good and useful friend to Germany. The reality of the situation was not what it seemed. According to A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook's dislike of the dictators was second only to his dislike of war.<sup>16</sup> He maintained his belief in democratic ideals and thus had little sympathy for totalitarianism, either at home or abroad. As early as September 1934, when Mosley proposed the idea of himself as a Fascist leader of Britain, Beaverbrook wrote:

'The Fascists attack Parliament and mean to destroy it if they get to power. I am Parliament man. An alliance with Fascism would be an unholy alliance.'<sup>17</sup>

Although an admirer of the Third Reich, Beaverbrook was also well aware of the nefarious nature of Hitler's regime, especially its lack of religious toleration:

'I am pro-German. I had hoped for much from Hitler. But he's a persecutor.'<sup>18</sup>

'I am opposed to the Germans on account of the Calvinists and the Jews. Particularly the Calvinists for I am a Calvinist myself.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 378.

<sup>17</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> September 1934. A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 329.

<sup>18</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> July 1933. Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 323.

<sup>19</sup> September 1935, Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 324.

With respect to the persecution of the Jews, Lilly Ernst, a Jewish refugee from Nazi-occupied Austria with whom Beaverbrook was having a relationship, made him fully aware of the plight of Austrian and German Jews. As a consequence, he encouraged Michael Foot to write long articles in the *Daily Express* backing the Jewish cause. As the 1930s wore on, Bruce Lockhart noted that Beaverbrook became 'solidly, fanatically, anti-Hitler', and at times referred to Hitler as 'Al Capone and to the Nazis as gangsters'.<sup>20</sup> Such an attitude was being reflected in his newspapers, as Sir Samuel Hoare noted in a letter to Beaverbrook in July 1934:

'I feel I must write this line to tell you how much I have admired the way in which the *Express*, the *Sunday Express* and the *Standard* have dealt with Hitler and the German gangsters. From what I hear, the disclosures of your correspondent in Berlin have made a great impression in Germany and Hitler and his crowd were considerably disquieted by them. All this ought to react very badly upon Mosley and his ridiculous business here.'<sup>21</sup>

Compared to other dignitaries, Beaverbrook, although picked out by Ribbentrop for special treatment, always kept his distance from the Nazis. At the 1936 Olympic Games, Beaverbrook felt uneasy and did not take kindly to the pressure exerted by his German hosts, as he knew too much about manipulation to enjoy being the subject of it.<sup>22</sup> This was one of the reasons why he tried to deter the Duke and Duchess of Windsor from visiting Hitler in 1937, in what turned out to be a propaganda coup for the Nazis. Beaverbrook, as a newspaperman, must have also found the total lack of freedom in the German Press, whose newspapers were themselves no more than propaganda sheets for the Nazis, disquieting. Two months after the Olympics, Beaverbrook wrote to Lloyd George:

'I went there too, but I hated so much the regimentation of opinion that I could not bear it.'<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence, Beaverbrook only attended the opening ceremony and left Germany shortly afterwards. He published nothing about his visit or on the Games themselves. Even the coverage of his visit in the *Daily Express* was sparse, the paper instead concentrating almost entirely on the sporting events. Harold Nicolson noticed that Beaverbrook's visit to Germany had had a negative effect on him:

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 299.

<sup>21</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare to Lord Beaverbrook, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1934, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 332.

<sup>23</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Lloyd George, undated circa 1936, Beaverbrook Archives.

'The curious thing is that his recent visits to Germany have convinced him that Hitler really means business and have thereby rendered him almost pro-French'.<sup>24</sup>

Although Beaverbrook consistently supported the Government's attempts to appease Hitler from 1937 onwards, he did allow other journalists and editors, apart from Low, to attack the Nazis in his papers. And although the *Daily Express* was instructed to play down the threat of war ('No War Talk. NO WAR TALK', read one telegram from Beaverbrook to Christiansen during that period),<sup>25</sup> the *Sunday Express* and the *Evening Standard* were generally free to express their own opinions on the subject. The Editor of the *Sunday Express* at the time, John Gordon, detested Hitler and the Nazis. As a result, the *Sunday Express* adopted a traditional patriotic hostility to Germany, with little or no interference from Beaverbrook. The same went for the *Evening Standard*, where first Percy Cudlipp urged a popular front against Hitler, and when he left to go to the *Daily Herald*, Frank Owen took over and continued the anti-Nazi line.<sup>26</sup> Beaverbrook occasionally tried to restrain him, but Owen appeared to take little notice. For example, Owen ignored a note from his proprietor to tone down attacks on Ribbentrop in June 1938.<sup>27</sup> Owen was even allowed a leader supporting the League of Nations sanctions over Italy's occupation of Abyssinia, which would have been much to Beaverbrook's chagrin.

Frank Owen also wrote several articles on Hitler's regime, in which he continually portrayed the Nazis as murderous gangsters. One of these articles, entitled 'A Night of the Long Knives', was commended by Beaverbrook as 'a most brilliant, illuminating and savage article attacking Hitler and his associates'.<sup>28</sup> And a serial by Owen on Hitler's *Mein Kampf* helped sales of the *Evening Standard* soar, no doubt to Beaverbrook's delight, as Hitler's name sold papers. Thus, Low's cartoons ridiculing Hitler and other leading Nazis were not at all out of line with the anti-Nazi path the *Evening Standard* was taking, and were also probably considered to be contributing to increased circulation figures.

A prime example of how Low's work complemented the editorial line during this period can be seen in relation to the Spanish Civil War. Low's cartoons on the conflict are firmly supportive of the Republican cause while hostile to Franco and the Nationalists. Those readers of the *Evening Standard* holding right-wing views, and they were presumably in the majority, were no doubt horrified by what they would have seen as such pro-Communist sentiments. How could a Tory Press Lord allow such a thing? In fact

<sup>24</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, Page 309.

<sup>25</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, Routledge, 1988, Page 49.

<sup>26</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, Routledge, 1988, Page 49.

<sup>27</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *The Encyclopaedia of the British Press 1422-1992*, Macmillan, 1992, Page 450.

Beaverbrook did not care which side won in Spain, and even more surprisingly, his own son, Max, spent most of the conflict delivering war-planes to the Republican forces. As a consequence, Frank Owen was also allowed to support the idea of British pro-Republican intervention in direct opposition to Government policy. Owen recalled later the freedom he was given by Beaverbrook in his coverage of the Spanish Civil War:

‘I asked to go to Spain and report on what I saw. When I did that, Beaverbrook printed it and it was certainly no plea for non-intervention.’<sup>29</sup>

Even in the *Daily Express*, certain foreign correspondents such as Geoffrey Cox were allowed to follow an independent line. Cox, who had joined the paper to cover Europe in the summer of 1937, saw Hitler as both dangerous and evil. His anti-Nazi reports from Vienna and Prague were printed in the *Daily Express* unchanged.<sup>30</sup> In November 1938, *Time* magazine reported that when Beaverbrook polled the *Daily Express* staff in order to find out whether they agreed with his policies on Appeasement and isolationism, the answer was ‘almost unanimously NO’.<sup>31</sup> Low was, therefore, not alone in being given the freedom to attack and ridicule the Nazis by Beaverbrook during the late 1930s. Even so, why was it Low’s cartoons in the *Evening Standard* which appeared to cause the most trouble for Beaverbrook with regard to Anglo-German relations?<sup>32</sup> News stories or editorials that were critical of the Nazis were one thing, but challenging them in pictures was quite another. Thus it may have had something to do with what Cudlipp said about peoples’ tempers being more inflamed ‘by a cartoon than by any letterpress’.<sup>33</sup>

There might have been other, more sophisticated reasons why Beaverbrook allowed Low continually to deride the dictators. Could it have had something to do with the way the cartoonist depicted Hitler (and to a lesser extent Mussolini) in the *Evening Standard* that generally made Beaverbrook feel that protests over such cartoons were unjustified? Low personally felt he was far more effective in undermining Hitler and Mussolini by portraying them as harmless fools or, as A.J.P. Taylor has said, ‘comic devils’, than as wicked or frightening monsters, as he pointed out in 1940:

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<sup>28</sup> Gron Williams, *Firebrand*, Square One Publications, 1993, Page 44.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 355.

<sup>31</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 243.

<sup>32</sup> As regards Anglo-Italian relations, there is absolutely no evidence to show that the British Government, Beaverbrook, or the editor of the *Evening Standard* ever showed their concern or disapproval over Low’s caricaturing of Mussolini. Hitler and the Nazis were a different kettle of fish, even though the *Evening Standard* was banned in Italy because of a Low cartoon, and the Italian Embassy complained to Low personally about his imaginary cartoon dog being called Musso.

<sup>33</sup> Percy Cudlipp to David Low, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

'No dictator is inconvenienced or even displeased by cartoons showing his terrible person stalking through blood and mud. That is the kind of idea about himself that a power-seeking world-beater would want to propagate. It not only feeds his vanity, but unfortunately it shows profitable returns in an awed world. What he does not want to get around is the idea that he is an ass, which is really damaging. I shall always remember Hitler, for instance, not as the majestic, monstrous myth of his propaganda build-up, but as the sissy who whined to the British Foreign Office about his dignity when I ran him for a while as a comic strip.'<sup>34</sup>

By depicting Hitler and Mussolini as figures of fun, Low may have inadvertently, to Beaverbrook's possible relief, made them appear less threatening to those that saw them in his cartoons, compared to, say, other left-wing cartoonists. By doing so, Low may have possibly dissipated the real threat the dictators' offered to the peace of Europe, thus proving counter-productive, as Beaverbrook may have appreciated. Such a theory is very much on the lines of what W.A. Coupe (in his 'Observation's on a Theory of Political Caricature' in 1969) believed to have been the case, especially apropos Low's treatment of the dictators in the 1930s:

'Far from tearing the mask from public figures and holding up a warning finger to the reader, the tendency is to represent serious political problems in humorous allegorical guise and to invite us to laugh at our political predicaments, thereby in a way robbing them of their reality, or at least cocooning us from the horror in a web of gallows' humour... Sir David Low's hatred of fascism is beyond doubt, yet the "Hit and Muss" cartoons of the thirties, in which he so often showed Hitler as a ludicrous, posturing and vain little fellow attended by a distinctly slow-witted, bruiser-like Mussolini, certainly did not strike alarm and despondency into his readers. Quite the contrary! In spite of his unimpeachable intentions, by showing the fascist dictators as political equivalents of the many humorous couples of popular mythology (Mutt and Jeff, Pat and Mick etc.), he probably contributed to the conviction that it "couldn't happen here". Such absurd little men surely could not constitute a serious political threat!'<sup>35</sup>

If Beaverbrook did perceive Low's cartoons of Hitler and Mussolini in this way, then one can see why, to a proprietor in support of Appeasement, such caricature would have

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<sup>34</sup> David Low, 'The Cartoonist in War', *Lilliput*, circa 1940, Low Papers, University of Kent.

been beneficial, and not harmful, to the cause. Even so, there were numerous occasions when Low appeared to change either his tack with reference to his treatment of Hitler, or continued to focus on the Nazis at a time deemed inappropriate by the editor, presumably in consultation with Beaverbrook. The first documented incident where Low was asked to tone down his depiction of the Nazis was during the period of the Berlin Olympics in July 1936. This may also have been directly due to Beaverbrook's visit to the Games, with Beaverbrook not wanting Low's cartoons to affect his personal relations with the Nazis whilst in Germany. The Assistant Editor of the *Evening Standard*, Stanley Tiquet, wrote to Low:

'During the period of the Olympic Games, especially, it is of vital importance that nothing should appear in English newspapers which might tend to prejudice international peace and, particularly, the good relations between all the countries now represented in Berlin. I rely on your kind co-operation in seeing that as far as the *Evening Standard* is concerned, nothing is published which is in the slightest degree likely to prove detrimental to our friendship with other nations.'<sup>36</sup>

As one can imagine, Low did not appreciate any editor, let alone a stand-in one, cautioning him over his selection and treatment of subject-matter for his cartoons. In what appears as a sign of both anger and defiance, his response was to write indignantly at the bottom of Tiquet's letter: '!!? To hell with Tiquet.'<sup>37</sup> Low appeared to ignore what he presumably considered as an affront to his position at the paper, although during this period he only mocked the Nazis over their handling of the Olympics in his weekly 'Topical Budget.' After the Games, Low continued what became known as almost a private war against the dictators, focusing most of his energy on deriding the Nazi regime and Hitler's continual flagrant disregard of the Versailles Treaty. Four months after the 'to hell with Tiquet' episode, the *Evening Standard* felt that Low's concentration on Hitler and Mussolini had become too frequent and thus may have been appearing to the *Evening Standard* readership as a vendetta against the dictators. In November 1936, Cudlipp, having no doubt confirmed with Beaverbrook, refused to publish 'THE JAW IS THE JAW OF MUSSO, BUT - '. In a letter to Low, Cudlipp wrote:

'We have talked over the ventriloquist cartoon very carefully, and have decided to hold it over for the present for this reason:

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<sup>35</sup> W.A. Coupe, 'Observations on a Theory of Political Caricature', *Comparative Studies in Society and History Volume II*, 1969, Pages 90-2.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley Tiquet to David Low, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

We do not want at the present time to run what will seem to be a cartoonist's campaign against the dictators. You dealt with it on Monday, so that there can be no question of your appearing to ignore the international situation. But a succession of such cartoons at this time might very well do serious harm. The present international situation is one in which a newspaper must be very keenly alive to its responsibilities; and my admiration for the ventriloquist cartoon – and for the one you sent me on Friday – as works of art has now to be subjected to those responsibilities. I suggest, therefore, that for the present you avoid the dictators altogether. Meanwhile, I should like to keep the ventriloquist cartoon by me until the present tension relaxes, with the object of using it then.<sup>38</sup>

Cudlipp, although stating he would use the 'ventriloquist' cartoon at a later date, never did. He also referred to the one Low had sent him on the previous Friday. As the editor declared it had also been 'subjected to those responsibilities', one can presume it followed



THE JAW IS THE JAW OF MUSSO. BUT —

a similar theme to that of the 'ventriloquist' cartoon. Therefore, two successive cartoons which ridiculed Hitler were refused publication because of the effect they may have had on

the 'international situation'. Low could not have been pleased at having such restrictions placed on him at a time when his talents as a cartoonist were being fully exploited by his abhorrence for the regimes in both Germany and Italy. Nine months later, with tension in Europe mounting over the possibility of Hitler invading Austria, Cudlipp again warned Low to tone down his cartoons:

'You will see from the news that the state of Europe is extremely tense at the present time. That being so, I don't want to publish anything in the *Evening Standard* which would add to the tension, or inflame tempers any more than they are already inflamed. There are people whose tempers are inflamed more by a

<sup>38</sup> Percy Cudlipp to David Low, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

cartoon than by any letterpress. So will you please, when you are planning your cartoons, bear in mind my anxiety on this score ?<sup>39</sup>

A week later Cudlipp was still anxious over whether Low was adhering to his earlier instructions. Low's 'Hit and Muss' cartoon strip in his 'Topical Budget' also appeared to be causing the editor some concern:

'I have been thinking over your Hit and Muss idea and I would prefer that you did not do this just now. In any case, I am going on holiday this evening and I am anxious that Tiquet, who will be deputising, shall not be faced with knotty problems of policy over the cartoons. Your co-operation would assist me in the peaceful enjoyment of my holiday.'<sup>40</sup>

Michael Foot believed strongly that these continual attempts by Cudlipp to control Low's vitriolic depiction of Hitler in his cartoons – and when failing to do so, refusing to publish them – were a direct result of instructions from his proprietor:

'No doubt the pressures came from Beaverbrook, otherwise Low would not have taken any bloody notice of the editors.'<sup>41</sup>

For it went against the grain for Cudlipp to have to warn Low about his treatment of the Nazis. Cudlipp, as is known, detested Hitler, and he was to leave the *Evening Standard* the following year for the *Daily Herald* because he could no longer stomach Beaverbrook's firm pro-Appeasement line. In December 1937, a rift had in any case developed over the subject of the treatment of the Nazis between Wardell and Cudlipp, which according to a note in the Beaverbrook Archives, had led directly to the latter's resignation from the *Evening Standard*.

### **Low's meeting with Lord Halifax in 1937**

Lord Halifax's position within the National Government in 1937 was as Lord President of the Council.<sup>42</sup> Although a member of the Cabinet, he had no actual department, and was thus free to undertake any task the Prime Minister asked of him. Chamberlain's idea of sending Halifax to visit Hitler for talks coincided with an invitation Halifax had received

<sup>39</sup> Percy Cudlipp to David Low, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>40</sup> Percy Cudlipp to David Low, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>42</sup> As from 28<sup>th</sup> May 1937.

from Goering to attend the International Sporting Exhibition in Berlin. Hitler insisted, however, that he was not prepared to travel to Berlin to meet Halifax. If Halifax wanted to see him, then he would have to travel to Berchtesgaden, which proved acceptable to both Chamberlain and Halifax. Anthony Eden was not only deeply concerned that Chamberlain had undermined Eden's own position as Foreign Secretary by letting Halifax visit Hitler, but was also alarmed that it would appear as if the British Government was eager for a meeting and thus 'give the impression of running after the dictator'.<sup>43</sup> Eden confronted Chamberlain over Halifax's proposed trip, but the Prime Minister had made up his mind, and after an acrimonious exchange told his Foreign Secretary 'to go home and take an aspirin'.<sup>44</sup>

After talks with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, Halifax met Goebbels at the British Embassy in Berlin. The Propaganda Minister explained to Halifax that Hitler was extremely sensitive to criticism in the English press, especially from English journalists in Berlin as well as from cartoonists. Apparently, out of all offending cartoonists, Goebbels singled out Low for special attention. Halifax subsequently promised at the end of their meeting that 'the Government would do everything in its power to induce the London Press to avoid unnecessary offence'.<sup>45</sup> When he arrived back in England he immediately contacted those newspapers whose journalists and cartoonists were causing offence to Hitler. Halifax confirmed in a letter to the then British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, that as far as cartoonists were concerned, Low seemed to be the most vitriolic:

'I am hoping to see the *Daily Herald* and *Daily News* controlling powers myself, but I haven't as yet devised any approach that is satisfactory to Low, who draws the pictures in the *Evening Standard*, and these I expect are the most troublesome of any.'<sup>46</sup>

However, Low was by no means the only cartoonist upsetting the Nazis, Will Dyson at the *Daily Herald* seemed to be doing an equally good job. Halifax was perturbed by a Dyson cartoon drawn on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1937, entitled 'The ROLE of the BLACK RACES', as he commented in another letter to Henderson:

"The *Daily Herald* had what I considered a very objectionable cartoon on Wednesday and I immediately wrote to Southwood following our interview and

<sup>43</sup> The Earl of Birkenhead, *The Life of Lord Halifax*, Hamish Hamilton, 1965, Page 365.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden*, Macmillan, 1986, Page 183.

<sup>45</sup> The Earl of Birkenhead, *The Life of Lord Halifax*, Hamish Hamilton, 1965, Page 373.

<sup>46</sup> Lord Halifax to Sir Neville Henderson, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1937, Halifax Archives. Halifax quoting the *Daily News* presumably meant the *News Chronicle*.

have had a reply of a character which gives me to hope that we shall not have reason to complain again of this sort of thing in that quarter at any rate.”<sup>47</sup>



Halifax must have wondered if Beaverbrook would be as co-operative as Lord Southwood at the *Daily Herald*, for he had never been on particularly good terms with Beaverbrook.

Halifax was known to refer to Beaverbrook as ‘the Toad’<sup>48</sup> while in return Beaverbrook had been heard to call Halifax an ‘old political fraud’.<sup>49</sup> So instead of approaching Beaverbrook, Barbara Metcalfe<sup>50</sup> suggested to Halifax that the best means of getting to Low would be through the *Evening Standard*’s Manager, Michael Wardell, who, according to Foot, was in any case ‘a Fascist sympathiser’.<sup>51</sup> Halifax subsequently met Wardell at Barbara Metcalfe’s house, and asked the *Evening Standard* Manager if he could not curb Low’s stance towards the Nazi leader. Halifax told Wardell:

‘You cannot imagine the frenzy that these cartoons cause. As soon as a copy of the *Evening Standard* arrives, it is pounced on for Low’s cartoon, and if it is of Hitler, as it generally is, telephones buzz, tempers rise, fevers mount, and the whole governmental system of Germany is in uproar. It has hardly subsided before the next one arrives. We in England can’t understand the violence of the reaction. Of course, there are some of us who don’t altogether relish being cartooned by Low.’<sup>52</sup>

Wardell replied by saying that he could not control Low, even if he had wanted to, nor he said, could Beaverbrook himself. According to Wardell:

<sup>47</sup> Lord Halifax to Sir Neville Henderson, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1937, Halifax Archives.

