

# ‘TO ENCOURAGE, INSPIRE AND GUIDE’ National service, the people’s war, and the promotion of civil defence in interwar Britain, 1938-39

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This article examines the promotion of civil defence or 'national service' in interwar Britain. Analysing a recruitment campaign organised by the Chamberlain government in 1938-39, it explores how civil defence was promoted in newspapers, posters, leaflets, guides, radio broadcasts, speeches and rallies, and how recruiters planned and executed the campaign. Existing literature has tended to focus on the role of national servicemen and servicewomen in wartime, but little is known about how these individuals were persuaded to join up before the war began or how national service was itself presented in the media. Through an analysis of official files, correspondence, advertisements and public relations, this article argues that the campaign for national service was not simply intended to attract new recruits, but to cement in Britain the notion that any future conflict would represent a 'people's war' in which each citizen would contribute an equal share towards victory.

**Keywords** National service; propaganda; advertising and public relations; interwar years; people’s war; Second World War.

In the dying days of 1938 Ernest Brown rose in the House of Commons to deliver a speech. Known for his thunderous voice and for the affectionate ridicule it sometimes earned him,<sup>1</sup> the Minister of Labour carefully unpacked a project that would become central to the way his department communicated with the British public. National service, a term usually associated with youth conscription to the British Army after 1945,<sup>2</sup> would be a campaign for Britain’s civil defences and auxiliary and reserve forces. Comparable in scale to the great recruiting drives of the First World War, it would surpass the latter if only because of the variety of positions on offer. Land tillers, tree surgeons and tractor drivers were required for the Women’s Land Army; current and ex-policemen were needed in the Police War Reserve, the Special Constabulary and the First Police Reserve; and the institution of Air-Raid Precautions (ARP) would seek everything from ambulance drivers to decontamination squads.<sup>3</sup>

Announcing the campaign to its readers the following year, the *Daily Mirror* called it ‘Britain’s greatest defence drive...a citizen “army”’ (25 January, 1939). Brown, for his part, was more prescriptive. National service, he claimed, would have two aims.

The first is to encourage, inspire and guide a free people to enrol themselves to undergo training in peace time for the services they could best render on the outbreak of war. The second is to ensure that volunteers for service should not be enrolled if they would not be available to be called on for such service in wartime owing to the essential nature of their occupation.<sup>4</sup>

That Parliament was once again discussing war illustrated the precariousness of the peace on which the interwar years were founded. Shortly before Brown's announcement, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had returned from Germany brandishing a 'pact' that was supposed to put an end to Anglo-German hostilities. The Munich Agreement, which has since been treated as a case study in failed diplomacy (and in historical revisionism generally)<sup>5</sup> did not, however, preclude contingency plans for another war, and nor did it prevent Britain continuing a massive and costly rearmament programme designed to put it on a level footing with Nazi Germany and imperial Japan.<sup>6</sup> National service, a network of 'passive' defences that would complement the active forces of the Army, Navy and Air Force, became part of these preparations, and in the months leading up to the war a major recruiting drive was organised that linked enlistment with protection of the home, the community and the nation. As Brown himself said to a group of speakers appointed to drum up enthusiasm from the podium, the public 'should be convinced that what is at stake is the preservation of *their* country, of *their* homes, of *their* families: and that can only be guaranteed by fully-manned defence services trained now'.<sup>7</sup>

Given the numbers involved – one historian has estimated that ARP alone recruited as many as 400,000 full-time volunteers<sup>8</sup> – it is perhaps unsurprising that national service has attracted the attention of historians. However, existing commentary has tended to focus on the work of national servicemen and national servicewomen in wartime.<sup>9</sup> Little is known about how these civilians were persuaded to join up *before* the war began, or how national service was presented in the media. H. M. D. Parker devoted a few pages to the recruiting drive in his official history of the Ministry of Labour, and passing references have appeared in the work of Peter Doyle and Robert Woolven.<sup>10</sup> Lucy Noakes has also considered some aspects of poster appeals for recruits for ARP, but most of the attention has been directed elsewhere, and even Mariel Grant's comprehensive survey of interwar government propaganda fails to mention, let alone explain, the campaign for national service.<sup>11</sup>

