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The Times and the Manchester Guardian's editorial perspectives on Irish Home Rule and the adoption of referendum debates during the British constitutional crisis: December 1910-August 1911

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***The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian's* editorial perspectives on Irish Home Rule and the adoption of referendum debates during the British constitutional crisis: December 1910-August 1911**

by

David Frederick Ernest Moore

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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This work is dedicated to Fusilier John F Moore 14419070, killed in action at Anzio, Italy, on 16th February 1944 age 19.

Author's declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award. Work submitted for this research degree at Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

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Abstract

***The Times* and *Manchester Guardian's* editorial perspectives on Irish Home Rule and the adoption of referendum debates during the British constitutional crisis December 1910 - August 1911**

David Frederick Ernest Moore

This thesis is a critical examination of the editorial coverage of referendum and Irish Home Rule issues as reported by both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* during the closing stages of the British constitutional crisis of 1911. The traditional and conventional constraints on the House of Lords were replaced with constraints based on the law namely the Parliament Act 1911. The Act gave financial control of the state to the House of Commons, and rendered the role of the House of Lords chamber primarily one of revision and delay. A coalition led by the Liberal Government, including the Irish Nationalist Party, had overturned centuries of tradition. Two of the major themes that stand out in the debate concerning the Act's passage are: claims that a referendum would offer a better mechanism to gauge the electorates views with regard to the major constitutional change that was proposed by the Parliament Bill, and the significance of the issue of Irish Home Rule and its impact on the relationship between the Liberal Government and the Irish Nationalist Party during the passage of the legislation. Therefore these two themes are the main focus of this thesis, which investigates the ways in which both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* editorials reported and commented on the two themes and the degree to which editorial opinion aligned with government and opposition opinion.

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Government of Ireland Act 1920.
Irish Church Act 1869.
Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881.
Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act 1870.
Importation Act 1846.
Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898.
Misdemeanours Act 1819.
Newspaper Stamp Duties Act 1819.
Parliament Act 1911.
Protection of Persons and Property (Ireland) Act 1881.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The period between December 1910 and August 1911 marks the closing stage of one of the most significant changes in British constitutional history. The constraints on the House of Lords based on convention and tradition were replaced with constraints based on the law - the Parliament Act 1911. The Act gave financial control of the state to the House of Commons, and rendered the role of the House of Lords chamber primarily one of revision and delay. What was often characterised, by the Conservative press at least, as a fragile coalition of the Liberal Government under Herbert Asquith, the Irish Nationalists under John Redmond and the smaller Labour grouping under first Arthur Henderson and then George Nicoll Barnes had overturned centuries of tradition. The threat of the government to use the King's prerogative powers to create Liberal peers, perhaps as many as 500, to 'flood' the House of Lords acted as a powerful inducement to the peers to agree to the Act being passed.

Two of the themes that stand out in the debate concerning the bill's passage are as follows. First, Conservative supporters claimed that a referendum would offer a better mechanism to gauge the electorate's views and feelings with regard to the major constitutional change that was proposed by the Parliament Bill. The subject was so important and the actual numbers of votes cast so close, the argument ran, that the general election results meant the government lacked the democratic legitimacy necessary to effect such a radical constitutional change.

The second theme was the question of Irish Home Rule. The Liberal Party had adopted Irish Home Rule as a policy objective in 1886. However, competing policy priorities

meant that Irish Home Rule had to an extent, slipped down the Liberal policy agenda by the time the Liberals were returned to office in 1906. The Conservative Party¹, sought to maintain and strengthen the Union and was strongly opposed to Irish Home Rule. Since the 1830s, some Conservative advocates had made their case for Irish Home Rule, albeit under a different title of 'federalism' or 'devolution' or 'Home Rule all round'; ultimately the Conservative leader Arthur Balfour resisted calls for moving towards the adoption of a federal system.

The two elections of January and December 1910 had resulted in the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) holding the balance of power at Westminster. Sharing a policy objective, albeit with varying degrees of urgency, the Liberal party and the IPP were perhaps natural allies but uneasy bedfellows. As with all coalitions, the price of the agreement became a major talking point both in Westminster and in the wider world. The IPP had Irish Home Rule at the top of its agenda. The United Kingdom's long, complex and often fraught relationship and involvement in Ireland added a new dimension to the political and constitutional crisis that occurred in 1910-1911.

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Study

Such momentous events were bound to feature in the pages of the press. For this study the editorial pages of two newspapers have been selected: *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. Both were examples of what might be called, by J.D Startt's criteria, the 'quality press'.² They were influential, by virtue of being read by decision-makers and persons of influence rather than by their circulation figures which were dwarfed by the popular press of the day. One newspaper, *The Times*, was London based and was conservative with a small 'c' in outlook. The other, the *Manchester Guardian* based in the North West, had been founded as and remained a Liberal journal.

¹ In 1912 the Liberal Unionist party, who had allied themselves to the Conservative party after 1886 merged with the Conservative party to form the Conservative and Unionist party in 1912

² JD Startt, *Journalists for Empire: The Imperial Debate in the Edwardian Stately Press, 1903-1913* (vol 29, Greenwood Press 1991) ix.

This study focuses on editorial coverage of the referendum issue and the Irish Home Rule issue between December 1910 and early August 1911, between the second general election of 1910 in December and the granting of Royal Assent to the Parliament Act in early August 1911.

1.2 Methodology

After the date parameters were fixed, the first process in the study was to build a data set, a set of editorials that could then be examined in more detail. To achieve this, a combination of keyword searches and manual searches of both *The Times* Digital Archive³ and the *Guardian* Digital Archive⁴ were undertaken to arrive at an initial data set. A weakness of the keyword approach to data searching experienced during the course of the study was the risk that the keywords used had more than one meaning and so a great deal of manual investigation had to be undertaken before the final dataset was fixed. In part, the reason for the relatively narrow time frame parameter being set was to facilitate the manual selection and processing of the editorials.

The final dataset numbered 600 items. Each editorial that had been downloaded was given a unique reference number and had its details captured in a specially designed Filemaker Pro database. In addition to the article itself, bibliographic details were captured, as were key extracts from the article text. The 600 records were then analysed in more detail to identify whether the editorial was pertinent to the subject of the referendum and/or Irish Home Rule.

For analysis purposes a spreadsheet was constructed to aid in the sifting of the 600 items into two categories: editorials that were significantly relevant to the two issues being studied, and editorials that were not. Effectively, this means editorials that made more than a passing reference to the subject area(s) were retained and ones that made only passing references were discarded. The chosen editorials were then considered

³ Gale Group, 'The Times Digital Archive' (2013) (http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_TTDA?sw_aep=plymouth) accessed 17 November 2016.

⁴ ProQuest LLC, 'The Guardian and The Observer Digital Archive' (2013) (<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/guardian/advancedsearch.html>) accessed 23 July 2017.

chronologically against the backdrop of significant events, e.g. the December 1910 general election or an attempt to have Irish Home Rule removed from the ambit of the Parliament Bill at House of Commons committee stage in 1911.

For completeness, the role of correspondence to the editor is also examined in passing. Whilst time and word count limits precluded a detailed study, it is recognised that the 'Letters page' is an important aspect of a newspaper's make-up. As mentioned, the study concentrates on editorials of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*; however other newspaper editorials are referred to on occasion when they are especially relevant to the topic under discussion.

1.3 Research Question

This thesis asks what the nature was of the editorial coverage of the issues. Specifically, it seeks to establish the narrative view of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* on the issues of the referendum debate and the Irish Home Rule debate. In the late nineteenth century *The Times* had been generally supportive of the government of the day. Whilst it valued its independence and traditions, it was fundamentally conservative in outlook. The *Manchester Guardian* had been established as a Liberal journal, albeit for middle class liberals. Did *The Times* support the Conservative oppositions view of the issues and did the *Manchester Guardian* support the view of the Liberal government?

1.4 Study Limitations

Although the study is generally chronological in scheme, it does not represent a full chronology of the passage of the Parliament Bill 1911. This study represents a snapshot of the editorial coverage of the two issues pertaining to the Parliament Bill's passage. Thus, events that occur before December 1910 or after August 1911 are excluded from this analysis, although they may well be referred to in the study. The study only considers the editorials' view and/or depiction of events, unless it is considered that a published letter offers some particular insight into events. It makes no attempt to

assess the impact on the newspapers' readership of what was printed in the editorials.

1.5 Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 outlines the scope and establishes the basic background of the study.

Chapter 2 looks at the role of newspapers in late Victorian and early Edwardian Britain. It considers the role of the press in establishing and changing public opinion and the public agenda, especially political agenda setting. The classification of the press into quality and mass circulation categories is considered, as is the influence of the press. Finally it considers the role of editors and editorials as they affect the dissemination of information and opinion.

Chapter 3 traces the history of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. The origins of *The Times* are considered as is its development as a newspaper of record. The chapter follows a similar pattern for examining the history of the *Manchester Guardian*. Its origins are considered, as are its campaigning and its relations with government.

Chapter 4 investigates the historical background to the referendum issue during the course of the closing stages of the passage of the Parliament Act 1911. Its origins are examined as are the views of the influential Liberal Unionist constitutional lawyer A.V. Dicey on the efficacy and applicability of the referendum to the United Kingdom. The adoption of the referendum as party policy by the Conservatives is examined. The background to the 1911 Parliament Bill is set out including the Constitutional Conference held in the wake of King Edward VII's death in May 1910. Finally, *The Times's* and the *Manchester Guardian's* responses to the Conservatives party adoption of the referendum as a policy is considered.

Chapter 5 addresses the editorial coverage of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* on the referendum issue between December 1910 and August 1911. The December 1910 election is considered. A chronology of the passage of the Parliament Bill is presented, together with significant events on the way to the passage of the Parliament Bill relating to the Conservatives referendum policy. The chapter closes by considering

the passage of the modified Parliament Bill back to the House of Commons before it ultimately returned to the House of Lords.

Chapter 6 deals with the historical background to the Irish Home Rule issue. The chapter starts by providing an overview of significant events. The impact of the Irish potato famine of 1845-1849 on relations between England and Ireland is described, as is the radical nationalism of the Fenian movement and the emergence of the Home Rule for Ireland movement. The views of A.V. Dicey, an academic and writer on constitutional matters who had much to say regarding Irish Home Rule are investigated. The policy positions of both the Conservative and Liberal parties on the eve of the second 1910 election are reflected upon with particular regard to the Irish Home Rule issue.

Chapter 7 investigates the editorial coverage by *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* of the Irish Home Rule issue between December 1910 and August 1911. The situation in Ulster with regard to Irish Home Rule is also considered. The general election result galvanised the Protestant Ulster loyalist movement, which was already greatly concerned about the growth of Catholic Irish nationalism and an Irish Home Rule movement. An attempt was made by a Conservative MP to have the King's speech (given at the opening of the new Parliament amended) such that the Irish Home Rule issue would be decoupled from the attempt to change the relationship between the Lords and the Commons. The Irish Nationalist party attempt at dampening down Ulster Protestant and English fears of Home Rule is considered. The impact of the delay on replacing the House of Lords with a new second house, built into the preamble to the Parliament Bill is considered, as is the attempt to remove the possibility of the passage of Irish Home Rule under the auspices of the Parliament Bill.

Chapter 8 reaches conclusions regarding coverage of the referendum and the Irish Home Rule issue within the editorial pages of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. Some suggestions and recommendations are made for further avenues of research.

Chapter 2

Newspapers

2.1 Introduction

The first step in examining how the issues of the referendum and Irish Home Rule were dealt with in the editorials of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* is to consider the state of the press industry during the late Victorian and early Edwardian period. This chapter looks at the role of the press in establishing and changing public opinion and agenda setting. The classification of the press into 'quality' and 'mass circulation' categories is investigated, as is the influence of the press in general. Finally, it describes the role of editors and editorials, as they affect the dissemination of information and opinion. For completeness, the role of correspondence to the editor is also examined, even though letters to the editor do not form part of the study.

2.2 Historical Background

Newspapers¹ were the predominant mass medium of the late Victorian and early Edwardian age. Access to printed material had never been easier. The periodic press in all its forms encompassing newspapers, journals, reviews and magazines published daily, weekly, bi-weekly, thrice-weekly and monthly, was available to anyone who could afford the cover price or had access to a library or reading room, or a pub or employer who purchased a particular title. For the declining number of people who were unable to read, it was possible to have someone read aloud for a small consideration. Lee reports a steadily improving situation with regard to literacy in England. Literacy rose

¹ As distinct from the broadsides, single page publications, aimed mainly at the poor and dealing with a variety of subject's but predominantly violent crime and punishment. See forthcoming K Bates, *Crime, Broadsides and Social Change: Moralities of the Masses* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018).

from 61% in 1850 to 97% in 1888. Whilst there were variations by region, county and by gender, overall nationally, the trajectory of literacy was upward.²

Whilst the cost of newspapers³ was less of an issue for the middle and upper classes, for the poor, the press represented another competitor for the already meagre wages on which many lived. Despite steadily increasing literacy rates among the working classes, a general decline in cover prices due to removal of various duties in the mid-Victorian period and improved production techniques, the opportunity to buy a newspaper on anything like a regular basis eluded many.

Before the advent of mass travel and electronic mass media, the press offered many people one of their few sources of information about the outside world. The press provided a view, albeit mediated by the editor, of events and happenings in other parts of the country, the Empire and the world. For those who had not done overseas military service or had never otherwise left their county much less the country, the press provided a window onto the world especially with the growth of the use of illustrations to enhance stories. The press 'in all its manifestations became during the Victorian period the context within which people lived and worked and thought and from which they derived their sense of the outside world'.⁴ The primacy of the printed page remained intact until it was supplemented and arguably supplanted by electronic media.

As well as providing the reading public with its major source of information and opinion, the press also had a role in educating and inculcating the values of the age, those values being derived from the government or any of the myriad scions and religious groups that took to the press with their messages of duty, sobriety, hope, faith and belief in the rightful and dominant position of Great Britain in the world.⁵ The fact that the

² Lee argues that the improvements in literacy were not in reality, as large as had been intended AJ Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914* (Croom Helm Rowman and Littlefield 1976) 29.

³ In 1821 *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* cover price was 7d by 1861 following the removal of advertising, paper and stamp duty the cover prices has been reduced to 3d and 1d respectively

⁴ J Shattock and M Wolf, *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (J Shattock and M Wolf eds, University of Toronto Press 1982) x.

⁵ For detailed discussion see: A Bingham and M Conboy, *Tabloid Century* (Peter Lang 2015); A Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth Century England* (Scolar Press 1996); J Rowbotham and K Stevenson, *Criminal Conversations: Victorian Crimes, Social Panic*

messages were printed gave them ‘a real moral authority just as, arguably, television and radio do today’⁶ and reminded the general public ‘of the triumphs and challenges to empire’.⁷

2.2.1 Newspapers as a Historical Source

For the historian, newspapers can offer a source of information potentially contemporaneous with the events which they describe. Context is added by the date and location of publication and the relevant article’s position in a particular newspaper or journal. The author, if known, also adds context; that is not to suggest that newspapers were necessarily accurate in their reportage but they were consistent in terms of not altering from one viewing to the next. In a sense they fix an event, or the reporting of the event in time and space. Newspapers are, Taft argues useful and valid sources for historians ‘if for no other reason than that a newspaper represents what the public knows about any event. It is, therefore, a datum even if it is not the whole truth’.⁸ Other sources of information were available. Music halls were popular, where contemporary issues and events were often explored albeit for comic effect.

The use by historians of editorials and letters should be treated with caution. Deconde states that, ‘The use of the editorial and the signed commentaries as an expression of public opinion is evidence that there was public concern about certain questions’.⁹ Williams argues that ‘editorial opinions are not as indicative of the state of opinion as historians have assumed’.¹⁰ Wiener concurs, stating that ‘a newspaper’s political views are not always a precise barometer of its influence or indeed its typicalness’.¹¹

When considering the use of either editorials or letters to the editor, some key gen-

and Moral Outrage (J Rowbotham and K Stevenson eds, The Ohio State University Press 2005); JH Wiener, *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain 1850 to 1914* (Greenwood Press 1988).

⁶ J Rowbotham and K Stevenson, *Behaving Badly: Social Panic and Moral Outrage, Victorian and Modern Parallels* (Ashgate 2003) 37.

⁷ JS Noth, ‘The Rationale - Why Read Victorian Periodicals’ in J Don Vann and RT VanArsdel (eds), *Victorian Periodicals A Guide to Research* (The Modern Language Association of America 1978) 5.

⁸ WH Taft, *Newspapers as Tools for Historians* (Lucas Bros 1970) 9.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid* 9.

¹⁰ Quoted in *ibid* 37.

¹¹ JH Wiener, ‘Sources for the Study of Newspapers’ in L Blake, A Jones, and L Madden (eds), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (Macmillan 1990) 16.

eral points need to be kept in mind. Facts stated or restated are often incorrect, either through human error or deliberate act. Since the decision as to which correspondents are to be published is taken by the editor, it seems reasonable to assume that the more often a correspondent appears in a newspaper, the more sympathy the newspaper editor and/or owner has with the views the correspondent espouses. That said, an editor might seek to stimulate circulation by introducing a topic known to be controversial or provocative to elicit a response from the readership.¹² The editorial is aimed at the readership of the newspaper and not at an academic audience. Newspapers will have a political bias and an agenda, sometimes self-proclaimed and sometimes not.

2.2.2 Public Opinion

The influence of the press on public opinion is central to the debate on the importance of the press for historians. Bentham wrote that:

Public opinion may be considered as a system of law, emanating from the body of the people the pernicious exercise of the power of government, it is the only check; to the beneficial, an indispensable supplement. Able rulers lead it; prudent rulers lead or follow it; foolish rulers disregard it.¹³

The question is, then, perhaps raised of what is meant by 'the public' and specifically, who are they? A more sophisticated and complete conception of public opinion distinguishes between public and private opinion, that is, between a collective opinion on a particular topic shared by a social group as opposed to individual or private opinions. Central to the concept of public opinion and its formation, measurement and control is publicity - a need for public affirmation and for the realisation by individuals of the existence of others who share similar views or beliefs or concerns regarding a particular subject.

