

The politics of humanitarianism, social radicalism and the ‘strange death of Liberal England’, 1886- 1925.

The period from 1886 to the First World War is often associated with the rise of Labour and the growth of interventionist attitudes in social reform. Such developments are often contrasted with the Liberal party’s ‘obsession’ with Irish Home Rule and other Gladstonian issues, such as the Armenian Atrocities in 1895-6. Many contemporaries felt that, because the Liberals’ were reluctant to develop a new collectivist agenda, they lost part of their working-class appeal and became vulnerable to independent Labour electoral competition.

This paper rejects such view. Focusing on popular politics, it argues that the Gladstonian issues mentioned above possessed and retained great political and electoral significance throughout the period up to 1914 and beyond. In fact, by redefining the Liberal party through the politics of humanitarianism, Gladstone helped to update the party’s outlook and its ability to mount a successful challenge to the Conservative and Unionist alliance from 1903-6. The politics of Gladstonian humanitarianism was consistent with the religious ethos of the age and could be applied not only to Irish and imperial affairs, but also to social reform – to assert the priority of human needs over classical economic orthodoxy. In this sense, there was considerable continuity between Gladstonianism and the popular response both to the new Liberalism and the Labour party.

The last section of the paper surveys the significance of the interpretation outlined above both for the New Liberalism and the crisis and eventual decline of the Liberal party in 1916-1925.

Social radicalism and the revival of the Gladstonian 'popular front', 1886-1906.

'I need scarcely mention that the ministers and religious bodies of all denominations were against us. [...] Perhaps, after all, the strongest force against me in the fight was that ... it was decided that the Irish vote should go Liberal'.¹ The frustration expressed in these words reflected a common experience among Independent Labour Party (ILP) and Social Democratic Federation (SDF) activists during the thirty years following the 1886 Home Rule crisis.² Yet most historians have argued that the Gladstonian campaign to secure Irish self-government left working-class electors indifferent. Indeed, Gladstone's adoption of this cause is generally regarded as one of his worst mistakes, caused by his wish to retain the party leadership and resist the rising tide of social reform³ – which Joseph Chamberlain and the Liberal left regarded as absolutely necessary if the party was to retain its working-class support. Consequently, Home Rule has been regarded not as a political strategy which the party rationally adopted having considered the alternatives, but as an ageing leader's personal obsession. Allegedly, by imposing Home Rule on his followers, Gladstone first split the party, then lost his working-class supporters – thus indirectly 'causing' the foundation of the Independent Labour Party⁴ – and eventually led British Liberalism towards its terminal decline.⁵ The Liberals' defeat in the 1886 election and their political impotence over the next twenty years have seemed to bear out this conclusion.

¹ 'Special article by Mr John Robertson on the North East Lanark Election', Lanarkshire Miners' County Union, Reports and Balance Sheets, 1904, 10 (NLS). On the situation in other parts of Scotland see W.M.Walker, 'Irish immigrants in Scotland: their priests, politics and parochial life', *Historical Journal*, xv,4(1972), 663-4; I.G.C.Hutchison, 'Glasgow working-class politics', in R.A.Cage (ed.), *The working class in Glasgow, 1750-1914* (1987), 132-3.

² For other examples see Ben Tillet, 'The lesson of Attercliffe', *WT&E*, 15 Jul. 1894, 6 and Lawgor, 'South-West Ham', *ibid.* the latter about Keir Hardie's problems with Michael Davitt and the Irish vote.

³ D.A.Hamer, 'The Irish Question and Liberal Politics, 1886-1894', in *Reactions to Irish Nationalism*, introd. by A.O'Day (1987), pp.253-4.

⁴ T.W.Heyck, 'Home Rule, Radicalism and the Liberal party', in *Reactions to Irish Nationalism*, introd. A.O'Day (1987), p.259; G.D.H.Cole, *British Working Class Politics* (1941), pp.82-3..

⁵ J.Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (1993), pp.306-9.

However, there are three main problems with this interpretation, which effectively sidelines the role of the Irish question in British politics. The first is that it takes little note of the fact that until 1921 the United Kingdom included the whole of Ireland and that the total number of Irish MPs accounted for about one-sixth of the House of Commons. Even within the British electorate, due to mass immigration, the Irish comprised a sizeable proportion of the working-class voters in many constituencies. Thus, politically as well as morally, in the 1880s and 1890s the Irish question could not be ignored: indeed, more than social reform or anything else debated in Parliament, Ireland was the pressing question of the day and was treated as such by both Liberals and Unionists.

The second problem is that Liberal England did not ‘die’ in 1886: of course, it was alive and kicking in 1906, when Gladstone’s heirs achieved a memorable election victory, and indeed throughout the 1910s and early 1920s. Moreover, even after its eventual ‘decline and fall’, liberalism continued to inspire and shape the political outlook of the main parties, and especially Labour, which from 1918 vied with the Liberals for Gladstone’s heritage. Thus the question to be answered is not about the demise of liberalism, but about its resilience and pervasiveness, which the Home Rule crisis did not undermine, but rather strengthen and further expand. Indeed, from 1886 even the Conservative party took on board the rhetoric and some of the policies of old liberalism. The result was that, as John Dunbabin once put it, while before 1914 Britain seemed to have *two* liberal parties, one of which chose to call itself Unionist, after 1918 it had *three* liberal parties, one of which chose to call itself Labour (significantly, a similar point has been made about British politics in 2006).⁶

The third problem is that historians have tended to consider the Home Rule crisis in isolation, when arguably it was part of the broader debate on imperialism, democracy and what the French democrats called *fraternité*, which in English could be translated as the politics of humanitarianism. The latter influenced a range of issues throughout the nineteenth century. It was often

⁶ M. Wolf, “‘Cameronism’ is empty at the centre’, *The Financial Times*, 20 Jan. 2006, 19. Cf. K. Matthews, ‘Stanley Baldwin’s “Irish Question”’, *Historical Journal*, 43, 4(2000), 1027-49.

religious in inspiration – as in the anti-slavery campaigns – but always non sectarian. In fact, as Georgios Varouxakis has argued, a commitment to humanity as a form of patriotism was what brought together Positivists like Frederic Harrison, Utilitarians like J.S.Mill, Christian Socialists like F.D.Maurice and Idealists like T.H.Green.⁷ In the late-Victorian period, its most famous and best-studied episode is the 1876 Bulgarian Agitation.⁸ However, historians have so far shown little interest in the post-1876 developments of political humanitarianism especially with respect to popular politics. There are a few studies on specific aspects of this tradition, such as Peatling on the Positivists as a pro-Home Rule lobby, Matikkala on anti-imperialism, Sager and Laity on the peace movement⁹.

But the bigger picture – including not only Ireland, but also, within Britain, the various currents of radicalism within the left – has been consistently neglected. In particular, in their studies on patriotism and internationalism D.J.Newton, P.Ward and S.Howe completely ignore the Liberals and the Lib-labs, despite the fact that one of them was awarded the Nobel prize for his efforts on behalf of international arbitration and peace. And Blaazer overlooks the links between Ireland, anti-imperialism, peace, arbitration and disarmament – which were so important in the quest for ‘popular front’ unity – and shows little interest in the humanitarian side of popular radicalism.¹⁰

Yet, it is easy to show that popular radical concern for Irish social and constitutional demands was culturally deeper and politically more important than has hitherto been conceded. From the days of the Chartists Irish legislative autonomy was part of the broader question of democracy in the British Isles. As Dorothy Thompson has pointed out, the Chartists expected the repeal of the Act

⁷ G.Varouxakis, “‘Patriotism’, “cosmopolitanism” and “humanity” in Victorian political thought’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol.5, No.1, Jan. 2006, 100-18.

⁸ R.T.Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian agitation* (1963); A.Pottinger Saab *Reluctant Icon. Gladstone, Bulgaria and the Working Class 1856-1878* (1991).

⁹ G.K.Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government 1865-1925* (2001); M.Matikkala, ‘Anti-imperialism, Englishness and Empire in late-Victorian Britain’, Ph.D.Thesis (Cantab.), 2006; P.Laity, *The British peace movement 1870-1914* (2001); E.W.Sager, ‘The working-class Peace movement in Victorian England’, *Histoire Sociale-Social History*, vol.xii(No.23), May 1979, 122-44.

¹⁰ D.J.Newton, *British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace 1889-1914* (1989); S.Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics. The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (1993); P.Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack. Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (1998); D.Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the progressive tradition. Socialists, Liberals and the quest for unity, 1884-1939* (1992).

of Union to be one of the outcomes of the implementation of the demands contained in their celebrated ‘Six points’. Ernest Jones, the last Chartist leader of national repute, regarded Ireland as a sort of British Poland ‘rightly struggling to be free’ from English ‘tsarism’.¹¹ The latter was the sobriquet applied to the Dublin Castle system, whose centralism and police powers were perceived as utterly ‘un-English’. As early as 1833 – well before the promulgation of the Charter – the first popular demonstration against Earl Grey’s Reform government was directed against their Coercion Act, which empowered the Lord Lieutenant to prohibit public meetings and army officers to court martial offenders in proclaimed counties. The radicals abhorred such measures in principle and feared that a government which was ready to use them against Irish peasants, could easily do so against British workers as well.¹² A later generation reached exactly the same conclusions, consistently expressed from the 1860s onwards by radical and labour leaders like George Howell, George Odger, A.A.Walton, Tom Burt and Joseph Cowen.¹³ Well before 1886 such concern developed into support for Home Rule. The latter was, by 1900, one of the few areas on which Lib-labs, ILP and the early Labour party all agreed.

Thus Ireland mattered, and Home Rule, far from being an ephemeral Liberal aberration and the product of Gladstone’s ‘obsession’, acted as the single most important catalyst in the remaking of popular radicalism after 1885. The 1886 Bill and subsequent agitation and electoral campaigns polarized politics and increased political awareness even among subaltern groups – including women – and helped to redefine and enlarge the notion of the public sphere in which it was ‘appropriate’ for them to be active. Animosity and partisanship under the recently enlarged franchise stimulated the rise of the party machine and caucus politics. The latter had contrasting effects on popular radicalism – simultaneously

¹¹ D. Thompson, ‘Ireland’, in Thompson and Epstein (eds.), *The Chartist Experience*, 145; D.Thompson, *The Chartists*, 317, 325; M.Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, ****.

¹² Thompson, *The Chartists*, 19.

¹³ G.Howell, ‘Worst for the future’, a lecture to the Pimlico branch of the Reform League’, 28 March 1868, in Howell Collection (microfilm edition) IX/HC/LB, 379 ff.; cf. his appeal ‘To the electors of the Borough and Hundreds of Aylesbury’, *ibid.*, 744 [check reference]; G.Odger, ‘Address to the electors of Sothward’, *The Bee Hive*, 8 January 1868, p.4; A.A.Walton, letter to the editor of *The Bee Hive*, 4 July 1868, p.3.

increasing and limiting effective participation in national politics – but became an essential device of mass mobilization in both Britain and Ireland.

As years went by, the prolonged Home Rule crisis consolidated new identities, political cultures and party allegiances. In Ireland politics became less concerned with local issues and more influenced by a national debate sustained by both the Dublin and the provincial newspaper press and animated by the campaigns of Parnell's Irish National League (INL). As Hoppen has written, 'constitutional nationalism ... was at once able and obliged to provide a refuge for men who would as readily have declared themselves Whigs or Liberals in earlier days.'¹⁴ In Britain, John Vincent has claimed, the protracted agitation enabled the Liberals to absorb electorally Irish Nationalism.¹⁵ Over the following years, 'many Irish men and women gained prominent positions within Liberal ward and divisional parties. Many became Liberal in both word and deed, strongly identifying with the party's Radical wing'.¹⁶ Such trends were evident to contemporary observers, who actually thought that the 'liberal' side of nationalism was becoming so dominant that an eventual full merger between the Irish and the British wings of Gladstonianism was a plausible scenario in 1890.¹⁷ It was not a momentary impression: twenty years later, in 1910, J.L.Garvin, then editor of the *Observer*, perceived what he described as the danger of an Irish-Liberal-Socialist coalition.¹⁸ From the Gladstonian left, *Reynolds's* agreed, but argued that 'it is not the British Democracy that is absorbing the Irish – it is the Irish that is absorbing the British.'¹⁹

Neither view was accurate: what was actually happening by 1905 was a renewal of the old alliance between Chartist-style democrats, free-trade

¹⁴ K.T.Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland 1832-1885* (1984), 485.