Through an analysis of official files, correspondence, advertisements and public relations, this article seeks to fill in some of the gaps that have emerged in the literature. Exploring how the campaign for national service was planned and executed, and how different

media were used and exploited by recruiters, it argues that national service was not simply intended to attract new recruits, but to cement in Britain the notion that any future conflict would represent a 'people's war' in which each citizen would contribute an equal share towards victory. The idea of a people's war has cast a long shadow over the historiography of the home front,<sup>12</sup> and the material examined here can shed light on the period in which it first began to take shape as a distinct way of viewing the conflict.

It can also, however, be used to draw attention to the common media culture that existed in Britain at the time. As Siân Nicholas has argued, the interwar years were a time of media convergence, with the 'BBC, the popular press, and the cinema...all constituent parts of an increasingly sophisticated and integrated mass information and entertainment culture'.<sup>13</sup> By fashioning appeals that appeared in newspapers, posters, leaflets, guides, films, newsreels and radio broadcasts, recruiters sought to tap in to and exploit this culture, and in so doing they organised what may have been the largest single advertising campaign of the 1930s.

### **The Origins of the Campaign for National Service**

Recruitment for some branches of civil defence began in 1937 after an Air Raid Warden's Service was established by the Home Office. It was thought that Britain would require as many as one million volunteers for this service alone, although that figure was gradually downsized in the coming years. On 1 January, 1938 an Air Raid Precautions Act came into force, obliging local authorities to both raise and train their civil defence forces. The Air Raid Warden's Service had failed to attract enough volunteers, and by June 1938 it was estimated that London alone required an additional 60,000 recruits. It was not until September, and the culmination of the Czech crisis, that serious steps were taken to mobilise the population.<sup>14</sup>

While it was a continental crisis,<sup>15</sup> events across the English Channel had lasting repercussions for Britain. At the height of the emergency, air-raid shelters were dug in several London parks, major cities were partially evacuated, and thirty-four million gas masks were issued.<sup>16</sup> The Royal Navy was mobilised, the RAF put on full alert, and steps were taken to ensure that Britain would be able to respond to any incoming aerial invasion.<sup>17</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, reassigned key staff at the General Post Office's (GPO) Public Relations Department to work on boosting enlistment to ARP. Ernest Crutchley, who had succeeded Sir Stephen Tallents as Director of Public Relations in 1935,<sup>18</sup> was drafted in alongside Alexander Highet, a respected amateur publicist then in charge of the GPO Film Unit. At around the same time, Sir John Anderson, MP for Scottish Universities and a former

high-ranking civil servant, was appointed Lord Privy Seal with special responsibilities for civil defence. Each man would play an important role in the forthcoming campaign.

On 6 December 1938, a fortnight before Brown's speech, Anderson introduced a 'scheme for national voluntary service' in the House of Commons. His plans entailed the distribution of a *National Service Guide* and the establishment of a series of national service committees in every borough and country borough in England and Wales, and in every county and large burgh in Scotland.<sup>19</sup> Delivered to all households in the country using the machinery of the GPO, the guide would contain details of individual services and an application form for volunteers. The committees, for their part, mirrored those set up during the Great War under the aegis of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee,<sup>20</sup> and were designed to help 'stimulate interest in the whole problem of National Service...[by] bring[ing] public opinion to bear on the working of the National Service machine'.<sup>21</sup>

To coordinate publicity for this 'machine', Anderson established a Central National Service Committee in the Ministry of Labour, placing Sir Humbert Wolfe, the deputy secretary, in charge.<sup>22</sup> Tasked with 'secur[ing] public interest in the scheme', the central committee acted like a giant production house, churning out advertising and public relations materials and organising a series of public events to generate additional publicity.