The gauging of public opinion is an important aspect of government in terms of policy setting, since it can both drive government policy to do or not do something and provide feedback on the success of the policy. However, historically, the sources of information

¹² For example the Garrotting Panic of the early 1860s

¹³ J Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* ed J Bowring (vol 9, William Taft 1843) 158.

regarding the accessing of the public mood were more constrained for contemporary governments. Mass public events, petitions, strikes, mass meetings, public property destruction and demonstrations are typically indicative of the mood of a particular group who share an interest or common opinion.

Elections and referenda are other indicators of public opinion, although imperfect because not everyone votes even if they are eligible. Exclusion of female voters from UK general elections until 1918 (and even then only married women over the age of 30 could vote) resulted in the exclusion of over 50% of the population from demonstrating their will or opinion. The print media in the late Victorian and early Edwardian period continued to form an important vector for attempts to influence public opinion, in part because of the absence of other sources that were as widely distributed. The newspapers acted as conduits, mediated by the producers of those newspapers, between politicians and the population. Editorials, articles, advertisements and letters written to the editor expressed opinion or at the very least informed debate on matters of public concern or importance.

2.2.3 Agenda Setting

The advent of modern technology in conjunction with sophisticated academic study has developed the study of public opinion into a sophisticated and nuanced discipline. The growth of the internet and social media provide many sources of information regarding public feeling toward a subject. The impact of the media on public opinion has been the subject of study since the 1920s, much of it in the United States. The noted journalist Walter Lippmann asserted that ‘the mass media was the link between world events and the pictures of those events in our minds’.¹⁴ Writing in the 1960s political scientist Bernard Cohen concluded that the press ‘may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think but that it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about’.¹⁵

¹⁴ W Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Harcourt, Brace and Company 1922) 9.

¹⁵ BC Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press 1965) 13.

The concept of agenda setting came to the fore in 1972 with the work of McCombs and Shaw, who had studied 100 registered but uncommitted voters in North Carolina during the 1968 US presidential election. They determined that there was a strong causal relationship between the media agenda (the emphasis placed on campaign issues by the media) and the public agenda (the importance and salience of the campaign issues). They concluded that 'The media appear to have exercised a considerable impact on voters judgements on what they considered the major issue of the campaign'.¹⁶ In a later study by McKuen and Coombs, in 1981, the press were identified as driving the public agenda setting; it was identified as 'the primary causal agent'¹⁷ in the process albeit with some feedback from the public.

An extension to agenda setting is the idea that media messages on a topic are brought to the forefront of people's minds and made more easily and quickly remembered or more salient to them. They are primed by repetition and prominence of a message regarding a topic and thus made more susceptible to agenda setting. The mid-1990s saw the agenda setting model developed further to include the concept of 'media framing', the process by which people acquire develop or change a particular view or conceptualisation of an issue. Tankard defined a media frame as 'a central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration'.¹⁸ The framing model moves beyond Cohen's theory in which the media establishes an issue for the people to consider, to one where the media establishes both the issue and consciously or unconsciously directs people to 'what' they should think about a particular issue. Or put another way how an issue is presented influences how it is understood by an audience.

If the political agenda is set by the political parties and the public agenda is largely set

¹⁶ ME McCombs and DL Shaw, 'The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media' (1972) 36(2) *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 176, 180.

¹⁷ MR MacKuen and SL Coombs, *More Than News: Media Power in Public Affairs* (SAGE Publications 1981) 20.

¹⁸ JW Tankard Jr, 'The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing' in SD Reese, OH Gandy, and AE Grant (eds), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and our Understanding of the Social World* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 2001) 100.

by the media agenda the question to be answered is who sets the media agenda? The media does not exist in a vacuum. It is subject to a variety of forces. This is true of print media as much as other forms. The beliefs, attitudes, views and opinions both implicit and explicit, of a newspaper's owners, shareholders management, editors and reporters are manifest in the final product. Commercial pressures exist both in terms of selling the newspaper and attracting and retaining advertising income.

An example of the politics of the newspaper affecting its advertising revenues occurred in 1886 when editorial decisions negatively affected advertising income albeit for a short while. W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, apologised to its owner, Henry Yates Thompson, after advertising revenue fell away temporarily following the publication in July, 1885 of a series of articles entitled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon',¹⁹ Stead's controversial expose of the Victorian child prostitution trade in Britain.

2.2.4 The Quality Press

The late Victorian and early Edwardian newspapers were categorised by Startt into two broad types, the 'quality' press and the 'mass circulation' press. The term 'quality press' refers to 'serious publications that aim to influence well-informed readers as well as the politically active'.²⁰ Startt identifies the *The Observer*, *The Spectator* the *Westminster Gazette* and *The Times* as the quality press. The mass circulation newspapers were typically possessed of much larger audiences and were populist both in outlook and in readership. The *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* sold hundreds of thousands of copies each day rather than the tens of thousands of daily quality newspapers.

It was, Startt argues, the 'quality press not the popular press that was central to Edwardian national politics': whilst politicians valued the mass circulation press for its publicity value, 'papers like the *Daily Mail* rarely led, and only seldom did other news-

¹⁹ JW Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper: An Account of the Temperament, Perturbations and Achievements of John Morley, W.T. Stead, E.T. Cook, Harry Cust, J.L. Garvin and Three Other Editors of the Pall Mall Gazette* (Methuen 1952) 34.

²⁰ Startt (n 2) ix.

papers, at home or abroad, quote their opinions'.²¹ Instead, 'For deep and sustained argumentation on public issues the political elite turned to newspapers such as *The Times* or the *Westminster Gazette*'.²²

McLachlan writing in the 1950s surmises that: 'The serious press, I think, reckons to influence a very small but very powerful audience. It is aiming at MPs', the businessmen, the Trade Union officials, school teachers, the lecturers, the officers in the services-all of whom are obvious nuclei of effective public opinion'.²³ The type of people whose opinion had 'a regular and sharp impact on those who take political, economic and administrative decisions'.²⁴

Whilst trade unions were growing in influence during the late Victorian and early Edwardian period they had not reached the same level of influence and power that they had achieved at the time of McLachlan's writing. However, the other categories he cites MPs, educators, business people and the officer classes were as influential.

2.2.5 The Influence of the Press

In terms of influence, Startt suggests that whilst 'the effects of the press on social trends and traits, styles and fashions may be straightforwardly identified, it is much more difficult to see how the press affects peoples political views'.²⁵ The elections of 1906 and 1910, where the stronger Unionist press failed to deliver a Unionist victory, are cited as examples of this difficulty.²⁶ Jones argues that whilst 'It is difficult to measure the extent of their political influence there can be little doubt that editors and journalists were in the main acutely aware of their responsibilities in this direction'.²⁷

Journalistic anonymity, created by the lack of journalistic bylines, developed the public

²¹ Startt (n 2) 7.

²² *ibid.*

²³ D McLachlan, 'The Press and Public Opinion' (1955) 6 *British Journal of Sociology* 159, 163.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Startt (n 2) 9.

²⁶ *ibid.* 11.

²⁷ A Jones, 'Local Journalism in Victorian Political Culture' in L Blake, A Jones, and L Madden (eds), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (Macmillan 1990) 99.

perception of editorial omnipresence and prominence.²⁸ The prominence supported the notion that the press was free to act to hold the government of the day to account.

Thomas Carlyle popularised the concept and attributed it to Edmund Burke:

Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact, very momentous to us in these times. Literature is our Parliament too. Printing, which comes necessarily out of writing, I say often, is equivalent to democracy: invent writing, democracy is inevitable. Writing brings printing; brings universal every-day extempore printing. as we see at present. Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making.²⁹

Another earlier and less edifying conception of the Fourth Estate was expressed by Henry Fielding writing in the *Covent Garden Journal* in 1752:

It may seem strange that none of our political writers, in learned treatises on the English constitution, should take notice of any more than the three estates, Namely, Kings, Lords, and Commons, all entirely passing by in silence that very large and powerful body which forms the fourth estate in this community, and have been long dignified and distinguished by the name of *The Mob*.³⁰

The notion of the press as the Fourth Estate that had developed in the nineteenth century still appealed to the Edwardians. The Fourth Estate described the Press as 'free, powerful, professional in conduct, anchored in public opinion and capable of having its views be of weight in the chambers of political power'.³¹

Boyce argues that *The Times*, during the 1840s and 1850s, seemed in many ways to be the paragon of the Fourth Estate, 'independent of government control and influence, representative of an enlightened middle class, giving readers information and comment to allow them to make up their own minds'.³² However, Boyce also contends that *The Times* did not conform to the model as its hugely dominant position and opposition to

²⁸ M Conboy, *Journalism A Critical History* (SAGE Publications Ltd 2004) 126.

²⁹ T Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* Reported with Emendations and Additions by Thomas Carlyle (James Fraser 1841) 14.

³⁰ Henry Fielding, *The Works of Henry Fielding* (J Roscoe ed, 2nd edn, Henry Washbourne 1841) 12.

³¹ *ibid* 13.

³² DG Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the Reappraisal of a Concept' in G Boyce, J Curran, and P Wingate (eds), *Communication and Society* (Constable 1978) 45.

the repeal of stamp duty (one of the so called taxes on knowledge) were contrary to the key requirement of the Fourth Estate model - that of the existence of many newspapers.³³ The Fourth Estate depended on a variety of opinions being passed to the people; limiting access to Parliament to only a few chosen newspapers, or indeed limiting the total number of newspapers in existence, compromised the role of the Fourth Estate. Startt described the whole notion of a Fourth Estate as outdated because of it being 'an outgrowth of the class political party system of the Victorian era'.³⁴

Koss argues that, 'The press was the best available index to popular opinion as well as the single most convenient mechanism for guiding it'.³⁵ Wiener indicates that the extent to which the press shapes public opinion is a major problem in using newspapers: 'Does the content of newspapers predominantly reflect the views of its writers? Is it substantially shared by its readers? Does it, in a less specific way, reflect the political and cultural ethos of the period?'.³⁶ In the long run, as McLachlan argues, newspapers, at any rate the more serious ones, guide readers, 'by the stories, ideas and recommendations they present whilst the reader can only refuse his pennies'.³⁷

According to Salmon, the authoritativeness of a particular newspaper was derived from its 'personality',³⁸ which comprised a combination of external and internal features. External features include the text, typography, straplines, the juxtaposition of the editorials, advertisements, illustrations and the quality of the paper printed on. The external features, Salmon argues, were often a 'perfect reflection of its internal features. Internal features were the spirit of the newspaper, its beliefs, opinions and attitudes and independence'.³⁹ Linked to personality was the authoritativeness gained by those newspapers that practised editorial and authorial anonymity, based on the idea that the newspaper would be identified as the author rather than an individual author. Thomas

³³ Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the Reappraisal of a Concept' (n 32) 56.

³⁴ Startt (n 2) 13.

³⁵ S Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: The Nineteenth Century* (vol 1, The University of North Carolina Press 1976) 9.

³⁶ Wiener, 'Sources for the Study of Newspapers' (n 11) 8.

³⁷ McLachlan (n 23) 8.

³⁸ L Maynard Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian* (Oxford University Press 1923) 40.

³⁹ *ibid* 40.

Barnes, editor of *The Times* between 1817 and 1841, promoted such anonymity, commenting that the public benefited from editorial/authorial anonymity 'because it obtains full and free discussion without any mixture of that egoism and self intrusion which are almost inseparable from the compositions of any individual writer in his own personal character'.⁴⁰

The editor/author was, however, still 'subject to all the usual responsibilities and penalties for any violation of social decorum'.⁴¹ Whilst anonymity might have lent authority, its use left editors open to allegations of hiding behind a cloak of unaccountability making the bringing of libel actions more difficult.

2.2.6 Increasing Supply and Demand

The middle classes, expanded after the Industrial Revolution; an increasingly politically educated electorate, and the greatly increased enfranchised and organised male working classes began to make their presence felt as a result of the Representation of the People Act 1867, with an increased demand for political power.

Both Noth⁴² and Boyce⁴³ suggest that greater literacy fuelled the increasing demand for newspapers. The Elementary Education Act 1870 provided education on an unprecedented scale. School boards were introduced and given the power to create new schools and pay the fees of the poorest children. Board schools could insist on the attendance of children between the ages of 5 and 13. The growth of these board schools made it possible for the Elementary Education Act 1880 to make school attendance compulsory for all children up to the age of 10. However Brown, drawing on W.T. Stead's workhouse survey of 1890⁴⁴ which had found a significant demand for newspapers among poorhouse inmates, argues that 'the limiting factor on circulation

⁴⁰ The Office of the Times, *The History of the Times: The Twentieth Century Test 1884–1912* (vol III, The Office of The Times 1947) 391.

⁴¹ *ibid* 391.

⁴² Noth (n 7) 26.

⁴³ Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the Reappraisal of a Concept' (n 32) 25.

⁴⁴ WT Stead, 'The Association of Helpers: Service for April, the Supply of Reading for the Workhouses' *Review of Reviews* 1 (April 1890).

was not illiteracy or lack of interest but price and availability'.⁴⁵

A series of duties had been introduced by successive governments from 1712 onwards on newspapers, newspaper advertisements, pamphlets and paper. The duties offered government a source of revenue, and a way of limiting mass access to the press by making copies prohibitively expensive and limiting the financial viability of those who chose to publish legal newspapers. However, the removal of the excise duty on paper in 1861 saw the last of the so called 'taxes on knowledge' removed.

The final repeal of the stamp duty on newspapers in 1855 argues Brown was a turning point in terms of the growing popularity of the press in that 'its abolition made the Penny Press possible'.⁴⁶ The number of daily newspapers increased from approximately 30 in the 1840s to approximately 150 in the 1860s.⁴⁷

Newkey-Burden calculated the comparative circulation returns of the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* between 1855 and 1865. The *Daily Telegraph's* circulation had grown from approximately 60,000 copies per day in 1855 to approximately 250,000 per day in 1865. *The Times* saw sales at the start of the same period of about 52,000 per day, but these had effectively remained flat ending the period selling an average 65,000 copies per day.⁴⁸ As the capital cost of volume printing technology escalated, increasingly, only joint-stock firms who saw the business potential of the industry and who had access to capital were able to enter or remain in the industry. The cost to Alfred and Harold Harmsworth of establishing the *Daily Mail* in 1896 was in the order of £500,000.⁴⁹

Developments in printing technology, the expanding railway network distribution system and the expansion of the electric telegraph system coupled with the falling cost of its use, also impacted on news gathering, production speed and cost. The late nineteenth century saw newspaper production become a capital-intensive and increasingly large

⁴⁵ L Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Clarendon 1985) 4.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ George Newkey-Burden, 'The Making of a Victorian Newspaper during a Period of Social Change' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, City University London 2011) 231.

⁴⁹ Approximates to £55,000,000 at 2013 prices

industrial process. Newspaper publishers had two major revenue streams - sales and advertising. As printing technology improved the potential for illustrated advertising was exploited to improve sales to an increasingly consumer society.

For the popular press, in particular, advertising became as important, if not more important than, cover sales as a revenue source. Increasing advertising revenue offered the possibility of the cover price being cross-subsidised. Since the value of advertising space was a function of circulation, there was economic pressure to sell more copy. Circulation became key.

2.2.7 New Entrants

The economies of scale of news production were such that companies sought to acquire and print more than one paper. This gave rise to a concentration of titles in the hands of a relatively small number of owners, the so called press barons, individuals who ruthlessly acquired newspaper titles, gathering considerable wealth and influence in the process.

The 1880s saw new printing technologies that enabled the unit cost of newspaper production to fall as volumes increased; new entrants entered the market to meet the demand for a popular press. The new business model focused on circulation and advertising revenue as key to making profit. The press, freed from the controls of the duties that had existed before 1861, targeted the lower-middle and working classes, people who had previously been unable or unwilling to afford 4d or 5d but who could and would spend 1d or even less to purchase a newspaper on a regular basis.

Entrepreneurs saw newspapers as profit-making enterprises, requiring huge capital investment but offering substantial profits. As well as the growth of the popular press, the change in the economics of newspaper production and a willingness to embrace new ideas meant that quality rivals to *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* such as the *Daily Telegraph*, were able to build a circulation that by 1865 had reached average daily sales in excess of 250,000 copies.

New entrants catering to both the quality and the popular markets entered the industry, adopting technology from the USA, for example introducing Linotype compositing machines, that greatly increased typesetting speeds, ahead of *The Times*. News agencies⁵⁰ emerged that gathered news from around the world and sold it to newspapers via the expanding network of sub-sea and transnational telegraph system. It meant that foreign news was more easily and cheaply obtained. The competitive advantage that *The Times* had enjoyed in terms of access to stories eroded, and, whilst the quality of its intelligence gathering and local contacts remained the same, the cost of maintaining a network of dedicated foreign correspondents was a considerable financial burden.

2.2.8 Editors and Editorials

Prior to the industrialisation of the newspaper business and the passing of ownership to joint stock companies, many titles had been produced on what might be described as a cottage industry basis. Editors, who were often the owners, were responsible for the content of the newspaper, its stance on a particular issue and the general tone of the publication. The editor was the key figure in the newspaper industry, situated at 'the nucleus of the Victorian world: he typified both the transformations that were making Britain an urban nation and a stable society'.⁵¹ Jones argues that the diversity of Victorian journalism was personified above all by the editors of newspapers and magazines and that 'not content with interpreting the world, they also did their best to change it'.⁵²

The ability of editors to affect public opinion is a key question. In 1893, Porritt wrote that '[I]t is doubtful whether the editorial columns of the daily press make many political converts'.⁵³ This view was endorsed by investigative journalist and author S.H. Adams, who in 1914 summarised the newspaper industry thus:

⁵⁰ e.g, Reuters founded in 1851 or the Press Association founded in 1868 by a group of provincial newspaper proprietors to provide a London-based service of news-gathering and reporting from across the UK

⁵¹ JH Wiener, 'Innovators and Preachers: The Role of the Editor in Victorian England' in JH Wiener (ed) (Greenwood Press 1985) xiii.

⁵² Jones, 'Local Journalism in Victorian Political Culture' (n 27) 65.

⁵³ E Porritt, *The Englishman at Home: His Responsibilities and Privileges* (T Y Crowell and Company 1893) 319.