<sup>48</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 440.

<sup>49</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Bruce Lockhart, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1950.

<sup>50</sup> It is unknown who Barbara Metcalfe actually was, but her name is mentioned by Halifax in connection with the suggested meeting with Wardell in a letter to Sir Neville Henderson on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1937, Halifax Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Wardell, ‘Flight to Berlin’, *Atlantic Advocate*, Volume 47 No. 11, August 1957, Page 53.

'Low has a contract which gives him complete immunity. Of course, I could refuse to publish a cartoon, if it were blasphemous or obscene or libellous, or in such bad taste as to bring discredit on the newspaper. But Low's cartoons don't fall into any of those categories. They just make you mad, if you don't agree with them.'<sup>53</sup>

As we have seen evidence of before, Low could be put under pressure or his cartoons stopped if Beaverbrook wished to do so. Wardell, like Beaverbrook on so many other occasions, had hidden behind Low's unique freedom clause in his contract. Wardell did suggest, however, that Halifax might be more effective if he were to talk to Low face to face. Halifax agreed and the meeting with Low took place over lunch at Wardell's flat in Albion Gate in Bayswater.<sup>54</sup> According to Low, Halifax first explained how upset Hitler had got at the sight of Low's cartoons of him.<sup>55</sup>

'Once a week Hitler had my cartoons brought out and laid on his desk in front of him, and he finished always with an explosion. That he was extremely sore; his vanity was badly touched... So the Foreign Secretary asked me to modify my criticism, as I say, in order that a better chance could be had for making friendly relations... The Foreign Secretary explained to me that I was a factor that was going against peace.'<sup>56</sup>

'Do I understand you to say that you would find it easier to promote peace if my cartoons did not irritate the Nazi leaders personally?' 'Yes,' he replied.<sup>57</sup>

'...I said, "Well, I'm sorry." Of course he was the Foreign Secretary what else could I say? So I said, "Very well, I don't want to be responsible for a world war. But, I said "It's my duty as a journalist to report matters faithfully and in my own medium I have to speak the truth. And I think this man is awful. But I'll slow down a bit." So I did.'<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Michael Wardell, 'Flight to Berlin', *Atlantic Advocate*, Volume 47 No. 11, August 1957, Page 54.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Wardell's version of the meeting with Halifax and Low was published in the *Evening Standard* on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1951. Interestingly, Low used Wardell's exact words in his autobiography in 1956, as his own account of the meeting.

<sup>55</sup> Low's account of the meeting has been taken from, and has been pieced together by both his own autobiography and an interview he gave in 1959 to NBC Television.

<sup>56</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for '*Wisdom*', an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

<sup>57</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 278.

<sup>58</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for '*Wisdom*', an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

Low was sure that Hitler was still a threat to European peace, and that agreeing to tone down his cartoons of him would not in the end have the slightest effect on future events. But according to Low:

‘Lord Halifax, after all, was Foreign Secretary [*sic*] with all the strings in hand, and maybe I was wrong.’<sup>59</sup>

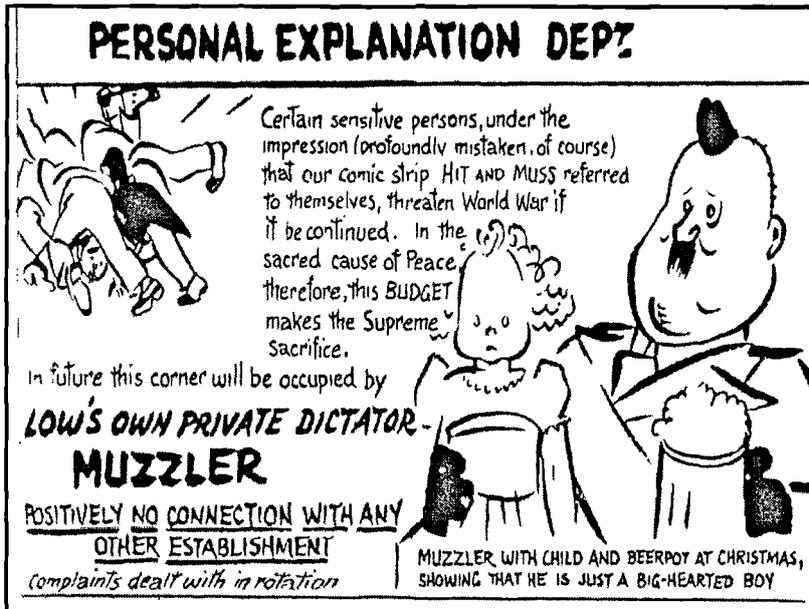
Probably for the first time, a senior member of the British Government had found it necessary to put Low under pressure in order to tone down his work. Low must have seen this as a backhanded compliment, for even though it had been an attempt to restrain him, he was now aware that his cartoons had really got to Hitler personally, and that the Nazis were going to considerable lengths to get him stopped. It must have done wonders for his self-esteem as a political cartoonist and for his credibility in the eyes of the free press. Low often repeated the story and actually embellished his account of this episode by constantly referring to Halifax as the ‘Foreign Secretary’ which, of course, he was not at that specific time. Halifax, as already mentioned, was Lord President of the Council, and did not become Foreign Secretary until 21<sup>st</sup> February 1938, four months after he had visited Hitler in Berchtesgaden. The story carries more weight if people were to believe it was the Foreign Secretary that took the trouble to meet Low personally, rather than the Lord President of the Council, however senior such an appointment may have been at the time. The result of the meeting with Halifax, according to Wardell, was that ‘Low treated things a little more gently.’<sup>60</sup> As far as Low was concerned:

‘Without relaxing the critical note, I played it in a less personal key. I dropped Hitler and Mussolini and to take their places created Muzzler, a composite character fusing well-known features of both dictators without being identifiable as either.’<sup>61</sup>

The Nazi hierarchy seemed to have been particularly incensed by Low’s cartoon strip ‘Hit and Muss’ which appeared weekly in his ‘Topical Budget’ feature. Low had a conference with Cudlipp over the problem of caricaturing Hitler and Mussolini as Hit and Muss and came up with the highly inventive idea of creating a composite dictator named Muzzler instead. The name was certainly intended as a pun to show how the authorities had unsuccessfully attempted to muzzle the cartoonist. In 1959, Cudlipp recollected to Low the meeting he had had with him over the creation of Muzzler:

<sup>59</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 279.

<sup>60</sup> *Evening Standard*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1951.



'I remember the conference we had about this, at which you said "I think I have the solution" and you left with a very sinister glint in your eye, and returned later with the figure Muzzler.'<sup>62</sup>

Low stated both in his autobiography and at other times that he had only allowed himself to be censored for three weeks from the date of his meeting with Halifax to Hitler's invasion of Austria, the latter event he considered being a let-out:

'A few weeks after my conversation with Halifax, Nazi troops entered Austria. My restraint had been wasted...'<sup>63</sup>

'And so I was good for about three weeks. Then Hitler bounced in and invaded Austria, showing that he had given our Foreign Secretary a run-around, had taken him for a ride. I considered that let me out, so I resumed criticism.'<sup>64</sup>

'A few weeks' or 'about three weeks'? Halifax's meeting with Low took place at the beginning of December 1937 and the Anschluss did not take place until 12<sup>th</sup> March 1938, over three months later. Somewhat longer than three weeks! Apart from what could be excused as a genuine oversight over both who was Foreign Secretary and the length of time that Low thought he had toned down his drawings of Hitler, there is one passage in Low's autobiography which suggests that such mistakes were probably deliberate. After Halifax had also attempted to get journalists and cartoonists from other offending newspapers to tone down their reporting or caricaturing of the Nazi regime in Germany, the Nazi Foreign Office later complained of lapses amongst certain members of the British Press. Low's

<sup>61</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 279.

<sup>62</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for 'Wisdom', an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

<sup>63</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 279.

<sup>64</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for 'Wisdom', an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.



23<sup>rd</sup> December 1937. This was the type of cartoon that Halifax had complained about, but it was refused publication.<sup>67</sup>

Hannen Swaffer reviewing *Low Again* in the *Daily Herald*, believed that Low had indeed been censored. Swaffer's argument was that the book contained no cartoon of Hitler dated after 19<sup>th</sup> November 1937, around the time Halifax was in Germany. Low, defensive as ever over his independence, stoically defended himself in his autobiography:

'Inevitably stories got round, when for some reason or other, a cold or a journey, I missed a cartoon, that I was undergoing "discipline". My friend Hannen Swaffer, the columnist, who had a watchful eye open for occasions when my cartoon should have appeared and didn't, was apt to draw conclusion at the top of his voice and headline his suspicions *Is Low Censored?* Such vigilance would have been a useful safeguard for me had Lord Beaverbrook not been the sort of man he was. But the truth was that his attitude to my personal charter of freedom remained impeccable, and the misgivings I had had on joining his paper long had been forgotten.'<sup>68</sup>

Such a strong and often repeated defence of his proprietor and his insistence that Beaverbrook never interfered with his independence at the *Evening Standard* just emphasised how important Low believed this independence was to his reputation. His response to Swaffer's conclusion that he had been censored seems something of an overreaction. Surely Low would have recognised that Swaffer's evidence, and thus his argument, was deeply flawed, simply because he had only come to his conclusion after looking at the drawings reproduced in the selection *Low Again*, and not from all the cartoons published over the period in question in the *Evening Standard*. However, Swaffer's article must have rankled, especially when it cast doubt on Low's precious independence. The American newspaper proprietor, Bruce Bliven, President of the *New Republic*, read Swaffer's article and, knowing Low personally, wrote to him to see if the allegations were true:

'As you will see, this cutting attributes to Hannen Swaffer the statement that you have stopped making cartoons of Hitler and Mussolini, and it is suggested that this is on order of the British government.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> This cartoon was, however, published in *Low Again* showing the date it had been drawn on so as to give the impression that it had actually been published. (See Introduction.)

<sup>68</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 280.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Bliven to David Low, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

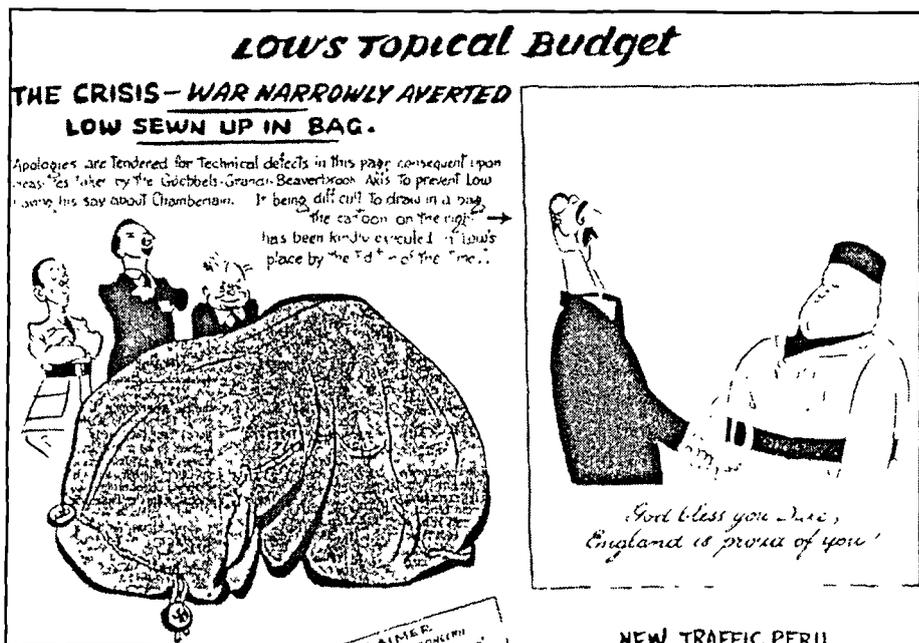
Low wrote back to Bliven denying that he had ever been in any way put under pressure as Swaffer had implied in his article:

‘For your private ear, the truth is that the Foreign Office has had several complaints about my cartoons from Germany, which they have communicated to me, but there has been no suggestion of ordering me about or putting pressure on me to moderate my ideas. They are not such stupid asses as all that.’<sup>70</sup>

Low’s denial is quite plainly an attempt to protect his own reputation. As has been noted regarding his meeting with Halifax eight months earlier, Low had indeed been asked to desist from depicting Hitler by a high-ranking member of the British Government. This he plainly admitted to Percy Cudlipp in an interview in 1959:

‘When asked “Have you ever had pressure brought on you?” you replied Yes, I think you would call it pressure. Two or three times. There was one occasion in the ‘Thirties, when I was doing some fairly blunt cartoons about Germany. Lord Halifax went over there (the Foreign Secretary, that is) to discuss with Goering and Hitler...’<sup>71</sup>

As discussed, Low felt he was no longer restrained after Hitler’s annexation of Austria in March 1938, and was no doubt comforted by the knowledge that all three of Beaverbrook’s newspapers had condemned the Anschluss with vigour. Low once again felt free to attack Hitler and the Nazis, especially as Hitler’s attentions had now turned to Czechoslovakia, with his demand for the return of the Sudetenland to Germany. Although



there is, mysteriously, no surviving correspondence in reference to Low’s cartoons of Hitler and the Nazis from 1938 till the outbreak of war in September 1939, there does appear

<sup>70</sup> David Low to Bruce Bliven, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>71</sup> David Low interviewed by Percy Cudlipp for ‘Wisdom’, an NBC television series, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1959.

to have been an increase in proprietorial interference as continued German territorial demands increased the likelihood of war.<sup>72</sup> For although Beaverbrook was usually oblivious to pressure from politicians over Low, he was prepared to intervene when the Prime Minister, to whom he had given his full support, complained of the damage the cartoonist was doing to an Anglo-German rapprochement. Michael Foot was one who was aware of ‘pressure coming from Downing Street via Beaverbrook’.<sup>73</sup> In fact Chamberlain, on one occasion, criticised Low in public. In an address to the Newspaper Society’s annual dinner in May 1938, he appealed to provincial newspapers to refrain from indulging in over-critical comment concerning foreign personalities, and stated:

‘Such criticism might do a great deal to embitter relations when we on our side are trying to improve them. German Nazis have been particularly annoyed by criticisms in the British press, and especially by cartoons. The bitter cartoons of Low of the *Evening Standard* have been a frequent source of complaint.’<sup>74</sup>

Chamberlain’s view of Low had been of a distinctly different nature less than a year earlier in June 1937, shortly after becoming Prime Minister. Chamberlain was known for his vain, self-righteous nature, and in taking exception to any form of personal criticism, but at first, according to *News Review*, he enjoyed Low’s cartoons as a fillip to the pressures of having just become Prime Minister:

‘Nevertheless the Premier found sleep difficult. Because of cares and worries of State, the master of No.10 Downing Street several times surprised his household staff by retiring at midnight and rising at 5 a.m. His recipe for such drawbacks is one good laugh a day, which he usually gets from David Low’s impish *Evening Standard* portrayal of himself. A standing Chamberlain order is that the Premier must see the earliest editions of the *Evening Standard* when he is the victim of cartoonist Low’s cynical pencil.’<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> As regards the late 1930s, there is very little correspondence of any description in the Beaverbrook Archives. One can possibly assume that as an arch-appeaser over these years, Beaverbrook destroyed anything that would have incriminated him as an appeaser in order to protect his reputation after the war. Katherine Bligh, responsible for the Beaverbrook Archives at the House of Lords, states that: ‘What you see is what Beaverbrook wanted you to see.’ Any correspondence as regards censoring Low over his treatment of Hitler would presumably therefore have been destroyed.

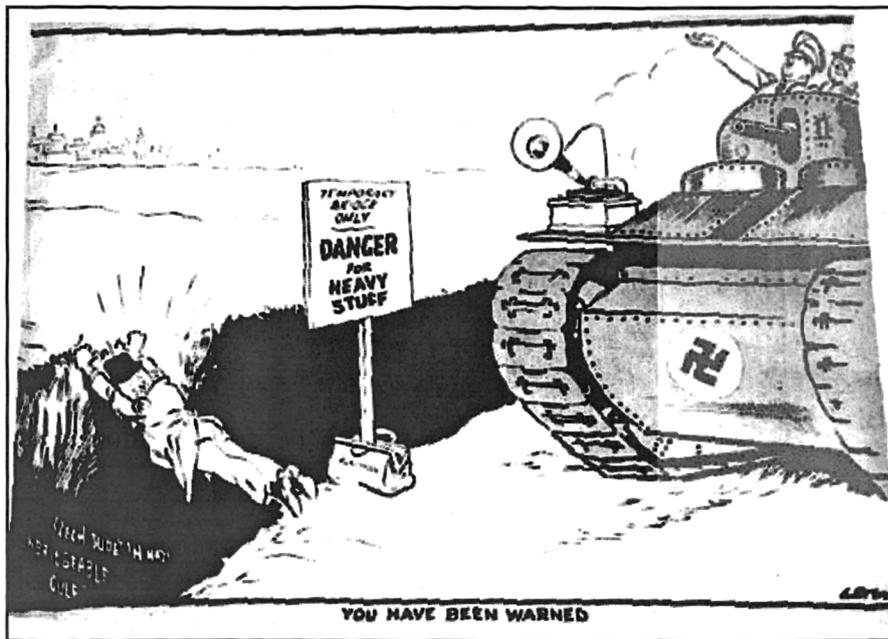
<sup>73</sup> Michael Foot interviewed by Timothy S. Benson on Low and Beaverbrook, February 1996.

<sup>74</sup> *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>75</sup> *News Review*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1937, Low Papers, University of Kent.

When Chamberlain sent Lord Runciman<sup>76</sup> to Prague in July 1938 as a 'conciliator and mediator' between the Czech Government and the Sudeten Germans, the *Evening Standard's* headline on the day of the appointment read 'Lord Runciman for Prague was the Premier's idea.'<sup>77</sup> By all accounts, Runciman's impartiality was seen by many observers as a sham:

'He spent the weekends with German princes in the Sudetenland; he tended to listen to Czechs with Nazi leanings.'<sup>78</sup>



It appears that this did not escape Low's attention. As can be seen in 'YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED', Low saw Runciman as nothing more than a bridge for Hitler's entry into the Sudetenland. As the Runciman Mission was an important part of Chamberlain's negotiations for peace, which no doubt had Beaverbrook's full support, the cartoon was refused publication. There then took place what can best be



described as Low performing an almost complete *vite-facé*, with a cartoon entitled 'WONDERFUL VISIT'.<sup>79</sup> Here we see Runciman as an angel of peace, which appears to be in total

<sup>76</sup> Lord Runciman was a Liberal peer who had been President of the Board of Trade in the First World War Coalition Government as well as in the National Governments of the 1930s.

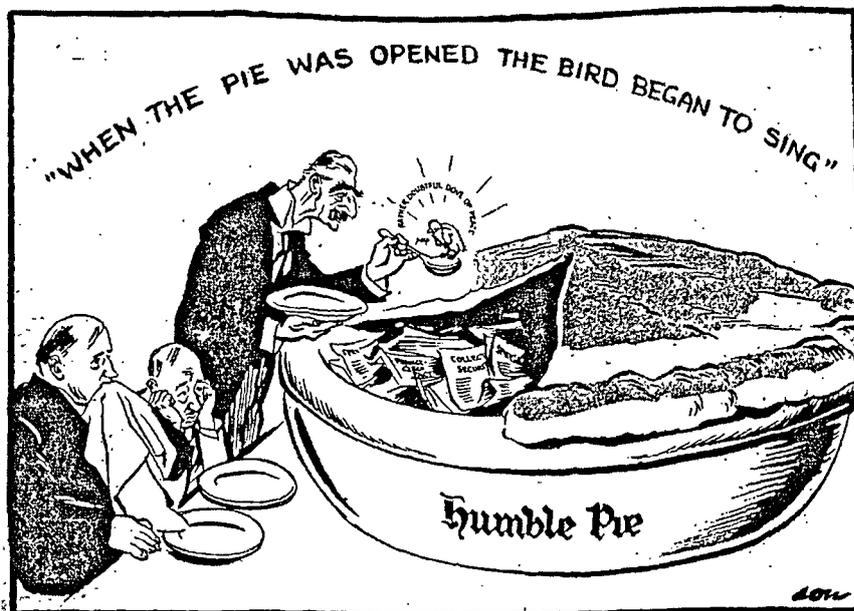
<sup>77</sup> *Evening Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Margaret George, *The Hollow Men*, Leslie Frewin, 1967, Page 297.