At the committee's first meeting, a set of proposals to increase public awareness of the campaign were agreed. Press releases detailing the distribution of the guide and procedures for enrolment would be issued. Broadcast addresses by the Prime Minister and the Lord Privy Seal would mark the beginning of the campaign in January. A panel of speakers comprised of Cabinet ministers, local government officials and other prominent individuals would be formed, and films, newsreels, posters and other media would be produced using the government's own experts.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, several outside organisations would be lobbied to lend their support to the campaign. The Trades Union Congress, which had close ties to the Labour Party, would be petitioned to secure the 'good will of Labour',<sup>24</sup> while women would be targeted via the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), originally set up in 1938 as the Women's Voluntary Service for Air Raid Precautions to boost enrolment of women in ARP. Much of this lobbying appears to have been carried out informally, but the WVS, an organisation set up on the request of the Home Secretary in 1938,<sup>25</sup> was sent detailed instructions on how to promote national service at its own public meetings. Speakers were urged to 'put themselves in the shoes of their audience...tackle the subject from the listener's point of view, [and] thus gradually lead audiences to the unanswerable need for their cooperation'.<sup>26</sup>

Since they were independent or nominally independent of government, recruiters regarded outside organisations as ‘recruiting centres of great value’.<sup>27</sup> Yet they also put some stock in the state’s own promotional expertise. During the 1930s, there had been a ‘considerable expansion’ of domestic government publicity in Britain, with as many as seventeen separate ministries establishing Public Relations Departments or Press Offices by 1937.<sup>28</sup> Tasked with making ‘planned use of publicity as a means of implementing departmental policy’, these institutions provided the resources and expertise necessary to carry out large-scale recruiting campaigns.<sup>29</sup> Their staff had extensive experience of working in and with the media, and were issued instructions in late 1938 to develop a ‘strong and intimate appeal to the sense of duty of every available man and woman’.<sup>30</sup>

A key feature of the ‘citizen army’ mobilised by the Chamberlain government was the part-time volunteer who would make up the majority of the workforce. Of the 1.5 million or so recruits required, less than a third would be paid full-timers. The rest would be expected to give their time (often in the evenings and on the weekends) freely, and to combine national service with other responsibilities such as childcare. Some positions, such as those for the various policing services, would require special experience or qualifications, while others would entail training given to applicants on the job. The full complement of staff would be mobilised in the advent of war, but otherwise only full-timers would work continuously.

To encourage a million or so civilians to work *pro bono*, recruiters appealed both to the self-interest of individuals who would benefit from the ‘passive’ protection of civil defence, and to the idea that national service symbolised a new kind of collective camaraderie in Britain which spread the burden of war equally among all classes. National service, as Anderson said in March 1939, ‘stands outside and above party politics’, and recruiters would need to convince the public that enlisting would allow them to ‘gain a great deal – a developed sense of comradeship and a developed sense of responsibility for voluntary service by all to the common weal’.<sup>31</sup> This idea, so often associated with the wartime home front, would become the driving force of the pre-war recruiting campaign.

### **Selling Service in a Citizen ‘Army’**

On 23 January, 1939 copies of the guide began to circulate around the country, and Chamberlain marked the beginning of the campaign with a broadcast address on the BBC. Describing national service as way of ‘defend[ing] ourselves and resist[ing] attack’, the Prime Minister claimed that it would make Britain ‘ready for war’ (*Times*, 24 January, 1939). This shift in political rhetoric reflected a growing belief in the United Kingdom that war was now

inevitable, and that preparations rather than appeasement *per se* represented the most pragmatic course of action. National service committees began to be formed throughout the country, and though the central committee that oversaw them did not hold a meeting until late February some preliminary promotion was organised by the Ministry of Labour.<sup>32</sup>

On 24 January, for example, a recruiting rally was held in the vast auditorium that is the Royal Albert Hall. The Leader of the London County Council Herbert Morrison delivered a rousing speech, telling the audience that Britons ‘must refuse to either be bombed or cajoled into slavery’, and the event garnered ample publicity in the press. The *Manchester Guardian*, which had begun to reverse its editorial position on appeasement,<sup>33</sup> described the rally as the harbinger of a ‘new chapter in our history as an island people’ (25 January, 1939). The *Daily Mail*, a newspaper that had been notoriously sympathetic towards Hitler and the Nazis during the 1930s,<sup>34</sup> ran an editorial that urged its readers to ‘join up now’, claiming that it is the ‘duty of every able-bodied person to volunteer’ because national service would be “national” in the fullest sense of the word’ (25 January, 1939).