¹⁵ J.Vincent, 'Gladstone and Ireland', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, lxii (1977), 193-238.

¹⁶ S.Fielding, 'Irish politics in Manchester 1890-1914', *International Review of Social History*, XXIII(1988), 271.

¹⁷ As a Liberal Unionist observed, '[t]here will arise out of the fragments of the present Opposition, in time, a new party of which the Irish members will form a large portion' (Arthur S Elliott to J.Chamberlain, 12 Dec. 1890, JC 6/6/1B/4).

¹⁸ Shannon, *Balfour*, 149.

¹⁹ L.a., 'Senators in harness', RN, 19 Feb. 1888, 1. A few years later (2 May 1895), when interviewed by an Irish-American reporter of the *Chicago Times and Herald*, Gladstone seemed closer to the Nationalists than to his former Liberal colleagues. The interview was then republished by the *Freeman's Journal*: 'Interview with Mr.Gladstone', FJ, 14 Jun.1895, 5

Cobdenites and Irish Nationalists in a popular front of moral outrage. Social radicalism had been a prominent concern in the 1890s, but from the turn of the century – the days of Taff Vale, militarism and Chinese slavery in South Africa – radicals of all shades came together under a post-Gladstonian umbrella. The latter did its job fairly well until it was shattered by German and IRA bullets in 1916.

Popular agitations inevitably involve both passion and populism. The politics of emotionalism – a notion first used by A.J.P.Taylor to describe the Gladstonian approach to the Bulgarian atrocities²⁰ – became more prominent in the 1880s, partly in response to the equally emotional politics of jingoism.²¹ The Home Rule crisis made post-1886 radicalism particularly passionate and emotional, as its leaders became ruthlessly populist. There was much to be emotional about: quite apart from the galvanizing rhetoric and stirring appeals of Gladstone and Churchill, Dillon and the Radical Unionist T.W.Russell, at stake were questions of principle. The fact that the proposed Home Rule Bill and its projected consequences could not be tested or even examined in detail – because the Bill did not progress beyond the first reading – contributed to focus popular attention on the assertion of abstract ideas – the Union or Home Rule – whose mystical validity was further exalted by the fact that they created an emotional bond between British and Irish radicals.²² In particular, as D.George Boyce has written, Home Rule became ‘an emotional and highly charged set of political goals, changing in emphasis according to time and circumstance, but always offering a beckoning utopia to the Catholic people of Ireland’,²³ and, one could add, a haunting nightmare to most of its Protestants. The passion surrounding the whole debate was catalysed by the emotional debate about the plight of

²⁰ A.J.P.Taylor, *The trouble makers. Dissent over foreign policy 1792-1939* (1967, 1st ed. 1957), 75.

²¹ The link between the two is explored in H.Cunningham, ‘Jingoism in 1877-78’, *Victorian Studies*, xiv, No.4, June 1971, 419-53. For the emotional nature of Jingoism see J.A.Hobson’s classical analysis, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (1901).

²² The single best illustration is contained in the 146 addresses of congratulations from Scottish and Irish radical and land reform societies in the pamphlet *Scotland’s welcome to Mr Parnell: A souvenir of his first political visit to Scotland* (1889).

²³ D.George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (1991), 212.

evicted tenants, the iniquities (or the necessity) of Coercion or the cost and benefits of Land Purchase.

However, we should not exaggerate the extent of the change. In both Britain and Ireland popular politics had long been characterized by periodical semi-religious ‘awakenings’ such as O’Connellism, Chartism, the 1864 Garibaldi agitation, the 1866 Reform movement and the 1876 campaign against the Bulgarian atrocities. In order to attract mass support, radicalism developed connotations similar to those of the religious revivals which had long been part of the British and Irish cultural experience. In some areas, such as foreign politics and constitutional reform, this involved focusing on moral principles, rather than debating the national interest in terms of *Realpolitik*.²⁴ Though it is generally believed that the Nationalist movement was single-mindedly focused on the achievement of Home Rule, in fact Irish opinion was responsive to the politics of humanitarianism. In particular, the Irish response to the Armenian massacres in 1894-6 drew on the Christian tradition of ethical foreign policy in ways reminiscent of Gladstonian liberalism. It suggested that the ‘Union of Hearts’ – the close alliance between British Liberals and Irish Home Rulers in 1886-90 – had created a political and rhetorical solidarity which outlasted Parnell and Gladstone.

Not only in Ireland, but also in Britain the 1895 election was important in clearing the air. It brought to an end a cycle which had started in 1886. The case of sectionalism in Wales is in this respect interesting. From the beginning of the 1890s Gladstone’s unwillingness to act on disestablishment began to test the loyalty of the Welsh Liberals.²⁵ To the horror of the local branches of the Irish Land League, the cohesion of the Home Rule alliance began to disintegrate into

²⁴ For two examples see W.Lake (a Devonshire farm labourer) to W.E.Gladstone, 24 Sep. 1874, in Glynne-Gladstone MSS 702; and Resolution of the Labour Representation League, 3 Nov. 1876, R(S.R.)61, Minute Book, f.215, in British Library of Political and Economic Science.

²⁵ Montgomeryshire Liberal Association, copy of resolution adopted at the Annual Meeting of the Council, Jun. 2nd, 1890, in NLW, Stuart Rendel Papers, 19446E, V4; see also L.D.Roberts to T.E.Ellis, 25 Oct. 1890, in NLW, T.E.Ellis MSS, 1806.

single-issue faddism.²⁶ Meanwhile the rank and file were divided between those overwhelmed by resentment and sense of betrayal²⁷ and those who continued to insist that ‘the GOM’s conduct is such as to demand a reverence akin to worship from all true Rad[ical]s’.²⁸ The MPs considered setting up their own party and adopting Parnellite tactics to remind ‘the phlegmatic Saxon’ that ‘Wales [can also] block the way’.²⁹ Despite his initial reservations about Irish Home Rule, even Lloyd George accepted that only a ‘National Parliament’ could solve the Welsh question in all its facets, including disestablishment, land reform and the foundation of a Welsh university college.³⁰ However, ‘[the] real and only question [was] this. Can Wales venture to say like Italy “Italia fara da se.” Can Wales accomplish alone & unaided & in defiance of her friends as well as her opponents her own deliverance?’³¹ On the whole, the answer was in the negative: ‘The only reason why Wales had not had her own way in this matter ... was simply because she was a comparatively small nationality.’³² As a consequence even in 1895 Irish Home Rule and the alliance with the English Liberals remained close to the top of the political agenda of many Welsh radicals, as a matter of both expediency and principle.³³ Thus Lloyd George’s strategy involved the permeation, not the destruction, of the Liberal party. By 1895 he believed that ‘[the] Liberal organizations [had] been captured already by Welsh Nationalism’,³⁴ although he would have been more accurate to say that ‘the voice of Wales is the voice of the

²⁶ Letter by E.Griffin, ‘Mr Alfred Thomas, MP, and his constituents’, *Pontypridd Chronicle*, 18 Dec. 1891,8.

²⁷ See two telegrams of protest from Welsh radicals to T.E.Ellis, dated 17 Feb. 1893, in NLW, Ellis MSS, 2975, and resolution passed by the Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire Welsh Baptist Association, 3 Aug. 1893, in NLW, T.E.Ellis MSS, 168.

²⁸ W.R.Davies to T.E.Ellis, 1 Aug. 1893, in Ellis MSS 2304. For Gladstone’s 1891 views see report, ‘Great speech by Mr Gladstone’, *The Scottish Highlander*, 8 Oct. 1891,2.

²⁹ Leading articles ‘Mr Gladstone and the Welsh party’, *Pontypridd Chronicle*, 24 Feb.1893, 5, and ‘Welsh Members forcing the battle’, *ibid.*, 7 Jul. 1893, 5.

³⁰ D.Lloyd George to T.Gee, 9 Oct. 1895, in NLW, T.Gee MSS, 8310D, 501a.

³¹ Stuart Rendel to T.Gee, 26 Dec. 1890, in NLW, T.Gee MS, 8308D, 265a.

³² J.Herbet Lewis, M.P., at the 1893 Liverpool Meeting of the NLF, NLF*** papers73.

³³ See J.H.Lewis’ election addresses for 1891 and 1895, NLW, Flintshire Parliamentary Elections, MS 9494E.

³⁴ D.Lloyd George to Miss Gee,29 Jan. 1895, in NLW, T.Gee MSS, 8310D, 500a.

Liberal party in all questions except those in which ... she is called to be a pioneer viz. the question of Home Rule and that of religious equality.’³⁵

This closing of ranks around the post-Gladstonian Liberal party was a more general phenomenon. For example, as late as 1892 the *Weekly Times* had been proclaiming itself ‘Liberal Unionist’ and referring to the Gladstonian-Home Ruler alliance as ‘the Separatists’. By contrast, in 1895 it dismissed Liberal Unionism as a spent force and Chamberlain as a self-seeking politician.³⁶ It did continue, however, to regard Liberalism as ‘dead and buried – for the time, at any rate’, adding that the worst of it all was that ‘its undertakers are never tired of insisting that whenever it comes to life again its resurrection-robos [sic] shall be unsmirched by the faintest trace of Socialism’.³⁷ Some historians have tended to agree with this analysis, which is further strengthened by studies on the vitality of the ‘socialist revival’.³⁸

But was the Liberal problem really about ideological arteriosclerosis? Let us take the case of George Howell, a veteran Lib-Lab and one of a number of ‘typical Gladstonians’ whose electoral defeat in 1895 was, as Maccoy argued, a sign of the times. He lost his seat never to return to Parliament. In his last electoral address to his constituents in Bethnal Green, he restated all the radical causes which he had been advocating since 1886 – including Irish Home Rule – but emphasized a number of domestic issues selected from recent Liberal reform proposals. They ranged from the equalization of the rates and the reduction of government expenditure, to land reform. He further proposed to bring the poor laws ‘into conformity with the age in which we live, and render them more humane’ in their provision of relief for the deserving poor, yet ‘mindful at all times that any increase in the rates must fall upon the ratepayers.’ For Howell

³⁵ M.F.Roberts to T.E.Ellis, 9 Mar. 1894, in NLW, T.E.Ellis MSS, 1855.

³⁶ L.a., ‘Eyes right – March!’, *WT&E*, 25 Sep. 1892, 8; ‘Power and Shot’, *WT&E*, 21 April 1895, 8; l.a., ‘New lamps for old ones’, *WT&E*, 30 Jun. 1895, 8.

³⁷ L.a., ‘Practical socialism’, *WT&E*, 13 Oct. 1895, 8.

³⁸ M.Freedon, *The New Liberalism: an ideology of social reform* (1978),***; H.V.Emy, *Liberals, radicals and social politics* (****),*** D.Howell ***** ; J.Lawrence, ‘Popular radicalism and the socialist revival in Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (April 1992), 163-86; G.Johnson, “‘Making reform the instrument of revolution’: British Social Democracy, 1881-1911’, *Historical Journal*, 43, 4(2000), 977-1002.

and many other radicals the fiscal touchstone was the taxation of land values, which would relieve the working man from the burden which was allegedly the main cause of unemployment.³⁹ Obviously this was neither a socialist nor a 'New Liberal' programme. Indeed for the rest of his life Howell professed himself a 'Radical of the old school', a 'proud ... disciple of Jeremy Bentham, ... John Stuart Mill, Henry Fawcett, [and] P.A.Taylor,' as well as an admirer of Charles Bradlaugh.⁴⁰ Ostensibly, then, his defeat marked the political end of a generation who had outlived the political relevance of their ideas.