<sup>79</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1938.

sympathy with how Chamberlain would have perceived his emissary. How could Low have drawn such a positive cartoon of Runciman's mission after his previous trenchant effort on the subject had been refused publication?

The Runciman Mission failed to resolve anything. Tension between Britain and Germany grew as Hitler increasingly threatened to invade Czechoslovakia if the Sudeten German question was not resolved. As war with Germany came ever closer, Chamberlain flew to Munich on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1938 and saw Hitler at Berchtesgaden, where he agreed to the separation of the Sudetenland from the rest of Czechoslovakia. Low saw this apparent sell-out to Hitler as a grave mistake for which the Prime Minister would later have to eat humble pie, as expressed in his cartoon of 21<sup>st</sup> September 1938. This cartoon was altered before publication because in its original state it explicitly showed the Nazis as the aggressor. In place of the contents of the 'Humble Pie' which are portrayed as documents



and speeches on Collective Security and the French-Czech alliance, there originally appeared an image of a cat with claws, presumably an allusion to the Nazis, about to pounce on Chamberlain's 'rather doubtful dove of

peace'. Maybe such a hard-hitting cartoon, at a time of great tension over the possibility of conflict, when the general feeling in the country seemed to be that Chamberlain was doing all he could to avoid another war, would not have been appropriate. For even the altered version found fierce criticism in some quarters, the *Evening News* for one:

'I invariably admire the cartoons by Low, but his characterisation of our Prime Minister partaking of "Humble Pie" is the quintessence of distorted taste.'<sup>80</sup>

Low had been particularly unrelenting in his treatment of Chamberlain since the latter had become Prime Minister in early 1937, especially over foreign policy. Here, just as with previous Prime Ministers, Low had had *carte blanche* in his treatment of them. However, was it a coincidence that just after the Munich Pact, in which Low had been particularly

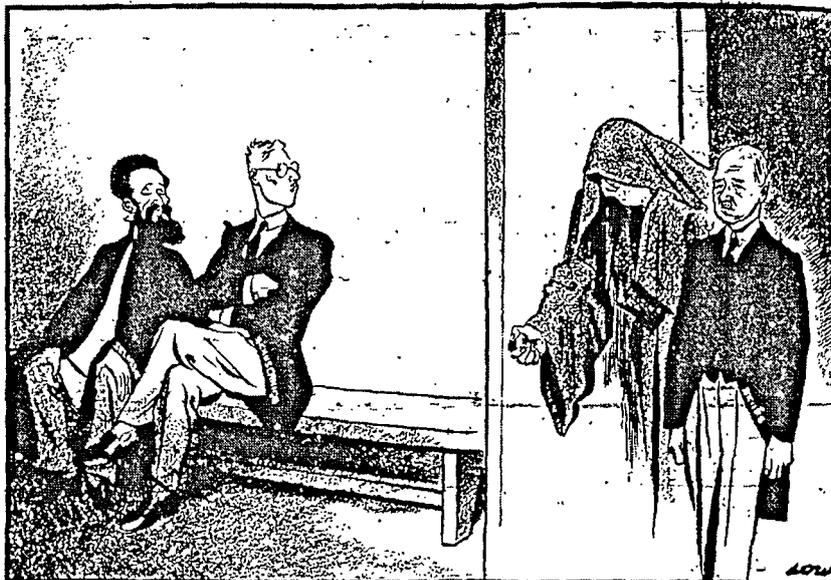
<sup>80</sup> *Evening News*, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1938.

critical of Chamberlain, Peter Howard, as Political Correspondent of the *Sunday Express*, published an attack on Low in defence of the Prime Minister? Howard attempted to show that the cartoonist was behaving in a contrary manner as far as his treatment of Chamberlain was concerned:

‘Low does a great deal to influence public sentiment in the country. I am staggered by his contortions. For a long, long time he has opposed, attacked and bitterly condemned the British Empire. He has been charged again and again with the desire to break up the Empire. Now he assails Mr Chamberlain and his supporters for their actions, on the grounds that he believes those actions will result in the break-up of the British Empire.’<sup>81</sup>

Following Chamberlain’s final meeting with Hitler in Munich in October 1938, where Britain, France, Germany and Italy sealed Czechoslovakia’s fate in Germany’s favour without a Czech representative being present, Low summed up the Munich Agreement in a hard-hitting cartoon which for publication purposes was toned down by the removal of both the drawing’s caption and all its wording. This is all the more remarkable considering that the *Evening Standard* was one of the few papers to sound a warning note over Munich. In its editorial headed, ‘Keep Sane’, Owen had spoken of the dangers now facing Britain as a result of the Munich Pact.<sup>82</sup>

Low’s cartoon showed the Czech President Benes, being shown by the cloaked figure of death into what appears to be a waiting-room, where the Austrian ex-Chancellor, Kurt Von Schuschnigg, and the deposed Abyssinian Emperor, Haile Selassie, are already sitting. The point Low is making is clear, but if one replaces the words deleted from the published



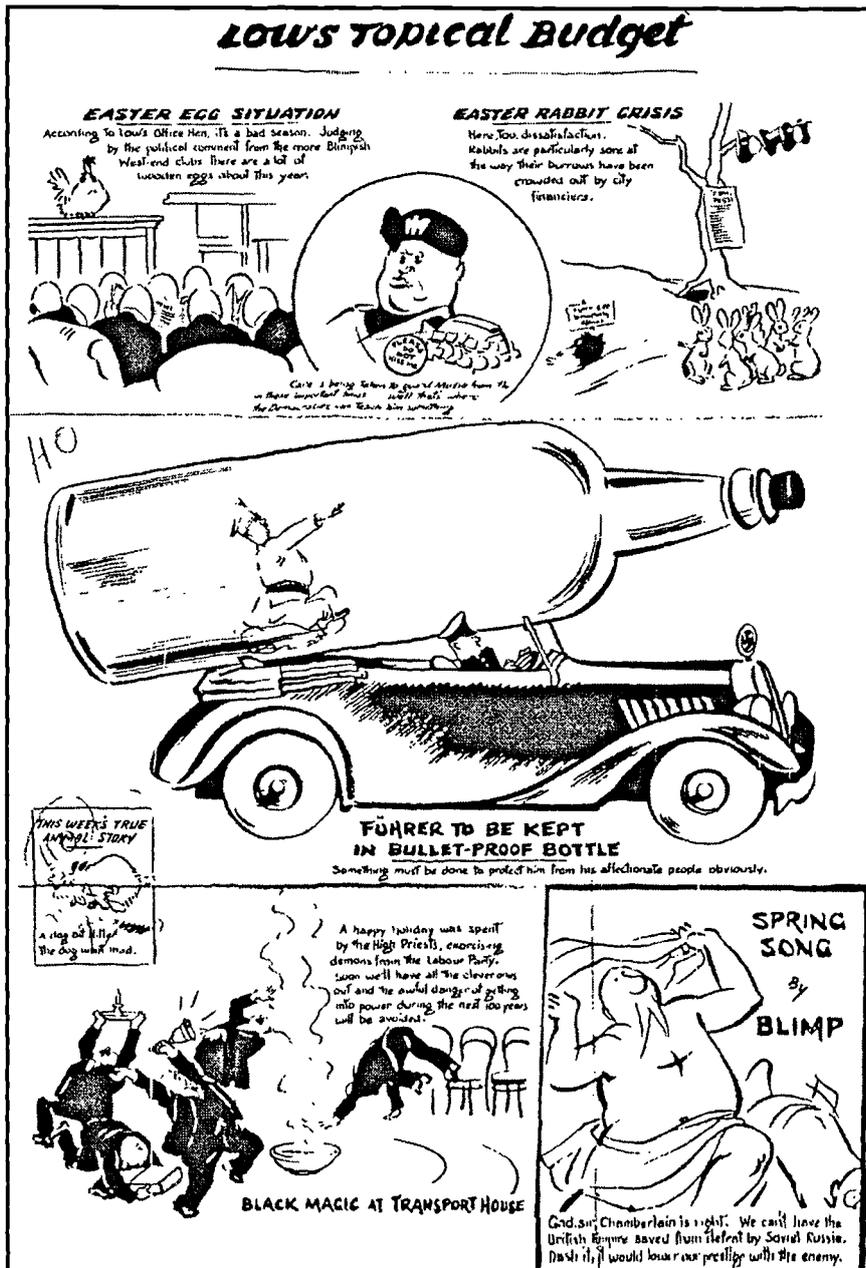
version of the cartoon, it becomes a bitter pronouncement on the outcome of Munich. For in the original drawing the title of the cartoon was ‘SELECT COMPANY’; on the door of the waiting-room was written Raw Deal

<sup>81</sup> *Sunday Express*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1938.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Howard. *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 120.

Department, and Selassie and Schuschnigg are saying to Benes 'You are welcome in here, friend, for at least the air is pure'. Thus the cartoon in its original state is unambiguous in showing that Low felt the Munich Agreement literally stank, while the edited version appears as just a sad and poignant reflection on what had happened to Benes as a result of Munich.

Even after Germany's occupation of the remaining dismembered Czech state, and Chamberlain's subsequent hardening of his attitude towards Germany, Low still found that anything too biting in his depiction of Hitler was refused publication. When he produced a



'Topical Budget' in April 1939 which depicted Hitler in a bullet-proof bottle and in a separate section showed a dog that gone mad after biting Hitler, it was considered unacceptable and refused publication. In fact, in relation to the two offending sections of the 'Topical Budget' someone, presumably the editor, had written 'HO' short, no doubt, for holdover. Here is actual visual evidence of censorship on the part of the *Evening Standard*. Looking at the cartoon from

today's perspective, the offending material seems rather tame, however, at the time, the dog biting Hitler would probably have been seen as just too pungent. As for putting Hitler in a bullet-proof bottle to protect him from his affectionate people, this might have been taken by some as an incitement to, or approval of, the actual assassination of the Nazi leader,

especially as Beaverbrook had been for some time convinced that Hitler would be assassinated.<sup>83</sup>

It is interesting to note that the cartoon, unacceptable for publication in Britain, was considered safe for publication in Ceylon, and thus appeared in the *Ceylon Observer* on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1939. The Blimp cartoon published unaltered as part of the 'Topical Budget' in Ceylon, was re-used by Low in his following week's 'Topical Budget' in the *Evening Standard*, except that 'Gad, Sir, Chamberlain is right...' was changed to 'Gad, Sir, Lord Punk is right...' possibly because Chamberlain was personally uneasy about any form of alliance with the Soviet Union, which Beaverbrook was presumably aware of.

## *Ken*

Low must have continually found it frustrating every time his hardest-hitting cartoons on Hitler and the Nazis were seen by the *Evening Standard* as too critical in their approach, and as a consequence either refused publication or drastically altered. Had he not done what had been asked of him prior to the German occupation of Austria? The *Evening Standard* may have felt that they were within their rights, as contractually they were, but for a cartoonist who had gained a world-wide reputation for prophetically highlighting, through humour, the dangers that Hitler and the Nazis posed to European peace, this must have been extremely hard to bear. How could he salve his conscience and produce the type of hard-hitting cartoons he felt the events in Europe necessitated when the paper had the right to refuse any cartoon that it felt was not suitable for publication? This may have been the reason why Low accepted an offer from the American publisher, Arnold Gingrich, who had originally founded *Esquire* magazine, to draw double-page cartoons for *Ken*, a glossy current-events magazine which although competing directly with *Life* magazine, was proving to be a success graphically. At the time, *Ken* also included contributions from George Grosz and Ernest Hemingway. The magazine was Left-leaning, and fervently anti-Fascist which made it a perfect vehicle for Low's views on political and foreign affairs. The editor of *Ken* even cabled Low this message 'Your Politics Fit *Ken* Like Glove'.<sup>84</sup>

Low drew fifteen cartoons in total for *Ken* from 5<sup>th</sup> May 1938 until 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1938, when he gave his reasons for stopping as overwork.<sup>85</sup> In July of that year, he had stopped his 'Topical Budget' for a while for much the same reason. The full-page cartoon

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1915-1938*, Macmillan, 1973, Page 299.

<sup>84</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 63.

<sup>85</sup> Raymond Gram Swing to David Low, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

had become too draining for him and was described by Low at times as 'an intolerable burden'.<sup>86</sup>

At a time when Low's cartoons at the *Evening Standard* were probably being seriously questioned if they were too strong in their attacks on the Nazis, *Ken* offered him the

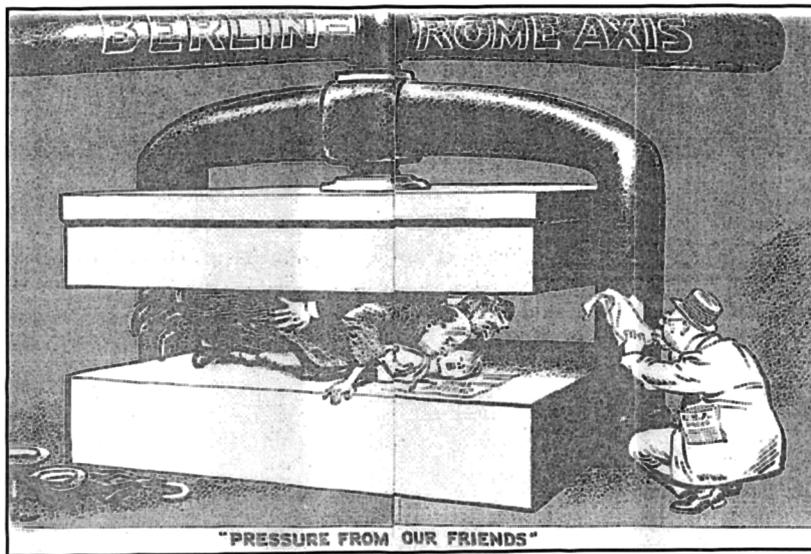


opportunity to voice his anger. Low must also have known that because *Ken* was in fact banned in Britain few people would be able to notice the change in emphasis between his work in England and America.<sup>87</sup> Of the fifteen cartoons he drew for *Ken*, eight either featured Hitler or alluded to the German threat, while the rest focused on American politics (2), Spain, Japan, the European refugee problem, Autarchy or Free Exchange, and Mussolini and Abyssinia. Of the eight referring to Hitler and Germany, it seems highly probable that at least six of these would have been far too strong

<sup>86</sup> David Low to R.J.T. Thompson, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>87</sup> Although it is quoted in several sources that *Ken* was banned in England the reason for it being so is unknown.

in sentiment for publication in the UK when compared to other cartoons on the subject which had been left out of the *Evening Standard*. Indeed, the cartoon that was left out of the *Evening Standard* in November 1936, which Cudlipp had promised to publish at a later date but never did, ('THE JAW IS THE JAW OF MUSSO, BUT -') was altered by Low so as to bring it up to date and was published in *Ken* on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1938. Low changed the crouching Eden figure into the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and updated Professor Hitler's *Mein Kampf* programme (having since 'grabbed Austria'). "DO YOUR STUFF, BOYS - SAME AS IN AUSTRIA", "OH, WELL, ANYTHING FOR A QUIET LIFE" and "PRESSURE FROM OUR FRIENDS" would also have been seen as too biting for the *Evening Standard* to publish. The ever-observant Hannen Swaffer, having been one of the few in Britain to see



*Ken*, noticed that Low's cartoons in that magazine not only frequently featured Hitler and Mussolini, but were also 'fiercer than those appearing in the *Evening Standard*'.<sup>88</sup> Swaffer, having already suggested that Low had been put under pressure at

the *Evening Standard*, posed the question: where did Low's real opinions on Hitler and the Nazis really lie?

'While in the *Evening Standard* Low has invented an imaginary Muzzler, he still draws for *Ken*, a very Red fortnightly, published in the States, double-page cartoons burlesquing what Hitler calls his glory... **Which is His Opinion?** Now is Low's opinion the one he prints in London, or the American one?'<sup>89</sup>

Of course, such an article casting aspersions on his independence at the *Evening Standard* would have infuriated Low. He immediately wrote to Swaffer categorically denying that his cartoons differed in outlook either here or in the United States:

'No cartoons of mine appearing in America or elsewhere conflict in outlook with those printed here. I have only one outlook.'<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> 'Swaffer Says', *World's Press News*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>89</sup> *World's Press News*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

However, Swaffer was not alone in thinking that Low's work differed in emphasis between here and the United States. Beverley Baxter, a former Editor of both the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Express*, and who was by 1938 an MP, also appeared to have had access to *Ken*. Baxter condemned Low for what he saw as far more hostile drawings than the ones the cartoonist usually produced for the *Evening Standard*. Baxter must have been quite incensed because he wrote an article called 'Those Who Slander Britain' for two Sunday newspapers in which he implied that Low's cartoons in *Ken* were in fact treasonable:

'A more difficult problem is that new type of publisher who combines nudity in pictures and sheer recklessness in political comment. There is a comparatively recent and most successful publication of this type in America, which is doing so well that it can afford to employ a famous British cartoonist (resident in London) to draw large, double-page cartoons which almost invariably hold up the British Government to ridicule and contempt. I hope the fee is a good one. After all one should not take less than the standard rate of 30 pieces of silver for that kind of work.'<sup>91</sup>

Baxter and Swaffer being two of the, one presumes, few people in Britain to have had the opportunity to see both Low's published cartoons here and in America, appear to have been of the same opinion that Low's work for *Ken* was far stronger in emphasis than what the cartoonist was producing at the *Evening Standard*.

### **Low's treatment of those that supported Appeasement**

Low attacked all the prominent members of the British Cabinet who had supported Chamberlain over his Appeasement of Hitler. However, his treatment of Joseph Kennedy, the American Ambassador to London, was surprisingly benign in comparison. For Kennedy, who still had ambitions to become the American President, was not only a strong advocate of appeasing Hitler, but also a fervent supporter of American isolationism. It was believed in some circles that Kennedy was even anti-British, which made him one the most unpopular American Ambassadors to London in

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<sup>90</sup> David Low to Hannen Swaffer, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>91</sup> *Sunday Graphic* and *Sunday News*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1938, Low Papers, University of Kent.

living memory.<sup>92</sup> According to Harold Nicolson's diary, Beaverbrook did his utmost to dispel the general belief that Kennedy was anti-British:

'Kennedy (Joe), American Ambassador, left for U.S.A. Tributes to his pro-British sympathies in newspapers, especially *Express* and *Standard*. Nothing to show that he is pro-British - on contrary, proof that he is not.'<sup>93</sup>

As a result of Beaverbrook's strong support for such an unpopular American Ambassador, a senior Foreign Office official at the time, Oliver Harvey, also recorded in his diary that Kennedy was 'engaged in defeatist propaganda with Beaverbrook'.<sup>94</sup> Could Low's innocuous treatment of Kennedy, therefore, have been a direct response to Beaverbrook's close friendship with the American? For Beaverbrook even gave instructions to his editors to treat Kennedy favourably:

'Mr Kennedy is not to be criticised in the columns of our papers, but that he is to receive favourable comment.'<sup>95</sup>



Above. Two cartoons from separate editions of Low's 'Topical Budget' featuring Joseph Kennedy.

One example of how Kennedy's views were put over in an extremely positive way can be seen in an excerpt from an article in the *Evening Standard* on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1938:

'Mr Kennedy, the American Ambassador, speaks with common sense and with dramatic force as well. He says that it is our duty to give young men and women something else to hope for than a short life carrying a gun... Mr Kennedy will receive support everywhere for the sentiment he expresses in the dictatorship

<sup>92</sup> After the B.E.F.'s evacuation from Dunkirk Kennedy told Roosevelt that Britain would not survive the war.

<sup>93</sup> *Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1940.