The newspaper is divided into three parts. News is the merchandise, which it has to sell. Advertising is the by-product that pays the bills. The editorial is a survival. At its best it analyses and points out the significance of important news. At its worst, it is the mouthpiece for the prejudices or the projects of whoever runs it. Few people are influenced by it, many are amused by it.⁵⁴

The opposite view was taken by Sir Edward Cook, writing in 1918, who stated that an editor, in this case Delane of *The Times*, could influence his readership in three ways: by initiating public opinion, by mirroring it or by guiding it. Cook argued that the editor collected and reflected public opinion through access to information and his contacts. The editor guided public opinion in that the reader was 'presented in a leading article with a logical force, a literary ability and a range of knowledge greater than his own'.⁵⁵ The issue with Cook's view is that he is talking about arguably one of the two greatest editors of *The Times*, and as such Delane might be considered an atypical example.

Writing in the 1920s Salmon argued that the age of great editors and editorials that had existed between 1830 and 1890 had passed, although conceding that 'examples of them are still to be found'.⁵⁶ The shift from personal to corporate ownership of newspapers marked the move, to a more conventional role for the editor and a decline in the importance of the editorial.

2.2.9 Letters to the Editor

At a time before the widespread use of opinion polls and other analytic tools, published correspondence to newspapers provided one of the few means of gauging public opinion and mood. Taft suggests that letters to the editor provide evidence that 'there was a public concern about certain questions'.⁵⁷ However, the use of letters to the editor as a historical source has to be approached with some caution. The inclusion or exclusion of a letter is an editorial decision, although made in the knowledge of the proprietors' likely views on the subject. The size of the editor's postbag on a particular subject is normally unknown. The appearance of a letter on the letters page, is, strictly speaking,

⁵⁴ SH Adams, *The Clarion* (London, Houghton Mifflin Company 1914) 90.

⁵⁵ ET Cook, *Delane of the Times* (Constable & Company Ltd 1918) 43.

⁵⁶ Maynard Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian* (n 38) 259.

⁵⁷ Taft (n 8) 46.

only evidence of the decision of the editor to print the letter. Also, letters are susceptible to editing - if overlong for example - and unless it is marked as edited it is difficult to know definitively if a letter has been reproduced exactly as the writer wrote it. The identity of correspondents is also an issue. It was not unknown for letters written by newspaper staff to be published in order to drum up controversy or increase circulation. The bona fides of letters to the editor are dependent to an extent on the personality and authority of the newspaper in which they appear especially if the letters are published anonymously. Perhaps a more accurate view of published letters to the editor is that they are a barometer of public opinion seen through the prism of the editorial policy of the newspaper. However, for the purposes of this study letters to the editor are not being investigated.

2.3 Conclusion

That the late Victorian and early Edwardian press influenced its readership and hence large sectors of public opinion seems very likely. However, the *extent* to which the press influenced the political views of its readership is the subject of debate. Koss argues powerfully that, notwithstanding the debate on the actual influence on the readership, 'readers and writers alike believed not only that such influence existed, but also that it was pervasive'.⁵⁸ This view is perhaps the crux of the issue; for as long as all parties believe that the press is influential it will be influential. Accordingly, political strategies were predicated on the assumption that newspaper comment, whether by quantity or quality, materially affected developments within, between and beyond parliamentary groupings.⁵⁹ However, Koss qualified the statement by adding that 'to a considerable extent, the power of the Press was a conceit on the part of journalists, naturalised citizens of the Fourth Estate, who drove vaingloriously to live up to the legend'.⁶⁰

Thus far, the implicit assumption is that the press affects the reading public, but the case could also be made that, whilst the press affected public opinion, people bought

⁵⁸ S Koss, *Asquith* (Alan Lane 1976) 7.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

a newspaper that best reflected their personal opinion. Newspapers reacted to the public's response as shown in terms of circulation changes and readers' letters. The objective underpinning the majority of late nineteenth and early twentieth century newspaper publishing enterprises was profitability. A newspaper that did not sell enough copies or advertising space, or did not have a wealthy patron ready to underwrite the cost of newspaper production, would not be able to enter the market let alone remain in it for long. The cost of entry and the requirement for significant circulation explains in part why the radical press declined in during the late nineteenth century. Also, as the capitalist ethos that was traditionally associated with right-wing politics came to dominate the industry, the large sums of money that were necessary to establish and run a newspaper business became more readily available.

The real power of the press, argues Scott-James is:

As an aggregate, as a multitude of writings, each of small importance when taken by itself. It is in its vast bulk, its incessant repetition, its routine utterance of truth and falsehood, its ubiquity, its permeation of the whole fabric of modern life, that the press, however blatant, rather conceals than reveals its insidious power of suggestion.⁶¹

A press campaign sustained over days, weeks, months or even years, can thus be seen to have the power to influence public opinion. Similarly, the same message repeated consistently via editorials and articles and reinforced by printed correspondence that chimes with the newspaper's main message is likely to have a similar effect.

The next chapter outlines the history of both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* from their founding until 1911. These newspapers shared similar characteristics: both had long pedigrees, both were characterised by protracted dynastic ownership and editors that stayed in post over several decades. Both developed close ties to government and both became embroiled in controversial issues and as such both became part of the story to an extent rather than merely reporting or commentating on the story.

⁶¹ RA Scott-James, *The Influence of the Press* (S W Partridge & Co 1913) 8.

Chapter 3

Two Newspapers of Quality

3.1 Introduction

The chapter outlines the history of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. The history of the titles is important to the formation of their 'personalities'. The origins of both are considered, as is their development as newspapers of record. The chapter follows a similar pattern in examining the history of both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*. It looks at their formation and development, some of their campaigns and their relations with government and political parties. To Startt's category of the 'quality press', to which he assigned *The Times*, one should add the *Manchester Guardian*, since it meets Startt's criteria: it was a serious publication, read by well-informed readers who were politically active. Both titles had long pedigrees characterised by protracted dynastic ownership, and both had editors that were in post for several years. Both had developed close ties to government, and both became embroiled in controversial issues. Nonetheless, there were marked differences. *The Times* was conservative with a small 'c', whilst the *Manchester Guardian* was avowedly Liberal. Finally, each had a relatively small circulation.

3.2 *The Times*

During the mid-nineteenth century, *The Times* was at its peak in terms of prestige, influence and circulation. However by the close of the nineteenth century, its working practises were outmoded; it was in financial trouble, facing a decline both in circulation and advertising revenue. It was assailed with disputes about its management and their diversification into book publishing.

Despite these travails, in 1904, when W.T Stead ranked London newspapers into four categories by reputation, he identified the *Westminster Gazette* and *The Times* as the two newspapers with the highest reputation whose overriding aim was to influence the populace: ‘no Minister, no diplomat, no public man can afford to miss reading *The Times* in the morning and the *Westminster Gazette* in the evening’.¹

In the second rank were newspapers whose aim was ‘to make money by the purveying of news’ for example the *The Standard* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In the third rank Stead identified those newspapers those with circulations that dwarfed *The Times*, i.e. ‘The Popular Press’, including the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Telegraph*, declaring that they ‘combined the maximum of advertising and of circulation with the minimum of influence’. Finally the fourth-ranked newspapers were those that had ‘neither weight or influence with the public’.²

In 1908, the Walter family, who had owned the *The Times* since its inception, were replaced by Lord Northcliffe, famous as one of the Press Barons who emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lord Northcliffe was to own *The Times* until 1922. As an iconic newspaper, *The Times* published continuously since 1788, had gained a reputation for its integrity and independence. The reputation, warranted or not, was forged and maintained at the hands of the Walter family and a number of editors. To understand the reputation achieved by *The Times*, it is useful to examine, albeit briefly, its history.

3.2.1 The Founding of *The Times*

The launch of the *Daily Universal Register* on Saturday 1 January 1785 by John Walter I was somewhat inauspicious. Production problems meant that the first day’s supply of papers for sale was severely constrained and perhaps only 1,000 copies were sold at 2d per copy. Walter, a sometime coal merchant, entrepreneur and Lloyds underwriter, had suffered bankruptcy due to losses occasioned by the unfortunate coincidence of a

¹ WT Stead, ‘A Character Sketch: His Majesty’s Public Councillors’ *Review of Reviews* (1904) 604, 604-5.

² *ibid.*

hurricane in Jamaica and the actions of American privateers during the American War of Independence. He was thus, at the age of 42, faced with the need to earn a living to keep his wife and six children.

Walter purchased, with help from two partners, the Kings Printing House in Printing House Square, Blackfriars, London, and set himself up first and foremost as a printer and book publisher. The publication of the *Daily Universal Register* was justified in its first edition by Walter, who wrote that its purpose was to:

Facilitate the commercial intercourse between the different parts of the community, through the channel of advertising, to record the principal occurrences of the times and to abridge the account of debates during the sitting of parliament and that The Register in its politics will be of no party. Due attention should be paid to the interests of trade, which are so greatly promoted by advertisements.³

It carried a range of parliamentary news, 'foreign intelligence', royal court news and advertising. There were some ten columns of advertising and only three of news. The balance between news and advertising reflected Walters desire to run the paper as a business venture for profit, demonstrating the centrality of advertising revenue to commercial newspaper production. However, even at this early juncture the news was printed in separate domestic and foreign columns, demonstrating a degree of sophistication.

On January 1 1788 after 930 editions, Walter changed the newspaper's title to *The Times*. London already had, several publications with 'Register' in the title, something that could potentially lead to confusion among the likely readership. Perhaps the most infamous *Register* was Harris's *Register of Ladies* - a Who's Who of Covent Garden prostitutes and their repertoire, although at a price of two shillings and sixpence per copy it is unlikely that any potential purchasers would have been confused about its content. The new title, Walter explained had the advantage that *Times* 'being a monosyllable, bids defiance to corrupters and mutilators of the language'.⁴

³ J Walter, 'Editorial' *Daily Universal Register* (London, 1 January 1785) 11, 1.

⁴ J Walter, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 1 January 1788), 1.

John Walter I enjoyed an interesting although not uncommon relationship with government. He was supportive of the Government of the day and was paid a subversion fee of £300 by William Pitt the Younger via the stamp of Thomas Steel, Joint Secretary to the Treasury to print material as directed. The secret payment from the Treasury continued even during Walter's 12-month incarceration in 1789 for libelling the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, and was only withdrawn by the Government in 1799. Walter was also an official printer of government documents between 1789 and 1804. Government printing work provided an extra source of income in addition to sales, advertising revenue and other government payments, in the form of the suppression or contradiction fee, payment of which could stop a story being printed in *The Times*.

In 1792, Walters set up a network of correspondents in Europe, based initially in Paris and Brussels. This laid the ground for the reputation that *The Times* came to enjoy for its prompt and accurate reporting of foreign events. It used innovative methods to secure its stories and return them to Great Britain. Professional smugglers were engaged to circumvent the Post Office which, under the control of the government, acted as a self-appointed news agency, importing foreign journals and translating, aggregating and excerpting them. The government also controlled the distribution of the output from the Post Office, which meant that control of news flow was very much in their hands. John Walter divided the business into two parts: the newspaper business and the printing business that printed *The Times* among other activities. This decision would have long-term implications since shareholder dissatisfaction over the cost of printing was to be one cause of the subsequent sale of the newspaper in 1908. Walter left the printing business to his second son John, and also made him responsible for managing the newspaper. Shares in *The Times* were divided among family members and other people associated with the newspaper. John Walter II would have 3/16 of the shares with the option of an additional 3/16 share. John Walters eldest son William, who had been running the paper but had proved not to be equal to the responsibility, retired in 1803 to be replaced by his younger brother John.

3.2.2 *The Times's* Formative Years

When John Walter II took over management of *The Times* in 1803, it was in a parlous state. Under his direction, it would, in the first half of the nineteenth century, 'grow from a struggling agglomeration of news and advertisements to the most influential print the world had ever known'.⁵

In 1808, after a vigorous campaign, alleging corrupt practices by the Post Office and its officials, both Walter and his father lost a libel action brought against them by the government and were fined and forced to print a retraction of their allegations. In February, 1810 John Walter II made a public declaration of independence in a leader, 'saying that the policy of *The Times* would be to support the party in power but without receipt of any subsidy, so that *The Times's* right to free judgement was not impaired'.⁶ This statement marks the beginning of the independence so long a cited characteristic of the newspaper. The point was that Walter had publicly declared his newspaper's independence and had set himself aside from his rivals, laying down a boundary for government.

3.2.3 Innovation

John Walter II recognised the importance and necessity of deploying new technology in the mechanisation of the printing process, seeing it as a way in which *The Times* could feed the growing demand for news. He also recognised that mechanisation would underpin a business model independent of government subsidy and printing contracts and reliant on circulation and advertising revenues. Walter funded development of steam-driven printing presses which was undertaken in great secrecy. The first edition produced on steam-powered presses was presented by Walter on the morning of 29 November 1814. In a leader, *The Times* announced itself as the first steam-produced newspaper:

Our journal of this day presents to the public the practical result of the

⁵ O Wood and J Bishop, *The Story of The Times Bicentenary Edition 1785-1985* (Michael Joseph 1985) 45.

⁶ Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 11 February 1810) 1.

greatest improvement connected with printing, since the discovery of the art itself. The reader of this paragraph now holds in his hand one of the many thousand impressions of *The Times* newspaper which were taken off last night by a mechanical apparatus.⁷

As well as introducing technical innovations, John Water II recruited independent, capable young journalists. For example, Henry Crabbe Robinson was appointed as *The Times's* first foreign correspondent in 1807. Crabbe reported on the Napoleonic Wars, the mismanagement of the Peninsula War in Spain and later the battle at Waterloo. He, like other *Times's* reporters, would seek to verify reports, which increased the authority of both reporter and newspaper alike.

In 1817, having hired a number of short-term editors, Walter appointed as editor Thomas Barnes, a professional journalist, as editor who would stay with *The Times* until his death in 1841. Barnes was given full editorial control, taking *The Times* to the height of its power and influence in the mid-nineteenth century. Barnes consolidated the developing network of foreign correspondents and was able to report on the Battle of Trafalgar soon after the battle was over. He also expanded the number of domestic correspondents, which gave him a valuable source of intelligence in the provinces.

Williams suggests that Barnes sought to make *The Times* the 'voice of public opinion, not just of one party or man'.⁸ Public opinion in this context meant that of the emergent commercial or middle classes that had grown out of the industrial revolution, who were now hungry for news and information and who were poorly served

The fact that the middle and well-to-do classes were largely Unionist or Conservative by nature informed the attitude of *The Times* and gave rise to the perception that *The Times* itself was conservative with a large 'c'.

With Barnes in charge, Walter was able to pursue his political ambitions. He had an unremarkable political career as an MP, being elected first in 1832 as a Whig MP representing Berkshire, and then, following the Whigs' internecine struggles in the 1830s, being returned as a Liberal Conservative MP representing Nottinghamshire in 1841,

⁷ News, 'The Times' *The Times* (London, 29 November 1814) 3.

⁸ F Williams, *Dangerous Estate; The Anatomy of Newspapers* (Arrow Books 1959) 9.

though remaining as such for less than a year. Although he had retired from direct management of *The Times*, Walter retained his property and his financial interest in both the newspaper and the printing business, including a 1/32 share in *The Times*. His retirement was temporary and in 1842, after his political ambitions stalled, he returned to lead the newspaper.

3.2.4 The Campaigning *Times*

A significant event both nationally and in the development of *The Times*, occurred in Manchester at St Peters Field on 16 August 1819 which became infamous as the site of the 'Peterloo massacre', when cavalry attacked a political meeting, resulting in several dead and several hundred injured. *The Times's* report of the incident, which took up over seven and a half columns, was published on 19 August 1819. Although disapproving of the purpose of the meeting, the newspaper condemned the use of military force against British citizens. Despite attempts at interference by the government, *The Times* produced highly critical coverage of the events and its aftermath.

Parliament convened on 23 November 1819 and new acts known collectively as the 'Six Acts' were introduced by the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth. By the end of December 1819 the legislation was passed, despite the opposition of the Whigs. The legislation⁹ variously prevented people gathering for drilling; allowed local magistrates to search persons or property for arms; prohibited unauthorised public meetings of more than 50 people; enhanced sentences for publications judged to be seditious or blasphemous or mocking of the judicial process; and sought to control the press. One of the Six Acts, the Newspaper Stamp Duties Act, widened the range of publications that would be subject to stamp duty. Publishers were also required to post a bond to guarantee their good behaviour. The Act attempted to gag radical newspapers, whose publishers had often avoided duty by publishing what they claimed to be opinion and not news.

The Times's critical coverage of the actions of the authorities, who labelled any rad-

⁹ The Six Acts: Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act 1819, Seizure of Arms Act 1819, Seditious Meetings Act 1819, Training Prevention Act 1819, Misdemeanours Act 1819, Newspaper Stamp Duties Act 1819

ical reform meeting as 'an overt act of treasonable conspiracy' represents a change in what had been regarded as a Unionist newspaper prior to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, but which was now firmly committed to reform. For example, an open letter from radical MP Sir Francis Burdette, inviting people to attend a protest meeting concerning Peterloo, was printed, and this troubled the Government. The critical stance of *The Times* led to an 'invitation' to Barnes to attend a meeting that included the prime minister, Lord Liverpool and the Duke of Wellington. At the meeting, Barnes was in effect warned of the negative effect his campaign was having on the government and the country. The meeting, suggest Woods and Bishop, was 'a clear indication that the Government recognised the influence that *The Times* now wielded in the country'.¹⁰

After Peterloo, *The Times* under Barnes campaigned on a variety of reform issues, chief among them being parliamentary reform. In January 1831, a leader proclaimed 'unless the people - the people everywhere - come forward and petition, nay thunder for reform it is they who abandon an honest Minister - it is not the Minister who betrays the people'.¹¹ After the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1832, *The Times* was moved to describe the event thus:

There never was, in the history of the world, an example so ennobling to the character of the English nation, or so encouraging to the hopes of every other. as this triumph of intellectual and moral power, achieved over gross stupidity and brutal force. A race of usurpers have been ousted from the field of their usurpation, and a great empire reconquered by its own people, without the shedding of one drop of blood, or the disturbance of any one right of person or property which the common consent of civilised men holds sacred.¹²

The Times campaigned in support of Catholic emancipation, the abolition of slavery, the Factories Act and the Tolpuddle Martyrs, but against Poor Law legislation, the Irish Coercion Bill and Daniel O'Connell, head of the Catholic Association, who demanded Irish independence.