The main problem with this interpretation is that all the *socialist* candidates, including the sitting ILP MPs, were also defeated, together with many Liberals, irrespective of their views on 'collectivism'. **Many of them had stood on platforms including Irish Home Rule 'on the ground that the government of the people should be *by the people for the people*.'**⁴¹ In other words, there is little evidence that in 1895 social radicals were in greater demand than the Cobdenite variety. Indeed, despite his staunchly 'old' Liberal and anti-socialist ideology Charles Bradlaugh had been by far the most popular radical leader for as long as he lived, and his memory continued to be honoured well after his death in 1891.⁴²

Like his colleague Randal Cremer, Howell stood as a Radical rather than a trade union representative not because his ideology was 'old-fashioned', but because of the weakness and disorganization of the labour movement in his London constituency, especially during in the slump of 1895 – when 'unions were fighting to survive, and had little surplus energy to put into politics.'⁴³ Interestingly enough, Keir Hardie, the man who more than anybody else personified ILP politics, was in a comparable position in his West Ham

³⁹ G.Howell, 'To the Electors and other Residents in the North East Division of Bethnal Green', July 1895, in Howell Collection, microfilm edition, I/5. The case was fully made by William Saunders to T.E.Ellis, 23 Mar.1894, in Ellis Papers, 1925.

⁴⁰ G.Howell, 'Labour politics, policies and parties. A striking indictment', *RN*, 4 Jun.1905, 3.

⁴¹ Frank Smith, 'Address for the Tradeston Division of Glasgow, General election of 1895', in Glasgow Parliamentary Literature, Mitchel Library, G.394.2; emphasis in the original.

⁴² For Bradlaugh's popularity see E.Royle, *Radicals, secularists and republicans* (1980), 233-5. For his rejection of socialism see the pamphlets *Debate between H.M.Hyndman and Charles Bradlaugh. Will socialism benefit the English people?* (1884), C.Bradlaugh, *Socialism: its fallacies and dangers* (1887) and Id., *The Radical Programme* (1889).

⁴³ P.Thompson, *Socialists, liberals and labour. The struggle for London 1885-1914* (1967), 43, 107.

constituency, where he relied on the temperance lobby more than on the trade unions, and stood as the ‘United Liberal, Radical and Labour party’ candidate.⁴⁴ Moreover, although his programme was different from Howell’s, it was not distinctively ‘socialist’: its seven points consisted of three traditional Radical demands (free unsectarian education, taxation of unearned increments and international arbitration), the Eight Hour Bill, the abolition of overtime for children under fourteen, work for the unemployed and ‘provision for the sick, disabled, aged, widows, and orphans, the necessary funds to be obtained by a tax upon unearned incomes.’ He used the rhetoric both of humanity and class struggle and proclaimed that the ILP was ‘[f]or the present, strongly anti-Liberal in feeling’.⁴⁵ While this was all sufficiently vague to fit any political complexion on the left, Hardie’s dismissal of radical causes, including temperance and Church disestablishment, and his contempt for Home Rule were more damaging than anything he espoused, especially in so far as he managed to antagonize the Irish vote and lost both socialist and Nonconformist support.⁴⁶ In the end, if the socialists could claim a ‘success’, it was in splitting the anti-Unionist vote in several constituencies.

This resulted in a series of three-cornered contests in which the Liberals lost constituencies such as Newcastle upon Tyne, Halifax and North-East Manchester. While the wisdom of this course of action was open to debate (as even Hardie came to admit by 1900), David Howell has pointed out that for the ILP ‘[t]he 1895 election was ... the death of easy optimism.’⁴⁷

The election was also a turning point for the Liberals. It felt like the end of the Gladstonian era – and ostensibly it was. Defeat and repeated leadership in 1895-1900 generated confusion, but also helped to reopen the debate about the future. Irish Home Rule was indeed taking ‘a back seat’, but the NLF and the SLA would not have allowed it to be thrown out altogether. Nor was the old

⁴⁴ F.Reid, *Keir Hardie. The making of a socialist* (1978), 130.

⁴⁵ For three examples of his rhetoric see ‘Mr Keir Hardie at Newcastle’, *WT&E*, 21 Jul. 1895, 5 and ‘Mr Hardie on his defeat’, *ibid.*; and J.Keir Hardie, ‘The Independent Labour Party’, *The Nineteenth Century*, No.CCXV, Jan. 1895, 9 and 12.

⁴⁶ Emy, *Liberals*, 53; Thompson, *Socialists*, 27, 131; Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, 80.

⁴⁷ Howell, *Independent Labour Party*, 309 and Thompson, *Socialists*, 164; Heyck, *Dimensions*, 203.

enthusiasm for Ireland completely quenched among the Nonconformists.⁴⁸ The complex and ambitious 1891 Newcastle Programme had failed to deliver an effective and sustainable electoral revival, but, as we have seen (above, pp.00-000), it did lead to a serious debate within the NLF and Parliamentary party about the role of the mass organisation. It also led to a rejection of the notion of ‘programme’ politics, which many felt had been ‘imposed’ on the party by the Federation. In particular, the Newcastle Programme now appeared to have been too wide-ranging to be feasible and so ambitious that it had raised expectations only to disappoint them – although arguably in 1891-2 it had done its job by helping to bring about a Liberal recovery, despite the demoralization and loss of support caused by the Parnell split.⁴⁹ This dismissal of ‘programme politics’ was therefore partly irrational and partly a feature of the Parliamentary party’s attempt to deprive the NLF of its policy making powers; but it also revealed exasperation with faddism and the younger Liberals’ impatience with the non-social side of the old programme. In turn, such intolerance was evidence of the widespread acceptance of the primacy of social reform – a back-handed tribute to Chamberlain’s ‘materialist approach’ to Liberalism.

In particular, many Radicals feared that the GOM’s snubbing of what they supposed to be the working-class demand for social reform would weaken the party’s electoral prospects.⁵⁰ In their view the NLF had missed a historic opportunity when it failed to redress the balance at its 1893 (Liverpool) meeting: as Tuckwell noted, ‘I had hoped for clear-eyed and exultant handling of the great social problem, whose solution was now once more attainable; I heard only the old, tame, passive, abject reliance on Gladstone’.⁵¹ Instead of the usual enthusiasm, ‘misgivings were expressed, in veiled language on the platform, frankly and angrily in the private talk of delegates.’ [A]nd the Independent

⁴⁸ ‘It would be better that Liberals should remain out of office for fifty years, than they should ... abandon the policy of Irish Home Rule’, claimed C.J. Shebbear in his *The Greek theory of the State and the Nonconformist conscience* (1895), v.

⁴⁹ D.A. Hamer, *Liberal politics in the age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (1972), 213-4.

⁵⁰ Ben Tillett, ‘Thirty minutes with Gladstone’, WT&E, 12 Mar. 1893, 9.

⁵¹ Tuckwell, *Reminiscences*, 207.

Labour Party was the consequence',⁵² with 'the ominous defection of the Labour vote' posing a threat to the future of the Liberal party, one which the latter could face down only by choosing new leaders and adopting 'the new and living principles which the necessity of the hour demand.'⁵³

Quite apart from exaggerating the electoral significance of the ILP, this criticism was not entirely fair on the NLF. Labour questions had been vigorously discussed at Liberal meetings for years. Meanwhile, as Peter Clarke has pointed out, even if the Home Rule campaigns had failed to achieve their principal aim, they '[had] precipitated a move to the left' among the Liberal and Radical activists,⁵⁴ in particular creating new expectations of state intervention in social reform in mainland Britain. In this sense at least, social engineering in Ireland was also affecting British politics: observers as diverse as George Lansbury and H.W.Massingham contrasted the eagerness with which both parties had offered State assistance to Irish farmers with the still prevalent *laissez-faire* orthodoxy in domestic affairs. It was to these activists and opinion makers – more than to the ordinary working-class elector steeped in the ways of self-help and dogmas of free trade – that 'the New Liberalism' offered hope.

In 1888-9 Massingham was assistant editor of *The Star* – the half-penny evening newspaper established in London in 1887 by T.P.O'Connor, a leading Irish Nationalist and radical. With a circulation which rose from 140,000 to 279,000 (by 1889), *The Star* was a resounding success. It articulated the new 'progressive' concerns – emphasizing working-class housing, land reform and free education – but took a Gladstonian line on imperial affairs and the Liberal-Nationalist alliance (O'Connor's top priority). With social analysts and reformers of the calibre of Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw, its staff was arguably one of the most talented ever assembled for a popular newspaper.⁵⁵ Soon however, O'Connor's Irish priorities exasperated Massingham, who, although a keen Home Ruler himself, was becoming increasingly excited about the wider

⁵² Tuckwell, *Reminiscences*, 223.

⁵³ L.a., 'The Liberal collapse', WT&E, 21 Jul, 1895,8.

⁵⁴ P.F.Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (1971), 154.

⁵⁵ Thompson, *Socialists*, 97-9; L.W. Brady, *T.P.O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish* (1983), 103-9.

social agenda of what was beginning to be called the ‘new liberalism’.⁵⁶ As Atherley-Jones, the son of the last Chartist leader Ernest Jones, put it in his famous 1889 article, this was to be a Liberalism *for* the working classes – targeting their needs, ‘as yet inarticulate’ but identified for them by the party’s intellectual elite of journalists and civil servants. It was this elite who insisted that the ‘new liberalism’ was to be about ‘a wider diffusion of physical comfort’.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, it was not quite clear which particular working-class issues the party should prioritise. The 1885 electoral success with the farm workers had proved difficult to repeat – also because the Conservatives did not raise the tariff reform issue again, the latter being the single most important factor in causing the labourers to come out and vote Liberal.⁵⁸ The Liberal government had tried to tackle some of ‘Hodge’s’ specific concerns, but the 1895 election showed that parish councils and allotments were not enough to earn the labourers’ gratitude: Liberal results in the English counties were only marginally better than in 1886.⁵⁹ But what delayed further moves in this direction was neither lack of ideas nor dogmatic *laissez-faire* within the party, but tactical and ideological divisions inside the trade-union movement, in particular between the proponents and opponents of a statutory eight-hour day. Rosebery, on becoming Prime Minister, made an attempt to seize the social reform agenda by personally endorsing the eight-hour day (in March 1894). Significantly, both the War Office and the Admiralty adopted it for their workers, while Asquith pushed through his Factory Bill, which was approved in 1895.⁶⁰

Ultimately, however, the single most important obstacle to Liberal reform was the House of Lords. In a further instance of that *fin-de-siècle* radical

⁵⁶ Brady, *T.P.O’Connor*, 114-7; A.F.Havinghurst, *Radical journalist: H.W.Massingham (1860-1924)* (1974), 18-40.

⁵⁷ L.A.Atherley-Jones, ‘The new liberalism’, *The Nineteenth Century*, xxvi, 1889,192; see also P.F.Clarke, *Liberals and social-democrats* (1978), 22-7.

⁵⁸ H.Pelling, *Popular politics and society in late Victorian Britain* (1979), 6. The Liberals won a majority of the country seats only in 1885 and 1906, and in both cases free trade was at stake. Cf. Lynch, ***. For free trade as an electoral issue in 1885 see Biagini, *Liberty*, ***, and Howe, *Free trade in Liberal England* ****.

⁵⁹ Hamer, *Liberal politics*,204; I.Packer, *Lloyd George, liberalism and the land. The land issue and party politics in England, 1906-1914* (2001), 25; Lynch, *Liberal party*, 147-9.

⁶⁰ D.Powell, ‘Liberal ministries and labour, 1892-1895’, *History*, vol.68 (1983), 417, 425-6.

phenomenon which Barrow and Bullock have described as ‘the survival of Chartist assumptions’,⁶¹ the NLF, like the INF in Ireland, insisted that *political* democracy was the precondition for *social* reform. This growing concern for the social question was accompanied by renewed interest in the question of democracy. The Lords’ rejection of most of the Bills endorsed by the Home Rule majority in the Commons prompted the NLF to demand the reform of the national representative system as a whole. Various other proposals emerged from the deliberations of local caucuses and were adopted by the General Committee in April 1893. They included the removal of the value qualification for lodgers, registration of new electors to take place twice a year and the abolition of disqualification through either change of residence or receipt of temporary Poor Law relief.⁶² Once again the NLF was critical of the Parliamentary party and the government, whose Registration Bill they regarded as timid and inadequate. This concern for democratic reform continued over the few next years. In 1895 a canvassing of constituency opinion conducted by the Liberal party’s Radical Committee indicated that the rank and file regarded the reform of the House of Lords as a matter of utmost urgency. Other concerns were the democratization of the electoral system, including one-man-one-vote, the abolition of plural votes⁶³ and the reform of the existing system of registration.