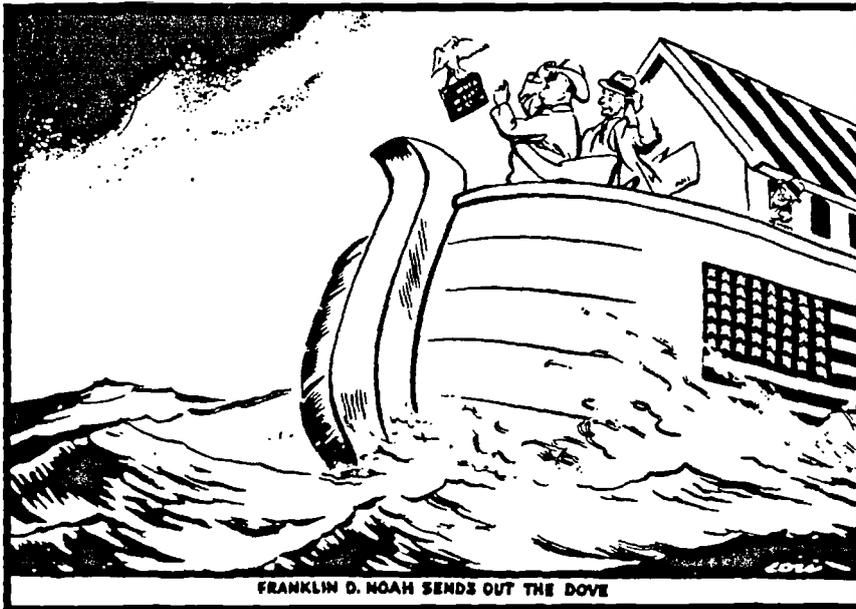
<sup>94</sup> John Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940*, St. Martin's Press, 1971, Page 326.

<sup>95</sup> E. J. Robertson to editors, Owen, Christiansen, and Gordon, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1939, Beaverbrook Archives.

states and the democracies alike.’<sup>96</sup>

It was not really surprising, therefore, that Low, on the very few occasions he did portray Kennedy, compared to the number of times he depicted the Russian Ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky, did not ridicule the American Ambassador’s views on foreign policy, even though they were the very antithesis of what Low vehemently believed in. Kennedy appeared in a few ‘Topical Budgets’, not, as one would have imagined, regarding his views on the European situation, but over the presentation of débutantes at court.

Even after Britain had declared war on Germany, and Kennedy was espousing his



defeatist views that the nation was ‘committing suicide’,<sup>97</sup> Low desisted from depicting him as Ambassador, apart from one cartoon drawn on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1940, entitled ‘FRANKLIN D. NOAH SENDS OUT THE DOVE’. Here Kennedy makes a minor and

somewhat innocuous appearance in a cartoon featuring Sumner Welles, the American Under-secretary of State, who came to Europe in the hope of mediating a peace agreement amongst the combatant countries.

### **‘There will be no war this year, or next year either’**

The *Daily Express* ran its infamous headline: ‘There will be no war this year, or next year either’ for the first time in September 1938 and used it again frequently until 7<sup>th</sup> August 1939, three weeks before the outbreak of war. Low, who felt strongly at the time that the country should have taken a far firmer stance against Hitler, never attempted to make fun of that slogan or of Beaverbrook’s staunch support for Chamberlain. Perhaps Low felt it was inadvisable to ridicule Beaverbrook over this matter, as he may also have done earlier over the Empire Crusade campaign. However, the more likely explanation is that he

<sup>96</sup> *Evening Standard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1938.

understood his proprietor better than most, and took Beaverbrook's public stance over Appeasement as just wishful thinking. Thus, the *Daily Express* headline was something his proprietor knew was unlikely to happen, but hoped that if the paper kept on saying it, it would eventually come true. In 1939, a *Daily Express* executive was heard to say 'our policy is to say there won't be a war, right up to the moment when the guns begin to shoot'.<sup>98</sup> Low must also have known that although the *Daily Express* was stating that there will be 'no war this year...' it was at the same time calling for a rapid increase in rearmament.

Low knew that Beaverbrook, for all his support of Chamberlain, had never been a favourite amongst those in the Cabinet, with the exception of Sir Samuel Hoare. But, according to Michael Foot, he always kept 'open his line with the Churchillites'.<sup>99</sup> Low was also well aware that some of the politicians in Chamberlain's Cabinet were, like himself, critical of both the appeasement of Hitler and the slow pace of rearmament. For all his protestations of loyalty to Chamberlain, Beaverbrook still managed to employ such ex-Ministers as Alfred Duff Cooper, and Leslie Hore-Belisha as journalists on his papers. He also employed Aneurin Bevan (on the *Evening Standard*), with whom he had initially become impressed after the radical Labour MP had forcefully attacked Chamberlain in the House of Commons over his appeasement of Hitler. When Hore-Belisha was sacked as War Minister, the *Daily Express* posed the question:

'If Belisha must go, do all the other members of the Government deserve to stay?'<sup>100</sup>

Just months before the outbreak of war, with the *Daily Express* still displaying its 'No war this year...' headline, Beaverbrook became increasingly aware that Britain could soon be at war with Germany. Why else would he have demanded, in the spring of 1939, Churchill's return to the Government? In April 1939, in a letter to Roy Howard, an American friend and fellow newspaperman, Beaverbrook made it clear that the British people would soon run out of patience with Hitler's aggressive foreign policy:

'I believe that war in Europe depends ultimately upon the attitude of the British people. They will not put up indefinitely with threats and menaces. The war spirit may finally possess the people. If this spirit does arise, it may force the Government to take drastic action. I hope very much that the day is far removed,

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<sup>97</sup> Edited Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Chips: The Dairies of Sir Henry Channon*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967, Page 225.

<sup>98</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 245.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Foot, 'The Case For Beelzebub', *Debts of Honour*, Davis-Poynter, 1980, Page 90.

but the English people won't stand indefinitely the injustices, persecution and abuses now being perpetuated in Europe.'<sup>101</sup>

## The Second World War

### Supporting the war effort

Even after Britain's declaration of war against Germany in September 1939, Low's treatment of the Prime Minister did not change. One would have expected that once war had been declared, and against a dictatorship that the cartoonist had been warning about for years, Low would have rallied round. Instead, he was particularly critical of Chamberlain's war leadership in his cartoons. They made much of the Government's inactivity in its preparation to wage war. Beaverbrook, who according to Michael Foot was supposedly 'still sulking in his appeaser's tent', was fully in sympathy with Low's sentiments.<sup>102</sup> Beaverbrook thought that Chamberlain should have resigned after war had been declared, as his obvious distaste for conflict made him an unsuitable leader. He felt it needed men of action such as Churchill, and even included himself in this category. He told Bruce Lockhart:

'This Government will never win the war, but no one will ever get them out unless we have big reverses. If there is a real war, I'll be in it.'<sup>103</sup>

So Low probably had his proprietor's blessing in attacking the Government up until Chamberlain's resignation from office in May 1940. When Churchill took over as Prime Minister, Low gave him his full support, but never hounded those still remaining in Government that had been both responsible for supporting Appeasement and Britain's lacklustre preparation for war that had ended with the BEF's retreat from Dunkirk. Unlike Low, other Beaverbrook employees did attack those responsible, as has been seen with *Guilty Men*.

When Low produced 'THE HARMONY BOYS' on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1940, barely a week before the German offensive in the West, it resulted in an immediate protest to the Foreign Office from the supposedly neutral Spanish Government. Halifax, as Foreign Secretary, wrote to

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<sup>100</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 253.

<sup>101</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 244.

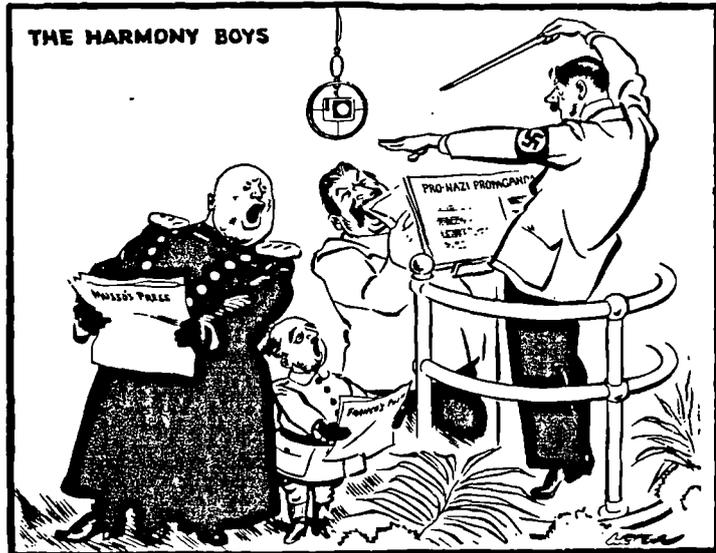
<sup>102</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 370.

<sup>103</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 253.

Beaverbrook in order to get Low to leave Franco out of future cartoons so as to not further irritate the Spanish dictator, especially at a time when the Germans were expected to launch an offensive in the West:

'I recently received representations from General Franco's Representative in London about the attached cartoon of Low's. I was personally considerably amused by the cartoon, and I fully realise how difficult it is to put any curb on Low's ebullience. But you may have noticed how the Spanish press have played up over the Trondheim evacuation and I believe that General Franco is not unwilling to be friendly with us. If it were therefore possible for Low to leave him out of the choir in future, I am sure it would be very helpful.'<sup>104</sup>

This request from Halifax did not appear unreasonable, and as Colin Seymour-Ure has correctly surmised, this was 'hardly the moment to be driving Franco into the German Camp'.<sup>105</sup> As discussed earlier, it is unlikely that Beaverbrook would have normally taken any notice of Halifax. Maybe Beaverbrook did appreciate the value of not offending Franco at this time. Nevertheless, according to A.J.P. Taylor, the more likely reason for him being prepared to accede to Halifax's request was



because his own political protégé, Sir Samuel Hoare, was, as the newly appointed Ambassador to Spain, already under enormous pressure from the Spanish authorities:<sup>106</sup>

'Beaverbrook would not have restrained the anti-Fascists of the *Evening Standard* merely in order to please Lord Halifax. The real explanation lay elsewhere. Sir Samuel Hoare was now ambassador at Madrid and was having a hard time upholding the British cause. He was one of Beaverbrook's oldest political friends, and Beaverbrook was anxious to help him. The call of friendship prevailed, where high policy would have carried no weight.'<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Lord Halifax to Lord Beaverbrook, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1940, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>105</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low*, Secker & Warburg, 1985, Page 49.

<sup>106</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare had acted as an intermediary between Beaverbrook and Neville Chamberlain during the period the latter was Prime Minister. Beaverbrook privately funded Hoare's political career, as he had aspirations of him becoming Prime Minister.

<sup>107</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 435.

As a result, Beaverbrook warned Low to desist from depicting Franco at once and informed Halifax he had done so:

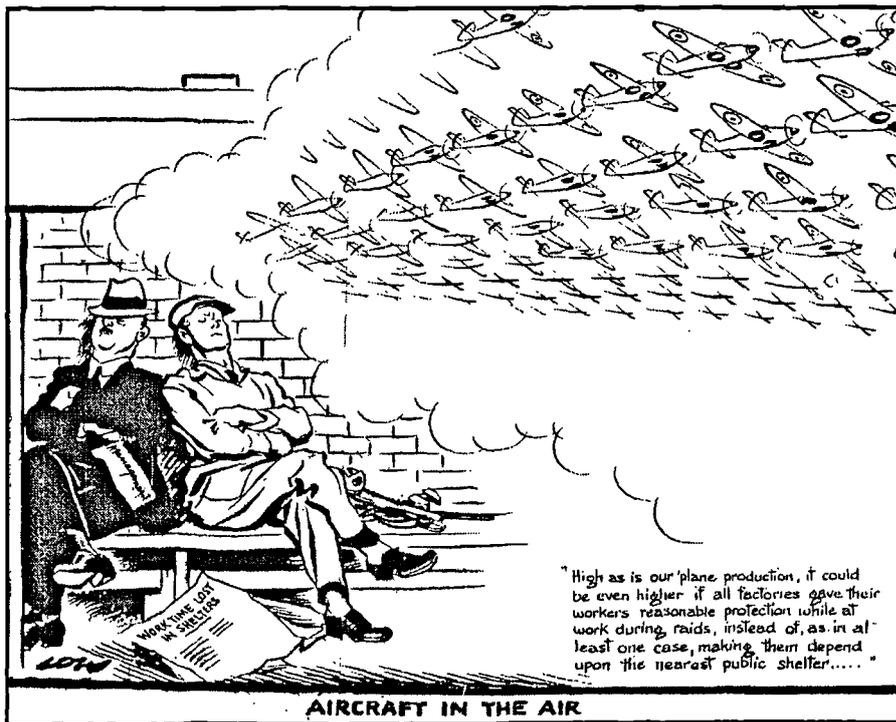
‘Your letter received and acted on according to your desire.’<sup>108</sup>

Low understood perfectly the gravity of the situation and concurred with the Foreign Office’s request:

‘If there is a prospect of Franco becoming friendly, I am sure I should not want to spoil it, so we will let him rest for the present.’<sup>109</sup>

Once Beaverbrook had been appointed as Minister of Aircraft Production, one would have thought that the latter would have been totally preoccupied with the enormous job in hand, and have left his senior staff at the *Evening Standard* to deal with any problems arising from Low’s work. This appears not to have been always the case, even though Low gave his wholehearted support to the war effort through his cartoons.

In September 1940, Low produced a cartoon entitled ‘AIRCRAFT IN THE AIR’ that



criticised the lack of protection given to aircraft-workers during air raids. Beaverbrook would certainly have frowned upon such a cartoon, as he personally never took shelter during daylight raids, and expected factory-workers to do the

same whilst continuing to work. He was known to be furious when aircraft factories stopped working just because of an air-raid warning. In this, said David Farrer, he ‘took it too much for granted that others were as able and ready to go on working when frightened as he was’.<sup>110</sup> The cartoon was thus refused publication.

<sup>108</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Lord Halifax, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1940, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>109</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1940, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>110</sup> Alan Wood, *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*, Heinemann, 1965, Page 268.



Africa. This had been as a consequence of General Auchinleck's desert offensive in November 1941 which had both relieved Tobruk and driven Rommel back towards Tripoli. Low prophetically saw this communiqué as rather too cocksure, no doubt fully conscious of earlier military reversals in the North African desert when the situation had also looked just as optimistic. The cartoon was refused publication, probably because of its rather negative outlook, even though later events proved that Low's criticism of the British authority's over-confidence was correct. Indeed, in the following month, January 1942, Rommel's counter-offensive retook all the territory the Axis troops had previously lost and pushed Allied forces all the way back to El-Alamein, recapturing Tobruk in the process.



*Above.* Image of Cripps from the original drawing before the additional figures, as seen in the altered version *Left* were stuck over him in the bottom right-hand corner of the cartoon.

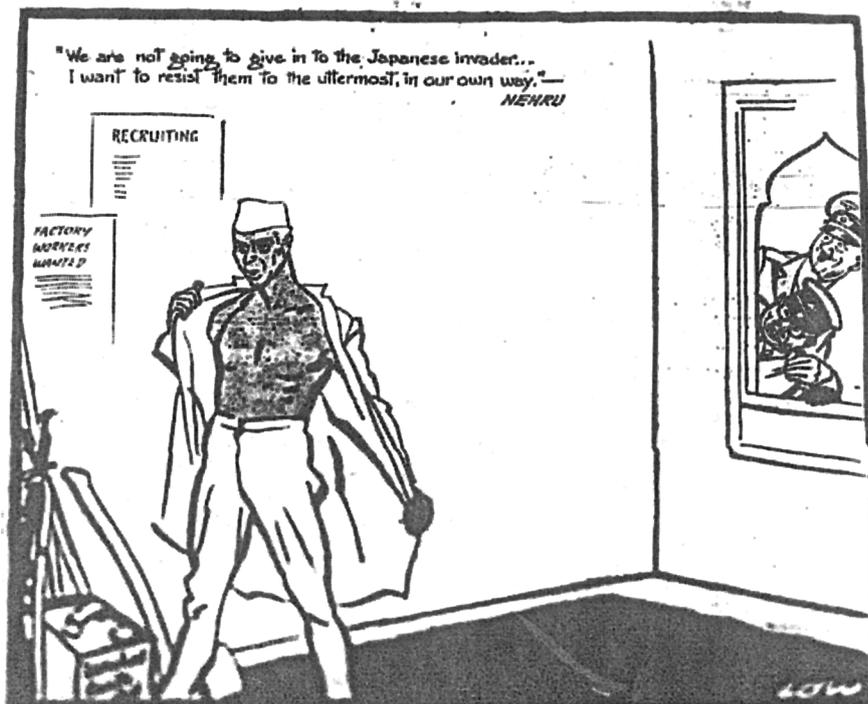
In the original version of 'BLIMP (INDIAN VARIETY)', drawn on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps is seen sitting cross-legged facing Gandhi, Nehru, and other Indian leaders who are also cross-legged, but unlike Cripps are all wearing tied-on Blimp-like moustaches. Cripps had been sent to New Delhi by the British Government in order to offer the Indian Congress new constitutional proposals for India after the war. Unfortunately, both Gandhi and the Indian Congress rejected these out of hand. As Blimp symbolised stupidity, Low has put the blame for the failure of the Cripps Mission solely on the Indians. If one considers that at the time the Japanese Army had got as far as Burma, and was now threatening to invade India, the last thing that anyone would have wanted on the British side was to antagonise Indian public opinion, so the cartoon was left unpublished. Low, having looked at events so negatively, may have, in retrospect, admitted

<sup>111</sup> Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1939-1945*, Macmillan, 1980, Page 218.

that he had weighed up the situation incorrectly. In a letter to the author and academic, E.P. Thompson, two months later, Low admitted to knowing little about Indian affairs:

‘As you know, like most British people I am very ignorant about India.’<sup>112</sup>

Possibly realising that such a cartoon was indeed detrimental to war-time Anglo-Indian relations, Low produced another cartoon on the subject, more in line with what would have been expected of him. Two weeks after having ‘BLIMP (INDIAN VARIETY)’ rejected, Low drew “LOOK, HE PREPARES TO THROW OFF THE BRITISH YOKE-YES?”<sup>113</sup> Here in



complete contrast to his last cartoon on India, Low shows a defiant Nehru preparing to take on the Japanese should they invade. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1942, ‘BLIMP (INDIAN VARIETY)’ was published, but two factors had changed dramatically. One was that the fear of Japanese

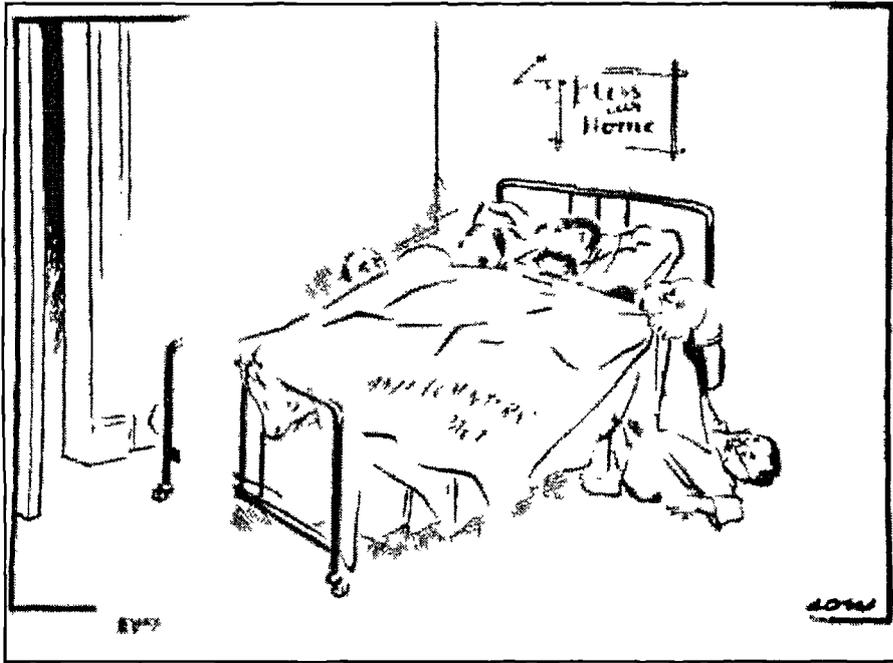
invasion had now eased, and secondly the cartoon was drastically altered with Cripps replaced by Leo Amery who was drawn wearing, like the Indian leaders, a tied-on Blimp-type moustache, thus this time showing intransigence from both the British and the Indians.

As has been noted, Low only produced one cartoon for any day’s newspaper. His drawings were either published or rejected. There is, however, just one surviving example of a cartoon that was not completed, which appears to have been drawn around May 1943.<sup>114</sup> It is untitled, and shows Stalin in bed with the leaders of the Axis powers under the blanket of the Anti-Comintern Pact. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1943, Stalin had disbanded the Comintern, the Communist International organisation that controlled Communist parties in other countries. Stalin had been forced into making this concession to the Americans and

<sup>112</sup> David Low to E.P. Thompson, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1942, Thompson Archives, Bodlian Library.

<sup>113</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1942.

<sup>114</sup> This is the only incomplete Low cartoon in existence. One presumes that such a thing was a one-off, or that other incomplete cartoons that were found to be of no further use were disposed of.



