Pamphlets and Politics: The British Liberal Party and the 'Working Man'; c. 1867-c.1925

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Table of Contents

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List of Abbreviations

ILP	Independent Labour Party
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
LPD	Liberal Publication Department
NLF	National Liberal Federation
NRU	National Reform Union

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This thesis aims to provide a new perspective on the British Liberal Party during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries via an analysis of pamphlet literature produced in support of the party. The period under investigation saw the fortunes of the Liberal Party move from being the principal rival of the Conservative Party to one of three competing for power, with the Labour Party emerging as a party capable of forming a government. The thesis aims to contribute to scholarly debate on the subject by showing that there was indeed a 'decline of Liberalism' and 'rise of Labour', but that these themes can be best understood in terms of the appeals both parties made to the electorate. It will show that when analysed through the literature they or their supporters produced to win over voters, the Liberal Party can be seen to have failed to adapt to a shifting electorate, and that they did not react to developing critiques of Liberalism from the Labour Party and its constituent bodies in sufficient time to prevent Labour establishing itself as a credible party of government, thus removing one of the Liberal Party's main advantages over Labour.

The thesis will use a close analysis of the text contained within a sample of Liberal Party pamphlet literature to show that the party had particular problems when addressing itself to working-class voters, who became an increasingly important section of the electorate following franchise extensions in 1867, 1884 and 1918. It will show that the Liberal Party constructed their appeals to working-class voters using a constructed figure, which will be termed the 'Liberal Working Man', who was possessed of particular characteristics which made him suitable to hold the vote. The 'Liberal Working Man' was both conceived within models of political behaviour deriving from 'whiggish' forms of political history and also appealed to by using narratives of political history which stressed the need for him to support the Liberal Party. The thesis will show that the Liberals did nor realise until too late that their understanding of the working-class electorate was flawed and had contributed to the emergence of the Labour critique of their party, by which time the First World War had created a series of practical problems which hampered the party's attempts to maintain working-class support. The Liberal Party will be shown to have been put into a position whereby its pamphlet appeals could no longer rely on the old assumptions with regards working-class electoral behaviour, and proved incapable of providing an adequate replacement for the concept in their attempts to garner support through electoral literature.

Declaration

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Introduction

The Liberal Party dominated British politics since its formation in 1859, but struggled in the last years of the nineteenth century, following the damaging split which followed the party's adoption of Irish Home Rule in 1886. A landslide election win in 1906 saw them take 397 seats to the Conservatives' 136, and set in place a government which enacted the first Old Age Pension schemes as well as sickness and unemployment insurance among other pieces of social legislation. Historians such as Peter Clarke have attributed the result in part to the development of the so-called 'New Liberalism', an intellectual movement which emphasised the need for the party to embrace social reform.[1] The significant feature of this Liberal renaissance was that it suggested the party had found a way in which to successfully appeal for support from the working-class electorate, whose importance had increased following the franchise extensions of 1867 which granted the vote to the male householder in borough constituencies, and in 1884 which had extended the vote to the county householder.

However, after two further elections in 1910, in which the Liberals achieved only slender majorities, the Liberals were never again to regain power in their own right. Conservative government, either on their own or as part of the Tory-dominated coalitions of 1918-22 and from 1931 until the Second World War, was the predominant feature of inter-war politics. When the Conservatives were not in power, it was the Labour Party, not the Liberals, who held the reins. Yet this did not imply a shift to genuine three party politics.

[1] Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, (Cambridge U.P., 1971).; see also Michael Freeden *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

What makes this shift in British politics particularly significant is the fact that until at least the First World War, the Liberals had come to regard Labour as an ally to a large degree. The Gladstone-Macdonald electoral pact of 1903 saw the two parties agree to stand aside for each other in constituencies where one party had a significantly better chance of beating the Conservative candidate, an agreement which represented the high-point of co-operation between the two. The Liberal Party claimed to represent the best interests of the working-class voter, and appealed to them through their electoral literature, in the forms of pamphlets, posters and party newspapers. While Labour presented a rival for the working-class vote, given the high degree of co-operation and shared values (Free Trade, land reform and temperance reform being some key areas), there was little reason to suppose that the Liberal Party were in any danger of being eclipsed by their junior partners. Yet within a comparatively short space of time, the once-dominant Liberals were reduced to a rump of 59 M.P.s by 1929, in comparison to Labour's 287.[2]

Given the longevity of the new political circumstances the Liberal demise produced, the desire to explain and understand the nature of that decline is clear. The issue at the centre of that process make a full comprehension of the fall of British Liberalism even more important. Touching as it does on matters of class, political strategy and developments in political philosophy, understanding the Liberal decline not only addresses a fundamental shift in British political history, it also can shape models of

[2] It should be noted here that despite the poor return of members to Parliament in 1929, the overall Liberal vote remained at a respectable 23%, compared with 38.1% for the Conservatives and 37.1% for Labour – a clear third place, but not a disastrous result, bettering their 1924 performance of 17.85 and 40 seats. The fact that the Labour vote remained consistent over this period while that if the Liberals and Conservatives fluctuated suggests that the Liberals had, however, were struggling to win back support lost to Labour over the previous four elections. The presence of Herbert Samuel's Liberals within the National Government plus the formation of Sir John Simon's National Liberals complicates the picture after 1929, but the decisive point after which the decline in the Liberal vote became permanent would seem to have been reached by 1931.

political identification and the role of the political party itself. This thesis will address these issues through a study of the pamphlet literature issued in support of the British Liberal Party from the 1867 Reform Act to the formation of the first Labour government in 1924, a period in which the Liberal Party were forced by the expansion of the franchise to pursue working-class votes in order to achieve electoral success. In doing so, the thesis shows how the Liberal Party set about appealing to 'working class' voters in an era which saw them competing first solely with the Conservatives, then begin faced with the additional challenge of the Labour Party. The thesis will demonstrate the importance of concepts of 'class' and perceptions of the 'working-class voter' to understanding the electoral successes and failures of the Liberal Party, and will argue that these issues, insufficiently integrated into the current scholarship of British political history concerning this period, must be addressed if we are to comprehend the reasons behind first the emergence of three-party politics, and later for the relegation of the Liberals to the perennial third force of British politics.

The Strange Death of Liberal England?

The study of political history may have changed much since George Dangerfield gave the greatest episode of party realignment in British history its most evocative description in his seminal 1934 book, but one thing which has remained constant is the desire among historians to explain the 'strangeness' of the Liberal demise. Dangerfield's work traced the fading fortunes of the Liberal Party to the period prior to the First World War, evoking a picture of a party which had come to the end of its political usefulness following the passage of the 1911 Parliament Act and the 1914 Home Rule Act, which had brought to a close the long-standing Liberal campaigns to

curb the power of the House of Lords and settle the question of Ireland's governance.[3] Given the vivid nature and polemical tone of Dangerfield's narrative, it is perhaps not surprising that historians have found his analysis simplistic and have sought to challenge his conclusions regarding the Liberal decline.[4] Over time the chronology of the events may have been adjusted, the analysis of the party's intellectual and ideological state may have been deepened and our understanding of the era's electoral sociology may have become more sophisticated, but much scholarship on the fortunes of the British Liberal Party in the early twentieth century still suggests that the party's fall from pre-eminence was an oddity explained best by emphasising the combination of unfortunate circumstances with which the Liberals were faced in the years following the First World War.

From Michael Freeden's studies of 'New Liberalism' in 1978 and his further analysis in 1981 of the Liberal intellectual movement's response to the rise in state power during the war, through Duncan Tanner's work on the ideological crossover between the Liberals and Labour; and finally to the recent scholarship of historians of political culture such as Jon Lawrence, the tendency has been to treat the Liberal eclipse as the unexpected (although not, with hindsight, unexplainable) demise of a party which

[3] *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, (London: Constable, reprinted 1936).
[4] The challenge to Dangerfield's thesis is perhaps most explicitly challenged in T.H. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935*, (London: Collins, 1966), which located the cause of the Liberal decline to no earlier than the First World War itself. Peter Clarke also gave the reasons for the process of Liberal decline as being wartime difficulties in *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, pp. ; see below for John D. Fair's 'catastrophist/inevitablist' description of the two major chronological trends in early 20th century Liberal historiography. Even the 'inevitablist' historians in Fair's analysis such as Matthew, McKibbin and Kay in 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 361 (Oct 1976), pp. 723-752; while seeing the causes of the Liberals' difficulties as long-term problems which pre-date the war, the catalyst for the party's peacetime loss of support is shown to be the post-war enfranchisement of all working-class male adults and married females over 30 years of age in 1918. While few can therefore be found to support Dangerfield's argument that the Liberal decline had already begun by the outbreak of war in 1914, his broader thesis that the party had become *vulnerable* by this point has adherents, and indeed this thesis will seek to argue the case for a pre-war origin for the Liberal Party's eventual demise as a party of government.

while faced with difficulties was not predestined to fail as a result of them.[5] John D. Fair has labelled the two major trends in Liberal historiography as the 'inevitablist' and the 'catastrophist' tendencies. The former camp, he suggests, draws from the work of Dangerfield and from H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and J.A. Kay's important 1976 article 'The Franchise Factor and the Rise of the Labour Party' , which emphasised the role of franchise expansion and class politics as the most significant factor which served to stymie the Liberal Party.[6] The core of the 'Franchise Factor' argument ran that the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which granted the vote to all males aged 21 or above, as well as married women of 30 years or older, re-shaped the electorate in a manner which gave the Liberal Party particular problems as the Act diluted the 'rational', limited franchise upon which the party depended.[7] Implicit in this argument is the notion that class played a key role in explaining the 1918 Act's impact. Matthew, McKibbin and Kay suggested that the new voters the Act enfranchised were 'natural' Labour supporters whose exclusion from the electorate prior to that point had masked the degree to which the working-class vote had switched to away from the Liberals towards Labour.

The 'catastrophists' of Fair's historiographical categorisation comprise those who follow Trevor Wilson and M.W. Hart in rejecting a class dimension in favour of

[5] See Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914-1939*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, (Cambridge U.P., 1990) and 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party,1906-1931', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 4., (Dec. 1991), pp. 893-908; Jon Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, (Cambridge U.P., 1998).

[6] Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', p. 723.

[7] Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', p. 743, 748; for the Liberal dependency upon a franchise limited to the 'rational' sectors of society, see Alan Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 6-7.

stressing the significance of the party's wartime split.[8] The 'Franchise Factor' argument has been challenged on a number of grounds. Firstly, the notion of the inexorable rise of Labour, obscured in the 'Franchise Factor' argument by the restricted franchise prior to 1918, has been called into question by historians such as Duncan Tanner, who saw the progress of the Labour Party as slow and uneven, with little to suggest an imminent and unavoidable shift away from the Liberals prior to the Great War.[9] The second major challenge to Matthew, McKibbin and Kay's thesis has come from those, like Patrick Joyce, whose work questions the usefulness of 'class' as a term of analysis, thus undermining its relevance as an explanation for the Liberal's eclipse at the hands of Labour.[10] The other significant questions concerning the 'Franchise Factor' argument have been posed by historians who, following work such as that by Jon Lawrence and David Jarvis, have sought to widen the study of political history beyond deterministic class arguments but focus their studies not on the 'agency' of the electorate but on the actions of politicians and parties to 'shape' political identities from above.[11]

The categorisation Fair adopts helps to demonstrate the particular weaknesses in the current scholarship by emphasising the simplistic dichotomy between long and

[8] John D. Fair, 'Labour's Rise and the Liberal Demise: A Quantitative Perspective on the Great Debate, 1906-1918', *Albion*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (Spring, 2002), pp. 58-73.
[9] Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*; 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party'; 'Class voting and radical politics: the Liberal and Labour parties, 1910-1931', in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1920*, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), pp. 131-152..
[10] Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the question of class, 1848-1914*, (Cambridge U.P., 1991); *Democratic Subjects*, (Cambridge U.P., 1994); 'Introduction', Joyce (ed.), *Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[11] Jon Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 428 (Jul., 1993), pp. 629-652; *Speaking For The People*; David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 440, (Feb, 1996), pp. 59-84; 'The shaping of the Conservative electoral hegemony, 1918-1939', in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1920*, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), pp. 131-152.

shorter-term explanations. The danger in abandoning the significance of long-term difficulties as an explanation for the decline of the Liberal Party in favour of emphasising essentially medium-to-short-term misfortunes is that we risk obscuring vital themes and trends which must be correctly incorporated into any analysis of the party's circumstances during the early twentieth century. Studying the lacuna between the two approaches identified by Fair can better help to explain the fate of the Liberal Party. While the deterministic aspects of Matthew, McKibbin and Kay's analysis would seem to be based upon a flawed methodology, the role of longer-term class-based political thought should not be underplayed.[12] The fundamental issue of exactly how the Liberal Party itself understood and reacted to the socio-political circumstances of the post-war era is the most important factor which needs to be understood in order to explain the Liberal demise.

Ross McKibbin continued his research into the role of class in British politic in the years following his contributions to the 'Franchise Factor' thesis, and began to develop a more sophisticated conceptualisation of the mechanisms by which the concept of 'class' was able to exert its influence. He devoted several studies, reprinted in *The Ideologies of Class* to analysing the ways in which class was *perceived* in the early twentieth century, and how this impacted on the politics of the day.[13] Of particular interest is the essay 'Class and Conventional Wisdom', in which McKibbin showed that the key to understanding the success of the Conservative Party during the interwar years lies in the way the party were able to create and disseminate a constructed version of the unionised 'working man' and a contrasting anti-inflationary

[12] See M.V. Hart, 'The Liberals, The War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 395 (Oct., 1982), pp. 820-832; Duncan Tanner, 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party,1906-1931'.
[13] Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, (Oxford University Press, 1990).

economic ethos which was depicted in terms of the 'conventional wisdom' behind the Conservatives' political thinking.[14]

McKibbin showed that there existed an apprehension among the Conservatives as regards precisely the sort of determinist implications of a perceived rise of class-based politics. The significance of this was that it created an imperative for the Conservatives to develop a particular construction of both the unionised - and implicitly Labour-supporting - 'working man' as a means of expressing the negative ramifications of the rise of class politics. More importantly, the demonization of the trades-union members was combined with an appeal to the 'conventional wisdom' of the 'respectable' sections of political society, conceived of broadly as the middle classes and the non-unionised working classes. What is vital to understand is that the targets of these appeals – the possessors of 'conventional wisdom' – were as much a construct of the Conservatives as the demonised Labour-voting unionised worker with whom they were contrasted.

The methodology of studying the role political parties played in shaping the views of the electorate has been echoed with the rise of what Stephen Fielding has termed the 'New Political History'.[15] The last two decades have seen a number of works which have set out to investigate how parties set about projecting their message to voters, and how this has acted to create bodies of support for those parties, rather than seeing allegiances as a simple case of 'speaking for' a particular, pre-existing group. David Jarvis' work on the inter-war Conservative Party, and Lawrence's wider studies of political marketing and the working-class vote have also been instrumental in spurring

[14] McKibbin, 'Class and 'Conventional Wisdom'', pp. 270-274.
[15] Steven Fielding, 'Looking for the 'New Political History'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Jul., 2007), pp. 515-524.

the development of the 'New Political History', and this thesis sits within the scope of the trend for studying parties' efforts at shaping allegiances.[16] Particular note should be made of Ball and Seldon's *Recovering Power*, which focuses on the methods used by the Conservative Party to regain office during their spells in opposition since 1867. Similarly, Matthew Worley's *Labour Inside The Gate* gives the 'rise of Labour' a new perspective by studying the way the Labour Party positioned itself politically rather than using deterministic class arguments or focusing too much on organisational and institutional factors.[17]

The notion that the success or otherwise of political parties can best be studied by investigating the way in which they *conceived of* and *communicated with* an imagined and constructed set of persons is central to this thesis. The thesis addresses the ways in which the Liberal Party, its supporters and its associated organisations interacted with the electorate by analysing the political sphere they believed themselves to inhabit and the degree to which conceptualised forms of electoral subjects – in particular, the constructed figure of the 'Liberal Working Man' – impacted upon the way in which the party addressed itself to the electorate.[18] The thesis will conduct a

[16] Jon Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, (Cambridge U.P., 1998); 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 428 (Jul., 1993), pp. 629-652; David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 440, (Feb, 1996), pp. 59-84; 'The shaping of the Conservative electoral hegemony, 1918-1939', in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1920*, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), pp. 131-152.; see also Mary Hilson, *Political Change and the Rise of Labour in Comparative Perspective*, (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006).

[17] Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition Since 1867*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside The Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2005).

[18] Until the formation of the Liberal Publication Department (LPD) in 1887 there was no single body involved in the production and distribution of Liberal Party propaganda. Even after the formation of the LPD, organisations such as the National Reform Union (NLU) provided additional pamphlet and leaflet publications which largely complimented - and often directly copied from – the official LPD literature. By the turn of the century, other bodies such as the Free Trade League and the Campaign of the Taxation of Land Values were providing further support for the LPD campaigns, with varying degrees of independence from the party. However separate they may have been, collections such as the

thorough study of the pamphlet literature which was issued in support of the Liberal Party, focusing on the language used in these publications and the way in which the linguistic constructs they employ reveal the limitations of the imagined figures and the political environment in which they were conceived and located in advancing the Liberal Party as the 'natural' or 'appropriate' representative vehicle for new 'working class' voters enfranchised between 1867 and 1918.

The thesis is intended to provide an important contribution to the vital historiographical debate concerning the Liberal demise as a party of majority government. The gap between explaining the party's slump in support by means of determinist class-based electoral sociology or as the result of catastrophic internal schism needs to be closed before we can arrive at a satisfactory resolution of this debate, for it is in the field of constructed identities that we can see most clearly the process by which the Liberal Party shifted from their late Victorian role as the chief exponents of the notion of 'progress', an idea which as shall be seen presupposed the allegiance of the working classes to the Liberal cause, to the ill-defined and directionless centrism which characterised the interwar party.

Crucially, this thesis will show that it was the persistent presence in Liberal-supporting pamphlet literature of a particular conception of the idealised 'working-class' voter which prevented the party from adapting its approach to attracting the support of the working classes until the Labour threat had seriously undermined the narratives and concepts which underpinned the Liberal message. The thesis will illustrate the tendency of the Liberal pamphleteers to assume that they were the

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John Gorst Papers at Preston Library suggest that the extra-party literature received a large amount of official endorsement.

'natural' beneficiaries of the working-class vote, as the 'working man' was understood to be acting against his 'interests' by voting for the Conservative Party. It will be shown that the same approach to working-class politics was taken throughout the first two decades in which the Liberals were faced with a challenge to the 'progress'/'reaction' dichotomy by the emergence of the Labour Party. It was this failure to adjust their approach in time that left the Liberals vulnerable to the destabilising effects of the Asquith/Lloyd George split, and left the party portraying themselves in a manner which appeared lacking in direction and purpose. The thesis will argue that studying the long-term trends in Liberal political appeals, as documented in the party's pamphlet literature, provides useful insights into the Liberal demise, and gives an important addition to the 'new political history' in its attempts to move beyond explaining political change by means of deterministic socio-political analysis or documenting short-to-medium term practical difficulties.

Given the long-established nature of these concepts which were to prove so critical, and the reluctance of the party to address the problems which developed when they were challenged, we should perhaps reconsider precisely how 'strange' the death of Liberal England actually was. 'Liberal England' was resting intellectually on flawed premises, and the Liberal Party was only able to alter the conceptual framework on which its politics relied by abandoning any grand notions of the party to any 'natural' base of support. Whatever the reality behind the idea of a specific class dimension to the loss of support experienced by the Liberals, the important point this thesis will make is that they *perceived* this to be so, and laid the ground for their own demise as soon as they did so. There was nothing inevitable about such a fate, but the failure of the Liberal Party to alter their conceptualisation of the role of the 'working man' in politics created a long-to-medium term crisis from which they proved unable to

recover. This thesis, therefore, while not aspiring to reach a definitive answer as to why the Liberal Party fell from pre-eminence, will at least provide a means for us to ensure we are looking in the right place for such an explanation.

Pamphlets, material politics and the 'Linguistic Turn'

One of the most significant controversies in nineteenth and twentieth century historical research in the last three decades has been the challenge to empirical methodology by the scholars of the 'linguistic turn'. With regards the period and political topics with which this thesis will engage, the historiography of political language begins with the work of Gareth Stedman Jones, in particular his essay 'Rethinking Chartism'.[19] Stedman Jones argued that "ideology…cannot be constructed in abstraction from its linguistic form", challenging the notion that political activity could be explained merely by analysing its social or economic context.[20] While Stedman Jones himself rejected the notion of replacing empirical analysis in favour of a purely linguistic approach, the most important debates concerning the use of political language as a tool for analysis have centred around the validity of just such a conclusion. Consequently, the lines of argument have been between two broadly-defined camps, the first being the 'post-modernists', in particular Patrick Joyce and James Vernon who both argue the case for language as the primary tool of analysis. [21] The second group comprises those who seek to provide

[19] Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-class history 1832-1982*, (Cambridge U.P., 1983), pp. 90-179.
[20] Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', pp. 94-95.
[21] Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, (Place: Publisher, Year); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867*, (Cambridge U.P., 1993), also Vernon, 'Who's Afraid

a nuanced empirical basis to their research, drawing upon the methodology and the beneficial aspects of the scholarship around political language but rejecting many of the wider implications of the linguistic turn itself. Representing this strand in the historiographical debates are historians such as Jon Lawrence, whose own work and that produced in cooperation with Miles Taylor put forward the case for retaining an empirical core behind even scholarship concerning language and identities.[22]

Given the role language plays in the methodology of this thesis, these debates illuminate the mechanisms by which I will use a study of linguistic constructions to analyse the relationship between Liberal Party ideology and the electorate, with pamphlet literature as an intermediary device filtering the former for the latter. This thesis will make use of Lawrence's arguments in favour of retaining an empirical basis to its analyses and conclusions; although it will not in itself undertake any of the wider empirical analysis which would be necessary to fully integrate the research with the politics of the period. It will not, for example, attempt to provide a detailed study of the 'impact' of the Liberal pamphlet publications on the minds of the reading public, nor will it try to integrate the analysis of the pamphlet literature with election results, polling figures, or any other form of sociological statistics. Time and space constraints dictated either adopting such an 'expansive' study, placing the pamphlet literature into the wider electoral context, or pursuing a close analysis of the text, language and the intellectual constructs which emerge from such an analysis. Since the thesis covers a long period of time, to take the former approach would have diluted the textual and linguistic analysis to the point of reducing the work's

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of the 'Linguistic Turn?' The Politics of Social History and its Discontents', *Social History*, 1994, Vol. 19 (1), pp. 81-97.

[22] Jon Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, (Cambridge U.P., 1997), and Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, 'The Poverty of Protest: Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language: A Reply', *Social History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (Jan., 1993), pp. 1-15.

usefulness. The methodology adopted here provides the intellectual basis for further study into precisely how Liberal pamphlet literature was produced and consumed, as well as its impact.

Despite focusing on these intellectual constructs, the thesis takes as its foundation the assumption that there is a role for empirical study in describing the effects of these devices. Outside of the scope of the study they may be, but the thesis proceeds from the basis that the constructed proxies and the narratives they are both provided with and conceived within are creations of bodies and persons who possess a degree of consciousness of their roles in creating them. The Liberal pamphleteer was therefore in a position which is quite different from that of Stedman Jones' Chartists, as well as Waugh, the disciples of Bright and the producers of 'constitutional narratives' which Joyce and Vernon discuss. While these historians stress the agency of the participants in the linguistic constructions they shape, and the implication that this negates objective sociological explanations of their political role, I would argue that a quite different process is at work with regards the Liberal pamphlet authors. The role of Lawrence's emphasis on retaining a focus on empiricism in this thesis lies in appreciating that the most important dimension in which class-based identity politics was constructed is the one which exists between political parties and movements acting as constructors and disseminators, and the electorate as recipients of the identities and politics the parties produced.

Lawrence's study of how political parties claimed to 'speak for the people' focuses on a study of the relationships between political entities and the electors, and compares these efforts with the impact these attempts to create a class-based imperative for the

working classes to vote for particular parties was received by their intended recipients.[23] Studying the way in which parties understood and related themselves to the electorate is a particularly useful method with which to analyse the political culture of the time, and is therefore one which underpins the research undertaken in this thesis. While the work does not perform the in-depth analysis of the material and social forms which Lawrence's history of Wolverhampton politics exemplifies, it adds to his work by providing a more thorough study of the important medium of pamphlet literature, addressed by Lawrence himself but perhaps too fleetingly. This thesis, therefore, seeks to explain how this form of communication was used by the Liberal Party not merely to attract support, but to perform the perhaps more important task of disseminating the intellectualised political world in which they perceived themselves to operate to those who they believed themselves to be addressing.

Some important recent studies on the subject of political communication besides Lawrence's work are David Jarvis' study of Conservative Party inter-war propaganda, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s'; James Thompson's essay 'on Pictorial Lies: Posters and Politics in Britain c. 1880-1914', and Laura Beers' piece entitled 'Labour's Britain: Fight For It Now!' which focuses on the Labour Party's pamphlet literature from the 1940s and the 1945 General Election in particular.[24] As contributions to the study of how political parties attempted to represent themselves and their ideas to the electorate both provide useful insights and methodological tools which I have attempted to use in this thesis. Thompson argues that the relationship between the visual and the textual in political propaganda was never a simple

[23] Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, p. 267.

[24] David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s',.James Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies: Posters and Politics in Britain, c. 1884-1914', *Past and Present*, No. 197 (Nov. 2007), pp. 177-210; Laura Beers, 'Labour's Britain: Fight For It Now!', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (2009), pp. 667-695; see also Jarvis, 'The shaping of the Conservative electoral hegemony'.

dichotomy between pictures and prose.[25] While his focus on political posters may differ from my own work on the specifically literary aspects of political pamphlets, his analysis concerning the link between text and image allows for connections to be made with the methodological aspects of this thesis.

The first point to stress is that text and image were often literally displayed together in the context of the political pamphlet.[26] Many pamphlets by the early twentieth century were produced in a format which combined one or more folios of text with a pictorial message, most usually on the reverse although by the later Edwardian period a picture was commonly used as a lead-in for a textual explication of the 'message' behind the image. There would seem to have been a growing recognition on the part of the Liberal pamphleteers that pictorial propaganda could do more than act as an adornment to a textual piece, but could in itself contain political messages in a way which could be more arresting than simple sloganeering at attracting a reader's attention.

Secondly, as Thompson argues, the political poster was in itself a textual artefact, whose 'messages' were rendered by use of words within the image to explain the symbolism being used.[27] The title of the piece was also frequently vital in establishing the 'meaning' of the image and the context in which the viewer was meant to place the 'message' it delivered. What is more, as the thesis draws attention to, the production of textual and visual communication became increasingly cohesive as the pamphlet literature reaches the later Edwardian period. Slogans were designed to be used in both verbal and pictorial settings, and worked well as both slogan in a textual

[25] Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', pp. 180-181.
[26] Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', pp. 194-196.
[27] Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', pp. 196-200.

context and as a topic on which to produce a simple and effective graphic representation of party policy.

Beers' article concerns the role played by printed material in securing Labour's 1945 General Election Victory. Her primary focus is on the operation of the Labour propaganda producers and the techniques and methods they used, but just as significant are her conclusions as to how it proved effective. While acknowledging that there is no direct way to assess the impact of Labour's propaganda upon the electorate, she nonetheless concludes that such material played a significant role in communicating the broad 'flavour' of Labour politics; communicating not necessarily particular policies but giving an impression as to what a Labour government was likely to do in office.[28] It is precisely the lack of such a strong communication of the party's likely future course which is immediately apparent from later Liberal literature, and which suggests possible ways in which the state of the Liberal pamphlet campaigns could affect the Liberal vote.

There remain significant methodological and theoretical problems associated with the historiography in the area of political literature. Lawrence, Jarvis, Thompson and Beers have been unable to satisfactorily address the key issues of how political literature was consumed and the impact they had on the electorate. This thesis may have similar limitations, but nonetheless the approach it has taken has allowed for a clearer picture of the Liberal Party's appeals over a long period to emerge. By doing so, it helps us to better understand the ways political parties themselves understood political communication to work. The long-term perspective coupled with a close

[28] Beers, 'Labour's Britain', pp. 692-693.

analysis of the underlying issue of how the Liberals saw and understood the working-class electorate allows us to see that the way the party viewed the working-class voter remained largely unaltered throughout a period which saw Labour challenge the Liberal claim to represent those electors. Studying the party's pamphlet literature has therefore given significant insights into the Liberal approach to the electorate, even if such a study can only grasp at how the electors themselves responded to the party's appeals.

The Impact of Political Literature

The most obvious problem confronting the historian of political literature is the problem of reception. Without any evidence of the reactions of those who read party pamphlets we cannot conclusively say what effect if any such publications had upon electoral behaviour. No relevant evidence exists which could make a comprehensive study of impact and reception possible here, and I have therefore looked elsewhere for indications of how influential pamphlet literature may have been. Firstly, there are the techniques employed by historians and sociologists who have investigated the problem of reception in media as a whole. There are also ways in which to infer at least how successful the party itself considered its propaganda efforts to have been, which given the focus of the thesis on the Liberals' own perception of themselves and the electorate is perhaps a useful exercise in itself.

As John Eldridge, Jenny Kitzinger and Kevin Williams have described, the question of 'reception' in terms of political media has produced a series of models to

understand what impact messages and images have upon their audience.[29] The 'Frankfurt School' described audiences as essentially passive, receiving information from a number of sources and acting accordingly. The Frankfurt technique was held to be at the heart of advertising as well as political propaganda, and while the model has been shown to be unsatisfactory when compared with later methodologies, it is important to note that it was precisely this form of 'passive' reception that is likely to have been understood by the pamphleteers of the period under study. If a pamphlet conveyed its message successfully, the desired effect – in this case, a vote for the Liberal Party – would result. The likely primary factor for pamphleteers then, was producing a consistent message and ensuring its maximum exposure. It is the task of this thesis to investigate how the pamphlet creators attempted to achieve the former of these aims.

With regards the matter of exposure, however, my research has uncovered only limited evidence. The prime sources of statistical information for the production and distribution of pamphlet material are the figures given in the annual reports of the National Liberal Federation. Beginning with the 1892 meeting, these reports can be found bound together with collections of the pamphlets issued by the Liberal Publication Department for that year. The reports contain breakdowns of the Federation's income and expenditure, including that on publications, which can help us to infer the take-up of the pamphlet material. There are, however, some reservations concerning using these figures as a basis for studying the impact of pamphlets. Firstly, increasing expenditure does not automatically imply increased production, nor does rising revenue necessarily indicate greater sales, as there is little

[29] John Eldridge, Jenny Kitzinger and Kevin Williams (eds.), *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 125-132.

data on production costs nor a breakdown of how revenue is calculated. However, we can state as a general rule that individual pamphlet prices so not seem to have increased by much over the course of the years from 1892 to 1914, and so the overall increase in pamphlet revenue we see looking at the figures leading up to the First World War would seem to indicate a rise in pamphlet uptake.

The figures given by Liberal Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone prior to the 1906 General Election support the picture of an increasing readership for Liberal pamphlet publications.[30] Gladstone's notes give a good picture of increasing sales of various publications, with handbills and leaflets in particular becoming more important in the run-up to the Election. The figures for 1906 put sales of one-to-two page publications at 16,080,000, out of overall pamphlet sales of 22,521,000. A survey of the collected volumes of LPD pamphlets would certainly indicate that the propaganda department were producing a more diverse range of leaflet-style pamphlets by this period than they had when the collections begin. The 1906 material is perhaps anomalous in being so focused on a particular issue, as Gladstone's statistics suggest that pamphlets on the 'Fiscal Question' were the dominant theme, accounting for 9,096,000 of the overall total sold, although whether this reflects greater interest in that particular topic or a larger amount of such material being produced is unclear. Also uncertain is how the pamphlets were categorised by theme - the next largest sales figures are for pamphlets on the 'Tory Record', but a great many pamphlets issued at that time would have contained an attack on the Conservatives' record on the economy combined with a restatement of the pro-Free Trade/anti-Tariff Reform message, so a large degree of overlap should be accounted for.

[30] Viscount Gladstone Papers, Vol. CXXIII (Add MS 46107), in the British Library Manuscripts collection.

Nevertheless, Gladstone's figures indicate that the LPD.'s pamphlets were becoming more popular in the early twentieth-century. Between 1903 and 1905 alone general subscriptions to the party's pamphlet publications increased from 756 to 1204, with figures from the first half of 1906 suggesting a similar number for that year. Such a breakdown allows us to suggest that the increased revenues documented in the NLF Annual Reports were indicative of a general rise in the popularity of the official Liberal Party publications. A degree of caution must still attach to the Gladstone figures however, given the uniqueness of the political climate of the time. An increase in pamphlet sales after 1903, with 'Fiscal' issues to the fore, suggests perhaps the party capitalising on a particular 'spike' in interest coinciding with the beginning of Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign.

Gladstone's figures do not help to answer the other problem attached to assessing success via sales statistics. The rise in general subscriptions does not indicate precisely who was buying the pamphlets, and for what purpose. The figures for 'Pamphlets and Leaflets Subscribers' given later are likely to be representative of bulk-buying from local Liberal Federations, but even here we have little indication of how successful these local organisations were in distributing the material, nor to whom they were circulating them. We may suggest that the likely intention was that pamphlets be consumed by individual voters in the environment of a family or small-scale social context, using David Vincent's argument that increased literacy among working men allowed political parties to target individuals and thus exercise the maximum degree of control over how literature was interpreted. Vincent suggests that this was seen as beneficial by politicians as the prior practice of communal reading of

political material removed control over interpretation from being a relationship between the party and the individual by the intercession of a group feeling which may alter the meaning and impact of the text.[31]

Research into the impact media had upon their audience became more sophisticated following the post-war boom in advertising and entertainment, which had prompted renewed interest in the question of 'reception'. What had become apparent was that audience response to a message or image depended to a large extent on their own pre-existing disposition towards an issue. Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Study (BCCCS) furthered analysis of audience impact by linking 'reception' to the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony'.[32] The model Hall and the BCCCS produced suggests that in order to understand how an audience's predispositions affect their reception of a message, one must first understand how those pre-existing patterns of thought were themselves constructed.

The implications of Hall's work for this thesis are therefore clear. While the evidence does not exist to suggest the precise response of working-class voters to Liberal political pamphlets, by studying the way in which political literature spoke to those voters we can suggest the ways in which predispositions towards *further* exposure to pamphlets were being shaped. In this respect the re-using of common forms of pamphlet such as the simple 'list of past legislative achievements' along repeatedly-stressed narrative and linguistic devices such as the historical 'march of progress' suggests that the Liberals' use of such archetypes could have given a strong sense of

[31] David Vincent; *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914*, (Cambridge U.P., 1989; paperback edition 1993), p. 235.
[32] See Eldridge, Kitzinger and Williams (eds.), *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain*, pp. 129-132.

how the Liberals wished their literature to be understood. It communicated a context as well as a specific message, into which all future appeals could be set. The further implication is that it could also produce what Hall describes as the 'oppositional position'; a negative reaction to Liberal pamphlets could be produced among voters whose exposure to the context of Liberal political discourse had convinced them of the Liberals' faults. In this respect, we can further see how critiques of Liberal policy from the ILP, as well as the Conservatives, may have been able to alter the context in which working-class voters perceived the Liberal Party.

Selecting Pamphlets

The other major methodological question which this thesis faces is the issue of selection. Given the vast amount of pamphlet literature which survives from this period, to say nothing of material which has potentially been lost, any survey of Liberal pamphlets must be at best a partial one. In accepting the impossibility of studying the entire record of political pamphlets, I have been compelled to apply limits to the scope of the thesis, both in terms of chronology and in the nature of the sources used. The reasoning behind the terms I have set is to ensure a meaningful period of study and a consistency in the type of material chosen.

With regards the time period I have set out to investigate, I chose to commence in the years immediately preceding the Third Reform Act for two key reasons. Firstly, the large amount of material available, much of which was held at Manchester Central Library, whose extensive pamphlet collections in large part inspired this thesis. Secondly, the period is significant for the focus which is given in these pamphlets to

questions of class politics. There appears to be a large volume of literature devoted to explaining to the newly-enfranchised agricultural worker precisely why his vote should be given to the Liberal Party, typified by pieces such as *Tory or Liberal: For Which shall I Vote?*, written by J.T. Walters, rector of Norton and Liberal pamphleteer.[33] The process by which the Liberal Party began to disseminate its views on the role of class in political participation would seem to have intensified here even if its ultimate origins lie earlier.

The thesis concludes just after the 1924 General Election because it is here that the process appears to have if not stopped entirely, then certainly to have run out of steam. Factors which affected the declining role of class and narratives of political history as means of attracting support will certainly have included the impact of new technologies which were by this point in use, such as radio broadcast and cinema vans. Jarvis, Lawrence and Peter Williamson have all shown the importance of these new forms of communication, which benefited the Conservatives as they were markedly better at utilising these new methods. Yet even when the role of improved technology is taken into account, pamphlet literature remains an important source because when we compare the Liberal literature with that the party produced in earlier periods, the inter-war pamphlets display a marked loss of confidence in speaking ot the 'working man'. The class imperative of the 'Liberal Working Man' to vote for the party has not only disappeared from the literature of that period, but so too have the grand narratives which were constructed around such a figure. While the Liberal vote held up to a considerable degree until the precipitous drop around the 1931 General

[33] J.T. Walters, *Tory or Liberal: For Which Shall I Vote? A Letter to the Middle-class and Operative Electors*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880), at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.n6 , p. 23.

Election, I argue here that it was in the years before the formation of the first Labour government which we can identify the more important point at which the Liberal Party lost its ability to depict itself as a credible party of government.

With regards the material selected, I have opted to concentrate on national (or at least geographically non-specific) literature rather than pursuing a series of local case studies. The reasons for this decision are in part because of time constraints, but largely due to the range and depth of local literature available, which as proved extremely variable from one location to the next, rendering long-term comparisons between particular locations difficult. While the national-level material provides a sufficient range of sources for the purpose of this thesis, the lack of local 'colour' provided by regional studies is regrettable, as some of the locally-specific collections have provided useful insights into the way different local Liberal organisations set about campaigning.

Two particular local collections stand out in terms of interest. At Bristol University, the National Liberal Club Papers contain a file concerning the 1878 Contest for Bristol.[34] The collection ranges from local newspaper clippings to locally-produced pamphlets and posters, confirming James Thompson's work on political communication which emphasises the role of such geographically-specific material. The contest itself was of particular note for the unusual list of candidates; as well as the Conservative and official Liberal nominees, there was a third candidate standing as an independent Liberal, and on a platform which suggests his was seen as a 'Lib-Lab' candidature. Secondly, the John Gorst Papers at Preston Library collect together

[34] Bristol Election Material 1878-80 Vol. 1, in Bristol University Library Special Collections, ref. DM1972/1.

all the material issued in support of Gorst's unsuccessful tilt at election in January 1910 as a Liberal candidate.[35] The collection is of interest as it showed how official LPD pamphlets were combined with literature from affiliated organisations such as the Budget League and the Free Trade Union, as well as a smaller quantity of locally-produced material. The latter demonstrates some of the campaigning strategies Lawrence observed in Wolverhampton, with Gorst being linked to a popular Preston North End footballer, in an attempt at the sort of 'associational' links Wolverhampton Conservatives enjoyed with the local soccer team.[36]

Such collections are reflected in too few areas in the timeframe under consideration for the thesis to be conducted along case-study lines. However, the story told by the national pamphlet campaigns have an interesting story of their own to tell, and a focus on this material rather than isolated local collections provides a consistent frame of reference throughout the period under investigation, and allow for a study of the general tenor of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Liberalism if at the expense of losing some of the local flavours it offered. Given the valuable insights this approach has provided in this thesis however, I would consider this less a drawback as a strength. It is my hope that from the general conclusions this thesis provides, further research into the specifics of local Liberal pamphlet campaigns can provide a full sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the Liberal Party at such a crucial point in its history.

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[35] 'Sir John Gorst - Election 1910' in Preston Library, ref. P05.

[36] This strategy could also backfire, of course. In this instance, the footballer in question, David Prophet Maclean, according to Dean Hayes' *The Who's Who of Preston North End* (Derby: The Breedon Books Publishing Company Limited, 2006), having been top scorer in the campaign prior to Gorst's attempts at utilising his popularity, enjoyed only one more full season for the team. Given Gorst's own failure, endorsing sports sides could evidently make for poor associations as well as good. For Wolverhampton Wanderers and the Conservatives, see Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, pp. 107-108.

Structure and Argument

What will become clear through this study is the important role played by narratives of political history in shaping the Liberal appeals to the electorate. The first chapter of this thesis will be devoted to a study of the relationship between the franchise and the Liberal Party's historical narratives during the years between the Second and Third Reform Acts, with the focus being on the way in which concepts of 'class' were addressed in the Liberal conception of the political sphere. Drawing upon well-established tropes of 'whiggish' history, the Victorian Liberal Party based their assumptions of the support they could expect from the newly-enfranchised working classes in 1867 and 1884 in part on the lessons which were drawn from a conception of political history as an epic of steady development along constitutional lines, driven by the rationally-derived 'interests' of the 'people'. The second of these two terms was to an extent defined elastically – the 'people' could have narrow or inclusive definition – but whoever was taken to comprise the political nation, their 'interests' remained defined in terms of the narrative of 'progress' throughout the nineteenth century, with a particular emphasis on expounding upon this notion being made immediately following the 1885 franchise extension.

The second chapter of this thesis will examine the Liberal conception of 'Toryism' and in particular the impact of Disraeli's perceived recasting of the Conservative Party from being a necessary counterweight to potential radical extremism into a party determined to eradicate the 'progressive' mission. The Liberal narrative of rational 'progress' and the commensurate forward march of Liberalism was defined against a Toryism which was depicted as a reactionary counterforce against which the Liberals

were forced to struggle in order to ensure the advancement and betterment of the working classes. The key figure in this conception of party politics was the subversive 'Conservative Working Man', and the chapter will study the creation and impact which this feared phenomenon had upon the Liberals' appeals to his fellow 'working men'.

Chapter three will investigate the Liberal Party's response to the rise of independent Labour politics in the period 1890-1914, and will suggest that the influence of the Liberal attempts to secure 'working-class' support on the fledgling Labour Party must be acknowledged as a significant factor shaping the terms of this new politics. The chapter will argue that the slowness of the Liberal Party to develop a response to the emerging Labour critique of its record and its political values was not merely due to a pragmatic attempt to co-opt the energy of the new movement for its own ends.[37] I shall argue that the Liberal Party's relationship with the nascent Labour Party that is depicted in the pamphlet literature was based upon well-established themes in Liberal political publications which saw the Labour movement as an offshoot, if an extremist one, of the Liberal mission of 'progress', and that this would prove a problem whan confronted with a developing Labour literature which drew from similar narrative and rhetorical techniques but used a vaguely-defined but strongly-articulated concept of 'Socialism' as the only political vehicle which would secure the prosperity of the 'working man' and his family, and an accompanying narrative of 'oppression' which directly challenged Liberal notions of 'progress' as the core theme of political history.

[37] For the Liberals' pragmatic approach to the Labour Party's emergence and the attempts by the former to utilise the latter to secure its position see for example Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism;* Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, and James Moore, 'Progressive Pioneers: Manchester Liberalism, the Independent Labour Party, and Local Politics in the 1890s', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4, (Dec., 2001), pp. 989-1013.

The final chapter will focus on the state of Liberal political literature after the First World War. It will address the eventual difficulties with which the Liberal pamphleteers were faced when the impact of the Labour critique became evident in the years between the Representation of the People Act in 1918 and the formation of the first Labour government in 1924. I shall argue that while the practical problems which beset the Liberal Party had an undoubtedly significant effect on the party's propaganda operations, the most important feature of the Liberal pamphlet literature in this period was the evidence it provides of a party facing a crisis of identity. While accepting Freeden's thesis that there was an ideological and intellectual impasse in the Liberal movement which saw the 'progressive' statist tendencies of Hobson and Hobhouse eschewed as a result of the implications of wartime expansion of state control, the chapter shall argue that the more pressing problem for the Liberals lay in its relationship with the electorate.

The figure of the 'Liberal Working Man' will be shown to have been an increasingly rare feature in interwar-era Liberal pamphlet literature, a casualty of the failure to deal adequately with the Labour challenge to Liberalism's claims to represent the working classes; consequently the Liberals focused on a centrist, anti-partisan appeal. While the disappearance at the same time of the grand narrative of 'progress' from Liberal literature could be seen as a consequence of the retreat Freeden identified from the self-assured embrace of statist policies,[38] I shall argue that a more significant factor at play here was an increasing uncertainty about the fundamental premise of 'progress' as a description of the historical and present-day relationship between Liberalism and the working classes. The Liberal response to a more assertive Labour Party following

[38] Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), pp. 26-44.

the First World war was to abandon attempts to speak to a ‘working class’ audience, rather than to adjust its narratives to the new politics of the post-war era. The undermining of the Liberals’ political narrative structure therefore represents far more than a mere rhetorical defeat, and went much deeper than simply representing the Liberal Party’s ideological strife; the abandonment of the ‘progressive’ narrative was in itself a key factor in the party’s interwar difficulties.

Chapter One: Class and 'Progress' in Liberal Political Discourse

Introduction

This chapter will consider the ways in which Liberal political literature in the late nineteenth century constructed and promoted a set of narratives designed to engage with the newly-enfranchised electors produced by the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1885. I shall show how discussions of 'class' acquired particular relevance to the Liberal attempts to attract the support of the new voters, and that the vital element of Liberal political narratives, that of 'progress' of society and its constituent individuals and social groups, cannot be fully understood without recognising the central role played by class in constructing such accounts. The chapter will therefore establish the important themes and features which were commonly found in Liberal political pamphlets, and subsequent chapters will show that 'class' and narratives of political history were persistently used in Liberal literature until the First World War. It will be show that the way in which the two themes were conceived of and articulated by Liberal pamphleteers was determined by a conception of the 'working man' as a vital component in the Liberal narrative of 'progress', and that this understanding prevented the Liberal Party from constructing appeals to the working-class voter in ways which did not presuppose the elector's 'interests' in any way inconsistent with the 'progress' narrative.