Since recruiters directed their appeals at a broad cross-section of the population, there was some truth to the notion that civil defence was ‘national’ in character and outlook. However, recruiting promotion was also highly gendered, with men and women encouraged to enlist for contrasting reasons. Recruiters tended to exhort women on the basis of their apparent gift for caring for the young, the sick and the elderly, while men were encouraged to join up to defend the family and protect the home. According to Noakes, this division of labour reflected a ‘discourse of citizenship’ that would become central to the ways in which the wartime home front was imagined.<sup>35</sup> It would also, however, form a crucial part of the pre-war recruitment campaign, which represented civil defence as a means of both unifying the nation *and* of ensuring that men and women retained distinct roles to help maintain it.

By early February, Crutchley had written to Anderson to request authorisation for a ‘quick “red-hot” recruiting campaign’. Local national service committees had indicated ‘fairly widely’ that a ‘good deal of general publicity’ was required, and Crutchley suggested ‘go[ing] “all out” for recruits for ARP in a nation-wide paid publicity campaign’.<sup>36</sup> His proposal was accepted, and on 15 February advertisements began to appear in the *Yorkshire Post*, the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Daily Mirror* and a host of other titles.<sup>37</sup> Crutchley believed that targeting a range of national and regional newspapers would allow recruiters to ‘[reach] the whole country’,<sup>38</sup> and sanctioned the development of eight separate advertisements to promote different aspects of ARP. Ranging in size from 3x4.5 to 3x6 column inches, these advertisements tended to appear near the front of newspapers in prominent positions. Written

in an informal and conversational style, they spoke to readers directly, playing on fears of air raids and the impact they might have on loved ones. ARP, as one advertisement put it,

is going forward splendidly. But there is a difficulty. It is some mysterious power referred to by people as “they”.

“They” will see to it that there is no war. “They” will come round at once if the house is set on fire. “They” will bandage me if I’m hurt...

There is no such thing as “they”. No longer, as in days gone by, can you leave the protecting of your home to soldiers and warships. In an emergency, your family doctor, your local Fire-Brigade, may have their hands too full to “come at once”.

There is no “they” today.

There is only “you”. (*Times*, 15 February, 1939)

Presenting national service as the last line of defence in any future war became a key trope of newspaper advertising, which portrayed civilians (or ‘fearless women’ and ‘real men’) as the backbone of the nation’s defences. ‘Modern war’, one advertisement declared, ‘does not discriminate between civilian and soldier; between men, women and children’, and responsibility for defence should thus be shared by all (*Daily Express*, 10 March, 1939).

A total of £20,000, a sum roughly equivalent to the annual printing budget of the GPO,<sup>39</sup> was spent on advertisements conveying this idea, and recruiters believed that their outlay would secure not only valuable media space in a series of major newspapers but the loyalty of the editors of these publications as well. As one official remarked, ‘there are few if any cases where a newspaper takes a policy which is contrary to the policy of its advertisers’.<sup>40</sup> By paying for advertising, Hight claimed, recruiters would procure both the ‘good will’ of editors and the attention of the ‘vast majority of the people’.<sup>41</sup>

While newspapers were prized for their apparent efficacy in boosting enlistment, however, they were only part of the ‘red-hot’ campaign initiated by Crutchley. Posters, leaflets, films, newsreels and radio broadcasts were also disseminated in 1939, with each medium representing a discrete ‘instrument’ in a wider ‘publicity orchestra’.<sup>42</sup> The strengths and weaknesses of different media had been debated by recruiters as early as 1937,<sup>43</sup> but there was a general consensus amongst politicians and civil servants that the scale of a campaign could be correlated to its effect. ‘It was on the volume of national service publicity’, in other words, ‘that the success of [the recruiting]...effort would be judged’.<sup>44</sup>