In contrast to their programmatic activism of 1891, in 1893-5 the Liberals adopted a predominantly ‘reactive’ strategy dictated by the Unionist reliance on the Lords’ veto. At first the new approach seemed to work: the anti-Lords campaign filled the NLF with renewed radical zeal. At the 1894 conference in Portsmouth, ‘Mr Acland’s speech against the Lords [was] received with mad

⁶¹ ‘The Liberals and the agricultural labourers’, Liberal leaflet, No.1553, in J.Johnson Collection, ‘Creed, Parties and Politics’, box 18. This was similar to the strategy adopted by the Irish Nationalists (see above, p.000). Cf. Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic ideas*, 9.

⁶² ‘Registration Reform’, meeting of the General Committee of the NLF, Westminster Town Hall, 19 April 1893, NLF Reports, 16-7.

⁶³ Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Council of the NLF, Cardiff, 17-18 Jan.1895, 5, 9. Emy, *Liberals*, 66. J.Moon (Liverpool) to T.E.Ellis, 24 Jul.1895, in Ellis Papers, 3605. In the Glasgow constituencies from 1894-97 the lodger voters for the Unionists had increased from 3830 to 4238; during the same period, the Liberal lodger vote had increased from 1165 to only 1209: figures in the Minutes of the Meeting of the Western Committee of the Scottish Liberal Association, Glasgow, 13 Oct. 1897, 338, NLS, Acc. 11765/6.

enthusiasm. At the evening meeting, where Sir W.Harcourt spoke, “God save the Queen” was hissed – a thing I never heard before or since’.⁶⁴ Perhaps for the first time since 1886, a Liberal agitation was favourably echoed in the Radical Unionist weekly press,⁶⁵ and this suggested that the Liberal rank-and-file desired party reunion as much as the Nationalists and agrarian radicals did in Ireland. Such an aspiration was further suggested in 1894 by the favourable responses elicited by Rosebery’s succession to the party leadership.⁶⁶ However, in the end the anti-Lords campaign failed to ignite the imagination of the wider public: as in 1886, rank-and-file zeal did not spread the radical contagion to the mass of the electors.⁶⁷ When this became apparent there followed loss of morale and self-confidence among Liberal associations even in traditionally Gladstonian areas, especially in England and Scotland. In such a context, the ILP denounced what they regarded as the Liberal infatuation with ‘merely political’ reform, although the Upper House’s rejection of the 1893-4 Employers’ Liability Bill indicated the extent to which an undemocratic constitution hindered social and economic reform and directly affected the interests of labour.⁶⁸ This was to become clearer at the turn of the century, with the Taff Vale judgement.

Despite the anxiety expressed by Tucker and other social Liberals, the chief significance of the early ILP was not its socialism, but its democratic politics, which revived a tradition of independent popular radicalism stretching back to the Chartists and beyond, and for which the Liberal split had again created a political space. By the same token, as Alastair Reid has stressed, the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) did not signal a new start, but

⁶⁴ Tuckwell, *Reminiscences*, 208; cf. W.Reid, ‘The Leeds Conference’ and rep., ‘Leeds: June 20th, 1894’, in *The Liberal Magazine*, vol.2, Jul. 1894, No.10, 200-3.

⁶⁵ L.a., ‘Hopeless obstruction’, *LW*, 20 August 1893, 8; l.a., ‘Welsh Disestablishment’, *WT&E*, 3 Mar 1895, 8.

⁶⁶ L.a., ‘Lord Rosebery’s opportunity’, *LW*, 4 Mar.1894, 8; l.a., ‘Federal Home Rule’, *WT&E*, 23 Apr. 1893, 8, suggesting federalism as the solution to the ‘British constitutional problem’ as well as a policy which would reunite the Liberal party.

⁶⁷ McKinsty, *Rosebery*, 328-31.

⁶⁸ 1895 Cardiff NLF meeting, cit., W.Abraham (‘Mabon’), 7 and 103-06. The Lords’ opposition focused on contracting out, a procedure which the Bill proposed to abolish: see Powell, ‘Liberal ministries and labour’, 422 and n.65, H.A.Clegg, A.Fox and A.F.Thompson, *A History of British trade unions since 1889, vol.1, 1889-1910* (1977), 253 n.1 and E.P.Henock, *British social reform and German precedents. The case of social insurance 1880-1914* (1987), 56-7.

rather ‘a revival of the spirit of the 1860s and 1870s’ and the demand both for a return to the Gladstonian settlement and for working towards stronger trade-union representation in Parliament as a means to an end.⁶⁹ Apart from the mid-Victorian Labour Representation League there were other precedents for this strategy. In 1887 a National Labour Party had demanded ‘Home Rule, County Government and Religious Equality’ together with payment of members and their electoral expenses. One of its most radical demands was “Adult Suffrage” and the right for women to sit as MPs.⁷⁰ For *Reynolds’s Newspaper* the proposed party was to be modelled on Parnell’s National party, rather than on the socialist ones already existing in other Western-European countries. Ideologically, it wanted the new party to be democratic and liberal, as indicated by its proposed leaders, who included Lib-Labs like Fenwick and Burt and radicals like Bradlaugh.⁷¹ In a similar spirit, a new Labour Representation League was set up in 1891 by the London Trades Council in an attempt to bring together labour candidates ‘irrespective of creed or sect’.⁷²

Within the Liberal party these developments created a renewed awareness of the need for a ‘progressive alliance’.⁷³ In one shape or other, such a ‘progressive alliance’ had been Liberal policy since 1868 at least, when Gladstone’s party had managed to secure the support of the Reform League and other organizations of artisan radicalism. From 1877 the NLF had tried to ‘institutionalize’ such an alliance, but with limited success. On the other hand, although the 1891 Newcastle Programme had largely failed, the policy aims which it had articulated continued to dominate the outlook of the radical left. In particular, land reform and the principle of taxing its value taxation retained

⁶⁹ A.J.Reid, *United we stand. A history of Britain’s trade unions* (2004), 260.

⁷⁰ ‘The remuneration of female labour, and the conditions under which women too frequently work are simply barbarous, and will never be adequately rectified, until we have a score or two of competent ladies like Miss Helen Taylor, and Miss Amy Mander, the Newnham College Undergraduate (sic), who gave such clear and convincing evidence the other day respecting the brutalities of the police at Mitchelstown, have seats in the House of Commons.’ (L.a., ‘The National Labour Association’, *RN*, 25 Sept.1887, 1.)

⁷¹ L.a., ‘The representation of labour’, *RN*, 25 Sept.1887,4; Gracchus, ‘The advance of socialism’, *RN*, 2 Oct.1887, 2.

⁷² Thompson, *Socialists*, 103.

⁷³ H.C.G.Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists* (1973), 22; Clarke, *Lancashire*, 166.

considerable appeal not only in the Celtic Fringe,⁷⁴ but also in urban England, where in 1892 it helped the party to make considerable, though ephemeral, advances in various borough constituencies, especially in London, in 1892.⁷⁵

This suggests that the problem lay not ideas, but in effective leadership. ‘Liberalism, if it is, as we trust, to rise once more ... must seek leaders of a very different stamp’, proclaimed the *Weekly Times* in 1895, ‘[o]therwise, the ominous defections of the Labour vote will increase rapidly.’⁷⁶ But the problem of competent leadership was also shared by the new labour and socialist organizations, as the *Weekly Times* had conceded at least since 1889.⁷⁷ In 1893 Keir Hardie launched his bid in an article which, at the time, must have been one of his most widely-circulated publications – arguably more so than his contributions to the *Labour Leader*.⁷⁸ He claimed that the political differences between the bourgeois parties were ‘minor’ and that the ‘experiment of a Socialistic party ... will ... hasten the time ... when the dividing lines of politics will no longer be the more or less shadowy line which divides Liberalism from Toryism, but that of Collectivism v. Individualism.’⁷⁹ Yet his messianic socialism, which rejected piecemeal reforms, appeared somehow vague and utopian: he deprecated state intervention, exalted collective working-class self-help and invested his best hopes in the ballot box – which was precisely what the despised Liberals also did.⁸⁰ Likewise, the joint manifesto of the ‘Socialist bodies’ of the Fabians, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the Hammersmith Socialist

⁷⁴ William Saundirs to T.E.Ellis, 24 Mar. 1894, in Ellis Papers, 1925.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Socialists*, 96; D.Howell, *British workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (1983), 258.

⁷⁶ L.a., ‘The Liberal collapse’, *WT&E*, 21 Jul. 1895, 8.

⁷⁷ L.a., ‘Socialism in the north’, *WT&E*, 2 Jun. 1889, 8.

⁷⁸ The paper had a circulation of about 50,000 in 1894: K.O.Morgan, *Keir Hardie, radical and socialist* (1984), 67.

⁷⁹ Keir Hardie, ‘Independent Labour Party conference’, *WT&E*, 22 Jan. 1893, 9.

⁸⁰ Keir Hardie, MP, ‘Marching orders for the Labour army’, *WT&E*, 15 Jan. 1893, 9: ‘I confess to having great sympathy with those who honestly deprecate State interference with the conditions of Labour. ... We say to the workers that they have no right to look to rich sympathisers for aid; they have themselves the power to do all that is necessary if they will but organize their forces and give expression to their wishes at the ballot-box. ... For it is not an eight-hour day by law enacted, nor a pension to every disabled worker, nor colonies for the unemployed that is the goal. These are but easy stages on the march. There can be no final solution of the Labour problem till Rent and Usury cease, and production is maintained to supply the necessities of the community.’

Society and other such groups was strongly anti-anarchist but very ambiguous about socialism, which it defined primarily in terms of *individual* freedom.⁸¹

Although such evidence may be read in different ways, in context it suggests that these socialist groups were aware that they operated within a popular culture dominated by values that were essentially liberal and individualistic. In other words, they realized that disgruntled artisans and working-class radicals could perhaps be persuaded to turn away from the Liberal party, but were not likely to reject self-help and related values. By the same token, the main motivation for the *Weekly Times* supporting the ILP and the SDF was not apparently enthusiasm for ‘socialism’, but ‘disgust’ with the alternatives facing ‘the English Democracy’. It praised and endorsed the ILP for being both ‘above’ party squabbles and single-mindedly devoted to ‘the promotion of the welfare of the workers’.⁸²

Who could unify such currents of radicalism and forge them into an effective political force again? Only a new democratic leader could do that. For the *Weekly Times* the rising stars were H.H.Asquith, R.B.Haldane, H.Fowler and A.H.D.Acland.⁸³ It prophesized, quite accurately, that Asquith ‘has but to wait, and wisely begin to reorganise a new *real* Liberal Party and he may be its chief, and Prime Minister ere the coming century has scored many years.’⁸⁴ As for Acland, his strength was that he could reconcile the crusading humanitarianism of the Gladstonian tradition with the social radical vision of ‘positive’ liberty, which would ‘improve, directly or indirectly ... the hard lot of, and increase the leisure of many of the workers ... develop[ing] ... for those who were at a

⁸¹ ‘Manifesto of the joint committee of Socialist bodies’, *WT&E*, 7 May 1893,1: ‘An Eight Hour Law, Prohibition of Child Labour for Wages, Free Maintenance of all Necessitous Children, Equal Payment of Men and Women for Equal Work, an Adequate Minimum Wage for all Adults Employed in the Government and Municipal Services, or in any other Monopolies, such as Railways enjoying State Privileges; Suppression of all Sub-contracting and Sweating. Universal Suffrage for all adults, men and women alike; Public Payment for all Public Service. The inevitable economic development points to the direct absorption by the State, as an organised democracy, of monopolies which have been granted to ... companies, and their immediate conversion into public services.’

⁸² L.a., ‘The Independent Labour Party’, *WT&E*, 22 Jan.1893, 8; this reaction against party politics had been going on for years, especially since 1886: see for example l.a., ‘Humbug all round’, *WT&E*, 14 Jul. 1889, 8.

⁸³ L.a., ‘New lamps for old ones’ and ‘The future of Liberalism’, in *WT&E*, 30 Jun.1895, 8.

⁸⁴ ‘Powder and shot’, *WT&E*, 21 July 1895, 9.

disadvantage in the struggle of life, fuller and wider opportunities to attain better things.’⁸⁵

Acland failed to rise to these expectations, but crusading humanitarianism continued to be the common feature of various currents of radicalism, including the ILP. Indeed, in October 1896 Rosebery resigned the party leadership, apparently feeling himself to be no match for the octogenarian Gladstone, who continued to mesmerise what Rosebery described as ‘the intriguers’ among the Liberals.⁸⁶ His words reflected not only his failure to unify the party, but also his awareness that he was ‘in apparent difference with a considerable mass of the Liberal party on the Eastern Question’.⁸⁷ He was alluding to the Armenian atrocities.