The Reform Act of 1867 had reformed the franchise for parliamentary elections in borough constituencies – urban seats with their own members of parliament. The 1832 Reform Act had created a largely middle-class electorate by enfranchising the

male '£10 householder'. The terms of the 1867 Act granted the vote to all male rate-paying householders in borough constituencies, doubling the total electorate and changing the character of urban seats, with working-class males now forming a majority of the borough vote. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals had developed rationales for reform – Disraeli's belief in the patriotism of the working class and their respect for the constitution, monarchy and parliament; Gladstone's belief that certain elements of the working class had demonstrated 'fitness' to share in the responsibilities of political participation, as well as other arguments such as those contained in the *Essays on Reform*.[1]

The passage of the Act had been a long and difficult process, which caused the collapse of the Liberal Russell ministry. The Earl of Derby's incoming Conservative government managed to secure the passage of the Act, which enfranchised a greater proportion of the working class householders than that proposed by the Liberals. Yet the loyalties of the new electorate seemed difficult to discern. The Conservatives lost the subsequent 1868 General Election, allowing the reformist first Gladstone ministry into office, but the Liberals in turn lost office in 1874, only to regain power at the next opportunity in 1884. The second Gladstone administration passed a further Reform Act in that same year, extending the household franchise to the county constituencies and thus granting many working class males in rural areas the vote. As we shall see

[1] *Essays on Reform*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867, reprinted in Elibron Classics edition, Adamant Media Corporation, 2006).*The Essays* were a series of articles produced as a response to opposition from within the Liberal ranks to the 1866 Gladstone/Russell bill. The authors put forward counter-arguments to the positions taken by the opponents of the Bill, particularly Robert Lowe and his argument that reform would enfranchise the basest elements of society. Of the various contributions to the *Essays*, perhaps the most interesting in terms of its argument was G.C. Brodrick's essay, 'The Utilitarian Argument Against Reform', pp. 1-26, which took issue with Lowe's view of the adverse effects on politics that extending the vote to the working-class borough householders would have., and argued that timely reform was vital for ensuring the well-being of the nation; a concept borne out of similar utilitarian approaches to political history which are encountered in several of the pamphlets discussed later in the chapter.

below, the Liberals were determined to ensure that the new county electorate did not prove as susceptible to Conservative appeals as the borough voters had been, and we shall see the party's efforts to stress the importance to the rural working class elector of voting for the Liberal Party.

While it has become common among historians of the period to emphasise the Liberal Party's 'classless' (if not strictly democratic) language and its broad-based appeal to all classes of the political nation, this chapter will show that in fact the incorporation of the new 'working-class' electors into pre-existing tropes of Liberal 'progress' was a difficult and contentious process.[2] The older Liberal narratives, based essentially on historical narratives deriving from the 'whiggish' notions of political development as refined by Macaulay as well as JS Mill, allowed little room to include the newly-enfranchised working-class voters without strictly delineating and restricting the forms 'working class' politics could take. In later chapters we shall see the difficulties such a narrow appeal to the working-class voter caused when confronted with more inclusive approaches from the Conservative and Labour Parties; here we shall examine the problem as it emerged in the years when the place of the 'working man' in politics first became a matter of concern.

The function of class in Victorian political history has been a topic of extensive scholarly debate, centring around the role class played as an engine for historical change. Few would now argue that older Marxist-derived views of class' deterministic role in driving political change stands as a wholly satisfactory model, while efforts to produce more nuanced approaches to class which nevertheless

[2] For Liberalism as a 'classless' party see for example James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A study in English Political Culture, c.1815-1867*, (Cambridge U.P., 1993), pp. 320-326; Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, (Cambridge U.P., 1994); pp. 213-220.

retained certain deterministic traits have also been eschewed.[3] However, many more recent approaches, focusing on the 'linguistic turn' approach inaugurated by Gareth Stedman Jones discussed above, have proved equally controversial. If, as Patrick Joyce suggests, much of the controversy created by postmodern perspectives in class as linguistic construct is the result of historians "talking past one other", this has perhaps been the result of a perceived overly-polemic attempt to 'dethrone class', and with it much of the legacy of social history.[4]

If linguistic approaches to class have proved controversial, this is less the case with the recent focus on gender identity in defining socio-political relationships.[5] Anna Clark has argued that class language in Victorian discourse can be understood as a

[3] For the older view of the functioning of class see for example Asa Briggs, 'The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England' in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History*, (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 54-57, 69, 70-73. Class was recast into a much broader dimension by E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963, reprinted 1991), where class is defined in cultural, experiential terms rather than strict materialist/economic lines, however the history of class formation he describes retains a faith in class as an oppositional force at the centre of political change, and which forms early, with class 'consciousness' apparent by the 1830s. Marc W. Steinberg has offered a defence of Thompson's understanding of the role of language as opposed to the anti-materialist critiques of Joyce and Vernon in ''A Way of Struggle:': Reformations and Affirmations of E.P. Thompson's Class Analysis in the Light of Postmodern Theories of Language', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 471-492. Besides Thompson's experiential model of class formation must stand the now-largely discredited notion of an 'aristocracy of labour' which attempted to explain the problematically quiescent nature of working-class politics in the later nineteenth-century; Henry Pelling critiqued Eric Hobsbawm's embracing of the concept in 'The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy', *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 37-61, while Neville Kirk, in *The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England*, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 6-11 and John Breuilly ('The labour aristocracy in Britain and Germany' in *Labour and Liberalism in nineteenth-century Europe: Essays in comparative history*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 26-75) have offered more recent refutations of the concept.

[4] Patrick Joyce, 'Introduction' in *Class*, (Oxford: University Press, 1995), p. 3.; *Democratic Subjects*, pp. 6-10. The degree of polemic entailed in the debate over class' role in political history can be seen in the discussion between Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor ('The Poverty of Protest: Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language: A Reply', *Social* History, Vol. 18, No.1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 1-15) and James Vernon ('Who's Afraid of the 'Linguistic Turn'? The Politics of Social History and its Discontents', *Social History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Jan., 1994) pp. 81-97). More recently, see the debate in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 57 (Spring 2000) between Geoff Eley and Keith Neild, 'Farewell to the Working Class?', pp. 1-30; 'Class and the Politics of History', pp. 76-87, versus Joan Scott, 'The "Class" We Have Lost', pp. 69-75; Barbara Weinstein, 'Where Do New Ideas (About Class) Come From?', pp. 53-59.

[5] See Matthew McCormack, 'Men, 'the Public' and Political History' in Matthew McCormack (ed.), *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 13-32. for an overview of the role played by gender n defining political relations.

way of maintaining an explicitly masculine concept of politics in the face of agitation for female suffrage.[6] As this chapter will show, class discourse did revolve around particularly male-orientated conceptions of 'character', 'respectability' and responsibility, with the 'working man' held to possess certain qualities which made him fit to hold the vote.[7] Discussed in class terms, the fitness of the 'working class' voter to enter the political sphere depended on what were specifically male qualities.

The most important factor to consider when approaching the concept of 'class' in Liberal literature was that the Liberals themselves conceived of society and political participation in class terms. The chapter will show that this line of thinking went beyond mere semantics; for the Liberal pamphleteers we will encounter, the 'working man' was understood to be a member of a class; that membership of a class could confer political rights upon him, and that his electoral behaviour was a direct consequence of the 'interests' he as a member of that class possessed. The Liberal appeal to the new electors of the late nineteenth century was explicitly a class one; the task of the Liberal pamphleteers being to fit this potential source of political

[6] Anna Clarke, 'Gender, class and the constitution: franchise reform in England, 1832-1928' in James Vernon (ed.), *Rereading the Constitution: New narratives in the political history of England's long nineteenth century*, (Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 239-253.; also John Tosh in 'Masculinities in an Industrialising Society: Britain, 1800-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 330-342.

[7] The introduction of gender perspectives into the language of 'character', 'respectability' and 'responsibility' adds a new perspective on the work of Stefan Collini concerning the importance of 'character' in particular as a signifier of political capacity in prospective voters. In 'The Idea of 'Character' in Victorian Political Thought', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, Vol. 35 (1985), pp.29-50. Collini argues that 'character' was a complex concept that resided partly in the notion that with sufficient application, individuals with the appropriate personal qualities could better their own circumstances, as well as having a fixed quality that could only tangentially be worked upon by the actions of wider society. Collini suggests that the concept of 'progress' was bound up in notions of 'character' as the development of beneficial personal (and in the wider sense, national) qualities could be considered both cause and effect of character. By adding gender to Collini's depictions of 'character', we can see that political participation was an exclusively masculine pursuit both because masculine personal characteristics were both a concept which needed to be developed through political action, i.e. 'progress' towards greater political participation; and because such masculine traits were required in order to effect change in this manner.

sectarianism into well-established tropes of classless, self-interested yet ultimately altruistic politics.

Thus, having first discussed the Liberal relationship with class, I shall then proceed to show the influence class politics had on Liberal narratives based upon political history and the concept of 'progress'. Historians such as A. Dwight Culler, Jeffrey Von Arx and John Burrow have long noted the influence of forms of 'whig' history on Liberal political discourse.[8] The 'whig' approach to understanding and discussing the past, exemplified in the histories of Macaulay and the philosophical writings of J.S. Mill, centred around a self-confident narrative of developing political freedoms.[9] The engine driving this process was argued by Macaulay and Mill was the Whig Party which had manifestly proven itself to have been sensitive to the needs of the various stages of history through which Britain had passed, with the Civil War, the Glorious Revolution and the Reform Acts being key milestones in a march of enlightened 'progress'. Culler, Von Arx, and Burrow have sought to show the complex nature of 'whiggish' history, in particular to show how the narratives it produced adapted to the political circumstances then prevalent. Vernon has also shown how 'constitutional' narratives taking similar forms to 'whiggish histories' could be claimed by working-class men as a justification for their own political preferences, little has been done to investigate the way in which the Liberal Party itself attempted to set the terms by

[8] John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past*, (Cambridge U.P., 1981, reprinted 2008); 'All that glitters: political science and the lessons of history' in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow (eds.), *That noble science of politics: A study in nineteenth-century intellectual history*, (Cambridge U.P., 1983, reprinted 2008), pp. 183-205; A. Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); John Gibbins, 'J.S. Mill, liberalism and progress' in Richard Bellamy (ed.), *Victorian Liberalism: nineteenth-century political thought and practice*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 91-109; Jeffrey Paul Von Arx, *Progress and Pessimism: Religion, Politics, and History in Late Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985).

[9] For Macaulay, see Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*, pp. 11-93; 'All That Glitters', pp. 192-196. For Mill, see Gibbins, J.S. Mill, Liberalism and progress', pp. 94-100; also Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History*, pp. 39-74.

which the 'working man' could participate in narratives of progress.[10] Also lacking in the historiography have been adequate counter-arguments to Vernon's inclusive narratives to show how this delineation could act to proscribe the way in which working-class politics could legitimately express itself, restricting the working-class electorate to a defined role as the new 'driving force' towards further 'progress'; defined along strictly 'Liberal' lines.

The chapter will therefore investigate the way in which the Liberal Party attempted to use narratives of 'progress' both to understand and describe the new electors and the influence they were to have upon the future forms of Liberal politics, and to ensure that the 'working man' in politics did in fact conform to this conceptualisation. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the important role that 'educating' the new voters would have in Liberal attempts to secure their desired version of working-class politics and ensuring Liberal 'progress' could continue.

Liberalism and 'Class'

The historiographical debate concerning class has centred around the notion that 'class' was a construction of language, supported by narratives and concepts which acted to shape popular understanding of social divisions. Joyce and Vernon have both noted that the most important aspect of this understanding of class as a constructed identity is its ability to act both as a force of elite control and as an emancipating form of 'agency', allowing the working class an opportunity to define themselves as members of political society. Their reconstruction of the latter function of linguistic

[10] Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 295-330.

construction is impressive and afford much needed insight into the ways in which working-class politics went far beyond even its Thompsonian definitions, with 'politics' reconstructed as a much broader concept, with concepts of 'culture' and 'experience' seen as capable of producing cooperation as well as opposition.[11] The notion which emerged of a working-class capable of defining itself and therefore its allegiances in terms other than 'class' itself was considered to indicate areas of consensus between elite and working-class politics, bases on a reified constitution, acceptance of the doctrines of 'character' and a declining use of violent means to achieve political ends.[12] Yet other historians have questioned the degree of consensus actually achieved, in particular Jon Lawrence who has stressed the continuation of public violence in the political arena and, more importantly, the need to recognise the limitations of linguistic methods in reconstructing political relations.[13] Lawrence's approach, focusing on the relationship between political appeals and the electorate, forms the basis of this section.

An analysis of the literature produced in support of the Liberals between the 1870s and 1890s reveals a picture of a Liberal movement attempting to combine its own commitments to the welfare of the individual with the influx of voters whom they nonetheless continue to treat as aggregates. The Liberal Party did not form its own propaganda department until 1887, so the analysis of 'Liberal' literature here will necessarily be based upon 'non-official' pamphlets which were issued in support of

[11] Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 334-335; Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 334-335, 'Who's Afraid of the Linguistic Turn?'', p. 84.
[12] Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, pp. 192-204 ; Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 295-330 for constitutional narratives, pp. 215-231.
[13] Jon Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, pp. 183-193,'The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War', *Past and Present*, 190, (February, 2006), pp. 185-187, *Electing Our Masters*, pp..71-92.

the Liberal Party.[14] These were produced by several different organisations, but given the antipathy of the Liberal movement towards monolithic party control, this is not surprising. Joseph Chamberlain, the Liberal M.P. and a key figure in the setting-up of the National Liberal Federation to co-ordinate Liberally-motivated forces, described the party's reliance on affiliated but external organisations for support. "They did not mean by the leaders of the Liberal party and Parliamentary organisation. By the success of Liberalism they meant the success of those great objects which lay at the root and the basis of Liberalism", but that greater organisation was needed to prevent "the enormous waste of energy, the waste of time, and means, and temper…arousing special political agitations for every political subject."[15] Chamberlain therefore believed that the formation of the National Liberal Federation would remove the necessity for such a division of resources, but the clear implication is that until such a unified force for agitation presented itself, the Liberal Party was dependent upon these other organisations to publicise their message.[16] For this reason, we shall consider the publications of such bodies as representations of Liberal opinion. Whilst bearing in mind that these are not documenting the beliefs of the parliamentary Liberal Party

[14] For the founding of the Liberal Publication Department, see H.V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914*, (Cambridge U.P., 1973), pp. 72-73. The LPD. operated under the aegis of the National Liberal Federation (NLF.) with input from the parliamentary party in the form of its administrative body, the Liberal Central Association (LCA). The former body had grown out of Joseph Chamberlain's desire for greater coordination between local Radical associations (see Peter Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain: A Political Study*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) for an account of the NLF's formation), but had been 'captured' by the Gladstonian party following Chamberlain's secession over Home Rule in 1886 and continue to act as a focal point for Radical associations, but with greater ties to the parliamentary party.

[15] *Proceedings Attending the Formation of the National Liberal Federation,* (Birmingham: The Journal Printing Offices, 1877), at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.n6, p. 20. Echoes of Chamberlain's concern that Liberalism Liberalism spoke with too many voices can be seen in Jeffrey Von Arx's study of the thinking of Leslie Stephen, *Progress and Pessimism*, pp. 2-3.

[16] Many of the extra-party pamphlets were produced locally or by other independent sources whose limited reach and narrow focus on a particular issue reinforces the picture of a divided Liberal voice. Several pro-Liberal pamphlets were produced by George Potter's Bee-Hive Press, a publication whose primary aim was the promotion of trades union rights, but which during the 1880s was unswervingly supportive of the Liberals.

itself, we shall use these pamphlets to illustrate the ways in which Liberalism related itself to the .working classes'.

The National Reform Union was one such body, and a key advocate of extending the borough householder franchise of 1867 to the county equivalents, and published a series of pamphlets and speeches in order to justify the cause.[17] One of the latter, Liberal M.P. and franchise reformer W.E. Forster's speech of the 7th of July, 1875, suggested that he had "no doubt that the rated householder in the county is just as fit to exercise the franchise" as the safely-enfranchised borough voter, and that the potential county electorate "possesses all those virtues that generally characterise the British people, and…would exercise (the franchise) with the same prudence and benefit to the community as the rated householder in the town." [18] It cannot be doubted that in expressing himself in this manner, Forster's argument calls for the enfranchisement of a group, not an individual, and on the basis of their capacity to safely discharge the responsibilities associated with the 'sacred trust' of the vote.

The argument may still be made that in doing so, Forster refers not to a 'class' as traditionally conceived, but to an amorphous group defined only by their non-inclusion within the pale of the constitution, echoing perhaps Vernon's thesis of the inclusive nature of constitutional narratives as a means of legitimating working-class political participation. The key concepts in Forster's understanding of the divisions

[17] The National Reform Union was independent of the Liberal Party but worked closely with them in many areas, particularly in Manchester, continuing to produce literature supporting the Liberal Party even after the LPD. began operations. The political pamphlet collections in Manchester Central Library derive from the NRU.'s holdings, and many of the Union's own pamphlets from closely resemble contemporary LPD. material, and in some cases pamphlets are co-produced by the two organisations.
[18] *Speeches on the County Franchise*, (Manchester: National Reform Union, 1875), at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.N6, Vol. 9/13, p4; for biographical information on Forster see Allen Warren, 'Forster, William Edward (1818–1886)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9926, accessed 29 May 2010].

between voter and non-voter derive however from British Liberalism's understanding of this division as one which is created by social and economic circumstances, conceived of and depicted in terms of class. Forster's speech gives thanks for the fact that "we hear little of that argument that the basis of the county franchise is property, and that of the borough franchise is not property", referring to the idea that the householder of the borough derived his right to vote from personal capacity whilst retaining the interest of property for the franchise of the counties. More striking is Forster's statement that the county householders "have suffered in practical legislation because they have had no votes… A large proportion of them are agricultural labourers; we all acknowledge how immensely important a class they are, and yet they are the only class unrepresented in this house." [19]

One further example of 'class' as a condition of enfranchisement can be found in 'Parliament and the People', a speech by Charles Anthony Junior, an author whose other works included the pamphlet *The Social and Political Dependence of Women.* He referred in his speech to the "unenfranchised classes" but proceeded to argue the unsatisfactory state of affairs prior to enfranchisement of the county householders of the "*bona fide* working man" having to "of necessity…act through representatives who are not of his class."[20] Although Anthony later referred to the "class of artisans", similar uses of the term in the passage would seem to indicate that he considered the 'artisan' and the working classes to be synonymous. Forster and Anthony, then, demonstrate the significance of the term for Liberal conceptions of political society.

[19] *Speeches on the County Franchise*, p4.
[20] *Liberalism versus Imperialism and Parliament and the People: Two Political Lectures delivered by Charles Anthony, Jun., .at Hereford and at Leominster*, (National Press Agency, n.d., c. 1879) at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.n6 Vol.8/25 pp. 39-40.

In the same collection of speeches published by the National Reform Union as Forster's was a speech by Liberal M.P. and campaigner for franchise extension George O. Trevelyan.[21] He made explicit firstly the link between 'class' status and political participation: the act of 1832 gave "an effective machinery of middle-class representation" and that "previously to 1867 the working classes were outvoted in all the counties, and in 90 percent of the boroughs", a situation which, at least in terms of the latter, he saw remedied in 1867. Having defined these as enfranchisements of 'classes', he then proceeds to call for the equalisation of borough and county franchises: "having enfranchised every man who was fortunate enough to occupy a residence within the boundaries of a Parliamentary borough, it dealt with all who resided outside the boundaries by the simple and summary process of ignoring their claims." For Trevelyan, then, there existed a clear case for considering both county and borough householder as being equally capable and deserving of the vote, and in fact that the measures of 1867 created an artificial division where none could be justified: "To the inequality of class that previously existed it now added the new and not less invidious inequality of location" and that, quoting J.H. Kennawny "in competency for the duty of an elector no broad line of distinction could be drawn between the rural labourer and the town artisan." [22] We can see, therefore, that for Trevelyan, class was a broad division which overlay narrower distinctions between sections of society, and in fact class represented a 'natural' delineation between people as opposed to 'artificial' ones which prevented the true representation of

[21] For biographical detail on Trevelyan see Patrick Jackson, 'Trevelyan, Sir George Otto, second baronet (1838–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36555, accessed 29 May 2010]; see also David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History*, (London: Harper Collins, 1992; Penguin edition 1997), pp. 6, 60 for further information on Trevelyan in connection with his historian son, George Macaulay Trevelyan, named in honour of the scholar (and relative) who had been a great influence on the elder Trevelyan's conception of history and politics, for example pp. 26-27, 183.
[22] *Speeches on the County Franchis*e, pp. 9-10.

working men as a body of similarly capable and vote-worthy members of political society.

Trevelyan's statement gives a picture of Liberal thought in Britain which suggests that the 'linguistic turn' approach can still be compatible with 'class' as the central term of Liberal politics. His words make clear a link between two different sections of society which nonetheless share a similar social and economic level, creating the impression that this connection is best understood as being a 'class' one. The county householders are, we should note, not considered fit to exercise the vote because they possess similar qualities to the existing borough electorate, but because they are considered to have *the same* qualities; in other words, that the two are not just equally competent, but that they are one and the same body of people, unable to vote merely by accident of geography.

Trevelyan's contributions to the pamphlet give an indication that the British Liberals were able, and willing, to discuss political questions – and as we shall see, economic and social ones – in terms of a tripartite sense of 'class'. It does not necessarily follow that 'class' had a single and conceptually distinct meaning for the Liberal, and was frequently used as a term to distinguish more minute differences between groups of people, or to refer to amalgamations of 'classes'. What is suggested is that an interpretation of 'class' that dismisses its relevance because of its inconsistent applications is to mistake utility and flexibility for vagueness and amorphousness. The argument that 'class' was used merely as an opportunistic language for redress of grievance by afflicted groups underestimates the power of the term. 'Class' was also a powerful way of describing aggregates of groups by means of perceived social,

economic and political ties by political parties. Taking a 'top-down' perspective provides a formulation close enough to a traditional understanding of 'class' to make the study of the relationship between class and party from this standpoint viable and necessary.

The Liberal Party was particularly sensitive to the distinctions of 'class' because of their emphasis on a gradualist extension of the vote. Kahan as well as Matthew, McKibbin and Kay all suggest that the Liberals depended for its success on the vote being restricted to a 'rational' electorate. [23] What is less obvious from their work is the role that a stratified 'class' system played in shaping the conceptualisation of that body of potential voters. 'Class' in fact impacted heavily upon how 'rationality' was to be demonstrated. The usage here of terms such as '£10 householders' or 'artisan electors' in discussions on franchise extension may be taken to imply a greater role in the Liberal mind for finer differentials between sets of people. However, these terms were to a large extent interchangeable with the notion of 'class'. George Potter, a journalist and author of pro-trades union newspaper *The Bee Hive,* wrote the pamphlet titled *'History of the Tory Party'* , which deals first of all with the Great Reform Act as "The Enfranchisement of the Middle Classes". [24] More intriguingly, when discussing the movement towards the Second Reform Act , the beneficiaries of the previous enfranchisement referred to how the "ten pound householders reduced

[23] Alan Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage,* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 6-7; H.C.G Matthew, R.I. McKibbin and J.A.Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review,* Vol. 91, No. 361 (Oct 1976), p. 749.

[24] G. Potter, *History of the Tory Party*, (London: George Potter, 1877), at Manchester Central Library Political Pamphlets 308.n6, p.12. For biographical detail on Potter, see Alastair J. Reid, 'Potter, George (1832–1893)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22610, accessed 29 May 2010]..

the working classes to less than one-third of the electoral body in the boroughs". [25] It should also be noted that the heading of this section uses yet another term: "Efforts to Enfranchise Working Men". Clearly, for Potter, it was possible to identify a 'class' in both its wider and its narrower senses, and to shift with little difficulty between largely synonymous terms.

It may be inferred that using various ways of describing the enfranchised groups proves Joyce correct when he calls for class to be considered "one term amongst many".[26] The clear impression of Potter's language is, however, that for Liberals there was a political significance attached to social and economic status, which was understood in an essentially tripartite manner. The £10 householder was a 'middle-class' franchise, and was considered a solid base on which to rest the base of the franchise; the further extensions in 1867 and 1884 were for Forster both members of the same status group, and were politically endowed on this basis.

Trevelyan also makes clear that the 'masses', a term famous from Gladstone's pledge to support them at the expense of 'the classes', represent in Liberal literature an aggregation of interests. These of course were usually identified with Liberal purposes, but these interests can be understood as an amalgamation of individual 'class' interests justified by virtue of their very commonality of principles, but also most specifically by the inclusion of the 'working classes' in their ranks. In another Trevelyan speech published by the National Reform Union, he states that "It is hard to

[25] On Potter, see Alastair J. Reid, 'Potter, George (1832–1893)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22610, accessed 29 May 2010]; George Potter, *History of the Tory Party*, (London: George Potter, 1877), at Manchester Central Library Political Pamphlets 308.n6, p.12, 15.
[26] Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p. 2.

draw a hard-and-fast line between districts where power rests with the masses, and districts where it rests with the upper and middle classes." [27] Quite clearly, here the masses is taken to refer to the 'working classes'. The term also appears in Potter's 'History of the Tory Party', where the term refers seemingly to the middle classes as well, prior to their enfranchisement in 1832, but which is also implied to include the working-classes in its usage. [28]

Liberalism, 'Progress' and the 'Interests' of the 'Working Man'

The concept which made Liberal political pamphlets most distinctive was the notion of 'progress' as a means of explaining to voters the importance of electing Liberals to office. 'Progress', as we shall see, was a theme which ran through Liberal political literature, imploring the voter to see the necessity not just of producing reform but of ensuring that when change occurred, it did so in an orderly and rational way. The vehicle which was used to express these ideas was a narrative of political history which emphasised the steady pace of change over time, with shifts in popular attitudes necessary to achieve the measure of reform required by the circumstances of the day. In this way, 'progress' could be shown to have been both a 'natural' state of affairs as well as being a process which required particular actions to be undertaken at specific times, and crucially for the correct reasons. 'Progress' was therefore depicted in Liberal pamphlet literature as a vital pursuit, which needed to be enacted carefully by a party which had the development of the nation and its people as its foremost goal, and which needed to be supported by an electorate who were conscious of the

[27] *Speeches on the County Franchise by G.O. Trevelyan, M.P.,* (Manchester: National Reform Union, 1877), Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.n6/Vol. 9/14, p. 12.
[28] Potter, *History of the Tory Party*, p. 15.

responsibility they possessed t o bring about the necessary reforms to ensure 'progress' was achieved in its proper way.

The theme of 'progress' and the importance of historical narratives in demonstrating the need for timely reform has been long recognised by historians as a significant feature of Liberal political thought in the nineteenth century.[29] John Gibbins' study of the relationship between history and 'progress' in the philosophy of J.S. Mill shows how important historical precedent could be to Liberal political thinkers. A comprehensive grasp of history, particularly the rise and fall of the great classical civilisations of Greece and Rome, could teach important lessons about how Britain could avoid or at least postpone similar collapse. Mill's rationale for reform, Gibbins argued, was derived from an assessment of Britain's position on a three-stage model of history, with a teleological principle of 'progress' towards the utilitarian goal of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Political priority should therefore be given to policies which advanced society towards this ultimate end, with 'liberty' and 'democracy' important insofar as they too contributed towards the onwards path of 'progress'.

The concept of a sense of unified interest between the 'middle' and 'working classes' is one which comes over strongly in the Liberal literature. It would appear that the Liberals held a conception of the mass electorate as just such an amalgamation of

[29] See for example John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*; 'All that glitters: political science and the lessons of history'; A. Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History*, John Gibbins, 'J.S. Mill, liberalism and progress'; Jeffrey Paul Von Arx, *Progress and* Pessimism; see also Stuart Jones, *Victorian Political Thought*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 52-55. For the continuing significance of establishing particularly 'Liberal' versions of political history, see for example D.A. Schreuder, 'The Making of Mr. Gladstone's Posthumous Career: The Role of Morley and Knaplund as 'Monumental Masons', 1903-27' in Bruce L. Kinzer (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind: Essays Presented to J.B. Conacher*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 197-243, David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan*, pp. 95-105.

interests, legitimated by being combined together, rather than as a 'classless' polity as such. Any expression of the sentiments of one 'class' in the political sphere was by contrast rendered illegitimate; consider president of the Birmingham Liberal Association J.S. Wright's comments during the conference which established the National Liberal Federation, also published in pamphlet form. In debating the structure this new body would take, Wright rejected the notion of separate associations for 'middle-class' and 'working-class' members as existed, for example, in Chelsea, calling for "a scotch upon those class interests which brought the party into a minority". [30] Similarly, in 'The Peers and the People', a contrast is made between the various stages of British government. From a position where "the House of Commons was merely the *alter ego* of the Upper Chamber", the Great Reform Act "changed the House into something like a representative body; the middle class acceded to power". The only way of achieving fully representative government was thus through the "first stage of a really popular franchise" in 1867, but only through ending the power of the Upper House would "the land of England return to its original proprietors – the people." [31]

What appears to define the issue of legitimate 'class' expression for the Liberals would seem to have been the unification of what would later be described as 'progressive' forces. The 'working classes' were considered, as a body, to represent an addition to an already-existing movement to block the illegitimate expression of power by the 'upper classes' as represented by the 'Tory' and the 'Peer', and were the legitimating factor that made Liberalism the only true 'class'-less party. By its very

[30] *Proceedings Attending the Formation of the National Liberal Federation,* (Birmingham: The Journal Printing Offices, 1877), p. 38; for the second quote see *ibid,* p. 30.
[31] *The Peers and The People,* (London: J.H. Cattell and co., n.d., c. 1884), at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.N6 , p. 11.

nature, such an argument presupposes a large degree of support from the working-classes for such an alignment, and more importantly rests heavily on a conception of the 'working-class' electorate as possessing not just capabilities which merited the vote but also the commitment to Liberalism as a movement. It was not enough for the voter to have 'capacity'; those capacities needed to be used in such a way as to ensure the onward march of Liberal progress. It is perhaps in this sense that we may understand the demonization of the non-Liberal working man as expressed in 'Tory or Liberal: How Shall I Vote?", written by John T. Walters, the rector of Norton. Walters is critical of Tory links with the drinks trade: "Toryism has allied itself, to its shame, with the "residuum" – the dregs – of the electoral body". [32]

None of this would necessarily be a problem area for the Liberal Party. If indeed their view of the 'working classes' was one which chimed with those of the newly enfranchised voters, it can only have been a help to their cause. Just as little mileage can be gained by simply supposing a Labour monopoly on 'working-class interests' in later periods, so in the late Victorian era we cannot assume that the Liberals did *not* possess a genuine affinity with 'working-class' interests. Defining any 'working-class interests' is difficult, particularly in a survey such as this, focusing as it does on pamphlet literature and political 'appeals'. However, this thesis is concerned less with the 'genuine' expression of a single or multiple 'working-class interests' as much as the manner in which the Liberals conceived of such a concept. The issue of testing the closeness of the Liberal version of 'working-class interests' will be dealt with in later chapters by means of identifying areas in which the Liberal literature created opportunities for alternative, critical counter-arguments to be made, and

[32] J.T. Walters, *Tory or Liberal: For Which Shall I Vote? A Letter to the Middle-class and Operative Electors,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880), at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.N6 , p. 23.

demonstrating the way in which the literature issued in support of the Labour movement was able to exploit these areas. In no way will it be suggested that the Labour responses are any more 'authentic' a representation of the 'working-class' voices, but that the Liberals in their appeals created an impression that their understanding of 'working-class interests' went only as far as these were consistent with their own, thus suggesting that Labour representation for its own sake was necessary.

A clear picture emerges in the Liberal literature of the party and its supporters of a tendency to treat 'working-class' interests as synonymous with Liberal ones, and to an understanding of the value of the franchise extensions as being progression towards a Liberal end, rather than a reform to allow the working men to be arbiters of their own destinies. For the Liberals, the destiny of the working men was to become Liberals, and the franchise was a method of achieving this objective. To this end, the Liberals published material which frequently indicated a presumption to speak on behalf of the 'working classes'. To return to Trevelyan and the debates on expanding the county franchise, he claimed that "if you (the proposed county electorate) have much to gain from us by your admission to parliament, we have very much to gain by you. We want your opinion on the thousand and one questions which concern your sentiments and interests." Trevelyan proceeds, however, to give a comprehensive list of such matters as he considers appropriate concerns for the new electors to consider. Naval punishment, education, local government, land laws, game laws and Disraeli's foreign policy were the questions with which he believed the rural working-classes should be preoccupied.[33] The conception of the necessity for 'working-class' political

[33] *Speeches on the County Franchise by G.O. Trevelyan, M.P.*, p. 43.

participation was held not for partisan reasons as such, but rather because of the seemingly genuine conviction that the rationally-derived interests of these voters were synonymous with the 'authentic' views and desires of the working-class electorate. The 'interests' of the working-class voter were seen through a lens of history; the Liberal Party and 'progress' were one and the same, and any advance towards amelioration of suffering was to be understood in this manner.

Charles Anthony's *Liberalism versus Imperialism* depicts this vision of a steady advance of Liberal progress as thus:

> A true Liberalism rarely dreams of those reactionary methods of setting right what has gone wrong with the world. It has more confidence in those institutions which have done so much for England; in the party which has waged a long and ardent struggle for civil and religious freedom; in its own cherished principles, which look ever forward and never behind; in its own well tried and tested patriotism, which aims at the conquest of all that is needful for a people's happiness by the steady and peaceful development of the inestimable and imperishable principles of human liberty. [34]

Anthony then, having described Gladstone as "the Great Physician of the State", compares the amelioration of human grievances to the treatment of a medical condition. Most specifically, he likens the advance of medical science to the gradual reduction of human suffering.[35] Any reform was also expected to be gradual; hence 'Demon' when discussing Reform of the House of Lords, states "nowadays, the freedom of English men is extended by reforms not revolutions" in contrast to the more radical and rapid changes in the early part of the nineteenth century; thankfully

[34] *Liberalism versus Imperialism and Parliament and the People*, p. 22.
[35] *Liberalism versus Imperialism and Parliament and the People*, p. 22.

"England passed safely through the trying ordeal" of such upheaval. It was the failure of Chartism to bring about otherwise laudable changes because although "Wise men saw that the Charter contained proposals which were certain of ultimate acceptance, but they saw too, that the time was not yet." The impetus to further change was the change in "the will, the authority of the people." Although the 1867 Act was the "logical successor" to the 1832 extension, it had to wait until "A generation had passed away, and a more enlightened occupied its place".[36]

Change, moreover, that could not be averted when its time had come. "There is…every reason for believing that we are steadily advancing towards popular government in its fullest and broadest sense…Nothing can divert this onward march; it is one of the most certain facts in politics. The Reform Bill of 1884 is an instalment of rights for which the nation will be heartily thankful, but it is only an instalment." [37] When debating the prior Bill of 1867, the House of Lords had attempted to block this march: "had they been able, would have deferred the change to some season that appeared to them more convenient…but they were compelled to give way, and to bow with what grace they could affect, to the will, the authority of the people." [38] The sense emerges from these sources that progress, while inevitable, had a pace to which it was bound to run, and which by inference was determined by the popular desire for but also ability to exercise. Most importantly, it was a pace to which only Liberalism

[36] 'Demon', *The Peers or the People: Which Shall Rule?,* (Manchester: National Reform Union, 1884), in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.n6, Vol. 25/11, p. 8. 'Demon' is of course a pseudonymous author, but his selection of this particular alias is interesting when considered alongside Culler's discussion on the 'spirit of the age', also described as the 'genius' or 'daemon', whose role in historical writings of the mid-nineteenth century Culler describes as a force "moving events forward, not in the name of God or Natural Law but of History itself," (*The Victorian Mirror of History*, p. 41). Given the arguments 'Demon' puts forward regarding the need for political reform when the time is ripe, and of not fearing the future consequences, his pseudonym would seem to have been carefully chosen.
[37] 'Demon', *The Peers or the People: Which Shall Rule?,* p. 9.
[38] 'Demon', *The Peers or the People: Which Shall Rule?,* p. 8.

seemed attuned, able to resist too rapid a change, whilst the reactionary forces were to be found holding back the tides till they became irresistible.

John Walters' pamphlet directing the electorate as to how to cast their vote talks of the danger of upsetting that progress. "For fifty years past there has been a slow, but sure, and steady progress of our national institutions in a Liberal direction, that direction was checked (in 1874)…now it is brought to a stand-still". Walters contrasted the Liberals and their drive towards 'progress' with the forces of Conservatism: "The law of life is motion: we must either go backward or forward – we must either grow better or worse." [39] 'Progress' was therefore an exclusively Liberal endeavour, and the inference given in these two texts is that, as 'progress' and the amelioration of suffering were seen as part of the same forward march, those seeking redress of grievance were expected to be participants in the great mission of Liberalism.

The sense of a specifically Liberal character of progress was no mere extrapolation of 'interest' derived from rational assessment. By its very nature, this equation of Liberalism and progress needed to be a demonstrated fact. Thus, the Liberal Party and its proselytisers were engaged in a project designed to enshrine Liberal 'progress' in its historical context. One of the most common types of pamphlet literature issued in support of the Liberal Party were those which took the form of a list of Liberal achievements or measures proposed by the Liberals and blocked by the Conservatives. To take one, 'Liberal Legislation during the Last Fifty Years'[40], one is struck by the degree to which continuousness of purpose was emphasised in an

[39] J.T. Walters, *Tory or Liberal: For Which Shall I Vote?*, p. 4.
[40] *Liberal Legislation during the Last Fifty Years,* (place and publisher unknown, n.d, c. 1873), in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.n6, Vol. 8/23.

attempt to locate then-current Liberalism within an established tradition of reform and 'progress'.

The pamphlet begins by stating its purpose, namely to provide: "A summary of the principal measures carried by the LIBERAL PARTY since the great revolt against TORY EXTRAVAGANCE, and the OPPRESSIVE and UNJUST laws passed by TORY PARLIAMENTS" [41]. By setting the terms of its argument as a conflict between Liberal 'progress' and Tory 'reaction', the pamphlet clearly set out the Liberal conception of the political arena; Liberalism acting as defender of the freedom of the people against unjust Tory legislation, a position consistent with older attacks on the Tory regimes before the Great Reform Act. Having established this antagonistic framework, the pamphlet proceeds to recount the deeds of the Liberal Party and its Whig ancestors in turning the tide of Tory oppression. The achievements detailed in the document are of course familiar ones for which one would expect the party to claim its rightful credit for: the Great Reform Act of 1832; the Abolition of Slavery in the Colonies, the repeal of several taxes; the abolition of Stamp Duty, and so on. In these respects, the historical justification for Liberalism as being the sole wellspring of 'progress' could hardly be challenged.

The degree to which this was a conscious construction of such a conception of political history is best illustrated by the pamphlet's attempts to deal with the issue of Conservative reform. That such measures as Catholic Emancipation, the repeal of the Corn Laws and the 1867 Reform Act was a major obstacle to the historical identification of Liberalism as the party of 'progress'. The pamphlet makes use of

[41] *Liberal Legislation during the Last Fifty Years*, p. 1.

differing strategies to overcome this problem. With regards Catholic Emancipation, the method used to depict the reform as 'Liberal' was to identify the earlier Whig attempt in 1828 to accomplish that aim, an effort thwarted by "the Tory House of Lords". That it was passed at all was due to "threat of a civil war in Ireland, against the votes of a considerable section of the Tory Party". [42] The Tories were given no credit for having passed the Bill, but bore all the opprobrium for having delayed it. Thus the pamphlet attempts to demonstrate the 'Liberal' nature of the measure, and portrays the Tory enactment of it as if 'Liberal' by proxy.

The other method of setting 'Tory' reform into a 'Liberal' concept of 'progress' was to claim that the actions of the Liberal Party was in some way responsible for the passage of Conservative measures. With regards the Corn Law repeal, the pamphlet makes a point of emphasising that the greater part of the majority which passes the Bill were Whig MPs, and the size of the Conservative bloc opposing the repeal.[43] The anomalous passage of the Second Reform Act by Disraeli was accounted for by stressing the significance of Liberal amendments to the Bill which made the final terms more democratic – again pointing out the protests of the Conservatives.

These arguments will be developed and studied further in the context of the study of 'Working-class Conservatism' which will take place in chapter two, but for the time being it is sufficient to state that the Liberals considered their unassailable position as the champions of 'reform' and 'progress' made them the natural home for the new electors of 1867 and 1884. As the enfranchisement of the 'working classes' had been contingent on their capacity and the need to have their 'interests' represented so as to

[42] *Liberal Legislation during the Last Fifty Years*, p. 1.
[43] *Liberal Legislation during the Last Fifty Years*, pp. 3-4.

perfect the machine of government, so these interests and the national interest in 'progress' were taken to be one and the same.

The equation of 'working-class interests' with those of the nation at large can be seen in William Tuckwell's published entreaty to the new county working men after their receipt of the vote. A regular speaker to National Liberal Federation meetings, Tuckwell's 'A Letter to the Newly-Enfranchised Voters' begins by discussing these voters' "duty" of "sending a member to the House of Commons to represent your interests and bring about your prosperity."[44] He then links these interests to those of the country: "the highest task of the English Parliament, and the first duty of its statesmen, is to legislate on your behalf and provide for your comfort and advancement, remembering that if only one-fifth of England is happy and well-to-do, while four-fifths are wretched and forlorn, it is clear to all of us that England is not rich but poor; not prosperous, but sunk in misery." [45] It was, then, in the national interest that the 'advancement' of the 'working classes' as well as their prosperity were increased, and therefore by inference it was not just for their own benefit but that of the country as a whole that they pursued their 'interests' – which were, of course, to be fulfilled by a Liberal vote.

[44] W. Tuckwell, *A Letter to the Newly-Enfranchised Voters,* (Birmingham: T.B. Lakins, 1885), in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.N6, Vol. 38/25. For biographical detail see William Whyte, 'Tuckwell, William (1829–1919)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, May 2006, accessed 29 May 2010]; for contributions to National Liberal Federation conferences see *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation, held in Liverpool on Thursday and Friday January 19th and 20th, 1893,* (LPD, 1893), in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[45] W. Tuckwell, *A Letter to the Newly-Enfranchised Voters,* p. 1.

Political Education and the 'True' Representation of 'Working-Class Interests'

The significance of self-improvement in the 'working classes' was therefore that the 'working classes' needed to have sufficient capacity to use their votes in such a way as it would further this synthesis of personal and national 'progress'. As we shall see, the debate around the 'capacity' of the working-class voter was not concluded with the 1867 Reform Act. The Conservative General Election victory in 1874 seems to have raised concern among Liberal Party supporters and pamphleteers that the 'working man' was not exercising his new right in the correct manner, supporting 'reaction' instead of 'progress' and thus failing in his duty to use his vote to further the Liberal cause. Part of the Liberal response to defeat was 'negative', and was visible in the pamphlet literature as a renewed attack on the Conservative Party and their pursuit of working-class support. The results of the anti-Tory propaganda will be investigated fully in Chapter Two. In this section we will study the second, 'positive' element of Liberal pamphlet literature following the 1874 defeat. The Liberal pamphleteers attempted to provide the working-class voter with a greater education in the duties and responsibilities associated with possessing the vote. In doing so, the Liberal literature created a binding definition of what working-class voters were 'supposed' to be concerned. The educative process, then, was chiefly concerned with showing the 'working man' that his own 'interests' were legitimate only if they coincided with Liberal aims, and that the latter were where his concern should be directed.[46]

[46] The Liberal concern that the working-class voter would betray the faith the party had shown them in promoting their right to the franchise is noted by Jeffrey Von Arx in *Progress and Pessimism*, pp. 2-5. The "older generation" of radical thinkers such as John Morley and Leslie Stephen had become disillusioned by their experience of democratic politics by the 1880s as a result of the rise of the "self-interest" of the working-class voter.

Henry Solly, a social reformer connected with the co-operative movement, wrote in 1879 a pamphlet entitled *Party Politics and Political Education,* which discusses the emerging working-men's club movement with which he was also involved. Though connected in many ways to several causes which marked him out as a radical in his personal politics, he expressed concerns about the damaging impact of partisan politics upon the club members' opinions. When discussing a Liberal club in the Lancashire and Cheshire region, he quoted the proprietors of the club on the motivation behind political education: "We saw at the (1874) election that unless the people were better educated in politics they had no chance of bettering their political condition. So we started this Club to help them." [47] Solly, therefore, saw the 1874 Tory victory as an indication that the political faculties of the 'working man' were insufficiently developed, and that as a result the working-class voter had proved vulnerable to voting against his 'interests'.

Solly himself regarded Liberal efforts at providing "help" through the club system as little more than partisan indoctrination, and stated that "the true patriot decides to act with one party rather than the other simply because he believes it to be the good but not the evil side." [48] His concern for the consciences of the 'working man' were to a certain extent besides the point, however: a questioning political intelligence was precisely what the Liberal clubs were intended to encourage, and considered alongside what we have already encountered in the pamphlet literature we can give the club official somewhat more credit for his concerns. A desire to procure the votes

[47] H. Solly, *Party Politics and Political Education,* (London: E. Stanford, 1879), at Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets collection 308.n6, Vol. 7/11, p. 4.
[48] Solly, *Party Politics and Political Education,* p. 6. Solly's criticism of unthinking partisanship is reflected in the work of LeMathieu in *A Culture for Democracy* for a study of the way in which education in the form of reading individually was eschewed by Victorian politicians in favour of private consumption of electoral literature in order to avoid the reader having his mind swayed by other people's interpretation of the text.

of the 'working classes' for the Liberal Party could be both self-serving and expressive of genuine concern for the working man's own political faculties.[49] Unless the 'working classes' received the correct instruction, their vote could be cast in a way which would harm their 'interests', considered to be the improvement of their political capabilities. The Liberal's duty, in terms of political education, was to give the 'working-class' voter the means to be the arbiter of his own fortunes, but only in so far as to bring him to an understanding of his role as part of the drive towards 'betterment'. As demonstrated by the club official's invoking of the election of 1874 as an example of the dire consequences of failing in this respect, confirms what we have already seen; that 'progress' implied an imperative for the working man to vote Liberal.