Thomas Barnes died on 7 May 1841 and John Walter II appointed a replacement ed-

¹⁰ Wood and Bishop (n 5) 12.

¹¹ Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 29 June 1831) 1.

¹² Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 6 June 1832) 5.

itor, a youthful, 23-year-old Oxford-educated *Times* employee, John Thadeus Delane. John Walter II died in 1847 and was succeeded by his son, also called John. After 1855, John Walter III was assisted by his son Arthur, who would succeed him as chief proprietor in 1894 and oversee the sale of the paper in 1908.

3.2.5 *The Times* in the Crimea

The Times had built a reputation for independence, supporting policies that it considered would best serve the interests of Great Britain and the Empire. Even if it supported government policies it never became an organ of government. This independence brought *The Times* and the government of the day into conflict on occasion, never more bitterly than over the Crimean War. The coalition government of Lord Aberdeen was very displeased when *The Times* learnt and published the fact that the Tsar of Russia had, in January 1854, made a proposal to the British Government to partition Turkey. Lord Derby heavily criticised *The Times* in the House of Lords in March 1854¹³ for publishing the story. He alleged that it had leaked privileged information obtained from Lord Aberdeen, who was serving as the prime minister or a civil servant. *The Times* robustly defended its behaviour and asserted its independence in an editorial: 'This journal never was, and we trust never will be, the journal of any Minister and we place our own independence far above the highest marks of confidence that could be given us by any servant of the Crown'.¹⁴

The Times favoured military intervention against Russia in the Crimea. An editorial declared 'We hold that the taking of Sebastopol and the occupation of the Crimea are objects which would repay all the costs of the present war'.¹⁵ Delane sent William Howard Russell to the Crimea in 1854 as the first war correspondent. Russell's dispatches revealed that British soldiers were living in terrible conditions and highlighted the inadequacies of the army. His dispatches were controversial, raising the question as to whether his attempts to tell the truth were unpatriotic.

¹³ HL Deb 13 March 1854, vol 131, 621.

¹⁴ Editorial, 'The Confidential Correspondence' *The Times* (London, 14 March 1853) 10.

¹⁵ Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 15 June 1854) 1.

Senior military figures had not wanted Russell present with the army and did all they could to stop him, including barring his passage on troop ships, denying him the right to sleep within army lines and overlooking low-level harassment. Undeterred, Russell sent back descriptive, colourful and sometimes embellished dispatches describing the Crimean War, and the charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava on the morning of 25 October 1854.

Russell's dispatches recounted the valour of the troops, military incompetence and the inefficiency of the Commissariat and supply departments and described the privations suffered by soldiers during the winter months of 1854-55, concentrating especially on the lack of proper medical facilities. The charge at Balaclava came to symbolise the ineptitude of British military operations in the Crimea.

The Times laid the blame for the ill-fated action squarely at the feet of the Earl of Lucan. An editorial declared 'It is not fitting that officers so little gifted with the powers of understanding or executing orders should be entrusted with the lives of men or the honour of the nation'.¹⁶ Ironically, two of the military commanders blamed for the disaster, the Earl of Lucan and Lord Raglan, each sought to shift the blame onto the other using the forum of the Letters to the Editor section of *The Times*.

Delane faced considerable establishment opposition to the publication of Russell's articles and his editorials. Senior government and military figures accused *The Times* and Russell of exaggeration and sensationalism and tried to discredit the paper. Lord John Russell, Leader of the House of Commons and a key figure behind Britain's involvement in the Crimea, wrote to the Earl of Clarendon 'If England is ever to be England again, this vile tyranny of *The Times* must be cut off'.¹⁷ The war was, thanks to *The Times*, played out on breakfast tables across Britain and the Empire. The newspaper, riding a wave of compassion for the soldiers, established *The Times* Crimea fund, to which people rushed to contribute and which sent out medical supplies, and Florence Nightingale among others, to the Crimea.

¹⁶ Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 9 March 1855) 8.

¹⁷ quoted in: Williams (n 8) 8.

Politicians made vain attempts to censor *The Times* and accused it of misusing its supposed power. As a result of the adverse publicity surrounding the war, on 29 January 1855 John Arthur Roebuck, the radical MP for Sheffield, tabled a motion calling for a Select Committee to be set up to investigate the situation of the British Army in the Crimea.¹⁸ The result of the motion was to contribute to the fall of the Earl of Aberdeen's government in 1855 and the formation of Palmerston's first ministry. *The Times's* status grew substantially afterwards.

The Times campaigning zeal offers one explanation for the epithet it acquired in 1830 of the 'The Thunderer'.¹⁹ In February 1830 *The Times* took issue with the inquest being held in to the death of Lord Graves, who was suspected of having taken his own life, being held early in the morning, to try to avoid the associated scandal. Subsequently, in response to criticisms of *The Times's* stance on the matter, a *Times* leading article offered a robust defence of Barnes's editorial that had 'thundered out that article in Tuesdays paper which has caused so great a sensation.'²⁰

3.2.6 The Parnell Letters

Following Delane's retirement in 1877, Arthur Walter appointed Thomas Chenery, an accomplished orientalist who had served as a diplomatic correspondent and latterly leader writer for the *The Times*, as editor. Walter also appointed George Earle Buckle as assistant editor to Chenery in 1880. Chenery's increasing ill health saw Buckle assume more and more of the role of editor. Following Chenery's death in 1884 Buckle became editor, a position he was to hold until his resignation in 1912. Arguably, Barnes and Delane, who had built the reputation of *The Times* and developed its ethos and character, were greater editors than Buckle. However, Buckle embodied the spirit of *The Times* and sought to preserve the essence of its character during its decline until 1908 and during the first five or so years after its purchase by Lord Northcliffe.

The Times, for so long seen as paragon of accuracy, was not infallible. Buckle had

¹⁸ HC Deb 29 January 1855, vol 136, col 979.

¹⁹ D Hudson, *Thomas Barnes of the Times* (Cambridge University Press 1942) 132.

²⁰ Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 11 February 1830) 6.

not long been in post when, in 1887, the newspaper became embroiled in the Parnell letters scandal, which in the short term both damaged its reputation and pushed it to the brink of bankruptcy. Buckle had received information that Charles Stuart Parnell, leader of the Irish Nationalist MPs in Westminster, was sympathetic to actions of the perpetrators of the Phoenix Park murders of 1882 in which the permanent under-secretary, Thomas Henry Burke, and the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish, the nephew of William Gladstone, were stabbed to death by the Irish National Invincibles, a secret society within the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).

The Times had purchased and then published a series of facsimile letters that purported to corroborate the accusation that Parnell had condoned the murders, along with a damning series of articles entitled 'Parnellism and Crime'. The letters were purchased despite doubts being expressed by *The Times's* legal counsel and Buckle himself over their authenticity. However, Buckle bowed to pressure from Walter and other senior staff members and publication went ahead.

Eventually, a special commission, which first met on 17 September 1888, was set up to examine the letters. It ruled that establishing the burden of proof lay with *The Times* - it must substantiate all the allegations contained in the articles in order to be exonerated. After a lengthy enquiry,²¹ during which some 494 witnesses gave evidence, the letters were deemed to be forgeries and Parnell was cleared. *The Times* was ordered to pay £200,000 in costs and £5,000 in damages to Parnell. This drove the paper to the verge of bankruptcy. Buckles and *The Times* reputations were damaged by the Parnell letters case.

The outcome of the 1888 government commission into *The Times's* involvement, argued Wood and Bishop, saw the paper moving to the right of centre and marked 'its formal progression from radical beginnings into the camp of the Conservatives: the heart of the paper no longer beat left of centre'.²² The maintenance of its independ-

²¹ See the verbatim report of the Special Commission in: GE Wright, *Special Commission Act 1888. Reprinted from The Times with Judges comments and Full Index* (George Edward Wright 1890).

²² Wood and Bishop (n 5) 142.

ence was the touchstone of what Buckle believed *The Times* stood for. In declining a baronetcy from Balfour in 1905, Buckle wrote that ‘such support as *The Times* has given to your government has been entirely on public and not party grounds’.²³

In 1894 Arthur Walter became chief proprietor of *The Times* and was to oversee the sale of the paper and the end of the unbroken Walter family control that stretched back to its founding in 1785. At the start of the twentieth century, the circulation of *The Times* had declined substantially for its peak in the 1860s. Its highest average daily sales occurring in 1866, when it sold 73,673²⁴ copies and its lowest in 1903, when it sold on average 35,603.²⁵ Thompson sums up the situation thus: ‘through a combination of failed leadership, mismanagement, disagreement among shareholders and general decrepitude, *The Times* had declined precipitously from its mid-nineteenth century pinnacle as the “Thunderer”’.²⁶

However, despite its slightly faded state, politicians and influential people of all hues read it and its reputation, notwithstanding its situation, remained substantial.

3.2.7 *The Times* Sold

In the early twentieth century, the venturing of *The Times* into book publishing and a reduction in dividends caused concern to a small group of shareholders. A series of legal actions ensued, aimed at forcing an examination of the accounts on the way to a complete overhaul of both ownership and management structures. In July 1907, the Court of Chancery consented to a minority shareholders petition, the outcome of which was a court order for the dissolution of *The Times* partnership and the subsequent sale of the newspaper under the supervision of Mr Justice Warrington.

One contender, bidding under conditions of great secrecy, was Lord Northcliffe, who wanted to add the icon of British newspapers to his already extensive newspaper empire. Indeed, he had approached the minority shareholders of *The Times* in 1898 and

²³ S Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: The Twentieth Century* (vol 2, The University of North Carolina Press 1976) 53.

²⁴ The Times, ‘The Times Result of the Issue at 1d’ *The Times* (London, 8 May 1914) 9.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ JL Thompson, *Northcliffe Press Baron in Politics 1865–1922* (John Murrey 2000) 78.

offered to buy their shares but the offer was rebuffed. Lord Northcliffe was also keen to purchase *The Times* in part because his great rival Pearson wanted it. Code names were used to protect the identity of the key players, with Lord Northcliffe being known as X and Moberly Bell as Canton. The policy of secrecy was defended 'somewhat speciously as being analogous to the papers own practice of anonymity'.²⁷ The real reason was perhaps the concern that if Lord Northcliffe had been identified he would have been seen, by some, as a very unsuitable custodian of *The Times* and would have created a considerable amount of resistance from the shareholders.

January 1908 saw intensive activity in the Northcliffe camp; a story was planted in Northcliffe's *Observer* that *The Times* was to be sold which came as a surprise to the staff who had been unaware of the negotiations with Arthur Pearson²⁸. On 8 January 1908 the *Daily Mail* published an unflattering profile of Pearson. Moberly Bell was able to persuade the largest shareholder and existing partner, General John Barton Stirling to abandon his support for the rival scheme and support that of Northcliffe. The contract to buy *The Times* was signed on 11 March 1908. The price was £320,000 in cash and this was paid into Bell's account so that he could transfer the money to Walter. The Court of Chancery ratified the agreement and Lord Northcliffe became the owner on 17 March 1908. Arthur Walter, under the new settlement, became chairman of *The Times* Publishing Company Ltd with Moberly Bell as managing director. Board members included Buckle and Ignatious Valentine Chirol, *The Times's* foreign editor.

The identity of the buyer was kept from the staff and the general public for several months after the purchase had been completed. It is argued by Wood and Bishop that 'for five years Lord Northcliffe took no drastic steps to reform *The Times*'.²⁹ He did send his representatives, including an accountant, into Printing House Square to see what he had purchased and discovered that he had bought something of a dinosaur that had a formidable reputation but which was in a financial crisis and with very few

²⁷ The Office of the Times, *The History of the Times: The Twentieth Century Test 1884–1912* (n 40) 541.

²⁸ Pearson was Northcliffe's great rival. He had launched the *Daily Express* in 1900 to rival Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*.

²⁹ Wood and Bishop (n 5) 205.

pretensions to modern newspaper production methods.

3.2.8 Press Baron

The epitome of a press baron, Alfred Charles William Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, gained control of *The Times* in 1908. Lord Northcliffe together with his brothers would ultimately control a portfolio of titles with a circulation of over 6 million copies including the *Daily Mail* launched in 1898.

Alfred Charles William Harmsworth was born near Dublin in 1865 to a Protestant Anglo-Irish family. In 1867, the Harmsworth family moved to London. From an early age, Harmsworth contributed articles to a number of school publications and paid-for publications. By the age of 19 he had been appointed editor of a publication named the *The Youth*. However, his big break came in 1888 when he set up the Amalgamated Press Company with his brother Harold Harmsworth (later Lord Rothermere) and published *Answers to Correspondents* which by 1895 was selling in excess of one million copies per week. The success of *Answers* helped finance a series of publication launches and acquisitions. In 1890, the hugely successful *Comic Cuts* - 'amusing without being vulgar' - a picture magazine aimed both at children and adults who had limited reading skills, was launched, as well as *Forget-me-not*, a newspaper aimed at women.

Harmsworth moved into newspaper publishing in 1894 when he purchased the failing London daily newspaper the *Evening News and Post* for £25,000. Conservative in outlook, it was losing money despite a circulation of 100,000.³⁰ On 31 August 1894, Harmsworth announced the new ownership and relaunched the *Evening News and Post*. It was to be a newspaper that would 'preach the gospel of loyalty to Empire and faith in the combined efforts of the people of the United Kingdom under the British flag' whilst being 'strongly and unfalteringly Conservative and Unionist in Imperial matters'. It declared itself to be sympathetic to Labour at home and would 'occupy an advanced Democratic platform and be religious but not sectarian'.³¹

³⁰ Thompson (n 26) 22.

³¹ *ibid* 23.

The revamped *Evening News and Post* would serve as a template for future Harmsworth newspapers, exemplifying the New Journalism that had emerged in the 1880s, which Lee Thomson describes as ‘a mixture of journalistic and typographical devices which taken together constituted a new kind of journalism’.³² The use of bold, attention-grabbing headlines, simplified reporting, a women’s page, fresh typology and rationalised advertising saw circulation recover, and by 1896 it was selling 800,000 copies per week.

The *Daily Mail* launched on 4 May 1896 at a cost of £500,000; subtitled *A Penny Newspaper for One Halfpenny*, it was the culmination of Lord Northcliffe’s particular and very successful approach to producing and selling popular newspapers, to both readers and advertisers. It adopted the populist techniques that Northcliffe had seen in his visits to the USA and had deployed in his domestic titles. The publications offer to the public was something for every one, old and young, male and female, London readers and the counties. News coverage was important, but articles and features, interviews, serialised novels and competitions all featured heavily. Advice given to journalists by Kennedy Jones, Northcliffe’s business manager, seems to sum up the approach that writers of the New Journalism should follow: ‘Make the news clear. Avoid technical terms or explain them. State who the persons are whose names are mentioned. Don’t forget that you are writing for the meanest intelligence’.³³

The crucial role of circulation to the success of popular newspapers was also demonstrated in the *Daily Mail* with the use of full-page advertisements and Northcliffe’s cultivation of advertisers; the bigger the circulation, the more the advertisers were willing to pay. Northcliffe took measures to ensure that copies were available at all outlets in sufficient quantities to meet anticipated demand and took the step of setting up satellite presses in Manchester. On the first day nearly 400,000 copies were sold, four times the initial estimate, and circulation would pass 1 million copies in 1902. As well as reporting the news, the *Daily Mail* also made the news by campaigning on a variety

³² Thompson (n 26) 120.

³³ K Jones, *Fleet Street and Downing Street* (Hutchinson 1920) 145.

of issues. Lord Northcliffe came to represent a staunch anti-German sentiment to the country, a sentiment that found voice predominantly in the *Daily Mail*, which led to accusations of being a warmonger. The newspaper was critical of the 1909 budget and of the growth of the Labour Party. It was pro-Empire and was very supportive of the government in the Boer War.

The Times could not have been more different from the *Daily Mail* and it is not surprising that the old guard at *The Times* were concerned for the future of their beloved newspaper once purchased by Lord Northcliffe.

3.2.9 The Impact of Lord Northcliffe on *The Times*

During the complex negotiations for the sale of *The Times* when Lord Northcliffe and Moberly Bell were in talks about its possible acquisition, Moberly Bell had sought to reinforce the previous discussions he had had with Northcliffe by securing a written agreement of the way in which Northcliffe would manage *The Times* once he had gained control. This reveals the fears Moberly Bell had, as keeper of *The Times* traditions, about the intentions of the new owner, who had made his name and fortune in New Journalism, which was in many ways perceived as the antithesis of *The Times* spirit and ethos.

Moberly Bell sought assurance from Northcliffe that the main changes to *The Times* following its purchase would concern its mechanical production. Further, there would be limited changes to the look of the newspaper, but there was an aspiration to the inclusion of fuller and more complete reports. The price would remain at 3d and the size would stay at 24 pages. The staff would remain under the control of Moberly Bell and be treated as far as possible in the same way. The distinction between news and advertising would be maintained and 'the paper shall avoid sensationalism and appeal to the better educated portion of the public'.³⁴

Lord Northcliffe's response was that Moberly Bell would run the business as Lord Northcliffe instructed or there would be no deal with Moberly Bell. A somewhat chastened

³⁴ The Office of the Times, *The History of the Times: The Twentieth Century Test 1884–1912* (n 40) 548.

Moberly Bell responded in a letter dated 9 February 1908, that he would 'carry out your absolute instructions' whilst fully accepting that 'you express your desire that the present policy of the paper to separate Home and Foreign Affairs should be continued under the Editorship of Mr Buckle and Mr Chirol'.³⁵

Northcliffe made a large capital investment installing £60,000 of new Goss presses and Monotype compositing machines. He also sent several of his staff to Printing House Square where they began to make subtle changes to bring *The Times* more into line with Lord Northcliffe's business practices and methods. These ranged from the implementation of a proper accounting system to the introduction of a manager to plan the contents of the paper and coordinate activities so that, for example, two different departments would not both send a reporter to cover the same event.