The government had found out about them in December 1894 and Rosebery the then Prime Minister, protested to the Porte in January 1895, but Harcourt and others within the government found his action weak and indecisive. In June Bryce urged the Foreign Secretary, Lord Kimberley, to publish a report on the massacres in order to awaken the public conscience, but he refused.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, although the Ottoman authorities tried to prevent foreign journalists from visiting the areas involved in the disturbances, news leaked out through the Russian border. Rumours and early reports were eventually confirmed in February 1895.⁸⁹ The women’s Liberal associations were among the first to take up the issue.⁹⁰ From April spontaneous non-partisan meetings were organized in various parts of the country: Gladstone was invited to speak at Chester, but declined on account of bad health, although in May he did send a letter of support to the organizers of the National Protest Demonstration Committee.⁹¹ In the

⁸⁵ A.H.D.Acland, ‘Liberalism and Labour’, NLF Reports, 1893, 40.

⁸⁶ Rosebery to C.Geake, 6 Oct 1896 and 7 Oct.1896, in National Liberal Club Collection, Bristol Univ. Library, P14560 and P14561.

⁸⁷ Cit. in NLF ***, Norwich, 18 March 1897,5.

⁸⁸ P. Stansky, *Ambitions and strategies. The struggle for the leadership of the Liberal party in the 1890s* (1964), 125-7; McKinstry, *Rosebery*, 389-92.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1895, 6, 23 Feb. 1895, 5, 29 Mar. 1895, 9.

⁹⁰ See meeting of 15 Feb. 1895 and Maria Richards’ circular of the same date in U. Masson (ed.), *‘Women’s rights and womanly duties’: the Aberdare Women’s Liberal Association, 1891-1910* (2005), 156-7.

⁹¹ *The Times*, 11 Apr. 1895, 3; 7 May 1895, 12.

mean time, important gatherings had taken place in various parts of the country. At St James' Hall, in early May, the Duke of Argyll, the Duke of Westminster (both of whom had already been active in the 1876 Bulgarian Agitation),⁹² the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Archbishop of York and various bishops, as well as Nonconformist leaders spoke at a 'weighty and impressive' demonstration which 'testifie[d] to the passionate feeling aroused in this country by the accounts ... of the cruel and shameful treatment of some of the subjects of the Sultan, whose rights and liberties had been especially placed under the safeguards of the last great European settlement of Eastern affairs.' A letter from Gladstone was read out, one in which the former Liberal leader 'expressed the hope that the Turkish Government would be forced "by moral means, if possible" to give securities against the recurrence of the horrors.'⁹³ He was eventually persuaded to address a meeting in August, at a time (after the general election) when it would not be open to the criticism that it was held in a partisan spirit – a concern shared by all the Liberal leaders.⁹⁴ Although they meant to support the Unionist government, rather than embarrass it, the rank and file and Nonconformists took a different line. In early December John Clifford, speaking at the Council of the Free Churches, sounded a defiant note:

It is impossible to sit still and read the disclosures made in the Press from day to day. It makes one's blood boil. ... Whilst the diplomatists debate the people perish. Little children are butchered like sheep, women are so brutally treated that they dread death less than the arrival of the Turk. ... Our own 'treaty obligations' are trampled under foot. Our Governments have withheld from us the 'Consular reports' ...⁹⁵

A few days later Gladstone came out in his support. In a public letter to Clifford, he stated his confidence that Britain '[was] quite able to cope not only with Turkey, but with five or six Turkeys, and she is under peculiar obligations'. He

⁹² K.M.Foster, 'The intellectual Duke. George Douglas Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, 1823-1900', Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2005, 155-7; E.P.Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to revolutionary* (1988), 211. check that it was the same duke, rather than his son

⁹³ *The Times*, 8 May 1895,9.

⁹⁴ 'Mr.Gladstone on the Armenian Question', *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1895, 4, and l.a., *ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁵ 'Armenia and the Church Council of the Free Churches of London', *The Times*, 7 Dec. 1895,7.

added that he *hoped* that ‘the Government has not been in any degree responsible for bringing about the present almost incredible ... situation’.⁹⁶ On both counts his words implied criticism of Salisbury’s policy and were interpreted as such. Meanwhile the deep link between Nonconformist Christianity and Liberal politics characterizing many parts of the country ensured that the issue remained at the forefront of local associations, with the women in particular becoming passionately involved and invoking the application of ‘Gladstone’s “bag and baggage” policy with regard to the Sultan’.⁹⁷ In March 1896, in a speech at Swansea, Asquith criticized Salisbury for what he regarded as his inept and counterproductive handling of the situation.⁹⁸

While Rosebery and Spencer insisted that the question should not be treated as a party issue, the wave of popular meetings went the other way: at Bradford, Rochdale, Shoreditch, Coventry, Glasgow, Northampton, Bolton, Nottingham and elsewhere well-attended demonstrations addressed by local Liberal and socialist leaders, as well as Nonconformist and Anglican clergymen, demanded immediate action, of an unspecified but presumably military character, to stop the atrocities.⁹⁹ H.W.Massingham, the then editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, who was trying to galvanize the Liberal leaders into taking up the Armenian crusade, reassured Gladstone about the strength of the popular agitation.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, the GOM overcame his reluctance and on 24 September addressed a popular meeting at Hengler’s Circus in Liverpool. It was an important political endorsement of an otherwise largely spontaneous campaign, which had experienced no encouragement among the Liberal party leaders. Gladstone called for a ‘humanitarian crusade’, taking care to stress that this was no religious campaign of Christians against Muslims, nor of Europeans against Turks: ‘The

⁹⁶ ‘Mr Gladstone and the Armenian Question’, *The Times*, 18 Dec. 1895, 12.

⁹⁷ See for example Masson (ed.), *Aberdare Women’s Liberal Association*, meetings of 24 Jan. and 27 Jan. 1896, 175-6. This association continued to support the victims of the Armenian massacres at least until the spring of 1900: see the entries for 23 and 27 Apr. and 4 May 1900 in *ibid.*, 216-7.

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 23 Mar. 1896, 7.

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 16 Sep. 1896, 3, 21 Sep. 1896, 3, 22 Sep. 1896, 4 and 24 Sep. 1896, 4 (including a resolution of the SDF).

¹⁰⁰ Stansky, *Ambitions and strategies*, 207.

ground on which we stand here it is not British nor European, but it is human.¹⁰¹ He demanded the issuing of a ‘peremptory note’ indicating the suspension of diplomatic relations. Britain should stop short of any action which could precipitate a general European war, but should renounce ‘neutrality’ in this matter, declaring that ‘we will not acknowledge as a nation within the family of nations the ruler who is himself the responsible agent of these monstrous acts’, and only resorting to military action if and when she deemed appropriate.

As *The Times* pointed out, it was not clear what course of action Gladstone was actually recommending,¹⁰² but the spirit of moral outrage pervading his speech was echoed at popular meetings in Carlisle, Newcastle, Leicester, Portsmouth, Guilford, and Reading (the last one convened by the Evangelical Alliance), Leith and Sheffield.¹⁰³ Such popular demonstrations became increasingly belligerent. At West Bromwich a meeting was introduced by a band playing ‘Rule Britannia’ and the National Anthem, and concluded by a resolution pledging ‘loyal support in any resolute steps which they may consider expedient to take in order to put an end to the barbarities.’¹⁰⁴ In October two important meetings took place in Hyde Park, attended by many labour leaders including Henry Broadhurst and John Burns, and at St James’ Hall, chaired by the Duke of Westminster of the Anglo-Armenian Association and supported by many Anglican and Nonconformist clergymen, including Dr Kane of Belfast.¹⁰⁵ Although Bryce and other Liberal leaders tried to restrain rank-and-file criticism of the government, the feelings expressed at these demonstrations were endorsed by the NLF.¹⁰⁶ Many Liberals wanted their leaders to exploit the emotion generated by reports of indiscriminate massacres in the Ottoman Empire in order to create a ‘Bulgarian Atrocities’ effect – similar to when in 1876 the party had been lifted up from the slough of despond by the People’s William’s enlivening

¹⁰¹ ‘Mr Gladstone on the Armenian Question’, *The Times*, 25 Sep. 1896, 5.

¹⁰² L.a., *The Times*, 29 Sep. 1896, 7.

¹⁰³ *The Times*, 26 Sep. 1896, 5 and 28 Sep. 1896, 5.

¹⁰⁴ *The Times*, 29 Sep. 1896, 8.

¹⁰⁵ ‘The Armenian demonstration’, *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1896, 6; K.D.Brown, *John Burns* (1977), 75; ‘The Armenian Question. Great meeting in St James’ Hall’, *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1896, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *The Times*, 24 Nov. 1896, 10 and 22 Dec. 1896, 4.

gospel.¹⁰⁷ They included a broad cross-section of supporters and activists – ranging from the ‘Liberal Forwards’ group to the peace movement and Nonconformists leaders such as Clifford and Hugh Price Hughes.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps because of its limited electoral consequence, the Armenian agitation has been neglected by historians,¹⁰⁹ but at the time it caused a remarkable display of political emotion and stirred up radical opinion not only in Britain, but all over Europe, especially when rekindled by the massacres in Crete and the Greek-Turkish war – which saw the participation of international volunteers, led by one of Garibaldi’s sons.¹¹⁰ At that stage the party nature of the agitation was explicit and was encouraged by James Bryce, Newman Hall and Herbert Gladstone, as well as Harcourt, Labouchere and Morley.¹¹¹ They presented the issue in terms increasingly critical of the government. Having both publicly described the Sultan as ‘the great Assassin’ and effectively called for the union of Crete with Greece, W.E.Gladstone adopted a partisan line himself in the letter which he wrote in support of Bonham Carter for the Petersfield (Hampshire) by-election at the end of May, criticizing the government not only for their inactivity in Armenia, but also for their complicity with the Ottomans in Crete.¹¹² Although Petersfield remained Tory, there followed a string of Liberal victories at by-elections throughout the country.¹¹³ The partisan nature of the agitation was then further intensified by the Colonial Secretary’s intervention. As

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the Western Committee (Glasgow) of the Scottish Liberal Association, 7 Oct. 1896, 264, and in of the Executive Council of the Scottish Liberal Association, 9 Oct. 1896, 266, NLS. . H.W.Massingham attacked Rosebery for following ‘the dogma of “British interests” as against the interests of humanity.’ (Laity, *British Peace movement*, 143).

¹⁰⁸ Laity, *British Peace movement*, 138-9. The ‘Liberal Forwards’ were to play an active role on the pro-Boer side during the political debates surrounding the South African War at the turn of the century: A.Davey, *The British Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (1978), 72-3.

¹⁰⁹ But see P.Marsh, ‘Lord Salisbury and the Ottoman massacres’, *Journal of British Studies*, 11, No.2 (May 1972), 62-83, R.Douglas, Britain and the Armenian question, 1894-7’, *Historical Journal*, 19(1976), 113-33 and the rather partisan ***, *Imperialism, Evangelicalism and the Ottoman Empire* (1993).

¹¹⁰ F.Andreucci, *Socialdemocrazia e imperialismo* (1988), 123-5.

¹¹¹ See reports in *The Times*: ‘Greece and Crete’, 20 Feb.1897, 12, ‘Sir W.Harcourt in Stepney’, 5 Mar. 1897, 11; ‘The Radicals and Greece’, 6 Mar.1897, 12; ‘The Cretan question’, 13 Mar.1897, 9; ‘The Cretan Question. – Mr Gladstone’s letter’, 19 Mar. 1897, 8; ‘Mr Morley at Merthyr Tydvil’, 8 May 1897, 16.

¹¹² W.E.Gladstone, *The Eastern Crisis. A letter to the Duke of Westminster, KG* (1897), 3, 13-5; *The Times*, 31 May 1897, 13.