Support for Liberal 'progress' was depicted in the pamphlet literature as the natural state of affairs, which would prevail unless in exceptional circumstances. 'Demon', in his critique of the House of Lords, makes this explicit:

> Those…who look upon the democratic movement as a new element in politics, and who profess fear at its dimensions, have allowed themselves to ignore the current of history…Those who distrust it overlook the fact, established by all history, that the genius of our national character is construction and preservation, not destruction. His faith is weak that thinks the future will be different to the past. [50]

We can clearly see in the argument 'Demon' uses the influence of the 'whiggish' histories we have already encountered. His contribution is illustrative of the way in

[49] See for example J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 13-14 ; John Gibbins, 'J.S. Mill, liberalism and progress', pp. 97-98 for the necessity of denying full expression to individuals who were not sufficiently educated to have legitimate 'interests'.
[50] 'Demon', *The Peers or the People: Which Shall Rule?*, p. 10.

which history could be used to produce a rationale for further reform, both by showing the teleology of 'progress' and the benefits of timely reform, but also by showing the ancestry of political ideas and the manifest 'correctness' of an idea. [51] The Liberal 'faith' in the usefulness and safeness of reform in turn influenced the party's attempts to reach out to the working-classes. In the minutes of the formation of the National Liberal Federation, the issue of working-class loyalty to the Liberals was discussed by William Harris, the vice-president of the Birmingham Liberal Association upon which the Federation was based. In organising the latter body, "the one solid basis on which all their efforts rested was absolute and entire confidence in the people…it was the people's voice they invited, and their cause they sought to promote, and they knew that perfect confidence and trust was consistent with thorough party discipline and united action." [52]

Although we should remember that Harris was discussing the matter of those working men *known* to be Liberals, he nonetheless indicated the Liberals' confidence in the working-classes to make the 'correct' decision by joining the various Liberal Associations: a greater role for the working men in those bodies "would serve to promote the greater independence, happiness, and welfare of the people, remembering at the same time that the happiness of the people would also tend towards the greatness and glory of England." In this much, "they were justified…not only because they knew it at present, but because of their experience in the past." [53] We can see

[51] See John Burrow, 'All that glitters' p.p. 195-196 for Macaulay's recognition of the need for elites to enact reform at the time it becomes necessary due to the circumstances of the day and the need to keep the march of 'progress' moving forwards; *A Liberal Descent*; John Gibbins, 'J.S. Mill, liberalism and progress', pp. 94-95 for Mill's application of the utilitarian 'happiness principle' as a test for whether an action advanced 'progress' towards its ultimate aim of the true freedom of the individual; 'Demon' would appear to be suggesting in the extract above that the progressive results of franchise reform justified its place as a vital element of the 'progress' narrative.
[52] *Proceedings Attending the Formation of the National Liberal Federation*, p. 23.
[53] *Proceedings Attending the Formation of the National Liberal Federation*, p. 23.

here that Liberalism demanded both of itself and of its potential supporters the same commitment to 'reform' and 'progress'. However, just as both the enfranchised person and the nation stood to benefit, so too the 'working classes' and the Liberal Party, with the former acting to provide the impetus for such advancement and the latter the vehicle for achieving it, were seen to act in harmony. The mutually beneficial relationship between party and class could be justified, as with Harris' example above, by the experiences of this progression in action.

Charles Anthony denounced such politicians as Lowe, Goschen and Leonard Courtney, "indisputable Liberals" as they were, who baulked at extending the provisions of 1867 to the county householder. Anthony criticised the anti-reformers both on the grounds incorrect application of Liberal principles, and on a failure to appreciate the lessons of recent history which vindicated the extension of the franchise:

> The gradual extension of the suffrage, far beyond its present limits, though always keeping pace with popular elevation and instruction, is a process which derives its force and sanction from the fundamental principles of popular freedom. Surely it must be as right and as safe to extend the now very exclusive franchise of the counties as it was ten or twelve years ago to extend the franchise of the boroughs. [54]

Here, therefore, Anthony adds one more piece of evidence confirming the picture which has emerged from the preceding literature. The Liberals, for him, are not only considered the 'natural' choice for the 'working-class' voter on the basis of his 'interests' with regards his own advancement. For Anthony, the Liberals are bound by

[54] *Liberalism versus Imperialism and Parliament and the People*, p. 26.

their own principles to provide the 'working classes' with the means to secure this progression. The Liberal Party's relationship with the 'working-class' voter, then, was shaped by more fundamental factors than mere political calculation; it was a relationship which involved an imperative on both sides to align each with the other, in order to secure a form of 'progress' which derived its imperatives from the grander national 'interest' and which therefore assumed the position of an article of faith.

It was vital for the Liberals that this harmonious mixture of 'working-class' support and Liberal political power was formed from a 'true' representation of the 'interest' of the working man and the influence of his developed intellectual capacity. Solly's defence of politically independent working-man's clubs was based on a concern that any 'working-class' support for the Liberal Party should be a manifestation of the intellectually mature working man's true desires : if

> important reforms are beginning to be carried by Liberal majorities at the polling booth or in the House of Commons, not after fair and thorough discussion, or educating the whole nation up to the point by the press, the platform, and the discussion meeting, but by mere force of numbers, the fears of the middle and upper classes will be roused…(that) some burly demagogue…will devote himself successfully to banding together large masses of the more ignorant and violent of the populace – and *then*, perhaps, the Deluge. [55]

Solly, therefore, believed that the most dangerous aspect of extending the franchise to the 'working classes' was the consequences which would follow if the new voters possessed the vote but were not sufficiently engaged in the legislative process. The legitimacy of tworking-class support for Liberalism would be undermined if it was an

[55] Solly, *Party Politics and Political Education*, p. 9.

unquestioning partisan sentiment rather than a product of mature debate and discussion, and the catastrophic unleashing of illegitimate 'class' sentiment would result. The 'working-class' voter needed to be allowed to deliberate on his political decisions. Solly considers that any impetuous movement towards "changes of a mischievous kind, or at the wrong season" for the sake of change itself was as damaging to the political development of the 'working-class' voter as complacency or resistance to change at all costs: "The truth is it requires a deal of thinking, as well as of honest purpose, either to stand still, or move on, *wisely*." [56]

Whether the working man's instincts were towards Conservative recalcitrance or Liberal reform, the important thing, therefore, was that this needed to be done via deliberation and with consideration to both sides of the argument:

> To ascertain the justice and wisdom of a certain political measure, to decide aright between the claims of rival measures and parties, we have, above all things to remind ourselves…that our uncompromising antagonist, the very man to whom we feel most bitterly opposed, may possibly have just that view of the matter which is necessary to make our own complete; and that we can never arrive at right conclusions on great questions until we have looked at them all round, and have heard a great deal on both sides.[57]

Solly indicated in the passage above that when fully-developed, the working man's political faculties would lead him to an essentially pluralist consideration of each party's merits on the basis of individual issues, and therefore denying any fundamentally pro-Liberal imperative towards advancement. Yet he then discusses the

[56] Solly, *Party Politics and Political Education*, p. 10.
[57] Solly, *Party Politics and Political Education*, p. 10.

merits of such independent deliberation in terms strikingly similar to the literature concerning 'progress': "It is just as certain that progress towards improvement can only be obtained by patient thought, candid attention to the views opponents, and conscientious endeavours to promote sympathy as well as justice, as it is that no one party is going to carry us on to political perfection with a rush, by vanquishing every other party." [58]

Solly, here, indicates that any advancement of the 'working-class' electorate will take place only if the new electors are allowed to exercise their critical faculties, but that this process of deliberation is in itself a spur to the betterment of the working man. The antagonism between the two great parties is seen as beneficial due to the opportunity it provides to test the political prowess of the new voters, for whom the rewards were a further step in their advancement. If 'progress' was considered by the Liberals to be the principal 'interest' of the working man, its assured forward march could only be impeded by imposing its terms on the working-classes by diktat. Faith in the identification of 'progress' as the chief factor acting upon their political consciences, the working men could be trusted to follow its imperative towards a Liberal vote, so long as their political education was sufficient to enable them to avoid the Conservative snare. As long as the 'working classes' were given the means to pursue their 'interests' independently, their participation in the political controversies of the day would enhance their ability to play their part in the great Liberal mission of 'progress'.

[58] Solly, *Party Politics and Political Education*, p. 10.

One key aspect of this formulation of the political sphere as a proving-ground for the intellectual faculties of the new voters was the role of the Conservative Party as the antagonist. More than a mere opponent, the Liberal pamphleteers attempted, as has already been seen, to cast the Tories in the role of the Liberals' antithesis; the manifestation of every obstacle to 'reform' and 'progress' and of every danger which the working man would face in attempting to pursue his 'interests'. These themes will be developed more fully in Chapter Two, but here it shall be noted that the existence of such an enemy was a vital component of the Liberals' conception of the political arena, which lent Liberalism with its understanding of the role the working classes was to play in politics. The 'working-class voters' were identified as being the force that would propel the drive to greater national advancement, and were therefore seen as natural allies of Liberalism. Yet this was essentially seen as a competition between the two great parties, and was as such understood as a dichotomy in which the Conservatives were directly in opposition to the working man's 'interests' in such a way as to leave the Liberals as the only true friends of the 'working classes'. More than a mere cynical ploy, this conception of a 'good' versus 'evil' political sphere was fundamental to any understanding of the sense of entitlement felt by the Liberals to the support of the new electors.

Liberalism and 'Working-Class' Policies

The Liberal Party were therefore committed to a relationship with the 'working classes' which was understood as a union of interests between themselves and the new electorate. To this end, the Liberals would attempt to make explicit the links between their own political priorities and the desires of the working-classes as

conceived within the context of a mutual drive towards 'progress'. The process of relating 'progress' to the 'working man' meant explaining beliefs held on a basis of abstract and rational theory by the Liberals in such a way as would communicate their relevance to a 'working-class' audience. The chapter will not seek to suggest that these matters were *not* concerns genuinely held by many of the new voters of the counties, but that there were concerted efforts made by the Liberals to link these issues to the 'progress' of the 'working-class' electorate.

One example of this process was *What Shall I D o With My Vote?* by Ernest Parke, a Liberal-supporting journalist, which set out the case for the mutual interests of the Liberal Party and the newly-enfranchised county householder. [59] Parke throughout demonstrates the Liberals' concerns that the policies which they proposed should be given genuine assent by the 'working-class' county voter, even though the suggested legislative reforms were in essence derived from prior Liberal interests. The Liberal support for land law reform was a significant feature of this pamphlet, unsurprisingly perhaps given its persistent support from Liberals. An example comes when Parke discusses the reform of tenant law. He states that the current system "the Liberals and Radicals will try to do away with, and if you help them they will certainly do it." [60] Similarly, when raising the question of application for allotments, Parke wrote that "If you show that you mean to have this done, the law will be changed very soon." [61] Parke clearly show the importance the Liberals attached to the mutuality of their interests and those of the working-class voter,

[59] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote? A Few Plain Words Addressed to Country Voters on the Questions of the Day*, (London: W. Reeves, n.d.) in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets 308.N6, Vol. 38/30; for biographical detail on Parke, see A. J. A. Morris, 'Parke, Ernest (1860–1944)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48466, accessed 29 May 2010].
[60] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 6.
[61] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 7.

The question of inheritance was an example of Parke linking a Liberal shibboleth to the perceived 'working-class interest'. The connection was made between unjust laws of entail and the economic impact upon the agricultural worker: the effect of entail was that landlords became reluctant to invest in improving their land, and as a result "the land is tilled not nearly as well as it should be, and it does not find work for as many labourers as it ought to." [62] The emphasis on the detrimental effect of the tenure system to the rural working-class links neatly the Liberal desire to see a liberalisation of inheritance law on point of principle, the campaign for 'free trade in land', and the economic welfare of the agricultural labourer. The Game Laws were then denounced in similar terms, calling for "laws to preserve labourers" as well as game animals. [63]

These were concerns which were rooted in long-standing Liberal rhetoric. Moreover, they were ones which were clearly not conceived of as primarily a ploy to earn the support of the county working-class voter. In a National Reform Union pamphlet issued a decade before the enfranchisement of the agricultural labourer, Professor F.W. Newman was vice-president of the National Land League.[64] In an 1876 pamphlet, he criticises the workings of land tenure for its effects on the agricultural labourer targeted by Parke, but also articulates the grievances of the farmers themselves: for farmers generally the laws operated unjustly: "When farmers prosper, the majority of them have quickly to pay more rent in consequence, and their superfluity does not overflow to the benefit of the wage-earner", and while the larger farmers are complicit in the labourer's sufferings, the small tenants-at-will "pay a moderate rent, which is not raised so long as they are obedient and dutiful clients.

[62] Ernest Park, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 6.
[63] Ernest Park, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 6.
[64] Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Newman, Francis William (1805–1897)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20019, accessed 29 May 2010].

They are bought into political slavery by the compact well understood by them and the bailiff; and their subservient votes and interest are a strong support of the existing landed system." [65]

The concerns of the agricultural labourer are described here by Newman as a factor in the larger issue of land and tenancy laws, rather than at the centre of the argument as occurs in Parke's pamphlet. Indeed, at the core of the arguments Parke puts forward is the link between tenancy laws, the hereditary peerage and the sufferings of the labourer. It is here that the Liberal project to combine the Liberal Party's own long-established traditions of opposition to landed interest and the presumed priorities of the working-classes is most striking. Parke's argument has much in common with other pro-Liberal pamphlets of the time, in that it goes to great lengths to establish the struggle against the House of Lords as an enduring feature of the Liberal march of 'progress'.

As was frequently the case, Parke's narrative of the matter begins in the reign of Charles II and the peers' legislation to remove themselves from their feudal duties; a controversy which occupied a large place in the Liberal catalogue of complaints against the Upper House.[66] Parke links this event to the fortunes of "the people", who "paid to the crown the taxes which the land had always paid" because the missing revenue was taken from taxation upon "beer and other things that the people

[65] *On The Relation of the Supply of Food to the Laws of Landed Tenure by Emeritus Professor F.W. Newman: A Lecture Delivered in Manchester, October 26th, 1876,* (Manchster: National Reform Union, 1876), in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets Collection 308.N6, Vol. 9/1, p. 11.
[66] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 8.

used…They have made the poor pay the biggest part by taxing the things that are used most – such as tea, tobacco and beer." [67]

Quite apart from the unusual defence of the poor's consumption of alcohol by a Liberal supporter, the most striking feature of Parke's treatment of the House of Lords question was the way in which he was able to link several Liberal concerns – the proper taxation of the land, the drive to direct taxation and the abuses of the peerage – with the poor's economic welfare. The House of Lords is treated elsewhere by Parke in the manner in which we have already seen 'Tory Obstructionism' derided, but is linked clearly to the condition of the 'working classes'. With regards tenancy, "Every effort that has been made to get justice for the farmer has always been opposed by the Lords, although they pretend to be his friends…The House of Lords has always opposed any attempt to protect the property of the tenants from greedy landlords." The sympathy of the county working man with his borough counterpart was also invoked: "the workmen of the towns have suffered from the actions of these noblemen just as badly. They refused to women and children the protection from hard masters and long hours which Liberals tried to get for them in 1842...because their labour is cheaper than men's. They also tried to spoil the Employer's Liability Act…In fact the House of Lords has always opposed every Bill intended to do good to the working classes or make them more free." [68]

We can see in this example how Parke managed to show how the Liberals' traditional antipathy to the House of Lords was a useful tool in their attempts to tailor their own priorities with those of the 'working-class' electorate. Note also that Parke is again

[67] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 9.
[68] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 9.

demonstrating an understanding of the county and borough working man as sharing an essential 'class' bond and common grievance at the hands of the peers. Parke moves on to discuss the issue of Free Trade, which would be another key area in which the Liberals would attempt to ally their aims with those of the 'working classes'. Anthony Howe has argued that reconstructed memories of the 'Hungry Forties' were an important part of the Edwardian Liberal campaign against Tariff Reform, and Parke's pamphlet suggests that the tactic of invoking past grievance was a long-standing approach of Liberal political appeals.[69] Invoking the memory of the Corn Laws in dealing with Conservative protectionist policies of the day, he uses the issue to paint a large and clear dividing line between the interests of the peers and those of the 'working classes', the latter of course to be championed by the Liberal Party: "There is one change which a good many Tory landlords and others want to make. They would like to put a tax on all corn that comes into the country – that is, they want to tax the loaf.…The landlord would get a lot more rent, but will you be willing to pay more for your bread that rich men may still be richer?" [70] Having neatly combined an attack on protectionism with the critique of Tory taxation already established in the discussion on land law, Parke proceeds to stir the memory of the times when "Landlords were better off, but the working men were starving" before attacking the Conservative claim that protectionism increased the 'working-class' income: "The real change that wants to be made is to alter the land laws so that the soil may be freely tilled." [71]

[69] For the role of evocations of the hardships created by the Corn Laws, see Anthony Howe, 'Towards the 'hungry forties': free trade in Britain, c. 1880-1906' in Biagini, Eugenio, (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and collective identities in the British Isles 1865-1931*, (Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 193-218, also *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 244-266; Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 34-45.
[70] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, p. 14
[71] Ernest Parke, *What Shall I Do With My Vote?*, pp. 14-15.

Parke, then, had shown a concerted effort on the part of Liberal supporters to emphasise the compatibility of the various elements of Liberal policy with the 'working classes', as well as constructing a viable central narrative based on opposition to the House of Lords which bound the Liberal programme together and stressing the impact of the peers on the working man's ability to 'progress' and the need to vote Liberal to achieve advancement being highlighted in Parke's conclusion: "The Liberals in town and country everywhere will help you to improve your condition; they will aid you in gaining whatever is rightly yours. Stand shoulder to shoulder; work with your mates for the same just ends, and there is no class in this country which is strong enough to deny you your rights when right is on your side." The pamphlet makes it very clear that this usage of 'class' is surely intended to refer to the role of the 'upper classes' as personified by the 'landowner' and the 'peer', and that this denial of rights refers to the blocking of Liberal legislation. Hence, the working man's vote for the Liberal programme was needed to secure any amelioration of their condition and their own betterment.

We can therefore see that for the Liberal Party and its supporters, the role of 'class' in the period we have covered, spanning two franchise extensions, was that the vote was seen to now be possessed by an aggregate of people whose interests were essentially synonymous with their own. Liberal shibboleths such as Free Trade, reformation of the Upper House, and land law reform were seen to have as much importance for the classes of people rewarded with the vote in 1867 and 1884 as for themselves. The understanding that 'class' was a term with no more value as a descriptor and explanation of social, economic and political forces cannot be justified when one

considers the significance that 'class' had as a method of understanding the large mass of new voters whom the Liberals understood as their natural allies.

Conclusion

The discussion above demonstrates that the Liberals possessed a conception of an essentially 'Liberal' class of people whose passion and desire for reform sprung from their own particular suffering under the present system, and that, while they needed educating on the finer points of distinguishing between genuine Liberal efforts at attracting their support by way of promised reforms and Conservative trickery, were a group of people who were united by a need to redress that suffering by support of the Liberal concept of 'progress'. They were entirely trustworthy with the vote provided such education could be given, and it would tend to question Lawrence's assertion of a shift in Liberal propaganda in the early twentieth-century towards which showed that "politicians must address electors as they are, not as they would like them to be".[72] For the Liberals, their understanding of the 'working classes' as electors was that they indisputably *were* the type of voters they wished them to be, and they relied heavily on this conceptualisation when targeting the new electors. We shall see in the following chapter how the Liberals attempted to understand and address those members of the 'working classes' whose political behaviour cast the Liberal faith in the symbiotic relationship between their 'class' and the Liberal Party into doubt, and the problems this highlighted for the future of such a relationship.

[72] Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, p. 224.

Chapter Two: The Conservative Working Man and the Liberal Working Man, c.1870-c.1895.[1]

Introduction

This chapter will show the importance of an imagined 'Conservative Working Man' and his Liberal counterpart to the construction of Liberal political narratives in the period between the Second Reform Act and the collapse of the Rosebery ministry in 1895. I shall suggest that the phenomenon of the 'Conservative Working Man', or the 'Working-Class Tory' would be one whose spectre influenced Liberal interpretations of working-class politics by creating a demonised figure from whom the Liberals sought to protect the idealised 'Liberal Working Man'. The period in question saw two franchise extensions in 1867 and 1884 and thus saw the need increase for a way in which the Liberal Party could relate itself to the new electorate which had emerged. Between these dates we can see how the form of the 'Liberal Working Man' developed as a narrative form to incorporate the working class voter within the narratives of 'progress' discussed in Chapter One. The Rosebery resignation prompting the first General Election to be contested by the Independent Labour Party, which as shall be showm in Chapter Three represented a major challenge to the Liberal appeal for working-class support, based as it was upon a form of narrative which had developed in response to the threat posed by the phenomenon of the 'Working Class Tory', and not easily adaptable to counter the new Labour challenge.

[1] The title if this chapter is borrowed from George Potter's Bee Hive tract, *The Conservative Working Man and the Liberal Working Man*, 'Tracts for the People', (London: Bee Hive, 1877) in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308/N6, Vol. 36/3.

The apparent contradiction of the 'working-class Conservative' has been a topic of interest in politics since the phenomenon first arose following the extension of the franchise to the borough householder in 1867.[2] The explanation offered by the Liberal Party was, as this chapter will demonstrate, that the 'Conservative Working Man' was acting contrary to his own interests if not actively betraying his own class. Historians have attempted to overturn the notion of 'class treachery', with one influential contribution being that of Frank Parkin who refutes the explanation of the working-class Conservatism as an abnormality produced by 'false consciousness' or excessive deference in favour of a model in which environment played a greater role than class in influencing an individual's politics, acting negatively to prevent reception of political ideas which were contrary to one's peers.[3]

In more recent years, interest has grown in providing a deeper analysis of the 'working-class Conservative' phenomenon, with emphasis being placed on issues of empire, patriotism, militarism and religion, as well as the underlying issue of gender. The explanation of working-class support for the Conservatives has taken a similar approach to the study of popular Liberal and Radical traditions, emphasising how parties appealed to already-widespread cultural themes. Comparatively little, however, has been done to examine the ways in which the Conservatives conceived of and solicited the support of the expanded electorate of the late-nineteenth century.

Richard Price's work on popular attitudes towards empire, and Andrew Thompson's recent work on the 'Language of Imperialism' provides one such area of study. Price

[2] See Jon Davis, 'The Slums and the Vote 1867-1890', *Historical Review*, 64 (1991), pp. 375-388; Davis and Duncan Tanner, 'The Borough Franchise After 1867', *Historical Research*, Vol. 69 (1996), pp. 306-327 for an explanation of the way in which the franchise operated in practice.
[3] Frank Parkin, Working-class Conservatives: A Theory of Political Deviance', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 18 (1967), pp. 278-290.

questioned the previously orthodox position that the working-classes were a base of support for 'Jingoism' and imperial war.[4] Thompson further suggests that far from being a simplistic exercise in arousing the sentiments of the 'Queen and Country' mob, Imperialism had several competing bases upon which it could be conceived and expressed. Competition between a 'Liberal' model and another 'Conservative' form made Imperial policy an interesting point from which to study the ways in which the two main parties communicated with the expanded electorate[5].

Jon Lawrence's essay on the effect constructs of identity had in the success of urban Toryism in the late nineteenth century makes some headway in attempting to understand the Conservatives' popularity in that period. [6] Lawrence highlights the role played in popular Toryism by a critique of what was portrayed as the increasingly Radical, sectional Liberalism of the Caucus.[7] Lawrence highlights the role played by social class and gender in creating an affinity among the male household electorate, and directs us to seek explanations of the Tory successes of the 1880s and 1890s by

[4] The relationship between the 'working man' and imperialism has been debated since Henry Pelling's essay 'British Labour and British Imperialism' (*Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian* England, (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 82-100), in which he argues that while much of the non-unionised working class supported the Boer war, ultimately imperial questions were not an overriding concern for many of the working class voters. Price further challenged the notion of the unquestiong patriotism and 'jingoism' of the working classes in *An Imperial War and the British Working Class; Working Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902,* (London: Routledge, 1972).

[5] Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 6, No.2, Twentieth-Century British Studies (Apr., 1997), pp. 147-177; suggests that in fact the competition between Liberals and Conservatives to establish a particular 'language' with which to express a consistent vision of empire show how important imperial issues were as a method of demonstrating the differences between the two major parties, invoking heavily gendered language in the process. With regards the issue of gender in working-class politics, work has focused on the importance of the Conservative appeal to women (see for example Martin Pugh, 'Popular Conservatism in Britain: Continuity and Change, 1880-1987, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Jul., 1988), pp. 259-261 for the importance of the Primrose Society in spreading Conservatism among working-class and female non-voters); also Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), chs. 1 and 3.

[6] Jon Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 428 (Jul., 1993), pp. 629-652.

[7] Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism', pp. 635-638.

studying how these factors were understood by the Conservatives and the ways in which they played upon such notions in their appeals[8].

This chapter uses a study of Liberal pamphlet material to demonstrate the degree to which the Liberal-conceived Liberal Working-Man was a model constructed from Liberal understandings of class and politics. In doing so, it shall show that the Liberals' conception of the 'working man' strongly influenced their appeals for working-class support. By explaining the Liberals' relationship with the working-class electorate in this manner, we will see how the party's interactions with that section of the polity took its particular form. The chapter will illustrate the ways in which the Conservative Party also imagined and depicted an alternative model of the 'working man' in politics, but in a way which did not create such difficulties in appealing to the 'working-class' electorate. In this chapter we will also see how the Liberal Unionist Party were able to join elements of the Liberal conception of the 'working man' with its support for Unionism to create a critique of Gladstonian Liberalism's appeals to the 'working classes'. By comparing the creation of the archetype of the 'Liberal' and ''Conservative' working man with these alternatives, I shall demonstrate that the Liberal Party had created a uniquely problematic figure which would prove unsuited to meeting the challenge of Labour.

[8] Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism', p. 631.

The Reform Acts and the electorate in Gladstonian Liberalism

In his lecture on 'Governmentality', Michel Foucault outlined the ways in which political societies incorporate the ideological precepts of its participants into the governmental structure of that society, and of how the reverse process also occurs.[9] The method by which this is done he described as a series of discourses, through which a society may assimilate widely-held premises and positions and use them to shape its institutions. Of most significance to the role played by the concept of the 'working man' in the political conceptualisations of the Liberal and Conservative parties is the way in which Foucault described the use of ideological discourse to mould an electorate fit to play the roles which the two parties respectively ascribed it.

Foucault notes that it is in the field of economy that political societies conduct this transaction of ideological premises from subject to state and from state to subject[10]. The concept of economy, originally a term which described the management of a household's finances, became one which denoted the prudential control of a state's revenue and expenditure. The new, wider definition of economy was disseminated through concern for the budgetary habits of the individuals who would form the political classes of that state; to be a member of a political society, one had to demonstrate one's ability to govern oneself in accordance with the doctrines of economy. What Foucault describes as 'downwards continuity' is a useful way in which to understand the preoccupation of nineteenth-century political literature concerning the franchise with the notions of 'capacity' and 'character'.[11] If we

[9] Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality' in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Liller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87-104.
[10] Foucault, 'Governmentality', p. 92.
[11] Foucault, 'Governmentality', p. 92.

understand political society as operating in such a reciprocal manner as Foucault suggests, then entry into the sphere of politics requires not just that the potential elector possesses 'fitness' to execute his role, but that his presence within the electorate will have an effect upon the institutions in which he has his share. We have already seen in the first chapter how the Liberals conceived of the 'working classes' as an electoral constituency in terms of their 'Liberal' nature; in many respects this tallies with the 'governmentality' concept – the need for the state to be infused with the qualities the working classes were perceived to possess in order to protect the Liberal ideal of the state.

Concerns over the impact the composition of the electorate had on the functioning of the state had significant effect on Liberal attempts to enfranchise the 'working classes'. Biagini points out the importance to Gladstone of what he perceived to be a lack of interest from the 'middle class'-dominated electorate of the period leading up to the failed Gladstone-Russell Reform Bill of 1866 in the Chancellor's proposed relief of the 'working classes' from the burden of excessive and unfair taxation.[12] Fears that the electorate as then composed were incapable of providing sufficient support for Liberal policies and the pursuit of 'progress' were highlighted as a significant factor in impelling the Liberal Party towards franchise extension by Keith McClelland, who has emphasised the role played by hostility among Radicals to Palmerstonian foreign policy which tended to relegate the reform question in favour

[12] Eugenio Biagini, *Gladstone*, (London: MacMillan, 2000), p. 43; see also Simon Peaple and John Vincent, 'Gladstone and the Working Man' in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone*, (London: Hamble Press, 1998), p. 76; also David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), pp. 280-281; Roland Quinault, 'Gladstone and Parliamentary Reform' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 75-93. For the significance of ideas of economy to Gladstone's political though in a wider context, see Biagini 'Exporting 'Western and Beneficent Institutions'; Gladstone and Empire, 1880-1885' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*,(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 209, 218.

of imperial adventure.[13] Conversely, the unfairness of burdening the unenfranchised with tax was seen as a key argument in favour of reform, although Gladstone's own drive to reduce the taxation imbalance weakened this argument somewhat.[14]

The effects of the 1867 Reform Act have excited scholarly debate just as much it sparked contemporaries into discussing the impact of the lowering of the borough franchise. F.B. Smith and Maurice Cowling produced two landmark works detailing the history of the Act and explaining how a Conservative ministry came to pass a measure which enfranchised more voters than the rejected Gladstone-Russell bill of 1866.[15] Both works give contrasting weight to different factors in their arguments. Smith's account draws from what had become the orthodox position; that the passage of the Bill was a result of popular pressure to do so, with the mass demonstration at Hyde Park a key event in convincing the Conservatives of the necessity of reform.[16] Cowling's argument gave precedence to 'high' politics; with Disraeli's ambition to secure his and the Conservatives' political future and his dextrous outmanoeuvring of Gladstone the primary factor in explaining the course of events.[17] Gertrude Himmelfarb has gone further, arguing that Disraeli's particular brand of Conservatism, with its emphasis on the links between the working classes and the aristocracy, proved a more adaptable tool to produce franchise reform than

[13] Keith McClelland, 'England's greatness, the working man' in Hall, McClelland and Rendall (eds.), *Defining The Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*, (Cambridge U.P., 2000), pp. 83-84; see also Peaple and Vincent, 'Gladstone and the Working Man', p. 76.
[14] McClelland, 'England's greatness, the working man', p. 93-94.
[15] F.B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*, (Cambridge U.P., 1966); Maurice Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, (Cambridge U.P., 1967).
[16] F.B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*, pp. 126-132; p. 229.
[17] Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp. 301-304. For a similar explanation in which Disraeli is best understood as demonstrating that the Tories were a viable party of government following the two previous unsuccessful Derby ministries see Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*,(London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 105-110,

Gladstone's restrictive Liberal ideology.[18] The nature of Tory enfranchisement and its pursuit of the working-class vote will be explored in detail later in the chapter. Here, it shall suffice to say that whatever the truth behind Disraeli's motives and responsibility for carrying the 1867 Act, the interpretation which was favoured in Liberal pamphlet literature was that it had been Gladstone who had successfully secured the passage of the Bill into law through a series of amendments which effectively 'liberalised' Disraeli's restrictive reform measure.

Demonstrating Gladstone's centrality to the passage of the Reform Act was important partly because, as we have seen in Chapter One, the Liberal narrative of 'progress' upon which much of the appeal to the 'working man' rested, required 'progress' to be an exclusively Liberal pursuit. Yet it was also because of the complex way in which the Liberals perceived the force of 'class' to operate in the political field. In a manner consistent with Foucault's 'Governmentality' model, the Liberals, and Gladstone in particular, required the 'working man' to provide the zeal and purpose to drive forward further reform.[19] The 'working man' was granted the vote because of the

[18] Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867', *Journal of British Studiies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Nov., 1966), pp. 110-117; 'Commitment and Ideology: The Case of the Second Reform Act, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (Nov., 1969), pp. 100-104. See also Robert Saunders, 'The Politics of Reform and the Making of the Second Reform Act, 1848-1867', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2007), pp. 571-591 for more recent work on the attitudes of Liberals and Conservatives to reform, and an argument that the Liberals remained hostile to reform which would strengthen the landed interest, also Paul Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics' in Charles Richmond and Paul Smith (eds.) *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851*, (Cambridge U.P., 1998), pp. 155-160; p. 169, for a discussion of Disraeli's attitude to the enfranchisement of the working man.

[19] The nature of the reformist impulse in Liberalism is a complex one in which the party can be seen to act as a brake on hasty and unnecessary change, while also perceiving themselves to be acting in accordance with the feeling of the day. See T.A. Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party, 1874-1886*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 3-4; Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Govnerment in Victorian Britain*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 231.For a discussion of the various groups within the Liberal Party which drove on reform, see Parry, 'Gladstone, Liberalism and the Government of 1874' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift, (eds.) *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 95-96. *For* a discussion of the relationship between the perceived moral superiority of the 'working man' and the need for this to be represented in the political sphere see David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 287-288.

beneficial effects his enfranchisement would have on the polity, and the qualities he possessed must be harnessed to the Liberal cause. The act of franchise reform therefore had to be construed as a measure of Liberal politics produced by Liberal reformers.

At this point the Liberal Publication Department had not yet commenced its pamphlet campaigns. We must therefore continue to study literature produced by sympathetic authors rather than party figures in most cases, with the caveat that this means it would be difficult to identify these sources as the 'official' voice of Liberalism. Given the factious nature of the Liberal Party at this time, however, these independently-produced pamphlets offer a useful picture of the currents of thought within the wider Liberal party and its supporters.

One such source which demonstrated the need to secure 1867 as a Liberal triumph was produced by Sedley Taylor, a churchman who espoused Liberal politics and campaigned for profit sharing in business.[20] Taylor gave a speech at the Cambridge Reform Club in 1876, reproduced as a pamphlet in 1877, in which he criticised Disraeli for his machinations during the passage of the Bill.[21] Taylor accused the then-Chancellor, by subverting the procedure and decisions of the House of Commons, of

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[20] Peter Searby, 'Taylor, Sedley (1834–1920)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47810, accessed 12 Jan 2011].

[21] Sedley Taylor, *The Earl of Beaconsfield and the Conservative Reform Act of 1867; a Lecture delivered at the Cambridge Reform Club on Monday, November 13, 1876*, (London: National Press Agency, 1877) in Manchester Central Library Political Pamphlets, 308.N6, Vol. 103/16, p. 17 on Disraeli's willingness to misrepresent results of votes in the House of Commons, giving them an unmerited "character of authority, nay more, of infallibility", to "pervert the decision actually arrived at into something totally different", and of making a "singular attempt" over rateable values versus rented values "to trade on the ignorance of the House of Commons of its own decisions"; pp. 17-18 on the contrast between the "broad democratic proposals" of the clauses extending working-class representation and the 'fancy franchises'; pp. 18-19 on Disraeli's "rapid act of tergiversation" over compounding which produced "the astonishment of his own supporters".

acting to "degrade English politics by sacrificing to the desire of retaining office considerations which no really high-minded statesman would have ever thought of sacrificing."[22] Such criticism of Disraeli as unscrupulous and concerned with nothing so much as holding office would form the core of the Liberal pamphleteers' attacks on the man who had produced the Reform Act by which the 'working classes' had gained the vote.

The connection between class, franchise reform and the Liberal Party was emphasised by W.M. Bell, chairman of the Heywood Reform Club in 1879. For Bell, reform had a cleansing effect on the existing system: With the Act of 1832 "the constitution was purged of much venality and corruption".[23] The restoration of political virtue was not reform's only benefits: "The Reform Bill of 1867 was another amendment, extending to large numbers of the working class the right to vote for members of parliament, but it fell short of the political requirements of the time."[24] For Bell, clearly, there existed not just a demand for reform that needed to be addressed, but as suggested by the use of the term 'required', there was also a need to produce reform that matched the needs of the political system itself.

Bell's remedy sums up the relationship between ideologically-reciprocating bodies in the 'governmentality' model. The only way to achieve the required measure of reform for the political system was to create the correct form of agitation to necessitate it; in other words, to instil the notion of the 'ideal' franchise settlement in the people, in

[22] Taylor, *The Earl of Beaconsfield and the Conservative Reform Act,* p. 28.
[23] W. M. Bell, *The Reform and Amendment of our System of Parliamentary Representation by an Extension of the Suffrage and a Redistribution of Seats: A Lecture delivered on Thursday Evening, January 16th, 1879, in the Lecture Hall of the Heywood Reform Club,* (Heywood: G.H. Kent, 1879), pp. 4-5, in Manchester Central Library Political Pamphlets, 308.N6, Vol. 103/10.
[24] Bell, *The Reform and Amendment of our System of Parliamentary Representation*, p. 8.

order that they may demand and receive the measure which leads to the 'ideal' system to bring about the best outcome for that electorate. As Bell states, "The principal object of the liberal (sic) party should be, to create an opinion in the country that will have sufficient force to cause the Houses of Parliament to pass a Reform Bill, by the provisions of which, the franchise shall be lowered in the counties, and the seats so distributed that an elected parliament will more fully represent the opinion of the electoral body."[25]

The significance of this extract lies in the link drawn between the role of the 'liberal party' as the vehicle through which reform should be achieved and the need to produce the 'opinion in the country' in favour of such reform to provide the impetus and justification for it. Yet by the time Bell produced his pamphlet, the new electors created by reform had demonstrated that their 'opinion' was not always consistent with furthering the cause of further reform. For Bell, any Conservative measure for reform can be considered as either inadequate or motivated by concern for their own advantage, while the Liberals are portrayed as acting in a greater interest, which, in the context of the pamphlet, should be considered as principally those of the 'working classes'. Yet the electorate had rejected the Liberal Party in 1874, in favour of a Tory government which pursued reforms directed at improving the lot of the 'working man.'[26] A phenomenon such as this required an explanation, and the imagined

[25] Bell, *The Reform and Amendment of our System of Parliamentary Representation*, p. 8. For a discussion of the relationship between popular clamour and political action, see Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, pp. 9-11 for the Whig principle requiring a leadership which was responsive but also sought to moderate popular sympathies in accordance with the needs of the nation. See also Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p. 227; G.R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886-1929*, (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 18-19.

[26] The 1874 defeat has been ascribed by historians to various factors. See D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 38-40; 44 for an account which favours faction and 'faddism' as the chief explanation; Parry, 'Gladstone, Liberalism and the Government of 1868-1874', pp. 95-110 suggests fear of an overbearing statism within the patty led to a reliance on 'dull, practical social legislation' designed to reduce inter-

'Conservative Working Man' must be considered as a means of accounting for the Tory Party's success in 1874.

In 'The Conservative Working Man and the Liberal Working Man' (1877), George Potter noted that "It is puzzling to explain that any section of the working men of Great Britain, however limited or however ignorant, could be led to support…those whose policy aims at making their poverty, ignorance and degradation permanent, and – as a consequence – their lives miserable and ignoble."[27] Potter made a clear allusion to the connection between the 'condition' of the 'working-classes' and the political society. In supporting Conservative legislation which is created by those who seek to debase him, the 'Conservative working-man' is demonstrating his own pre-existing debasement. The 'working-classes' require legislation to improve their condition, yet just as this cannot be performed by the Conservatives, the existence of the 'Conservative working-man' must be of a level of absolute and scarcely-conceivable 'ignorance'. By extension, Potter described the entire conception of the 'working man' using his vote to support the Conservative party as an affront to political society itself.[28]

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pary tensions, and a dogmatic adherence to 'economy' as a guiding principle of government which led to criticism and contributed to serious and damaging foreign policy errors.

[27] Potter, *The Conservative Working Man and the Liberal Working Man*, p. 4.

[28] The notion that there were particular political functions and roles inherent to both of the great Victorian parties is perhaps echoed by Jenkins' account of the resignation of the Whig 'duumvirate' of Hartington and Granville following the Liberal defeat in 1874; the two leaders being content to assume that the Tory victory marked the end of a political era which had seen Liberal ideas predominate rather than a simple (and hence reversible) setback – Jaenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, pp. 44-47. The implications of Jenkins' argument will be discussed in further detail below, as it runs contrary to the idea of the march of specifically Liberal 'progress'; however it will suffice here to say that the notion of a harmless transition between political eras rested on an understanding that Toryism was able to act in a moderate and benign manner, which is clearly not the form of Conservatism which Binney and Potter describe.

The inference in Potter's statements is that Conservatism tended to pander to the basest elements in the 'working classes' and act as a barrier to their 'progress', but also that there were forces which were attempting to assist them in elevating their position. Linking this in to the concept outlined in chapter one of the inevitability of the 'progress' of the 'working classes' unless checked by malign influence, Potter argues that

> Working men, above all other men, (are) false to themselves, when they oppose progress…The Conservative Working Man, whatever he may think of himself, is, in fact, out of accord with everything that tends to promote the interests of his class, which means the interest of justice and the progress of society...It is the duty (of working men) to rise to a comprehension of Principles, and to join those who assert and apply them.[29]

The 'duty' of the 'working man' was of course to vote for the Liberal Party. We can see that Potter defined the 'interests of the working classes' as being, as we have seen, their 'progress'; and that such 'progress' was not only impossible if the Conservatives held power, but that the Tories actively opposed such a process. The notion of the 'working man' having a duty to his country and his 'class' are one and the same as exercising his individual faculties, the correct manifestation of which is seen as rejection of the Tory, and giving support to the Liberal.

Out of the discussion of the process of franchise reform, then, comes the Liberal preoccupation with the nature of the 'working-classes', and the creation of the model of the 'Liberal Working Man' and his Conservative counterpart. The importance of the former was as a personification of the voter the Liberals expected or hoped to see

[29] Potter, *The Conservative Working Man and the Liberal Working Man*, p. 5.

in the household electorate; while the latter represented the dangers of allowing the Conservatives to usurp what the Liberals, from what we see in the pamphlet literature of the period, seem to assume to be their just claim to be the natural recipients of the 'working-class' vote. Just as admitting the intelligent, rational and essentially 'Liberal' members of the 'working classes' to the franchise would have the effect of 'elevating' the condition of the state and further increasing the 'capacity' of the electorate, the admission of the 'Conservative Working Man' would serve to diminish the character of the country and foster an ever more ignorant, fickle and illiberal 'working-class'.

The need to emphasise to the 'Liberal Working Man' the dangers of supporting the Conservatives became more important once the franchise was extended in 1884.[30] The new rural householders would have to be educated in their duties to prevent the 1874 election result being repeated. Fred Binney in his pamphlet of 1886 entitled *What Liberals Have Done for the Country*, aimed at the "Conservative Working-Man", demonstrated this line of thought. "A working man who is a Conservative, and votes as such, is simply voting for the man who (however plausible his talk may be) is at heart the natural enemy of his class. At least, the history of the last half century is enough to prove this."[31]

[30] For the passage of the 1884 Act, see Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, pp. 184-189; p. 198. See also Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, 280-283. Parry argue the Act was an extension of the principle of 1867 to eliminate the earlier Act's failings For the practical implications of the Act, see Michael Dawson, 'Money and the Real Impact of the Fourth Reform Act', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Jun., 1992), pp. 369-381.

[31] Frederick Binney, *What the Liberals Have Done for the Country: A Few Words to Conservative Working Men*, (Manchester: John Heywood, 1886), p. 3, in the British Library of Political and Economic Science, Political Pamphlets, JF2 (42L) 51. For echoes of this sentiment in Gladstone's own political thought, see Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 282-284.

Binney proceeded to argue that the 'working men' should find the method for bringing their electoral weight to bear through the Liberal Party:

> For the last fifty years the Liberal party has been struggling to carry through Parliament reforms that have all helped to improve the condition of the working man; and it is not too much to say that during the whole of that time the Conservative party has been fighting "tooth and nail" to oppose all those measures. And yet, in the face of those facts…there are thousands of working men at every election who are so gullible – so blind to their own interests – so ignorant of the past history of their own country – that they will flock in crowds to vote for that party which has systematically opposed every measure for their good.[32]

The key points to note from Binney's statements here are the identification of the 'interests' of the 'working man' as being best achieved through the Liberal Party, but also that the "unscrupulous politicians of Conservative principles" are opposed to them. Binney therefore showed the need for the Liberals to demonstrate not only the Liberals efforts to help the 'working man', but that there was no equivalence between the two great parties. Legislation to benefit the 'working man' was not given by either party by virtue of favourable circumstance: reform was given by the Liberal and denied by the Conservative on point of principle. Those among the 'working classes' who voted for the 'Tory' were not making a rational selection so much as colluding with an intractable foe.

Richard N. Hall, secretary of the Cardiff 'Liberal Thousand" and the South Wales and Monmouthshire Liberal Federation, in *Liberal Organisation and Work* (1888), argued

[32] Binney, *What the Liberals Have Done for the Country*, pp. 3-4.

strongly for greater Liberal engagement with the 'working class' voters, and for the special position of the Liberal Party as their representatives.

> The cause of the working man is identical with Liberalism, if Liberalism be only true in carrying out the principles which it proudly boasts. History shews clearly that the truest friend of the working-classes has been the Liberal Party, and we can point to long lists of Acts of Parliament passed by the Liberals in the teeth of the strongest Tory opposition. We must tell them of the history of the Liberal party, and how it is still pledged to promote legislation for the "masses" as opposed to the "classes." We must interest ourselves in questions which vitally interest them. We must court them, for they are of ourselves, and we must let them know that we are thoroughly in earnest on their behalf.[33]

Hall here made explicit the way in which the Liberals saw their own relationship with the working-class electorate. The use of both the terms 'working-classes' alongside the 'masses against the classes' dichotomy recalls the concepts of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' expressions of 'class' discussed in chapter one. Using the two terms here indicates that in referring to the 'masses', Hall was utilising the word in its sense of the desirable amalgamation of 'working' and 'middle-class' interests as contrasted with the monopolistic exercising of power by the 'upper classes'. The driving force behind the harmonising of class relations was held to be the franchise extensions of 1867 and 1884, and thus claiming these events as part of the Liberals' political heritage was vital in establishing the 'correct' forms working-class politics should take. By acting in a manner which ran contrary to the historical process of 'reform' the 'Conservative Working Man' was hindering the future 'progress' of his fellow men.

[33] Richard N. Hall, *Liberal Organisation and Work*, (London: National Liberal Federation, 1888), in British Library of Political and Economic Science, Political Pamphlets. JF2 (42L) 53, p. 8.

Disraeli and the 'noble Tory'-Protecting the 'Liberal Working Man'

The Liberal pamphleteers' criticism of Conservative legislation went hand in hand with alerting the 'working man' to the dangers presented by the Conservative Party itself. Propaganda aimed at doing so worked in a number of ways. Firstly, it did so by showing the begrudging nature of reforms granted by the Tories. Secondly, the literature focused on the dishonesty of the Conservatives' intentions in legislating for the 'working classes'.[34] Finally, Liberal pamphleteers highlighted the incongruity of reform with Tory principles in such a way as to suggest the Conservatives in enacting 'working class'-orientated legislation, they were perverting the political system itself.