The sale was made public in a terse announcement in March 1908 that concluded 'there will be no change whatever in the political or editorial direction of the paper, which will be conducted by the same staff on the independent lines pursued uninterruptedly and for so many years'.³⁶ Thompson argues that Lord Northcliffe left *The Times* a large degree of independence at least until 1912, when there was a change of editor, in part because of the reverence he felt for the British institution that it was and in part because its conservative view coincided with his own.³⁷ However, Lord Northcliffe was recorded as saying that he would leave *The Times's* editorial independence intact unless *The Times* failed to warn the British people of the coming German peril: 'I insist upon that duty being discharged'.³⁸

The difficulty facing Northcliffe in the first few years was that the old guard, led by Moberly Bell and Buckle embodying the 'spirit of *The Times*', mounted a strong rear-guard action against his reforms. It was unrealistic to expect a man of Northcliffe's experience, newspaper background and personality to invest so heavily and let *The Times* remain as it was. The official history of *The Times* states that, having purchased the

³⁵ The Office of the Times, *The History of the Times: The Twentieth Century Test 1884–1912* (n 40) 549.

³⁶ News, 'The Times' *The Times* (London, 17 March 1908) 9.

³⁷ Thompson (n 26) 124.

³⁸ R Pound and G Harmesworth, *Northcliffe* (Cassell 1959) 327.

newspaper, Lord Northcliffe's intention was 'to dominate not merely direct its policy; he would make it his personal organ; and this the old family, the editor and the manager and leading members of the editorial staff felt bound to resist'.³⁹

It was because of this resistance, Williams argues, that *The Times* 'never became in any true sense his paper' because 'The ghosts were too strong for him. The Paper's traditions were theirs and not his'.⁴⁰ Not until the old guard died (Moberly Bell in 1911) or retired (Buckle in 1912) was Lord Northcliffe able to replace them with his own appointed editor and exert more control and influence. For example, on Buckle's retirement in 1912, Geoffrey Dawson was appointed by Northcliffe as editor and went on to do two stints 1912 to 1919, and 1923 to 1944.

3.2.10 A Sacred Trust

In the first few years following its purchase in 1908, Lord Northcliffe allowed the editorial tradition created by Barnes and Delane, the editors of the early nineteenth century, to continue. They had created an identity, an ethos and a personality for *The Times* that was carried on by Moberly Bell and Buckle almost as a sacred trust. For as much as Lord Northcliffe might have initially wanted to mould *The Times* to be more in keeping with his approach to the newspaper industry, he faced opposition from within *The Times*, and perhaps he also realised that radically changing *The Times* would destroy the very thing that had attracted him to it in the first place.

3.3 The *Manchester Guardian*

The second newspaper to be considered is the *Manchester Guardian*, a Manchester-based newspaper, that had close ties to the Liberal Party and represented something of a throw back to an earlier age when owner-editors were the norm, as compared to the corporate newspaper ownership model that had come to dominate the British newspaper industry.

The *Manchester Guardian* edition no.1 was published on 5 May 1821 by a Manchester-

³⁹ The Office of the Times, *The History of the Times: The Twentieth Century Test 1884–1912* (n 40) 583.

⁴⁰ Williams (n 8) 33.

based politically active cotton merchant named John Edward Taylor. The *Manchester Guardian* is notable for a number of reasons. It developed from an influential provincial newspaper into one that was nationally read. It was owned and controlled by the Taylors and the Scotts, two interlinked families, from 1821 until 1936. Its outlook from the late nineteenth century coalesced into a staunchly Liberal newspaper that was unafraid to court controversy by supporting unpopular causes – for example, calls for Irish Home Rule or the Boers during the Second Boer War. Its most famous editor and, latterly, owner Charles Prestwich Scott (C.P. Scott), edited the newspaper for 57 years, and he held and defended a seat in the House of Commons between 1895 and 1906.

3.3.1 Origins

John Edward Taylor was born into a family that was both religiously Nonconformist and radical in its political outlook. He had a Quaker and a Unitarianist background, a Protestant faith originating in Eastern Europe (Poland and Transylvania) during the Protestant Reformation in the 1560s and 1570s. Considered heretical, his background expounded a faith based on religious freedom and toleration with an emphasis on rational thought, liberalism and gender equality. Educated at his father's school, which was set up under the patronage of Quakers, he was apprenticed at the age of 14 to a cotton manufacturer. He had by the age of 21 become a partner there, before moving to another firm as a partner. As well as pursuing his business interests, Taylor was also an active Unitarian.

Given his background and beliefs it is perhaps not surprising that Taylor became politically active, writing political articles for assorted newspapers and journals – for example, the *Manchester Gazette*, an avowedly anti-Unionist newspaper, where he developed a reputation for his balanced and reasoned, but not radical, reformist arguments. From 1815, Taylor became a member of a group of Liberal Unitarian Manchester-based citizens, mostly involved in the cotton business, who drew their inspiration from Bentham and Priestley and who became known as the 'Little Circle'.

The group was chiefly interested in social, electoral and religious reform. The large

industrial conurbations of the North and North West were on the front line of the Industrial Revolution. Cities like Manchester and Liverpool were creating wealth for some, whilst poverty was widespread and lack of education, alcoholism, unemployment and ill health were all too common.⁴¹

The group was concerned that industrial cities did not enjoy proportionate representation in the House of Commons, with political change being the only way of alleviating the ills that beset the cities.

3.3.2 Taylor Radicalised

Two events were key to John Taylor setting up the *Manchester Guardian*. One was Taylor's own indictment for the offence of criminal libel in March 1819. The other was his experience of the events at St Peter's Field in August of the same year, and especially their aftermath.

Taylor's attempt to become an assessor for the Salford Police Commission in July 1818 was blocked following an objection by John Greenwood, on the grounds that Taylor was the author of a handbill that had provoked the burning down of the Manchester Exchange during the Luddite riots of 1812. When challenged by Taylor to withdraw his accusations, Greenwood refused. Taylor's response was to send Greenwood a letter accusing Greenwood of being, amongst other things, 'a slanderer, a liar, a scoundrel'.⁴² Taylor referred to the letter in a column he wrote for the *Manchester Gazette*, and he invited the public to view a copy of the letter at its office.

In a politically motivated action, John Taylor was indicted on a charge of criminal libel in March 1819. The case was held before Lancaster Assize Court on 29 March 1819. Taylor conducted his own defence and, rather than denying his statement, he argued that the statement that slander had occurred was true and that he, in fact, had been

⁴¹ Fredrich Engels, writing in 1844, described Manchester as a place of 'filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation and health'. It was 'Hell upon Earth'. F Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (F Kelley-Wischnewetzky tr, Swan Sonnenschein & Co 1892) 53.

⁴² A Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester* (Charles Gilpin and J T Parkes 1852) 135.

slandered by Greenwood, rather than the other way round. This represented a departure from the then-extant doctrine adopted by the courts in cases of libel, where the statement complained of was not admissible as defence to the indictment of libel.

The trial judge, Mr Baron Wood, addressed the jury at the close of the trial. He indicated that there could be no doubt that Taylor had committed the libel and that the jury should find Taylor guilty as charged. Furthermore, the judge said that he regretted allowing Taylor to use the defence that he had.⁴³ The foreman of the jury, described by Prentice as 'honest, firm, conscientious',⁴⁴ insisted on the jury retiring to reach a verdict. The jury's deliberations took so long that the entire court had to process to the judge's bedroom in the middle of the night, finding him 'sat bolt upright, in his night cap and bedclothes',⁴⁵ to deliver the jury's verdict that they had found Taylor not guilty of the indictment.

The second event that was seminal in the creation of the *Manchester Guardian* occurred on 6 August 1819 at St Peter's Field, Manchester, when a peaceful public meeting was violently broken up by a force of special constables, regular cavalry, yeomanry and an artillery detachment. Exactly what happened is still the subject of debate. However, after troops were deployed to prevent people fleeing the meeting, seemingly a small detachment of troops attempted to arrest the speakers on the platform at the behest of local magistrates. As the initial deployment of troops were swamped by the sheer numbers of people present, further detachments were dispatched into the confused crowd, and at some point the mounted troops charged the crowd with sabres drawn. The situation spiralled out of control, resulting in 11 dead and several hundred injured, including a number of women.

Those on the platform on that day included Henry Hunt MP and Major John Cartwright, who were campaigning for parliamentary reform. Sharing the platform were a number of journalists, including John Tyas, a reporter for *The Times* who had been reporting

⁴³ Prentice (n 42) 143.

⁴⁴ *ibid* 140.

⁴⁵ *ibid* 143.

on Hunt's speeches at various meetings. John Tyas was arrested and imprisoned and thus prevented immediately from sending a dispatch to *The Times* in London. John Taylor and a journalist called Archibald Prentice, who also wrote for the *Manchester Gazette*, attended the meeting but had left before the violence occurred.

On learning of the situation, they both returned and interviewed a number of eye-witnesses to the events. Both then wrote up their accounts and sent them by night coaches to London to various newspapers. Ayerst asserts that 'it was clear that the same hand wrote the reports which *The Times* carried on Thursday the 19th and the *Manchester Gazette* on Saturday the 21st'.⁴⁶ Tyas would ultimately file a report on the events of the day on the evening of the event, on his release; he corroborated Taylor's and Prentice's accounts of the incident and added extra details of his own.

By the end of 1819, in the wake of the events in St Peter's Field, or 'Peterloo' as it became popularly known, the Unionist Government had passed what would later be called the Six Acts. One outcome of this was that the *Manchester Observer* was forced to close in 1821, because of the imprisonment of its editor, James Wroe, and because it was unable to cover the crippling cost of fighting repeated prosecutions.⁴⁷

Taylor also returned to pamphleteering when he produced a pamphlet 'Notes and Observations critical and explanatory' in 1820, to provide a measured and well-balanced counter-narrative to that of the government. The government, in the shape of Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth, had written to the magistrates involved in the incident thanking them for their decisive and efficient policing action and conveying the thanks of the Prince Regent. Lord Sidmouth in the House of Lords declared that, with access to secret information possessed only by the government, it was clear, 'relying on the opinion of the great legal authorities' that the 'assembly of the 16th of August was not only illegal, but treasonable'.⁴⁸ Calls for an enquiry into events in Manchester were rejected by, for example, the Marquis of Buckingham, who argued that:

⁴⁶ D Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (Collins 1971) 19.

⁴⁷ S Harrison, *Poor Men's Guardians: Survey of the Democratic and Working-class Press* (Lawrence and Wishart Ltd 1974) 53.

⁴⁸ HL Deb 23 November 1819, vol 41, col 24.

The country was in imminent danger. This was not a time for enquiring into the causes. The danger must be provided against without delay, or ruin would be the consequence. When a house was on fire, what was the fittest thing to be done, to enquire into the causes of the conflagration, or to take means of putting it out?⁴⁹

3.3.3 The *Manchester Guardian* Launched

Backed by 11 members of the ‘Little Circle’, who subscribed a total of £1,000 to support the newspaper’s launch, John Taylor launched the *Manchester Guardian* on 5 May 1821 as a weekly newspaper published on Saturdays. The rationale and goals of the *Manchester Guardian* were set out in its prospectus, published in April 1815.⁵⁰

The newspaper was to be created in response to the vast increase in political interest and awareness that had been occasioned by improving education levels ‘in the previous quarter of a century’.⁵¹ Whilst domestic issues would take priority, the *Manchester Guardian* would closely observe foreign policy matters ‘for there perhaps never was a period, at which the affairs of other nations could awaken, in the minds of Englishmen, so deep an interest as at the present moment’.⁵² Many people had watched with interest the efforts of other states to free themselves from ‘antiquated and despotic government’ in an effort to improve ‘the proportion of public happiness, and security of popular rights’.⁵³

The wealth, intelligence and importance of Manchester required that a newspaper be published that was capable of providing ‘the influence of the public press, spirited discussion of political questions, and the accurate detail of facts, particularly important at this juncture’.⁵⁴

On its launch, the cover price was 7d a copy. The cover price reflected the burden of

⁴⁹ HL Deb 23 November 1819, vol 41, col 50.

⁵⁰ Prospectus reproduced in W Haley and others, *C.P. Scott, 1846-1932: The Making of the Manchester Guardian* (Frederick Muller Ltd 1946) 9.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

the government taxes on knowledge. The price was unaffordable for the majority of people in Manchester and District, which meant that advertising revenue would be vital to the continued existence and growth of the *Manchester Guardian*. Given this, the first page of the newspaper was almost entirely comprised of advertisements. In fact, the first words published in the newspaper were of an advert placed by someone who had found 'A black Newfoundland bitch'. The owner was invited to reclaim the dog on payment of expenses or run the risk of it being sold to defray further expenses within 14 days of the advert's appearance.⁵⁵

Notwithstanding its initial high price, initial weekly sales were around 1,000 copies, mostly in Manchester and District, although initial readership was higher based on the fact that copies were bought by public library newsrooms from as far away as Glasgow in the North to Exeter in the South West. By 1835, circulation had increased to approximately 3,000 copies per week. As the stamp duty⁵⁶ on newspapers was reduced in 1836 to 1d, Taylor was able to reduce the price of the newspaper to 4d per copy, and a second edition was printed on Wednesdays in 1837. Wednesday's edition was selling approximately 4,000 copies, compared to the Saturday edition, which sold approximately 6,000 copies.

3.3.4 Middle-class Reformer

Although a reforming liberal outlook characterised the *Manchester Guardian*, its origins and editorship in the hands of Taylor were middle class, and middle-class cotton manufacturers, at that, in a region where 'King Cotton' was the predominant industry. Although capable of working with working-class radicals on occasion, when their political aspirations coincided for instance on the repeal of the Corn Laws or parliamentary reform – they were opposed to the direct action approach taken by many radicals.

Taylor had attended the St Peter's Field meeting, even though he was opposed to the approach taken by the organisers, believing that his presence would signify to the

⁵⁵ Advertiser, 'Dog Found' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 1 May 1821) 1.

⁵⁶ For a detailed study regarding newspaper taxation, see M Hewitt, *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain* (Bloomsbury 2013).

authorities the importance of the cause of parliamentary reform. There is evidence of Taylor's critical attitude towards radical reformers in his statement⁵⁷, just prior to Peterloo, that:

they have appealed not to the reason but the passions and the suffering of their abused and credulous fellow-countrymen, from whose ill-requited industry they extort for themselves the means of a plentiful and comfortable existence. 'They toil not, neither do they spin, but they live better than those who do'.⁵⁸

Later, Taylor also spoke out against legislative attempts to limit the length of a work-day in the shape of the 1832 Ten Hours Bill; also, the *Manchester Guardian* doubted whether, in view of the foreign competition, 'the framing of a law positively enacting a gradual destruction of the cotton manufacture would be a much less rational procedure'.⁵⁹

The editor and part-owner of the radical *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, George Condy, described the *Manchester Guardian* as the 'the commons heap in which every purse-proud booby shoots his basket of dirt and falsehood.' it was 'the foul prostitute and dirty parasite of the worst portion of the mill owners'.⁶⁰

In considering votes for the working classes, Taylor was not unequivocally in favour of universal male suffrage and did not see voting as an inherent right for all British citizens. The vote should be given to those labouring classes he deemed worthy, but certainly not to all, it should be put 'fairly within the power of members of the labouring classes by careful, steady and persevering industry to possess themselves of it, yet not so low as to give anything like a preponderating influence to the mere populace'.⁶¹ However there was no intrinsic right to vote 'the right of representation is not an inherent or abstract right, but the mere creation of an advanced condition of society. Its single object is to promote good government'.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ayerst asserts the words represent Taylor's views even if the authorship of the words is not certain Ayerst (n 46) 20.

⁵⁸ JE Taylor, 'Editorial' *The Manchester Gazette* (Manchester, 7 August 1819) 2.

⁵⁹ JE Taylor, 'Editorial' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 28 January 1832) 7.

⁶⁰ Quoted in C Driver, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler* (Oxford University Press 1946) 321.

⁶¹ JE Taylor, 'Editorial' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester Guardian, 1 December 1830), 1.

⁶² *ibid.*

Concerns arose among some of Taylor's original supporters that in fact the *Manchester Guardian* had not spoken out sufficiently strongly on social issues, and this would lead some of them ultimately to purchase the *Manchester Gazette* with the intention of creating a radical rival to the *Manchester Guardian*.

3.3.5 The Dynasty Continues

The death of John Edward Taylor in January 1844 saw his brother-in-law Russell Scott take over the running of the newspaper until his sons, Russell Scott Taylor and John Edward Taylor Junior (commonly called Edward Taylor), came of age. The editorship of the *Manchester Guardian* passed to Jeremiah Garnett, who had been at Peterloo and who was a business partner of John Taylor. However, Russell Scott Taylor died in 1848, leaving Jeremiah Garnett as sole editor. Garnett would remain as editor until 1861, when Edward Taylor became editor.

Garnett had worked for Taylor to launch the *Manchester Guardian* in May 1821. He had served his apprenticeship as a printer before joining the staff of a Unionist newspaper, the *Manchester Chronicle*, in 1814. He had been instructed to report on the meeting at St Peter's Field in August 1819 and had written an eyewitness account for his newspaper. However, the actual article published had been heavily edited by the pro-Unionist editor, to the point where most of the detail was absent. Garnett left the employment of the *Manchester Chronicle* due to the – as he saw it – political interference in his reporting. In 1821 Garnett began working for Taylor and undertook a variety of tasks for the fledgling *Manchester Guardian*, including reporting, editing and physically compositing text to be printed. He obtained a partnership in the business in 1826 and became sole editor on the death of Taylor in 1844.