¹¹³ See ‘Election intelligence’, *The Times*, 30 Oct. 1897, 8 and 5 Nov. 1897, 7; ‘Mr Asquith at Rochdale’, *ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1897, 9.

we saw in the previous chapter, Chamberlain had always been unable to sympathize with the ‘sentimental’ politics of humanitarianism – a failure further exacerbated by the Home Rule split. Not surprisingly, in 1897 he reacted to the Liberal adoption of the Armenian and Cretan issues by denouncing the ‘forward party’. He minimized the massacres in Crete by comparing them with the violence which had been going on for centuries on the Afghan frontier, and insisted that Britain’s interests in the Sudan should be regarded as the country’s paramount obligation.¹¹⁴ His remarks came across as even more callous than Disraeli’s response to the Bulgarian massacres of 1876. Chamberlain’s ‘neo-Beaconsfieldism’ was further compounded by a new war on the Indian North Western Frontier and the embarrassing Jameson Raid in South Africa.¹¹⁵

These episodes generated a wave of emotion which transcended class and party divides and indicated the potential for a popular front, not one of progressivism, despite significant steps in this direction in the north-west and elsewhere,¹¹⁶ but a Gladstonian popular front of moral outrage. Even Keir Hardie seemed to adopt the cause of radical unity. In October-November 1896, campaigning at Bradford East in a three-cornered contest, he reasserted his support for Irish Home Rule, Church disestablishment, temperance reform and taxation of land values, claiming to be not only ‘the best Liberal candidate available’, but also the worst enemy of ‘the Sultan of Turkey’. Incredibly, however, he denounced Gladstone’s stance on Armenia and praised Gordon of Khartoum as ‘the most Christ-like man this country had ever seen’. He was defeated, and finished at the bottom of the poll. In any case, his rediscovery of radical unity seemed short-lived and from 1897 he lapsed in his typical warfare against the Liberals, despite the fact that the latter showed signs of revival in a series of by-election victories, while ILP candidates were humiliated everywhere. But by the summer of 1898, as further electoral results urged pragmatism, the ILP Parliamentary Committee (which included Hardie, MacDonald and Brocklehurst)

¹¹⁴ ‘Mr Chamberlain in Birmingham’, *The Times*, 1 Feb. 1897, 8; ‘Mr Chamberlain in Glasgow’, *ibid.*, 5 Nov. 1897, 7.

¹¹⁵ General Council Meeting, Dundee, 26 Nov. 1897, NLS, Acc. 11765/7 ???; Davey, *British pro-Boers*, 39-4; ‘Scottish Liberal Association’, *The Times*, 27 Nov. 1897, 12.

¹¹⁶ Clarke, *Lancashire*, 163 ff.; Blaazer, *Popular front*, 60-85.

started covert negotiations with the Liberal chief whip Ellis for an electoral pact in eight constituencies, in return for ILP support for a future Liberal government.¹¹⁷

From the end of 1899 the Boer War provided further fuel for a latter-day Gladstonian revival, which started to attract well-known Liberal Unionists like Albert Bright and Leonard Courtney back to the fold.¹¹⁸ When Morley delivered an electrifying peroration at the St James' Hall in Manchester in September 1899, it seemed that the agitations of the previous years would now turn into a real movement, but he was unable to sustain the enthusiasm for long and turn it into a national uprising. Nevertheless, as Grigg has written, the war in South Africa gave 'new urgency and relevance' to the anti-jingoist vein in the radical tradition and increased the standing both of the leaders who championed it, including Campbell-Bannerman and of the more ambiguous, though incredibly resourceful, Lloyd George.¹¹⁹ Pro-Boer sentiment – although divisive within the Parliamentary Liberal party – was consistent with many of the currents of radicalism which had contributed to the Liberal alliance in 1879-86. In particular, it attracted agrarian radicals throughout the United Kingdom and mobilized both ethical socialists and unreconstructed Gladstonians in a 'popular front' of moral outrage. It brought together old friends and created new alliances, ranging from John Dillon, Michael Davitt, John and Willie Redmond to Thomas Burt, John Clifford, F.W.Hirst and other representatives of different shades of Cobdenism. It also attracted J.Ramsay MacDonald, Lloyd George and C.P.Scott, as well as 'New Liberals' like J.A.Hobson and J.L.Hammond – who, more than any other Liberal of the younger generation, symbolized the ideological affinity between pro-Boerism and Home Rule.¹²⁰ At last there was cooperation between socialists

¹¹⁷ Howell, *Independent Labour Party*, 189-93; Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, 90-4 and 96.

¹¹⁸ Clarke, *Lancashire*, 178-9.

¹¹⁹ J.Grigg, 'Lloyd George and the Boer War', in A.J.A.Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism 1900-1914* (1974), 16.

¹²⁰ D. MacCracken, *The Irish pro-Boers 1877-1902* (1989); A.Davey, *The British pro-Boers* (1978), 150-1; Laity, *Peace movement*, 153; Cameron, *Mackintosh*, 211-2; A.Howe, 'Towards the "hungry forties": free trade in Britain c.1880-1906', in E.F.Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community* (1996), 206-10, 214-5; P.Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism* (2002), 83-9; D.Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (1997), 64-5; S.A.Weaver, *The Hammonds. A marriage in history* (1998), 57-62; G.K.Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government 1865-1925* (2001), 61.

(including the SDF) and Liberals in many constituencies, particularly in Lancashire.¹²¹ While Davitt thundered for Boer freedom, Hardie, to the astonishment of some of his supporters, adopted distinctly radical arguments, which ‘differed very little in kind from Bright’s and Cobden’s denunciation of the Crimean War almost fifty years earlier’.¹²² Even more remarkable was the extent to which his former anti-Liberalism was replaced by eulogizing leading anti-war radicals. He even went as far as making overtures to John Morley, whom he had long denounced as the arch-individualist apologist of unbridled capitalism.

Lack of leadership was certainly one of the problems for the pro-Boers. Hardie was aware that only a strong and widely accepted leader could effectively harness all these currents of radicalism to the cause of ‘humanity’. The new priorities created by the war again made him ready even to contemplate cooperation with Morley. But, as in 1896-7, the latter failed to rise to the challenge. He was clearly keener on writing Gladstone’s biography than on following in the GOM’s footsteps. Hardie soon had reason to regret that ‘[there was] no voice at Hawarden.’¹²³ This was indeed both a problem and a paradox.

1906 and the significance of the ‘New Liberalism.’

In an influential piece of historical revisionism, Duncan Tanner has presented Liberalism and Labour in 1900-18 as two anti-Unionist parties competing for the same social constituency.¹²⁴ In such contest, at least until 1910 the Liberals enjoyed an important advantage. For, those who proposed left-wing

¹²¹ Clarke, *Lancashire*, 312.

¹²² Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, 106. For Michael Davitt’s views see his *The Boer fight for freedom* (1902).

¹²³ Hardie to Hodgson Pratt, cit. in R.Price, *An imperial war and the British working class* (1972), 44-5; cf. G.Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (1982), 181. In June 1899 C.P.Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* was also considering Morley as the potential leader of a ‘progressive’ party; Clarke, *Lancashire*, 174.

¹²⁴ D.Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (1990).

alternatives to Liberalism discovered, to their cost, that they were locking horns with the combined forces of Christian radicalism and Celtic nationalism, the latter being strongly Catholic in Ireland and staunchly Nonconformist in Wales. Many thought that ‘religion and radical politics [were] inseparably connected’¹²⁵ and behaved accordingly.

In particular, the supposed link between liberty and Home Rule developed into something of a dogma and semi-religious faith. In the process popular liberalism as a whole became similar to religious revivalism, being driven by lofty ideals rather than practical policy aims. For these reasons it was often ineffective and would have suffered from competition from the new socialist organizations, had it not been for the fact that they, too, were similar to dissenting religious sects. However, unlike the Liberals and the Protestant Dissenters, the socialist groups, for all their prophetic zeal, experienced little in the way of revivals between 1895 and 1913.¹²⁶ Far from challenging the Gladstonians’ hold on the working-class vote, at the turn of the century they came under pressure from the neo-Chartist NDL.

Patricia Jalland has argued that Home Rule delayed the rise of a new Liberal leader who could appeal to labour and that it ‘paralys[ed] the party’s development in other directions’ [check quote].¹²⁷ But Gladstone’s political longevity did not hinder the debate on collectivism and ‘progressivism’ within the NLF and Liberal intellectual circles, or, for that matter, the government itself. In fact, collectivist legislation started very early – from 1881 in Ireland and 1886 (Crofters Act) in Scotland. Moreover, the 1887 agitation against coercion in Ireland was a formative experience for a whole generation of radicals and future Labour leaders, including George Lansbury, W.H.Massingham and Sidney Webb, who derived from the Irish crisis wide-ranging conclusions about social injustice

¹²⁵ ‘The Plebiscite’, *The Congregationalist*, August 1886, 603.

¹²⁶ P.Thompson, *Socialists, liberals and labour. The struggle for London 1885-1914* (1967), 195, 226.

¹²⁷ P.Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland. The Ulster Question in British politics to 1914* (1993, first published 1980), 21-2.

and the importance of remedial political action.¹²⁸ Thus in terms of formulating new social policies the Liberal party was far from 'paralysed' in 1891-1905.

In any case, given the rise of Parnellism as a mass movement in the early 1880s and the unpopularity of coercion, which was necessary to hold it back, the British 'Democracy' could not have ignored the question of Irish self-government. It is hardly surprising that it arose when it did and that it split the Liberals. Without a Gladstone, it would have severed the Liberals from labour, with a Joseph Cowen or Charles Bradlaugh playing the role subsequently, and rather ineffectively, adopted by Keir Hardie in setting up an independent democratic party.

Moreover, it is not clear whether more aggressive 'statist' social reform was an electoral asset at any stage before 1914. In fact, it is likely that Chamberlain-style proposals would have been electorally counterproductive had they been tried in the 1880s: they could easily have provided the Tories with a rallying cry in defence of the Englishman's liberty against the 'Prussian police state' associated with state intervention. Even in 1891 national insurance was opposed by the friendly societies, who felt that 'they would be competing in the same limited market for working-class savings as the friendly societies themselves.'¹²⁹ From 1910 Lloyd George was more successful not only because the general ethos was then different, but also because, although his basic premises were similar to those of Chamberlain, he was more skilful than the Unionist leader and better at playing the politics of emotionalism.¹³⁰ Even so, National Insurance did not make the government more popular in 1911.

Like Lloyd George, Chamberlain was one of those radicals who liked to 'get things done'. This required power at the centre and the preservation of the Union, which Gladstone regarded as a constitutional quagmire. The GOM's rhetoric suggested the impression that, largely for moral reasons, he considered the

¹²⁸ Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, p.90; Maccoby, *English Radicalism 1886-1914*, pp.59-63.

¹²⁹ G.Stedman Jones, *An end to poverty? A historical debate* (London, 2004), 215.

¹³⁰ J.Grigg, 'Lloyd George and the Boer War', in Morris, (ed.), *Edwardian radicalism*, 13.

political ‘process’ more important than its ‘results’. Although this was not necessarily what he actually thought – most of the time he was more interested in achieving practical solutions than in crusading for ethical imperatives – it was enough to exasperate Liberals of the young generation, like Acland and Samuel. By contrast, popular radicals and the labour movement tended to agree with Gladstone, not because they shared his moral concerns, but because they feared that, without democratic control over the process, they could not trust the government to deliver desirable policies. This was the rationale behind the turn of the century resurgence of the old Chartist demand for full democracy as a precondition of real social reform.

After the intense debates about collectivism and socialism in the 1890s, and the parallel emphasis on ‘constructive unionism’ in Ireland, the ‘neo-Chartism’ of the beginning of the twentieth century could be perceived as something of an anti-climax. But in fact it revealed a new awareness of the limitations of ‘democracy’ in its ‘household franchise’ dispensation, and, as Barrow and Bullock have pointed out, highlighted a plan for a ‘radical political democracy’ in which Parliament and local assemblies would be more directly accountable and citizens would be empowered by the referendum and the ‘initiative’.¹³¹ However, in contrast to what they have argued,¹³² there is little evidence that ‘greater democracy and full-blooded socialism’ were regarded as ‘but two sides of the same coin’, except by a small minority. While ‘socialism’ was a vague notion, a new jargon for most British and Irish people, in 1905 many believed that the real issue was neither ‘collectivism’ or ‘statism’, but democracy. In hindsight we can only say that they were right. Democracy – or lack thereof – was the problem then and would continue to be so for a long time afterwards. This is related to another apparent ‘anachronism’, namely the fact that land reform was a major issue in English, as much as in Irish, Scottish and Welsh politics. This reflected not only the complexity and importance of the issue (which affected urban, as well as rural, land values and the ownership of the

¹³¹ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic ideas*, 14.