Jenkins' study of the Liberal Party between the defeat of 1874 and the Home Rule split shows that the Whig leadership of Hartington and Granville saw little to separate themselves from the more 'moderate' elements within the Conservative Party and, initially at least, regarded Disraeli's return to power as signifying the end of an anomalous period of political innovation which had typified Gladstone's first administration, rather than a check to the nation's 'progress'.[35] David Bebbington's recent intellectual biography of Gladstone has also demonstrated that while the Liberal leader's views had undergone a fundamental shift towards a greater embrace of 'liberty'; he had nonetheless retained many features of his prior Toryism, most notably a respect for traditional institutions and in particular the notion of responsible aristocratic government, echoing Jenkins' description of the sense of duty felt by the

[34] For an explanation of the ideological underpinning s an tactical considerations inherent in late Victorian Toryism, see Matthew Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism 1886-1914*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 54-87.
[35] Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, p. 45.

resurgent Whigs in the 1870s.[36] The Liberal pamphlet literature, however, continued to exhibit alarm at Disraeli's constitutional innovations and his pursuit of the working-class vote. Liberalism's relationship with the Conservatives was therefore being depicted in terms of a Tory Party distorting the prior equilibrium between the parties for its own gain.

Disraeli's second government caused consternation among Liberal pamphleteers because it appeared to represent a radical reorganisation of the political arena, both through its legislative programme but also due to its electoral success. Constitutional innovations such as the Royal Titles Act of 1876 which conferred upon the monarch the title of 'empress' were, as we shall see below, understood as part of a policy of realignment which would seek to use working-class votes to perpetuate an 'imperialist' agenda. The pursuit of 'imperialism' would, by acting as a competing direction for political action and by virtue of acting to distract voters from the need for further reform at home, divert Britain from its path of ordered 'progress'. The agitation which resulted from Disraeli's conduct over the Bulgarian Atrocities in 1877 offered further proof of the Tory leader's moral failings in the wider context of the international stage, and provided a contrast between Disraeli and Gladstone, with a lionised depiction of the latter an important part of emphasising the fundamental differences between Toryism and Liberalism. For the Liberal Party, the 'working man' needed to be told the reasons why Conservatism could never represent a genuine vehicle for their 'interests', in a way which could also explain the phenomenon of Tory legislation to aid the working classes.

[36] Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, pp. 7-9.

The contemporary 'imperialist' party would be contrasted with the traditional Tory role of principled opposition to reform which was necessary to act as the bar to excessive innovation and hasty reform. The figure of Disraeli would therefore be contrasted with an archetype of what we may call the 'noble Tory' to demonstrate the dangerous nature of 'imperialist' Conservatism. The defining feature of the 'noble Tory' was being a figure of principled opposition; one who maintained the line of demarcation between the Liberals and Conservatives. The 'noble Tory' theme was one which was used as a method of criticising what the author of *The Book of Benjamin*, an anti-Disraeli pamphlet popular enough to produce three editions, described as the 'experiment in government' which for the Liberals characterised the Beaconsfield administration.

Sedley Taylor used the figure of the 'noble Tory' when he quoted at length from future Prime Minister (as 3rd Marquess of Salisbury) Viscount Cranborne's speech in the House of Commons at the committee stage of the 1867 Franchise Bill.[37] Taylor introduced the speech by noting that despite Disraeli's 'fancy franchises' "as it originally stood, (the Bill) was a measure Radical in principle", and that Cranborne "had resigned office rather than assist in bringing in a Radical Reform Bill." Cranborne's objections went beyond reservations concerning the Bill's provisions, as he decries not just its results, but the methods used to achieve it: "Our theory of government is that on each side of the House there should be men supporting definite opinions, and that what they have supported in opposition they should adhere to in office; and that everyone should know, from the fact of their being in office, that these particular opinions will be supported." Doing otherwise "strikes at the root of all that

[37] Taylor, *The Earl of Beaconsfield and the Conservative Reform Act*, pp. 23-26.

mutual confidence which is the very soul of our party government, and on which only the strength and freedom of our representative institutions be sustained." Taylor notes that Cranborne's speech "carries thought of great nobleness expressed in language of befitting dignity." [38] By contrasting Cranborne with Disraeli's opportunism, Taylor could use the 'noble Tory' archetype to demonstrate the danger to the 'working man' of placing his faith in the Conservative leader.

A pamphlet produced shortly before the 1880 General Election from a paper delivered to the Leigh Liberal Club by T.T. Hayes exemplifies Liberal criticisms of Disraeli's ambition triumphing over his principles.[39] Having repeated the charge that Disraeli never openly declared any shift in his political positions, Hayes claims that the Conservative leader had "never changed his opinions except when he could benefit himself…Mr. Disraeli as a Radical, could never obtain a seat in Parliament, but on turning Tory he was returned." Hayes' paper consists of an exposition of the then premier's career, stating that "if we carefully examine the life of Benjamin Disraeli, that his guiding star has been his own ambition, and that self has been the only deity he has worshipped."[40] Hayes provides a detailed account of Disraeli's various changes in stance, before stating that "He is the pet of the aristocracy, he is the idol of the Music-hall cad, and the saint of the residuum."[41]

Hayes' language here is significant. The most notable word in the last extract is 'residuum', which links Hayes' piece with the spectre of the uneducated 'working

[38] Taylor, *The Earl of Beaconsfield and the Conservative Reform Act,* p. 25.
[39] T.T. Hayes, *Lord Beaconsfield: A Paper read by T.T. Hayes, Junr., before the members of the Leigh Liberal Club*, (Leigh: The Journal Steam Printed Works, n.d., c. 1876.) in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308.N6, Vol. 12/8.
[40] Hayes, *Lord Beaconsfield*, pp. 2-3.
[41] Hayes, *Lord Beaconsfield*, p. 19.

classes'. Weak-of-character and therefore undeserving of the vote, the members of the 'residuum' were a significant presence in the debates around the 1867 Reform Act, as a warning of the dangers of reform for the Adullamites, or as a justification of resting the vote on the householder by advocates of extension such as John Bright. Using the term in the context he does, Hayes makes a statement about Disraeli's use of 'illegitimate' forms of 'class' expression. By associating him with the 'aristocracy' as well as the 'residuum', Hayes is implying that Disraeli appeals to sentiments which are beyond the political pale, and which we have established in chapter one as running contrary to the acceptable relationships of 'class' politics. Hayes' depiction of the ascent of Disraeli as being the result of duplicitous, power-hungry abandonment of principles establishes him as an untrustworthy figure. By linking this with his willingness to play to the basest of sentiments as well as pandering to the upper classes, Hayes depicts Disraeli as the ensnarer and manipulator of 'class' sentiments and the diverting the political loyalties of the 'working classes' towards the Conservatives.

Besides his own self-serving tendencies, the other key aspect of Disraeli's perceived repositioning of the Conservatives was the effect this had on the traditions of the Conservative Party itself. An interesting example of depicting Disraeli as being opposed to Tory tradition was the humorous pamphlet *The Apparition of the Late Lord Derby to Lord Beaconsfield*, in which the deceased Conservative premier appears as a ghost to his former protégé and delivers a critical assessment of Disraeli's time in office.[42] The vehicle provides a means for the author, the pseudonymous 'Politicus', to contrast the approaches of Disraeli and his predecessor.

[42] 'Politicus', *The Apparition of the Late Lord Derby to Lord Beaconsfield*, (Manchester: Tubbs and Brooks, n.d, c. 1877) in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308.N6 Vol. 12/4.

The use of Lord Derby is interesting when one considers the pamphlet in the light of the Liberals' struggle to deprive Disraeli of his credit for giving the 'working classes' the vote. It was of course under Lord Derby's premiership that the 1867 Act was passed, and the impression of discord between the two men created by the pamphlet can be interpreted as a way of achieving that aim.

While the subject of the Reform Bill was not specifically addressed in the text, Derby's manner is depicted as steadfast of principle, and as being more sympathetic to democracy and egalitarianism than his successor. For example, following Disraeli's question as to whether Lord Derby was part of any aristocracy in heaven, Derby replies: "There is an aristocracy in that other world. I cannot say, however, that it is largely recruited from the aristocrats of earth. Such as you have small chance of figuring in it. 'The first shall be last, and the last first.'"[43] Having suggested the futility of Disraeli's infatuation with earthly rank and privilege, Derby's questions as to the fortunes of his son are met by Disraeli with a despairing at the younger Derby's preoccupation with preserving the Constitution, whilst also portraying Salisbury as being less scrupulous in the matter of currying favour.

Derby's reply sums up the form of 'noble Toryism' which the Liberal pamphleteers accused Disraeli of sacrificing to his ambition: "When I was Premier, I had, as you know, some regard for the Constitution. I thought the *Conservatives* had some a peculiar regard for the 'glorious Constitution in Church and State."[44] Following a long evocation of the hardships brought on by Disraeli's economic policies, Derby concludes his criticisms by saying "Conservative as I was, and *am*, I always thought,

[43] 'Politicus', *The Apparition of the Late Lord Derby*, pp. 10-11.
[44] 'Politicus', *The Apparition of the Late Lord Derby*, p. 12.

and still think, that the best things for a Government to *conserve* are the liberties, the prosperity, and the happiness of the people."[45] In attributing what we may think of as 'noble Tory' intentions to Derby and demonstrating Disraeli's course as a deviation from this form of Conservatism, one can see how this reflects the charge of Disraeli pursuing reform for his own gain and further deprives him of any credit for assisting the claims of the 'working classes'. Both Peel and Disraeli are considered here as men who reneged on Conservative principles and espoused 'Liberal' measures, yet the former is seen as laudable for having faced down the opposition of his party and refused to be governed by the least desirable tenets of its political philosophy. The latter, on the other hand, is demonised as a traitor to his own kind, and his faithlessness is held as one of the key reason for the electorate to mistrust him.

Sedley Taylor's pamphlet on the 1867 Reform Bill gives an answer: Peel's volte-face was one which he had been forced upon him by circumstances which had dictated a reassessment of his position, and about which he was open and frank. Disraeli, on the other hand, had maintained instead that his position over electoral reform was as it always had been. He had instead acted dishonestly in a manner which "tended directly towards the degradation of English politics" by undermining public confidence in the professions of its politicians.[46] The difference between the two perhaps lies also in the nature of the issues with which both broke with their parties. Peel took the policy of Free Trade, which ran contrary to the supposed 'interests' of the rural voters seen by many producers of Liberal pamphlets as their core vote, at the expense of his political future, and pursued it nevertheless. Disraeli, by taking on the mantle of electoral

[45] 'Politicus', *The Apparition of the Late Lord Derby*, p. 16.
[46] Taylor, *The Earl of Beaconsfield and the Conservative Reform Act*, pp. 30-31.

reform, was depicted as acting purely in his own interests by pursuing a policy with which many in his party found fault.

Sir Arthur Hobhouse, Q.C., judge and ardent Liberal, in a pamphlet containing a speech given to the opening of a Liberal Club in Westminster, describes in greater detail the way in which Disraeli was seen as subverting the Conservatives.[47] Hobhouse states that "an intelligent Conservative party was one thing, and a very good thing in its way; but that an Imperialist party was quite another thing, and a very detestable one too." Disraeli's manipulation of the Conservatives had shifted them away from the necessary antidote to Liberal hastiness in matters of change: "The questions between the Conservatism of Sir R. Peel and the Liberalism of his day, were little more than questions of pace…or questions as to the objects which should first be selected for adjustment to the conditions of the day. So it appeared to be between the many years which elapsed before Mr. Disraeli found himself with a majority in the House of Commons. It is a very different matter when one party wants to move in one direction and the other party in a precisely contrary direction. Then comes in full force the ever-recurring struggle between those who see the evil side of existing arrangements and those who see the good…those who, trusting and honouring their fellow – men, would give them more freedom and power, and those who, distrusting or despising them, would subject them to authority; those who walk by faith, and those who walk by sense."[48]

Hobhouse questions Mill's famous description of the Conservatives as being the "stupid party", but that Mill had implied "that by the very nature of the case the bulk

[47] Sir Arthur Hobhouse, *Liberals and the New Conservatism*, (Manchester: National Reform Union, 1880), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science, Political Pamphlets, JF2 (42L) 48.
[48] Hobhouse, *Liberals and the New Conservatism*, pp. 7-8.

of the bulk of stupid people will be found attached to the Conservative party…to alter things requires more mental activity than to let them alone". However, Hobhouse concedes that the Liberals likely "contain the larger number of excitable or rash men, and also of merely discontented men…Conservative parties have also been conspicuous for men of solid and strong understanding; for men with a keen appreciation of the good side of whatever exists, and with excellent talents for turning it to account."[49]

Hobhouse's statements give an insight into how the Liberal mind conceived of the operation of party politics, and this is necessary to grasp how they also understood the competition for the votes of the 'working classes'. The role of the Conservatives in this understanding was to provide the vital check upon any over-hasty Liberal reforms, but that such reforms were to be forthcoming when appropriate. By depicting the necessity of Toryism as a counterbalance to Liberalism, Hobhouse's argument compares with the literature we have seen concerning the fitness of the 'working man' to vote – what is desired is that 'progress' is achieved at the speed dictated by forces beyond that of mere politics, but that politics should play its part in assisting that transition.

The nature of the Liberal conception of the 'Conservative Working Man', then, cannot be considered as apart from the way in which they conceived and depicted the Conservatives themselves, as the literature indicates. A demonization of Disraeli was an oblique attack on the 'Conservative Working Man', just as the idolising of Gladstone could be a proxy lionisation of the qualities of the 'Liberal Working

[49] Hobhouse, *Liberals and the New Conservatism*, p. 8.

Man'.[50] Yet it was not only the substance of the differences between the two leaders which mattered. The way in which the Liberal literature represents the role played by the leaders in the political sphere is also significant, indicating as it does a sense that the Liberals had a more healthy relationship between leader and electorate than that of the Conservatives.

Gladstone: Peel, Politics and Personality

The use of idealised depictions of Gladstone, often focusing on his masculine qualities such as his hobby of tree-felling, has long been recognised by historians.[51] The contrasting personalities and histories of Gladstone and Disraeli were used as proxies for the parties themselves, and therefore depicting the one as the true 'friend of the working man' and the other as his corruptor was a prevalent feature of Liberal pamphlet literature in the period under study. An example of this can be seen in *Whom to Follow*, an anonymously-produced pamphlet of 1879 advising potential voters of the choices before them at the election which would take place the following year.[52] The pamphlet takes the form of a career history and character study of Gladstone and Disraeli, attempting to demonstrate to the voter the wisdom of choosing the former over the latter.

[50] For an account of Gladstone's relationship with the working-class voter, see Peaple and Vincent, 'Gladstone and the Working man', Jagger (ed.) *Gladstone*, pp. 71-84, which relates Gladstone's unique popularity with the 'working man'.
[51] See for example Asa Briggs, 'Victorian Images of Gladstone', in Peter J. Jagger (ed.) *Gladstone*, pp. 33-50.; Peaple and Vincent, 'Gladstone and the Working Man' in Peter J. Jagger (ed.) *Gladstone*, pp. 71-83;
[52] Anonymous, *Whom to Follow? William Ewart Gladstone, M.P., or the Earl of Beaconsfield, K.G.*, (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1879) in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308.N6, Vol. 105/2.

The author spends a great deal of his time describing Gladstone's Tory past in a way which serves the triple purpose of justifying his change in allegiance, of making clear the deficiencies of the party he left, and conversely of defending the form of 'Toryism' which Disraeli would be seen as unscrupulously sweeping away. In this reading, Robert Peel emerges as a figure whose support for Free Trade had pointed the way forward for a form of progressive Conservatism that the party had rejected in favour of retaining its historic prejudices, until even this was corrupted by Disraeli's 'Imperialism'. Gladstone was portrayed as being correct in leaving the Tory Party when it became an obstacle to reform, and thus his change in allegiance is shown to be a principled decision in contrast to Disraeli's opportunism. Gladstone was therefore shown to be a man in whom the 'working man' may put his trust, and Disraeli is held as a dishonest manipulator of working class sympathies. Peel, in this narrative, becomes an important figure in Gladstone's ideological conversion, one whose legacy could be claimed by the Liberal Party because of the Tory renunciation of his attempted repositioning of the party. In turn, by representing Peel as a Liberal by proxy, the Liberal pamphleteers could better situate his act of repealing the Corn Laws as a Liberal measure.[53]

The relationships between Gladstone, Peel, Disraeli and the Conservatives as described in *Whom to Follow?* centred on economics. "The iniquities of Protection which Peel, with Mr. Gladstone as his chief henchman, thus cast behind him, was eagerly clutched by Mr. Disraeli, and long used to serve his purpose till even his

[53] For the importance of Peel to Gladstone's political development, see Eric Evans, 'The Strict Line of Political Succession'? Gladstone's Relationship with Peel: An Apt Pupil?' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 29-58.; also Biagini, *Gladstone*, pp. 21-23.

"stupid party" found it out."[54] Peel is described as "the most honourable statesmen whom the people have ever sent to power from their own ranks", making a point of his relatively humble, industrial background, was depicted as being the direct predecessor of Gladstone and the latter the heir to his political legacy, and to his claim to be the people's champion: "(Peel's) removal only made way for Mr. Gladstone himself, for a time as the head of the Peelites – who may be described as cultured Conservatives with popular sympathies – but soon, as we shall see, as himself leader of the people and representative of the people."[55] The impression created here is of the connection between the two men, the significance of which is clear once when considers the value to the Liberal pamphleteers of claiming Free Trade as a Liberal endeavour – if Gladstone is Peel's true heir, then it is the Liberals who can claim to have inherited the mantle of the defenders of the 'working classes' in this regard.

The link between Gladstone and Peel was made explicit when the role of Disraeli is added to the narrative. Even though Disraeli "had already spoken for Free Trade in the abstract…since then he had openly declared war on Sir Robert Peel", and therefore Disraeli declared his support for Protection. Having established Disraeli's duplicity and prizing ambition over principle, the author continues by accusing Disraeli of "Attacking now the measures you defended in 1842; charging your party with stealing principles you then congratulated them on having inherited from their fathers", referring to his earlier claims that Free Trade was an inherently Tory concept. Disreali's behaviour is sharply contrasted with that of Peel: "How he rose above his party, how he freed trade, as the Whigs had freed the franchise in 1832, are

[54] *Whom to Follow?*, p. 28.
[55] *Whom to Follow?*, p. 30. This image of the 'cultured Conservative' should be understood in the light of Jenkins' assessment of the closeness of Whiggery to moderate Conservatism which we encountered earlier.

matters of which every English Liberal is proud. This complete triumph of Liberal principles over the conscience and intellect of a Tory chief…is certainly the greatest victory in English politics. The session of 1846 is marked with red letters in the calendar of Liberalism…Yet on this day, when even the chief of the Conservatives became Liberal, Mr. Benjamin Disraeli receded into the darkest depths of Toryism."[56] The author uses the term 'Tory' to describe the pre-1832 version of the party, while here 'Conservative' is being used to describe what we will shortly encounter as the form of Conservatism which the Liberal pamphlet literature condemns Disraeli for abusing.

However, there were indications that this was a relationship which would prove unhelpful when the time came to move on from Gladstone's leadership. The pamphlet *Gladstonian Liberalism: In Idea and in Fact* by future Liberal Unionist pamphlet author George Brooks gave a critical account of the dependence of the late-Victorian Liberal Party on the veneration of their talismanic leader.[57] Brooks emphasises the stranglehold exerted by Gladstone upon not only Liberal policy, but the Liberals' identity: "During the past five years…no Liberalism but that which consists of a belief in Mr. Gladstone and an adoption of his principles has been known in the House of Commons", with the exception of a few Radical Members. "He has been regarded as the loyal Liberal, and he alone, who followed Mr. Gladstone wheresover he went…The great Liberal Party has no creed but Gladstoneism. This is at once its

[56] *Whom to Follow?*, p. 30.
[57] George Brooks, *Gladstonian Liberalism: In Idea and in Fact*, (London: Woodford Fawcett & Co., n.d, c. 1885) in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308.N6, Vol. 105/1; also see Brooks' *Why I Became A Liberal Unionist*, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1889), in the British Library, reference 8145 EE17 2.

strength and its weakness.[58] Mr. Gladstone's renowned name may do to conjure with at the forthcoming General Election, and by a skilful and persistent use of it that election may be won for the Liberal Party." However, Brooks express doubt as to the sustainability of this policy: "But when the triumph has been won, if won it should be, and Mr. Gladstone shortly afterwards has to retire, then the weakness of the situation will reveal itself. Liberals will then learn that it is impossible to rely upon one man, however great, instead of relying upon vital and lofty principles, without ultimately paying a very heavy penalty for their mistake."[59]

Brooks believed this not only to be a strategic mistake, but a philosophical contradiction. "One of the foundation principles of Liberalism is that every man shall have the right of independent thought and judgement, indeed that he is bound to form and act upon convictions. Tories may blindly pin their faith to a leader; may be political fanatics who ignore reason and repudiate responsibility; but Liberals can never stoop to this without playing false to that which is fundamental in their faith, and proving themselves unworthy of the freedom in which they glory. Liberals degrade themselves to the level of their opponents when they substitute blind trust in a leader for enlightened loyalty to the cause in which he leads."[60] Moreover, the very purpose of the democratic process would be undermined if such idolatry were allowed to occur. "If democracy is merely to land us in Caesarism; if all men are to be enfranchised only in order that they may bow the knee to one man; then those who

[58] This is a central point to Jenkins' assessment of Gladstone's role in the Liberal Party. In effect, he states, Gladstone represented both a means of unifying the Whig and Radical wings of the party, but paradoxically also provided a means by which both elements could further the cause of their section of the party; Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, p. 182; see also Paul Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism: The Middle-Class Experience 1830-1914*, (London: Longman, 1984), pp. 123-139; Richard Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain: A Political Study*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 167,
[59] Brooks, *Gladstonian Liberalism*, pp. viii-ix.
[60] Brooks, *Gladstonian Liberalism*, pp. 19-20.

believe in freedom and progress are deluded, and the advance of Liberal principles has merely been a reaction towards barbarism."[61]

Here we can see hints that, for Brooks, the danger would become that the very essence of Liberalism could be corrupted by depending upon one figure, and that by promoting the successes of Gladstone - who Brooks credits with the Liberal victory of 1880 but with failing to keep his promises to the electorate – the party risked debasing the electorate, or at least dispossessing it of its purpose in promoting 'freedom and progress', at the same time as they abased themselves by resorting to 'Tory' despotic leadership models.

The transition to the post-Gladstone era would indeed prove difficult for the Liberal Party however. John Morley, Liberal minister and agitator for many key Liberal reforms, in a speech after the Liberal leader's retirement, published as 'The Liberal Programme' in 1894 described how "the more fully the story of (Gladstone's) character is told, be sure that the more you will sympathise with those of us who follow him into his well-earned retirement with our affectionate and unalterable gratitude and reverence. But the battle must still be fought. The torch which he kindled with us still glows with full light must be handed on, and I hope and believe…will not be extinguished because he has retired."[62]

[61] Brooks, *Gladstonian Liberalism*, p. 22.
[62] John Morley, *The Liberal Programme: A Speech delivered by the Right Hon. John Morley at Newcastle, on May 21st, 1894*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1894),. The continuing reliance of the Liberal Party on invocations of Gladstone's character is discussed by Chris Wigley in ''Carving the Last Few Columns out of the Gladstonian Quarry': The Liberal Leaders and the Mantle of Gladstone' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, pp. 243-259.

Morley's comments reflect the difficulty in replacing Gladstone politically, but the suggestion that his 'character' be studied also hint at the problem of replacing him with a figure of similar status as a symbol of Liberalism's mission.[63] The Rosebery succession carried with it a great deal of hope and expectation, as perhaps can be glimpsed in the title of the anonymously-penned 'New Review' article 'The Setting and the Rising Sun', part of a series of articles on the new premier compiled by the Liberal Publication Department.[64] The piece is mostly critical of the stultifying legacy of Gladstonian Liberalism, dismissing "the Old Liberalism – which is almost identical with Conservatism"[65] and that Gladstone alone kept these relics and the more progressive New Liberals together – "Take him away, and they begin to fall asunder. The Old Liberalism silenced, or driven to encamp on the outskirts of the Tory lines"[66], which suggests a need to shift the party's basis of support.

Strikingly, though, part of the article discusses Rosebery's standing with the electorate in terms which are pessimistic about the prevalence of Tory support among the 'working classes'. "Lord Rosebery is a true democrat in the sense of trusting the judgement of hic countrymen. He is well known and highly respected by the working classes. But he recognises the truth of the Aristotelian maxim, that the middle class is the salvation of society. If the middle class were finally to desert the Liberal Party the loss would never be repaired. No party can capture the working men. The

[63] For the problematic succession crisis, see Robert Rhodes James, *Rosebery*, (London: Phoenix, 1983), pp. 289-328; Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism*, pp. 135-139; for the collapse of Gladstone's last government in detail see David Brooks, 'Gladstone's Fourth Administration, 1892-1894' in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*,(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 225-242.
[64] Anonymous, 'The Setting and the Rising Sun', *New Review*, Vol. 10, No. 59, April 1894, pp. 401-416, compiled in 'Roseberiana', at Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Club Papers, reference DM 668, housed at Restricted Access DA 564, R7 ROS.
[65] 'The Setting and the Rising Sun', p. 411.
[66] 'The Setting and the Rising Sun', p. 409.

Conservative working man is always with us, and always will be. Parties ought not to coincide with classes."[67]

The inference that the Liberals had failed in their attempts to ensure the undivided loyalty of the 'working classes' is clear, and the contrast with Potter's earnest attempts to guide the 'Conservative Working Man' away from his folly could hardly be stronger. In their attempts to define the role of the 'Tory' as essentially opposed to the perceived 'interests' of the 'working classes' the Liberals had constructed a picture of a party utterly reliant upon a single, dishonest and corrupting figure as represented by the demonised version of Disraeli. The 'working man' who supported them would be viewed as traitorous to his peers and himself, and ultimately to the party who promoted his personal growth and his 'progress'. Yet it would appear that even before the end of the nineteenth century some supporters had lost faith that the party could achieve its aims by attracting the support of the 'working classes' in sufficient numbers. If the author of 'The Setting and the Rising Sun' appears to have neglected the role of Labour in diverting support from the Liberals, he was not alone, as we shall see in the next chapter. However, one of the most interesting alternatives for the 'working man' and his vote were the uniquely positioned former colleagues of Gladstone and Rosebery, the Liberal Unionists, to whom we shall now turn.

The Liberal Unionist 'Working Man'

The Liberal Unionist Party represent a conundrum in terms of Victorian politics: given what we have seen of the enmity borne by the Liberals for the Conservatives,

[67] 'The Setting and the Rising Sun', p. 408.

which went far beyond mere electoral competition towards fundamental and implacable philosophical differences, the ability of the dissident Liberals to ally themselves with their foes requires explanation. The notion that the Liberal Unionist Party represented the result of the Radicalisation of the Liberal Party under Gladstone, with the 'Flight of the Whigs' being inevitable as the party shifted towards a greater emphasis on Radical social policies.[68]

The Liberal Unionists issued a substantial series of pamphlets over the first few years of the Unionist compact which attempted to position themselves as the true heirs of the Liberal legacy. The first of this series reproduced a speech by Joseph Chamberlain in which he sets out the Liberal Unionist agenda.[69] Under the section titled "The Future of the Liberal Party at Stake", Chamberlain states that his entry into politics was motivated by his "interest in social questions, and by my desire to promote the welfare of the great majority of the population… and then I looked to the Liberal

[68] For the older 'Flight of the Whigs' argument, see Gordon L. Goodman, 'Liberal Unionism: The Revolt of the Whigs', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Dec., 1959), pp. 173-189.Hugh Stephens, in 'The Changing Context of British Politics in the 1880s: The Reform Acts and the Formation of the Liberal Unionist Party, *Social Science History*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1977), pp. 486-501 argues that the results of the 1884 Franchise Act ad the subsequent redistribution measure acted to create a very similar voter base between the Liberal and Conservative parties, facilitating an easier and more solid link between the two wings of Unionism than may have been the case if the voter base had been radically different, Searle in *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration* argues that Chamberlain's religious objections to Home Rule were matched with an appreciation of the measure's unpopularity. Jenkins in *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party*, p. 248, dismisses the notion that Gladstone's adoption of Home Rule was a reaction to Chamberlain's Radical Programme, and on pp. 251-254 suggests that tensions between Chamberlain and Hartington over the programme were also less pronounced by the time of the schism than they had previously been, furthering Jenkins' argument that the Home Rule split was more complex than being merely the final separation of the Whiggish elements from the remainder of the Liberal Party. John Lubenow in 'Irish Home Rule and the Social Basis of the Great Separation in the Liberal Party in 1886', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March, 1985), pp. 125-142, argues that while the social class of Liberal Unionist M.P.s was a factor in their wider political opinions, their support of Home Rule was not affected by their class status. Matthew Fforde, in *Conservatism and Collectivism*, p. 70, stresses Chamberlain's intellectual affinity with Conservatism, while Robert Jay in *Joseph Chamberlain*, pp. emphasises the local and national factors which were serving to undercut Chamberlain's Birmingham powerbase as well as diminish his national pre-eminence in the Liberal movement, making a formalisation of the initial Home Rule split necessary.

[69] Joseph Chamberlain, 'Mr. Chamberlain and the Birmingham Association: Speech delivered in the Town Hall, Birmingham, April 21, 1886', (London: Cassell & Co., 1886) in *The Case For The Union*, 1st Series, 1886, no pamphlet number, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32.

Party as the means for removing and remedying those grievances – as the great instrument of progress and reform".[70] However, Chamberlain claimed that the 'Irish Question' had taken Gladstone's attention from pressing social issues, and that the proposed Home Rule settlement was "absolutely odious and hateful to every true Liberal."[71] Delivered to a seemingly working-class audience, Chamberlain's speech quite clearly attempts to show the split between the two Liberal parties as being a defence of Liberalism itself, rather than a sundering of ways caused by the Home Rule affair. 'The Irish Question' is at best a distraction from dealing with more important issues; at worst, it represented an abdication of the Gladstonian party's position as the champion of the 'working classes' whose grievances Chamberlain speaks of as his prime motivation in politics.[72]

Gladstone's renouncing of moral authority was seized on as evidence of the premier having committed the very crime of which his great rival Disraeli had been accused – sacrificing principle for political gain, and of defying his party's noble traditions. In a Chamberlain pamphlet from 1887 entitled *The Claims of Ulster*, taken from a speech in Belfast[73], he accuses Gladstone of betraying the Ulster Protestants, "a minority that includes almost all of the cultivated intelligence of the country…the greater part of the enterprise and a large proportion of the wealth".[74] These ties, however, were ignored because of Gladstone's dependence on the Parnellite vote – "Loyalty in the House of Commons – Irish loyalty – is represented only by 17 votes; and

[70] Chamberlain, 'Mr. Chamberlain and the Birmingham Association', p. 5.
[71] Chamberlain, 'Mr. Chamberlain and the Birmingham Association', p6, 11.
[72] This motion is examined by Hamer in 'The Irish Question and Liberal Politics, 1886-1894', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1969), pp. 511-532, in which he suggests that Home Rule was described by Gladstonian Liberals as 'blocking the way' and thus acquired greatest importance to the Liberal platform, but that this was in fact a way of achieving party unity over a single goal, in contrast to the 'faddism' produced by Chamberlainite Nonconformist agitation. See also
[73] Joseph Chamberlain, 'The Claims of Ulster',, (London, Cassell & Co., 1887) in *The Case for The Union*, 3rd series, 1887, pamphlet 89, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32.
[74] Chamberlain, *The Claims of Ulster*, p. 1.

sedition…enjoys a majority of 88 votes."[75] The inference here of political calculation trumping all other concerns is clear, as is the charge that such a sacrifice as Chamberlain describes is one of an immoral and shameful nature.

There were also allegations that the Liberals were abandoning the working – classes of both Ireland the rest of the Kingdom by failing to prioritise formerly paramount concerns above experiments in self-governance. George Goschen, in a speech published by the Liberal Unionist Party as the pamphlet 'Ireland Shall Not Stand In The Way'[76], makes known his fears for the future of the 'working classes': "I want to know, are the children of the operatives to be kept away from technical education, because Ireland blocks the way?"[77]

One of the most notable complaints was the neglect of the temperance issue. The 1887 pamphlet 'The "Old Pilot" and Temperance Reforms' criticises Gladstone's licensing policies as inconsistent.[78] The temperance issue is linked with the Home Rule debacle by virtue of Gladstone's dependence on the Irish nationalist vote – "The Parnellite Party is essentially a drink party – many of the members being actually engaged in the trade." Surrendering on such a key Liberal pledge as temperance is shown here to be an act of cynical calculation deserving of contempt, and directly linked to Home Rule.

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[75] Chamberlain, *The Claims of Ulster,* p. 2.
[76] George Goschen, 'Ireland Shall Not Block The Way' (London: Cassell &. Co., 1887), in *The Case For The Union,* 1st Series, 1886, pamphlet 104, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32.

[77] Goschen, 'Ireland Shall Not Block The Way', p. 1.
[78] Anonymous, 'The "Old Pilot" and Temperance Reform', (London: Cassell & Co., n.d., c. 1887) in *The Case For The Union,* 1st Series, 1886, leaflet 76, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32., p. 1.

Another issue on which the Gladstonian party were accused of abandoning their principles was land reform, in particular over the amendments to the Agricultural Holdings Act proposed by sometime Liberal Unionist M.P. Jesse Collings. In his 'Appeal to the Agricultural Labourers' Collings criticises the primacy given to Home Rule in Gladstone's priorities, calling it "a question which was not before the constituencies at the last general election", a common criticism of Home Rule. Collings relates how the Bill was proceeded on with no public consultation: "Without warning, without consultation, without the Liberal Party, without regard to the probable effect on the unity of the party".[79]

Such criticisms are especially important when linked to the cause of land reform in such a way, as the agricultural labourers had only recently been granted the vote at the time Collings was writing. By targeting these voters and linking the Gladstonian Liberals' failure to deliver on legislation to benefit them directly with Home Rule, the Liberal Unionists were making a powerful statement about the ability of the former to depict themselves as the friend of the rural 'working classes'. If it was a Liberal tactic to display Disraeli's extension of the vote as dishonest and self-serving, then highlighting such affronts to the newly-enfranchised voters as Collings does can be interpreted as treating the Gladstonian reforms in the same sceptical manner.[80]

Indeed, the Liberal Unionists were keen to demonstrate their own affinity with the 'working classes'. In the pamphlet 'Is Home Rule A Class Question?' the party

[79] Jesse Collings, 'Mr. Jesse Collings' Appeal to the Agricultural Labourers' (London: Cassell & Co., n.d., c.1886) in *The Case for The Union*, 1st Series, 1886, pamphlet 34, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32. , p.1.
[80] For the significance of Land Reform to Chamberlain and the Liberal Unionists, see Matthew Fforde, *Conseravtism and Collectivism*, pp. 45-50, for the treatment of the smallholdings question by the Unionist government see pp. 75-78; also Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain*, pp. 164-165.

answered Gladstone's claims that opposition to Home Rule was drawn from the upper classes .[81] The pamphlet counters this suggestion by reminding the reader of the many among the Liberal Unionist ranks who could claim to have represented 'working-class interests'. John Bright, "the veteran champion of Free Trade and the rights of the people", a policy which in another George Brooks pamphlet 'Why I Became a Liberal Unionist' is said to be under threat from Parnellite hostility.[82] The pressure on Bright was also said to come from George Trevelyan "who zealously strove to give the franchise to the county householder years before Mr. Gladstone himself attempted it"; and the aforementioned Jesse Collings "the special friend of the agricultural labourer".[83]

Class, far from being the dividing factor in the Home Rule debate, was here claimed to be irrelevant as far as creating support for Unionism; in fact, Home Rule was to be seen as the issue which united all classes in their concern for the ill-effects it would bring: "The real truth is that all classes, high and low, rich and poor, have an equal interest in preserving intact the power of the present Parliament to pass just laws, and protect life, liberty, and property throughout the whole British Empire, including Ireland. For on such power depends the peace and prosperity of England and Ireland". The 'working man' would suffer just as much as any aggrieved landlord: "the working men of Ireland will suffer, because the wealth and capital of landlords and manufacturers will be driven out of the country, and the wage fund diminished by fear of Parnellite rule. The working men of England will suffer, because the unemployed

[81] Anonymous, 'Is Home Rule A Class Question?' (London: Cassell &. Co., n.d, c. 1886) in *The Case For The Union*, 1st Series, 1886, pamphlet 28, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32.
[82] George Brooks, *Why I Became A Liberal Unionist*, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1889), in the British Library, reference 8145 EE17 2, p. 4.
[83] 'Is Home Rule A Class Question?', p. 1.

and impoverished Irish labourer will crowd into England…and by competition lower the rate of wages…Thus it is the interest and duty of all classes alike to oppose Home Rule."[84] For the Liberal Unionists, the real concern over the Home Rule affair was that the mission of Liberalism was being sacrificed to the needs of remaining in government. Opposing it brought them into union with the Conservatives, but in doing so they could claim as in the extract above to be acting to unite all 'class' interests together, even if both wings of the Unionist Party came to the cause for differing reasons.

In another pamphlet containing the text of a speech from June 1887, Chamberlain refuted the charge that by entering coalition with the Conservatives, the Liberal Unionists were guilty of precisely the same calculating political scheming of which they were accusing their former colleagues.[85] Describing the Unionist Party as "the advocates of progress – of orderly progress and of constitutional reform, the party of the Union, in fact", he accuses the "Separatist faction" of threatening to "usurp the honoured name and the functions of the Liberal party…I would say that the action, not of the Radical section, but of the Unionist Liberals as a whole, have saved the Liberal party"[86] from ruin. The use of the term 'Separatists' as a way of denigrating the Gladstonian party was not only used for its pejorative connotations, but as away of helping define the Liberal Unionists as the only party worthy of the name 'Liberal'.

[84] 'Is Home Rule A Class Question?', p. 1.
[85] Joseph Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered by the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club at Willis' Arms, on Thursday, June 14th, 1887', (London: V. Speight and Sons, 1887), in *The Case For The Union*, 3rd Series, 1887, no pamphlet number, in the British Library, reference 8146bb.32.
[86] Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered…To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club', p. 3.

Chamberlain proceeds to argue that the Gladstonian Liberals were "a sect without a creed…a religion with no articles; they have a faith, but I defy them to say what their doctrine is"[87], in terms which echo Brooks' concerns. Chamberlain continues by stating that the Gladstonians "profess to be the only orthodox representatives, by apostolic succession, of the Liberal party, and in the course of a brief time they have passed through almost every kind of political heresy."[88]

The Liberal Unionists, by contrast, "have not abated one jot or little of any of the professions which we have ever expressed". The alliance with the Conservatives had, in fact, only served to strengthen their ability to maintain their course with a sense of national union empowering their relationship to continue their mission. The party "found ourselves reluctantly into alliance with our political opponents…and in consequence we have had to examine their general policy on its merits and without regard to party considerations."[89] Thus Chamberlain defended the Unionist alliance by using what at first appears mere sophistry; that by combining their policy with that of their enemies was the only way in which their own programme could be adopted. Yet when one considers what he have seen of the Liberal Unionists professions that the retaining of the Union in itself was vital to the Liberal project, the notion appears at least consistent with their other statements, and a rationale becomes apparent. The Unionist cause, by virtue of its fundamental cause, was for the Liberal Unionists, the most inherently 'Liberal' platform of all.

As to the policies of their new partners, Chamberlain seems to have found much to suggest compatibility with his party's aims. Chamberlain thought it possible that as a

[87] Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered…To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club', p. 8.
[88] Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered…To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club', p. 8.
[89] Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered…To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club', p. 9.

result of the Liberal influence on the Conservatives "that the great social questions and problems of our time which most urgently demand solution should receive satisfactory settlement at the hands of a national party"[90]. The aims of the government were "conservative in their truest sense, because by fulfilling them we can strengthen our institutions to bear the strain cast upon them; and they are liberal because they involve a generous recognition of the claims of the least fortunate members of the community".[91]

We can see, then, how the Liberal Unionists were able to draw upon a discernable and familiarly 'Liberal' conception of how politics and the 'working man' related to each other in order to justify their claims to be the 'true' inheritors of the Liberal legacy. By opening up the Gladstonian party to charges of dishonesty, placing survival in office above their declared principles and of ignoring the grievances of the 'working classes', the Liberal Unionists were accusing the mainstream party of far more than doing less than was promised or sufficient to elevate the condition of the 'working classes'. They were alleging that the Gladstonians were unsuited to represent the 'Liberal Working Man'' because they could no longer claim to be the force of enlightened, principled politics that the pursuit of 'progress' required of its parliamentary representatives.That mantle, as Chamberlain's speech demonstrates, was said to have passed to the Unionist coalition, which alone could claim to be operating in the 'interests' of the 'working classes'. The alliance with the

[90] Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered…To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club', p. 9.
[91] Chamberlain, 'Speech delivered…To the Members of the Liberal Unionist Club', p. 10. For the development of closer ties between Chamberlain and his Conservative allies, see John Fair, 'From Liberal to Conservative: The Flight of the Liberal Unionists after 1866', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Winter, 1986), pp. 291-314, in which he argues that while Home Rule provided the chief cause for the Unionist alliance to remain together, on other issues such as Land Reform and opposition to Harcourt;s 1893 Budget drew the parties closer. See also Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain*, pp. 173-175; Gregory Phillips, , 'The Whig Lords and Liberalism, 1886-1893', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (March, 1981), pp. 167-173.; Matthew Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism*, pp. 70-74.

Conservatives allowed Chamberlain to claim that the Liberal Unionists, while they may have entered into coalition, were truly able to put the principle of the 'progress' of the 'working classes' before political calculation, by virtue of the benefits the 'working man' accrued through defending the Union.

The Conservatives and The 'Working Man'

To conclude this chapter we will now examine the way in which the Conservative Party dealt with the same issues of creating a base of support from the newly-enfranchised voters of the 'working classes'. I do not intend to conduct a thorough survey of the vast amounts of Conservative literature on the matter, but to suggest ways in which certain extracts hint at how the Conservatives related to the 'working man'. A study of how the Conservatives conceived and depicted the 'working man' illustrates most clearly how it was that this became an issue with which the Liberals struggled, as we have seen. The Conservatives were able to understand a relationship between themselves and the 'working classes', and to conceive how the new voters fit into the electoral landscape, without recourse to an idealised 'Conservative Working Man', nor a corresponding 'Liberal' counterpart which restricted the way in which the party engaged with them, as we have seen with the Liberals.[92]

[92] The position of the Conservatives with regards the working class electorate has been discussed in various terms, with much older scholarship tending to prioritise organisation, manipulation of the franchise system or coercion over an active attempt to appeal to working-class sympathies. Thus Blake in *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher,* ch. V, attributes Tory success to constituency organisation. The theory of 'Villa Toryism' in which Salisburry's gerrymandering via the 1885 Redistribution Act accounts for much of Torry success in the late nineteenth-century is criticised by Matthew Roberts' study of Leeds Conservatism, ''Villa Toryism' and Popular Conservatism in Leeds, 1885-1902', *Historical Journal,* Vol. 49, No. 1 (March, 2006), pp. 217-246. Similarly, J.C. Lowe's position in 'The Tory Triumph of 1868 in Blackburn and Lancashire', *Historical Journal,* Vol. 16, No. 4 (Dec., 1973), pp. 733-748 argues that a combination of 'Hornbyism, a form of paternalistic Toryism, and the church-chapel divide contributed more to Tory success than constituency border revision. V.C. Barbary , in 'Reinterpreting Factory Politics in Bury, Lancashire, 1868-1880, *Historical Journal,* Vol. 81, No. 1 (March, 2008), pp. 115-144, has also questioned the significance of employer coercion in

In a speech given at Edinburgh in 1875, published in pamphlet form by the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, the Earl of Derby, son of the 14th Earl who had been Prime Minister three times between 1852 and 1868, discussed the existence and characteristics of the 'Conservative Working Man' from the Conservative standpoint[93]. Speaking to an audience at a Conservative Working Men's club, Derby attacked the notion of such men being figments of wishful – or otherwise – political imaginations: "It was the fashion in the years between 1868 and 1874 to talk of the Conservative working man as if he was an ideal and imaginary being. I think he has shown the reality of his existence pretty clearly by this time."[94] These comments suggest that, during the period essentially represented by the first Gladstone ministry, there was indeed just such a conceptualised model of the ideal, partisan 'working man' as we have encountered with the Liberal Party, although his comments do not make it clear whether he refers to the Liberals or Conservatives as being the constructors of this archetype, nor in what manner he was understood to act. Yet Derby's subsequent comments suggest that the Conservatives, whether possessing a specific concept of an 'ideal working man or not, such a model was not subject to the prescriptions and strictures upon their motives and actions as the Liberals expected of their 'working man'.

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boosting Tory support among the working classes. The existence of a form of 'Tory Democracy' centred around Randolph Churchill has been challenged by Ronald Quinault in 'Lord Randolph Churchill and Tory Democracy, 1880-1885', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (March, 1979), pp. 141-165, and more recently by Fforde in *Conservatism and Collectivism*, pp. 68-70.

[93] Earl of Derby, *The Conservative Working Man: Speech given by the Earl of Derby at Edinburgh; December 17th 1875*, (Westminster: National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, 1875), in the Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archives, National Union Pamphlets, PUB23/1, pamphlet 1875/2.

[94] Earl of Derby, *The Conservative Working Man*, p. 4.

Derby described allegations being made that the 'Conservative Working Man' was apolitical and voted for the Tory on the basis of local personal popularity. Yet for Derby, such a voter was not to be derided: "The members whom you sent to Westminster are not mere voting machines…A member of the House of Commons exercises, and must exercise, a large and wide discretion on many questions, and as to which his constituency itself has perhaps hardly made up its mind. If, therefore, it be true that the Conservative working man looks to persons as well as professions – if he does not think that the sole qualification for political life consists in willingness to swallow to swallow any number of pledges – I say, for one, the Conservative working man is quite right."[95] Derby gave an indication here of the difference in the way the Conservatives and Liberals understood 'their' versions of the 'working man'. The 'working man' Derby describes is not held to be worthy of the vote he has been given because he possesses particular qualities or because he has a part to play in a particular conception of society. He is simply to be expected to exercise his individual faculties in selecting a candidate, with the implication being that an ability to detect sophistry is vital, and that a degree of cynicism is preferable than allowing himself to place excessive trust in electoral promises.

Given Derby's eventual shift in allegiance, crossing the floor to become a Liberal minister in 18??, we should be careful to note that his opinions may not have been shared by all of his then party. His unique position, however, perhaps allows a useful way of seeing how the concept of the 'working man' could be understood in both Conservative and Liberal contexts, and illustrate the differences between the imagined figures they created. Derby's arguments seem to suggest the existence of another,

[95] Earl of Derby, *The Conservative Working Man*, p. 4.