Above. Low's unfinished cartoon on the subject of Stalin's decision to disband the Comintern.

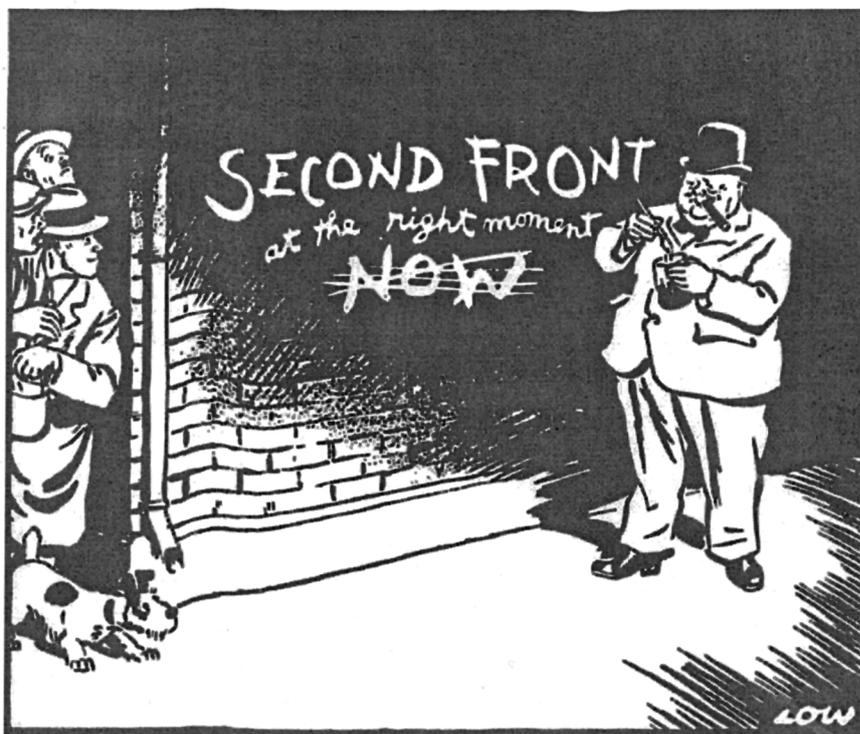
British because of his embarrassment over the Katyn massacre in Poland of which the Germans had just revealed. This had put an immediate strain on relations between the Russians and their allies and Stalin, therefore, hoped the concession would deflect their attention away from the Katyn atrocities. At the time Beaverbrook was a staunch supporter of the Russian leader, and gave Stalin the benefit of the doubt over the incident by minimising what had been found at Katyn, to the great affront of the exiled Polish Government. Low no doubt originally believed that, having disbanded the Comintern, he could show Stalin in bed with the Axis leaders with the amusing implication that he had become a member of the Anti-Comintern pact. The cartoon, of course, was intended to attack the Axis leaders, but Low may have realised whilst completing the cartoon that, he had inadvertently laid it open to possible misinterpretation. This image of Stalin 'getting into bed with the enemy' so to speak, could have been too contradictory during wartime for Beaverbrook to find acceptable. As a result, Low probably decided not to finish the drawing. Alternatively, it is conceivable that Low mentioned the cartoon he was drawing to his editor, who may have told him that such an idea would not have been acceptable for publication for the reasons already mentioned. In the week following Stalin's decision over the Comintern, only three Low cartoons appeared instead of the regular four.

Having resigned from the Government in February 1942, Beaverbrook championed, for his own personal political reasons, the call for a Second Front in Northern France in order to alleviate the pressure on the Soviet Union. This became known as the 'Second Front Now' campaign and was directed by Beaverbrook mainly from the *Evening Standard*. This was a cause mostly identified with those on the Left in politics, and not from those on the Right such as Beaverbrook. Many thought that Frank Owen and Michael

Foot had been behind the *Evening Standard*'s support for a Second Front during 1942 and 1943. However, after the war, Beaverbrook categorically denied this, and stated that he personally had been directly responsible for it:

'Owen and Foot never gave a left turn to the politics of the *Evening Standard*. This will surprise you... there was considerable agitation in the *Evening Standard* for a Second Front. This may have been misunderstood as a movement to the left. But it was no such thing and indeed I was responsible for it, after I retired from the Government.'<sup>115</sup>

When Low produced a cartoon entitled 'BASIC WINSTONESE' early in 1943, he dared to suggest that the Second Front should not take place until Churchill thought it appropriate. The cartoon in the *Evening Standard* was refused publication. In fact, any article or cartoon that questioned the validity of a Second Front was unacceptable to Beaverbrook.<sup>116</sup> By September, Beaverbrook had gone as far as putting down a motion in the House of Lords demanding the opening of a Second Front. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, Churchill asked Beaverbrook to drop the motion, as an attack on northern France had been finally decided upon for the spring of 1944.<sup>117</sup> Beaverbrook's campaign had now come to a successful, though long-awaited, conclusion. With that he rejoined the Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1943. Was it totally coincidental that four days after



BASIC WINSTONESE

Churchill had informed Beaverbrook of the planned Second Front, Low's previously unpublished cartoon 'BASIC WINSTONESE' appeared in the *Evening Standard* on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1943?

<sup>115</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Ralph Assheton, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1946, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>116</sup> At the *Daily Express*, Strube was put under constant pressure by his editor to show support for a Second Front in his cartoons, even though he did not personally believe in it. Undated notes, Strube Papers.

<sup>117</sup> Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life*, Pimlico, 1993, Page 446.

On 6<sup>th</sup> March 1944, Low drew a cartoon entitled 'FRONT BENCH MECHANISED DIVISION'. The cartoon was highly critical of two Cabinet Ministers: the Chancellor of the



Exchequer, Sir John Anderson, and the Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg. Both Cabinet Ministers had been attacked in the House of Commons failing to listen to calls demanding for immediate increases in pensions, army pay and allowances. This led to a revolt in the House of Commons and the Government's majority fell to 23

over the issue.<sup>118</sup> As Lord Privy Seal, Beaverbrook, as has been seen, did not take kindly to cartoons that alluded to criticism of fellow members of the Cabinet over sensitive issues during wartime. There were also stories circulating at the time that Beaverbrook was about to replace Grigg as Secretary of State for War, and thus such a cartoon may have been interpreted as if it had been intended to help smear Grigg's reputation.<sup>119</sup> The cartoon was refused publication.

On 11<sup>th</sup> December 1944, Low produced a cartoon, 'WISE WORDS CLOUDED', that was critical of Churchill's order for British forces in Greece to clamp down on ELAS, the military wing of both the Greek Communist Party and other left-wing groups during the Greek civil-war, without the agreement of the country's Social Democrat premier, George Papandreou. British Labour MPs had condemned Churchill's move against 'popular movements which have vigorously assisted in the defeat of the enemy'.<sup>120</sup> Low makes the



point that by forgetting the left-wing militia during Greece's civil war, Churchill was in fact assisting the far right, who in all probability had collaborated with the Germans. Low uses a direct quotation from Churchill on democracy to emphasise the hypocritical nature of the Prime Minister's actions in

<sup>118</sup> *Evening Standard*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1944.

<sup>119</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Page 555.

<sup>120</sup> *Chronicle of the Second World War*, JOL International Publications, 1994, Page 586.

overriding the country's newly formed democratic process. The cartoon, according to Low, was the only one to have ever been refused publication because of its political content:

'I can recall only one cartoon being left unprinted because of a disagreement over its political content - a spirited effort about the situation in Greece in 1945 [*sic*] which was blocked at the request of Churchill in what he held to be in the interests of western democracy.'<sup>121</sup>

As has been seen throughout this thesis, the vast majority of Low's cartoons that had been refused publication had been suppressed because of their political content. If, as Low states, this cartoon was blocked at Churchill's request, does this mean that Churchill had been informed of the cartoon before a decision had been made whether to publish it or not? This seems most improbable. More likely, Beaverbrook realised that such a critical cartoon of the Prime Minister's handling of the situation in Greece would have resulted in a possible rift between them. Beaverbrook, therefore, probably instructed his editor to inform Low that the cartoon could not be published because of Churchill's personal disapproval. However, why should a cartoon in support of democratic principles be left out in the 'interests of western democracy'? In response to this, Low appeared somewhat unsettled that yet another cartoon had been left out of the paper to suit Beaverbrook's political needs. In a letter to his proprietor he wrote indignantly:

'I am loath to trespass on your national time, but my position on the *Evening Standard* seems to be getting a little tangled. Could I possibly see you for a few minutes sometime?'<sup>122</sup>

Two further cartoons during this period were also refused publication: 'UNWELCOME ALLIES', drawn on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1944 and "'SOMETIMES I WONDER IF WE'RE IN THE SAME WAR'", drawn on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1945. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of the artwork is unknown.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, one can get a possible inkling why they may have been left unpublished by the titles themselves. Both titles appear critical as well as negative of the war effort in whatever area Low was focusing on.

<sup>121</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 197. The cartoon was drawn in 1944, and not in 1945 as Low states here.

<sup>122</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1944, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>123</sup> Evidence that these two cartoons existed can be found in a list the *Evening Standard* kept of Low's original drawings that were presented as gifts. According to the list, Beaverbrook was given 'UNWELCOME ALLIES' while Low kept "'SOMETIMES I WONDER IF WE'RE IN THE SAME WAR'" for himself. The cartoons are neither in the Beaverbrook Foundation collection at the University of Kent, nor presently, or in the past, have the Beaverbrook/Aitken family or the Low family had them in their possession nor do they have any memory of them.

## Conclusion to Chapter Five

When it came to the main events and most controversial circumstances of his time at the *Evening Standard*, Low's independence was shown not to exist in the way he and his proprietor had publicised it. Time after time, Beaverbrook directly infringed upon Low's autonomy by refusing to publish cartoons that he, and not the editor, found to be inconsistent with his own political and personal beliefs.

Even though he constantly gave the impression of being a radical, by the time Low joined the *Evening Standard*, he had accepted the restraint shown generally in Britain over caricaturing the Monarchy. According to Rachael Whear, he 'was no longer in a hurry to come out fighting'.<sup>1</sup> Whilst at the *Evening Standard*, Low found that even oblique references to the Monarchy were interpreted as being disrespectful. Consequently, Low desisted. During the Abdication crisis, Low's only approach was to follow the Beaverbrook line and blame Baldwin. In one cartoon, he made fun of Beaverbrook's call for restraint, whilst paradoxically showing remarkable restraint himself.

By the time Low had joined the *Manchester Guardian*, members of the Royal Family started to appear in his cartoons. The passing of time may have been a factor, but attitudes towards the Monarchy were still little different from the 1930s.

Low's coverage of British General Elections at the *Evening Standard* was completely different to that of the other newspapers he worked for. At the *Star*, he had supported the Liberals in his cartoons, whilst at the *Daily Herald* and the *Manchester Guardian* he had been firmly behind the Labour Party. Yet while he worked for Beaverbrook, apart from in 1945, he was strictly non-party and non-committal at election time. Any cartoons that deviated from this line were, as has been seen with those that followed the *Daily Herald* line at election time, refused publication. During elections, Low may have ridiculed Tory leaders such as Baldwin, Chamberlain and Churchill, but he was never allowed to directly mock the Tory Party itself.

On the whole, Beaverbrook enjoyed immensely Low's portrayal of his friends and acquaintances. It appealed to his mischievous and devious nature, even when his friends became quite upset or disgusted by Low's portrayal of them. Beaverbrook quite clearly felt that mere outrage, on the part of personages such as Birkenhead and Rothermere, was an inadequate reason for suppressing Low's cartoons of them. However, if it was to affect Beaverbrook's business interests, such as, with Rothermere, over the *Evening Standard*, then Low was expected to show restraint. Sometimes this was forced upon him, as when he

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<sup>1</sup> Rachael Whear to Timothy S. Benson, August 1998.

was instructed not to associate Rothermere with Mosley's Blackshirts. Although Low was furious over such constraints at the time, and even though he felt such topics to be valid newsworthy material, he acquiesced. Beaverbrook, also did not take kindly to the idea of having his close female companions satirised in cartoons.

One would have thought that Low's treatment of the dictators during the 1930s, would have been totally incompatible with his proprietor's public support for Appeasement. However, Beaverbrook may have felt that Low's depiction of Hitler and Mussolini made them appear as harmless fools. The immense publicity that Low received over his treatment of the dictators also probably helped the *Evening Standard's* circulation. Throughout the late 1930s, Low attempted to give the impression that he was the only cartoonist to target and rattle the Nazis. Partridge, Shepherd, Dyson, Zec, Strube and Friell, amongst many others, are forgotten for their own part in heckling Hitler. Low's meeting with Halifax in 1937 was later often used by the cartoonist to bolster his own reputation. When, as a result of the Halifax meeting, he was forced into toning down his cartoons of Hitler, Low became ever more defensive over his autonomy.

Even though Low's autonomy was being flagrantly violated during this period, with cartoons that appeared too strong in their attacks on Hitler being either altered or refused publication, he is still best remembered, out of all the cartoonists at the time, as the one who fought, regardless of his proprietor's views, an almost private war against the dictators in the pages of the *Evening Standard*.

During the Second World War, Low, who had for years warned of the dangers from Hitler, naturally propagandised in support of the war effort. The *Evening Standard* saw cartoons that were too critical of social or political issues caused by the war as harmful to morale. On occasions Low was even prepared to concede that he may have been wrong when a cartoon was refused publication, and drawn something more in line with what the paper would have found acceptable, as has been seen regarding the cartoons 'YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED' and 'BLIMP (INDIAN VARIETY)'.

What each of the four case studies has established is that Low's autonomy at the *Evening Standard* was invariably affected by Beaverbrook's attitude to political and personal matters. Over the major events of his time, Low was confronted not only with fixed limits to what he could get away with, but also with an uncertainty over what Beaverbrook would find acceptable or unacceptable. Even when his work was being unfairly left out, and even though he once threatened to resign over not having been allowed to caricature Rothermere's support for the Blackshirts, Low accepted, although not publicly, Beaverbrook's right to exclude his cartoons for over 23 years.

## Chapter Six: A Wasting Asset or Just Yesterday's Man?

Was David Low deliberately forced into resigning from the *Evening Standard* after 23 years of unrivalled success? Was leaving for the *Daily Herald* the right thing for him to do in the circumstances?

'David Low was once described by Beaverbrook as "the man he couldn't fire".'<sup>1</sup>

"Why don't you sack him?" "I have often," replied Beaverbrook. "But he won't go".'<sup>2</sup>

### **What prompted Low to leave the *Evening Standard* in December 1949?**

'The *Standard's* editorial personnel had completely changed too, and I was the oldest inhabitant. So what?'<sup>3</sup> (Low)

In 1956, Low put the reason for resigning from the *Evening Standard* primarily down to staleness.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the anti-climactic effect the post-war world was having on him, Low had come to the conclusion that 23 years with one paper was too long.<sup>5</sup> Both reasons seem quite understandable, especially the latter when one considers the great heights he had reached both during the dramatic events of the late 1930s and of the resulting Second World War:

'Looking around the political scene, I felt old. After the world war there could be only anti-climax in the return to home affairs, however interesting might be the plans for social improvement. To me Westminster lacked the stimulus of novelty. There were few of the ageing actors on the parliamentary stage I did not know inside out... I had exhausted the possibilities of Churchill and there was no longer the pleasure drawing him. Eden had shaken down to an unsensational formula.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Newspaper World*, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Kinross, 'Puck With A Pencil', *London Illustrated*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1950.

<sup>3</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 368.

<sup>4</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 378.

<sup>5</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>6</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 356.

Low also found that in the post-war world Beaverbrook began to increasingly spend most of his time abroad.<sup>7</sup> That touch of liveliness and nervous tension that existed when Beaverbrook was in total control was no longer there. This led a number of Express Newspapers, most notable journalistic staff to leave, making Low, in effect, the *Evening Standard's* oldest inhabitant.<sup>8</sup> Psychologically, Low also felt that he had become part of the furniture.

The sense of anti-climax, staleness and increasing frustration over the space for his cartoons being steadily reduced in size, had led Low into becoming increasingly disillusioned with the post-war *Evening Standard*. These factors, not surprisingly, affected the high standards he had always set himself. Those who were best qualified to assess, i.e. fellow cartoonists, noticed a decline in the quality of his output. According to the American cartoonist, Rollin Kirby:

‘As one views such of his more recent work as comes under observation here in America, one seems to detect a slight falling-off in execution.’<sup>9</sup>

Ronald Searle also noticed that Low’s return ‘to the home front had had a dulling effect on him’.<sup>10</sup> Frederick Joss, having been the cartoonist for the *Star* since 1934, wrote in July 1949:

‘I have heard people ask: “What’s happened to Low?” Meaning that his work has somehow become less of an event. That the institution has become less of a daily sensation... In recent years, to be sure, I heard more people refer to Giles, Osbert Lancaster’s and Vicky’s cartoons than to David Low’s. Then, what HAS happened? Low always held that cartoonists need not be funny. But he used to be very funny himself. His occasional sermons were outweighed by his gags and jabs. The gags have all but disappeared. The sermons have remained... The cutting edge of his sword seems duller.’<sup>11</sup>

Joss even doubted whether the reputation Low had gained from the preceding 30 years had indeed been really valid. He asked himself the question about whether Low’s reputation was just a result of the fanfare and adulation that had constantly appeared in Express Newspapers over the years:

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<sup>7</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 368.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rollin Kirby, ‘Low And His Cartoons’, *American Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1946, Page 609.

<sup>10</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1963.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Joss, ‘What’s Happened to Low?’, *Star*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1949.

‘Perhaps Low’s absolute hegemony was never quite the fact it was advertised to be by the papers he worked for. Perhaps Strube and Tom Webster had larger and more faithful audiences even when Low was at the zenith of his glory.’<sup>12</sup>

As revealed in his autobiography, Low’s relative disinterest in the post-war world, compared to what had gone on before, was reflected in what little he had to say about either the post-war British political scene or the increasing friction between the two new super-powers. What in fact did occupy him, during these last years at the *Evening Standard*, were his constant trips abroad. In his autobiography, Low had little to say about his cartooning exploits, while in total contrast he described, in detail, his visits to war-torn Germany and the Nuremberg trials, Paris and the first Assembly of the United Nations, Czechoslovakia, Korea, and then the three months he spent in America following the pre-election primaries and visiting Hollywood:

‘For the next year or so I was restless and took every opportunity to see at first hand what was happening in the world.’<sup>13</sup>

As has been mentioned in a previous chapter, Low had fully committed himself at the 1945 General Election to supporting the Labour Party with its plans for a Welfare State as well as supporting, wholeheartedly, its proposals to nationalise certain key industries. With Labour’s overwhelming success at the polls, Low found that for the first time since joining the *Evening Standard* he really was in support and therefore in sympathy with the Government of the day. As a consequence, he found it increasingly difficult to attack and ridicule the day-to-day goings on at Westminster. Osbert Lancaster noticed what an inauspicious period this was for Low, as it was for all overtly political cartoonists who had a tendency to preach or put over a particular political point of view:

‘It’s OK when you’re in opposition. But when you have to be *for* something then they all fall flat on their faces. Even Low - those splendid attacks on Hitler, Mussolini and Tories - then he occasionally had to do an idealistic picture of happy young workers marching into the dawn - like a soap ad.’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 357.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Boston, *OSBERT: A Portrait of Osbert Lancaster*, Collins, 1989, Page 112.

The American *Time* magazine seemed to agree with Lancaster's point of view that cartoonists like Low needed to be against something in order to be at their best:

'The fact that Labour was in power seemed to dull down Low. The answer seemed to be that Low, like other cartoonists, is at his best when he is against something.'<sup>15</sup>

The *Economist* also questioned whether Low's work had suffered as a result of Labour coming to power:

'Low will not be really happy again until there is a Conservative Government to poke fun at.'<sup>16</sup>

*The Times* implied that because Low was now in support of the party of government, he lacked the range of subjects or characters he was normally able to hold up to ridicule. As a result the newspaper wrote:

'Yet how many of us think that Low is at his best in the present dispensation?'<sup>17</sup>

There is little doubt that the readers of the *Evening Standard* also noticed a deterioration in Low's output. Here are examples of what some of the paper's readership thought about Low's post-war cartoons:

'Since the advent of the Socialist Government, Low has not produced one amusing political cartoon, due, no doubt, to an inferiority complex suffered by most Socialists, unable to make a joke against themselves. Or is he turning mediocre out of sympathy for our Socialist Government.'<sup>18</sup>

'NOT AMUSING. Low used to amuse me, now he bores me. Socialist propaganda is the keynote of his cartoons.'<sup>19</sup>

'The real trouble with Low is that like the weather, he is mostly dull, with only occasional bright intervals.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Time*, 'Time for a Change', 29<sup>th</sup> December 1950.