The premium placed by recruiters on scale can explain the large quantities of advertisements produced in 1939. In July, for example, 60 million leaflets were delivered to all households in the country, with a similar quantity of ‘emergency’ leaflets (to be distributed if war was declared) stored in His Majesty’s Stationary Office (HMSO).<sup>45</sup> Posters, which had

been used extensively during the First World War to advertise the New Armies,<sup>46</sup> were also issued in large quantities. In the month of July alone, for instance, the Civil Nursing Reserve displayed 500 posters on sites previously maintained by the Empire Marketing Board, and six different ARP designs were displayed on the sides of mail vans and buses, in trams and trains, and on (and inside) a host of public buildings.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, work commenced on two separate recruiting films and on a variety of instructional shorts that would be shown to new recruits as part of their basic training. The GPO Film Unit, which had earned a reputation as Britain's pre-eminent factual filmmaker,<sup>48</sup> was responsible for both films, and spent in excess of £11,000 on production and distribution.<sup>49</sup> Most of that sum was devoted to *The Warning* (1939), a documentary released in April that concluded with a call to service by Anderson, and *If War Should Come* (1939), a feature-length factual film released a week before the war (and later renamed *Do it now!* in recognition of that fact). According to its producers, the latter film was designed to 'speak to the people of Britain' by combining shots of domestic industry and agriculture with a voice-over that declared, 'Britain is prepared...Britain will win through...[and] democracy will triumph'.<sup>50</sup> Jack Livesey, a film and radio actor who would later work in Hollywood, provided the voice-over and an Elgar score was superimposed onto the soundtrack.

Like newspapers, films were consumed by a large cross-section of the British population. According to one estimate, cinema attendance accounted for two-thirds of paid-for leisure activity in Britain, with an average of 20 million cinema tickets sold each week in the 1930s.<sup>51</sup> However, while the size of cinema audiences certainly appealed to recruiters, an apparent lack of audience interest in public information films presented a problem. People visited the cinema, according to Hight, 'to be entertained', not exhorted, and national service films would therefore be 'tolerated, but not too often'.<sup>52</sup> For this reason, national service committees were asked to combine conventional theatrical screenings with exhibitions of films at recruiting meetings, using mobile projection units loaned to them by the GPO.<sup>53</sup> They were also encouraged to invite newsreel companies to report on the progress of their campaign, and *British Pathe* was among those that covered the event.<sup>54</sup>

Problems of distribution were not restricted to film. On 5 May, 1939 national service committees expressed in 'emphatic terms' their disappointment at not receiving, or receiving late, recruiting posters. Shortages and complaints were noted 'everywhere', with some regions lacking their 'initial supply of posters' scheduled for delivery in March. HMSO, which handled printing on behalf of the government, claimed thousands of posters had already been distributed, but blamed mix-ups in correspondence between recruiters and other parties.<sup>55</sup> One



such incident occurred when Shell-Mex, a major corporate advertiser in the interwar years,<sup>56</sup> offered to lend its hoardings to national service only for production to be delayed and the window for display lost. Another setback centred on misplaced supplies. Posters were delivered by post, train or van, but the possibility that some had been lost in transit led to concerns about over-production. Some recruiters were adamant that ‘posters were still required for effective sites’, although one official queried whether existing supplies were being ‘effectively used’.<sup>57</sup>

It became clear fairly early on that promotion would need to be adapted to suit the requirements of the media that carried it. To have a realistic chance of being seen, texts like *If War Should Come* needed to conform to existing conventions of filmmaking, and the same principle applied to broadcast publicity. As noted above, the BBC broadcast an address by the Prime Minister to mark the beginning of the campaign in January, but that did not conclude its involvement in recruitment.<sup>58</sup> According to the records of the Central National Service Committee, the Corporation ‘offered’ a series of 3-4 minute slots in the 6 o’clock and 9 o’clock news bulletins for a three-week period beginning on 24 March. These slots were designed to promote different aspects of national service, although they would need to do so through the medium of newsworthy stories, such as “‘black outs’...demolitions of old houses involving demonstrations of ARP units...special mass meetings of employers to stimulate recruitment...[and] statistics of enrolment...in any town of exceptional interest’.<sup>59</sup>