As sole editor, Garnett, a committed Liberal, completed the shift of the *Manchester Guardian* to the political left – more reformer than radical. The Corn Laws, first introduced in 1804, had sought to protect landowners' profits by imposing duty on imported corn. The end of the Napoleonic War in 1815 saw the price of corn in England, almost halve. The House of Commons was prevailed upon to pass a law that set a threshold

market price, below which foreign wheat could not be imported without an additional duty being levied on it. The staple food of the working classes became more expensive, and the Corn Laws were seen as an example of Parliament bending to the will of large landowners. There were also concerns about the inflationary impact on wages of the poor, in that they might demand more in order to pay for the more expensive wheat. The Anti-Corn-Law Association was founded in 1837, and became the Anti-Corn-Law League in 1839. The League campaigned in opposition to the Corn Laws and organised large public meetings across the country. The League's membership grew and by 1841 Richard Cobden became the first MP for Stockport endorsed by the Anti-Corn-Law League. Prime Minister Robert Peel, in the face of the first Irish Potato Famine of 1845, gradually became won over by the views of the Anti-Corn-Law League, and by 1846 a new Corn Law was passed that significantly reduced the amount of duty paid. Garnett, who had joined the Manchester Anti-Corn-Law League in 1838, was prepared to support the gradual reduction of Corn Law rates rather than demanding their absolute abolition. This brought him into conflict with more radical Liberal reformers.

3.3.6 Return to its Radical Roots

John Edward Taylor's son, John Edward junior, was brought up in the Unitarian faith. His early education was provided by tutors, and later on he attended courses at universities in London and Bonn, finally studying law between 1848 and 1853 in Manchester, where he was called to the Bar but never practised law. Prior to commencing his studies, he had worked at the *Manchester Guardian* between 1847 and 1848. Following the death of his elder brother, Russell Scott Taylor, in 1848, Edward Taylor became the newspaper's sole owner in 1850, having purchased his deceased brother's share of the copyright from his widow. Jeremiah Garnett continued to act as editor.

Edward Turner sought to return the *Manchester Guardian* to its radical roots, launching a series of investigative reports into the social problems afflicting the poor of the North of England and Ireland. In the nineteenth century, Britain experienced a significant democratic transition in the political system of the country, underpinned by the growth

of Liberalism as a political ideology. The Representation of the People Act 1832, also known as the Great Reform Act, began the process of extending the franchise and rationalising the electoral system by, for example, removing the Rotten Boroughs. Prior to 1832, out of a population of some 16 million people, only 400,000 were entitled to vote. A limited but significant change had been achieved by the Great Reform Act but for many it did not go far enough. The property qualifications meant that the majority of working men still could not vote. But it had been proved that change was possible and over the following decades calls for further parliamentary reform continued.

The Representation of the People Act 1867 continued the process of extending the franchise commenced in 1832. Taylor supported the Act, the passage of which meant that some 2.5 million became eligible to vote.⁶³ He also supported the passing of the Ballot Act 1872, which mandated that parliamentary and local governor elections be held by secret ballot, which was a significant step in the reduction of undue political influence and corruption. The Act was of particular importance in Ireland, where tenants became able to vote without, at least in theory, being subject to pressure, for example from landlords.

3.3.7 A Daily *Manchester Guardian*

Taylor converted the *Manchester Guardian* from a biweekly to a daily newspaper and in 1857 reduced the price from 2d to 1d. Under Taylor's leadership, a number of changes were made to its operation. John Edward Taylor II, unlike his father, based himself in London, and relied upon a team of writers to edit the newspaper, leaving the management of the newspaper in the hands of Peter Allen. Whilst not involved in day-to-day operations, he continued to take a close interest in the editorial stance of the newspaper and to make decisions with significant impact on the newspaper.

In 1868 a permanent London office was opened in Westminster, close to the Houses of Parliament; the move *Manchester Guardian* to Fleet Street, where the majority of London-based newspapers had their offices, did not occur until 1913. The step

⁶³ J Kingdom, *Government and Politics in Britain* (Polity Press 1992) 182.

marked the move from a significant provincial newspaper to a national newspaper. In the same year as the establishment of offices in London, Taylor was able to obtain for the *Manchester Guardian* a permanent seat in the House of Commons to allow parliamentary reporting. Until then, the *Manchester Guardian* parliamentary reporters had had to vie with other reporters to obtain a seat, which meant that not all debates were covered by its reporters.

Information is the lifeblood of a newspaper office, and prior to 1872 telegraph operators ran a monopoly and held newspapers in effect to ransom, in that they could charge what they wished and were not above delaying or refusing to send telegraphs to or from a particular newspaper. This limitation was particularly felt by provincial, especially northern, newspapers, which came together under the leadership of Taylor in February 1872 to form the Press Association, thus ending the private telegraph company monopoly. Taylor's oversight of the *Manchester Guardian* was rendered difficult by the distance between London and Manchester. However, he had recruited talented colleagues and given them positions of responsibility, for instance C.E. Montague, Arthur Toynbee, W.T. Arnold and, lastly, and most significantly, C.P. Scott.

Perhaps Taylor's greatest contribution to the ongoing success of the *Manchester Guardian*, aside from improving circulation figures, was the hiring of his cousin C.P. Scott, whose father Russell Scott had overseen the running of the paper following the death of John Edward Taylor. C.P. Scott went on to edit the paper for 57 years. Taylor decided to recruit C.P. Scott to join the *Manchester Guardian* with a view to his ultimately taking over the editorial function, albeit closely monitored by Taylor. C.P. Scott would join the *Manchester Guardian* in 1871 and became editor 11 months later in 1872 at the age of 25.

3.3.8 The *Manchester Guardian* Sold

In 1905 Edward Taylor died. In his will he stipulated that C.P. Scott be given the option of buying the copyright to the *Manchester Guardian*, although not the premises, for the sum of £10,000. The will also offered Scott the alternative option of buying the

business and the premises at a rate to be set by the trustees, as long as the trustees wished to sell. The issue then was that there was no requirement to sell the business in the first place, unless the trustees thought it in the best interests of the newspaper.

Eventually, after a protracted series of negotiations, the trustees decided to sell and valued the business at £242,000. Scott was able to raise the asking price by drawing on savings, loans from friends and a mortgage. He became the sole owner in 1907, a position he would retain until 1913, at which point he divided his shares between himself and his sons Edward and John and his son-in-law C.E. Montague, with the proviso that on the death of any of the four shareholders the deceased shareholder's shares must be offered for sale to the three surviving shareholders.

3.3.9 Charles Prestwich Scott

C.P. Scott had been educated under a Unitarian minister and had attended a grammar school run by a noted progressive educational reformer, Charles Prichard. Scott attended Corpus Christi College, Oxford, one of the few colleges that had, despite legislation requiring them to do the opposite, removed the ban on Nonconformist students' entry. Whilst at university, he submitted articles to the *Manchester Guardian*, the first concerning a rowing race in Paris. Following a six-month apprenticeship at *The Scotsman* newspaper in Edinburgh, Scott joined the staff of the *Manchester Guardian* in February 1871 and was made editor in February 1872. In 1907, following the death of Edward Taylor, and also following protracted negotiations over a complicated will, Scott was able to purchase the *Manchester Guardian* and he retained his editorship until 1929.

3.3.10 Scott's Parliamentary Career

As a key figure in Manchester's Liberal politics, Scott sought political office in the shape of a seat in the House of Commons, from where he might promote his Liberal agenda at the heart of government. He tried and failed to get elected to Manchester constituencies in 1886 and 1891, and in 1892 he was finally elected as Liberal MP for the

Leigh division of Lancashire. His parliamentary career was unremarkable, but during his time at Westminster he forged strong ties with Liberal politicians, especially David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Lords Haldane and Grey.

In 1895, in his first Parliament, Scott campaigned against the British involvement in the Sudanese Wars and the conduct of the war, with particular regard to the treatment of wounded enemy combatants. In September 1898, General Henry Kitchener led an army to retake Khartoum, where his forces successfully destroyed the former Mahdi's followers at the back of Omdurman on a plain near Khartoum. Two events cast a long shadow over the victory. First, enemy combatants who were wounded were either left to die or, according to a report from the *Manchester Guardian* war reporter Henry Cross, summarily shot and their bodies looted, a report corroborated by eyewitness testimony of soldiers. The killing of prisoners was an action condoned, if not ordered, by senior military commanders on the ground. Second, after the battle, it emerged that Kitchener gave orders that the Mahdi's tomb was to be destroyed and his remains thrown into the Nile so as to leave no physical evidence to act as a shrine or monument to the former Mahdi. However, the Mahdi's skull was retained and presented to Kitchener, which bought condemnation from the British press and hostile questions from Parliament.

The destruction of the Mahdi's Tomb and body was a case of great concern for the *Manchester Guardian*, and a leader in February 1899 condemned the treatment of the Mahdi's body: 'it is, we believe, quite exceptional for a British general to insult a dead body. These things are done by savages, but they hardly form a suitable beginning for the lessons in civilisation which we are to teach the Sudanese'.⁶⁴

As a reward for his crushing of Mahdism in the Sudan in June 1899, A.J. Balfour, Conservative MP, introduced a motion to award Kitchener £30,000 from the public purse. Henry Campbell Bannerman, leader of the Liberal Party, supported the motion whilst expressing regret over the treatment of the Mahdi's body. A minority of MPs opposed

⁶⁴ Editorial, 'Editorial' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 21 January 1899) 6.

the award. John Morley, former Liberal Chief Secretary for Ireland, opposed the award due to the treatment of the Mahdi's remains, as did C.P. Scott.

Scott objected not only to Kitchener's actions but also to the defence of his action by the government and the Leader of the House of Commons. Scott said 'The excuse which has been made amounts to this, that because we were making use of barbarous instruments we therefore must have recourse to barbarous methods'.⁶⁵ A substantial majority saw the motion pass and Kitchener received the award.

3.3.11 The Second Boer War

The Second Boer War (1889–1902) proved to be almost as divisive of the Liberal Party as the Irish Home Rule crisis in 1885. The Liberals divided into three broad camps: first, those who did not support Britain's imperial expansion and sought to avoid foreign entanglements; second, those who supported expansion of the Empire – the so-called 'Liberal Imperialists'; and finally, those in the middle who, whilst recognising the advantages and the electoral popularity of imperial expansion, also recognised that such expansion jeopardised Liberal principles.

The Unionist Government called a general election in 1900. Scott was able to retain his seat, albeit with a reduced majority, in the so-called Khaki Election, which saw the Unionists returned against a background of patriotic fervour for the Boer War. That he retained his seat is all the more remarkable given his and the *Manchester Guardian's* support for the Boers and opposition to both the war itself and the tactics used by the British Army, such as concentration camps.

The British strategy, masterminded by Lord Kitchener, included a controversial scorched-earth policy, in addition to which Boer and native women and children were packed off to refugee camps or concentration camps, where an estimated 28,000 Boers,⁶⁶ mostly woman and children, died.

⁶⁵ HC Deb 5 June 1899, vol 72, col 351.

⁶⁶ B Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902* (Arnold 1999) 281.

3.3.12 Concentration Camps Exposed

The conditions in the South African camps⁶⁷ were exposed to the British public in a book by Emily Hobhouse,⁶⁸ the sister of L.T. Hobhouse, a journalist working for the *Manchester Guardian*. The book was published following her visit to camps in the Orange Free State during 1901. Hobhouse's findings caused outrage and the Unionist Government was forced to act to improve conditions. Emily Hobhouse first met with Sir John Broderick⁶⁹, but his lack of action meant that she approached Henry Campbell-Bannerman, which led him to change his position from one of support for the war to opposition to it. Campbell-Bannerman delivered a speech on 14 June 1901 in which he made the famous statement, 'A phrase often used is that "war is war", but when one comes to ask about it one is told that no war is going on, that it is not war. When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa'.⁷⁰

He repeated the remarks in the House of Commons three days later, when he praised the courage of Emily Hobhouse; he also criticised the system that had resulted in the ill treatment in question, rather than implying 'cruelty or even indifference on the part of officers or men in the British Army'. He continued, 'it is the whole system which they have to carry out that I consider, using a word which I have already applied to it, barbarous'.⁷¹

The *Manchester Guardian* criticised the war and its conduct from its editorial pages. It also published extracts of a series of Hobhouse's letters covering the period from 22 January 1901 until 22 April 1901, which set out the conditions she found in the camps and which formed the basis for the report Hobhouse submitted to the committee controlling the South African Women's and Children's Distress Fund. After her report

⁶⁷ Hobhouse used the terms 'concentrate' and 'concentrated' but not 'concentration' in her report; however, in a letter to her aunt she used the term 'concentration' camp

⁶⁸ E Hobhouse, *A Report of the Visit to the Camps of the Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies* (Friars Printing Association, Ltd 1901).

⁶⁹ Secretary of State for War

⁷⁰ Speech given at the Holborn Restaurant quoted in J Wilson, *C.B.: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (Constable 1973) 349.

⁷¹ HC Deb 17 June 1901, vol 95, col 599.

was read, Hobhouse wrote that:

My work in the concentration camps in South Africa made almost all my people look down upon me with scorn and derision. The press abused me, branded me a rebel, a liar, enemy of my people, called me hysterical and even worse. One or two newspapers, for example The *Manchester Guardian*, tried to defend me, but it was an unequal struggle.⁷²

Meanwhile, in Parliament Scott repeatedly asked for detailed statistics on the death rates within the concentration camps that had been established as part of the war strategy, as well as asking pointed questions about the improvement of treatment of women and children within the camps. He returned to the subject again in January 1902, expressing his gratitude to the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain for taking 'an active and energetic interest in the improvement of the condition of those camps'. Scott continued by saying that the House of Commons 'had not yet heard, however, that his intervention had had a great effect' still less that 'this terrible mortality had ceased'.⁷³ He later urged every member of the House who was a Liberal or a Liberal Imperialist to resolve that the ill treatment should end for the sake of 'humanity and statesmanship', since 'these terrible things were sowing the seeds of hatred between race and race in South Africa'.⁷⁴

3.3.13 The Campaigning *Manchester Guardian*

The Irish Home Rule crisis of 1885 marked a shift in the *Manchester Guardian's* political position away from the centre ground, always independent but cautious, characterised by a liberalism that, Hammond argues, was 'critical, calm and circumspect'.⁷⁵ The *Manchester Guardian's* objection to Gladstone's Irish Home Rule Bill in 1885 turned from rejection of the bill to support for it, albeit with some reservations. The reason for the shift, Hammond argues, was twofold: the influence of W.T. Arnold, renowned classical scholar and *Manchester Guardian* journalist and leader writer; and a change

⁷² BS Seibold, *Emily Hobhouse and the Report on the Concentration Camps During the Boer War 1899-1902* (Ibidem-Verlag 2014) 155.

⁷³ HC Deb 21 January 1902, vol 95, col 528.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ JL Hammond, *C.P Scott* (G Bell and Sons Ltd 1934) 60.

of mind from Scott, who concluded that, whatever the risks of Home Rule, the risks of not having it were worse.⁷⁶

An editorial in April 1885 concluded that 'we must either take this bill with amendments, or prepare for the inevitable struggle with Irish members and the Irish people'.⁷⁷ The position taken over Irish Home Rule by the *Manchester Guardian* made it, Hammond argues, the 'most accomplished and effective voice on the side of Home Rule in the day-to-day struggle that absorbed all the attention and excited the deepest emotions of the British people'.⁷⁸

Scott also supported the passing of the Ballot Act 1872, which mandated that parliamentary and local governor elections be held by secret ballot, thus forming a significant step in the reduction of undue political influence and corruption. The Act was of particular importance in Ireland, where tenants became able to vote without, in theory at least, being subject to pressure, for example from landlords.

Scott supported the cause of women's suffrage, although deploring the use of violence by the suffragettes. Following the January 1910 election, a cross-party committee was established with the aim of preparing what became known as a Conciliation Bill. Scott both advised the committee on the bill's contents and defended the plans via the *Manchester Guardian*. Scott's involvement was such that suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst wrote to Scott in December 1910: 'You perhaps more than any single man outside the Cabinet have the power to bring this dreadful struggle to an end'.⁷⁹

Ultimately, the bill failed to pass, in part because there had been a resurgence of violent militant suffragette activity, which alarmed the government, and in part because Irish Nationalists were concerned that passing the bill would prompt Asquith to resign, which would effectively at best delay and at worse end the immediate prospect of Irish Home Rule. Female suffrage was one of the few topics that Taylor and Scott did not agree

⁷⁶ Hammond (n 75) 60.

⁷⁷ Editorial, 'Editorial' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 17 April 1885) 77, 7.

⁷⁸ Hammond (n 75) 9.

⁷⁹ Quoted from letter EP to Scott in: Jane Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (Routledge 2003) 154.

on. Taylor wrote to Scott in 1892 'Your article yesterday on the female suffrage Bill was adroitly done, and your display of the cloven foot most discreetly managed; still it was quite visible. I ask you not to advocate this measure while I live. The restriction cannot last very long.'⁸⁰

In 1909 the political battle over the number of Dreadnought warships to be bought for the Royal Navy came to the fore. The funding of the naval building programme would form part of the catalyst for the budget crisis that that would precipitate the passing of the Parliament Act. According to some members of the government, German naval expansion in support of its increasing geopolitical ambitions could only be countered by building a number of Dreadnought battleships. The key question was how many were to be built each year. C.P. Scott and the *Manchester Guardian* took the side of Liberal politicians such as David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, who argued that the German menace was exaggerated and that the money would be better spent on social reform.

In 1888, trade union membership in the UK stood at 750,000, a figure that would grow to 2.6 million in 1910 and 4 million by 1914.⁸¹ Whilst always deploring the violence that sometimes accompanied industrial action, Scott was generally supportive of the development of the Labour movement. The late 1880s/1890s saw a series of labour disputes that became increasingly bitter. The dock workers in 1889, the miners in 1893 and the engineering lockout in 1897 were all causes supported by Scott.

C.P. Scott and the *Manchester Guardian* took, Wilson argued, an unequivocal stance on political issues that was not always universally popular. He described the *Manchester Guardian* as 'a journal of the liberal left, espousing causes like social reform, alliance between liberalism and labour, the female suffrage, Irish home rule, and a pacific foreign policy'.⁸²

⁸⁰ Hammond (n 75) 82.

⁸¹ HA Clegg, A Fox, and AF Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unionism since 1889* (vol I, Clarendon Press 1964) 1.

⁸² T Wilson, *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928* (Collins 1970) 21.