¹³² Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic ideas*, 57.

mines), but also an old radical dream, a form of economic democracy (instead of social democracy), based on the independence and self-reliance that a plot of land was supposed to confer to its peasant owner.¹³³

Thus, in contrast to Collini, I am not sure that we can indicate a precise point in time when collectivism fully replaced the old creed of ‘peace, retrenchment and reform’ as a credible political strategy.¹³⁴ But arguably 1906 was the last election of the late-Victorian cycle which had started in 1880. Then ‘Gladstone’s speeches [had given] a moral dignity to a struggle against a policy which claimed to be based on a sensible, realistic approach’,¹³⁵ by showing that Beaconsfield’s imperialism and ‘profligate’ mismanagement of the Treasury were both immoral and impolitic. In 1906 there was no equivalent of the GOM, though something like a build up of collective Gladstonianism had taken place over the previous three years. As in 1880, so also in 1906 Home Rule played no direct role, but in both cases there was a reasonable expectation on the part of the Irish Nationalists that a Liberal victory would indirectly benefit the cause of Irish self-government. In particular, there was widespread awareness that Home Rule was not an isolated issue, but one of the broader aspects of imperialism and democracy.

It is certainly true, as Laybourn writes, that, despite the fact that political allegiances are hard to break, once the Labour party came into existence it offered an alternative focus of activity.¹³⁶ Political identities and loyalties were in a state of flux after Gladstone’s retirement. Radical activists of various hues could vote for and support a range of diverse and ultimately conflicting organizations without feeling that this involved a betrayal of any particular cause, because many thought that Liberals, radicals, the socialist societies, the NDJ and the LRC

¹³³ M.Tichelar, ‘Socialists, Labour and the land: the response of the Labour party to the Land Campaign of Lloyd George before the First World War’, *20th Century British History*, vol.8, No.2, 127-44; G.Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, in G.S. Jones, *Languages of class: studies in English working class history, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), 90-178.

¹³⁴ S.Collini, *Liberalism and sociology: L.T.Hobhouse and political argument in England, 1880-1914* (1979), 42.

¹³⁵ T.Lloyd, *The general election of 1880* (Oxford, 1968), 160.

¹³⁶ Laybourn, ‘The rise of Labour’, 225.

were all – though in different ways – championing the overriding and all-encompassing causes of democracy and ‘humanity’.

If 1906 was a victory for Gladstonianism and ‘the old Liberal faith’, the economic crisis of 1908 and the electoral victories of 1910 helped the new social radicals to promote their creed of reform.¹³⁷ Although there was often a generational clash between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Liberals, they both included a strong Nonconformist component.¹³⁸ Moreover, there was no necessary contradiction between the policies advocated by each group. The continuity between the two was best personified by Lloyd George, whose 1909 land campaign ‘retained the form of a traditional crusade against “privilege” ... [but] its content became major social reform’, focusing on urban land values, minimum wages and housing developments.¹³⁹ With the notable exception of old age pensions, the measures introduced by the new government in 1906-9 tested and vindicated the enduring relevance of Old Liberalism. This was obviously the case with free trade and the 1906 Trades Disputes Act.¹⁴⁰ ‘Home Rule’ for South Africa in 1909 was not in the same league, but was important for the Liberals: it vindicated the pluralistic view of the Empire and United Kingdom celebrated by Gladstone from 1886.¹⁴¹ It was also consistent with the New Liberal ‘inclusive’ patriotism which sought to transcend conventional class struggle. As Readman has shown, despite the Radicals’ display of social hatred for ‘landlordism’, even their advocacy of land reform ‘largely stemmed from a conviction that it would do much to bolster the national character of the people.’¹⁴² The ‘feudal’ nobility and the House of Lords were attacked in the name of the ‘public good’, rather than of class struggle. It was a refined version of Gladstone’s ‘masses versus classes’, not the watered-

¹³⁷ S.J.Brown, “‘Echoes of Midlothian’: Scottish Liberalism and the South African War, 1899-1902”, *Scottish Historical Review*, vol.lxxi, 191/2(1992), 182-3.

¹³⁸ G.R.Searle, *The Liberal party. Triumph and disintegration, 1886-1929* (London, 1992), 64.

¹³⁹ I.Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the land. The land issue and party politics in England, 1906-1914* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001), 194.

¹⁴⁰ J.Thompson, ‘The genesis of the 1906 Trades Disputes Act: liberalism, trade unions and the law’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 9, No.2 (1998), 175-200.

¹⁴¹ J.S.Ellis, ‘Reconciling the Celt: British national identity, Empire and the 1911 investiture of the Prince of Wales’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol.37, No.4, Oct. 1998, 391-418.

¹⁴² P.Readman, ‘The Liberal party and patriotism in early twentieth century Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.12, No.3, 2001, 295.

down variety of Marx's proletarian gospel, which inspired Lloyd George's rhetoric and helped to contain the Labour party in 1910.¹⁴³

This is not to deny that, already before 1914, the shift from cultural to class politics was eroding the viability of Old Liberalism.¹⁴⁴ But it is to remind us of the extent to which the period under consideration was one of transition. In this respect, Clarke's theory about the importance of the Liberals being ready for the politics of class is still persuasive. For Asquith's party was, so to speak, ahead of the game, and well-provided with a supply of men, ideas and experience which would shape the collectivist consensus throughout the period 1918-1945. The real question is why, after 1918, so many of these men and ideas 'migrated' into Conservatism, National Liberalism and especially the Labour party, whose first two governments included a number of former Liberal ministers and MPs such as Haldane, Trevelyan, Ponsonby and Wedgwood. In other words, Clarke helps us to identify the problem behind Liberalism's decline. The latter had little to do with the alleged inadequacy of the party's ideas and policies. Instead it was about the post-war generation believing that traditional liberal values were best promoted through other party organizations.¹⁴⁵ The Irish equivalent of this problem is, in a sense, easier to solve. The decline and fall of Parliamentary Nationalism is closely linked to generational clashes, cultural shifts and the disruption caused by war and terrorism in 1916-18.¹⁴⁶

There is no equivalent of the electoral collapse of Redmond's party in post-war British politics. The oft-quoted rebuttal of Clarke's Lancashire thesis – namely that the New Liberalism was much less prominent in other parts of the country,

¹⁴³ N.Blewett, *The Peers, the parties and the people* (London, 1972).

¹⁴⁴ P.F.Clarke, 'Liberals, Labour and the franchise', *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), ***; D.W.Bebbingotn, 'Nonconformity and electoral sociology, 1867-1918', *Historical Journal*, 27, 3 (1984), 655.

¹⁴⁵ B.M.Doyle, 'Urban liberalism and the "lost generation": politics and middle class culture in Norwich, 1900-1935', *Historical Journal*, 38, 3 (1985), 617-34.

¹⁴⁶ P.Bew, 'Moderate nationalism and the Irish revolution, 1916-1923', *Historical Journal*, 42, 3 (1999), 729-49; T.Garvin, *1922. The birth of Irish democracy* (1996), 123-55; M.Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland. The Sinn Fein Party 1916-1923* (1999); F.Campbell, *Land and revolution. Nationalist politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921* (2005), 166-225; M.Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party: provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (Oxford, 2005).

where the party stuck to its Old agenda – is not completely convincing.¹⁴⁷ Of course, ‘constituency parties could emphasise particular aspects of the “national” image’.¹⁴⁸ But, while local electoral outcomes essentially depended on party organization (rather than ideas), in order to be effective New Liberalism needed to be established not so much in the constituencies, as at the centre, where was indeed well entrenched before the First World War. Moreover, among many of their supporters in the country, ‘peace, retrenchment and reform’ continued to provide an adequate battle cry for the local Liberal parties well into the twentieth century.¹⁴⁹ In fact the combination of a New Liberal ministry and Old Liberal caucuses and MPs in parts of the country may have been highly suited to a time of change – when ideas of state intervention were still controversial and less than welcome to many of the working class, its intended beneficiaries.¹⁵⁰ In so far as the latter preferred ‘independence’, trade union rights and fair wages sufficient for them to save for hard times, they too, and even the early Labour party, were closer to Old Liberalism than to any variety of socialism or New Liberalism which might lie ahead in the future.¹⁵¹

Laybourn’s claim that ‘[t]he primary cause of the Liberal decline and Labour growth was obvious’ – namely, that ‘the voters had abandoned the Liberal party in favour of its Labour or Conservative rivals’¹⁵² – appears so self-evident and yet is wide of the mark. For, in absolute terms, the Liberal vote continued to grow after 1918, reaching its peak in 1929, when the party had twice as many votes as in 1906. But by then they amounted to only 23 per cent of the votes cast

¹⁴⁷ K.O.Morgan, ‘The new Liberalism and the challenge of Labour: the Welsh experience, 1885-1929’, in K.D.Brown (ed.), *Essays in anti-Labour history* (1974), 164, 170; Laybourn, ‘The rise of Labour’, 215.

¹⁴⁸ Tanner, *Political change*, 15.

¹⁴⁹ M.Dawson, ‘Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall, 1910-1931: “The old time religion”’, *Historical Journal*, 38, 2(1995), 425-37; C.P.Cook, ‘Wales and the general election of 1923’, *Welsh History Review*, 4(1968-9), 387-95; M.D.Pugh, ‘Yorkshire and the New Liberalism?’, *Journal of Modern History*, 50, 3, (Sep. 1978), D1139-D1155.

¹⁵⁰ Pelling, ‘The working class and the origins of the welfare state’, *Popular politics & society in late Victorian Britain* (1979), 1-18.

¹⁵¹ P.Thane, ‘The working class and state “welfare” in Britain, 1880-1914’, *Historical Journal*, 27, 4, (1984), 877-900; Id., ‘The Labour party and state welfare’, in K.D.Brown (ed.), *The first Labour party 1906-1914* (1985), 183-216.

¹⁵² K.Laybourn, ‘The rise of Labour and the decline of Liberalism: the state of the debate’, *History*, 80, 259 (June 1995), 207.

under the recently introduced universal suffrage. Thus the Liberals' problem is not that they were 'abandoned' by their old supporters, but rather that in the 1920s they attracted a smaller share of the new voters than their competitors. Moreover, in terms of their ability to offer new policies, although they had been leading 'progressive' opinion until 1914, they seemed to have lost the initiative during the War, when free trade and humanitarianism were discredited and New Liberal strategies were also adopted by the other two parties. They managed to regain it only in 1929. But by then Lloyd George had wasted much of his credibility as a national leader and the party was unable to match its rivals in terms of organization and funding.

Meanwhile Nonconformity (or the Free Churches, as they began to be called) remained a potentially powerful force in politics. Lloyd George unsuccessfully sought to mobilize this constituency in the inter-war period. He claimed, not without some justification, that 'when the Evangelical Free Churches have failed to play any notable and active part in the struggle for social reform and for international justice and freedom, they have been weak and negligible'. By contrast, 'they [became] strongest when they are fired with enthusiasm for some living cause which vitally affects the practice of Christianity in human life.'¹⁵³ However, for the Liberals the problem was that, although the Dissenters did never become committed supporters of the Labour party, in the 1920s and 1930s their allegiances were divided, as Labour MPs became the main advocates of the 'Nonconformist conscience' in matters such as drink control and gambling.¹⁵⁴

In any case, what is most remarkable in the post-war era of universal suffrage is not the rise of Labour, which was very slow and painful, but the continued electoral dominance of a rejuvenated Conservative party, which was able to recast Unionism in terms of national unity above social strife, instead of

¹⁵³ Lloyd George's memorandum, 18 May 1938, cit. in S.Koss, 'Lloyd George and Nonconformity: the last rally', *English Historical Review*, 89, 350 (Jan.1974), 108.