Such stories were designed to highlight the topical nature of national service, and were accompanied by a series of fortnightly discussions presented by Howard Marshall, a well-known radio personality who had commented on the coronation of King George in 1937 and who would later serve as Director of Public Relations at the Ministry of Food in 1940-43. Tasked with questioning officials on the implementation of national service, Marshall was praised by a critic in the *Listener* for ‘[inspiring] listeners to feel that these talks are not just a kind of polite battledore and shuttlecock questionnaire’ between the state and the BBC, but a critical examination of ‘arrangements for bomb-proof shelters, the evacuation of children, and [other aspects of national service]’ (23 February, 1939). In 1943, Marshall returned to the BBC to help set up its War Reporting Unit and was one of the corporation’s war correspondents during the Normandy landings.

By May, the Corporation had authorised a series of 5-minute regional broadcasts, and tentative discussions had begun on feature programmes to depict national service work.<sup>60</sup> The apparent amenability of the BBC to official requests raises the prospect of government intervention, but it is worth noting that certain figures in the Corporation appeared reluctant to broadcast national service material. Several complaints about BBC production staff were noted

in official files, and towards the end of the campaign one official even lamented a 'lack of BBC enthusiasm'.<sup>61</sup>

One of the reasons recruiters struggled to get material into the news was that recruitment *per se* was not considered particularly newsworthy. Journalists were more likely to cover national service if it was connected to a specific story, and recruiters organised a programme of public events in the first half of 1939 to generate additional publicity.

The Football Association, the governing body of the sport in England, was lobbied to include national service announcements at matches during the Easter holidays. County cricket clubs were also petitioned to circulate appeals to members, and local national service committees organised a programme of public meetings, attended by prominent community figures. On 1 April, a display of regular and civil defence forces that included a massed fly-by of RAF fighter aircraft was held in London, and in May ARP demonstrations were included as part of the itinerary of the annual Empire Air Day. Finally, to mark the end of the campaign on 2 July, a major recruiting rally was held in Hyde Park.<sup>62</sup>

Rallies introduced a degree of spectacle to the recruiting drive, and illustrated how pageantry could be used to promote enlistment. For the Hyde Park rally, King George was invited to salute columns of national servicemen and national servicewomen as they marched past a 'Royal Dais' at the centre of the park. A Guard of Honour was stationed directly in front of the dais, and uniformed policemen were positioned throughout the area. Troops of the Territorial Army lined the route from Hyde Park Corner to Grosvenor Square, and the Army sent a cavalcade of motorcycles, trucks and armoured personnel vehicles to take part in the procession. The Air Ministry launched six balloons into the skies above the park, and a 'massed band' from the Brigade of Guards provided music throughout the day.<sup>63</sup>

To encourage enlistment recruiting booths were set up throughout the park, but the rally's main function, according to recruiters, was to 'focus attention on National Service and give it public recognition'.<sup>64</sup> Judging by the coverage the event received, recruiters were successful in achieving their aims. The BBC devoted an entire afternoon to the rally on its radio and television services, *British Pathe* reported on it as well, and several newspapers also covered the event. The *Daily Mirror*, for example, dedicated part of its front page, part of page 5 and a double page spread on pages 14-15 to the story. Suggesting the rally 'was a spectacle never before seen in British history', it commended Britain's 'spirit of voluntary service' (3 July, 1939). The *Times*, though more reserved in its reporting, nevertheless declared the rally 'eloquently expressive of complete national unity' (3 July, 1939).