<sup>16</sup> *Economist*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Page 74.

<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 'Sagittarius: Let Cowards Flinch', 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1947.

<sup>18</sup> *Evening Standard*, readers letters, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1947, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>19</sup> *Evening Standard*, readers letters, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>20</sup> *Evening Standard*, readers letters, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1947, Low Papers, University of Kent.

‘Isn’t it about time you pensioned Low off? An impartial cartoonist poking fun at all political parties would be appreciated by anyone with any sense of humour, but any humour Low had has disappeared.’<sup>21</sup>

The 1945 General Election also meant that for the first time Low and Beaverbrook had found themselves in diametrically opposing political camps. The non-party approach that had been the only way the arrangement between them had survived as it had done at previous elections, and as had been the case with other radical cartoonists joining Conservative newspapers before, was now at an end. Low’s ridiculing of Churchill and the Conservatives during the election campaign, and the resulting criticism of Beaverbrook from senior Tories for having employed him, created a sea-change in the cartoonist-proprietor relationship. Although Low believed it had ‘made no difference to personal relations’, it does appear to have put a strain on their relationship.<sup>22</sup> No longer would he receive congratulatory telegrams or letters from Beaverbrook about his work, unlike the other cartoonists at Express Newspapers. Even Osbert Lancaster occasionally received the odd congratulatory letter, after the war, from a proprietor who, as we have already seen, had little time for him. In regard to a pocket cartoon on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1948, Beaverbrook wrote:

‘It was as brilliant a piece of work as anything I have seen in the *Daily Express*, and I have seen much that is good in the paper.’<sup>23</sup>

Here are three examples of congratulatory letters or telegrams sent from Beaverbrook to Strube at the *Daily Express* between 1945 and 1946; a cartoonist whose work was certainly, by all accounts, on the decline:

‘I send you my warmest congratulations on the cartoon in the *Daily Express* on Tuesday morning. It is a fine performance and what is called hitting the news on the snout.’<sup>24</sup>

‘I congratulate you most warmly on the cartoon today. I liked yesterday’s even more and with grateful thanks for an excellent good morning.’<sup>25</sup>

‘Your cartoon this morning was magnificent. I send you my warmest congratulations.’<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Evening Standard*, readers letters, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>22</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 354.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Boston, *OSBERT: A Portrait of Osbert Lancaster*, Collins, 1989, Page 116.

<sup>24</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1945, Strube Papers.

In the year that Low left the *Evening Standard*, Carl Giles received a congratulatory letter from Beaverbrook that sounded like the great Low had never existed, let alone been the greatest political cartoonist ever employed by Express Newspapers:

‘I have had many years in journalism now, and I must say that the Giles’ output is the best I have ever had.’<sup>27</sup>

Beaverbrook did send one congratulatory letter to Low, but it was with some irony that it was in reference to an article Low had written on the Nuremburg trials and not in relation to his actual cartoons:

‘I read with immense admiration your article in the *Evening Standard* on the Nuremburg trials, and I send you my warm congratulations. What a splendid journalist was lost to the *Evening Standard* when you were taught to draw!’<sup>28</sup>

There also appeared to be few, if any, public utterances about Low on Beaverbrook’s behalf, except for a sarcastic snipe at the cartoonist in the *Sunday Express* in 1947. On the news that the Labour Government had decided to appoint a Royal Commission into the Press, Beaverbrook stated that:

‘All comments should be as fair and balanced as that of my friend Mr Low, of the *Tribune* and the *Yellow Books*.’<sup>29</sup>

Whether, in Beaverbrook’s eyes, Low’s cartoons had deteriorated, one cannot possibly tell, but as can be seen by such a public utterance, he no longer held the cartoonist in such high esteem. This factor would ultimately play a part when it came to Low’s resignation.

### **Were paper shortages really responsible for the reduction in the space available for Low’s cartoons in the *Evening Standard*?**

‘Low’s cartoons in the *Evening Standard* have been reduced in size but the little man still has big ideas.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1946, Strube Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Sidney Strube, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1946, Strube Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Carl Giles, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1950, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>28</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1945, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>29</sup> *Sunday Express*, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1947.

<sup>30</sup> *Newspaper World*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

In the spring of 1945, the *Evening Standard's* Editor, Sidney Elliott, found that, like his predecessor, he could not embrace his proprietor's support for the Conservatives at the forthcoming General Election. In his biography of Beaverbrook, Tom Driberg referred to Elliott as the Socialist Editor of the *Evening Standard*, and believed the election 'was going to be a bitter fight, and the days of some freedom of expression for Socialists in the Beaverbrook press were over'.<sup>31</sup> Elliott therefore left the evening paper to join the *Daily Mirror* for what the *World's Press News* reported as 'political reasons'.<sup>32</sup> He was replaced as Editor, before the election, by Herbert Gunn, who was, according to A.J.P. Taylor, a safe pair of hands.<sup>33</sup> To James Cameron 'Mr Gunn's mind belonged, like the *Standard*, to Lord Beaverbrook.'<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, Gunn was not only happy to follow the proprietor's political line, but was also fully sympathetic to his wishes and whims, as this quotation from a letter to Beaverbrook indicates:

'This is written reaffirmation of my undertaking to submit to you, before publication, all copy of leaders and other projects...'<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, there was a strong likelihood that Gunn would not have approved of the political line Low was following in his cartoons, unlike that of the four previous Editors of the *Evening Standard* before him, Elliott, Foot, Owen and Cudlipp. Low, by his own omission, was at political odds with Gunn and had little success in bringing him round to his political standpoint. At a dinner in Low's honour, the cartoonist had said of Gunn:

'[I] think his politics are fantastically wrong. Don't seem to have any luck in infiltrating him at all.'<sup>36</sup>

Apart from obviously being unsympathetic to Low's political line, Gunn, in his own words, admitted to finding 'Low's humour obscure'.<sup>37</sup> According to A.J.P. Taylor, Gunn took responsibility for making the *Evening Standard* 'more sensational and popular'.<sup>38</sup> He also came under increasing pressure from his chairman, E.J. Robertson, to improve the quality of the paper.<sup>39</sup> Under these circumstances, it would not have escaped Gunn's attention that Low's cartoons were, by all accounts, no longer what they had been prior to

<sup>31</sup> Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956, Page 299.

<sup>32</sup> *World's Press News*, undated, Low's press cuttings, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>33</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1973, Page 550.

<sup>34</sup> James Cameron, *Point of Departure*, Barker, 1967, Page 85.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1947, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>36</sup> A direct quotation from a speech David Low gave at his farewell dinner from the *Evening Standard* which was held in his honour on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1950. Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>38</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1973, Page 621

<sup>39</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 312.

his arrival. Gunn would most likely have been influenced by the Editor of the *Daily Express*, Arthur Christiansen, who certainly noticed a deterioration in Low's work:

'I have not admired Low's work for the last couple of years. For every good cartoon, there have been three bad ones.'<sup>40</sup>

Did Herbert Gunn come to the conclusion that Low was now well past his best? Was it therefore feasible that the removal of Low was part of his plan for revamping and revitalising the evening paper? Gunn may have considered terminating Low's contract, but presumably to do so would have required Beaverbrook's consent. This was obviously not given as Beaverbrook, whatever his feelings about the 1945 General Election may have been, may have felt that this was too harsh an action to take. Express Newspapers would surely have been left with egg on their face had they suddenly sacked a cartoonist they had been widely publicising for years as the world's greatest cartoonist. In any case, how could they sack such a legendary and famous figure? Knowing full well that space was sacrosanct to Low, why not gradually reduce the space available for his cartoons, blame it on the paper shortage, and wait till he found it unacceptable and was forced to leave by his own volition?<sup>41</sup> Beaverbrook knew perfectly well that Low had left the *Star* because the space for his cartoons had been reduced. Could this have been, with Beaverbrook's passive support, exactly what happened?

Alternatively, was Beaverbrook, who in Low's own words 'had gone to live across the Atlantic',<sup>42</sup> no longer so concerned with the running of his newspapers, thus for the first time allowing the *Evening Standard* Editor full reign to do what he felt was right? The *New Statesman* felt this arrangement would not bode well for Low's future:

'Beaverbrook has now reached the age when he no longer constantly rings up his editors on the phone and dictates the substance of tomorrow's paper. Even he may find this difficult to do long-distance from Jamaica, where he now spends most of his time. This means that the direction of his papers must fall into other and perhaps less tolerant hands. Low may well doubt whether the familiar relationship by which the cartoonist rags the leader-writer in the *Evening Standard* can be maintained for many years longer.'<sup>43</sup>

Of course Low contemptuously dismissed, in his autobiography, those who felt he was no longer tolerated or wanted on the *Evening Standard* by either his editor or Beaverbrook:

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<sup>40</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>41</sup> According to Dr Rachael Whear, Low's younger daughter, 'space was one of my father's manias'.

<sup>42</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 368.

<sup>43</sup> *New Statesman*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1950.

'Stoopids who had always thought of me as one of Beaverbrook's leg-men assumed that I must have lost favour and been banished...'<sup>44</sup>

It may have all been totally coincidental, but from 1946 the space given to Low for his cartoons in the *Evening Standard* began to regularly shrink in size. According to the late *Daily Express* cartoonist, Michael Cummings:

'A cartoonist knows when he is no longer wanted when they start shrinking the space available for his cartoons.'<sup>45</sup>

Low's highly popular and successful 'Topical Budget' which had consisted of a full page montage of topical cartoons that had appeared every Saturday up until March 1940, was not continued after the war. Frederick Joss, the cartoonist of the *Star*, believed that Low had voluntarily decided not to reintroduce it into the *Evening Standard*:

'He has given up his startling Saturday feature, the "Topical Budget".'<sup>46</sup>

Even though his contract stipulated that his cartoons should be a half-page, this was to be totally ignored in the post-war years. Low, personally, seemed to accept that the continuing paper shortages were directly responsible for the decreasing size of his cartoons:

'Paper shortages had kept, and seemed likely to keep the British newspapers scant of space indefinitely.'<sup>47</sup>

Dennis Griffiths, in his history of the *Evening Standard*, wrote that after the war the



evening paper 'could no longer afford room for the full-sized cartoons of Low'.<sup>48</sup> In July 1947, Low drew a cartoon entitled 'CLAUSTROPHOBIA DEPARTMENT'<sup>49</sup> that firmly put the blame on the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, for the paper shortage in Britain,

<sup>44</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 379.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Cummings interviewed by Timothy S. Benson, October 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Frederick Joss, 'What's Happened to Low?', *Star*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1949.

<sup>47</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 378.

<sup>48</sup> Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard*, Macmillan, 1996, Page 321.

<sup>49</sup> Published in the *Evening Standard* on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1947.

and thus the smaller cartoon. It is, however, difficult to comprehend why Low's cartoons were being reduced in size, when the paper shortages were that much greater during the war. For example, between 1943-44, the *Evening Standard* had been reduced to only 8 pages, compared to that of 12 pages in 1947. Although it is possible that advertising may have significantly increased, it is nonetheless surprising that Low's cartoons should have been affected so much.

In March 1948, six months after the previous reduction in space, Low was for the first time humiliatingly forced into including the caption inside, instead of outside, his cartoon. This concession was probably due to the increasing limitations put on him by his editor. Even though no other cartoonist in the Express Group appeared to have to do this, Gunn still seemed dissatisfied. Two weeks later, the editor requested Low to make a further reduction in the size of his cartoons:

'After giving the matter a great deal of thought and consideration, I have come to the conclusion that we have got to ask you for a reduction in the size of your cartoon, from 4 to 3 columns without increasing the depth beyond the present measure. I appreciate that you may find it difficult to work in this smaller space.'<sup>50</sup>

Low was horrified to receive the news that he would yet again have to reduce the space available for his cartoon. Responding to Gunn, Low made it quite clear how detrimental the changes were having both to his work and his reputation at the *Evening Standard*:

'I fully appreciate your difficulties about space in the small newspaper, and I think you understand mine. Therefore I will not labour the point about the cut in width, since the present size is already too small to "operate" properly, beyond noting that the new size will permit only the bare illustration of ideas and will make artistic quality not merely difficult but impossible. This is a dismal prospect for me, who wants to DRAW, and my reputation, which must suffer a decline here and wherever *Evening Standard* syndications go.'<sup>51</sup>

Knowing what effect the reduction of space was having on Low, neither Gunn nor Beaverbrook made any attempt to alleviate the problem. A week later, Gunn wrote another letter to Low, which surely emphasises the fact that Low was no longer considered the great asset he had been at the paper:

<sup>50</sup> Herbert Gunn to David Low, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent

<sup>51</sup> David Low to Herbert Gunn, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

'I hate to raise the point but you were a good half an inch over your depth this morning, and you are similarly too deep tomorrow. One and a half inches less on the page means a Diary para left out.'<sup>52</sup>

Gunn must have been aware that rebuking Low over using too much space, having already recently asked him to cut his space down, was likely to test the cartoonist's patience to the limit. Was Gunn now hoping that he would resign in response to his letter? Low's response seemed to hint that his resignation would not be long in coming:

'I did the best I could with the space, but the result gives me no satisfaction.

Regarding the space question: the depth of my cartoons (title included) under the previous arrangement was never 5 inches, but usually between 5 ½ and 5 ¼. If your comment is a suggestion that in addition to the cut in width, there should also be a further dent in depth, then I have had enough.'<sup>53</sup>

For Low to threaten that he had 'had enough' seemed to imply that Gunn's strategy was about to bear fruit. Instead of taking issue over the half-page which had been guaranteed to him in his contract Low, fed up and 'already feeling a bit stale since the war ended', defused the situation by invoking the clause of his contract which allowed him to take three months' leave and thus went off to the United States to cover the 1948 American Primaries for *Time-Life* magazine.<sup>54</sup> In the event, Low's long absence was not deemed detrimental to the paper. In fact, Gunn found that during this period the space for Low's cartoon had been put to far better use. According to Gunn:

'One more factor which is assisting us at present, of course, is the absence of LOW. The space normally occupied by the cartoon, enables us to use pictures and to set in a great deal more material.'<sup>55</sup>

Gunn obviously felt that Low's cartoons were no longer of value to the paper. Therefore it was no surprise that when Low returned from America in August, the space for his cartoons was yet again reduced in size. Arthur Christiansen noticed how the smaller space that Low was being forced to work with had led to a visible deterioration in the cartoonist's performance:

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<sup>52</sup> Herbert Gunn to David Low, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>53</sup> David Low to Herbert Gunn, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>54</sup> David Low to Herbert Gunn, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1948, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>55</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1948, Beaverbrook Archives.

‘It may well be that the main reason for his decline as a force at the *Evening Standard* lay in the small space allotted to him.’<sup>56</sup>

Not only could Low see that his artistic and intellectual talents were being compromised, but that, as a result, his reputation was also suffering. Express Newspapers were fully aware of this but, for reasons already stated, did nothing to alleviate Low’s increasing unhappiness with the situation. If Low was still valued, why was no effort made to keep him or re-launch his career at the *Evening Standard*? This, surely, would not have been all that difficult to do. Beaverbrook could easily have stepped in and improved the situation had he wished to. Jimmy Friell, who replaced Low, was a far inferior cartoonist, but when Friell found himself unhappy with conditions at the *Evening Standard*, the management went out of its way to keep him satisfied. Max Aitken, then Managing Director of the *Evening Standard*, wrote to his father:

‘... we are going to make every effort to keep Friell.’<sup>57</sup>

By the late 1940s, Low was not the only cartoonist that Express Newspapers thought was expendable. Strube, who had been at the *Daily Express* since 1912, was also considered well past his best. According to his successor, Michael Cummings:

‘Strube was got rid of because he had become stale and repetitive.’<sup>58</sup>

Knowing that Strube, unlike Low, was prepared to work within the confines of limited space, Christiansen, then Editor, took it upon himself to sack an astounded Strube on the spot. E.J. Robertson then informed Beaverbrook of what had happened:

‘After publishing a number of very indifferent Strube cartoons, we decided yesterday that the time had come when we should cease the publication of any more cartoons by our dear old friend. After Christiansen broke the news to him I had a long talk with him. After 35 years on the paper our decision obviously came as a great shock. His attitude was a mixture of incoherence and great belief in himself. He could not, for instance, understand how anyone could decide to drop a great artist like himself and continue with a poor one like Giles. With complete sincerity he told me he hoped that the resulting loss of circulation would not be as

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<sup>56</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Max Aitken to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1958, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Cummings interviewed by Timothy S. Benson, October 1997.

great as he thought it would be. It was an unfortunate coincidence that today is his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday.’<sup>59</sup>

Was this the way to treat someone who had given 35 years’ loyal service to the *Daily Express*?<sup>60</sup> Why did they not retire him gracefully by cutting down his workload, like a number of other newspapers had done to their long-serving cartoonists in the past? When Lord Winterton was Editor of the *Newspaper World* between 1910–11 he did exactly this to save the face of Leslie Ward, the famous ‘Spy’ caricaturist, as he explained to Strube in 1932:

‘Leslie Ward was doing the cartoons then; he was getting on in years even at that time, and his work was not quite what it had been earlier. As I thought the public were getting a little bit tired of it, I arranged that he should alternate each week with “Sem”, and though the old man resented this at first, he eventually agreed to this course.’<sup>61</sup>

According to Strube’s son, George Strube, his father was got rid of because Christiansen did not approve of the cartoonist’s left-wing sympathies. However, a more likely explanation is that Christiansen wanted to replace Strube with Cummings, whom he felt had great potential, and was also in total sympathy with the political line of the paper:

‘For politics, we will have to rely on Cummings. And there, I think, we have a real gem. Mr. Churchill wrote to me this week in these terms: “Cummings may well become one of the greatest cartoonists of our time.”’<sup>62</sup>

Although not discarded as abruptly or as crudely as Strube had been, Low found that Express Newspapers were looking for a new generation of cartoonists for the *Daily Express* and probably for the *Evening Standard* as well. It is therefore not surprising that, without any support from Beaverbrook personally, an increasingly despondent and lacklustre Low was now, more than at anytime since joining the *Evening Standard*, susceptible to overtures from other newspapers.

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<sup>59</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1947, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Christiansen, who had devoted his life to the *Daily Express* had been primarily responsible for making the paper the huge success it was. After recovering from a heart attack due to the pressures put upon by his position as Editor, he found that in his old office was his replacement as editor Edward Pickering.

<sup>61</sup> Lord Winterton to Sidney Strube, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1932, Strube Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

## Why did Low leave the *Evening Standard* for the *Daily Herald*?

‘Thank goodness the *Evening Standard* has seen the light at long last. You should thrive with the “Gutter Press” which is your natural home, you poisonous little swine.’ (Anonymous letter to Low, dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1950)

Low believed that Percy Cudlipp had been by far the best editor that he had ever worked under. According to Low:

‘Percy Cudlipp was that rare phenomenon, an editor who knew what a political cartoon was and how to present it... Unique in my experience of editors, Percy would have been a bit of luck for any cartoonist. He was made for me. We were, so to speak, on the same wavelength. With him ideas flowed.’<sup>63</sup>

Feelings were no doubt mutual. Cudlipp was not only a great admirer of Low’s work, but also strongly aware of the cartoonist’s popularity, especially amongst those on the Left. Because Cudlipp and Low were on the same political wavelength, their relationship was all the more successful. Michael Foot was convinced that Cudlipp was a sincere Socialist, but Harold Nicolson thought he was just an opportunist. When Editor of the *Evening Standard*, Nicolson believed he was ‘a man who would climb over his mother’s dead body to get a step higher’.<sup>64</sup>

After four years as Editor, Cudlipp left the *Evening Standard* in December 1937, having been offered the editorship of the *Daily Herald*. The two reasons behind why he left the *Evening Standard* were: (1) He could no longer endure Beaverbrook’s political stance or his support for Appeasement. (2) As a result of this, a rift had developed between himself and Michael Wardell, the *Evening Standard*’s Manager, over the latter’s continual interference in the running of the newspaper.<sup>65</sup> Cudlipp’s successor, Frank Owen, also later quit because he could not stand the autocratic nature of Wardell’s management.

One of Cudlipp’s first decisions as Editor of the *Daily Herald* was to try and persuade Low to defect to the Labour-backed newspaper, as E.J. Robertson noted in a memo to Beaverbrook in 1949:

<sup>63</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 287.