Whilst never selling large quantities of copies compared to the popular press, Scott had, according to Williams, done something unique in British journalism, in that he had developed the *Manchester Guardian* into a 'provincial paper which came to be accepted not only in Britain but also in every part of the civilised world as a premium expression of the liberal spirit'.⁸³

3.4 Conclusion

By 1910 the newspaper industry in Great Britain was a well-developed, sophisticated business. Improved living conditions and improved education standards had fuelled increasing demand for newspapers. Supply had been increased by large-scale capital investment in high-speed printing technology and news gathering. The industry continued to evolve as a few key actors had come to dominate the newspaper industry: a class of profit-driven entrepreneurial businessmen known as 'the press barons'. Starting a newspaper was no longer a cottage industry, and the high capital cost of doing so created substantial barriers to entry to the industry. A segmented market saw some titles selling hundreds of thousands of copies a day to a population who were able to afford and read the material for themselves. Advertising revenue, always important, became an increasingly significant part of the revenue stream, and circulation became paramount.

Setting aside what might be called the popular or mass-market press, there remained a number of titles that were perhaps disproportionately influential, not by virtue of the numbers they sold but rather by the class of reader. This study considers two newspapers from what might be called the quality press genre, *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, titles that, though possessed of only relatively modest circulation compared to other quality newspapers, let alone popular newspapers, nevertheless continued to have perceived influence and authority. *The Times* was very much a newspaper of the establishment, being read by the political and social elite and those who made decisions. The *Manchester Guardian* offered an alternative view and message

⁸³ Williams (n 8) 57.

to decision-makers who shared its Liberal principles and who formed the extant government.

The Times could trace its origins back to the late eighteenth century and had developed a reputation for independence of thought, although perceived by many to be conservative in nature. It had, under the long ownership of the Walker family and under a number of long-serving editors, arrived at a point in time when a definite character or ethos had been developed. The sale of *The Times* in 1908 to Lord Northcliffe, the archetypal press baron, was a time of great concern for the editorial staff, who feared that Lord Northcliffe might impose his well-tested newspaper business model on the venerable *Times*. Lord Northcliffe seems not to have tried to turn *The Times* into one of those modern newspapers characterised by the term 'New Journalism'.

Despite its reputation being damaged, not to mention the financial impact of the Parnell letters affair, *The Times* retained its reputation and authoritativeness. Some indication of the perceived influence *The Times* was felt to have is contained in a letter published in *The Times* in February 1970, recounting a story, possibly apocryphal, involving King George V. It was recounted that a friend of King George had hoped that a word from His Majesty in the right quarter would solve a difficulty, to which the King replied 'My dear fellow, I can't help you! You'd better write to *The Times*'.⁸⁴ In a sense, it does not matter if the story is true or not: that it was published says something about the reputation it enjoyed.

The *Manchester Guardian* was a newer newspaper, possessed of equally small circulation and, crucially, located in the North West of the country, thus carrying the challenges of being – initially, anyway – very much a provincial newspaper. It too had remained in the hands of a small number of family members but, unlike in the case of *The Times*, when the *Manchester Guardian* was sold it passed to its editor, the charismatic C.P. Scott. Scott was one of the Scott dynasty, whose fortunes were interwoven with those of the founding family, the Taylors.

⁸⁴ H Reid, 'Writing to the Times - Postscript' *The Times* (London, 4 February 1970) 11.

Both newspapers were characterised by having editors who were in post for many years and thus provided a continuity of editorial direction that would otherwise not have existed. After 1907, Scott, as editor and owner of the *Manchester Guardian*, was to an extent a throwback to the previous generation of newspaper owners who were politically motivated to produce a newspaper. Founded by a cotton merchant, albeit one with a genuine political and social reform agenda, the *Manchester Guardian* had a reputation as *an organ of the middle class*.⁸⁵

The *Manchester Guardian* was liberal in political outlook and nature and made its name in part by its opposition to government policy that was often populist. It opposed Britain's imperial actions and aspirations and the adverse impact on indigenous populations of policies founded in support of imperial designs. For example, Britain's involvement in the Sudan and South Africa were roundly criticised, in the face of public hostility, such that its newspaper offices had to have police protection during the Second Boer War. The *Manchester Guardian* editor for 57 years, C.P. Scott had served as a Liberal MP between 1895 and 1906 and had developed close and lasting relationships with leading members of what became the Liberal Government in 1906.

Both the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* fulfil the criteria set out by Startt for those newspapers that could be labelled 'stately'; that is, they were both 'serious publications that aim to influence well-informed readers as well as the politically active'.⁸⁶ Both were run by people who were deeply committed to what they saw as their respective newspapers' legends, which had developed over time. *The Times*, whilst still independent,⁸⁷ was conservative with a small 'c' and aligned with the Unionist cause. The *Manchester Guardian* was Liberal, supportive of the working class and unafraid to court controversy by having opinions that were not necessarily popular.

⁸⁵ Engels (n 41) 109.

⁸⁶ Startt (n 2) ix.

⁸⁷ Though as part of the Northcliffe stable the promise of change loomed

Chapter 4

Historical Background to the Referendum in the UK

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the historical background of the political referendum device – a vote by the electorate on a single political question that has been referred to them for a direct decision. Its origins are examined, as are the views of the influential Liberal Unionist constitutional lawyer and academic Professor A.V. Dicey on the efficacy of the referendum and its applicability to the United Kingdom's situation. The background to the 1911 Parliament Bill is set out. Finally, *The Times's* and the *Manchester Guardian's* editorial responses to the adoption of the referendum as a policy are considered.

4.2 The Referendum in the UK

In a representative democracy, the electorate elects representatives, who then make decisions and govern on behalf of the electorate. It is hoped that the representatives make decisions based on their considered judgement, taking into account both those who voted for them and those who voted for other candidates. How, then, are the views of the electorate assessed? The concept of the electoral mandate is essentially straightforward. Prior to an election, a party will state its policy with regard to some issue(s) of public importance. The opposing parties will often have differing views on said issue(s). The electors' votes are then cast and counted, and the party that won the election is deemed to have been returned because the electorate has supported the policy views espoused by the winning party.

The first example of the electoral mandate being generally operative, argues Eden,¹ was the Representation of the People Act 1832, also known as the Great Reform Act. The Act began the process of extending the franchise, although it only enfranchised some 6 per cent of the male population and rationalised the electoral system by, for example, removing the so-called ‘rotten boroughs’. The electors were for the first time treated ‘as capable, not merely of electing members, but of making decisions on vital political questions, such as the maintenance of free trade’.²

4.2.1 The Salisbury Doctrine

In the late 1860s, at the same time as the expansion of the franchise was underway, a view emerged that, in fact, the government needed a specific mandate from the electorate in order to undertake major changes to, for example, the constitution. In 1868, Benjamin Disraeli, a Unionist politician, objected to the issue of the disestablishment of the Irish Church being raised in Parliament without having first been exposed to the scrutiny of the electorate. Speaking in the Commons debate on the State of Ireland, he said:

Technically, no doubt, Parliament has the power to do so. But, Sir, there is a moral exercise of power as well as a technical, and when you touch the fundamental laws of the country, when you touch the principles on which the most ancient and influential institutions are founded, it is most wise that you should hold your hand unless you have assured yourselves of such an amount of popular sympathy and support as will make your legislation permanent and beneficial.³

Lord Salisbury, a previous leader of the Unionists in the House of Lords, went further and argued that there were a small number of cases in which the electorate must be given the opportunity to decide on government policy and that the House of Commons could not always be relied upon to be genuine arbiters of the electorate’s will: ‘There is a class of cases small in number, and varying in kind, in which the nation must be called into council and must decide the policy of the Government. It may be that the

¹ C Eden, *The People and the Constitution: A History of the Development of the Peoples Influence in British Government* (2nd edn, Clarendon Press 1956) 8.

² *ibid.*

³ HC Deb 16 March 1868, vol 190, col 1788.

House of Commons in determining the opinion of the nation is wrong'⁴

What is more, it was the duty of the House of Lords to correct the defects in the Commons' understanding of the public will by insisting 'that the nation shall be consulted, and that one House without the support of the nation shall not be allowed to domineer over the other. In each case, it is a matter of feeling and of judgement.'⁵

4.2.2 The Will of the People

If the House of Commons did not always reflect the will of the electorate, and if elections could not always be relied upon to return governments who truly represented the will of the people, and if the House of Lords had a responsibility to correct the erroneous House of Commons, how could the will of the people be gauged? One potential answer lay in the referendum,⁶ a political device with its roots going back to first-century Germany. Tacitus wrote:⁷ 'Upon minor matters the chiefs deliberate; upon greater matters the general assembly, with the reservation that, in the latter case, where the popular vote settles the question, these matters, too, must be thoroughly debated at a meeting of the chiefs.'⁸

Although not used in Great Britain, the referendum⁹ had been subject to debate and discussion. John Locke, the English philosopher, writing in 1690, argued that in a case where an important legal principle was subject to contention between Prince and the people, and where the outcome of the case would have far-reaching consequences, then 'the proper umpire in such a case should be the body of the people'.¹⁰ The device had been used in parts of the United States immediately after the Revolutionary War

⁴ HL Deb 17 June 1869, vol 197, col 84.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ A vote taken by the whole of a people on a policy issue: Matt Qvortrup, *A Tale of Two Referendums: Elite Manipulation or Engagement?* (The Constitution Society 10 December 2015) 6.

⁷ In AD 98 Publius Cornelius Tacitus wrote *De origine et situ Germanorum*. The book described the lives of the tribes occupying what today is called French Flanders to the west of the Rhine that formed the Northern Roman frontier. Tacitus contrasted the virtues of the tribes, with the moral laxity of Rome and highlighted the threat to Rome the tribes posed if they acted together. The modern state of Germany was formed in 1871

⁸ Publicus Corenellus Tacitus, *The Agricola and Germania of Tacitus* (KB Townsend ed, Aberdeen University Press 1894) 63.

⁹ For history and use of the Referendum in UK see: Qvortrup (n 6).

¹⁰ J Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (Cambridge University Press 1988) 42.

(1775–1783). At state and local, but not federal level, the referendum was adopted by the founding Continental Congress as one mechanism by which American states could adopt or amend their individual state constitutions. Massachusetts was the first state to put its proposed original constitution to a vote of the people in 1778¹¹. Since the ‘mid-nineteenth century’ every new state has been required by Congress to submit its initial constitution to a popular vote.¹²

An attempt was made to introduce the referendum into the British constitutional system in 1854 when a temperance bill was placed before Parliament. A temperance organisation whose name was commonly shortened to ‘The Alliance’¹³ had been founded as a single-issue lobby group in Manchester in 1853. At the time, the power to grant licences for the sale of intoxicating liquor rested with magistrates or Justices of the Peace. The Alliance campaigned for the Permissive Bill, a statute that would allow local ratepayers to vote by referendum on the granting of licences to sell liquor in their local neighbourhoods. After its initial failure in 1854, the bill was, during the course of 20 years, resubmitted nine times. Only much later would a form of the bill be accepted by the Liberal Government. However, Horvill, writing in 1911, suggested the bill’s failures were much more about the power and influence of the liquor interests and should not be seen as definite proof of parliamentary hostility to plebiscitary methods.¹⁴

4.2.3 A.V. Dicey’s View of the Referendum

A.V. Dicey was an influential leading Liberal Unionist constitutional lawyer and scholar. He was a passionate anti-Irish Home Rule advocate who wrote of his concerns over the direction the constitution was taking. In addition to journal articles and scholarly

¹¹ The Massachusetts constitutional convention of 1778, put before the electorate (male voters over 21 years of age) a proposed state constitution for ratification. The voters refused to ratify the document. The legislators were forced to hold a second constitutional convention in 1779-80. The convention produced an amended constitution document, which the voters ratified in June 1780 and which became effective in October 1780.

¹² WB Fisch, ‘Constitutional Referendum in the United States of America’ (2006) 54 University of Missouri School of Law Scholarship Repository 485 (<http://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1411&context=facpubs>), 486.

¹³ The United Kingdom Alliance to Procure the Total and Immediate Legislative Suppression of the Traffic in Intoxicating Liquors as Beverages

¹⁴ HW Horvill, ‘The Referendum in Great Britain’ (1911) 26(3) Political Science Quarterly 415 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2140963>), 416.

texts he was also the most published author on the subject of the constitutional crisis in the letters pages of *The Times* between November 1909 and August 1911, having some 23 letters published.

For Dicey, the British constitution's great weakness was that, given the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, 'there is under the English constitution no marked or clear distinction between laws which are not fundamental or constitutional and laws which are fundamental or constitutional'.¹⁵ This meant that a change in the British constitution could be made relatively simply, using a simple process and against the wishes of the people. This was very different from the approach to constitutional change in the United States. There, the process was far more complex and involved a far higher threshold to be passed in order for constitutional changes to be made. A request for an amendment to the US Federal Constitution required a two-thirds majority of both the Senate and House of Representatives of the US Congress, and even then the amendment only became operative once it had been ratified by three quarters of the individual states.¹⁶

The weakness, for Dicey, was made worse by the changing nature of the House of Commons, which had seen both the growth of the party whip system, and the growth of cabinet government. The Commons had become in reality 'the body of persons elected for the purpose of carrying out the policy of the predominant party'.¹⁷ Dicey, who had diminishing faith in the ability of the House of Lords to limit constitutional change, considered that the voters should act as a check on fundamental legislation being passed that was against the will of the people. A referendum would offer 'the best, if not the only possible check upon who considered alterations in the fundamental institutions of the country'.¹⁸ In his view the referendum was 'the only check of the predominance of party which is at the same time Democratic and Conservative'.¹⁹

¹⁵ AV Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Constitution* (Macmillan 1889) 89.

¹⁶ Although it should be remembered that the United States, unlike the Great Britain, has a written constitution.

¹⁷ AV Dicey, 'Ought the Referendum to be Introduced into England?' (1889) 57 *Contemporary Review* 489, 504.

¹⁸ *ibid* 507.

¹⁹ *ibid*.

Dicey viewed the growth of party power and absolutism as being contrary to 'The doctrine which lies at the basis of English democracy', since 'the law depends at bottom for its enactments on the consent of the nation as represented by the electors'.²⁰ Therefore, a referendum represented 'the one available check on the recklessness of party leaders'.²¹

Just before the general election of December 1910, Dicey wrote to *The Times* in support of the application of the referendum. He remarked that after some 20 years' study of it he strongly advocated use of a referendum in the current situation. He saw it as 'nothing more or less than the nation's veto of legislation which electors do not approve'.²² He set out the quoted disadvantages of using the referendum and his response to these claimed disadvantages. First, referendums were unknown in Great Britain and would limit the power of Parliament, especially the Commons. This, he conceded, was true to an extent; however, except during the time of the Civil War, Parliament had never had unlimited authority and had always been constrained by the monarchy or the Lords. Second, there was the claim that in effect a general election was as good as a referendum. This was untrue, he argued, since elections do not turn on a single issue, whereas referendums are essentially concerned with a simple, clear, straightforward question: 'do you want the following bill to pass into law?' Third, a referendum represented, it was claimed, an appeal from 'the superior knowledge of Parliament to the ignorance of the people'.²³ This argument had merit, he agreed, but it did not really apply to a modern, mature society such as Great Britain. Fourth, a referendum would, he agreed, lower the character of the House of Commons to a degree. Lastly, he conceded that what it really did was to modify the whole of the existing party system: it was an expansion of popular government.²⁴

In a subsequent letter, Dicey called the referendum 'an accepted part of Unionist

²⁰ AV Dicey, *A Leap in the Dark: A Criticism of the Principles of Home Rule as Illustrated by the Bill of 1893* (John Murray 1893) 504.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² AV Dicey, 'An Appeal to the Nation VI The Referendum' *The Times* (London, 7 December 1910) 11.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

policy', describing it as 'a bold step along the path towards the maintenance of honest and democratic government'. He then highlighted the advantages of holding a referendum it would make it possible to gauge in a way not formerly possible 'the clear expression of the will of the people on the proposed law of real importance'. A referendum held out the reasonable hope of raising the public morality of statesmen. A referendum would also offer for the first time 'a fair and full expression of the real will of the majority of the United Kingdom'²⁵ and the hope of a limit on the ever increasing power of the party system.

4.2.4 The Unionist Tariff Reform Agenda

For many Unionists, the adoption of tariff reform policies, as opposed to free-trade policies, was key to Britain reasserting itself on the world stage. Closer economic ties between Great Britain and its Empire would allow a regeneration of the British Empire and allow a move back to greatness where an imperial race ruled an Empire, resuming its place as a world superpower. A chief proponent of what started as a call for 'Imperial Preference' but would develop into the tariff reform policy movement was Joseph Chamberlain who argued that 'the days are for great empires not for little states'.²⁶

Chamberlain was the Liberal Unionist Colonial Secretary under Salisbury's Unionist Government from 1895 until his resignation in order to campaign on behalf of tariff reform in 1903. From 1904 to 1906, Chamberlain campaigned strongly for tariff reform and advocated a referendum on the subject. He obtained a strong tariff reform following among many Unionists. However, divisions in the Unionist ranks soon widened, with Unionist tariff reformers dominating and Unionist free-traders being at first marginalised and then driven from the party ranks.

The Unionists won the 1902 general election, the so-called Khaki election, on a wave of popular support for the second Boer War. But the Liberal Party, hitherto split,

²⁵ AV Dicey, 'An Appeal to the Nation VII The Referendum: Its Advantages' *The Times* (London, 8 December 1910), 11.

²⁶ JL Garvin and J Amery, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (vol IV, Macmillan 1929) 196.

closed ranks around the free-trade issue, and secured the support of the Labour Party, whereas Balfour attempted, unsuccessfully, to hold the various sections of the Unionist Party together; on 4 December 1905, he tendered his resignation.

In opposition, the Unionists persisted with tariff reform as a major policy issue, despite its unpopularity with the general public. For the tariff reform lobby, tariff reform offered the opportunity to bind the Empire together and to finance social reform programmes that the Unionists accepted were necessary. However, as a policy it was divisive; the Liberals' skilful use of the (in)famous 'big loaf, little loaf'²⁷ imagery during the election campaign of 1906 had cost the Unionists dearly in the general election of January 1906.