## Reviewing the Campaign for National Service

When war broke out on 3 September, 1939, as many as 1.9 million civilians had volunteered for the various branches of the civil defence and auxiliary and reserve forces.<sup>65</sup> So great was the response to the call to arms that national servicemen and national servicewomen outnumbered the combined forces of the Army, Navy and Air Force by more than two to one.<sup>66</sup> Numbers began to fall, however, after the widely-prophesised 'knock-out blow' from Germany failed to materialise, and by the end of the year the government had ordered significant reductions in expenditure on civil defence. Full-time staff, paid between £2 and £3 a week, bore the brunt of the cutbacks, and their treatment at the hands of the state, and in certain quarters of the press, stood in stark contrast to the ways in which volunteers had been portrayed in much of the British media in the months leading up to the war. As Juliet Gardiner, following Angus Calder's celebrated account of the home front, has argued,

the months of Phoney War were a testing time for [new recruits]. Part of the 'fourth line of defence', as the Civil Defence services were called...[they] suffered a certain crisis of identity, and the slings and arrows of their fellow citizens whom they had volunteered to protect.<sup>67</sup>

If the government had, as some critics charged, over-prepared for civil defence, recruiters and several historians have not tended to echo this verdict. Reflecting on the progress of the recruiting campaign shortly after the Hyde Park rally, Anderson claimed that there could be 'no doubt' that the 'idea of National Service has been *firmly established* in the minds of people throughout the country'.<sup>68</sup> Noakes has also maintained that '[t]o a large extent and undoubtedly spurred on by the Munich crisis of 1938, the campaign worked'.<sup>69</sup>

There can be little doubt that the combined efforts of recruiters, national service committees and politicians contributed to the tremendous spike in enrolment rates witnessed in 1939. However, archival evidence has revealed significant deficiencies in particular services and different areas of the country. The Auxiliary Fire Service, for example, still required as many as 100,000 volunteers by August 1939, and in one town the air raid warden service had a surplus of 8,000 while first-aid parties and ambulance crews were under-subscribed to the tune of 5,500.<sup>70</sup> The tendency for certain services to attract more volunteers than others suggest that recruiting appeals only carried so much weight, and that people joined the services they liked, not those which the government told them to join. Furthermore, while many evidently supported the 'idea' of national service others were fervently opposed to it. At a recruiting rally in Glasgow in February, for instance, Anderson delivered a speech that was repeatedly

interrupted by protesters who, according to a report in the *Manchester Guardian*, ‘threw gas masks from the balconies onto the platform and shouted, “Don’t give us these, give us peace”’ (15 February, 1939).

The records of the Central National Service Committee indicate that officials were conscious of public opposition to their campaign and the recruiting ‘black spots’ that emerged in certain areas of the country.<sup>71</sup> Yet they also reveal the faith that recruiters placed in the persuasive power of the mass media. Using newspapers, newsreels, films, radio broadcasts, leaflets, posters and guides, they sought to change public opinion towards civil defence and the ‘citizen army’ needed to maintain it. In so doing, they provided an early impetus to the notion that war could act as a catalyst for social change and social renewal. As Anderson said in March, 1939, the campaign for national service ‘may serve not merely to preserve the soil of England, but perhaps to save her soul [as well]’.<sup>72</sup>