<sup>64</sup> *Harold Nicolson Diaries and Letters: 1930-39*, Collins, 1966, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1946.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Foot referred to Wardell as a “bloody Fascist” when interviewed in February 1996.

‘When Percy Cudlipp left the *Standard* to join the *Daily Herald*, he made an immediate effort to take Low with him. Low at the time refused on the grounds of loyalty to you and complete contentment in the job.’<sup>66</sup>

It was not surprising that Low rejected Cudlipp’s overtures in 1937, as he was then at the height of his powers and popularity, fighting an almost private war against the dictators in his daily cartoons. By 1948, the situation was quite different. An overture from Cudlipp would now surely have been difficult for Low to resist. The overture was made, with Cudlipp offering numerous enticements that he hoped would go a long way to re-launching Low’s faltering career. The first of these, and for Low the most important of all, was the offer of as much space as he wanted for his cartoons. This, more than anything, precipitated Low’s decision to join the *Daily Herald*, as *Newsweek* was to recognise in 1952:

‘In 1949, for instance, a promise of an inch and a half more display space for his cartoons was said to have wooed Low away from the Tory Lord Beaverbrook’s *Evening Standard* and taken him to the Labourite London *Daily Herald*.’<sup>67</sup>

Low was also offered the same salary as he had received at the *Evening Standard*, £10,000 per annum, but he would only have to draw three cartoons a week instead of the previous four. This was equivalent to a salary increase of 25%. He would, in any case, still be earning more than anyone else on the newspaper. Cudlipp also offered to lavishly advertise his arrival at the *Daily Herald*. Under such conditions, Low felt that he could once again reach the heights he had done in earlier years at the *Evening Standard*, as he told E.J. Robertson:

‘Low said he was a wasting asset both from our point of view and his own, and that his removal to the *Herald* would mean the Odhams would naturally put him over in a big way, that he would be re-established as the world’s greatest cartoonist, and that as a result he would be stimulated to doing better work. It is also a stipulation that there would be no limitation on the amount of space given to him to present his cartoons to the best advantage.’<sup>68</sup>

Cudlipp also felt that the timing was just right for Low to come and join the *Daily Herald*. With an election due by 1950, Low, Cudlipp believed, would help boost the newspaper in its circulation war against the *Daily Mirror*, whilst at the same time helping

<sup>66</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>67</sup> *Newsweek*, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent.

the Labour Party win a second term in office. Again, in a memo from E.J. Robertson to Beaverbrook:

‘According to Percy, the acquisition of Low will greatly strengthen the *Herald* as a propaganda organ.’<sup>69</sup>

However, Robertson personally believed that Low would be far more effective as a Labour propagandist had he remained at the *Evening Standard*:

‘I suggested to Cudlipp that Low would be worth very much more to the Socialist Party if he continued to do his cartoons for the *Standard* during the campaign...’<sup>70</sup>

### **Did Low make the right decision in joining the *Daily Herald*?**

After 23 years as a cartoonist on the *Evening Standard*, it is probable that Low would have found a certain degree of inspiration and fresh impetus from any newspaper that had offered to both re-launch his career and supply him with the space he required for his cartoons. Christiansen believed that although he personally felt that Low had been in decline for some years, the cartoonist might rediscover his touch if the *Daily Herald* gave him what he needed to work effectively:

‘Will it do the *Daily Herald* any good? I think they will get something out of it. Obviously, Low is going to put everything he has got into the come-back. He has also been promised space, and that is vital to the temperament of the artist. The *Herald* is bound to sell well during the General Election, and if Low has a real period of inspiration, he may hold a few readers when things settle down. It is good business for Cudlipp anyway, whether Low makes sales or not...’<sup>71</sup>

What difference would changing papers make to Low personally? If the cartoonist was truly feeling stale, one wonders, apart from being offered a larger canvas, what effect moving from the *Evening Standard* would in reality have had in reviving his spirits. The post-war political, economic, and social scene would have been the same whatever paper he worked for. As a result his subject matter, and the treatment of it, would have invariably not altered. When the *Daily Herald* went into severe decline in the early 1960s it re-launched as the *Sun*, which today, apart from being Britain’s best-selling paper, is also

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<sup>68</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>69</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>70</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

almost devoid of any intellectual input. Presumably, even before Murdoch's involvement in the paper, the *Daily Herald* was as populist as the *Sun* is now, and one cannot imagine someone of Low's stature and intellect working today as the cartoonist for the *Sun*.<sup>72</sup>

As has been stated, Low worked on his own, either at his studio in Hampstead or at his home in Golders Green. Therefore, it was not as if he was working from a new office, surrounded by new faces with new ideas. Low continued to work in the same environment after having joined the *Daily Herald*, and it is highly unlikely that he ever visited the newspaper's offices in Manchester, compared to his regular visits to the *Evening Standard*'s offices in Shoe Lane, just off Fleet Street. He would therefore presumably have had less personal contact with his new employers than before.<sup>73</sup>

Apart from the space and the fanfare that would come with his arrival at the *Daily Herald*, Low must have relished the thought of working for a national newspaper for the first time, instead of London evening papers like the *Evening Standard* and the *Star*. When his reputation was growing during the 1920s and 30s, the cartoonist must have at times yearned for the opportunity to cater for a mass audience like Strube at the *Daily Express* or Poy at the *Daily Mail*. Did not people often wonder what the greatest cartoonist of the inter-war period was doing on a small-circulation London evening newspaper? Unfortunately for Low, although the *Daily Herald* was a national paper with a large circulation, those papers that had in the past published his syndicated cartoons, such as the *Manchester Guardian* amongst others in England and Scotland, had to cease to do so, as the *Daily Herald* would claim exclusive rights to Low's work.

The *Daily Herald* had a readership of around two million, but unlike the *Evening Standard* and *Manchester Guardian* it catered largely for the lower-middle and working classes. As a result, *Time* magazine was one journal which felt he would basically be 'preaching to the converted'.<sup>74</sup> The *Recorder* also used the same phrase in describing how Low would not now be able to influence the uncommitted voter:

'Low's friends are wondering whether he has made a wise decision. Politically his move may lose the socialists 100,000 votes. In the *Evening Standard* his cartoon was seen largely by non-Socialists; in the *Daily Herald* he will be preaching to the converted.'<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> The *Daily Herald* changed its name to the *Sun* in 1964, and was purchased by Rupert Murdoch in 1969.

<sup>73</sup> One presumes that as the *Daily Herald*'s Editor, Percy Cudlipp worked in Manchester.

<sup>74</sup> *Time*, 'Time for a Change', 29<sup>th</sup> December 1950.

<sup>75</sup> *Recorder*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent.

Comparing the readership of the *Daily Herald* at the time to that of the *Evening Standard* and the *Manchester Guardian*, one finds that the latter newspapers were being read by a far wider economic and social readership than the former. It was Low's ability to ridicule the social and political beliefs of most of those that read the *Evening Standard* that made his cartoons so controversial and thus vastly appealing to its readers, who either loved or loathed them. His continued support for Labour, as has already been touched upon, meant that his cartoons at the *Daily Herald* would quickly lose their previous bite:

'Low recently transferred to the *Daily Herald*, which is a Labour paper. Many people consider this to have been a great mistake, because Low's cartoons, appearing in a paper like the *Evening Standard*, had a special sting and appeal that is missing when they are published in the *Daily Herald*.'<sup>76</sup>

Gunn was surprised that out of all the possibilities open to him, Low had chosen to join the *Daily Herald* to display his talents. Did not Low, upon deciding to resign from the *Evening Standard*, want to take a more internationalist stance in his cartoons? In his autobiography he wrote:

'I wanted to be universal. I would cut out the local trivia and adopt the supra-national viewpoint of a citizen of the world. In this elevated mood I went home and sacked myself from the *Evening Standard*.'<sup>77</sup>

Surely, then, the *Daily Herald* was not the appropriate vehicle? A month before Low resigned, Gunn had written to Beaverbrook about the cartoonist's long time fascination and admiration for the United States:

'I think Low has a strong feeling that his prestige in America is of supreme importance to him.'<sup>78</sup>

In 1936 Low had told a reporter that it had been his 'ambition to spend his old age in California'.<sup>79</sup> This fascination with America, and for those who followed his cartoons and articles in the *New York Times* and other American syndicated newspapers and journals, made Gunn conclude that Low was far more likely to look for an outlet for his work on the other side of the Atlantic rather than at home:

<sup>76</sup> 'An Interview With David Low', *New Era*, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>77</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 379.

<sup>78</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>79</sup> *West Australian*, circa 1936, Low Papers, University of Kent.

‘I had always thought that if he left us he would work for the Americans and in particular *Life* magazine. He used to show me sometimes the spread *Life* would give him and compare it with the space we limited him to in the *Evening Standard*.’<sup>80</sup>

As far as a contract with the *Daily Herald* was concerned, Low of course expected, if not demanded, the ‘complete freedom’ clause he had had at the *Evening Standard* to be included. Initially, he must have thought that his clause was more likely to be adhered to at the *Daily Herald*, as his increasingly pro-Labour stance would follow directly the political line of the paper. He believed it to be a refreshing opportunity to work in political tandem with a newspaper, unlike his time at the *Evening Standard*, where he admitted to having become tired of the novelty of being a Leftist cartoonist appearing in a ‘Tory’ paper.

Ironically, there appeared to be a general consensus amongst the Press that Low would not be allowed anywhere near the freedom that he had had while working for Beaverbrook. Low admitted in his autobiography that people assumed that, at the *Daily Herald*, he would naturally become a Labour Party cartoonist, and would thus fail to take into account his independence of viewpoint.<sup>81</sup> According to the *Recorder*:

‘A more vital point is that Low will have nothing like the freedom in the *Herald* that he has had in the *Evening Standard*, although his politics are said to be in line with the *Herald*’s.’<sup>82</sup>

The right-wing magazine, *Truth*, naturally believed that the *Daily Herald*’s proprietors were in no way as tolerant of their staff as compared to that of the Conservative Press:

‘The Socialists are unlikely to allow criticism of themselves in their own papers.’<sup>83</sup>

The *New Statesman* was also of the same opinion:

‘Trade unionists, unlike Lord Beaverbrook, do not like being ragged.’<sup>84</sup>

The *Socialist Leader*, which had its own reasons for being critical of the union-backed *Daily Herald*, felt that the portents did not bode well for Low:

<sup>80</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>81</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 380.

<sup>82</sup> *Recorder*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>83</sup> *Truth*, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>84</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent

‘All journalists I have known who have worked on the *Herald* have complained of the rigidity of editorial control. The paper reads more like a political pamphlet, of course, than a modern and snappy news sheet, and Beaverbrook allows his men far more latitude than do the bosses down at Long Acre.’<sup>85</sup>

Remarkably, Cudlipp confided in Gunn that he was concerned about whether Low would be allowed a totally free rein at the *Daily Herald*:

‘I had a private talk with Cudlipp over Xmas and he confessed himself a little worried over the reaction of the Trade Union bosses if Low tries to pursue a really independent course.’<sup>86</sup>

Also, Low does not seem to have taken into account Will Dyson’s own experiences at the *Daily Herald* up to his death in January 1938. Dyson’s cartoons were often toned down by the *Daily Herald*’s editors when they appeared to offend either the Labour Party, the TUC, or the Odhams Press directors’ concern that depressing news or views might harm circulation and help to make another European war possible.<sup>87</sup> Incredibly, Low was well aware of the restraints put on Dyson by the *Daily Herald*. In his book on British cartoonists in 1942, Low stated that Dyson, after the First World War, had had to conform to the *Daily Herald*’s wishes:

‘...the *Herald* revived to serve a Labour Party now groomed for respectability as His Majesty’s Opposition, the editor was moved to shut down on the Devils, Dyson was conjured to play the Party game and flatter the Party leaders, to become tame and “funny”.’<sup>88</sup>

Researching an essay on political cartoons and British foreign policy, Peter Mellini spent some time carefully looking at, and analysing, many of Dyson’s original cartoons located at the University of Kent. Mellini noticed that much of the artwork contained changes made by editors to adjust their meanings so that they would conform to Labour Party dogma, and allay the worries of the *Daily Herald*’s editors and Odhams’ directors.<sup>89</sup>

After Will Dyson’s death, the *Daily Herald* employed two rather unimaginative and technically poor cartoonists, namely, George Whitelaw and Gilbert Wilkinson. Whitelaw

<sup>85</sup> *Socialist Leader*, ‘The Low Highbrow’, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Low Papers, University of Kent

<sup>86</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>87</sup> Will Dyson’s biographer, John Jensen interviewed by Timothy S. Benson, September 1998.

<sup>88</sup> David Low, *British Cartoonists: Caricaturists and Comic Artists*, Collins, 1942, Page 44.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Mellini, ‘Why Didn’t They Listen?’, *Political Cartooning and British Foreign Policy 1933-40*, Sonoma State and San Francisco State Universities, unpublished, 1988, Page 3.

joined the newspaper shortly after Dyson had died, while Wilkinson arrived in 1942 to work in tandem with Whitelaw. In comparison with Low, these cartoonists were indeed third-rate. Ironically, both cartoonists had at times plagiarised Low's very own style. In replacing Whitelaw, who had retired from the *Daily Herald* in 1949, Low would not have welcomed having to follow in his footsteps, nor would he also have appreciated the prospect of now having to work alongside such an undistinguished cartoonist as Wilkinson. Gunn sardonically pointed this out in a letter to Beaverbrook:

'I do not anticipate Low will like being bracketed with an artist of the poor calibre of Wilkinson. So no doubt Cudlipp will have some trouble there too.'<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, Wilkinson was probably expecting to become the *Daily Herald's* main cartoonist after Whitlaw's retirement, but found himself usurped by Low who was most likely to keep him in the shadows. Wilkinson was greatly upset when he found out from his Editor, Percy Cudlipp, that Low was joining the newspaper.<sup>91</sup> Gunn, again, in a letter to Beaverbrook, refers to how dismayed the cartoonist was when Cudlipp broke the news of Low's capture, and thus tried to compensate somehow for the fact that Wilkinson would be playing second-fiddle:

'Obviously Cudlipp has had some trouble with his other artist Gilbert Wilkinson, and he has had to devote front-page space this morning to pacifying him.'<sup>92</sup>

Low's time at the *Daily Herald* does not appear to have been a particularly successful one, mainly for the reasons already given above. This was clearly noticed by the *Spectator*, the *New Statesman*, and the *Recorder*, at the time of his departure to the *Manchester Guardian* when his three-year contract with the Labour-backed paper ended:

'The translation of Low from the *Daily Herald* to the *Manchester Guardian* is very much to be welcomed, for during the three years he has served the Labour paper this talented cartoonist has been virtually in eclipse. While he was at the *Evening Standard* his cartoons were the talk of the town... He had immense range, a most attractive impudence and that incisive touch without which a cartoonist had better drop his brush or his pencil altogether. But from the moment he joined the *Daily Herald* virtue went out of him.'<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Wilkinson, in spite of Low's arrival at the *Daily Herald*, outstayed the latter, and did not leave until the *Daily Herald* became the *Sun* in 1964.

<sup>92</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Beaverbrook Archives.

‘The *Daily Herald* never suited his genius. Cartoons are by their nature satirical, and the *Herald*, the virtues of which are its special industrial news and its very full sporting columns, is not a good vehicle for satire.’<sup>94</sup>

‘Again the *Recorder* was the first to print the news of the resignation of Low to join the Socialist *Daily Herald* just before an election, which of course had great political potentialities. As we forecast, these potentialities were not fulfilled.’<sup>95</sup>

### **How did Express Newspapers respond to Low’s resignation?**

Having been offered, and thus accepted, the position as the *Daily Herald*’s main cartoonist towards the end of November 1949, Low wrote two resignation letters: one to Beaverbrook and the other to E.J. Robertson. He wrote to Beaverbrook first, explaining what seemed to be the main reason for his resignation. This was that he had been with the *Evening Standard* so long that he had become its oldest inhabitant and as a result had become increasingly stale:

‘All the people I used to know in the office seem to have gone (the biggest gap being that which you yourself have left) leaving me as the Oldest Inhabitant with the prospect of becoming an “institution” appearing regularly in my little corner until my inevitable decline into dullness and boredom. In short, I can no longer work happily for the *Evening Standard*. I feel that both my pleasure-in-work and social usefulness are ended and that any new ideas I can produce are for some different atmosphere with a different challenge.’<sup>96</sup>

The letter was most affable, without any bitterness over how he had been treated during the last few years as regards space for his cartoons. However, he later admitted that he had not told Beaverbrook the real reason for his resignation. Seven years after having left his service, Low wrote to Beaverbrook:

‘It has always been a regret to me that an opportunity never presented itself that allowed me to tell you why I had to leave the *Evening Standard*.’<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Spectator*, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>94</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>95</sup> *Recorder*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1952, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>96</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>97</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1956, Beaverbrook Archives.

Beaverbrook, of course, knew full well that Low had left because of the way he had been treated over the space for his cartoons. He mischievously replied:

‘I would like you to tell me why you left the *Evening Standard*.’<sup>98</sup>

To E.J. Robertson Low did bring up the matter of ‘present restrictions’ but in no way did he blame the paper for this or, somewhat remarkably, did he complain over the flagrant liberties to his contract that had taken place in regard to his ‘half-page’:

‘I have the happiest relations with everybody concerned from Lord Beaverbrook and yourself downwards, and I have no complaint about my contract. I no longer feel the zest, fun or pleasure in the work that I did, and there is a danger of my getting into a rut, a rut which the present restrictions confirm and petrify. You will, I am sure, understand that since the pleasure in my work is the *sine qua non* of my professional life, I cannot permit this to happen while there is still the possibility of new interest and liveliness in ‘green fields and pastures new’.<sup>99</sup>

E.J. Robertson immediately sent a telegram to Beaverbrook who was residing at his plantation in Jamaica:

‘Low has resigned joining *Herald* stop has written you asking earlier release stop **while no regrets** recommend earliest release date after general election.’<sup>100</sup>

If Express Newspapers were about to lose the greatest cartoonist they had ever had, why ‘no regrets’ on behalf of Express Newspapers? Even though A.J.P. Taylor described Low’s resignation as the ‘gravest event’ of Beaverbrook’s newspapers in 1949, those concerned with the running of the *Evening Standard* seemed to be quiet relieved that he had done so.<sup>101</sup> As is now known, they seem to have planned this to happen. Consequently, they had been ready to accept his resignation ever since the paper had first reduced the space available to him in 1947. Robertson wrote to Beaverbrook a week after sending the telegram, which helps validate the hypothesis that Low was no longer wanted at the *Evening Standard*:

‘It makes pretty clear that he is leaving the *Standard* largely because he feels his reputation is being damaged by the space limitations which we put upon him. My guess is that Percy Cudlipp has promised to give him all the space he desires.