Conservative ideal 'working man' similar to that imagined by the Liberals – the call to exercise discernment being a replication of the place occupied by the need for the voter to ensure the continuation of 'progress'; a similarity perhaps unsurprising given Derby's personal politics. The crucial difference emerges when the 'working man' is considered by Derby in the particular context of how the imagined 'working man' is expected to relate to the Conservative Party. Derby is not stating that the 'Conservative Working Man' has the same duty or requirement to vote a particular way as his Liberal counterpart; Derby is instead suggesting that it is his right to do so if he wishes. The 'Conservative Working Man' outlined by Derby, then, is one who is not so much bound to vote Conservative in the way we have seen the Liberals conceiving of the 'Liberal Working Man' as he is free to *not* vote Liberal.

Derby does make mention of "a conservative feeling, which is deep and strong – a feeling which may at times be masked, and whose influence may be overborne by some grievance of the day or some popular cry, but which reappears when these disturbing influences are removed."[96] But this is not a description of a spirit which animates and strives towards the 'interests' of one 'class' or an alliance of 'classes' whose 'interests' coincide and are the ultimate if indirect focus of a party's 'mission'. It is one which "is in ever class, and the working class as much as any other."[97] The 'Conservative Working Man', for Derby, is Conservative because this is the state of things which exists when agitation is removed. 'Agitation', in more than one sense of the word, was a concept which the Conservative pamphlets use to attack the interfering tendencies of the Liberals which tended to perturb the 'working man'

[96] Earl of Derby, *The Conservative Working Man*, p. 4.
[97] Earl of Derby, *The Conservative Working Man*, p. 4.

rather than elevate him.[98] It is this particular way of imagining the 'working man' to act that allows Derby to utilise an idealised figure similar to that used by the Liberals, but to do so in a specifically Conservative context.

Derby's imagined 'working man' has strong links to the Tory tactic of accusing the Liberal Party of interference with the 'working man' and his family, in contrast to the benevolent Tory figure against which the Liberal agitator was depicted. The 'meddling Liberal' stereotype is depicted perfectly in the poem *Revolution Joe or the Rad Canvasser and The Workingman's Wife*. Published in 1885, the piece describes the harassing of a 'working class' woman by two Radical agents wishing to persuade her husband of the benefits of him casting his vote for the Liberal candidate.[99] The canvassers' opening lines to the wife of the 'working man' are a clear echo of the Liberal literature we have seen, which assumed the 'Liberal' nature of the 'working man' by virtue of their concern in elevating him.

"'Your master's a working man,
So you'll get him to vote for the *Liberal* cause,
And help us the best you can."
"For wives we know have such winning ways –
And the workingman's *always* a Rad –
So that when you begin with your wheedling talk,

[98] Fforde, *Conservatism and Collectivism*, pp. 81-82.
[99] 'An Out And Out Conservative', *Revolution Joe or the Rad Canvasser and The Workingman's Wife*, (Darlington: North Star Printing Works, 1885) in the British Library General Reference Collection, RB 31. b. 95/74.

His heart will be truly glad.'"[100]

Such a depiction is crucial to understanding how the Conservatives were able to understand and construct their appeals to the 'working classes'. The 'Conservative Working Man' makes a proxy appearance in this piece, through the angry retort of his disgruntled wife, but most important here is the manner in which the Liberal notion of the 'Liberal Working Man' is picked apart. Having denounced much of the Liberals' work over the preceding years, the 'workingman's wife' accuses the Liberal offer of 'three acres and a cow' as "a mighty fine bribe for t'labouring man" in return for their "help to carry your 'Godless Schools'". More pointedly, she accuses the Liberals of acting out of electoral calculation themselves:

"You're TOO suddenly fond of the working man,
Whom you never have noticed before;
Shaff! wi' your love! which began only when
The Franchise Act was law!"[101]

As has been demonstrated, the Liberal Party's pamphleteers relied upon the notion that Disraeli had acted dishonestly over the Franchise to deter the 'working man' from supporting the Conservatives. Yet here we see a subtly different way in which to construct the unscrupulous behaviour of the Liberals. The notion that the "workingman's always a Rad" allied to the criticisms of neglecting him up until he received the vote allows the Conservative author to suggest that the Liberals' claim to be the friend of the 'working man' a dishonest one, but the manner in which the

[100] 'An Out And Out Conservative', *Revolution Joe*, p. 1.
[101] 'An Out And Out Conservative', *Revolution Joe*, p. 1.

canvassers conducted themselves suggests a sense of entitlement to a monopoly on the support of the 'working man' which was unwarranted and unwanted by their supposed 'friends'.

The Conservatives displayed a similar concern for the 'elevation' of the 'working classes' as did the Liberals, however, the way in which this was justified, and more importantly, rendered into a Conservative pursuit, was one which differed greatly from that of the Liberals. In his speech at the banquet during the annual conference of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations in 1872[102], Disraeli had demonstrates the significance of the recent franchise extensions for the Conservative Party. Reproduced with the conference's report as a pamphlet, Disraeli's speech indicates reasons why a conception of the 'working man' in politics was not the great problem which we have seen it represented to the Liberals.

That the speech alludes throughout to support for the various institutions of Great Britain and its Empire is unsurprising. The importance lies in justifying the desire to defend them as being one which cuts across class and is the true means of protecting liberty: the Conservative Party "is not a confederacy of nobles, it is not a democratic multitude; it is a party formed from all the numerous classes in the realm – classes alike and equal before the law". The object of that party was "to maintain the institutions of the country – not from any sentiment of political superstition, but

[102] *Report on proceedings at the Annual Conference, held at the Westminster Palace Hotel,* (Westminster: National Union of Conservative and Constitutionalist Associations, 1872) in the Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archives, National Union Pamphlets, PUB23/1, pamphlet 1875/5.

because we believe that it embodies the principles upon which a community like England alone can safely rest."[103]

The distinction between this and the Liberal sense of 'class' in which its expression was valid only in certain circumstances is immediate. The 'working man' in the Conservative conception of politics is not the wellspring of 'progress', nor to be admitted solely if he is able to fulfil his specific role in furthering the 'interests' of his 'class' and the nation. The Conservative concept of 'elevation of the condition of the people' was one which Disraeli's speech suggests was an important issue for the party, but suggests that its importance lies more in the wishes of the 'working class' electorate once already enfranchised: given that the 'working classes' now "possess every personal right of freedom, and, according to the conviction of the whole country, also an adequate concession of political rights, is it at all wonderful that they should ask the legislature to assist them in that behest as far as it is consistent with the general welfare of the nation?"[104]

The 'Conservative Working Man' as imagined by Disraeli, then, was one whose place in politics was granted not because he had a specific role to play and a particular self-interest in doing so, but because he belonged to the country, as did all persons from all 'classes', from whose institutions he derived his freedoms. Disraeli declares that the Reform Act of 1967 was based upon "a confidence that the great body of the people of this country were "Conservative." When I say "Conservative," I use the word in its purest and loftiest sense. I mean that the people of England, and especially the working classes of England, are proud of belonging to a great country, and wish to

[103] *Report on proceedings at the Annual Conference* (1872), p. 16.
[104] *Report on proceedings at the Annual Conference* (1872), p. 23.

maintain its greatness – that they are proud of belonging to an Imperial country, and are resolved to maintain, if they can, their empire – that they believe, on the whole, that the greatness and empire of England are to be attributed to the ancient institutions of the land."[105]

Disraeli's "confidence" in the essentially Conservative nature of the 'working classes', however, differs from the Liberal notion of the 'progress' of the 'working man' as being the driving force behind Liberalism. The 'Conservative Working Man', for Disraeli, is as such innately and incorruptibly – the only thing to ensure, as Derby states, is that he is able to detect Liberal subterfuge. The 'Liberal Working Man' of the mainstream Liberal Party's imagination, does not have this security. 'Progress' is a mission; as such it requires a starting point as well as a destination. The model of 'working man' utilised by the Conservatives suggests a degree of faith in the 'working classes' as to be able to let them come to their own conclusions over electoral questions, safe in the knowledge that the 'Liberal' is so easily depicted as the arrogant, interfering bearer of false promises we encounter with *Revolution Joe*. The Liberals, on the other hand, seemingly possessed little of this trust in those who they sought to represent, perhaps precisely because in seeking to 'rescue' them from the wicked Tory manipulator and 'elevate' their condition, the Liberals had begun from the point of assuming a certain helplessness in their would-be 'friends'. By doing so, the Liberal Party could easily become misconstrued through their pamphlet literature as busy-bodying interference or as underestimating the 'working man'.

[105] *Report on proceedings at the Annual Conference* (1872), p. 19.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that the chief difficulty inherent for the Liberal Party when trying to engage with the 'working-class' electorate involved the principle of the Liberal 'entitlement' to the votes of the 'working men'. The sense that the 'working classes' had a particular role to play in the political system created a challenge when the Liberals encountered 'working men' who, despite the Liberals' best efforts, embraced the Conservatives was one which ran contrary to the expectations of the supporters of the Liberal Party. As we have seen, it was the possession of precisely these expectations which caused the Conservative-friendly 'working men' to become figures of apprehension, fear and disgust for the Liberals. By expecting the 'working classes' to act in their own 'interests', which the Liberal supporters understood rationally as being similar to their own 'progressive' impulses, the Liberals took onto themselves the burden of explaining away or attempting to counter the figure of the 'Conservative Working Man' who rejected the supposedly rational choice to join Liberalism in their drive towards a 'progress' that would benefit the 'working man' as well as the nation at whole.

The Conservative Party possessed an imagining of the 'working man' which did not rely on anything more than a belief that left to his own devices, a 'working man' would naturally be a Conservative. Lacking this faith in their own imagined 'Liberal Working Man' to resist the appeals of the Tories for their votes, the Liberals engaged in a complex process of demonizing the 'Tory' to render him repulsive to the 'working men'. Yet the Conservatives, in conjunction with the Liberal Unionists, were able to provide an equally plausible critique of Gladstonian Liberalism for

failing to meet its own standards. The most dangerous problem for the Liberal Party however, was that this preoccupation with the ‘Conservative Working Man’ would divert the attention from the discontentment among the supposedly-‘Liberal Working Men’, which would lead to the growth of the Labour movement.

Chapter Three: The Liberals and Independent Labour, c. 1890-1914

"We do not believe in the possibility, or even desirability, of uniting the Liberal and Labour parties, but we do believe most potently in the union of the Labour forces in an Independent Party…It is the workers, now divided by party ties, whom we wish to see united."[1]

Introduction

The relationship between the Liberal Party and the working class electorate entered a new phase with the emergence of independent Labour politics in the 1890s. The creation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 saw several of the organisations which had been pursuing the goal of a distinct vehicle for working-class political interests join together with the Trades Union Congress to form a single party aimed at achieving this goal. Yet the emergence of the Labour Party, as the LRC. became in 1906, did not produce any unambiguous shift in political allegiances until at the least the aftermath of the First World War, and in fact the Liberal Party was able to win the biggest landslide in its history in 1906 despite the new competition Labour provided for the votes of the 'working man'.[2] After the two narrow victories of 1910, the Liberal Party were never again to win in a General Election, with historians such as Peter Clarke seeing the party's struggles and schism during the First World war as a key factor in explaining the Liberal decline.[3] The present chapter will

[1] John Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party – A Criticism of Liberal-Labourism*, (Middlesbrough; Middlesbrough and South Bank Branch ILP, 1903), p. 14, in the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, box 192, ref. 329.74-79.

[2] The Liberal party won 397 seats in the 1906 election, an improvement of 214 on their resulting 1900, and compared to the Conservative party's 156 seats in 1906. Labour had increased its share of seats from 2 in 1900 to 29 in 1906, with the Gladstone/Macdonald electoral pact acting to aid the Labour performance in the latter election.

[3] See for example Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, (Cambridge U.P., 1971), pp. 393-39; T.H. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935*, (London: Collins, 1966); M.W. Hart, 'The Liberals, The War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 395 (Oct., 1982), pp. 820-832.

study the way in which the Liberal Party adapted to the presence of the Labour Party on the political scene in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. It will show how the eventual post-war struggles the Liberals experienced can be traced back to the early difficulties the party experienced in responding to the Labour threat, and in particular the role played by Liberal narratives concerning the political responsibilities of the 'working man' to vote Liberal.

The opening extract comes from a pamphlet produced by John Arnott, treasurer of the Middlesbrough and South Bank branch of the Independent Labour Party. Published in 1903, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party: A Criticism of Liberal-Labourism* illustrates the difficulties the Liberal Party was encountering with the emergence of a form of Labour politics which did not conform to the vision of the Liberal Working Man we have encountered in earlier chapters. Arnott's pamphlet is a diatribe against Seamen's Union leader Joseph Havelock Wilson, who had served as an M.P. for Middlesbrough since the retirement of the sitting Liberal member, Mr. Isaac Wilson, before the 1892 General Election.[4] J.H. Wilson had, according to Arnott, been elected explicitly as a Labour candidate.[5] Wilson, however, declared his loyalty to the Liberal Party within a week of his being elected, and began a series of interventions in local affairs which blocked the progress of the Independent Labour Party in Yorkshire and the North-East.[6]

Arnott and Wilson's situation highlights the confused nature of Liberal and Labour relations during the Edwardian period. Studies of the early years of the Labour Party have increasingly moved away from understanding Labour's slow rise in support in

[4] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party,* p. 5.
[5] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party,* pp. 4-5.
[6] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 4; 7, pp. 11-13.

terms of deterministic class arguments.[7] The early Labour Party has been shown to have been extremely heterodox in its ideological positions, crystallising to an extent after the First World War around the explicitly statist 1918 Party Constitution. The notion of an inexorable rise in support as workers became aware of Labour's message has also been shown to be an idealised view of the party's nascent years.

Since Clarke's work on Edwardian Lancashire, much scholarship has been devoted to showing the degree of cooperation between Liberalism and Labour, and the ideological currents which allowed the parties to declare themselves part of a 'Progressive Alliance'. In particular, work on the 'New Liberalism' of writers such as J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse, taken up by politicians including David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and C.F.G. Masterman, has attracted much attention.[8] Michael Freeden has argued that the political philosophy of New Liberalism was well-developed and consistent in its arguments in favour of social reform, and conceived in a way which was thoroughly compatible with traditional Liberal

[7] The seminal essay 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 361 (Oct 1976), pp. 723-752, by H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and J.A. Kay is perhaps the most explicit of the older arguments which tried to explain the rise of Labour in terms of an inevitable product of working-class enfranchisement which was completed for males in 1918. For counter-arguments, see Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, (Cambridge U.P., 1971); T.H. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935*, (London: Collins, 1966). Both historians argue that the Liberal Party were afflicted more by their own wartime splits than by increased competition with Labour. The impact of the level of enfranchisement on the fortunes of the Liberals and Labour has been questioned by Duncan Tanner in *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, (Cambridge U.P., 1990); 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party,1906-1931', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (Dec., 1991), pp. 893-908 and 'Class voting and radical politics: the Liberal and Labour parties, 1910-1931', in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1920*, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), pp. 131-152; see also M.W. Hart, 'The Liberals, The War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 395 (Oct., 1982), pp. 820-832.

[8] J.A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy*, (reprint London: Elibron, 2005), and L.T. Hobhouse, 'Liberalism', in James Meadowcroft, (ed.) *Liberalism and Other Writings*, (Cambridge U.P., 1994). For the impact of 'New Liberral' thinking on these politicians, see for example Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971).33-37, 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', in Kenneth D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 159-182.; Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*; Edward David, 'The New Liberalism of C.F.G. Masterman, 1873-1927' in Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, pp. 159-182.

philosophy.[9] Peter Clarke in *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* argued that close relations had begun to develop between the Liberal and Labour parties, based upon a recognition by the former that the plight of the 'working classes' was such that it required more than the pursuit of traditional Liberal goals to rectify the social evils produced by the Victorian era.[10] The 'New Liberalism' would involve a greater role for the state in securing the wellbeing of its populace, and would lead the Asquith government to the first wave of welfare reforms.[11]

The impact of New Liberalism on the party's fortunes has already been challenged by historians. Keith Laybourn and George Reynolds' study of the relationship between the Liberal Party in West Yorkshire and the early Independent Labour Party suggested that the Liberal associations of the West Riding remained largely impervious to the demands for Labour representation in the local party bodies. [12] Laybourn and Reynolds argue that the failure of the form of collaborative politics such as that Clarke found in Lancashire, borne out of reluctance from West Riding Liberals to concede working-class representation in the party's local organisations was perhaps the greatest spur to the formation of the ILP. Laybourn has further suggested that the national picture of Liberal and Labour relations was at best piecemeal; with many local associations maintaining distinctively traditional campaigns throughout the supposed heyday of New Liberalism.[13]. H.V. Emy argued that the social policies of the Edwardian Liberal Party drew upon a wide range of political traditions within

[9] Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).
[10] Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*.
[11] For the impact of New Liberal thinking on welfare reform, see J.R. Hay, *The Origins of the Liberal Welfare Reforms, 1906-1914*, (London: Macmillan, 1975). pp. 33-36.
[12] Keith Laybourn and George Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour1890-1918*, (London; Croom Helm, 1984), p. 9.
[13] Keith Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The state of the debate', *History*, 80 (1995), pp. 207-226.

Liberal thinking rather than as a direct result of 'New Liberal' ideas, and that a comprehensive approach to social reform is hard to determine. [14]

Duncan Tanner's work has highlighted the 'coalitions' of interest groups within both the Liberal and Labour parties vying for influence. It was the relative strengths of the various bodies within the two parties that had the greatest influence on the relationships between the Liberals and Labour. He identifies a core of 'New Liberals' led by David Lloyd George who had close access to the party machinery and were able to insist on the development of a cohesive social policy. Crucially, at the same time as this the Labour leadership was held principally by the 'moral reformist' group within the party, with Ramsay MacDonald as its key figure, which had a shared Liberalism as its political inheritance and saw evolutionary change rather than drastic measures as its best chance for success. It was this coincidence of interests which made 'Progressivism' and the Lib-Lab electoral pact possible.[15]

Such viewpoints as these raise questions about the influence New Liberalism had on the party's appeals. The present chapter will show that, as much as the Liberal campaigns of the 1890s and 1900s bore some evidence of New Liberal policy commitments, these were discussed as part of a wider campaign which remained focused upon traditional Liberal ground. Liberal pamphlets continued to display similar tendencies under the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman and even when the party were on the verge of the 1906 landslide Election victory and on until the outbreak of war in 1914. By showing that the nature of the Liberal pamphlet literature

[14] H.V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914*, (Cambridge U.P., 1973), , pp. 104-118, 127-141.
[15] Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, (Cambridge U.P., 1990), pp. 33-43.

in this period was mixed at best between 'Old' and 'New' Liberalism in its commitments, the chapter will show that whatever impetus New Liberalism may have had in providing an 'ideology for social reform', the Liberal Party as a whole had not fundamentally reappraised their relationship with the 'working man' which defined their pamphlet campaigns of the post-1867 period.

The version of 'working man' to whom the Liberals were addressing themselves remained largely the same conceptualised person as had featured in the literature we have encountered in the first two chapters. The Liberals' chief concern remained to protect the 'working classes' from the influences of the 'Tory' and the 'Unionist' corrupters, with too little explication as to what differentiated the Liberal Party from the Independent Labour movement. Treating Labour as, in McKibbin's phrase an "adjunct" of the Liberal Party would create problems as the Independent Labour Party had comparatively little difficulty in articulating this divide, and created in a consistently maintained delineation of their own position with relation to the Liberals.[16] The ILP's campaign of delineation has not been as evident in the appeals of the Labour Party itself in its early years, but the existence of a well-articulated rationale for independence from the Liberal Party will be seen to provide a useful basis from which the wider party could draw when it began to assert its independence more forcefully following the Great War. As I shall now discuss, the chief difficulty for the Liberal Party with regards outlining the distinctiveness of the Liberal message was that, in their understanding of working-class politics, there should not have been any separation in any case.

[16] Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 51.

The Liberal Dilemma, 1892-1900

The relationship between the Liberal Party and the various bodies advocating independent Labour representation was defined by the degree to which Liberalism overlapped with the political philosophy of the Labour Party, and just as importantly, the boundaries between the two. From the very terms of this comparison we can see that any over-emphasis on the compatibility of the two wings of the 'progressive' movement should be avoided. As we shall see, for every Liberal pamphlet which emphasised the ways in which the party shared with the Labour Party a similar desire to remedy the grievances of the 'working man', there would be another which stressed the evils of 'Socialism' and sought to exonerate the Liberal Party from Unionist charges that they were mere apologists for the confiscation of property and the selfish interests of the 'working-class' agitators.

The years following the Home Rule split saw the Liberal Party out of power for six years, but victory in 1892 was not followed by a sense of euphoria in the Liberal movement. The failure to achieve a substantial majority despite the promised enactment of the 'Newcastle Programme' resulted in a climate in which the party was would need to analyse its own shortcomings in attracting the support of the 'working-class' electorate. However, the Liberals proved slow to do so. The period between the Irish crisis and the party's return to office in 1905 has been characterised as a period of drift and ideological incoherence. Michael Bentley's work in *The Climax of Liberal Politics* paints a picture of a party which far from comprehending the reasons behind their lack of success were loathe to admit that they were indeed failing. According to

Bentley, buoyed by a series of by-election victories, the Liberals' disappointment at failing to win a large majority produced confusion rather a clamour for change.[17]

One of the key areas historians have studied has been the rise in the 1890s of a new faction within the Liberal Party centred around the 'Liberal Imperialists', led by the former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery and counting future premier H.H. Asquith among its members.[18] The 'Liberal Imperialists' have been discussed alongside the emergence of 'National Efficiency' as a key concept which appeared capable of providing a new ideological platform which the Liberal Party could usefully adopt.[19] The debates around 'National Efficiency' arose out of alarm from many quarters concerning the social conditions of the poor in Britain, and were brought into focus by the performance of the army during the Boer War, which ended in 1903.[20] Based upon the notion that scientific and business expertise could be used to 'mechanically' improve the medical and moral condition of the British people, 'National Efficiency' linked Liberal Imperialists such as Rosebery to Fabian thinkers such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb and G.B. Shaw, but ultimately failed to give Liberal Imperialism any advantage over other factions in the Liberal Party, and Rosebery's project failed to secure control over the Liberal Party as a whole, while Lloyd George failed when

[17] Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice, 1868-1918*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p. 98; see also Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics*, pp. 38-45.
[18] See H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian elite*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Peter D. Jacobson, 'Rosebery and Liberal Imperialism, 1899-1903', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Nov., 1973), pp. 83-107; D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Robert Rhodes James, *Rosebery*, (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1963; paperback edition London: Phoenix, 1995), also Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism, 1776-1988*, (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 133-142.
[19] G.R Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971); Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism*, pp. 138-142.
[20] For the impact of the poor performance by the army in South Africa, see Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, pp. 34-53; Frans Coatzee, *For Party or Country*, pp. 38-42 for the wider debate which affected the Conservative Party.

utilising 'National Efficiency' as a means of forging an alliance with similarly-minded Conservatives alienated too many partisans within the party to claim sufficient support.[21]

One reason for the ultimate failure of the Liberal Imperialists cause was that 'National Efficiency' in itself was not a distinctly Liberal creed, as Frans Coetzee has shown that it proved a more malleable and durable concept when used as a basis for Conservative political thought.[22] 'National Efficiency' did not sit well alongside the other predominant ideological trend within the Liberal Party due to its coldly mechanistic approach to reform, which Radicialism's central attachment to a 'common humanity' could not easily agree with.[23] Liberal Imperialism, and with it the outright commitment to 'National Efficiency' as a rationale for reform, were dealt a blow by the uncertain leadership of Rosebery, and by the resurgence in Radicalism occurring in the first few years of the twentieth-century. David Bebbington has identified a renewal in Nonconformist agitation in the late nineteenth century, spurred on by a deepening awareness of the responsibilities of the state towards the poor and their problems. Bebbington argues that these Nonconformist agitators provided a groundswell of support for 'New Liberal' ideas concerning the necessity of using state action to remedy social ills.[24] Stephen Koss argues that the unpopular 1902 Education Act, which forced local ratepayers to fund denominational religious education, had

[21] Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, pp. 138-141,162-170, 200-204; see also Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism*,133-148.
[22] Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England*, (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 38-70. 'National Efficiency'
[23] Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, pp. 101-106.
[24] David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp. 11-17.

deepened Nonconformity's ties with the Liberal Party in the Edwardian period and assisted the Liberal revival in that period which culminated in the 1906 landslide.[25]

A study of the Liberal pamphlet literature reveals much evidence to support the notion that a continued adherence to 'shibboleths' such as religious questions and temperance reform remained the key interest of the Radical wing of the Liberal Party, and that up to the end of the nineteenth century, the Liberal appeal to working-class voters had not adjusted far from the safe territory of old Radicalism. The proceedings of the National Liberal Federation's annual conference were issued each year in pamphlet form, and the discussions during the 1893 event suggest a developing sense of the need to produce a programme which would address the concerns of the 'working-class' voters. The tone of the meeting seems to have been one of introspection and a desire to understand the unsatisfactory result of the previous year.[26] The arguments during the Second Session of the Council surrounded the effectiveness of the Newcastle Programme as a means of attracting 'working-class' support. In the view of Reverend W. Tuckwell, a delegate from Rugby and a self-proclaimed 'Radical Parson', the Liberals needed to do more to demonstrate their commitment to tackling the Social Question. In his view the issue of Home Rule inspired "no mad enthusiasm" in favour of the Liberals, and he therefore attributed the qualified success of 1892 to the party's stance over social issues, but stressed that a failure to properly outline their stance on the matter had cost them a greater victory:

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[25] Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1975), pp. 39-40; 47-54.

[26] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation, held in Liverpool on Thursday and Friday January 19th and 20th, 1893*, (LPD, 1893), in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.; see also D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery*, pp. 211-215. Hamer suggests that the "unco-ordinated, and incoherent" programme had been the result of the lack of ideological rigour which had set in during the last years of the Gladstonian era when Home Rule had acted to obscure intra-party disputes and prevented true debate on Liberalism's future.

> the small majority they had obtained was due to the fact the promises for English social reform which were given on behalf of the Liberal chief by candidates had not been endorsed by the chief in good time. Had those pledges been confirmed early, our majority would not have been 40, but 140.[27]

However, the mere fact of victory itself had convinced other delegates that the Liberal Party had little need to lambast itself over its social policies. Mr. R.J. Price, M.P. for East Norfolk, suggested that the Newcastle Programme had been entirely laudable in its aims, and that while it may not have been perceived as an effective final settlement of the social question that it was as advanced as was advisable for the present: he stated that

> all Liberal members and the Liberal Party ought to be thankful for the Newcastle programme; and if some of them could see a little further than that programme they should remember the American proverb, that "It is better not to bite off more than you can chew".[28]

Price made reference to suggestions that the implementation of the Newcastle Programme would take up the work of Parliament for twenty years, however, in his belief "if they passed three or four of (the Programme's points) they should have done enough to secure their position at the polls", and that this would enhance the "proud position" of Britain, "not merely for wealth and glory, but because of the happiness and freedom of its inhabitants."[29]

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[27] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation, 1893,* p. 4.
[28] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation, 1893,* p. 3.
[29] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation, 1893*, p. 4.

In this respect Price suggests a continuation of Liberal priorities of political and religious reforms, but his reference to 'happiness and freedom' also indicate the debates which would define the relationship between Liberalism and the emerging Labour Party during the next decade and beyond. Reverend Tuckwell suggests an awareness of a shift in public conceptions of 'happiness and freedom', and more importantly, an indication that he understood there to be an increasing dissatisfaction which characterised the 'working-class' experience of top-down Liberal legislation for their supposed benefit. Tuckwell states that "The temper of the country had changed since 1885; the aspirations of the country were enlarged, and men no longer submissively accepted measures from their leaders." The perceived shift in the attitudes of the 'working man' towards the Liberal legislators manifested itself in a demand for greater emphasis on social matters than the Newcastle Programme promised: "there had emerged a clear demand that in framing and rescinding laws the lives, the health and the morals of the workers who created the wealth of England" should be put before the interests of "the few" – the capitalist businessmen who continued to "indulge in superfluities while the many were wanting the necessities of life."[30]

Tuckwell's statements are phrased in terms which would become familiar in Labour propaganda: the unjust discrepancy between the labourer's incomes and their contribution to the economy, which were depicted as parallel to the disproportionate rewards drawn by the employers in comparison to their efforts. Yet we can also see these arguments in terms of Liberal critiques of the wasteful and indolent 'upper classes' which formed the basis of earlier Liberal campaigns. Tuckwell's proposals to

[30] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation*, p.4.

better represent the views of the 'working classes' also suggest he saw no reason why Liberalism should not continue to be the creed of the 'working man'. As well as calling for social policies involving arbitration during strikes, the establishment of labour exchanges and shortening of working hours, Tuckwell also recommends political reforms including full male and female suffrage, payment of members. However, he also repeats familiar Liberal calls for Welsh and Scottish disestablishment and for stricter legislation concerning public houses. He concludes his proposals by stating that his suggested reforms "were all nothing but the Newcastle Programme sympathetically extended and courageously administered."[31]

The Liberal members could count themselves reassured that there was no shortage of Liberal thought devoted to how the great social questions of the day could be tackled without requiring any deviation from the fundamental principles of personal liberty and the ownership of private property. John Stuart Mill had in the last years of his life begun to construct a Liberal critique of the doctrines of socialism and had come to the conclusion that while the issues of social injustice and unnecessary suffering which were raised by socialist agitators were genuine ones, there was no case for the abandonment of the capitalist system which currently existed.

Mill saw no flaws in the operation of capital that were not better addressed by reform of the present institutions and the promotion of self-reliance and competition, and that the various schemes of Louis Blanc, the Fourierists and Owenites, not to mention the revolutionary methods espoused by the more radical elements of socialism, would do

[31] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation*, p.50, also see pp. 44-45 for David Lloyd George - "No party ever set itself to a nobler task than that contained in the Newcastle Programme".

more harm to humanity and society than good.[32] The degree to which such thought had permeated the ranks of the NLF is uncertain, but the key elements of Mill's critique would become significant features in the Liberal Party's professions on the imperative towards social reform, and the fitness of their party to achieve it.

Price and Tuckwell therefore suggest that, at least at this stage, while the importance of legislating to ameliorate social evils experienced by the 'working classes' was vital in order to secure their electoral future, they believed that the Liberal Party's programme lacked little more than a steadfast commitment to their principles as already espoused. More importantly, by noting the perils of legislating too far in advance of what they were capable of at that time, Price maintains a line which we have already encountered when discussing the ways in which 'progress' was understood as having a set pace which should neither be resisted nor forced.

We can also see a continuation of the prescriptive character of Liberal legislation; the tendency for the party to determine for itself what the 'working classes' required in terms of legislation. While Tuckwell noted an increasing tendency for the 'working classes' to eschew such practices, he nonetheless maintains that the Newcastle Programme as outlined by the party remained essentially an accurate summary of the legislative desires of that group. While it may have been unsurprising that at this early stage Liberals such as Tuckwell were not considering Independent Labour as a serious rival in terms of electoral politics, it is worthwhile noting that he depicts the struggle

[32] John Stuart Mill, 'Chapters on Socialism' in Jonathan Riley, (ed.), *Principles of Political Economy*, (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 413-436.

over the votes of the agricultural labourer as seeking "the fulfilment of Radical hopes and the disappointment of Tory expectations."[33]

Debate within the party concerning the unsatisfactory results of 1892 highlight therefore the difficulties the Liberals were encountering in providing an answer to the Social Question. Although some Liberals were evidently able to see the dangers of prescriptive and tentative measures, their faith in their ability to provide a settlement of social issues by maintaining a commitment to long-established Liberal course is equally apparent. While the language used reflected a new appreciation of the socialist critique of the economic and social factors at play in late Victorian society, many of the remedies proposed remained rooted in traditional Liberal policy areas. The debates also illustrate the continuing reliance on the tropes associated with the 'Liberal Working Man' – desiring of reforms, yet understanding the necessity of gradualism and the importance of political reforms being secured before other changes could be attempted.

The lessons of 1892 appear to have gone unlearnt; at least in as far as can be seen in the public pronouncements of the Liberal Party. Paul Readman's essay 'The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late-Victorian Britain' suggests that there was more at work during the Liberals' defeat in that election than poor organisation, an argument Readman states to have become the orthodox explanation.[34] He argues that deep divisions in the party between Rosebery's Liberal Imperialist faction and the remainder of the party leadership rendered any attempt at developing a constructive platform for electoral success impossible. The Liberals instead relied on

[33] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation, 1893,* p.5.
[34] Paul Readman, 'The 1895 General Election and Political Change in Late-Victorian Britain', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 2., (Jun., 1999), p. 467.

'programmatic' politics and attacks on the House of Lords to attract support.[35] As can be seen from the pamphlet literature, the party showed little signs of recognising the narrowness of that policy's appeal even after Rosebery's departure, and continued to stress the lack of any necessity for comprehensive social legislation.

In 1899, Campbell-Bannerman, discussing the party's policy on Home Rule, broadened the scope of his answer to explain the lacklustre legislative records of the fourth Gladstone and sole Rosebery administrations.[36] Again, he attributed this largely to the lack of a substantial majority. The two governments "carried some great and notable reforms, yet accomplished very much less than was expected and hoped of them", and this was due to an "inadequate" majority. However, Campbell-Bannerman suggested that the failure to secure a substantial majority was a cause of, rather than a result of, a failure to engage with the electorate.

He in fact claimed that the legislative programme of an administration was determined by the weight and character of the voices which had returned it: drawing upon a Turkish proverb which stated that one should "never proceed to give a name to a child until its sex has been ascertained", Campbell-Bannerman stated that a government's priorities "depend upon the sex of the majority with which the constituency furnish us." An election may produce either a masculine majority possessing the strength and vigour which would make it "fit for great enterprise", or a feminine majority "equally excellent in heart, clear in mind, and full of generous emotions" but incapable of pushing through great legislative feats. The 'character' of

[35] Readman, 'The 1895 General Election', p. 469.
[36] *Liberal Policy and Liberal Principles: Speech delivered by the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman at Hull, on March 8th, 1899*, (London: LPD, 1899), in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1899', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

the electorate could not be ascertained beforehand, and this made it "impossible for us to lay down any fixed programme for our action" before assuming power. "Priority must depend upon the circumstances of the day, upon the feeling of the nation", but also "upon the temper of the party."[37]

These statements could suggest that Campbell-Bannerman was prepared to reject a prescriptive form of Liberalism in favour of a greater receptiveness to public opinion. However, the impression given by those statements is rather that the *pace* of any programme of legislation would have to be dictated by public opinion; it is not suggesting that the issues which any Liberal government would address were to be decided by popular pressure. Campbell-Bannerman's statement is therefore consistent with the arguments of the 1880s, which pressured for electoral reforms on the basis that popular calls for such change demonstrated that the correct conditions had arrived for franchise extension to take place. Such an argument reverses the relationship between political parties and the national opinion; it was the job of the former to formulate ideas, which were to be implemented as and when the latter had sufficient desire for their adoption. The Liberal Party's relationship with public opinion continued to be characterised by a requirement of the electorate to be composed of such members as would help produce 'progress', thus dictating the basis on which the Liberals conceived 'working-class' politics to operate. A strictly-delineated form of 'working-class' politics was complemented by the notion that Liberalism's other role besides allowing change whose time had come was the resistance to ideas that had not. With this in mind, we shall now turn to the party's relationship with the Labour Party.

[37] *Liberal Policy and Liberal Principles*, p. 6.

Liberalism and Socialism

The 'Labour Question' undoubtedly formed a large part of the Liberal appeal to the 'working-class' electorate in the 1890s. Yet the Liberals remained determined to distance themselves from the perceived evils of 'socialist' doctrine as we have seen in Mill's critique, and attempted to construct a form of relationship with the 'working classes' which sought to provide redress for the grievances of the worker without conceding the need for the more advanced tenets of socialism, which were understood chiefly to be the overuse of state power to the detriment of the exercise of free choice, and the perils of pursuing economic equality. As we shall see, however, there exists a significant case for stating that the Liberals were themselves creating a socialist 'straw man'; based upon their own fears of the rise of such politics. The imagined form of 'socialism' with which the Liberals understood themselves to be contending would shape the way in which they related themselves to the Labour Party as it coalesced, and provides a framework from which we can analyse the Liberal attitude towards independent working-class politics.

The form of 'socialism' the Liberals defined themselves against should be considered in the light of the wider European socialist movement. As Geoff Eley described in *Forging Democracy*, this could take many forms, and the form of socialist thought which characterised the British Labour Party was one which was notable for its moderation and, above all, was shaped by its accommodation with Liberal gradualist politics.[38] Tanner discusses the highly ambiguous relationship between British Labour

[38] Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 65. See also John Breuilly, 'Liberalism or Social Democracy? Britain and Germany 1850-1875', in *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, paperback edition 1994), pp. 115-116; pp. 125-128.

and socialist doctrine, ill-defined as he argues it may have been in any case. For Tanner, this ambiguity was typified by the figure of Ramsay Macdonald, whose 'moral reformist' stance allowed him to position himself as a socialist in terms of his ultimate ambitions for long-term change, but a pragmatist in his short-term politics whose rejection of the 'class war' thesis placed him well outside the 'extreme' which figured in so much anti-socialist liberal rhetoric.[39] The 'socialism' of the Liberal imagination was not necessarily born from a deep understanding of the nuances of the British Labour Party, but drew on an awareness of the more radical elements present in European socialism.

One of the most successful socialist party of the time, the German SPD, were, as Eley notes, pressed into an oppositional stance against the economic and political system in Germany because of the particular circumstances in which it operated – the Anti-Socialist laws and an inability to use parliamentary politics to effect legislative change due to the peculiarities of the German political system rendered a revolutionary stance necessary.[40] Stefan Berger notes the influence the SPD had on the early Labour Party as a model of a successful socialist organisation, but the oppositional nature of their German counterparts was not adopted by the British party.[41] However, for Liberal observers, the 'socialist' threat typified by groups such as the SPD was easily

[39] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 30-35; see also Jose Harris, 'Labour's political and social thought' in Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo, (eds.), *Labour's First Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), pp. 13-14 for an account of how Macdonald's 'moral reform' socialism, along with that of Hardie, fit into the broader spectrum of Labour thinking.
[40] Eley, *Forging Democracy*, pp. 66-68. Eley's 'political systems' argument has been questioned in Mary Hilson, *Political Change and the Rise of Labour in Comparative Perspective*, (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 43-47. Hilson argues that the *dynamic* of political change, rather than the political system in operation at a given time, was the most important factor in determining the degree of cooperation between established parties and labour movements. For the purposes of this chapter, Eley's basic point that the accommodating nature of British politics made the 'rise of Labour' easier than it was for their German counterparts can be taken without too much difficulty, even if taking Hilson's questioning the deterministic aspects of the 'political systems' thesis as valid.
[41] Stefan Berger, 'Labour in Comparative Perspective', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, (eds.), *Labour's First Century*, (Cambridge U.P., 2000), pp. 314-315.

transmutable by such contacts, and fears of this occurring must be understood as a key factor in the Liberals' relationship with Labour. Yet as we shall see, the Liberals were nonetheless keen to point out that if these more extreme facets of 'socialism' were the key difference between themselves and Labour, the rejection by Labour of such tendencies would allow the junior party to see that its other objectives were all achievable as part of the Liberal mission of gradual 'progress'.

Liberal rejection of the extremes of Socialism was depicted as attacking the greed and selfishness of the 'working classes'. Liberal M.P. Samuel Smith, in the pamphlet *Letters in Reply to the Manifesto of the Social Democratic Foundation,* replies to H.M. Hydman's defence of socialism by first attacking it as "confiscation", and would result in "a murderous civil war" and the destruction of society if carried out to its full extent.[42] Here we can begin to see how the Liberal alternative to socialism derives its philosophy from the concept of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' expressions of 'class' sentiment we encountered in Chapter One, and helps understand the principles which underlay the Liberal pamphlet campaigns of the 1890s and 1900s.

The 'Liberal Working Man' to whom these documents were addressed would be characterised in the Liberal mind by his commitment to the common good rather than his own sectional interests; and rather than appeasing his desires for greater equality he was to commit himself to the political and religious struggles of the broader Liberal movement as a means of achieving rewards in Labour legislation which he would thereby earn. Campbell-Bannerman's speech referenced above gave housing for the poor and Old Age Pensions prominent places in his section on 'Social Policy',

[42] Samuel Smith, *Letters in Reply to the Manifesto of the Social Democratic Foundation,* (Liverpool: Turner, Routledge and Co., 1884), p. 3-4, in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308/N6, Vol. 27/16.

but listed temperance as the first concern of any Liberal schemes for improving the lives of the 'working classes'.[43]

A narrow definition of the acceptable parameters of 'working-class' politics would characterise the Liberal Party's relationship with the early Independent Labour politics. Shortly before his election as member for Newcastle in 1906, Liberal candidate Josiah Wedgewood participated in a debate with Teresa Billington, a member of the ILP as well as a campaigner for women's suffrage, which was published as a pamphlet entitled *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*[44] In it, Wedgwood defended the Liberal Party for opposing the 'Socialism' of the Independent Labour Party, defined in terms of an illiberal and partisan form of politics, while maintaining the essential compatibility of Liberalism with a less dogmatic application of 'Socialist' principle. Addressing the audience, he stated that "He wanted them all to be Liberals; not because he wanted their votes…but because the essence of true Liberalism and true Socialism was the same." The ILP, however, was not representative of 'true Socialism' – defined as "The live of justice and mankind, at all costs to yourself" by Wedgwood. Instead, the ILP "had got off that track, and were setting up more sordid motives" and now pursued "a new creed based on selfishness…they put forward their members, not as representing the people as a whole, but one class only."[45]

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[43] *Liberal Policy and Liberal Principles*, p. 12.
[44] *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals? A Debate between Mr. Josiah Wedgwood and Miss Teresa Billington*, (Hanley: Wood, Mitchell and Co., n.d, c. 1906), in the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, box 192, ref 329.74-79. The relationship between the ILP and the Women's Suffrage movement is explored by Krista Cowman in 'Incipient Toryism'? The Women's Social and Political Union and the Independent Labour Party, 1903-1914, *History Workshop Journal*, No. 53 (Spring, 2002), pp. 128-148. Cowman dismisses the notion that the WSPU's declaration of political neutrality following the Pankhursts' resignation from the ILP represented a breach in practice with their former allies among the rank and file of the Union, and stresses the continuity of activity conducted between the two bodies following the declaration.
[45] *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, p. 6.

Wedgwood makes here a clear distinction between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' forms of Socialism. However, Wedgwood here is not arguing in favour of opening a divide between Liberalism and Labour, but quite the opposite. He suggests that the Independent Labour Party are misinterpreting their own philosophy, which in Wedgwood's argument means that Independent Labour, from a philosophical point of view, is merely a vehicle for 'illegitimate' expressions of concerns which the Liberal Party were adequately equipped to represent in a 'legitimate' fashion. He highlights the success of the Australian Socialist Government in putting forward Labour legislation without resorting to the language or practice of "confiscation", and stated that this proved that "when Socialism was put into practice it consisted almost entirely of measures advocated by Liberals."[46]

The issue as to whether Labour and the Liberals should unite was, as far as Wedgwood's arguments suggest, a meaningless one: the two were one and the same, divided solely by Labour's abandonment of the key principles which underpinned the pursuit of 'progress.' Division, for Wedgwood, could only benefit the Tories: "instead of helping, the ILP tried to ruin the Liberal Party of progress." The chief difference between the Labour and Liberal parties was a commitment to the fundamental principle of liberty, which undermined the ILP's plea for independence: "theirs was the very negation of independence" in pressuring their candidates to swear an oath to assist the Liberals, even in cases where the Liberal and Labour candidates shared views. In doing so "they were obeying blind orders and not their conscience…though

[46] *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, p. 6.

it meant the victory of a Tory." Indeed, for Wedgwood, this pursuit of office to the detriment of the common good was tantamount to Toryism itself[47].

The belief that the existence of Independent Labour gave a boost to the chances of the Conservatives was a significant element in the way in which the Liberals conceived the relationship between themselves and the Socialist parties. Laybourn and Reynolds have noted that some Liberal associations of West Yorkshire were concerned that the actions of the ILP were little more than a Conservative plot to hamper their attempts to garner 'working-class' votes.[48] Independent Labour was, therefore, a heresy in much the same way as the 'Working –class Toryism' and Liberal Unionism. However, we should seek to explain why this particular departure from principle did not occupy the Liberal mind to the same degree as the Conservative-leaning alternatives.

One answer is suggested by the work of Paul Readman and Andrew Thompson on the particular forms which working-class Toryism took in the last years of the nineteenth century.[49] Readman's work on the 'khaki' election of 1900 follows from his study of the 1895 contest in rejecting lack of organisation as the key to explaining the Liberal defeat in favour of an argument which stresses the way in which the Conservatives used the Boer War to construct a base of support. The Conservative appeal to the 'working man' involved the creation of a highly-gendered form of political language

[47] *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, p. 8.
[48] Laybourn and Reynolds, *Liberalism and Labour*, p. 71.

[49] Paul Readman, 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (Jan., 2001), pp. 107-145; Andrew Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 36, No.2, Twentieth-Century British Studies, (Apr., 1997), pp. 147-177.

which emphasised their own patriotism in strongly masculine terms, while also seizing upon the issue of Uitlander rights to further their credentials as party of political liberties and made clear the economic benefits of the South African war for the British worker.[50] Thompson's work on the 'languages of Imperialism' suggests that there was a broader failure among the Liberals to develop or depict a vision of imperialism which was sufficiently attractive or cohesive to capitalise on an issue which had acquired a significant place in popular politics.[51] Liberal preoccupation with the 'working-class Tory' over his Labour counterpart can then be explained by the difficulties they experienced in countering imperialist and patriotic rhetoric, which necessitated the employment of much of their resources of propaganda.

Added to this, however, appears to be a genuine conviction on behalf of the Liberal Party that what we perhaps should term the 'Independent Working Man' was less a victim of Tory seduction, despite the fears of Laybourn and Reynolds' West Riding Liberals, than the 'Tory Working Man'.[52] The 'Independent Working Man' was instead, as Wedgwood described, misguided and potentially dangerous in the course he pursued, but was ultimately of the same sentiment as the 'Liberal Working Man', and thus required little more than persuasion of the relevance of the Liberal programme to his condition to bring him back to the fold.