## Notes

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1. After seeing Brown make a call in the telephone booth of the House of Commons, Stanley Baldwin was reputed to have said, 'I didn't know Brown needed a telephone to reach his constituents in Leith'. Ryan, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 7.
2. The National Service League, founded in 1902, may have been the first organisation to associate 'national service' with conscription. See Adams, 'National Service'.
3. All told, there were 21 services and 55 different occupations. See *National Service*.
4. 342 Parl. Deb., H.C., 5th ser. (20 December, 1938): 2713.
5. Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After'.
6. Post, 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen'.
7. HO 186/110: 28 March, 1939; my emphasis.
8. Doyle, *ARP*, 8.
9. Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, Rose, *Which People's War?*, and Calder, *People's War*.
10. Parker, *Manpower*; Doyle, *ARP and Civil Defence* and Woolven, 'Pre-War Preparations'.
11. Noakes, 'Serve to Save' & Grant, *Propaganda*.
12. Harris, 'War and Social History' and Smith, *Britain and 1940*.
13. 'Media History', 387.
14. Doyle, *ARP*, 6-7, Parker, *Manpower*, 48-9 and Calder, *People's War*, 21.
15. The crisis centred on German demands to annex the Sudetenland. After Austria was absorbed into the Third Reich in the spring of 1938, Hitler turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. In bowing to Hitler's demands at a conference in Munich on 29 September, Chamberlain was pilloried by some contemporaries (most notably Winston Churchill) and by a host of post-war commentators.
16. Taylor, *English History*, 427-8.
17. Overy, *Twilight Years*, 346.
18. Crutchley, *GPO*, 247.
19. Northern Ireland was excluded from the campaign.
20. Simkins, *Kitchener's Armies*, 61-2.
21. 342 Parl. Deb., H. C., 5th ser. (6 December, 1938): 1023-4.
22. After the committee's first meeting, Wolfe subsequently passed responsibility for the committee to his deputy, Herbert Morgan.
23. LAB 6/102: 9 December, 1938.
24. LAB 6/102: 9 December, 1938.
25. For an account of this body, see Hinton, *Women*.
26. HO 186/108: January, 1939.
27. HO 186/110: 17 March, 1939.
28. Grant, *Propaganda*, 5.
29. Clark, *Central Office*, 26.
30. LAB 6/102: 9 December, 1938.
31. HO 186/110: 29 March, 1939.
32. Files of the committee can be found in LAB 6/102 and HO 186/110.
33. Overy, *Twilight Years*, 348.
34. Hodgson, 'Appeasement and the Press'.
35. 'Serve to Save', 743.
36. HO 45/18207: 6 February, 1939.
37. The *Manchester Guardian*, *Times* and *Daily Express* also carried advertisements. All told, seven newspapers displayed advertisements on thirty separate occasions between 15 February and 1 April, 1939.
38. HO 45/18207: 6 February, 1939.

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39. Grant, *Propaganda*, 226.
  40. HO 45/18207: 20 January, 1939.
  41. HO 45/18207: 11 January, 1939.
  42. HO 45/18207: 12 January, 1939 & January 20, 1939.
  43. HO 45/18207: 20 October, 19 November & 23 November, 1937.
  44. HO 186/110: 14 April, 1939.
  45. HO 45/18207: 8 August, 1939.
  46. Dutton, 'Moving Images?'.
  47. No figures are given in official files detailing how many posters were produced. However, since it cost the GPO £5,000 to produce and distribute 20,000 posters in 1937, and since £8,000 was spent on national service posters in 1939, as many as 30,000 posters may have been produced for the campaign.
  48. Scott and Mansell, *Projection of Britain*.
  49. HO 45/18207: 28 August, 1939.
  50. HO 45/18207: 6 February, 1939, 8 August, 1939, undated and 11 January, 1939.
  51. Sedgwick and Pokorny, 'Film Business in Britain'.
  52. HO 45/18207: 11 January, 1939.
  53. HO 45/18207: 28 August, 1939.
  54. 'National Service' and 'Sheffield May Special'.
  55. HO 186/110: 5 May, 1939.
  56. Hewitt, 'Shell Advertising in the 1930s'.
  57. HO 186/110: 5 May, 1939.
  58. In November, 1938 serious consideration was given to using the King's annual Christmas broadcast to promote national service. That plan was eventually shelved for fear that it would 'sting [Hitler] into action'. LAB 25/161.
  59. HO 186/110: 24 March, 1939.
  60. HO 186/110: 5 May, 1939.
  61. HO 186/110: 9 June, 1939.
  62. HO 186/110: 31 March, 1 April & 1 May, 1939 and MH 79/184: 2 May, 1939.
  63. Files for the rally can be found in HO 199/1 & MH 79/184.
  64. HO 186/110: 5 May, 1939.
  65. Doyle, *ARP* & 348 Parl. Deb., H. L., 5th ser. (22 June, 1939): 685.
  66. According to Davies, the total number of soldiers, sailors and pilots registered on the outbreak of the war stood at 681,000. See *Europe at War*, 21.
  67. Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, 68 and Calder, *People's War*, 66.
  68. HO 199/1: 14 July, 1939; my emphasis.
  69. 'Serve to Save', 746.
  70. 350 Parl. Deb., H. C., 5th ser. (1 August, 1939): 2314.
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