<sup>98</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1956, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>99</sup> David Low to E.J. Robertson, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>100</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>101</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, Hamish Hamilton, 1972, Pages 594-5,

**None of us are unduly depressed at his leaving the *Standard*.** When we first cut down the size of his cartoons we were prepared to accept his resignation, and nothing has happened since to change our view. Last year, when the *Glasgow Evening Citizen* took over his cartoon from the *Evening Times*, neither paper experienced gain or loss of a single reader.<sup>102</sup>

It may have been the case that Robertson, and other members of his staff, would have put a gloss on the situation so that their proprietor would not be shocked into thinking that Low's resignation was a miscalculation on behalf of the paper. However, even Arthur Christiansen, as Editor of the *Daily Express*, seemed positive that Low's resignation was in no way harmful to the *Evening Standard*:

'...like a great man in his decline, he has commanded interest, respect, affection and contumely, both for himself and for the *Evening Standard*. But I want to be emphatic on this point... I do not think his leaving will damage the *Evening Standard* in any way.'<sup>103</sup>

However, in an earlier letter to Beaverbrook Christiansen expressed his fears that if Low teamed up with James Cameron, together they might become politically formidable, but reiterated that Low was of no threat on his own.<sup>104</sup> Having been instrumental in making life impossible for Low Herbert Gunn believed, no doubt after his previous conversation with Cudlipp, that the cartoonist was making a big mistake in joining the *Daily Herald*:

'I do not think it will have any effect on our sales. Low, in my view, is making a great mistake to go to the *Daily Herald*. I cannot see how, with papers their present size, they can give him more acreage than we did. And it would seem to be almost certain that the freedom he has enjoyed with us will not be granted to him over there.'<sup>105</sup>

There were even one or two in the Labour Government who felt that nothing would be gained by Low going to the *Daily Herald*. The then Attorney-General, Sir Hartley Shawcross, wrote to Beaverbrook after hearing of Low's resignation:

<sup>102</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>103</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur Christiansen to Lord Beaverbrook, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>105</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

'It would not do the *Evening Standard* any harm, nor would it do the *Daily Herald* any good.'<sup>106</sup>

Beaverbrook must have been quite heartened by Shawcross's letter, which was no doubt in complete harmony with his own view of the situation. In a complete disavowal of this view, and in what became known as the 'Black Friday' letter, Beaverbrook wrote to Low from Jamaica deeply regretting the cartoonist's decision to leave the *Evening Standard*. Crying crocodile tears and in an attempt to make Low feel full of remorse about his decision to leave, Beaverbrook mischievously wrote:

'Your letter is an unwelcome message. I always look over my letters here before opening them myself, for I have no Secy or Typist. Then I select the pleasant looking lot and read them. The rest I put off until after lunch. Your letter was in the first batch because I expected to hear that you wished me well for Christmas or that you & Mrs Low would visit Jamaica or that you had changed your mind about Churchill. Instead I got the worst letter first. That's the way life has treated me far too often. Your decision is a disaster. It is unnecessary and inadvisable. That is what I think of it. You will like Percy and you won't like the TUC bosses any more than Percy himself, who is always in trouble with Bevin and Morrison - except at Election time... Black Friday'<sup>107</sup>

This letter was not only a sham, but total humbug. Beaverbrook must have known exactly what Gunn was up to. Surely Beaverbrook would not have allowed such a prized asset to be treated in this way without his prior permission? Malcolm Muggeridge, having worked for both Beaverbrook and the *Evening Standard* during the 1930s, knew how his Lordship really felt about Low's resignation. Muggeridge wrote in his diary on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1950:

'Saw Percy Cudlipp, who was very full of Low, the cartoonist, going over to the *Daily Herald*, but exaggerated his delight because, obviously, he feared he might be getting only the leavings. Said that Beaverbrook was very reluctant to let Low go from the *Evening Standard*, about which I am sceptical.'<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Sir Hartley Shawcross to Lord Beaverbrook, circa 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>107</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to David Low, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>108</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *Like It Was*, Collins, 1981, Page 371.

Even though a year's notice was required, Low was allowed to leave within eight weeks of handing in his resignation. He had personally asked Beaverbrook if he could leave the paper earlier than his contract stipulated:

'I am wondering if, considering the friendliness existing between you, me and Cudlipp, the Company would release me earlier. If I remember rightly we did something like that when I left the *Star* for the *Standard*.'<sup>109</sup>

The *Evening Standard* was obviously keen to get rid of Low before the forthcoming General Election, whilst the *Daily Herald* was very keen to gain his services before it. However, Express Newspapers played hard to get so that they could come to a deal with both Low and the *Daily Herald* over syndication rights, as Robertson informed Beaverbrook:

'I will also try and make a bargain with Low whereby we continue to act as his syndicating agent.'<sup>110</sup>

Robertson put forward the proposition that the *Evening Standard* would only release Low early if Express Newspapers were allowed to continue to syndicate his cartoons even after present overseas contracts had expired.<sup>111</sup> The *Daily Herald*, knowing that Robertson had them over a barrel if they wanted Low in time for the next election, agreed to the deal. Low put a different slant on the arrangement:

'I am leaving on the best of terms; so good, in fact, that the *Evening Standard* will continue to syndicate my cartoons to the 170-odd journals that print them around the world.'<sup>112</sup>

Following this comment it was not surprising that after Low's resignation had become public news, both the cartoonist and Express Newspapers emphasised that his reasons for leaving were in no way the fault of Beaverbrook or his management, and that relations between them had at all times remained amicable:

'Low's letter was entirely friendly,' said Mr Robertson, "and there have never been any but the most happy relations between us.'<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> David Low to Lord Beaverbrook, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>110</sup> E.J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>111</sup> Most of the syndication contracts were with overseas papers on a 12 months' basis.

<sup>112</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1950, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>113</sup> *Daily Express*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1949.

‘Low is changing over for purely personal reasons. He remains in the happiest friendship with the *Evening Standard* and all his colleagues.’<sup>114</sup>

Such comments were increasingly misleading at a time when Low, during the last few weeks before he left the paper, was carrying out a relentless attack on Churchill, constantly ridiculing him in an attempt to damage his credibility with the readers before the election. In a letter to Beaverbrook, Gunn wrote:

‘Low finishes on Tuesday next. He has kept up his attack on Churchill until the last, and I have urged him to be more gentle in his final cartoon.’<sup>115</sup>

The *Evening Standard*’s Conservative readership certainly became increasingly irritated with Low’s biting attacks on their leader. As a consequence, many readers retaliated by writing into the paper in their droves, complaining of why this was allowed to continue. The *Financial Post* wrote:

‘Recently his cartoons have been so caustic and anti-Tory that readers made angry protests.’<sup>116</sup>

Both Gunn and Robertson felt the need to spell out to Beaverbrook why the readership of the *Evening Standard* had got so hot under the collar over Low:

‘Every week that goes by several score of *Standard* readers express their bewilderment that we allow Low to carry on his Leftish propaganda.’<sup>117</sup>

‘...our readers launched a tremendous onslaught on him in the last few days of his tenancy here over two cartoons in which he had attacked Churchill.’<sup>118</sup>

By the last week, all those concerned in the management of the *Evening Standard* seemed relieved to see that Low was now actually leaving, as Gunn confirmed in this excerpt from a letter he sent to Beaverbrook:

‘Low has shown a great deal of deterioration in the last week. He has only another week to run, so this will not bother us very much longer.’<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1949.

<sup>115</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>116</sup> *Financial Post*, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1949, Low Papers, University of Kent.

<sup>117</sup> E. J. Robertson to Lord Beaverbrook, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>118</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1950, Beaverbrook Archives.

<sup>119</sup> Herbert Gunn to Lord Beaverbrook, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1950, Beaverbrook Archives.

A few months after Low had left the *Evening Standard*, Herbert Gunn found he too was no longer wanted by Beaverbrook, and was summarily dismissed. Less than ten years later Low, who was still active at the *Manchester Guardian*, had been totally eclipsed in Beaverbrook's eyes by Carl Giles. In a letter to Giles, Beaverbrook wrote:

'... it also made me gratified and happy that the *Express* has the most brilliant cartoonist in London.'<sup>120</sup>

## Conclusion

There is little doubt that those who were responsible for producing the post-war *Evening Standard* believed that David Low's talents were very much on the decline. This period also coincided with the introduction of an editor who had little sympathy for the cartoonist's predicament. The continual restrictions over space for his cartoons probably played a major role in making up Low's mind that it was now time for him to move on from the *Evening Standard*. Having looked at the way Low was treated during his last years at the paper, it appears more and more probable that the restrictions placed on him were in fact intentional rather than as a result of post-war paper shortages.

After the 1945 election Low's relationship with Beaverbrook, as far as his work for the *Evening Standard* was concerned, changed for the worse. His failure to receive congratulatory letters from Beaverbrook coincided with his cartoons being continually reduced in size. Both Low and Gunn blamed the paper shortage, but other cartoonists on other newspapers did not suffer the limitations that were enforced on Low. How then was the *Daily Herald* able to offer Low so much more space than the *Evening Standard*, when Express Newspapers were, at the time, the most successful newspaper group in the United Kingdom, second possibly only to the Rothermere Press?

It was Percy Cudlipp who, by his previous association with Low, persuaded him to come over to the *Daily Herald* where all his demands were met. The *Daily Herald*, unfortunately, would prove a disastrous move as far as Low's reputation was concerned, both at home and abroad. The TUC, unlike Beaverbrook, did not like having its leg pulled, while the *Daily Herald's* mainly working-class readership were largely passive in their support of what Low was saying. Also in all probability, the often intellectual nature of his cartoons often meant that they failed to understand them properly. Randolph Churchill was perfectly correct in his assessment of the situation:

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<sup>120</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Carl Giles, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1959, Beaverbrook Archives.

‘When after the Second World War he went to the *Daily Herald*, it seemed an unhappy period for him. The Labour Party and the TUC didn’t enjoy being teased by Low and many of his jokes were far above the heads of the readers.’<sup>121</sup>

Low joined the more appropriate *Manchester Guardian* in 1953, where he stayed until poor health forced him into retirement in 1963. Like Strube and other eminent journalists past their best, David Low surely deserved better treatment from Express Newspapers after what he had achieved at the *Evening Standard* during the 23 years he worked there. Unfortunately, it was not in Beaverbrook’s make-up to hang on to staff who were generally felt to be a burden to the newspapers they worked for.

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<sup>121</sup> Randolph Churchill in ‘Guide to the Press’, *Truth*, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1954, Low Papers, University of Kent.

## Conclusion

‘I will give you my assurance, that during my 15 or 20 years’ association with Low I have never suppressed a cartoon of Low’s. I took whatever he gave, good or bad...’<sup>1</sup> (Beaverbrook)

‘My apprehensions about Beaverbrook had been groundless and I was gratified to find that the alleged prince of darkness was scrupulous in observing my independence, and even defended it against his friends.’<sup>2</sup> (Low)

Low thought that having a ‘complete freedom’ clause inserted into his contract would, when he joined the *Evening Standard* in 1927, secure for him an unparalleled position as a newspaper cartoonist, free from both editorial and proprietorial control. At that time, it was totally unheard of for a political cartoonist to have such freedoms on a British newspaper. For the function of the newspaper cartoonist was generally to support the editorial policy of the paper, thus reflecting the views of its owner. In his 23 years at the *Evening Standard*, Low generally succeeded in giving the impression that his autonomy during that period had never been infringed on. It appeared that he was able to continually ridicule Conservative politicians and their policies against, it was believed, the wishes of his proprietor. Readers also found Low at times controversial in his selection and treatment of subject matter, which often resulted in the publication of correspondence for and against the offending cartoon in the paper. Is this not evidence enough to emphasise his complete independence at the *Evening Standard*?

However, Beaverbrook was unlike any other Tory Press Baron before him, and the *Evening Standard* under his ownership took an atypical political line. The evening paper was, in A.J.P. Taylor’s eyes, Beaverbrook’s ‘playground where writers, cartoonists and Beaverbrook himself could shake off the shackles of orthodoxy’.<sup>3</sup> Not only was Beaverbrook a political maverick, but he was also mischievous enough to enjoy seeing politicians from all parties, including those in his own party, being made fun of in his newspapers. He thus encouraged his staff to be provocative and to spare no one, no matter what their political sympathies were. He was, therefore, more than happy to let Low agitate

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1945.

<sup>2</sup> David Low, *Low’s Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956, Page 195.

<sup>3</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook’s England 1940-1965*, University of Kent, 1981, Page 7.

as well as amuse the *Evening Standard* readers. According to Ronald Searle, Beaverbrook personally 'encouraged Low's opposition to the paper that printed his drawings'.<sup>4</sup>

If ever anything appeared in the *Evening Standard* that Tory Ministers or supporters did not like, Beaverbrook's response was to say that he held no control over his journalistic staff, whilst in reality he was encouraging them in their attacks. Sir Samuel Hoare was one such Tory Minister to frequently protest to Beaverbrook about the treatment that Baldwin got in his papers, as Peter Howard later recalled, after having himself written a critical article about Baldwin:

'Sir Samuel Hoare, a mutual friend of both men, phoned Beaverbrook in an attempt to draw his attention to the article. Beaverbrook to Hoare: "Now listen to me. I can't do anything with the fellow. No. I tell you I can't do anything with him. Now listen, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll have him here and I'll roll him in the mud. Will that satisfy you?" Then, replacing the telephone, he looked at me and a grin the size of a melon cut across his face. He began to slap his hands on his knees and to laugh. "Ha, ha, ha. Do it again next week, Peter. Do it again next week".'<sup>5</sup>

As with Howard, Beaverbrook acted in the very same manner to Low by saying he could do nothing with him, whilst enjoying the very angst he was causing, as was probably the case when Churchill complained to Beaverbrook about Low in 1940:

'I do not agree with Low. I have rarely done so. I do not interfere with Low. I have never done so.'<sup>6</sup>

However, much of Low's work was frequently subjected to Beaverbrook's approval. As has been seen, most of the cartoons that were either altered or refused were for reasons that can be directly attributed to Beaverbrook. Editors, time after time, sent him proofs of cartoons that they were unsure of. It seems apparent that they did not have the authority in deciding whether a questionable cartoon was publishable or not. This seems to imply that editors were generally aware of what Beaverbrook was likely to find objectionable, as can be witnessed by the many letters Beaverbrook received from them over problematic cartoons. Of course, such a system was not foolproof, and some cartoons did find their way into the paper that might otherwise have been refused. This may have been one reason why some cartoons only ever appeared in the first edition of the *Evening Standard*. Thus, with Beaverbrook having the right to exclude cartoons he felt were objectionable, Low,

<sup>4</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1963.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Howard, *Beaverbrook: A Study of Max the Unknown*, Hutchinson, 1964, Page 19.

although free to draw what he liked, was aware that if he drew too many cartoons that the proprietor found unacceptable, it would soon have become apparent that his work was subject to censor. The merest suspicion of censorship would have done untold damage to his world-wide reputation. It can thus be argued that at times Low was conscious of this fact, voluntarily censoring both his selection and treatment of his subject matter.

If Low had a reputation for being the world's greatest cartoonist whilst at the *Evening Standard*, why did he tolerate the paper refusing or altering his cartoons? Would there not be a great deal of interest from the rest of Fleet Street should he have had enough of Beaverbrook's interference and left the fold? Apart from the *Daily Herald*, the answer is a categorical 'No'. When Low left the *Star* in 1927, the paper made little effort in tempting him to stay. In fact, Low had become disillusioned with the *Star* over its apparent failure to recognise and reward him for his efforts. Which other newspaper would have taken Low on? The *Daily Herald* appears to have been the only paper ever to attempt to employ his services. During Low's time at the *Evening Standard*, there is no evidence to show that any other newspaper ever tried to lure him away or even showed interest in doing so. Will Dyson, another radical antipodean cartoonist, could only ever find employment with the *Daily Herald*. During the 1930s, Dyson became increasingly perturbed over editorial interference over concerns that he may be upsetting the paper's advertisers. He was unable to find alternative employment, and therefore accepted the infringements placed on him, staying at the paper until his death in 1938. Like Dyson at the *Daily Herald*, Low had to conform to what was acceptable to Beaverbrook. The alternative option of resignation would have probably been too damaging both to his own reputation, as chances of employment on another newspaper would have been slight, and his finances.

Low also conformed to the point of actually supporting his proprietor, as with his portrayal of Beaverbrook without, it seems, anyone at the time noticing. In fact, Low was in agreement with Beaverbrook on far more issues, politically and socially, than has ever been thought possible before. Maynard Keynes was, however, one of the few to notice, in May 1944, how Low appeared to be firmly in support of his proprietor, instead of backing an economist such as himself, to whom the cartoonist had shown considerable sympathy in the past:

'It is the voices of Beaverbrook and the Bank of England you are listening to. For you to obey these voices and picture me as a monetary Blimp is indeed a stab in the back.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Winston Churchill, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1940, Churchill Archive.

<sup>7</sup> Maynard Keynes to David Low, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1944, Low Papers, British Library.

Complete freedom of expression meant little if the *Evening Standard* had the right to refuse publication of any cartoon it felt unsuitable. Both Low and Beaverbrook must have been fully aware of the implications of this. However, they both misled the public by stressing that Low had complete freedom over his work (except for libel), thus implying that the *Evening Standard* published whatever Low came up with. Indeed, Low and Beaverbrook never put the ‘complete freedom’ clause into context by explaining that the former’s cartoons were subject to a certain degree of censorship by the *Evening Standard* having the right of refusal. If one also considers what an interfering and dominant proprietor Beaverbrook was, for all his claims of non-interference, how could it really have been expected that, in the final analysis, he would have given Low complete freedom, something that no other employee of Express Newspapers had ever enjoyed? Maybe, Low’s employment on Beaverbrook’s flagship newspaper, the *Daily Express*, rather than that of the politically non-conformist *Evening Standard*, would have proved a greater test of the cartoonist’s autonomy.

After the Second World War, the Editor of the *Evening Standard*, Herbert Gunn, no longer felt that Low’s cartoons were an asset to the paper. As Gunn repeatedly shrank the space allotted to Low for his cartoons, his proprietor, from afar, seemed quite happy to disassociate himself from the cartoonist’s plight. Beaverbrook, by not stepping in and alleviating the problems facing Low, was thus aware that he may lose him, in spite of his later statements of shock over Low’s resignation. As seen in Chapter One, Beaverbrook would never carry any employee whom he felt had become a burden to the profitability of his papers. According to Chapman Pincher, who joined the *Daily Express* in 1946 as its ‘Science man’:

‘By and large, the Beaver always gave priority to sales.’<sup>8</sup>

Like Strube, the nature of Low’s departure from Express Newspapers could be considered ignominious considering the vast contribution he had made to the *Evening Standard* over the years. However, it could be argued that this viewpoint is rather unfair to Beaverbrook. Was it not Beaverbrook who had given Low the perfect platform to produce his best work during both the 1930s and the Second World War? The impact of Low’s work was also greater under Beaverbrook because the cartoons were, more often than not, hostile to the beliefs of the *Evening Standard*’s readership. Beaverbrook also successfully promoted Low through his newspapers, and most notably his syndication department was largely responsible for making Low not only a house-hold name in Britain but around the

world. Consequently, Low's reputation both at home and abroad would probably not have been as great had he decided to ignore Beaverbrook's overtures and instead joined up with the *Daily Herald*.

This thesis offers us little that is new in respect to Beaverbrook's reputation as a newspaper proprietor. The nature of his hands-on approach and continual interfering in the work of his journalistic staff, despite fervent denials on his part, have already been well documented, as we have seen in Chapter One.

Low, over the 23 years that he worked for Beaverbrook, gained a reputation unique in publishing history. However, in spite of Low's attempts to embellish this reputation, the findings of this thesis reveal Beaverbrook did not give his cartoonist the free reign he has for so long been accredited with. Although Low can be considered to have been the greatest political cartoonist of his generation, possibly of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his unrivalled reputation for having had complete autonomy under Beaverbrook can now be seen to have been undeserving.

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<sup>8</sup> Chapman Pincher to Timothy S. Benson, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1998.

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(EVENING STANDARD CO LTD)

PHONE CITY 2040 (PRIVATE EXCHANGE)  
TELEGRAMS: EVENING STANDARD, LONDON.

In your reply please refer to



*47. Shoe Lane,  
London, E.C.4.*

4th December 1926

David LOW Esq.

Dear Sir,

The Evening Standard Co. Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as the Company) agree to arrange to employ you as cartoonist, on the termination of your present contract, but not later than January 1st 1928, on the following terms and conditions:-

- Papers. The papers to which this agreement refers are the "Evening Standard", the "Daily Express"-and the "Sunday Express".
- Remuneration. A salary of Four Thousand Five Hundred Pounds (£4,500) per annum payable by cheque in equal monthly instalments.
- Duration of Contract. This agreement shall remain in force for three years from the date you join the "Evening Standard" staff, and shall then ipso facto determine.
- Policy. It is agreed that you are to have complete freedom in the selection and treatment of subject matter for your cartoons and in the expression therein of the policies in which you believe; and that this fact will be given prominence in all our announcements relating to you when you join the staff of the "Evening Standard".

(3)

Liberty to  
Withhold or  
alter Cartoons.

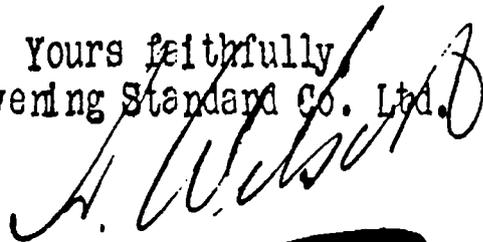
It is understood and agreed that the Editors of any of the papers referred to in this agreement shall be at liberty at their own discretion to withhold publication of any cartoons you submit, provided always that no alteration shall be made to any cartoon without your approval.

Arbitration

Any dispute as to the meaning of these terms or arising directly or indirectly thereunder to be referred to some person mutually agreed upon, or failing agreement, to the President of the Law Society for the time being or any person nominated by him, who, after hearing the parties interested, shall inform them what he considers should be done in settlement of such dispute, the parties hereby agreeing to give effect to such recommendation.

You will kindly write me that you accept the terms of this engagement so set out in this letter.

Yours faithfully  
pp. Evening Standard Co. Ltd.



GENERAL MANAGER.