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[50] Readman, 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism and British Politics', pp. 109; for gendered language see pp. 122-125; for the exploitation of the violation of Uitlander rights see pp. 120-121.
[51] Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism', pp. 160-161; p. 170.
[52] Laybourn and Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*, (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 71 . Laybourn and Reynolds suggest that West Riding Liberals harboured suspicions that independent Labour representation was promoted by the Conservative Party as a means to dissuade local trade organisations and working-class voters from supporting the Liberal Party. The Yorkshire Liberals' suspicion of labour representation, coupled with a belief that independent working-class politics were irrelevant as they believed themselves to be the proper vehicle for the 'working man' and his 'interests', were a key factor in convincing labour representatives of the need for their own party given the Liberals' intransigence on working-class issues, see pp. 6-7, 18-20

The closeness of the imagined 'Independent working man' and the 'Liberal working man' is outlined in another Campbell-Bannerman speech from 1903 in Lees, which was published by the L.P.D as the pamphlet *Liberal Policy*. The Liberal Leader criticised the Balfour administration for neglecting the public finances and the "accepted principles and doctrines on which our prosperity is founded"; but also of failing to improve "the condition of the mass of the people (nor) their moral welfare" and putting the interests of business, entrenched social privilege and the established church before those of the people.[53] These he described as the questions which would concern "every honest and genuine Liberal in the land…and not only of us who are Liberals, but of the great masses of the workers".[54] Campbell-Bannerman here suggests the link between the Liberal Party and the 'working classes' is one which is based on a shared set of political principles, the particular features of which are identifiably Liberal.

Campbell-Bannerman expressed his support for the attempts of the 'working classes' to secure greater representation for themselves, admitting they provided "new competitors for public favour" for the Liberals of Leeds. However his reasons for supporting this development were firstly that on "the vital and essential elements of public policy, there is absolutely no difference…between us Liberals and those who speak in the name of Labour." His second was that "there is a wide gulf, unbridged and in some case unbridgeable, between both of us…and the party now in power". Moreover, this divide between the 'progressive' forces and the Conservatives necessitated the closeness in the philosophy of the Liberal and Labour parties: if there

[53] *Liberal Policy: A Speech delivered by the Right Hon. Sir H. Campbell Bannerman at Leeds on March 19th, 1903*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1903), p. 4., in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1903', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[54] *Liberal Policy*, pp. 4-5.

were not "this unanimity between Labour and Liberalism…the one must be insincere and the other must be unreal."[55]

We can see here that for Campbell-Bannerman, the case for admitting the case for Independent Labour was that the two were united in opposition to the greater threat of Conservatism. His comments allow us to understand perhaps the most important factor in explaining the Liberals' focus of their attention on those 'working men' whose diversion from the Liberal cause had taken them towards the Unionist fold. The 'Independent Working Men' may, in some instances, have taken the tenets of Socialism to dangerous extremes as Wedgwood argued, but the essence of their convictions remained, at least as far as the Liberal Party were concerned, identical to their own. Campbell-Bannerman's concept of 'unanimity' of 'progressive' forces was centred on the degree to which the 'Independent Working Man' possessed Liberal sympathies.

Campbell-Bannerman's views on the relevancy of Liberal policies and ideals to the interests of the 'working classes' were made clear in his address to the National Liberal Federation in 1903. In the speech, also issued as a pamphlet by the LPD, he argues for the importance of "The Old Liberal Principles" to the 'working classes'.[56] He rejects the Conservative charge that the party were out of step with the political climate of the day in calling for religious equality, Free Trade and licensing reform. Campbell-Bannerman states that the prominence of these issues in the Liberal campaign was that the policy of the Conservatives necessitated their defence. It should be noted that it was not merely the government themselves who were to blame,

[55] *Liberal Policy*, p. 5.
[56] *Proceedings in connection with the 25th Annual Meeting of the Federation, 1903*, p. 4.

but "the foolish electors who put them in power – it is they who have aroused the sleeping issues." Noting the Education Act of 1902's effect on religious liberty, the need to defend Free Trade in the face of Conservative tax policy and the sugar conventions, Campbell-Bannerman also raises the issue of freedom of combination, which he links with a wider Tory attack on freedom of labour as exemplified by the South African controversy over Chinese Labour.

These "rearguard actions against the powers of reaction and on behalf of civil and religious liberty" were not just defensive, but were strengthening the bond between the Liberals and Labour: "our success…can only serve to give training and fresh inspiration to the progressive forces of our country in the onward march…toward the development of the welfare of the people."[57] The perceived unity of Liberals and Labour on the basis of Liberal 'progress' therefore, meant that as far as the former were concerned, these shared principles justified Liberal prioritisation of their 'shibboleths' in the face of the Tory onslaught. Indeed, it was the very possession of principles which Campbell-Bannerman identified as the key difference between themselves and the Conservatives, and suggested that the greatest problem for the Liberals was that they had "not too few but too many legislative purposes" he declared that the priority for the party was those issues which involved core Liberal principles[58]. While this may have been a prudent lesson derived from Campbell-Bannerman and Price's analysis of the failures of 1892-95, it would create problems when this principle was extended to their presumed allies in the Independent Labour movement.

[57] *Proceedings in connection with the 25th Annual Meeting of the Federation, 1903*, p. 75.
[58] *Liberal Policy*, p. 7.

Independent Labour and Liberalism

Campbell-Bannerman's confident prediction that an anti-Tory sentiment and a shared fondness for Liberal principles would cement an alliance with Independent Labour is of course at odds with the absolute rejection of such union which we saw from John Arnott at the beginning of the chapter. Arnott published his pamphlet at the same time as Campbell-Bannerman made his speech at the National Liberal Federation, and his arguments would therefore have also been made in the context of the 'Lib-Lab Pact' of 1903 between the Liberals and the Labour Representation Committee. While Arnott's specific identification of himself as being a member of the ILP does suggest that we should be careful in using his remarks to represent the wider Labour perspective, it should be noted that Arnott does speak in favour of the formation of the LRC., and accuses Wilson of having broken the constitution of the organisation by his actions.[59] We should not, therefore, be too hasty in dismissing the relevance his hostility to union with the Liberal Party as being merely the voice of one unhappy ILP official, but instead recognise it as being part of the Independent Labour movement's complex, and at times antagonistic, relationship with the Liberals. As we shall see, Arnott's views bore comparisons with those of Ramsay Macdonald, the LRC. chairperson who negotiated the Lib-Lab Pact, suggesting a broader sense of unease about the Liberal attitude towards Independent Labour than the comfortable accommodation Clarke found in Lancashire's 'Progressive' coalition.[60]

[59] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, pp. 3-4.
[60] For an example of another contest which provoked similar conflicts over the nature of 'Lib-Lab' representation see Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, pp..57-59. The Chesterfield by-election of 1913 saw the Labour Party unable to field a competitive candidate of their own and forced to nominate the 'Lib-Lab' politician Barnet Kenyon, despite his well-known inclination towards the Liberals.

Duncan Tanner's work on the relationship between Labour and the Liberals in the early twentieth-century stressed, as we have seen, the significance of internal factors within the Labour Party in order to explain how the two parties came to co-operate to the degree they did. However, he also notes that key areas of conflict within the party as to how deep such cooperation should run were frequently the result of conflict between the 'political' wing of the nascent party, supplied chiefly from the ranks of the ILP; and the trades unions, who retained less animosity towards the Liberal Party than the ILP due to a long history of union reform passed by the Liberals.[61]

The degree to which the Labour Party diverged from the Liberals has been a source of much historical debate. Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid's 1991 collection *Currents of Radicalism* argued that the bulk of Labour's political traditions were drawn from pre-existing Radicalism and thus neither the ILP or the LRC. and Labour Party represented a fundamental departure from established politics, the only new dimension being Labour's labelling of its ideology and politics as 'socialist', despite their Radical Liberal origins.[62] H.V. Emy had previously suggested that many in the Liberal Party regarded the ILP and subsequently the Labour Party as little more than an extension of their own left wing, and work since *Currents of Radicalism* has linked the collection's reassessment of Labour's novelty as a political force with Tanner's psephological deconstruction of the inexorable 'rise of Labour' and studied the

[61] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 38-39; see also Alastair J. Reid, 'Labour and the Unions', in Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century*, pp. 224-225.
[62] Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid, 'Currents of Radicalism, 1850-1914, in Biagini and Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850-1914*, (Cambridge U.P., 1991), pp. 5-6, 17-19.

Liberal/Labour relationship to see how cooperation rather than hostility can best explain the historical trajectories of the two parties and their levels of support.[63]

Arnott's arguments against Joseph Havelock Wilson's suitability as a Labour representative and the wider issue of Liberal and Labour unity run in direct contrast to Campbell-Bannerman's statements in favour of cooperation. The Liberal leader's conception of an anti-Tory compact was not in evidence in Middlesbrough, where Wilson's actions resulted in the Conservative candidate winning the seat in 1900.The electoral defeat did not, however, prove the necessity of reaching such an agreement as much as it demonstrated for Arnott the reasons why this was an unwanted arrangement:

> Mr Wilson, who sacrificed principles and associates on the altar of political expediency, now obtained the fruits of his labours. His policy was designed to unite and consolidate the Liberal and Labour forces in Middlesbrough. It has miserably failed. No union can be established on a sacrifice of principle…The one party which has benefited by Mr. Wilson's presence in Middlesbrough is the Tory Party.[64]

For Arnott, then, attempts to produce an anti-Tory coalition had served only to create deeper divisions between the 'progressive' parties. What most angered Arnott was Wilson's betrayal of the ILP's independence to the Liberals, of whom Arnott held a low opinion. For him, the laudable achievements of Gladstonian Liberalism were a matter of history, and that even as early as during Rosebery's tenure, the Liberals had exhibited an excessive reverence for their own past at the expense of their present

[63] See James Moore, 'Progressive Pioneers: Manchester Liberalism, the Independent Labour Party, and Local Politics in the 1890s, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 2001), pp. 989-1013;
[64]Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 13.

ideological malaise. Arnott notes "a deification of the wisdom of former leaders such as Bright and Cobden…One cannot fail to note an absence of the spirit of the former men" in the figures of Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Rosebery or Edward Grey. The principles which had formerly animated the Liberals and spurred them towards its successes had been replaced by:

> a timid, temporising, half-hearted, log-rolling, time-serving, trimming whiggery, destitute of moral dignity, of faith in the future, of belief in the greatness of democracy, or of the permanent value of principles, Liberal or otherwise.[65]

Arnott's criticism of the lack of steadfast moral conviction in the Liberal Party in contrast to its past heroes ran deeper than a low estimation of the abilities of the Campbell-Bannerman party's individual figures. He continues to make the case that Liberalism was a philosophy of the wrong time, suited to the days of Cobden and Bright but which was incapable of adjusting itself to fight the new battles which the Independent Labour movement were addressing. Noting the opposition of the Free Trade campaigners to Trades Unionism and factory legislation, Arnott states that

> their *laissez faire* theories have been rejected long ago. Antiquated and obsolete economic doctrines are not reliable guides for reformers to-day. The present age has its problems for which it must find solutions.[66]

Arnott builds upon this by suggesting that Liberalism was in part responsible for many of these problems, and constitutionally incapable of providing their solutions. Liberalism "was bound hand and foot by vested interests" which led it to excessive

[65] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 18.
[66] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 18.

levels of compromise in its social programme: "it would assist the oppressed, but feared to offend the oppressors; would aid the poor without injuring the rich…and is henceforth a worthless instrument of reform." Arnott's argument went beyond accusations of timidity, and linked the opposition to 'progressive' unification to the wider Socialist critique of the capitalist classes. The Liberals were depicted as being in essence little different to the Conservative Party in terms of their composition, support and their attitude towards Labour issues and social matters. Of particular note is Arnott's use of the Liberal Party's defence of Free Trade in opposition to Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign as representing the interests of men of wealth from the Unionist ranks pledging support to the Liberals to better serve their own interests.[67] These new additions to the Liberal ranks would only serve to drag that party further rightwards: "their accession strengthens the Liberal Party in its electoral campaign…by strengthening the most reactionary elements within the Liberal Party". Arnott concludes this with a blunt declaration which is echoed in many Labour pamphlets attacking the Liberal claims to represent the 'working classes': "Both parties are now Conservative."[68]

Arnott's comments represent a complete inversion of the Liberal claims to head the 'progressive' alliance. The Socialist version of party alignment which reoccurs in the pamphlet literature at various stages of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century period depicted the only effective unifying force in politics to be that of capitalism, and had been a long-standing feature of Socialist conceptualisations of the party system. The 1883 Manifesto of the Social Democratic Party stated that since the Great Reform Act, there had been no meaningful difference between the Liberal or

[67] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 18.
[68] Arnott, *Mr. J.H. Wilson and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 19.

Conservative parties, and that both acted to further the interests of capitalism at the expense of 'the workers'.[69]

Besides such simplistic conceptualisations of the relationship between the Liberals and the Conservatives was a more sophisticated analysis of the convergence between the two, and one which placed greater emphasis on the role of Liberal vacillations on 'working-class' issues, the existence of which is particularly important in the light of Tanner's arguments concerning internal Labour divisions. If Ramsay Macdonald represented the 'moral reformist' wing of Labour, that section of the party most open to Liberal collaboration, we can see that this was not to suggest that he under-emphasised the importance of independence.[70] In a pamphlet containing the text of his speech in Leicester in 1899, MacDonald put forward the charge that the Liberals were incapable of delivering on their promise to improve the lives of the 'working classes'. MacDonald first praises Liberalism for its past achievements, but claims that these were the result of the Liberal Party responding to pressure from outside agitation rather than being products of the party's convictions.[71]

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[69] *Socialism Made Plain; being the Social and Political Manifesto of the Democratic Federation*, (Place of publication and name of publisher unknown, 1883), p. 1, in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308/N6, Vol. 27/5; see also *Socialism versus Smithism: An Open Letter from H.M. Hyndman to Samuel Smith, M.P.* (London: The Modern Press, 1883), pp. 6-7 in Manchester Central Library, Political Pamphlets, 308/N6, Vol. 27/8, for a criticism of philanthropic Liberals as being exploitative capitalists whose concern for the 'working man' did not extend to improving his remuneration or working conditions.

[70] For Macdonald's desire to work with the Liberals towards social reforms in order to expand the Labour vote while maintaining a policy of differentiation via speeches and propaganda, see Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 72-74. See also Ross McKibbin, 'James Ramsay Macdonald and the Problem of the Independence of the Labour Party'1910-1914, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 42, No.2 (Jun., 1970), pp. 216-235 for an account of the complex nature of Macdonald's vision of Labour independence. McKibbin argues that Macdonald's wish was for Labour to be "separate from the Liberals in its members and general aims", but with "moderate" immediate ambitions. The necessity for electoral arrangements with the Liberal Party such as the Gladstone/Macdonald Pact should therefore be seen primarily as a means of short-term expediency than as a reflection of Macdonald lacking commitment to Labour existing independently of the Liberal Party.

[71] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester by J.R. MacDonald, 3rd October , 1899*, (Place of publication and name of publisher unknown, 1899), p. 6, in the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, box 135, ref 329.12-1944.

MacDonald focuses on two key themes of the Liberal version of political history and indicates that the claims of that party to have achieved success in those areas were exaggerated. On the issue of vote by ballot, MacDonald noted the opposition of the Liberal Party to schemes to reform the voting process, on the grounds of political expediency. With regards Free Trade, he dismisses the attempts of the Liberals to depict the repeal of the Corn Laws as being a Liberal success, a line of argument we have seen in previous chapters to have been a significant feature of Liberal pamphlet literature. MacDonald notes Cobden's criticism of the Liberal Party for attempting to take sole credit for the measure, and that Cobden had himself extolled the virtues of independent politics with regards the Anti-Corn Law League.[72]

MacDonald, therefore, seeks to demonstrate the deficiencies of the Liberal conceptualisation of political history, and uses this to defend the independent stance of the ILP. His critique, however, moves beyond this deconstruction of the historic Liberal Party, and seeks to demonstrate the flaws of the Liberals as a vehicle for a 'progressive' future. MacDonald dismisses the argument in favour of supporting the Liberal Party on the basis that their programme, even if not a complete embodiment of the desires of 'progressists'; was nonetheless sufficient for the present time.[73] Price, it should be noted, took a similar position at the 1893 NLF. meeting. MacDonald, however, did not share Price's satisfaction with the pace of Liberal 'progress'. "The Liberal opposition is not promising you anything now that it did not promise you

[72] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 7; for further instances of Labour reassessment of Liberal political history see *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, pp. 4-5, for Miss Teresa Billington's claims that the Great Reform Act was the result of agitation from an 'independent labour movement' whose co-option by the Whigs thwarted chances of a wider enfranchisement, she also makes similar claims for the defeat of Chartism.
[73] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 7.

before the election of 1892, and since then Liberals were three years in office. They tried their best and they failed."

The Liberal Party's lack of success, MacDonald claimed, was not due to an insufficient majority but was instead the result of a more fundamental flaw in Liberalism. "When elections are to be won, and where the party is in opposition, Newcastle programmes are manufactured and speeches made. But when the party is in power the sinister influences of its rich supporters are paramount." Rather than being, in Campbell-Bannerman's terms 'masculine or 'feminine', MacDonald stated that the character of the Liberal majority of 1892 was better described as "poor" and "weak-kneed", and that this was increasingly the case with Liberal members, who were "becoming more and more mediocre in its powers, and passing more and more completely into the possession of its moneyed men."[74] For MacDonald, therefore, the Liberal Party was a pale reflection of its former self, and even at its vaunted heights had not been as steadfast an advocate of furthering the cause of 'progress' as its self-constructed history suggested. The Liberals' failure to achieve even their own limited aims had implications beyond merely depicting the Liberals as unreliable friends of the 'working man', as it raised the question of that party's ability to call upon the support of the 'working classes' as a matter of right.

MacDonald responded to the accusation that the ILP was splitting the democratic vote by taking 'working-class' support from the Liberal Party, and thus easing the Conservative's path to electoral victory. As we have seen, Arnott believed that Joseph Havelock Wilson's actions in Middlesbrough had created tensions within the Labour

[74] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 8.

vote. MacDonald furthers this line of argument by suggesting that the real split in the 'progressive' ranks was not one of Liberal versus Labour, but between worker and worker[75]. MacDonald argued that the difference between 'Liberal Working Man' and 'Tory Working Man' was superfluous; as both were being diverted from the one cause he argued was in their own 'interests'. MacDonald stated that in Leicester he found:

> Trade Unionist voting against Trade Unionist, and Co-operator against Co-operator, and Worker against Worker, with the result that Leicester politics…are fast becoming the tottering, timorous, commonplaces and compromises which Liberals used to attempt to win belated cathedral cities and ultra-respectable Liberal-Conservative constituencies.[76]

Liberalism was therefore proving a corrupting influence on the political habits of 'working men'. It had sacrificed its own principles or at least been inconsistent in applying them in their bids to regain office. For these reasons MacDonald urged the need for Independent Labour representation. Yet this opinion came from a figure whose attitude towards the Liberal Party was in many ways a pragmatic one, as evidenced by his signing of the Lib-Lab Pact. Indeed, in his speech MacDonald makes several statements which would not have seemed out of place on a Liberal pamphlet – stating, for example, the importance of defending liberty and property.[77]

Yet MacDonald's speech suggests that for him, these were no longer principles which the Liberal Party were capable or willing to enact, and that this abandonment of even

[75] This is also referenced in *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, p. 4, as Teresa Billington argues that as their "interests as workers were identical", it was "foolish indeed" to divide their votes between Tory and Liberal candidates. Billington also stresses that the true meaning of "class legislation" was that produced by the capitalist classes.
[76] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 5.
[77] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 11.

these key Liberal stances was evidence of its untrustworthiness on Labour issues. Moreover, this was an inherent problem for Liberalism, as the issue struck at the root of the difference between the two parties: the Liberals propensity to accommodate with capital, depicted here with reference to the party's financiers, whose malign influence rendered Liberalism incapable of fulfilling even its own programme.

MacDonald stated that "there was not a single plank in the Liberal programme which some candidates were not willing to sacrifice if a vote or to were to be gained by doing so", noting several instances of candidates who reneged on such core Liberal promises such as taxation of land values.[78] Lax adherence to principle had led to there being "no real unanimity inside the Liberal Party…on the great questions affecting labour and democratic government." The Liberals were at the behest of the wealthy benefactors, to the detriment of its 'progressive' mission, to the extent that "it will dishearten the progressive opinion of the country, and prepare the way for a long term of reactionary government." The only solution, MacDonald argued, was for the party to be kept upon the 'progressive' course by having "independent men to watch its actions.[79]

Far from the relationship between Liberalism and Labour being one in which the latter added to the strength of the former, for MacDonald an Independent Labour Party was necessary in order to keep guard over the Liberal Party and prevent its worst characteristics from blocking the 'progressive' path. Most importantly, by reference to the Liberals' backers, Macdonald is suggesting that while there remained a degree of overlap between the two 'progressive' parties' policies, the only way for

[78] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 8.
[79] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 9.

those aims to be met was through the greater resources of virtue inherent in independent Labour politics. Macdonald here is able therefore to maintain a position in which he creates the conditions necessary for cooperation, but in a way which sees the Liberal Party's finance-induced inability to make good on promises as the obstacle to real reform, and Labour as the only true party of 'progress'. While Tanner is correct in identifying Macdonald as the key figure in enabling 'progressivism' to develop as a means of allowing Labour and the Liberals to work together, it is important to stress that his position was one which allowed him to do so without affecting the independence of Labour in contrast to Liberal efforts to subsume differences within 'progressive' politics.

If the Independent Labour movement had successfully constructed an argument against Liberal claims over the votes of the 'working classes' in the then present, they were able to do so by creating their own version of political history which emphasised the neglect or abuse of the 'working man' by the two great parties. Jon Lawrence has discussed the importance of historical 'myth' to the Labour Party from its earliest days, but the myths he describes are the legends and fables associated with the party's own history.[80] More significant in helping to shape the party's self-image as well as its external depictions were the re-writing of the political narratives upon which Liberal representations of the march of 'progress' were created, negating Liberal attempts to demonstrate the historical proof of their version of 'progress' as an implicitly Liberal pursuit. Such a process would involve a re-casting of the great events in nineteenth-century political history as representing the collusion of the Liberal and Tory parties in refusing the just claims of the 'working man'. While this

[80] Jon Lawrence, 'Labour – the myths it has lived by' in Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century*, pp. 341-366.

to some extent can be considered a logical extension of Marxist-materialist approaches to history, the way in which Independent Labour pamphleteers constructed their reinterpreted pasts owed much to an active rejection of the Whiggish teleology which we have seen formed a large part of Liberal electoral appeals.

One example of this Independent Labour-orientated history can be seen in *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy in the Nineteenth Century*, a pamphlet written C.A. Glyde, an ILP politician and member of Bradford City Council circa 1900.[81] Glyde discusses key incidents from the previous century and argues that the actions of the Liberals and Conservatives across this period demonstrate equal amounts of contempt for the 'working classes' and their 'interests' as each other. His history is clear in its division of society into the 'working classes' and the 'capitalist classes', and while the latter are portrayed as being separate from the 'landed classes', as represented when discussing the Great Reform Act ,these two are united in their opposition to the workers.[82] Glyde then seeks to show how each issue raised bears comparison to the rhetoric and policies of the parties of his day. The various incarnations of political Liberalism are referred to as 'Liberals' throughout, perhaps partly to avoid confusion, but more likely, given the content of the pamphlet, it is in order to better relate the deeds of the Whigs to the Liberals of Glyde's day and to establish that the party's heritage was a consistent story of neglecting the 'working classes'.

[81] C.A. Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy in the Nineteenth Century*, (Keighley: Whitworth and Co., n.d, c.1900), in the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, box 320. For further biographical information on Glyde see Michael Cahill, 'C.A. Glyde' in Joyce M. Bellamy, David E. Martin and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 6*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 117-121.
[82] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 11.

The first section is entitled 'The Massacre of English Outlanders at Peterloo, Manchester, in 1819', drawing similarities with the deaths of members of the audience of Henry Hunt's speech in favour of electoral reform, and the treatment of the Boers during the then-ongoing South African War. Glyde cites Conservative M.P. J.L. Wanklyn as stating that the purpose of the Boer war was to bring "equal rights to all men, the love of justice, the love of freedom, and the love of mercy."[83] Glyde proceeds to offer an analysis of the events surrounding Peterloo which re-imagines the incident and the privations which had pre-empted the meeting as exemplars of Toryism's deplorable sentiments towards the 'working classes'. Yet Glyde is also keen to show that Hunt and his audience were drawn from a culture of "Independent Radical-Labour Clubs" and had assembled at St. Peters' Fields peacefully.[84] Glyde finishes this account by noting the Tory Government's praise for the actions of the yeomanry that day, and compares the denial of votes to "the English outlander" in the form of the labourers to Conservative promises with regards the Boers.[85]

Glyde's assessment of the Liberal record is no less damning. We have already noted MacDonald's accusation that the Liberals had stood in the way of several pieces of legislation designed to benefit the 'working classes', but Glyde's indictment of the Liberal Party portrays their inaction as more than political timidity, but outright callousness. The section dealing with the Whig opposition to the Factory Acts is subtitled 'The Slaughter of the Innocents'[86], which draws together the capitalist critique of Liberalism as being only superficially less malicious towards the worker as the Tories, and the attack on the Tory yeomanry at Peterloo.

[83] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 1.
[84] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 2.
[85] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 3.
[86] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 4.

The actions of the capitalists were also compared with the conduct of the Tory landowners over enclosure, with the latter having been accused of professing patriotism when attempting to prevent Napoleon's conquest of Europe while stealing 'common land' from its own people. Glyde describes the lives of the 'working class' children in the factories in vivid and emotive detail, emphasising the contradiction between the cruel treatment of the child workers and the supposed Christian ethics of the capitalist factory owners, who are clearly identified as Liberals. The children are described as "little slaves", and their plight is described in terms of both the physical and psychological effects.[87] Time was also taken to note that the conditions of their labour had allowed the morality of the children to deteriorate.[88]

Glyde derides the Liberals for their claims to have legislated to ameliorate these conditions. He states that both parties carried out measures of reform, but not out of any sense of a need to remedy injustices: they intervened "either from fear or a desire to dish the other party, but never from principle or conviction." Glyde uses an incident in Leeds in 1832 as an example of how this lack of principles acted to block legislation to remedy the grievances of the child labourers. Here, the Tories had mounted a campaign to reform conditions at a mill which was under the ownership of the Liberal candidate for the area, by unveiling a banner depicting the plight of the child workforce. Glyde states with evident irony that this "roused the ire of the freedom-loving Liberals," whose attempts to seize the banner created a riot. Glyde claims that the eventual end to these conditions was brought about through "Socialistic acts of Parliament," which was opposed by the Liberals.[89] While Glyde does also attack the Tories for similar acts of obstruction, it is the Liberals, as the "so-

[87] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 5.
[88] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 6.
[89] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 7.

called Reform Government" who received the bulk of his criticism for their hypocrisy.[90]

The main charge laid against the Liberals in terms of their opposition to 'working class' political advancement was the role they played in the defeat of Chartism. Glyde's account of the movement's development emphasised had itself sprung directly from 'working-class' disillusionment with the 1832 settlement, in which "they had been made tools of by the capitalists", and with their treatment at the hands of the Liberals, who had displayed "criminal indifference and neglect of…working-class ideals and aspirations." Glyde also alleges that the chief reason for the Liberals' ire towards Chartism was their anger at the success of 'working-class' politics which was not under their aegis; their independence had made them "obnoxious" to both parties, but more so to the Liberals, who blamed the Chartists' "influence" upon the electorate for defeat in 1841.[91]

The last passage renders clear the Independent Labour position with regards the Liberal Party's attitude towards them. Resentful of the freedom of the 'working classes' from their control, and fearful that their secession from the drive towards the Liberal vision of 'progress' would lead to the electoral success of the Conservatives, the image of the party put forward by men such as Glyde was that the Liberals would always seek to constrain Labour politics and defer their own aims to better suit their own priorities and secure office for the Liberal Party. While Glyde, MacDonald and

[90] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 9, pp. 7-11.
[91] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 15; for further instances of Labour reassessment of Liberal political history see *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, pp. 4-5, for Miss Teresa Billington's claims that the Great Reform Act was the result of agitation from an 'independent labour movement' whose co-option by the Whigs thwarted chances of a wider enfranchisement, she also makes similar claims for the defeat of Chartism.

Arnott have all been careful to salute Liberalism's successes and attribute a degree of moral virtue to the Liberal Party's members, the allegation from all three was that the party had not only failed to build on their successes, but had rested on their laurels, believing that a mere recitation of past deeds would be sufficient to gain the support of the 'working classes'; and that morals were a clear second to the pursuit of office when the Liberal Party considered its priorities.

Thus while the Liberal Party was able to provide some degree of assistance to the causes with which they shared concerns with the 'working classes', they could not be trusted to fulfil their promises or to place them high enough in their programme when placed alongside their own 'shibboleths'. Ultimately, as Glyde was keen to point out, the Liberals had little better a legislative record than the Conservative Party, and had proved themselves to be just as likely to sacrifice the 'working man' and his 'interests'. Glyde's description of the 1892-95 Liberal government as being "The Party of "Going to Do" painted the Liberals as being just as prone to renege on promises; and his detailing of the party's hypocrisy in failing to address unemployment while providing financial assistance to the Duke of Edinburgh after he had taken up residence in Germany portrayed them as being complicit in the ongoing privilege of the 'upper classes' at the expense of the 'working man'.[92]

Glyde extended his criticism of Liberalism to allegations of outright collusion with the Tories to maintain the position of capitalism in face of Labour opposition, noting Asquith's support of the "Tory capitalist, Lord Masham" by using military action

[92] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 25; see also *Should the Labour Party Unite with the Liberals?*, pp. 4 for a summary of Miss Teresa Billington's argument that the Liberals were little better than the Conservatives in their contempt for the 'working man' and their lack of belief in their own principles.

against striking miners at Featherstone in 1893. Glyde brings his denouncement of Liberalism full circle by describing this incident as "the second Peterloo of the century".[93] After devoting a section to the actions of the third Salisbury ministry, "the worst government since the days of kingly autocracy", Glyde concludes by summing up the state of British politics as being merely deciding which of the "blue and yellow Tories" was preferable, with neither likely to tackle "social evils".[94]

We can clearly seem therefore, that the various elements of the political Labour movement had managed to create a consistent and cohesive critique of Liberalism by the early twentieth century. We should not suppose that this Labour conceptualisation of British politics was any better a model for understanding the 'interests' of the 'working man'; nor that it was the existence of this literature which persuaded those men who did support the nascent Labour Party to so. What we can say is that by the end of the nineteenth century the Liberal Party were being challenged by a very different vision of the political future than the Conservative conceptualisation with which they had been contending since the 'working classes' had been admitted to the franchise.

Drawing upon many of the reforms the Liberals themselves had promised, the Labour conceptualisation of the role of the 'working classes' in the political sphere was that they should pursue those goals from a sense of justice for themselves, rather than as part of a greater scheme of 'progress' as defined by Liberalism. The distinction between the two can be expressed as the desire for reform for the sake of the amelioration of suffering in the present compared with the Liberal emphasis on

[93] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 26.
[94] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 31.

reforms being dictated by a semi-abstract concept of a national sentiment or of a natural pace which too often Liberals such as Price and Campbell-Bannerman could be guilty of. The fate of the Liberal Party over the next decades would be defined by how well they rectified these tendencies and addressed the concerns of men such as Armott, for whom Liberalism had increasingly come to represent an obstacle to 'progress' rather than the means through which it could be achieved. In the next section, I will demonstrate through an analysis of the Liberal Party's pamphlets and handbills the difficulties the party experienced in remedying this problem.

The Liberal Party, Policies and Pamphlets, 1892-1910

The period which this section covers saw the Liberal Party's pamphlet campaign increase both its scope and its sophistication. By the time of the 1906 General Election, the Liberal Publication Department was producing documents which covered a broader range of issues and was addressing them with a wide variety of linguistic styles and idioms. Many of the pamphlets from the latter end of the period feature cartoons and coloured texts and images, providing evidence for the seriousness with which the Liberal Party undertook their pamphlet campaigns and the importance which they were seen to have to the party's overall electoral strategy.
By comparing the ideas communicated through the Liberal pamphlets and the tenor of the overall campaigns, a picture is revealed of a party which was failing to address the concerns which underlay the Labour criticisms of Liberalism detailed above.

The key aspects of the Liberal programme throughout the 1890s and 1900s which I will study in this section are reform of the House of Lords; economic and fiscal policy

with the emphasis on Free Trade and the taxation of Land Values. I shall show how the literature produced to support each area of the Liberal programme communicated a conceptualisation of the 'working classes' and their 'interests' which remained rooted in the abstract concerns and gradualist timeframe which had provoked the ire of the Labour writers, and which demonstrates that the party had not sufficiently understood the underlying difference in the way they and Labour conceived of the 'working man' in politics.

That the Liberal Party should focus much of its energies on a resolution of the House of Lords issue is not surprising, given its historical antipathy to Lords' interference in legislation and in particular the Upper House's role in blocking their programme in the 1880s and 1890s. Attacks on the upper house would be one of the most significant element through the Liberal literature of the period, with the party keen to emphasise the Lords' rejection of bills which would have benefitted the 'working man'. As we have seen, however, Readman argues that the focus on Lords reform was as much a product of crippling inter-party schisms as it was a concrete policy, and it produced little enthusiasm among working-class voters.[95]

We should conclude that mere pragmatism was at work in choosing to focus on constitutional matters. The approach taken to Lords reform had changed little since the 1880s with the exception of using more specific examples of Labour legislation which the Lords had blocked. The Liberal Party still saw the issue as one which could inspire support. The 'Liberal Working Man' was, as these examples will show, still considered to be the ideal form of the working-class voter, and besides gestured

[95] Readman, 'The 1895 General Election', pp. 469-470; for the lack of popular enthusiasm for Lords reform see pp. 482-483.

towards emphasising the practical economic benefits of fulfilling such a role by casting a vote for the Liberals, the party's literature displays little evidence that they considered a Lords-based appeal to be anything other than an issue with which their idealised 'working man' would find favour.

David Lloyd George had referred to the nullifying tactic in the House of Lords in the same National Liberal Federation discussed earlier. The Upper House was "the weapon which Lord Salisbury chose to fight the will of the people".[96] However, he was referring not to the obstruction of any measure to improve the condition of the 'working classes', but the blocking of the Home Rule Bill. While the Liberals were keen to point out the financial benefits of Irish self-government to the worker on the mainland it is indicative of the Liberal tendency to discuss the fulfilment of their principles and objectives as being part of a broader popular zeal for such reforms, whether they were immediately beneficial to the mass of the public or not.[97]

Pamphlets relating to the House of Lords conflict depicted the issue in its historical context, but this was often done in line with the well-established tropes of Liberal political history. Indeed, *The House of Lords And the Liberal Party*, a Gladstone speech of 1893 issued in pamphlet form, dates the conflict back to the end of aristocratic influence over the Lower House caused by the Great Reform Act.[98] The conduct of the House of Lords was a particularly important area of Liberal concern in

[96] *Proceedings in connection with the 15th Annual Meeting of the Federation*, p.48.
[97] See for example *The Liberal Programme No. 1 – Home Rule For Ireland – What it Means and What it will Do*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[98] *The House of Lords and the Liberal Party: a Speech delivered by the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone, M.P., in Edinburgh, September 27th, 1893*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1893), p. 9., in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2

this period because the opposition of the Upper House was instrumental in explaining why the Liberals had failed to achieve more of their objectives in office. The partisan opposition of the Lords was particularly used when discussing the legislative failures of the 1892-95 ministries, and indeed many of the pamphlets which chronicled the achievements of Liberalism did so alongside a list of those bills which had been defeated by the Lords.

An early example of this in our period was *2 Years of Liberal Government 1892-94*. It should be noted that the pamphlet devotes five pages to the government's record on Labour issues, largely concerning trades union rights, and the duration and condition of work[99]. Such matters are also addressed when the attention is turned to the negative influence of the House of Lords, mentioning their actions in reducing the eligibility for benefit under the Railway Servants (Hours of Labour) Act, as well as rejecting the Employers' Liability Bill.[100] However, there is just as much emphasis on less obviously relevant issues, such as the Home Rule Bill and the Parish Councils Bill.

The latter issue offers an interesting insight into how Liberal pamphlets tried to relate their policies to the 'working-classes' in cases where the benefits were not immediately clear. The measure, as *2 Years of Liberal Government* explains, provided for allotments, public spaces and reform of district councils, vestries and boards of guardians. Another 1893 pamphlet, *The New Liberal Charter*, expands on this, stating that the Bill "is designed to bring the blessings of self-government right to the very

[99] *2 Years of Liberal Government, 1892-94*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1894), pp. 4-8, in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., see also *A Dozen Measures in the last two years for which you have To Thank the House of Commons* in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1894', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2 which compares legislation passed by the Lower House to that rejected by the House of Lords.
[100] *2 Years of Liberal Government, 1892-94*, pp. 17-18.

door of the agricultural labourer and village artisan", while also benefitting those in the towns, and would "give a new direction and energy" to how local communities conducted "care of the poor, land, charities, roads and rights of way, commons, the health and homes of the people".[101] In such details, the impact on the lives of the 'working classes' can certainly be seen, yet the emphasis is still on political reform rather than legislating directly on Labour issues. The pamphlet refers to the Lords' obstruction over the Bill, which again is discussed in terms of the political ramifications rather than the direct impact on the intended 'working-class' beneficiaries: the Lords had eventually relented, however "the process of making them surrender is undignified, wastes and enormous amount of time, and is a permanent obstacle in the way of all Liberal Reform".

Here we can begin to see the way in which the Liberal representation of the Lords issue could create difficulties. While the Lords issue did hold up several bills aimed at remedying grievances of the 'working classes', by emphasising the harm this caused to 'Liberal' concerns, the party ran the risk of appearing to prioritise the political injustice of the Upper House's actions, rather that depicting this as a case of the defeat of social legislation, thus failing to address the developing Labour critique of the House of Lords, centring on the direct impact on the life of the 'working man' as the capitalist classes colluded to oppose his 'interests'. Here again we can see how the hypothesised concerns of the 'Liberal Working Man' predominated over practical politics when it came to outlining the party's priorities.

[101] *The New Liberal Charter of Government of the People, by the People, for the People* (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1893), p.1, in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2..

One particular problem with the Liberal conception of the Parliamentary conflict was that it tended to simplify the matter to a struggle between Liberal and Tory forces in the legislature. *The New Liberal Charter* discussed the Lords and the Tories as essentially the same reactionary body, and in this it was far from alone. *Lords and Commons*, a pamphlet from 1894, aims to demonstrate the near-innate Toryism of the Upper House by comparing the House's record in passing Liberal and Conservative bills in two columns listing defeated or amended bills.[102] The 'Liberal' column lists such defeated measures as the Home Rule Bill and the Employers' Liability Bill; while the column headed 'Tory Ministries' lists simply "Nothing" for each period of Conservative rule. *The Lords' Record 1892-95* verbalises the point; "The House of Lords very obediently passes the Bills sent up to it by this Tory Government; but when a Liberal Government is in office…the House of Lords finds plenty of work – for its idle hands to do."[103] The difficulty in so defining the Liberal position with regards the Upper House as being in essence identical to their opposition to the Conservatives. As we have seen, the Labour critique of the Liberals centred on the allegation that neither party were distinguishable from the other in their prioritising of Labour legislation. By identifying the House of Lords conflict in terms of one party versus the other, the Liberals were highlighting only their tendency to view 'progress' in terms of the fulfilment of their own priorities.

[102] *Lords and Commons*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1894) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1894', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

[103] *The Lords Record 1892*-95 (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1895), p. 1, in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1895', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2. For other criticisms of the Lords' potential to prevent the passage of Liberal measures, see *The House of Lords by Augustine Birrell, Q.C., M.P.* (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1899), p. 3. in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1899', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., for the often-repeated statement that during Conservative governments the Lords' tendency to allow bills through unaltered was tantamount to unicameral legislative process.

Moreover, the Liberal remedy for the House of Lords problem was for the most part the removal of the House's power of veto. The existence of the House and its composition was left essentially unchallenged. In the 1899 pamphlet *The House of Lords by Augustine Birrell*, the Liberal M.P. repeats the criticism that the Lords served to oppose Liberal measures – particularly "Revolutionary" or "obnoxious" ones – again defining the problem as being one of Conservative versus Liberal. However, having outlined the case in an impassioned and unambiguous manner, Birrell concludes by demanding the end to the Upper Houses' power of veto.[104] We can compare this with the Ramsay MacDonald speech referenced earlier, which calls for the outright abolition of the House of Lords, saying "To talk of only limiting its veto is silly nonsense."[105] We may also note Glyde's pamphlet, which having noted many instances of bills rejected by the Lords which includes many of what we may term political reforms as well as items such as the Home Rule Bill, denounced the Liberals for failing to act on their convictions and remove the veto when they were presented with an opportunity over the County Franchise Bill of 1894. Glyde rejected the Liberals' subsequent pleas that Lords obstructionism had been the cause of their failure to pass legislation on the grounds that:

> Had they been in earnest for progress and democratic legislation they would have long ago introduced a great working-class measure, and upon the Lords rejecting it they would have appealed to the country for a mandate to settle the obstruction of that House once and for all.[106]

[104] *The House of Lords by Augustine Birrell*, p. 4.
[105] *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester*, p. 11.
[106] Glyde, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy*, p. 28.

The Liberals, then, were not able to offer a response to their Labour critics by pressing for a reduction in the Lords' power, and their failure to address the issue satisfactorily was, according to Clyde, intrinsically linked to their unwillingness to prioritise Labour issues to a sufficient degree. Campaigning on the Lords' question was not, therefore, a rebuttal to claims that the Liberals had neglected the 'working man' and his 'interests'. The 'Liberal Working Man' may have seen the connection between Lords reform and Labour issues as being one which gave the former prominence over the latter, but in assuming him to stand for all of the non-Tory working-class voters was obscuring the problems an emphasis on constitutional reform above all else was causing.

The only major attempts to link 'working men's concerns' with the obstruction of the Upper House concerned the defence of Free Trade and the wider issues of fiscal policy and the economy. The campaign to protect Free Trade was perhaps the most important single issue of the 1906 General Election campaign, as it could draw together the campaign against the House of Lords with another great 'shibboleth'; one which required little new thinking in order to deploy the issue as a means of propaganda. In recent years Anthony Howe and Frank Trentmann have done much work on the popularity of Free Trade in Edwardian Britain, and the benefits of retaining unrestricted trade had already become part of popular consciousness; Liberal pamphlets could draw on concepts such as the 'hungry forties', a constructed memory of the privations associated with protection, in order to articulate their ideas.[107] The challenge for the Liberals was therefore linking their other propaganda to the topic of

[107] Anthony Howe, 'Towards the 'hungry forties': free trade in Britain, c. 1880-1906' in Biagini, Eugenio, (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and collective identities in the British Isles 1865-1931,* (Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 193-218; *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 249-250; Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Free Trade and the campaign against Tariff Reform, a task taken up by the pamphlet literature when joining together Lords reform and Free Trade.

Lords opposition was, for example, raised in the pamphlet *Which Party has done most to Relieve the Working Classes of Taxation?*[108] The pamphlet focuses on the reduction on taxation of foodstuffs under the Liberal Government, in particular upon sugar, and noted that the Lords had attempted to throw out many of these reforms. The pamphlet is specifically aimed at "the working man" and uses the figure of the 'working-class' wife as a repository of ideas of household economy – the 'working man' who reads the pamphlet is urged to show it to his spouse, in order for her to see the benefit the Liberal budgets of the mid-1890s had brought. However, even given this seeming recognition of the need to relate Liberal policy to the economic wellbeing of the 'working man', there remains evidence that the Liberal Party expected this concession to be reciprocated by the 'working classes' giving their support to Liberal political reforms, with the reader being reminded that:

> It is to the Liberals you owe your right to vote, and if you value the advantages already won for you, and wish for other great and important reforms, Vote for the Liberal Candidate.[109]

The inference that the concern for the welfare of the 'working classes' was a means of ensuring his vote for the benefit of the Liberal project remains clear. By the turn of the century, the debate on fiscal policy was clearly centred on the defence of Free Trade. The issue was one which formed part of the Labour platform, but the Liberal

[108] *Which Party has done the most to Relieve the Working Classes of Taxation?* (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1895) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1895', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[109] *Which Party has done the most to Relieve the Working Classes of Taxation?*, p. 2.

campaign to retain Free Trade possessed one feature in particular which marked it out as distinctively Liberal; namely, the concept of the 'Hungry Forties'.[110] An example of the concept in the Liberal literature was *Plain Talk to Farm Labourers*, said to have been written by "one of themselves".[111] The author recounts his father's stories of the privations which he had suffered through under Protection, and urges the labourers to prevent the return of such times by voting Liberal. The pamphlet continues by making reference to the increased wages Free Trade brought, and links Unionist policy on the matter to failure to deliver on other pledges, noting particularly Chamberlain's promised Old Age Pensions. However, the Liberals even here are attempting to synthesise the wider party concerns with a policy which was aimed in this instance directly at the 'working classes'. While the lack of negative reference to the Labour Party is unsurprising given the electoral pact in operation and the two parties' common support for Free Trade, the focus on Chamberlain and the Conservatives fits into the wider picture of Liberal political history as the struggle between the two great parties with the Liberals as the force of 'progress', which we have seen being deconstructed by the Labour pamphleteers.

Moreover, the pamphlet also urges the reader: "to vote for the Liberal Party, who will legislate not for the Parsons, or for the Brewers, nor for the Landlords, but for the People", and that "every vote given to the Liberals is a vote for Progress and Reform"[112], in terms which seek to draw the fight against Protection into a long-established form of Liberal appeal. While the emphasis on the 'working-class' voters is evidence of the Liberals adjusting their concerns to those of the largest part of the

[110] Howe, 'Towards the hungry forties', *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 249-250.
[111] *Plain Talk to Farm Labourers by One of Themselves*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1903), in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1903', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2..
[112] *Plain Talk to Farm Labourers*, p.2.

electorate, the terms in which they did so remained entirely consistent with the party's earlier attempts to secure the votes of the 'working man', a process we can see being challenged by the Labour pamphlet campaigns.