¹⁵⁴ P.Catterall, 'Morality and politics: the Free Churches and the Labour party between the wars', *Historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993), 667-85.

territorial integrity against the claims of separatist nationalisms.¹⁵⁵ This involved stealing the New Liberals' mantle, which, as Daunton has shown, they did with some success in 1925-9, with the help of Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer.¹⁵⁶ It is also significant that, at least as late as 1920-3, the Conservatives felt that they ought to make a real effort to 'deactivate' Old Liberal time-bombs – such as Welsh Disestablishment, the relationship between Church and State in Scotland and the 'Irish question' – which Lloyd George might have been able to use in order to mobilize an anti-Unionist popular front. Baldwin contributed promptly to the settlement of all these questions, including Home Rule (in the shape of the Irish Free State and devolution in Northern Ireland) and prevented the Lords from precipitating a new 1910-style constitutional crisis.¹⁵⁷ However, he could not avoid defeat on another 'Old Liberal' sacred cow – free trade – around which the anti-Conservative vote rallied both in 1923 and 1929.¹⁵⁸

Yet, the Liberal party had no shortage of post-Gladstonian idealists or humanitarian crusaders, including intellectuals, politicians and publicists such as C.P.Trevelyan, Norman Angell, Arthur Ponsonby, J.A.Hobson, E.D.Morel and H.N.Brailsford. The last of these embodied many of the trends surveyed in the present book: a strong critic of British rule in Ireland, he started his career in 1898 as a Manchester Guardian special correspondent in Crete, in the aftermath of the massacres, and was an active pro-Boer from 1899. With Bryce and the Buxton brothers he was a founding member of the Balkan Committee in 1902 and from 1907 became the censor of the government's foreign policy (he joined the ILP in protest against Liberal imperialism in Egypt). From 1914 he was a leading light in the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), and after the war went on to champion the League of Nations and a revision of the Versailles Treaty for

¹⁵⁵ S.Evans, 'The Conservatives and the redefinition of Unionism, 1912-21', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.9, No.1, 1998, 1-27.

¹⁵⁶ M.Daunton, *Just taxes. The politics of taxation in Britain, 1914-1971* (Cambridge, 2002), 124-135.

¹⁵⁷ G.I.T.Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1869 to 1921* (Oxford, 1987), 313-6, 226; K.Matthews, 'Stanley Baldwin's "Irish question"', *Historical Journal*, 43, 4 (2000), 1027-49.

¹⁵⁸ A.Howe, *Free Trade in Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1997), 274-308; F.Trentmann, 'Bread, milk and democracy: consumption and citizenship in twentieth-century Britain', in M.Daunton and M.Hilton (eds.), *The politics of consumption* (Oxford, 2001), 129-64.

the purpose of redressing the vindictive peace terms imposed upon Germany.¹⁵⁹ Like other radicals of his generation, he was enthusiastic about the Bolshevik revolution, a cause which at first attracted considerable sympathy in Britain, largely on account of the combined influence of internationalism, democracy and pacifism.¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in 1919-21 H.W.Massingham fulminated against the repressive policies introduced by the Lloyd George government for the purpose of crushing the republican revolution in Ireland. It was like a re-enactment of the Gladstonian anti-coercion campaigns, but with a difference: now British Radicals advocated full independence for Dublin and, despairing of the Liberal party's inability to stand up for liberty, many of them defected to Labour.¹⁶¹ Moreover, James Bryce, one of the supporters of the Armenians in 1895-6, became the chairman of a group of Radical and UDC politicians and journalists which drafted the 1915 'Proposals for the prevention of future wars', which became one of the most important preliminary schemes for the League of Nations.¹⁶²

The Liberals emerged from the war hopelessly divided, while the UDC facilitated the exodus of a significant number of both Cobenite and social radicals to Labour by championing the old Gladstonian faith in rationalism and humanitarianism in foreign politics. Again, the decisive factor was not social radicalism, but the assertion of the traditional principles of 'peace, retrenchment and reform' together with democratic control over foreign policy (the cause for which Gladstone had made his famous stand in appealing to 'the masses' in 1879.)¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Taylor, *Trouble makers*, 132-66; Havinghurst, *Radical Journalist*, 226-68; Cain, *Hobson*, 165-99; C.A.Cline, 'E.D.Morel: from the Congo to the Rhine', in Morris, *Edwardian radicalism*, 234-45; H.N.Brailsford, *The League of Nations* (1917) and *After the Peace* (1920). See F.M.Leventahl, 'H.N.Brailsford and the search for a new international order', in Morris, *Edwardian radicalism*, 204-5; M.Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British politics during the First World War* (1971).

¹⁶⁰ S.Grabard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924* (1956); R.Page Arnot, *The impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain* (1967); K.Robbins, *The abolition of war: the 'Peace movement' in Britain, 1914-1919* (1976).

¹⁶¹ Havinghurst, *Massingham*, 283-6, 307-10.

¹⁶² G.W.Egerton, *Great Britain and the creation of the League of Nations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1978), 3-23. The group included the Churchman and Liberal MP W.H.Dickinson, along with Graham Wallas, J.A.Hobson, Ponsonby and others.

¹⁶³ Schwartz, *The Union of Democratic Control*, 1-2, 6-7.

Yet, even for most of those who remained within the party the internationalism of the League of Nations was now the orthodoxy, backed by intellectuals like Gilbert Murray and idealists like Lord Lothian and further strengthened by the influence of the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson.¹⁶⁴ By contrast, liberal imperialism was now totally discredited: although it continued, in a mitigated form, under the name of ‘trusteeship’, even Ramsey Muir, a supporter of that idea, accepted that there was ‘a natural antithesis or antipathy between the words “Liberalism” and “Empire”’.¹⁶⁵ Instead, international co-operation was powerfully canvassed by J.M.Keynes in his best-selling *The economic consequences of the peace* (1919). The latter was certainly no a Gladstonian tract, but its message was consistent with the GOM’s vision of economic interdependence and free trade. Applauded by the radical press and statesmen such as H.H.Asquith and Austen Chamberlain, who embodied the Liberal Unionist tradition,¹⁶⁶ *The economic consequences of the peace* symbolized a strange post-war paradox: despite the Liberal party being in disarray and slow decline, its intellectuals were as influential as they had been in the days of John Stuart Mill.

The enduring power of the Gladstonian tradition and the appeal of the politics of humanitarianism were also evident in the Labour party. In November 1918 its programme advocated free trade, ‘freedom’ for both Ireland and India, the right of self-determination for all peoples within a ‘British Commonwealth of Free Nations’ and a ‘Peace of International Co-operation’ in Europe.¹⁶⁷ In fact, as A.J.P.Taylor has written, after the war ‘[t]he Union of Democratic Control and the Labour movement were one so far as foreign policy was concerned.’¹⁶⁸ Of course, this did not prevent Ramsay MacDonald – like the GOM, a pious

¹⁶⁴ L.W.Martin, *Peace without victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (1973); R.S.Grayson, *Liberals, international relations and Appeasement* (London, 2001), 36-40, 50-3.

¹⁶⁵ R.Muir, ‘Liberalism and the Empire’, in H.L.Nathan (ed.), *Liberal points of view* (London, 1927), 253; on Muir’s views see Grayson, *Liberals*, 42-3.

¹⁶⁶ R.S.Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the commitment to Europe. British foreign policy 1924-29* (London, 1997).

¹⁶⁷ ‘Labour manifesto – “A challenge to reaction”’, TI, 28 Nov. 1918, ***.

¹⁶⁸ Taylor, *Trouble makers*, 165.

preacher of sentimental radicalism – from acting as ambiguously as Gladstone had done whenever ‘the dictates of morality’ landed him ‘in difficulties’.¹⁶⁹

1. In the 1920s the Libs fell into third-party status but the electoral system I which they were operating was different from the one of 1910, so no direct comparison is easy.
2. Moreover, the withdrawal of Irish MPs from Westminster, deprived them of a powerful ally (ca. 80 MPs) , while the Ulster Unionists remained, and the southern-Irish seats were eventually redistributed, to the advantage of the Conservatives.
3. The fact that the war: 1) ‘solved’ the Home Rule question; 2) convinced the Tories to accept Welsh Disestablishment in a revised form, and 3) discredited the Liberal leadership before the Gladstonian/humanitarian lobby.
4. David Dutton argues that ‘there now [after 1906] existed an avowedly working-class party calling for the representation of working men in Parliament by working men and in the interest of working men’. – Well
 - i. The ‘working men’ did not seem to be too impressed: slow, painful growth of the Labour vote
 - ii. The Libs remained resilient despite their internal difficulties (see figures)
 - iii. The emphasis on ‘working men’ both interesting and accurate: as Martin Francis has shown, one important flaw in the appeal of the Labour party was that its message was

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 94.

perceived – and to some extent actually was – as
‘essentially masculinist’.¹⁷⁰

5. Growth of the TUC, but not all his members voted Labour and class consciousness did not automatically translate into Labour votes, as both G Steadman Jones and Eric Hobsbawm have pointed out.
6. DD points out to the ‘partial conversion’ to social democracy of the Liberal party: well, before 1918 this is true of the country as a whole. It was not necessarily a disadvantage that the Libs still adhered to Gladstonianism: quite the reverse. They never did so well as when they stood by free trade (both before and after 1906). Some of their most advanced reforms, such as National Insurance, backfired and Masterman, who was closely associated with these policies, managed to lose 2 by-elections in 1914, in Bethnal Green and Ipswich
7. Thus, if Masterman felt that the Libs had no sympathy for the people, the real question is: Did ‘the people’ have sympathy for Masterman? Just as well that it was only Lloyd George and Churchill who were mainly responsible for social reform legislation, for their policies were ahead of popular demand.
8. Thus if Edwardian Liberalism was ‘Janus faced’, looking back to the traditional doctrines of Cobden just as much as it projected forward to the social democracy of the mid 20th C, this could only have been an advantage.
9. Vitality, strength and popularity of Old Liberal issues in 1906 to 1923; free trade, Welsh disestablishment, peace and retrenchment. Way forward: land campaign, which combines old + new Liberalism
10. Libs split was on foreign policy, not on social reform

¹⁷⁰ *Ideas and policies under Labour 1945-1951* (1997), 213.

11. UDC split from Libs on humanitarian/Gladstonian issues which would have attracted the likes of John Bright. MacDonald's Labour stood out after WWI on humanitarian as much as social reform issues
12. 1912-3: Had the Irish Nationalists anywhere else to go but the Liberal alliance? Was the Labour party any closer to militant trade unionism than the Liberals?
13. The point of all these counterfactual analysis is not to fantasize about 'what might have happened' had the Liberals not lost their role of main alternative to the Conservative party, but to identify the reasons why this happened.
14. I argue that these reasons must be found in the War and the period 1918-1929. In particular: 1) division within the leadership; 2) lack of Liberal alternatives to Lloyd George in 1918, when Asquith failed or refused to lead the Opposition; 3) the decay of the party/electoral machine during the war; 4) the shortage of funds and candidates in 1924.
15. One further, last counterfactual: WW III in 2003-7, when Blair and Bush invaded Iran and provoked a Russian counterattack. Parallel to 1914, with Blair as Asquith and Gordon Brown as Lloyd George. –
 - a) In Great War of 2003-7 huge casualties and economic costs; in the end, ca 3/4 of a million Britons dead in the war, and perhaps another million in a 'flu pandemic in 2007
 - b) British economy – which was fine in 03 – devastated by 07, with loss of markets overseas and labour unrest at home in response to high unemployment rates
 - c) Disarray in the Labour party. After 2 years, Brown forms a coalition govt with the Tories and some Lib Dems but the Lib Dem leader stays out and leads opposition to war. PM Brown and ex PM Blair

lead opposite factions. Constituency party demoralised, short of new members and penniless. Traditional Labour voters hate both leaders because of this imperialist war.

- d) After the War Brown forms a new coalition govt with the Tories; Labour factionalism continues, with Blair leading a group of faithful.
- e) The Lib dems, now re-united, are only credible opposition, only party who can claim clean hands – they start attracting former Labour activists and the new generation
- f) Franchise extended to new generation of 16+
- g) Is it surprising that, in this scenario the Lib dems grow gradually and by 2012 – 5 years after the end of the war – have a few ‘000,000’s more votes than Labour (which is still led by Blair and Brown)?

Conclusion: what is surprising is not that the Liberal vote decline after the War, but rather that it held so well and so long despite 1) poor and divided leadership; 2) messy electoral machine in the constituencies; 3) shortage of candidates and 3) frequent general election and related costs causing shortage of funds.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ What is most amazing is that – had the Cons been less prepared to compromise on welsh disestablishment or grant the Treaty to Ireland – there might have been a Lib come back on a greater scale than the one which actually took place.