

3: GOING IT ALONE

Creating a completely new political party, not just realigning a disparate collection of disgruntled Members [realistically, an ever-present feature of British politics] and allowing them to coalesce into a noisy group [but as yet ineffective, as had generally been the case hitherto] of like mind, was a radical step, and sent shockwaves emanating through the British Establishment; there had been previous attempts at similar undertakings [and some contemporary efforts, which almost threatened to mask the fledgling New Party [1](#)], but none with so charismatic and well-placed a figurehead as was Mosley, and the changes of allegiance of a significant number of sitting Members shook all the major parties quite severely. In truth, Mosley wasn't the sole instigator of the New Party; as alluded to in Chapter 2, W. J. Brown, the sitting Labour MP for Wolverhampton West, had provided significant impetus for this departure and, according to John Beckett, Mosley had actually prevaricated somewhat before deciding to take the plunge, which could just as easily be interpreted as evidence of political maturity in wanting to weigh up the possible ramifications, as it could be evidence of indecision [2](#).

Nevertheless, Mosley was prepared to provide the public face for this new venture, no doubt fuelling the public perception by some of his need for attention; Beatrice Webb, who had previously been impressed by Mosley's socialist fervour, and whose husband Sidney was in the Cabinet, did not see any future in this move, comparing him unfavourably with Hitler, who had yet to show his true colours internationally [3](#). The core of this group was based in Birmingham, putting Wilfred, notwithstanding his personal connection with Mosley, at the heart of events as they unfolded; prior to the formation of the New Party, what had already become known as "Mosleyism" had been described as "Birminghamism rampant", and there was also significant support from the mining community, another area where interests coincided with Wilfred's [4](#).

As can be seen in **Appendix B**, Wilfred was still active within the ILP, in his capacity of Midlands Divisional Organiser, right up to early February 1931, even though plans for the official inception of the New Party, which actually took place on the first of March [although Mosley had the previous day, perhaps against medical advice, appealed for volunteers and funds at head office, despite the pneumonia racking him, and with hindsight rashly promising to run 400 candidates at the next election], must have been well advanced; no doubt there will have been many reasons for this, not the least of which will have been loyalty, although according to Skidelsky, “the New Party’s open bid for ILP support [was] facilitated by the initial willingness of many ILP Branches to tolerate membership of both organisations” [5]. Birmingham Borough Labour Party however, as personified by its president, Jim Johnson, was not impressed, appearing to be more disappointed than aggrieved, acknowledging [as he could hardly avoid] the help Mosley had given the Party machine specifically, and the Socialist Movement generally, in Birmingham and the West Midlands; in a contemporary article in *Labour Magazine*, he said, somewhat sniffily, that “The New Party will appeal to the people with catch phrases and quack remedies in a definite attempt to smash the Labour Party and to discredit its leaders for ever. The centre of their attack in the Midlands is to be Birmingham.” [6] This suggestion of violence from the New Party, either verbal or physical, or both, was unwarranted, and appears to have been made in the spirit of ‘offence being the best form of defence’, and was an obvious attempt to cast the party and its proponents in a bad light from the outset; aggressive criticism of the opposition, although generally falling short of actual violence, was a common feature of British adversarial party politics, but there was actually a concerted campaign, including “violent opposition”, ironically instigated by the socialists, in a precursor of the later Communist “class against class” policy, to prevent this new movement gaining any credence in the public view [7].

During the planning period, Mosley was doing his best to sever his connection with existing Birmingham affiliations: “the painful task of