With regards the issue of land, we can see some evidence of change in the Liberal message from the 1890s. Literature of that time was typified by *The Liberal Programme: Reform of the Land Laws* from 1893, which attacked the present system of land ownership using familiar Liberal arguments centred on history – the land laws described as "a relic of the feudal system", and of Tory obstruction having blocked change.[113] The 1894 pamphlet *The Land and the Budget* began to discuss the claim the State possessed over estate duties.[114] By 1902, the land issue was clearly focused on the question of taxation of land values. The pamphlet *The Landlord Party Opposes Rating of Land Values* of that year, however, can be seen by its title to be part of the same process we have witnessed with the House of Lords and Free Trade. The pamphlet focuses on the Conservative opposition to the scheme, and uses arguments rooted in Liberal conceptualisations of political history, dating the question back to the era of enclosure[115]. The issue is again framed as an example of Tory obstruction, and the Conservative opposition is linked with political concerns, as the Liberals criticised the Conservatives for rejecting a scheme which was already in use in

[113] *The Liberal Programme: Reform of the Land Laws*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1893) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - April 1893', ref. JN 1129.
[114] *The Land and the* Budget, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1894) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1894', ref. JN 1129
[115] *The Landlord Party Opposes Rating of Land Values*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department), p. 1, in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets 1902', ref. JN 1129.

Australia, and which in the view of the Liberals was preventing "the interchange of political ideas between the different branches of a free and democratic race." [116]

The land value campaign was thus being fought in a broadly familiar way at this point; however, there were some signs that the Liberals were attempting a more 'working-class' – orientated message, and one which addressed Labour issues more directly. *The Unemployed*, a pamphlet from 1905, provided a concise elaboration of the impact that taxation of land values could have on providing employment for the building trade and on affordable housing, without recourse to Liberal history or a criticism of Tory obstruction.[117] Similarly, the pamphlet *Wanted: An Opening*, a cartoon depicting a figure identified as 'Labour' being blocked from entering a door marked 'To The Land' by another figure labelled 'Landlord'.[118] Both have simple messages relating the Liberal policy to the 'working man', and are evidence that on the eve of the 1906 landslide, progress was being made in some areas in representing the Liberal message in a way which left itself less open to its Labour critics. The difficulty in future, however, would be that in effecting this response at such a late stage, enough damage had been done to the Liberal Party's image in terms of its relationship with the 'working classes' to compromise its ability to retain the support of the 'working man' in the years following that success.

The years between the 1910 elections and the First World War saw little change in the Liberal Party literature. The LPD leaflets for the last few years of peacetime politics consisted of many pamphlets and leaflets concerning social legislation such as the

[116] *The Landlord Party Opposes Rating of Land Values*, p. 2.
[117] *The Unemployed*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1905) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets, 1905', ref. JN 1129.
[118] *Wanted: An* Opening, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets, 1905', ref. JN 1129.

Insurance Act of 1911, but continued to give equal weight to traditional Liberal causes such as land reform and Free Trade, with some pamphlets on the subject of Welsh disestablishment.[119] The renewal of the Home Rule campaign was the predominant feature of the post-1910 literature however, and the degree of emphasis on this matter is illustrative of the difficulties the Liberal Party had created for themselves with regards the contest with Labour.[120] The importance attached by the Liberals to the passage of the Parliament Act was held in such pamphlets as *Why We Must Get Rid of the Lords' Veto* to be that removing the Lords' veto would allow the Liberals to enact further reform without the upper house to stand in its path.[121] Yet the

[119] See for example *A Nation Insured: The National Insurance Bill explained by L.G. Chiozza Money, M.P.*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1911); in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1911', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.; *The National Insurance Act Speaks for Itself*,(Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1912); *The Great Insurance Act: A Year's Experience: A Comment by the Right Hon. T.J. Macnamara, M.P.*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1912) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1912', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2 for examples of pamphlets on the Insurance Act; *The Government, The Crown and The People; A Speech delivered by The Right Hon. H.H. Asquith, M.P. (Prime Minister) in the House of Commons on August 7th, 1911*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1911); *How We Got Rid of the Lords' Veto: Landmarks in the Great Struggle*, (London: Liberal Publication Department,1911); in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1911', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2 on the House of Lords; *Free Trade Finance: Is It Played Out?*, (Liberal Publication Department, 1911) on Free Trade; *A Dialogue About The Welsh Church* (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1911); *Robbery of God* (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1911) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1911', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2; *Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment: A Speech delivered by the Right Hon. Reginald Mckenna (Home Secretary at the Queens' Hall on January 25th, 1912*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1912) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1912', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2 on Welsh disestablishment.

[120] Home Rule featured on several pamphlets and leaflets in each year's batch; for examples see *Home Rule for Ireland: A Speech delivered by the Right Hon. Augustine Birrell, M.P, Secretary for Ireland, at Ilfracombe, on October 19th, 1911*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1911); *What Does Home Rule Mean? Mr.Redmond's Answer*, (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1911) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1911', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2; *The Home Rule Bill: A Speech delivered by the Right Hon. H.H. Asquith, M.P. (Prime Minister) In introducing the Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons on April 11th, 1912*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1912) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1912', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2; *Lest we Forget!* (Westminster: Liberal Publication Department, 1912); *The Irish Question: A Speech delivered by the Right Hon. H.H. Asquith, M.P. (Prime Minister) at Leeds, November 27th, 1913*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1913); *Has the Home Rule Bill Been Sufficiently Discussed?*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1913) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1913', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

[121] *Why We Must Get Rid of the Lords' Veto*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1910) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1910', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2; see also *What The Tories Are Really After*, (London: Liberal Publication

pursuit of Home Rule suggests that the Liberal Party had not fully recognised the need to demonstrate its commitment to social legislation instead of prioritising the old Liberal 'shibboleths'. The ILP literature's argument that Liberals cared more for their ancient concerns than for the 'working man' and his needs was hardly being answered by granting Home Rule such a privileged place within the LPD pamphlet campaigns.

What makes the Liberal literature appear even more problematic was that the Home Rule campaign was being conducted in the midst of the wave of trade union militancy that erupted in 1911 and created a renewed urgency among socialist thinkers and agitators to see Labour issue prioritised in British politics. J.W. Winter has stressed the significance of the 1911 strike wave in stimulating the thinking of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, R.H. Tawney and G.D.H. Cole in new, more assertively and recognisable 'socialist' ways (although Winter points out the differing forms these 'socialisms' took).[122] Whilst the 1911 militancy marked a key change in the attitudes of trade union politics in favour of broad socialism and the Labour Party, the Liberal literature makes little reference to the agitation. Few pamphlets from this period address the strikes and sought to alert the voters to the dangers of socialism. The only pamphlet to address the strikes directly was *The Recent Strikes and the Trade Disputes Act 1906*, written by Sir Thomas P. Whittaker, M.P. and published in 1912, focused on the legal basis for the strikes under trade union legislation did not exist, rather than making any concerted attempt to investigate the motives or implications of

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Department, 1909) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1909', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2; *The Black Record of the House of Landlords*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1910) in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1910', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

[122] J.W. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912-18*, (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 13-25.

the strikes.[123] The Liberal pamphlet literature did not show any evidence of a party aware of a shift in the relationship they had previously enjoyed with Labour, but by failing to adapt its electoral literature at this time, the party was proving slow to appreciate that the independent Labour critique of Liberal politics had created an alternative appeal to the working-class voter. The next chapter will analyse the results of this failure and its implications for the Liberal Party and its place in politics.

Conclusion

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Liberal Party were no longer able to construct their appeals to the 'working-class' electorate solely on the basis of being the 'natural' party for their votes, and the idea of the idealised 'Liberal Working Man' was proving more problematic as popular rejection of a form of politics aimed squarely at a perceived support for Liberal 'shibboleths' appeared to grow. The earlier conception of British politics which had dominated Liberal pamphlet literature since the first concerted admission of the 'working classes' to the franchise had relied heavily upon constructing a model of political history which represented an idealised form of 'progress' which was defined as inexorable but also as gradual, and which was based upon issues which the Liberals alone claimed to represent. The Liberal vision of 'progress' was accompanied by a depiction of the Conservatives as the force which sought to negate this process by ensnaring the vote of the 'working man' and diverting him from his role in securing 'progress'; and, if that proved unsuccessful and a Liberal majority existed in the House of Commons, then the Conservatives

[123] Stephen P. Whittaker, M.P., *The Recent Strikes and the Trade Disputes Act of 1906*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1912). in Bristol University Special Collections, National Liberal Federation Collection, 'LPD Leaflets - 1912', ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

would rely upon obstruction and negation in the House of Lords to ensure that Liberal measures to help the 'working classes' were mutilated or defeated.

The emergence of the Independent Labour Party and the other bodies advocating a Socialist alternative to Liberal 'progress' reduced the effectiveness of the Liberal model of 'working-class' political participation. Not only was there a rival with which the Liberal Party now had to contest the 'progressive' vote, but this new force had drawn upon the Liberal model and were directing their pamphlet literature at weakening the Liberals' case for their understanding of politics and representation. The Liberal version of political history was challenged; the party's role in providing relief to the 'working classes' was questioned; and the foundation of the elder party's claim to superiority over the Conservatives - their steadfast devotion to principle and morality – was being undermined by Labour suggestions that the Liberal Party's ideals were of secondary consideration to securing office. Given this, the Labour critique of the Liberal Party had built its argument on a re-casting of that party as cynical vote-grabbers; quick to proclaim their concerns for the 'working classes' and their condition, but slow and at times seemingly unwilling to act upon these professed sympathies. Combined with an understanding of the capitalist/worker dichotomy which placed most Liberals on the side of the exploiter, the Labour pamphleteers constructed an image of Liberalism as being little better, if not essentially identical, to the Conservative Party with whom they contended.

While Liberal pamphlet literature appears to have begun the process of repositioning themselves with regards the nascent Labour Party by the eve of the 1906 Election, the response had come too late to avoid the Labour critique of their conceptualisation of

politics to develop into a cohesive and concerted attack on the perceived failings of Liberalism. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how the Liberal Party's struggles following the Campbell-Bannerman ministry were a result of the party's underestimation of the threat this ideological challenge from the left had posed in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Four: The Liberal Decline, 1915-1925

Introduction

In 1935, George Dangerfield published what was to become one of the most influential historical works of twentieth-century British political history. *The Strange Death of Liberal England* represented an early attempt to explain the post-war collapse of the party which had entered the First World War in office.[1] The Liberals had won 397 seats in the 1906 landslide and had retained power on a reduced number of 272 at the December 1910 election. By 1924 the Liberals had finished behind the Labour Party in four consecutive elections since the war, and were reduced to just 40 MPs, even after the reunion of the Asquith and Lloyd George factions in 1923. Such a precipitous decline and the emergence of a new political era in which Conservatives vied with Labour for power required an explanation, which Dangerfield attempted to supply. Dangerfield argued that the Liberals were set on a course of irreversible decline well before the outbreak of hostilities, with the Irish Home Rule crisis, the increasing militancy of the women's suffrage campaign and a wave of syndicalist strikes suggesting not only the erosion of the Liberals' political authority, but also the end of the rational, consensual and gradualist politics upon which the Liberal Party had based its success.[2]

Dangerfield's argument has been challenged by many historians in subsequent years. Both the date from which the Liberal decline can be said to have started as well as the reasons for that process occurring have been the subject of debate. John D. Fair has

[1] George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, (London: Constable, reprinted 1936).
[2] Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, pp. 13-14, 280, 123-129, 178-180

outlined an interesting historiographical dichotomy between an 'inevitablist' school whose output argues that the Liberal Party were doomed before the outbreak of war, albeit for more complex reasons than Dangerfield allowed for, and a 'catastrophist' position which stresses the strains placed upon the Liberals by the war and the party schism it generated.[3] The 'inevitablist' position is best exemplified by the thesis of H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and Kay in their influential article 'The Franchise Factor and the Rise of the Labour Party' where they suggest that the extension of the franchise in 1918 to all adult males and to the first women voters was key to understanding the Liberal demise.[4] The new voters, they argued, were a source of previously untapped support for the Labour Party and would upset the 'rational' limited electorate upon which the Liberals depended for support. According to Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, Liberalism could never have adjusted to the era of adult male suffrage, and therefore that any other factors which negatively affected the Liberal Party determined merely the timing of their decline rather than being its cause.[5]

[3] John D. Fair,'Labour's Rise and the Liberal Demise: a Quantitative Perspective on the Great Debate, 1906-1918', *Albion*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 58-73. The 'catastrophists' are identified by Fair with Trevor Wilson's *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935*, (London, 1966), in which Wilson argues that while the Liberal Party were confronted with a series of crises over industry, Lords' reform and Ireland, it could not be proven that these were insurmountable problems, and that it was only following the First World war that the party could be claimed to be in decline. See also Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics*, (Cambridge U.P., 1971), pp. 91-107 for an argument centred on the personal failings of Lloyd George in causing the mid-war split and Asquith for being unable to rally Labour support for an anti-coalition bloc; Paul Adelman, *The Rise of the Labour Party, 1880-1945*, (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 85-90 for a similar explanation focusing on the errors of the party leadership; also Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism, 1776-1988*, (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 195-198 for the strong position of Liberalism prior to the Great War.

[4] H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and John Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 361 (Oct 1976), pp. 726-733. For an earlier account of the 'class strife' narrative and the importance of franchise reform, see Henry Pellling, 'Labour and the Downfall of Liberalism' in *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 101-120.

[5] Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', pp.

More recently, the 'catastrophists' of Fair's historiographical dichotomy have seen limitations to the 'Franchise Factor' argument. Most directly critical are those who challenge the validity of the conclusions its authors drew from the sociological data.[6] There have also been those who suggest that Liberalism, and in particular the emerging strand of social reformist 'New Liberalism' was in fact more than able to adapt itself to a predominantly working-class electorate and stress the role of inter-party divisions such as the Asquith and Lloyd George split in explaining why the party was not able to give force to 'New Liberal' ideas after the war.[7] Duncan Tanner has even argued that the success of the post-war Labour Party was due to their better ability to accommodate 'New Liberal' ideas than the strife-ridden Liberal Party.[8]

This chapter argues that whatever the *practical* effects of franchise reform, the Representation of the People Act had a profound impact on the *perception* of an altered political sphere which shaped Liberal Party thinking and their electoral appeals.[9] In a speech issued in pamphlet form in 1924, Lloyd George claimed that the party had "suffered…more from the fact that it has not in time tackled the drift in its own ranks towards Socialism" than due to any other factor, including the Liberal

[6] M.W. Hart's 'The Liberals, The War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 395 (Oct., 1982), pp. 820-832. Hart's analysis in particular refutes much of the sociological basis underpinning the 'Franchise Factor' article, and is complemented by Duncan Tanner in 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol.34, No. 4 (Dec 1991), pp. 893-908., where he reassesses the pre-war municipal successes of the Labour Party and concludes that the evidence of a large body of untapped Labour support among the unenfranchised working classes of prior to the 1918 act is at best inconclusive. (p. 904). Fair himself in 'Labour's Rise and the Liberal Demise' concluded that his analysis of voting behaviour of Labour and Liberal members in the House of Commons is not indicative of a clear Labour challenge to the Liberals on policy issues but remains undecided as to the implications of this evidence for the 'inevitablist'/'catastrophist' debate. (p. 64).
[7] P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, p. 394; M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), pp. 20-21; *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914*-1939, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), pp. 327-328. For a rebuttal of the success of 'New Liberalism' as a nationwide force, see K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).
[8] Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918*, (Cambridge U.P. 1990), p. 416
[9] Duncan Tanner, 'Electing the governors/the governance of the elect' in Keith Robbins (ed.), *The British Isles: 1901-1951*, (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 47.

schism.[10] The chapter will show firstly how the Franchise Act's enfranchisement of women impacted upon the Liberals' fortunes, as the Labour Party were better able to shape a cohesive narrative which could appeal to the new female voters using substantially similar arguments to those directed implicitly at working-class men. Secondly, it will show how the failings of the Liberal Party to successfully engage with the emerging Labour critiques of Liberalism or to articulate a satisfactory conception of the Liberal narrative of 'progress' prior to the 1918 Act were crucial to the Party's post-war fortunes.[11]

Finally, the chapter demonstrates the continuing difficulties the Liberals experienced over 'class', in particular with regards its relationship with the expanded electorate.[12] It will conclude with a section studying the party's attempts to devise a new set of narratives which would fit the party's newfound status as the midpoint between the left and right wings of British politics and difficulties te party faced in doing so. The Liberal literature of the inter-war era shows the party had largely abandoned any attempts to portray themselves as the natural party of 'working-class' politics. The 'Liberal Working Man' we have identified in earlier chapters was cast aside as a term to which the party addressed itself, as a result of the Liberals' move away from the narratives of political history which shaped how the Liberals saw and appealed to

[10] *Liberalism and Liberty: A Speech by the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George, O.M., M.P. to the London Liberal Federation at the National Liberal Club, London on the 12th of May, 1924*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1924) in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2, p. 9.

[11] See G.R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886-1929*, (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 119-120 for fears Liberalism was fated to be beaten by Labour because of ealier failing to support working-class M.P.s; see also Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924*, (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 70-71 for a "growing feeling…perceived if indefinable" that working-class support had shifted from Liberalism to Labour.

[12] Jon Lawrence, in *Speaking For The People*, (Cambridge U.P., 1998), argues that the Liberal Party had largely abandoned 'rational' appeals to the working classes by 1906 in favour of a more practical if less high-mindedly ethical approach, for example over the 'Chinese Labour' question.

him. The 'Liberal Working Man' was not satisfactorily replaced with a cohesively-constructed alternative narrative subject.

The Liberal Party and the Franchise

The 1918 Representation of the People Act would prove a particular challenge for the Liberal Party. If we accept Matthew, McKibbin and Kay's thesis, the Liberals stood to gain least and lose most from the extension of the vote. Yet the party which had constructed its appeals to the public on a narrative which placed franchise extension at its heart could not oppose further extension, particularly in light of the oft-cited cross-party desire to both appease and reward the 'working classes' and women following the exertions of war. Liberal attempts to adjust their pamphlet appeals to incorporate the 1918 Act were the first stage of the difficult process of adjusting to the new political realities of the post-war period. It was here that we can first see how the Liberal Party's pamphlet appeals began to move away from addressing an idealised 'working man' to whom the party addressed itself. The removal of the 'Liberal Working Man' from the structure of Liberal narratives renders a picture of a party struggling to come to terms with a shift in the political landscape caused by its own failure to address competing narrative styles in sufficient time prior to the war.

The 1924 pamphlet *Principles of Liberalism* gives some indication as to the problems faced by utilising traditional Liberal narratives of 'reform' and 'progress'.[13] The document began with an appraisal of the key differences between the three major parties, identifying the pursuit of 'liberty' as the feature which distinguished the

[13] *Principles of Liberalism*, (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

Liberal Party from its authoritarian opponents.[14] The pamphlet then discussed the nature of 'liberty' and its practical applications, choosing franchise extension as its first example of the principle in action. Conspicuously, the historical account of the extension of the vote shied away from adopting the 'class' framework we have seen in earlier pamphlets, choosing instead to state the increased number allowed to vote. In fact, the pamphlet was at pains to dismiss the element of 'class' from the enfranchisement process altogether. The beneficiaries of 1832 had not been favoured because of their particular qualities, nor had the shift in electoral demographics towards the "comparatively poor working people" been due to the fact that the Liberals "preferred one class to another".[15] The negation of class conflict here contrasts markedly with the manner in which parliamentary reform had previously been incorporated into historical narratives, in which the 'working classes' had been progressively enfranchised as part of the uniquely Liberal pursuit of 'progress'. Franchise reform was still depicted as being "almost exclusively the work of the Liberals", but that the motivation behind it came "from a deeper principle, and is not concerned with balancing the interests of classes."[16] The 'deeper principle' at work in the reform process was defined as that of the "value of man"; a concept to which we shall return, but here it is the deliberate refusal of the Liberals to discuss the 'class' implications of franchise reform which are of more significance.

In rejecting the notion of a 'class' motivation behind franchise extension, a process for which the Liberals claimed the majority of the credit due, the pamphlet attempted

[14] *Principles of Liberalism*, p. 3.
[15] *Principles of Liberalism*, p. 7.
[16] See also *Liberalism in Practice*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), pp. 3, in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., which described the 1832 Reform Act as enfranchising the "ordinary citizen"; also p. 12 which stresses the need for Liberals to "complete the work they have already begun" on franchise reform by equalising the male and female voting age.

to justify the contemporary political positioning of the Liberal Party. The Liberal literature portrayed the party as a stabilising influence on the destructive forces unleashed by class tension, which were depicted as being the provinces of their Conservative and Labour opponents. Yet *Principles of Liberalism* also served the necessary function of defending Liberalism's historical record to an electorate who, either through political inexperience or as a result of propaganda campaigns of their rivals, had little knowledge of the party's past successes.

The fears of the Liberal Party that the working classes were ignorant of the party's past are demonstrated in the pamphlet *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*.[17] Taken from a speech given by T.J. Macnamara, the pamphlet described the events leading up to the early 1924 General Election and its outcome. Having recounted the "stupid and blundering" performance of Baldwin's brief first premiership and the "folly" of his calling for a dissolution so soon after the 1922 Election, Macnamara stressed the need to look beyond Tory failures to find a "deeper" understanding of the new political landscape if the Liberal Party were to address themselves to the new era of three-party politics.

For Macnamara, the primary factor which accounted for the defeat of the Conservatives and the increased share of the vote won by Labour was the emergence of "new estimates of relative values, new perspectives, new ideals, new aspirations", which came into being following the turmoil of war. More importantly, these developments were the result of the admittance to the polity of "vast numbers (of

[17] *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims: An Address delivered in London in February 1924 by The Right Hon. T.J. McNamara, M.P.*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

voters) new to their civic responsibilities".[18] Macnamara underlined the importance to the new electorate of a social programme which would address poverty and provide welfare for the working man, and offered a summary of the gains made by the Liberal Party in those areas[19].

Significantly, he also spoke of the need to remind the new voters of these achievements. Macnamara outlined the Liberals' achievements by means of a series of questions concerning the granting of particular measures, beginning with the matter of franchise reform. He explained his approach by stating that "great numbers of the newly-enfranchised citizens…do not know that the answer to each of these questions is the word "Liberalism". Macnamara identified poor recognition of the Liberal record among the new voters as the chief danger facing the party.[20]

However, lack of interest in Liberalism's historical achievements was not an attitude born of mere ignorance, but had been shaped by the propaganda of the Liberal Party's "more active" opponents. The newly-enfranchised electors "have been accustomed to hear Liberalism denounced as mischievous by one group of politicians, denounced as worthless by another", leading to what Macnamara sees as a pervasive dismissal among these voters of Liberalism as a political force, which must be countered by an active re-stating of the principles and mission of Liberalism, and an urgent insistence on its continuing relevance. A more determined campaign of Liberal propaganda was demanded by Macnamara, exemplified by such pamphlets as *To The Farm Worker,*

[18] T.J. Macnamara, *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*, pp. 3-4.
[19] T.J. Macnamara, *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*, pp. 4-5.
[20] T.J. Macnamara, *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*, pp. 8-9.

from 1924.[21] The pamphlet sought to explain to the agricultural labourer how the party had granted them the vote in 1884, the franchise being "at the root of everything", giving the workers "real power"; another 1924 example being *The Road To Freedom,* which offered a summary of the franchise reform legislation since 1832, as well as the various bills designed to benefit the industrial worker.[22]

The key to understanding the Liberal response to the 1918 franchise extension is to be found in these pamphlets. It is not enough to suggest that the Liberal Party were adversely affected simply by the unfavourable demographics of the new franchise. What matters is the *perception* which these pamphlet authors display that the new electorate would be unreceptive to Liberal appeals. We need to recognise the active influence of the Conservative and Labour Party in the process, who used pamphlet campaigns to create the conditions in which Liberalism came to be perceived as unsuited to the electorate's needs.[23] It is just as important to understand the role played by the Liberal campaigns produced to counter their opponents' efforts. The nature of the problem required a re-positioning of the party on the political spectrum to take into account both the changing electoral demographics and the impact of Tory and Labour propaganda.

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[21] T.J. Macnamara, *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*, p. 9; *To The Farm Worker*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

[22] *To The Farm Worker*, p. 1; *The Road to Freedom*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2, pp. 2-4.

[23] For an account of the effectiveness of Conservative propaganda campaigns in the inter-war years see David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 440., (Feb, 1996), pp. 59-84. For a perspective which allots responsibility for Tory success to Liberal desertions to the Conservatives provoked by fear of Labour's rise see Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, (London: Fontana, 1990), pp. 225-229; for the Conservatives' appeal to 'national unity' through 'One Nation' polices and an appearance of competence, see Robert Waller, 'Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class' in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900*, (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 586-591.

The pursuit of proportional representation was a direct response to the Liberal Party's predicament, as can be seen in *The Three Party Peril*,[24] Harold Storey's pamphlet of 1924. His study of the benefits of PR began by stating the novelty of the situation produced by the December 1923 Election, which he described as demonstrating the potential for any one of the three major parties to "receive a substantial share of the voters", but which would lead to parliamentary turmoil due to the lack of legitimacy which any government formed under such conditions would face.[25]

Worse still, Storey suggested that any realignment of the support for the three parties would be highly unlikely, thus creating a state of near-permanent minority government. Another of his pamphlets, *P.R. vs A.V.* discussed the impossibility of altering the three party system.[26] Storey's final concern suggested both the difficulties faced by the Liberals in this situation, but also how the party attempted to deal with these problems. Storey argued that the biggest danger of minority government would be the formation of either an ultra-reactionary Conservative government or an extreme Socialist equivalent which pursued radical objectives without majority electoral support, due to the inadequacies of the first-past-the-post system. However, he also outlined the importance of all three parties maintaining their distinctive identities, rather than stressing the merits of coalition itself.[27] Defining both Labour

[24] Harold Storey, *The Three Party Peril and the Only Safeguard*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, in Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[25] Storey, *The Three Party Peril*, pp. 3-4.
[26] Harold Storey, *P.R. Versus A.V., Or the democratic and equitable properties of Proportional Representation compared and contrasted with the irrational gamble of the Alternative Vote*, (London: L.P.D, 1924) in Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., p. 3. For other examples of this concern see *Proceedings in connection with the Fortieth Annual Meeting and Special Meeting of the Council and Annual Meeting of the General Committee; held at Buxton on May 30th, 31st and June 1st, 1923* (London: L.P.D., 1923), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., pp51-52, in which George R. Thorne warns of the danger of further coalition given the present state of play between the parties.
[27] Storey, *The Three Party Peril*, pp. 8-9.

and the Conservatives by their extremes and stressing the importance of retaining a balancing force in the shape of a well-articulated Liberalism would form an increasingly large element in Liberal pamphlet literature.

Storey's concept of 'balancing' lends weight to the work of Matthew *et al* in suggesting that the Liberal appeal remained wedded to the notion of a rational electorate capable of recognising the need for maintaining political equilibrium. However, as I have suggested, the reasons for the Liberal malaise did not arrive simply because the party found itself with a shrinking pool of such voters from which to build a base, but from a complex interaction between the propaganda of their opponents, especially that of the Labour Party, and their own efforts to articulate their own unique suitability to deal with the difficulties Britain faced in the mid-1920s.[28]

Two key examples of attempts to demonstrate Liberalism's continued relevance appeared in a pair of pamphlets which together attempted to show both the historical and the present-day vitality of Liberalism. *Liberalism in Practice*[29] dealt with the past achievements of Liberalism, while *Principles of Liberalism,*[30] encountered earlier when discussing the 'class' appeal of Liberalism, tried to show the particular policies which a commitment to the core ideological beliefs of the Liberal Party could produce. *Liberalism in Practice* is typical in many ways of the form of historical literature the party had produced prior to the war, giving a thematic and chronological account of the history of Liberal legislation. However, in certain respects we can see

[28] For the Tory success in recasting British politics as a battle between socialism and the great mass of the populace, see Tanner, 'Electing the governors/the governance of the Elect', p. 50;
[29] *Liberalism in Practice*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, in Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[30] *Principles of Liberalism*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, in Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

key differences which illustrate the new paths Liberal pamphlet literature took when composing narratives.

Emphasis was placed in *Liberalism in Practice* on the Liberal role in passing the nineteenth-century franchise reforms as well as significant bills designed to ameliorate the conditions of the 'working classes' (this section is titled, as had many earlier leaflets taking this form, "What the Liberals Have Done For Labour", suggesting the usefulness that this form of address was taken to have). The Liberal welfare reforms of the pre-war years also featured in the pamphlet's defence of the Liberal record in producing "social" legislation.[31] Most importantly, the pamphlet ensures that these reforms were explained in terms which emphasised the distinctiveness of Liberalism. The legislative achievements of Liberalism were defined as "The Fight For Freedom", and indicative of the fact that the Liberal Party had "always fought for Liberty in every sphere."[32]

Principles of Liberalism defined the differences between the three major parties, and, more importantly, the similarities between Labour and the Conservatives and what differentiates Liberalism from this conjunction of extremes. "The key-note of both the other parties is *authority*. Both pamphlets exalt the idea of the state as an abstract institution, whether that meant the authority of a "superior class" or that of the imposition of state authority over all aspects of life. Liberalism, on the other hand, aimed to "make every man a *free man*, in the sense of having full possession over himself and his own life."[33]

[31] *Liberalism in Practice*, pp. 3-5.
[32] *Liberalism in Practice*, p. 3.
[33] *Principles of Liberalism*, p. 3.

In practical terms, the application of Liberal principles required policies which mediated between that of the two 'authoritarian' parties. Liberalism in industrial terms meant rejecting the imposition of Socialist control which would serve to diminish personal liberties, but equally it required the equalising of conditions under the capitalist system which themselves served to restrict liberty in terms of denying a man the fruits of his labour. The unequal bargaining power between capital and Labour meant that the idea of 'free competition' must be discarded, as it did not provide a "mutual liberty" of all parties. Casting social policy in a language of "mutual liberty" necessitated showing how the Liberal approach differed from Socialist prescriptions. The distinction drawn, that while the control of competition was necessary the removal of the "stimulus…of private enterprise" suggests that the room in which post-war Liberal narratives operated was a narrow one, which needed considerable efforts to distinguish itself from either side of the capital/labour conflict from its rivals.[34]

In defining themselves specifically as a force for equilibrium between reaction and revolution, the Liberal Party risked portraying itself as little more than a restraining influence on the extremes of Toryism and Labour, playing into Labour criticisms of Liberalism as anachronistic and ambivalent, if not deceitful. Of crucial importance here is the absence at the heart of this literature of any form of idealised 'working man' around whom the narratives are shaped. Yet his absence does not, as Lawrence suggests, indicate a Liberal Party struggling to identify a particular constituency to whom to appeal. I shall now turn to the impact of the struggles between the Liberals and Labour in shaping the straits into which the Liberal pamphlet campaigns were forced.

[34] *Principles of Liberalism*, pp. 9-10.

The Post-War Challenge: ILP and Labour Party Literature

Duncan Tanner's study *Political Change and the Labour Party* represents one of the most comprehensive studies of the crossover between Liberal and Labour political ideology in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Tanner proposes that we can best understand the relationship between the two parties at the level of ideas, and that this can only be achieved by a sophisticated study of the inter-party factions that promoted or checked particular ideological formulations within the wider party context.[35] Tanner suggests that the key to understanding the success achieved by the Labour Party following the First World War is to recognise the aspects of pre- and post-war Labour ideology that corresponded with the 'New Liberal' wing of the Liberal Party. He argues that the Labour Party prospered less because of its own unique ideological formulations but because it represented a palatable alternative to those supporters of 'New Liberal' ideas who had become disenchanted with both the Coalition and Independent Liberals.[36]

Tanner's conclusions are important to this study because, as we have seen, the Liberal Party's pamphlet literature displays the party's concerns that just such a process of 'drift' was occurring. While a statistical analysis of the degree of support switching was piecemeal, the more fundamental crises occurring at this time were the rhetorical and philosophical quandaries in which the post-war situation left the Liberal Party.[37] Again, it was the *perception* of a shift in support which gave rise to the changes which began to occur in Liberal pamphlet literature following the First World War.

[35] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 41-42.
[36] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, p. 371; see also Pat Thane, 'Labour and local politics: radicalism, reform and social reform, 1880-1914' in Biagini, E.F. and Reid, A.J. (eds.) *Currents of Radicalism*, p.254.
[37] See Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 408-412.

Labour had, as we have seen, begun before the Great War to challenge the notion of Liberalism's mission of 'progress' through gradual change and the identification of the 'interests' of the 'Liberal Working Man' with a Liberal Party who were uniquely attuned to their needs. In the post-war years, the Liberal conception of the politics of 'progress' and its usefulness as a means of securing 'working-class' support was not only being contested, but was in danger of being overturned. The Labour Party had, in its 1918 party constitution committed itself to a platform of social reform using the apparatus of the state, derived from the ideas of the Fabian Society and Sidney Webb in particular. Adopting such a position implied a rejection of violent upheaval or any wide-ranging challenge to the functioning of British society, emphasising the new ideological cohesion and pragmatic approach which had emerged with in the Labour Party as the stresses of war nullified any alternative to Webbian gradualism as a basis for party policy.[38]As Tanner notes, the ILP had begun to adapt its appeal to take advantage of an increase in middle-class support attracted to it by its wartime stance and a perceived shift towards a better accommodation with the notion of individual liberty.[39] The Labour Party were able to articulate their own model of 'working-class' political participation which used similar concepts of securing 'progress' and of the 'duty' of the 'working man' to support Labour as the party best placed to achieve it. The character of what we may term the 'Labour Working Man' in comparison to his Liberal and Tory counterparts observed in earlier chapters, may be inferred from these adopted narratives.

The response of the Labour Party to the Representation of the People Act of 1918 demonstrates the efforts the party made to shape an idealised for of 'working man'

[38] J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912-1918*, (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 270-277.
[39] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, p. 398.

upon whom to base their appeals for support. As David Howell notes in *MacDonald's Party*, although Ramsay MacDonald's election as overall Labour leader in 1922 and gains made by ILP members in the General Election of that year had been heralded as a triumph for the ILP wing of the Labour Party, the relationship between the two bodies had not been as harmonious at the time of MacDonald's electoral defeat in 1918, and the ILP began to develop an antagonistic relationship with the Parliamentary Labour Party over the course of the 1920s.[40] We should therefore be cautious about taking the positions declared by ILP literature as standing for that of the Labour Party as a whole. However, the constructed form of 'Labour' against which the Liberals defined themselves in their pamphlet literature was one which was aimed at combating a 'Socialist' threat typified by the forms of agitation noted by Howell as practiced by the inter-war ILP.[41] In this regard, it is helpful that we focus on the form of 'Socialism' with which the Liberal literature was preoccupied.

As the self-declared 'political' and 'educational' wing of the Labour Party, the ILP continued to supply much of the propaganda thrust in terms of Labour pamphlet literature.[42] One example of their contribution was S. Higenbottam's *The New Franchise: All About the Representation of the People Act, 1918.* [43] Higenbottam, who according to the pamphlet was a national organiser for the Labour Party, began by explaining that the purpose of the pamphlet was to clarify the Act's provisions to

[40] David Howell, *MacDonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922-1931*,(Oxford U.P., 2002), pp. 234-238.
[41] Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, p. 236.
[42] For a contemporary summary of the ILP. relationship with the Labour Party see *The ILP. and the Labour Party-What is the Difference?*, (Bristol; Bristol ILP., 1918) in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1919 Vol. 1/25.
[43] S. Higenbottam, *The New Franchise: All about The Representation of the People Act, 1918*, (London: Labour Party Office, 1918), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918 Vol. 1/16.

"the ordinary folk."[44] Using this term to identify the pamphlet's audience is significant when considered along with the statement which followed, which was that the Act "may prove to be a potent instrument in the hands of the democracy".

Higenbottam was suggesting that the 1918 Act was significant to the Labour movement not because of its place in the struggle for fairer apportionment of votes, but the purposes to which it could be put. By contrast, the Liberal narratives we have seen above argued that it is the Act's place in the continuum of 'reform' which accords it its significance at least as much as its effects. Here, Higenbottam spoke in terms of using the Act to "speedily press for complete Adult Suffrage", emphasising that this was a result of the franchise having removed "absurd electoral restrictions" and having placed power "in the hands of the people".[45] The distinctive feature of the Labour response to franchise extension was therefore to be found in depicting the granting of the vote as a boost to Labour's chances of effecting the changes proposed in their other propaganda material; changes which were depicted as being demanded by "the people", an appellation which would prove a malleable tool in addressing Labour propaganda to a base which could be widened to include dissident 'New Liberals' as well as appealing to their 'working-class' base, consistent with Tanner's assessment of Labour's post-war successes.[46]

Philip Snowden described the benefits of the increased Labour representation produced by the 1918 Act in his pamphlet *The New Franchise Act Clearly Explained*,

[44] S. Higenbottam, *The New Franchise*, p. 3.
[45] S. Higenbottam, *The New Franchise*, p. 3. See also the ILP.'s *Parliamentary Report* pamphlet for 1918 in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918 Vol. 2/24, which describes the Representation of the People Act as "a compromise measure" due to the inequality of the male and female franchises it created.
[46] For the need to maintain the support of the party's 'base', see Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 398-399.

published that same year.[47] The Labour Party, he argued, deserved the support of the new voters not because of the party's role in pushing for franchise reform but because of the uses to which Labour would put the popular mandate should they receive it: Labour's "programme of economic, industrial and social reforms and its attitude on great international questions are such as to entitle it to the support of the men and women electors…who wanted to see politics used as an instrument for the advancement of democratic ideals." Snowden referred throughout to "the new electors" and "the enfranchisement of women and of all adults", never directly referring to 'working-class' males. When summarising the terms of the Act he notes the enfranchisement of women, but the extension of the male franchise is related in terms of numbers rather than 'classes'.[48] The avoidance of 'class'-based terminology was echoed by the ILP's National Executive Committee, whose 1918 Report notes that "widespread dissatisfaction with the old political parties has caused very large numbers of people to turn to the Labour Party in the hope that they might find there a political party better suited to their political needs."[49]

Snowden's class-neutral language was used alongside more overt attempts to suggest the link between the 1918 Act and the 'working classes', yet even so, the Labour pamphlets were able to make this 'class' appeal a wide-ranging one. The most notable area in which this can be shown concerns the enfranchisement of women. In this field perhaps more than any other, the ILP pamphlet campaign shows itself to be more sure-footed than their Liberal rivals, despite Tanner noting reluctance before the war

[47] Philip Snowden, *The New Franchise Act Clearly Explained*, (London; The National Labour Press, 1918) in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918 Vol.2/32.
[48] Snowden, *The New Franchise Act Clearly Explained*, p. 8;
[49] *Report of the National Administrative Council of the Independent Labour Party* (in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918 Vol. 2/28, pp. 15-16,

to greater integration within the wider Labour Party of women's suffrage movements.[50] Matthew McCormack has highlighted the need for historians to recognise the male gendering implicit in political discourse which was not directly targeted at women, yet the ILP literature displays an approach to gender politics which aimed not to depict female voters as a distinct body, but as being affected by the same problems as their male counterparts, allowing for a cohesive cross-gender appeal to emerge.[51] *Women and The Vote*, another 1918 pamphlet, appealed to the new female 'working-class' voters to join with their male counterparts to reject the "old way of voting" and avoid the perils of the "working people…voting against each other", as had previously been the case.[52] The pamphlet therefore represented a clear attempt to link together an embrace of the 'democracy' created by the 1918 Act with an appeal to traditional ILP and Labour 'class' rhetoric, which, as well as being aimed at attracting support from a wider demographic, shows an attempt at rebuffing claims to 'sectionalism'.

In doing so, Snowden showed how the Labour literature demonstrated the greater ease with which the party were able to make the transition to the age of mass democracy and female suffrage than that displayed by the Liberals. Ethel Snowden,in her 1919 pamphlet *The Real Women's Party*, illustrated how the Labour appeal to women complemented their broader arguments.[53] Snowden gave a thorough argument for women to give their support to the ILP, arguing from economic, social

[50] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour* Party, p. 320.
[51] Matthew McCormack, 'Men, 'the Public' and Political History' in McCormack (ed.) *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 14.
[52] *Women and the Vote* in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918 Vol. 2/45, p. 1. See also the ILP. .pamphlet *An Open Letter to Women Voters*, (Place and publisher not given, n.d., c.1918) in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918/23.
[53] Mrs. Philip Snowden, *The Real Women's Party*, (Glasgow: Reformers' Bookstall Ltd., 1919) in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1920 Vol. 2/54.

and moral perspectives, as well as using historical narratives to construct a picture of the party as female suffrage's greatest supporters. Having begun by noting the competition for women's votes from all political parties, she stresses the same point as her husband Philip; that the ILP aimed to secure women's votes not out of a perceived debt of gratitude for the work of the party's 'pioneers' in gaining the vote, but because the ILP represented a spirit of 'co-operation' which Snowden identifies as the party's distinctive and most attractive feature.[54]

'Co-operation' was defined as the diametric opposite of 'competition', and by arguing in such a manner Snowden was able to explain the link between the ILP and what she identified as "Women's Interests in Politics".[55] Female concerns are identified as being an opposition to "poverty, impurity and intemperance", derived from their maternal concerns for the future of the nation and the fate of their offspring, but these fears are in turn explained in more complex language than a simple assignation of 'women's interests' in social problems to mere sentimentality. Their role as wife and mother are shown to involve great sacrifice in terms of the work required in performing these roles, with the vote a recompense for their efforts as well as a

[54] Mrs Philip Snowden, *The Real Women's Party*, pp. 2-4.

[55] This was a link which, despite the difficulties in establishing formal links with the women's movements Tanner noted, was a popular topic for ILP. pamphlet literature in the pre-and post-enfranchisement era. See for example Isabella O. Ford, *Women and Socialism*, (London: ILP., 1904), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1904/17, which on p. identifies Socialism and the women's movement as "but different aspects of the same great force", both arising from "the common evil of economic dependence"; T.D. Benson, *Women's Franchise: Its Philosophy and Effects*, (London: ILP., 1904), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1904/10, which situated its argument on the grounds that increasing female employment naturally led to a demand for equal political rights; Keir Hardie, *The Labour Party and Women's Enfranchisement*, (London: ILP., 1907), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1907/25. Hardie's *Radicals and Reform: Being a Statement of the Case for the Inlusion of Women on the coming Reform Bill*, (London: ILP., 1912), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1912/12, on pp. 3-5 criticises Liberal vacillation and deception over the issue of women's suffrage.

recognition that their 'interest' in society and politics was worthy of representation in parliament.[56]

The significance of Snowden's comments is that by linking 'women's interests' with socio-economic and political issues, the ILP was able to construct a rationale for these female voters to support themselves and by extent the Labour Party, in a way which was consistent with earlier Labour criticisms of the established political order. When she discussed the other parties' claims to represent the new women voters, Snowden was able to use arguments and themes which would have been familiar to any existing ILP or Labour supporter, and which would have acted as a way of introducing newer voters to the broader narratives of the Labour Party and its affiliates. The Conservatives are represented as the party of "privilege", and whose attempts to represent themselves as uniquely "constitutional" were unjustified when compared to the other parties. While Snowden does credit "Toryism at its highest and best" with philanthropic intentions, Tory social reformism is dismissed as being of less importance to that party than the defence of "private possession" which represented the "essence" of Conservatism.[57]

The Liberals are similarly credited for their espousal of "liberty and social reform", but Snowden considers the party's individualist capitalism to be a greater priority for the party, the effects of which are depicted as being injurious to "the workers".[58] The Liberals are portrayed as using 'individualism' as a front for allowing capitalism to operate unchecked, thus implicating the party directly in that process. The two forces of Liberalism and capitalism are both described as acting in the interests of "private

[56] Mrs Philip Snowden, *The Real Women's Party*, p. 4.
[57] Mrs Philip Snowden, *The Real Women's Party*, p. 6.
[58] Mrs Philip Snowden, *The Real Women's Party*, p. 6.

owners", thus emphasising the degree to which the two established parties both acted to preserve the same 'interests' at the expense of the 'workers'.[59] By referring to the actions of "the parties representing landlordism and capitalism" which had brought poverty and suffering to "the overwhelming masses of the people", Snowden linked the two great parties together and rendered the claims by either the Conservative or the Liberal Party to remedy the situation hypocritical at best. The only alternative to the two parties of property was the ILP, who would ensure that "no child of any women (would) be given over to the cruel temptations of vice, to the slow tortures of poverty or to the savage brutalities of war".[60]

If the ILP were working towards a synthesis of traditional Labour themes with a conceptualisation of 'women's interests', the Labour Party as a whole displayed their ability to adapt their message to encompass the perceived 'interests' of the remainder of the electorate. One example of this was Workers' Education Association writer George Guest's *An Introduction to English Rural History*, which aimed to provide an education in Labour history to an increasingly militant section of the agricultural workforce.[61] Guest attempted to show how the trades union movement related to the history of the agricultural labourer, with occasionally fanciful conclusions being drawn – for example, comparing the leaders of local agitation during the Peasants' Revolt as being " a sort of trade union secretary" – but the significance here is that the attempt was being made to establish the relevance of the Labour Party to groups

[59] For earlier examples of attempts to link the Liberal and Conservative Parties together as representatives of capitalism see *Speech delivered at the Temperance Hall, Leicester by J.R. MacDonald on the Occasion of his Adoption as Labour Candidate for Leicester, 3rd October* 1899, (Place and name of publisher unknown, n.d., c. 1899), in the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, box 135, ref 329.12-1944/3.
[60] Mrs Philip Snowden, *The Real Women's Party*, p. 16.
[61] G. Guest, *An Introduction to English Rural History*, (London: The National Labour Press, 1920), in the Labour History Archive, People's History Museum, box 11, ref. 320. pp. 3-6.

outside the proletariat base which their Conservative and Liberal opponents supposed to be their base.[62] By applying the theme of 'capital versus labour' to the history of events such as the post-Black Death labour crisis, Guest's pamphlet contributed to an accumulating body of Labour literature from various strands of the party which depicted a consistent argument as to the relevance of Labour politics to a larger portion of the polity than it had been able to previously.[63]

What was more, the Labour Party had intensified its criticisms of the Liberal Party in the aftermath of the Great War, and political histories again formed a significant component in the pamphlet campaigns through which these attacks on the Liberal position were conducted. These histories began to exhibit new features compared with the pre-war anti-Liberal historical narratives, which had drawn on long-term themes of capitalist oppression with which the Liberals were shown to have been complicit, although these histories continued to be produced, as with George's pamphlet.[64] Newer pamphlets could use the narrative structures and employ similarly constructed arguments to criticise more recent political events.

The 1924 ILP pamphlet *Six Months Liberalism* focused on contemporary events which were said to show that "Liberalism has fulfilled its mission and now lags superfluously on the stage", having succumbed to the new "vested interests" of

[62] G. Guest, *An Introduction to English Rural History*, p. 22.
[63] G. Guest, *An Introduction to English Rural History*, p. 21.
[64] The C.A. Glyde pamphlet *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy in the Nineteenth Century*, (Keighley: Whitworth and Co., n.d, c.1900), in the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, box 11, ref. 320, which drew heavily on this form of narrative, went through multiple editions and had reached its thirtieth by 1924, by which time it had been revised and renamed to cover the early twentieth century. Glyde's *Pamphlets for the People No.7: The Centenary of the Massacre of British Workers: Peterloo, Manchester, Monday August 16th 1819*, (Bradford, publisher unknown , 1919), in the Labour History Archive, box. 11, ref. 320. was another example of the long-term narrative employed as a commentary on contemporary events.

commerce which depended for their success on the maintaining of Free Trade.[65] The Liberals under Campbell-Bannerman was still led by the "better side of the party", but before long the influence of Liberal Imperialism – "the jingo and capitalist aspect of Free Trade" – as personified by Asquith, Grey and Lloyd George had taken hold of the reins. The Liberals were now "a party with idealist followers but led by materialistic leaders."[66]

Considered alongside Tanner's thesis in which the Labour Party succeeded by presenting themselves as the true heirs of the 'New Liberal' social programme, Glyde's references to Liberal factionalism is significant. Liberal *ideals* are not necessarily being criticised, rather the Liberal *Party* were being shown as a deficient vehicle with which to express and implement those ideas. While some ILP literature prior to the war had expressed similar accommodation with certain Liberal tenets from a distinctively 'Labour' perspective, here a deeper process emerged – the pamphlet was articulating important ways in which Labour were able to claim the mantle of 'progress' and 'reform' from the Liberal grasp whilst asserting an individual appeal which negated the very need for a Liberal Party to exist.[67] In effect, the pamphlet argued that Labour was the only true vehicle for continuing the 'mission' of Liberalism whilst attacking 'Liberalism' as a meaningful *philosophical* term for describing that mission. *Six Month's Liberalism* supplied further evidence in

[65] *Six Months Liberalism: A Record of Mess, Muddle and Make-Belief*, (London: Independent Labour Party Information Committee , 1924) in the Labour History Archive, People's History Museum, box 192, ref. 329.74-79.
[66] *Six Months Liberalism*, p. 2.
[67] See for example H. Brockhouse, *The Curse of the Country: The Land Monopoly*, (London: ILP., 1909), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1909/13, esp. p. 3, which stresses the importance of the land question to the workers and criticises Liberal failure to legislate adequately in this area; Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Teetotalism*, (London: ILP., 1909), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1909 Vol. 1/66, p1. recognises the need for Socialists to display their temperance more readily to refute criticisms in this regard.

support of Tanner when it discusses "The Great Schism" between the Asquith and Lloyd George factions: "the scramble for power had divided Liberalism into two antagonistic groups" differing in their aims, but with each "talking of high-souled Liberalism".[68] Rather than being simple beneficiaries of the Liberal Party's difficulties, however, the pamphlet suggested a much more active role played by Labour in emphasising their compatibility with Liberal goals than Tanner allows for.

By demonstrating the contradictions inherent in 'Liberalism' as a term through an explanation of its descent into factionalism, the pamphlet attempts to show the limits to which 'Liberalism' could act as a force for change. The only issue which served to reunite the two opposing wings of the party is shown to have been the defence of Free Trade, which as the pamphlet quoted Lloyd George as stating "may be an issue not specifically associated with Liberalism".[69] Thus, Labour could articulate their support for policies which are likely to have found favour with Tanner's disaffected 'New Liberal' adherents, whilst prising these issues away from direct association with Liberalism itself.

The issue of Free Trade is useful for analysing how this process worked. The 1918 edition of the popular and frequently revised pamphlet *All About The ILP* contained a passage which explains the ILP stance on the matter.[70] The party opposed Protection because "Socialism is the ally of the worker and Protection the ally of the Capitalist and profiteer".[71] The denunciation of Protectionism continued by attributing the problems of British industry and trade to the economic actions of "the privileged

[68] *Six Months Liberalism*, p. 3.
[69] *Six Months Liberalism*, pp. 4-5.
[70] *All About the ILP.*, (London: The Independent Labour Party, 1918), in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1918 Vol. 1/1.
[71] *All About the ILP.*, p. 15.

classes", thus linking a defence of Free Trade to the ILP's broader socialist critique of the capitalist state. Moreover, the internationalist dimensions of Free Trade economics were connected to the ILP's pacifism and to the international trades unions movement. Finally, Free Trade was not to be pursued as an end itself, but rather it "should be accompanied by the public and democratic ownership and control of industry."[72] The pamphlet , therefore, articulated its own conceptualisation of Free Trade which could fit into the broader Labour narratives of 'class' oppression and evocations of the harm caused by irresponsible capitalism.

Arguments suggesting Free Trade could best be defended by Labour were already well-rehearsed in the party's propaganda. ILP member and anti-conscription campaigner A. Fenner Brockway's pre-war pamphlet *Labour and Liberalism* argued that the dogmatic Liberal pursuit of Free Trade as a cure for all economic and social ills represented "a fool's paradise", and that the party's focus on trade figures whilst paying insufficient attention to unemployment showed that the Liberals "have shut their eyes to the distress which will inevitably follow."[73] Labour's conceptualisation of Free Trade, then, was one which took a popular Liberal policy and used it to further the argument that the Labour Party represented a vehicle for *extending* the 'progressive' agenda to encompass reforms which 'capitalist' Liberalism as a philosophy and as a parliamentary force was fundamentally incapable of pursuing.

[72] *All About the ILP.*, p. 15.
[73] A. Fenner Brockway, *Labour and Liberalism: An Examination of the Government's Record from a Working-Class Standpoint* (London: The National Labour Press, n.d., c. 1913) in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics, ref. ILP 5/1913 Vol. 1/8, pp. 24-25. For a biography of Brockway see David Howell, 'Brockway, (Archibald) Fenner, Baron Brockway (1888–1988)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39849, accessed 12 April 2012].

By demonstrating the limitations of Liberal politics Labour were able to reduce the political space in which the Liberal Party could operate. While the ILP's pamphlet campaigns had targeted some Liberal policy areas in their literature prior to the war, the Labour pamphlets were not merely exploiting common ground, but actively seeking to impose themselves upon the 'Liberal' electorate as a direct replacement. In this light we can begin to appreciate how the authors of Labour-orientated pamphlet literature could help shape their attacks on the Liberals. Drawing on what were by then long-established themes of Liberal inability to fulfil 'working-class' expectations the Labour literature was able to incorporate 'Liberal' issues and policy priorities into their critiques of Liberalism without appearing inconsistent.[74]

The synthesis of Labour and 'New Liberal' ideas was more than just an opportunistic attempt to capture disaffected Liberal votes, but an internally cohesive set of arguments and principles which amounted to a nascent ideology with which to approach the new mass democracy, articulated within an essentially 'Labour' narrative. It is not enough to explain the Labour success as a simple matter of profiting from the Liberal split as the 'catastophist' argument would have it; an active process had been at work which capitalised on such difficulties but which ultimately drew its strengths from the adaptability of 'Labour' arguments and narratives to the changing circumstances following the imposition of mass democracy. Pamphlet literature, then, had a central role in creating the conditions for Labour's success.

[74] See for example A. Fenner Brockway, *Labour and Liberalism*, pp. 84-91 in general, p. 90 for explicit statement that the mere fulfilment of the Liberal programme would not be enough to cure social ills; the Labour Party "stood for much more" and that only the "complete overthrow of Capitalism" would be sufficient.

The Open Road: New Liberal Narratives

This section will analyse the Liberal response to the Labour challenge and will demonstrate how the failure to counter the narratives which shaped the Labour literature impacted upon the Liberal pamphlet campaigns in the post-war years.. The Liberal Party were forced to face a new era of three-party politics in which their well-developed narrative forms and their approach to the politics of 'class' were inappropriate, and which required 're-positioning' of the party in its ideological, representational and rhetorical contexts. These problems, I shall argue, were a direct result of the Liberals' failure to produce an effective counter-narrative to the Labour challenge before the Great War.

Yet what we have seen above when studying Labour's electoral literature is that the debate may not be a simple case of pitting an argument focusing on the unfortunate circumstances of the Liberal Party against one arguing for the certainty of Labour success. As this section will now explain, the Liberal problems were not simply a matter of an exaggerated collapse in the Liberal vote but had more to do with the presentation of its political narratives, and an accompanying crisis in terms of how it was to position itself on the political spectrum.[75]

The Liberal pamphlet campaigns of the post-war era needed to fulfil three functions. Firstly, it needed to provide an effective critique of the Conservative Party and its attacks upon the Progressive social and economic agenda, and the defence of Free

[75] For a criticism of Matthew, McKibbin and Kay's analysis of the Liberal electoral collapse, see Hart, pp. 823-824; 827-828. See also Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 408-415. Both conclude that there can be no simple correlation made between the increase in the franchise and the Liberal defeat of 1918.

Trade in particular following Baldwin's re-statement of the Protectionist creed.[76] The second purpose of the Liberal pamphlet campaign would be to respond to the Labour challenge to Liberalism's role as the chief vehicle of Progressive politics. Finally, and perhaps most urgently, was the need to create a body of literature which could restate Liberal principles in a away which took account of the new political realities of the three-party state while providing a platform for future success. It was this last task which proved most problematic for the Liberal Party, but the problems experienced in this area derived ultimately from the difficulty in establishing a narrative which gave the party a clear picture of what differentiated the party from its rivals.

The Liberals were on their surest footing when it came to producing anti-Tory literature. Attacking the Conservative Party and its literature required no major shift in the Liberal narrative, nor the construction of new models of 'working-class' politics upon which to superimpose their appeals. The campaign against the Conservative challenge could therefore proceed along established grounds, establishing the Liberals' superior claims to have produced legislation to benefit the 'working man' while correspondingly attacking the Tory record in this regard.

One obstacle in the way of such an approach was the continuance of the wartime Coalition following the conflict's conclusion. Tanner notes the conundrum in which

[76] Ross McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom: The Conservative Party and the 'Public' in Inter-war Britain'; *The Ideologies of Class: Social relations in Britain, 1880-1950*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, reprinted 2011), pp. 259-293. For more on the Conservative attempts to cast Labour and socialism as the sole enemy of all 'moderate' opinion, see James T. Smyth, 'Resisting Labour: Unionists, Liberals and Moderates in Glasgow between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), pp. 375-401; also Phillip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values*,(Cambridge U.P., 1999), pp. 177-186; Robert Waller, 'Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class' in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.) *Conservative Century*, (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.. 571-572.

the Asquithian Liberals were placed by its existence.[77] Even in 1923, Lord Grey raised significant concerns about the prospects of Liberal reunion if the party based its attacks on the Baldwin government by reference to the record of the coalition, whether that reference be positive or negative[78]. Such concerns notwithstanding, the 1923 Report of the National Liberal Federation Executive Committee, published as a pamphlet with the Conference Report for that year, felt able to comment on "the unlamented fall of one Government and the futile rise of another", with the former representing "in practice…for the most part a Conservative Government", little distinct from its "wholly and frankly Conservative" successor.[79]

The new ministry was initially criticised in Liberal pamphlet literature for its seeming lack of direction. In electing the Conservatives, Britain was described as having "got rid of a government that had no coherent or consistent policy" but replaced it with one which "has no policy of any kind." It was not long, however, before this dismissive tone began to be replaced by a realisation that the Baldwin government intended to follow through on its Protectionist convictions. The Liberals' concerns manifested themselves in familiar narrative forms, based upon established defences of Free Trade which drew on the successful 1906 campaigns, as well as a critique of the Tories' attempts to secure a majority for Protectionism.

The latter is evidenced by the introduction to the party Manifesto for the 1923 General Election which attacked the Tories for creating political upheaval for reasons relating to their own self-interest. Having stood on a platform of "five years of tranquillity", the Conservatives had selfishly instead chosen to "plunge the country into…turmoil"

[77] Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 404-405.
[78] *Proceedings in connection with the Fortieth Annual Meeting* (1923), p. 56
[79] *Proceedings in connection with the Fortieth Annual Meeting* (1923), pp. 12-13.

over unsubstantiated claims that Tariff Reform could cure unemployment.[80] Baldwin had "deliberately chosen" an early date for the Election to avoid parliamentary scrutiny of his reasons for seeking a dissolution, which were contrary to the concerns for the country's unemployed. The Prime Minister had brought the contest about as a means of deflecting attention from his party's poor handling of the post-war economic crisis.[81]

Baldwin's self-interest was made evident by the description of Protectionist remedies as "unproved and unprovable", and by alleging that some senior Conservatives had explicitly stated that the tactic of calling an election to pursue such aims was motivated primarily by a desire to strengthen the party's position. As well as being cynical, Baldwin's tariff campaign had already had its day and, implicitly, had been found wanting: he and his party were "reviving the musty war-cry that Tariff Reform means work for all."[82] In *Tariffs and Unemployment: An Exposure of a Hollow Sham*, taken from a speech by Asquith from November 1923, the Liberal leader questioned why Bonar Law's "considered declaration" that Tariff Reform was unlikely to solve as many economic problems as it may cause was being abandoned, given the largely unchanged unemployment situation: "If Protection is a remedy for (unemployment) now, it was just as much a remedy then."[83] The Liberal Manifesto therefore attacked the Protectionist revival both by means of its ineffectiveness and because of the

[80] *The Liberal Manifesto: A Call To The Nation*, (L.P.D., 1923) in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[81] *The Liberal Manifesto*, (1923), p. 3., see also the 1924 Report of the Executive Committee in *Proceedings in connection with the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the National Liberal Federation, held at Brighton on May 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, 1924*, (London: L.P.D., 1924) in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., p. for the use of tactics of Protection to cover for "the Government's blunders and…its feeble and futile policies".
[82] *The Liberal Manifesto*, (1923), p. 3.
[83] *Tariffs and Unemployment: An Exposure of a Hollow Sham., A Speech Delivered at Dewsbury, November 5, 1923 by The Rt. Hon. H.H. Asquith, M.P.*, (London: L.P.D., 1923) in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2., pp. 3-4.

heedless nature of Baldwin's pursuit of it: despite warnings even from pro-Tariff Reform such as his predecessors Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain that Protection could only harm the struggling economy, Baldwin "asks for a blank cheque, and if he is wrong the country must take the risk."[84]

Baldwin thus acquired a threefold portrayal in Liberal pamphlet literature; as lacking in ideas, as pursuing a reckless economic course and as being dishonest about his intentions. These characteristics should be read partly in response to what historians such as Philip Williamson have identified as Baldwin's keenness to depict the Conservative Party and himself in particular as the protectors of the working classes from the uncertain economic and social situation following the war, as well as the appeals made to the non-collectivist sections of society to embrace 'conventional wisdom' in order to promote a new, Conservative bloc of electoral support which Ross McKibbin identified in Baldwinite Conservatism.[85] Certainly, attacks on Baldwin's cultivated persona played a part in the Liberal literature, as the cartoon 'Vote Liberal and Swat That Fly!' indicated – Baldwin's depiction as a fly carrying the slogan of 'Protection' is the image which carries the cartoon's 'message'; however, the representation of the premier's somewhat haughty facial expression and his smoking of a cigar suggest an attempt to depict him as aloof and unconcerned with the impact of Tariff Reform.[86]

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[84] *The Liberal Manifesto*, (1923), p. 5. See also *Tariffs and Unemployment*, p. 3., for Asquith's statement that "the knowledge of an impending election…is as disturbing a factor as could be introduced by the most reckless politician into the life of a business community".

[85] [85] Philip Williamson, 'The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin' in Michael Bentley (ed.), *Public and private doctrine: essays in British history presented to Michael Cowling*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1993), pp. 184-185; McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom', pp. 270-271. See also David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 44., (Feb, 1996), pp. 59-84.

[86] 'Vote Liberal and Swat That Fly!', cartoon (London: L.P.D., 1923), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

However, another factor in the Liberals focusing on Baldwin's Protectionism was that it simply provided an issue on which the recently reunited Liberal Party could coalesce, based as it was on such long-standing and well-articulated arguments and principles. If the Liberal Party could only come together to defend Free Trade, it became all the more imperative to argue that the only policy which defined the Conservative Party was their commitment to Tariff Reform.

We can see that the Liberal pamphlet literature which dealt with the Tory threat took just such a line of argument, exemplified by leaflets such as *Imperial Preference: The Only Tory Policy* from 1924.[87] The pamphlet restated the pre-war Liberal connection between Protection and "Taxes on Food" and constructed an impression of a Tory Party determined to force Protection on the country despite the nation's continued opposition to it.[88] The Conservatives were shown to have "tried to get a majority for Protectionist Taxes at four General Elections" since 1910, but had "failed every time".[89] The Tories' continued pursuit of Protection, under the guise of 'Imperial Preference' is thus depicted as an irrational one; a policy which was adopted solely because it represented "their one special mark as a Party".[90]

The selfish and reckless pursuit of Protection was contrasted with the Liberal Party's defence of Free Trade along altruistic and rational lines. Examples of this theme can be seen in the 1923 leaflets *Protection Causes Unemployment* and *A Businessman on*

[87] *Imperial Preference: The Only Tory Policy* in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[88] *Imperial Preference: The Only Tory Policy*, p. 3.
[89] See also the 1924 Report of the Executive Committee in *Proceedings in connection with the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the National Liberal Federation*, for the "old but always distracting" nature of Protectionist appeals.
[90] *Imperial Preference: The Only Tory Policy*, p. 1.

Protection.[91] In the former, the impact of "Protecting the home market" was explained, as Protection was shown to lead directly to higher prices and falling consumption, thus increasing unemployment. We can easily see how the Liberals were linking, as they did in 1906, a defence of Free Trade with 'working class' economic 'interests'. The second pamphlet shows a more interesting use of altruism, as a letter from Austin Hopkinson, an M.P. as well as a businessman who stood to gain from the rejection of Free Trade is reproduced to show the ill effects of Protection. Hopkinson alleged that Free Trade alone kept the quality of his products high and the prices low, as under free market policies he would be left free to produce "rotten bad machines at exorbitant prices", with the beneficiary being the national interest. The contrasts with the representations of Baldwin's conduct are clear and indicate the lines on which the Liberals pursued their campaign to preserve Free Trade.

If the conflicts over Free Trade and Protection were the core theme of Liberal attacks on Tory policy, the Liberal literature's stance on Conservative politicking was based on similarly fundamental matters, but in this area we can see distinct elements of concern. The Liberal Party's relationship with the Conservatives was no longer being defined as the confident struggle against reaction which typified earlier Liberal literature, but instead the post-war pamphlets displayed a marked sense of existential crisis. Borne out of a heightened fear of being squeezed from both sides of the political spectrum, David Lloyd George best summed up this thought process in *Liberalism and Liberty*, a reprint of his speech to the London Liberal Federation in

[91] *Protection Causes Unemployment* (London: L.P.D., 1923), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.; *A Businessman on Protection* (London: L.P.D., 1923), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.

May 1924.[92] His tone emphasised the gravity of the situation in which Liberalism found itself. In the Conservative and Labour Parties, the Liberals were faced with "two parties…equally resolved with relentless purpose to destroy the Liberal Party."[93]

The Liberals' historical relationship with the Conservatives acquired a sense of critical importance, and was depicted in terms which are melodramatic even when compared with the earlier Liberal literature in which the ancient and intractable struggle between the two parties had loomed large. The Tory Party had "for centuries…waged war against Liberalism". The conflict was "decreed by inherent and irreconcilable antagonisms of aim and principle", and these had only been made worse by attempts at compromise: the Conservatives "have in the end prevailed over every attempt at common action in the national interest."[94] Thus distrust of Baldwin's motives for pursuing Protectionism can be seen in context of one further act in what is shown to be a history of Tory self-interest and deception.

If we contrast this with the narratives of Liberal/Tory conflict we identified in Chapter Two, we can see a significant and revealing shift in the way this relationship was conceived and depicted. While Lloyd George describes the Tories here as "The Traditional Foe", the 'traditional' form of Toryism which Liberalism had depicted itself against – the necessary corollary of Liberalism, acting as its check and brake until Conservatism was perverted into 'Beaconsfieldism' – is replaced by a construction of Toryism as an avaricious assailant upon Liberalism, striving to destroy

[92] *Liberalism and Liberty: A Speech by the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George, O.M., M.P. to the London Liberal Federation at the National Liberal Club, London on the 12th of May, 1924* (London: L.P.D., 1924) in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1924, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[93] *Liberalism and Liberty*, p. 5.
[94] *Liberalism and Liberty*, p. 6.

its rival rather than merely to compete with it.[95] The significance of this shift is that it is implicitly accompanied by a corresponding alteration in the role of Liberalism in thus relationship.

The old rhetoric of 'Tory Obstruction' impeding the path of Liberal 'Progress' had become a narrative in which it is the power of Conservatism which requires checking in order to prevent the destruction of Liberalism; a point which is of vital importance if we are to understand how the Liberal demise occurred. Lloyd George revealed the key to understanding the Liberal Party's difficulties in establishing clear rationale and narrative for voters to support them. We can see in Lloyd George's words the Liberal Party's collapse being played out on the pages of its political pamphlets.

The shift from narratives of 'progress' to ones of apocalyptic Tory rapaciousness was not an immediate process, and there were some attempts to reconcile the two forms. Lloyd George's speech in *Liberalism and Liberty* had suggested that it was the exertions of wartime which had prompted an exhausted population to turn to the "inertia" of Toryism: "exhausted with a great effort to advance further along the road of progress", the nation "falls back on the repose of conservatism".[96] If Lloyd George was correct in stating that "a tired nation is a Tory nation", and thus attempted to explain the public rejection of further Liberal 'Progress' as a temporary lapse in the nation's strength of will, it is nonetheless important that the model of 'Progress' is in itself becoming less certain of its ultimate success, and in depicting the Conservatives as both rapacious but also characterised by "inertia", there is a sense of Lloyd George attempting to shore up a faltering model of Liberal/Tory relations.

[95] *Liberalism and Liberty*, p. 5.
[96] *Liberalism and Liberty*

Lloyd George's partial recasting of the Conservatives into aggressors intent on destroying Liberalism was accompanied by a fear that the Labour Party, driven by an increasingly 'Socialist' ideology were intent on doing the same. As we have noted above, the form of 'Socialism' with which the Liberals were contending had been largely constructed from the Liberal imagination. We must read this increased concern to prevent the establishment of Socialism with the wave of left-wing uprisings taking place throughout Europe. As Stefan Berger has noted, the Labour Party had a long history of correspondence with the German Socialist Party (SPD) and had maintained a commitment to internationalism in the post-war years and it would therefore not be surprising, given the increased wave of industrial action and Socialist insurrection on the continent, that the established party would display concern that these cross-currents would lead to a similar situation in Britain.[97]

While it may be apparent in hindsight that fear of large-scale political and industrial upheaval was unfounded, the Liberals may have been forgiven for their heightened anxieties about the influence of revolutionary Socialism on the Labour Party. Jose Harris has noted that despite MacDonaldite reformist Socialism remaining the dominant ideological strand of the post-war party, there were those such as George Lansbury who were advocating a greater use of the language, if not the practices, of revolution as a result of the radicalising effects of the war.[98] If the continental situation added to fears of unrest, the parallels between Britain and the Socialisms which were driving the European upheavals were not necessarily neat ones. Geoff

[97] Stefan Berger, 'Labour in Comparative Perspective' in Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), pp. 309-340, for the relationship with the SPD see pp. 314-315., for the internationalist outlook of the post-war Labour Party see pp. 316-317.
[98] Jose Harris, 'Labour's political and social thought' in Tanner, Thane and Tiratsoo, (eds.), *Labour's First Century*, pp. 13-14.

Eley has demonstrated that while the SPD had assumed a more revolutionary character than the British Labour Party, this had been provoked by a much greater resistance from the German state to engage with it than the system in Britain which had allowed a means of moderating any extreme tendencies which may have arisen in parliamentary Socialist agitation[99].

In any case, Eley has shown that in fact the experiences of war had severely weakened the SPD, as it had, like its British counterpart, participated in government during the war as a means of demonstrating its 'responsible' nature, leading to its diminished control over the broader left-wing movement in Germany once the discredited Kaiserreich had collapsed, with the SPD's reformism now seen as evidence of its unsuitability to lead the radicalised Socialist left.[100] Given the conclusions which can be drawn from this comparison, we must be cautious when ascribing a fear of *Socialism* to an increase in Liberal attacks on Labour as a party. Labour were not easily identifiable with the varieties of extreme Socialism which had rejected the SPD, and comparing the two parties in any case was problematic. While the distinctions between Labour and the SPD may not have been immediately apparent to any Liberals appalled by the European revolutions, we should at least seek a more complex understanding of the Liberal Party's increased focus on the Socialism of the Labour Party in the post-war era. The answer, as we shall see, lies in the implications which a construction of an extreme left-wing, and specifically Socialist, Labour Party had for the Liberals' own political narratives. What is of most interest here is the aspect of this constructed 'Socialism' which served more as a rhetorical weapon than as a manifestation of fear. It was through contrasting this 'Socialism' and the

[99] Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, (Oxford U.P., 2002), p. 68.
[100] Eley, *Forging Democracy*, pp. 165-169.

'Socialists' it created, represented by the Labour Party, with the demonised 'Protectionist' elitism of the Tories that the Liberals attempted to shape an appeal to a newly-constructed ideal 'Liberal voter'. Yet this new voter was not a recast 'Liberal Working Man' or woman, but an ill-defined 'rational', 'centrist' person who would support Liberalism because of its negation of the extremes of the constructed 'Socialist' and 'Protectionist'.

The Liberals had, of course, produced anti-Socialist literature prior to the war, but pieces such as *Socialism Examined* , a publication of John Simon's House of Commons speech of the 16th of July 1923, demonstrated a greater concern to engage fully with the Socialist critiques of Liberal capitalism.[101] Replying to Philip Snowden's resolution in the House calling for public ownership and control of production, Simon sought to defend the capitalist system, but more importantly, to demonstrate the vitality of Liberal politics as the best means of ensuring the system operated fairly.

Samuel began by stating that in order for Snowden's resolution to be passed, its proponents must first prove that capitalism was incapable of being reformed except by its destruction, and that it had produced so bad a set of circumstances that it could not be allowed to continue in its present form.[102] Snowden's policy, for Simon, rested upon the "universality of its application" – the notion that state control under the

[101] *Socialism Examined by the Right Hon. Sir John Simon, M.P. In a speech delivered in the House of Commons on July 16th, 1923, in reply to the Socialist Resolution*, (London: L.P.D., 1923) in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[102] *Socialism Examined*, pp. 3-4.

proposals would render private property illegal.[103] Simon stated that this is the essential difference between 'Socialist' measures and Liberal policy. Many Liberals could see the benefit in state control in areas where its intervention would prove beneficial, but not the imposition of public ownership or control as a matter of course.

Here we see an important point being made. In attributing to the Labour Party a mechanistic nationalising tendency with no scope for discrimination between cases, Simon drew attention to the intractable extremism of 'Socialism'. The 'Socialist', well-intentioned as he may be, sought to go too far towards authoritarianism with his politics. Yet this extremism is created because of opposition to more gradual change: "it is only those who obstinately resist (better distribution of wealth) who provide the most effective propaganda for Socialism." [104] The "True Line of Progress", as Simon put it, is therefore Liberal gradualism, both removed from the two extremes but also trying to prevent the political landscape becoming so polarised as to create problems.

T.J. Macnamara employed an interesting metaphor to outline the Liberal perspective on three party politics. Describing a house, intended to represent "the British Social and Economic Order", he compared the attitudes of three figures representing the major parties when it becomes clear the house requires maintenance. The Conservative, Macnamara states, would refuse to acknowledge the need for any repairs, preferring to save money and trust in the building that was '"good enough for our grandfathers"'. The 'Socialist' would demand that the faulty construction be torn down and rebuilt "entirely differently". The Liberal, on the other hand, would

[103] *Socialism Examined*, pp. 4-5. See also *Why We Don't Want Socialism*, (London: L.P.D., 1924), in the National Liberal Club Pamphlets for 1923, at Bristol University Special Collections, ref. JN 1129 L4 P2.
[104] *Socialism Examined*, pp. 14-15.

acknowledge the existence of any problems, analyse them, and methodically set about repairing them.[105]

Macnamara here shows us the way in which the Liberals had come to understand the new era of three-party competition and a near-fully democratic electorate. The Liberal Party were to be the "Political Gyroscopic Force" of British politics, preventing the descent into two-party adversarial politics, which would lead to obstruction of any government business by either of the implacably opposed forces.[106] It is here that we can see how much the Liberal appeal had in fact changed. Where once the Liberal Party had been one of the two great forces in the political arena, striving to achieve its goals in the face of Tory obstruction, its new circumstances had forced it into a position where the only role left for it to play was as a balancing force. Having defined by a gradualist approach to politics, it had allowed the rhetoric of 'progress' to become split. On the one hand, the Labour Party could claim the mantle of 'progress' while showing that the way forward was ultimately a pursuit of a 'Socialism' that was loosely defined and elastic in its applications. On the other, in attempting to avoid extremism, the Liberals had become cut off from the dynamics of politics, the terms of which – capitalism versus Socialism – it had helped to shape, but had proved unable to adequately position itself to take advantage of. Liberal 'progress', therefore, was defined by a commitment to reform but with little ultimate objective beyond avoiding the polarisation of politics and a swing to either extreme.

Consequently, much of the grand narrative forms of 'progress', defined as it had been along dichotomous lines against an implacable Tory foe, disappeared from Liberal

[105] T.J. Macnamara, *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*, p. 10.
[106] T.J. Macnamara, *Liberalism: Its Past Achievements and its Future Aims*, p. 11.

pamphlet literature. As the terms of the established narrative of ‘progress’began to disintegrate when new forms of narrative emerged, broadly set out along ‘capitalist’/’Socialist’ lines, the Liberal appeal to provide the main vehicle with which ‘Progress’ could be achieved also began to fragment. Along with the abandonment of the older narrative forms went the demise of a ‘Liberal Working Man’, defined in opposition to a Tory equivalent and the subject to which the Liberal appeal was addressed.

Macnamara may have claimed that “Liberalism far more closely reflects the abiding British sentiment than does either Toryism or Socialism”, but in losing the ability to define an ‘ideal’ voter from the ‘working classes’ to whom they could address their electoral appeals, the Liberal Party ran the risk of being cut off from any constituency whatsoever. Able to define themselves only as being a force of mediation standing for the sentiments of ‘rational’ society, the new Liberal narratives failed to produce a form of ‘ideal’ voter to fit this narrative, and began to lose ground to the parties of the ‘common sense’ anti-collectivist, and the new representatives of the forms of ‘progressive’ narratives and subjects they had been forced to abandon. The impact of failing to adequately check the growth of Labour’s political narratives had begun to create a new form of ‘Labour Working Man’. That this figure borrowed much of his characteristics from his Liberal equivalent must stand as one of the most important stages in the demise of the Liberal Party.

Conclusion

To return to the historiographical debates with which we began, how far can we say we better understand the reasons for the Liberal decline? Certainly the 'catastrophist' viewpoint advocated by Wilson and Hart, and complimented by Tanner's deconstruction of the demographic theory of the Liberal eclipse retains much of its appeal. As Tanner shows, the Liberal Party surrendered its ideological and rhetorical assets to the Labour Party as a result of the wartime schisms. We can say that the narrative forms which Labour were able to adopt and merge into their own critique of Liberalism accrued to them because the Liberal Party were unable to provide a suitable repository for these constructed rationales following the Asquith/Lloyd George split, in the same manner that the Liberals were incapable of giving sufficient room for New Liberal ideas to replenish the party after its wartime travails.

Yet there is still much to be said for the general terms of Matthew, McKibbin and Kay's analysis, even if we can see that the statistical basis of their conclusions is flawed. If we remember that the Liberals were doomed under their thesis not just due to the emergence of class politics per se but because of the rise of a non-rational electorate who would be incapable of accepting their message, then we must conclude that in this much, at least, they had identified the key problem for the Liberals. Macnamara's 'Gyroscopic' model of Liberalism continued to rest upon the notion of a rational voter, albeit one now removed from his identity as a member of a 'class'. Liberalism therefore retained just as many problematic aspects in its conception of political society as it had when the model of the self-interested 'Liberal Working Man', dutifully voting for gradualist 'Progress' because his role in the electorate had

been given him in order that he fulfil just such a role. In addressing themselves to this 'Liberal Working Man', the Liberal Party was able to attract much support, and indeed retained much of it even after its wartime difficulties. Having surrendered both the 'class' aspects of the narratives underlying the concept of the 'Liberal Working Man' to Labour, as well as losing the ability to portray itself as the sole viable anti-Tory party, the Liberals were left with only the 'rational' elements of their former narratives and constructed subjects. Such a narrow section of support would prove a difficult base from which to rebuild a new constituency in an age when the chief 'Progressive' force had been allowed to fuse the elements of 'Progress' and 'class' together to oppose a Tory narrative focused directly against this self-construction. Pamphlet literature, then, provides a useful way of appreciating the terms on which the Liberal decline occurred.

Thesis Conclusion

While a survey of this length can only hope to provide a sample of the vast pamphlet literature produced by the Liberal Party and its supporters, this thesis has analysed enough of a range of material over a substantial length of time to reach a series of conclusions about when the Liberal Party's electoral decline may have begun and identified some key areas in which the Liberal appeal was deficient. By taking the approach that the Liberal difficulties began with a specific sense of what working-class voters represented to the political system, how this impacted upon their attempts to modify their pamphlet literature to accommodate their perceived 'interests', and how the forms these new approaches to communicating to the electorate proved problematic when the challenge shifted from a simple Tory/Liberal dichotomy to a three-sided contest with Labour, the reasons for the difficulties the Liberals experienced from the mid-1920s onwards become clearer.

The key to understanding the significance of the 'class' dimensions of the Liberal decline has not been correctly identified in the existing historiography. It was not enough to study the intellectual vitality nor the psephological history of the Liberal Party; to understand why the party failed to create a lasting cross-class alliance between the middle and working-classes (to say nothing of the 'Flight of the Whigs'), a longer-term approach which addresses the ways in which the Liberals conceived of the voters they sought to attract was vital. With this thesis, the timeframe given helps to demonstrate how the problems with engaging with the working-class electorate in the mid-twentieth century were of an ancestry which stretched back to the second quarter of the nineteenth century. As far back as the first systematic working-class enfranchisement in 1867, the Liberal Party displayed a problematic conception of the

‘working man’ in politics, and the party’s pamphleteers communicating to the new electors on this basis were producing literature which made great assumptions concerning the loyalties and desires of these voters. A seeming failure to sufficiently critique or adapt the intellectual constructs behind these presumptions can be seen throughout the period studied above. The Liberal pamphlet literature continued to speak to the particular form of ‘working man’ they had always assumed existed, and thus created space for the burgeoning Labour appeal to provide the critique of the Liberal claims to represent the ‘working man’, and this was only a favourable commentary when it best suited their rival to act convivially. The terms of the Liberal/Labour relationship could only produce division and discord at a certain stage within the ‘Progressive’ alliance’, and one in which for too long the major source of ideological and rhetorical schism was the junior party.

The difficulties in the relationship between the Liberal Party and the working-class voter arose primarily from the manner in which the Liberals conceived of class itself, and this problematic conceptualisation was reflected clearly in the pamphlet literature produced by its members and supporters. As discussed in Chapter One, the most important feature of the Liberal conception of ‘class’ as depicted in the pamphlets discussed, was the notion that membership of a class could confer aspects of ‘character’, and that this had a significant impact on the way the Liberal pamphleteers discussed political participation.

As we have seen, the way class acted in Liberal concepts of politics and the holding of the vote was bound up in notions of the fitness of the persons being enfranchised to exercise the vote responsibly, and that this was in turn a product of the need to

demonstrate the beneficial effects the granting of the cote would have on the match of 'progress'. The concept derived from Mill's utilitarian-influenced concept of political history as a means of deriving lessons for contemporary politicians to draw upon, and the traditions of 'whiggish history' adapted by Macaulay to suit an age of parliamentary reform. The theme of 'progress' wove throughout the literature we have studied, and created the context into which the Liberals came to understood working-class politics. The 'working man' could claim the vote because of the supposed beneficial qualities he could bring to the polity as well as merely meeting the minimum standards of 'character'. The Liberal pamphleteers discussed class in terms which suggested that they saw 'class' as a method of identifying traits which were desirable in the political sphere, and that consequently the notion of Liberal political appeals which saw them aimed at a 'classless' society misses the key point. When the Liberals appealed either for the enfranchisement of the householders in 1867 and 1884, or for the support of these new voters once this power was conceded, they could and did so on the basis of class. This is not to say that some Liberals eschewed class appeals; but rather to state that instead of a simple 'classless' model of politics, the Liberals saw enfranchisement and the courting of the 'working man' to be a means of securing stability and produce further 'progress'. However, by doing so they appealed to a particular form of 'class' which would allow the various sectors of society to advance towards common goals.

The Liberal conception of a working-class who would act in such a way as to secure 'progress' were therefore deserving of the vote and a desirable presence within the polity. As we saw in Chapter Two, the pamphlet literature produced for the newly-enfranchised voters emphasised that once within the political system, the working

class were expected to cooperate with the Liberal Party. The Liberal pamphleteers were therefore required to relate the language of 'progress' to the working-class elector, a process which came up against a large stumbling block in the form of the Conservative Party's competing claim to the working-class vote. Liberal pamphlet literature was able to deal with this challenge by composing a complex model of relationships between the working class and the two great parties, a process which became all the more pressing following the Liberals' 1874 General Election defeat, serving as it did to emphasise the fact that if the working class were not informed of the danger inherent with supporting the Conservative Party they would not be capable of recognising their own true 'interests' and thus blocking the march of 'progress'.

The most significant thing to note about the response seen in the Liberal pamphlet literature to the Conservative challenge is that, for the most part., it was successful in terms of marrying their existing narrative forms and political conceptualisations of society and the electorate. Implicitly or explicitly, the figures of the 'Liberal Working man' and the Conservative Working Man' can be seen being employed as a device in the pamphlet literature. The former acted as a way of representing the 'ideal' working man, conscious of his 'duties' and of the debt he owed to Liberalism, while the latter could stand as symbolic of the illegitimate expression of working class politics; easily swayed and acting against his fellow working men, the 'Conservative Working Man' of late-nineteenth century figured as the example of illegitimate class sentiment in action.

Yet there was more to the 'Liberal' and 'Conservative Working Man' than the ciphers produced as representations of the ideal and the demonic. A sense emerges through

reading the Liberal pamphlets that the two archetypes were in fact models for how the Liberals themselves saw the working-class electorate. In the concern to keep the 'working man' pledging his support for the Conservatives, we can see that the pamphlet literature was itself being targeted at perceived 'real' figures who corresponded to the conceptual devices the pamphlets were depicting. The 'working man' was understood to be fundamentally Liberal in his opinions unless 'corrupted' by the embrace of Toryism, and in particular the distorted 'imperialist' brand of Conservatism advocated by Disraeli. As long as politics could be conceived of as a Tory/Liberal dichotomy, there was little need for the Liberal Party to consider the relationship between politics, class and 'progress' any deeper. The result of ideological conceptualisations of political history and assumptions of the march of 'progress' had led the Liberal Party to conduct its appeals on the basis of 'whiggish history' whose tropes proved attractive to a party attempting to provide itself for a rationale for its future relationship with the electorate.

The arrival of political Labour in the 1880s with the Social Democratic Foundation had not impacted significantly upon the Liberal Party's ability to define itself as the true friends of the 'working man'. The formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 had, as we encountered in Chapter Three, not produced an immediate change in the Liberal's political calculations. However we also saw that there were grounds for considering the ILP's entry into political life as an important moment because of the longer term impact its anti-Liberal positioning and campaigning would have. The ILP had originally been created as a response to working-class dissatisfaction with the Liberals' presumptions to act on their behalf but without allowing the 'working man' a voice in local party affairs. It was precisely because as well as being motivated by

its own political principles derived from socialism, the ILP possessed a suspicion of Liberal motives borne of disillusionment with what the Liberal Party had achieved in office that in hindsight the ILP represented such a dangerous opponent. The history of the Liberal Party's relationship with the ILP was marked by a large degree of cooperation in its early phases, but an analysis of the two parties' pamphlet literature shows that there were potential sources of trouble for the Liberal Party if they failed to adapt their political appeals to counter the arguments put forward in the Labour literature.

The ILP pamphlets revealed a critique of Liberalism which struck directly at the Liberal Party's claims to represent the 'working man'. These propaganda efforts were delivered at a time when the Liberals were struggling to construct an electoral appeal which addressed an entirely different political problem. The success of the Conservative and Liberal Unionist alliance having dashed hopes that 'Home Rule' could provide a platform over which a party divided between various factions, each section of the Liberal Party continued to produce different appraisals of the nature of the party's problems and the appropriate remedy, to say nothing of the requirements of the nation. Pressed into producing an electable platform, the Liberals issued the famous 'Newcastle Programme', and in doing so provided ample justification for the ILP pamphleteers' characterisation of the Liberal Party as incapable of delivering on the most important and necessary reforms which would benefit the 'working man'.

The relationship between the Liberals and the early political Labour Party, such a well-studied and important aspect of British political history, has been characterised by historians as being that of a smaller party riding the tailcoats of a well-established

senior party until the former saw their opportunity in the crisis of war and subsequent domestic upheaval to assert its independence. Chapter three's study of pamphlet literature from the Edwardian period suggests a subtle but vital reassessment may be necessary. The subsuming of the ILP into the broader church of the Labour Representation Committee (later the Labour Party), the existence of the Lib-Lab Pact from 1903, as well as Ramsay Macdonald's cautious leadership and his lingering sympathies with the Liberals combined to promote a convivial relationship between the two parties of the left, which based on ideological cross-currents and high-political cooperation has been depicted as a "Progressive alliance". Yet the ILP literature gives the lie to the implication that there were few genuine differences between Labour and the Liberals.

We saw how for people such as Middlesbrough ILP member John Arnott, the Liberal Party had, through its lacklustre record on labour issues such as Trades Union legislation, workplace regulation and working-class representation, betrayed the trust of working-class voters. Moreover, the Liberal claim to work with Labour was undermined by what Arnott perceived as manipulation of Labour support to elect proxy Liberal candidates such as J.H. Wilson. Arnott made an allegation which was repeated through many ILP pamphlets: the Liberal Party only espoused what measures for the 'working man' and his family as would secure election; once in office, they would use their position to pursue reforms which had little to do with 'working-class interests'. However sceptically we may look at the ILP's claims to represent any 'true' form of 'working-class interests', or even the priorities of the Labour Party leadership after 1906, the essentially political nature of the Liberal programme until the 1906 General Election cannot be denied. Despite Liberal

attempts to show that such measures as House of Lords reform would have practical, economic and social effects, pledging the party in favour of political and ecclesiastical reform as matters of priority played into this ILP critique.

The problem, as shown by the Liberal Publication Department pamphlets, was that far from the Edwardian-era Liberals having learned to "see the voters as they were not as they would like them to be", their public presentation through political literature meant that they were easily depicted as being either incapable of truly comprehending the nature of the 'working man' and his needs, or more forcefully as being essentially unprincipled exploiters of working-class grievances for their own ends.[107] Comparing the ILP attacks on the Liberal Party in this period to the Liberal campaign to warn the electorate of the dangers of the 'Working-Class Tory', we can see that the Liberal narratives of class, politics and 'progress' were being challenged, yet the Liberal response in the pamphlet campaigns prior to the Great War attempted too infrequently to address the Labour critique. Therefore, while Macdonald and the Labour Party were carving out an electoral niche for themselves as a result of the Gladstone/Macdonald pact, the ILP wing supplied the rhetorical basis for defining the Labour Party as an independent, identifiably working-class party, and the Liberal Party as being complicit with the Conservatives in preventing effective remedies to social and economic problems. However many of the Liberal political reforms were actually supported by the Parliamentary Labour Party, the ILP literature could claim these acts as ameliorative ad therefore useful, but in essence a means to the greater end of socialism, whereas the Liberal in ILP literature was, as merely a capitalist with a modicum of conscience, incapable of accommodating wider-ranging reform.

[107] Jon Lawrence, *Speaking For The People*, p. 224.

The case has been made, then, that the roots of the eventual shift from Liberal to Labour as the main anti-Tory force in British politics can be seen in the pamphlet literature produced not just during the years immediately prior to the First World War, but throughout the period in which the 'working man' was the defining force in politics. What becomes clear as a result of this study is that explaining the Liberal demise in terms of 'inevitablist' grounds based on deterministic accounts of the 'rise of Labour', or by arguing from a 'catastrophist' point of view, stressing the Liberal Party's collapse during the First World War is insufficient. The two perspectives complement each other to a great extent, in that there were indeed grounds for suggesting that the Liberal Party were unfortunate to encounter the circumstances they did both during and following the Great War, and that the 'rise of Labour' had been modest and characterised by an accommodating sentiment on both sides of the 'Progressive Alliance'. The reasons why the Liberal Party proved so vulnerable to the traumas which so afflicted them were however due to long-term failures to address the way in which they conceived of and communicated with the 'working-class voter'. These factors had produced a situation in which the Labour Party had been able to amass enough of an electoral base from which to provide a secure platform from which to challenge Liberalism should it become weakened; and a consistent rhetorical basis had been found from which to critique the Liberal record and assert Labour's independence. The catastrophes endured by the Liberal Party in the 1920s were a direct result of this long-term process rather than mere misfortune.

The Liberal Party we saw by 1924 were rudderless, struggling to achieve intellectual consistency and encountering a new dichotomy in political discourse, one in which

their narratives of ‘progress’ and harmony were of little use. The language of ‘class’ which Liberal pamphleteers had used to understand the electorate to whom they spoke and which guided them in forming their appeals had become a concept which drove a new model of politics; that of ‘capital’ versus ‘socialism’, or in the Conservative conception, between ‘conventional wisdom’ and ‘sectionalism’. That much of the language in which this new discourse was conducted would not have looked out of place in earlier Liberal literature emphasises the point that what ultimately influenced the party’s demise was the forms into which they shaped their narratives, and the failure to reassess these constructions in sufficient time. If this thesis cannot claim to have definitively solved the historical problem of the Liberal demise, it has nonetheless indicated that by studying a party’s electoral literature we can best demonstrate how political dilemmas emerge from intellectual and conceptual constructs and chart the impact they can have on a party’s fortunes. By doing so, this study has shown that the Liberal Party’s relationship with the ‘working man’ in politics, constructed through its pamphlet appeals, set the party on the road to its decline. The death of Liberal England was only ‘strange’ if studied in isolation from how the party itself understood ‘Liberal England’ to function.

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