Balfour never wholeheartedly embraced tariff reform policy. However with the tariff reform supporters dominating the party, at a meeting on 29 November 1910 at the Albert Hall as part of the general election campaign, before an audience of nearly 10,000 Unionist supporters, he pledged to submit tariff reform proposals to a referendum as long as the Liberals would agree to do the same with their Irish Home Rule proposals. He said that 'I have not the least objection in submitting the principles of tariff reform to a referendum'.²⁸ The pledge surprised many in his own party. Tactically, it was intended to highlight the Liberals' policy regarding Irish Home Rule; however, it also marked the beginning of a movement to replace Arthur Balfour as leader of the party, since the pledge demonstrated to the hard-line tariff reform elements of the party Balfour's lack of belief in and commitment to tariff reform as a policy. Balfour believed that the divisions in the Liberal Party caused by the conduct of the Boer War would prevent them from forming a government. He underestimated the Liberal Party, which put aside its differences over the Boer War and united around the common cause of free trade.

²⁷ Liberal opposition to what they characterised as 'stomach taxes' were powerfully argued in a poster depicting the 'big loaf' of free trade compared to the 'little loaf' of protectionism

²⁸ R Luce, *History And Theory of Lawmaking By Representative Government* (Reprint, Lawbook Exchange Ltd 2008) 605.

4.2.5 The Campbell-Bannerman Resolutions

The first session of the 1906 Liberal-dominated Parliament saw an Education Bill passed in the Commons and sent to the Lords. The Bill sought to bring the education system under the control of local authorities and reduce the influence of the Church on education. The bill was amended and returned to the Commons in a very different form. The Commons sent it back to the Lords, who rejected it. Subsequently, it was abandoned by the Liberals for that session of Parliament. The bill was resubmitted to the Lords in the second session of Parliament in 1907, when it was again rejected, as it was on its third submission during the 1908 parliamentary session.

In addition to the failure of the Education Bill, in the space of three parliamentary sessions between 1906 and 1908 the Liberals conceded defeat on a number of bills to which the Lords had taken exception. The Old Age Pension Bill, whilst not expressly rejected by the Lords, was so altered during the Committee Stage in the Lords in 1908 that it was effectively rejected. Following intense pressure from the Unionist-dominated Lords, a proposal for an Irish Home Rule bill was withdrawn by the Liberals. A bill to end the practice of plural voting, in which people who owned multiple properties were legally able to vote multiple times, was also rejected.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman²⁹, Liberal prime minister, indicated that after the Lords' first rejection of the Education Bill his party would seek to limit the power of the Lords. He said in a debate in 1906 that:

It is plainly intolerable, Sir, that a second Chamber should, while one Party in the State is in power, be its willing servant, and when that Party has received an unmistakable and emphatic condemnation by the country, the House of Lords should then be able to neutralise, thwart, and distort the policy which the electors have approved.³⁰

He concluded his address 'I say with conviction that a way must be found, a way will be found, by which the will of the people expressed through their elected representatives

²⁹ Commonly known as 'C B' within Liberal party

³⁰ HC Deb 20 December 1906, vol 167, col 1740.

in this House will be made to prevail'.³¹

The Liberal Government began to move against the Unionist-dominated Lords in June 1907 when Campbell-Bannerman, using the then not uncommon practice of moving a government resolution, moved that 'it was necessary to limit the power of the Lords to give effect to the will of the electors as expressed by the elected representatives'.³²

During the course of introducing the resolutions, Campbell-Bannerman commented that he was aware of some 'vague, and, I think, not very well-informed proposals for a foreign institution, called a referendum, whereby a particular Bill can be submitted to a special vote on the part of the electors of the country'.³³

He objected to the use of a referendum on three grounds: first, that it was so unknown to the British polity as to make its use 'well nigh impossible'; second, that its adoption would be 'inconsistent with, and destructive of, Parliamentary government'; and finally, that if it were adopted into the constitution it would never be used except when 'Liberals were in a majority and will be employed for the purposes of flouting and defeating the government of the day, the majority in the House of Commons, and the electorate itself'.³⁴

The correct course of action, argued Campbell-Bannerman, was to accept the resolutions and recognise 'ungrudgingly the authority which resides in this House, and accept the views of the nation as represented in the great interests within these walls'.³⁵ The resolution was carried by 315 votes to 107. By this resolution, the Liberal Government arguably 'drew a line in the sand', and signalled their intention to control the Lords and exercise executive supremacy.

4.2.6 The Lords' Rejection of the Budget

In November 1909, the House of Lords overwhelmingly rejected David Lloyd George's Finance Bill on its second reading by 350 to 75 votes. During the course of the second

³¹ HC Deb 20 December 1906, vol 167, col 1740.

³² 926 HC Deb 24 June 1907, vol 176, 1514.

³³ *ibid* col 926.

³⁴ HC Deb 24 June 1907, vol 176, col 925.

³⁵ HC Deb 24 June 1907, vol 176, col 911.

reading in the Lords, the Unionist Lord Balfour said:

My Lords, if you win [by rejecting the vote], the victory can at most be a temporary one. If you lose you have altered and prejudiced the position, the power, the prestige, the usefulness of this House [He continued prophetically] If you win you are but beginning a conflict. Should I say beginning a conflict? You are re-making a conflict which has gone on from year to year and from century to century until the House of Commons has attained the position which I suggest to you it enjoys by usage at the present time.³⁶

The refusal of the budget left the government with no option but to call a general election and dissolve Parliament. In December 1909, Herbert Asquith, the Liberal prime minister, moved that 'a breach of the constitution and usurpation of the right of the Commons had taken place'.³⁷ To do otherwise would have meant that the government was in the thrall of the Lords, because in effect the Lords' rejection of the budget meant they could dictate the lifespan of the government.

The results of the January 1910 election were far from a ringing endorsement of the Liberals, who held 275 seats against the Tories' 273 seats, the Irish Nationalists' 82 seats and Labour's 40 seats. The net effect was a hung parliament, with the Liberals having a majority over the Unionists and Liberal Unionists of two seats, but, with an agreement with the Irish Nationalists, enjoying a working majority.

4.2.7 The Parliament Bill

The start of the process of bringing the Lords under the control of the Commons began in March 1910, with Asquith moving a resolution that 'this House will immediately resolve itself into a committee to consider the relations between the two Houses of Parliament and the question of the duration of Parliament'.³⁸ He then introduced three resolutions that were passed after a debate of 11 days on 14 April 1910. The first resolution was that the House of Lords could not amend or reject a Money Bill, it being under the jurisdiction of the Speaker of the Commons to decide what was or was not a Money Bill. The Lords could delay non-money public bills to a maximum of two years

³⁶ HL Deb 25 November 1909, vol 4, col 1039.

³⁷ HC Deb 2 December 1909, vol 12, col 578.

³⁸ HC Deb 29 March 1910, vol 15, col 1162.

and one month.³⁹ The second resolution was that a bill sent up to the Lords in three successive sessions of Parliament was to become law within 28 days of presentation on the third occasion, without the assent of the Lords, if it had not been passed by the Lords without amendment save for amendments agreed between both Houses.⁴⁰ The third resolution was that the maximum duration of Parliament was to be reduced from seven to five years.⁴¹

Following the passing of all three resolutions, the Parliament Bill was read for the first time on 14 April 1910. However, the bill's passage through the Commons stopped with the unexpected death of Edward VII in May 1910 which led to a rapprochement between the Liberals and the opposition, albeit of a temporary nature.

During the debate on the resolutions, Asquith addressed the possibility of using a referendum as a way of dealing with deadlock between the two Houses. Although he reserved the option of using a referendum in the case of 'extreme or exceptional constitutional entanglements', he rejected its usage for 'ordinary or everyday deadlocks of our present parliamentary system'.⁴²

He listed the reasons for his rejection of the referendum. First, he thought the referendum would be applied unevenly, such that it would only be used when the Lords and the Commons were in disagreement, whereas in reality it should also be available when both Houses were in agreement and the people did not agree with them. Second, its use would undermine the 'independence and responsibility of this Chamber'. It was not, he argued 'a normal part of our system'.⁴³ Finally, as he did not consider that the electorate would be able to separate the ostensible issue of the referendum from the whole of the surrounding political environment, he did not 'believe it would be possible for the electorate to completely segregate the particular issue on which the Referendum took place, and entirely to ignore the whole of the rest of the field of politics'.⁴⁴

³⁹ The resolution was passed by 340 to 240 votes

⁴⁰ The resolution was passed by 346 to 243 votes

⁴¹ The resolution was passed by 334 to 236 votes

⁴² HC Deb 29 March 1910, vol 15, col 1174.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

John Redmond, leader of the Irish Nationalists in Westminster, expressed in the same debate his concern that Asquith 'had clearly indicated that as a solution of the difficulties the Referendum is out of the question' and yet at the same time could envisage that 'some great special constitutional occasion may arise' in which a referendum offered a solution. Redmond said 'I certainly would oppose any such course'.⁴⁵ Redmond had made the political judgement that if a referendum were held on the subject of Irish Home Rule, there was every chance that the electorate would vote against the proposal.

A timetable debate saw the second attempt at a Finance Bill pass its third reading in the Commons in April 1910, which was passed by the Lords at the end of April 1910. The speed of the bill's passage through the Lords is arguably a measure of the acceptance by the Lords of the election result, an election they had in effect forced by refusing to pass the first Finance Bill.

4.2.8 The Constitutional Conference

The death of King Edward VII on 6 May 1910 was a shocking event for the country, and triggered, if not the cessation of normal politics, then certainly its diminution as the people mourned and the machinery of state swung into action to crown a new monarch. As might be expected, the columns and editorials of the press were taken up by fulsome praise for King Edward and the anticipation that King George would follow the example set by his late father at a time of political crisis occasioned by the Parliament Bill. *The Times* reported:

That the loss of a sovereign so experienced, so sagacious, so popular with the statesmen of both parties, as well as with the nation, so cautious, so courageous, and so tactful in the management of men and of affairs, the moment when we stand committed to the gravest domestic crisis of our time, is indeed a public calamity.⁴⁶

On 8 May 1910 J L Garvin the editor of *The Observer* published a plea for a 'Truce of God' and a plan for a Constitutional Conference of leading statesmen to take place. He

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Editorial, 'Death of The King' *The Times* (London, 7 May 1910) 11.

had become concerned over the political conflicts that were, in his view, ‘threatening the very basis of the Nations institutions’.⁴⁷ The country faced, he warned, ‘national dangers which the politicians could no longer ignore, whatever their constitutional differences.’ *The Times* made a similar plea on its front page, albeit in verse written by the Poet Laureate, Alfred Austin entitled ‘The Truce of God, a King’s bequest’.⁴⁸ It called for a national display of solidarity and the end of conflict that put the country in peril. For the Liberals a conference had the advantage that it avoided the necessity of a general election happening immediately and the concomitant uncertainty of being returned to office.

F. S. Oliver, who wrote under the pen name Pacificus, was a well-connected Scots Unionist writer who advocated the adoption of constitutional conventions and federalism in Britain as in the United States. He saw the adoption of both as capable of solving the constitutional problems that he perceived Britain would have in maintaining unity both within the Empire and within Great Britain. *The Times* not only published Oliver’s letters but also went as far as commending the letters to their readership.

Pacificus warned that the nation and the Empire was threatened with strife, and that the country was standing on the brink of a struggle that he predicted would be long and bitter. Should either side win an overwhelming majority in the next election, ‘forthwith sacrilegious hands will be laid upon the constitution’.⁴⁹ For Pacificus, a Unionist victory would simply serve to strengthen the role of the House of Lords, whilst a Liberal victory would have the effect of limiting its function and democratising it. Either outcome was likely to be dangerous, but the worst danger was that ‘a game which has never yet been played out in any country without ending either in Civil War or national ruin’⁵⁰ would be set in motion.

Pacificus perhaps envisaged the political pendulum swinging ever more violently as the party in power sought to entrench its constitutional changes whilst the party out of

⁴⁷ JL Garvin, ‘Editorial’ *The Observer* (London, 8 May 1910) 1, 1.

⁴⁸ Editorial, ‘Truce of God, A King’s Bequest’ *The Times* (London, 8 May 1910) 1.

⁴⁹ Pacificus, ‘A Constitutional Convention’ *The Times* (London, 23 May 1910) 36.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

power would spend the entire time before the next election campaigning and agitating for repeal. In the meantime, the rest of government activity would suffer. To make matters worse, the author forecast a burgeoning coterie of 'shallow disputants, fluent in forensics, understanding nothing, but delighting in cheap scores, in strokes made for the gallery, in a gushing sentimentality, and in sonorous platitudes'. The solution Pacificus proposed, was 'a constitutional conference – with a closed door'.⁵¹

The conference ran from June to November 1910 with some 20 meetings. Delegates were drawn from the Liberal and the Unionist parties, from the Lords and the Commons, but not from the Irish Nationalists or the Labour groups. On the Liberal side were Herbert Asquith, David Lloyd George, Lord Crewe (leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords) and Augustine Birrell (Chief Secretary for Ireland). On the Unionist side were Arthur Balfour, Austin Chamberlain, Lord Lansdowne and Lord Cawdor.

The conference sought agreement on the ways in which both Houses could work together. During the conference, Liberals and Unionists held discussions about the possibility of forming a coalition government, although the Unionists ultimately rejected the suggestion. The Unionists proposed categorising bills into three types: Ordinary (non-money) Bills, Money Bills; and Constitutional or Organic Bills. There was some agreement between the Liberals and Unionists that Finance Bills were to be the sole province of the Commons and that the Lords would lose the right to amend or reject Money Bills. However, the Unionists insisted that budget measures should not go beyond raising revenue; that is, other non-financial measures should not be 'tacked' onto budgets. This was unacceptable to the Liberals since it would mean that every budget would have to be solely concerned with raising revenue, thus removing the use of future budgets as instruments for social change. Differences over ordinary legislation – that is, bills other than Money Bills – could be resolved using something akin to the Ripon Plan,⁵² i.e. meeting in joint session, although the mechanism for arriving at the

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² In 1907 a cabinet committee chaired by Lord Ripon recommended that dispute resolution between Lords and Commons should be in the form of a joint conference and not a suspensory veto. Asquith rejected the recommendation and opted for adoption of the suspensory veto. See:

number of Lords allowed to sit in a joint session was not agreed on.

The most controversial type of bill was the Constitutional or Organic Bill. The Liberals refused the Unionists' demand that bills categorised as constitutional or organic legislation should be subject to a referendum. Whilst accepting that a small number of bills might be excluded from the provision of the Parliament Bill, the Liberals refused to countenance that an Irish Home Rule bill might be one of those 'excluded bills'. Irish Home Rule was the particular organic⁵³ issue the Unionists were insistent on adding to the 'excluded list' of bills.

The lack of any kind of inbuilt restriction on the altering of the constitutional basis of the nation led the Unionists to propose the referendum mechanism be employed. The mechanism proposed would be triggered as follows: 'if a bill affecting a change in the constitution was twice rejected by the House of Lords, it should be referred to the electorate and proceeded with only if approved by a majority of electorate voting'.⁵⁴ The delegates split over the proposal with the majority opposing it, and so it was rejected. Ultimately, in November 1910 the conference ended in failure, at which point hostilities between the Liberals and the Unionists resumed.

4.2.9 The House of Lords Puts Down a Marker

The breakdown of the Constitutional Conference in November 1910 saw not just a renewal of hostilities between the major parties but rather an intensification. The prospect of an election drove the Unionists to the realisation that they needed to crystallise their opposition to the Liberals' Parliament Bill with an alternative policy of their own that they could campaign on in the forthcoming election.

In early November, the Lords adopted a series of resolutions moved by Lord Rosebery, the former Liberal leader, for Lords reform. Lord Rosebery proposed that in future the House of Lords should be comprised of a mixture of hereditary members, members

V Bogdanor, 'The Liberal Party and the Constitution' [2007] (54) *Journal of Liberal History* 46 (<http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/journal-articles/the-liberal-party-and-the-constitution/>), 48.

⁵³ Fundamental to the constitution

⁵⁴ C Comstock Weston, *Peers, Politics and Power: The House of Lords, 1603-1911* (C Jones and DL Jones eds, Hambledon Press 1986) 506.

nominated by the Crown, members who formerly occupied a public office and members who were to be elected directly or indirectly.⁵⁵ Lord Crewe rebutted the premise of the resolutions. The first resolution was that the peers should be chosen from among hereditary peers. Lord Crewe commented that the country and ‘conservative elements’ might prefer an all-elected second chamber that was not ‘weakened by the infusion of a strong hereditary element’.⁵⁶ The second resolution, concerning the adoption of qualification criteria for selecting the Lords, was unclear, and Lord Crewe predicted that the House might end up full of ‘retired Admirals, Generals, and Ambassadors’.⁵⁷ The final resolution was that some Lords should be chosen from outside. Crewe rejected this idea especially if they were elected. Finally, even if the resolutions did ultimately form a bill that was passed, they still did not address the issue of the relations between the Commons and Lords, meaning that the issue would not be over. And whilst complaints had been made that the Parliament Bill was concerned with ‘a question of deadlock and difference’, Lord Crewe stated that ‘I am bound to point out that the question of deadlock and difference has never before earned the slightest notice of your Lordships’ House’.⁵⁸

On 16 November, Lord Lansdowne put forward a motion calling for the government to submit forthwith the Parliament Bill for the consideration of the House of Lords.⁵⁹ This request was agreed to by Lord Carew, acting for the government, who said that whilst no amendments would be allowed he would accept Lord Lansdowne’s request and would move the first reading of the Parliament Bill in the Lords that very same day. This would allow the second reading discussion to occur as quickly as possible. The second reading was scheduled to be heard on 23 November. However, before the second reading could be held, Asquith announced in the House of Commons on 18 November that the King had been advised and had agreed to dissolve Parliament and

⁵⁵ HL Deb 17 November 1910, col 714.

⁵⁶ HL Deb 16 November 1910, vol 31, col 752.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ A fundamental disagreement between the Houses stopping the law making process HL Deb 17 November 1910, col 754.

⁵⁹ HL Deb 16 November 1910, vol 31, col 684.

that this would occur on 28 November.

During the second reading debate on Monday 21 November, Lord Lansdowne moved a motion that the debate be adjourned until the following Wednesday, at which point he would bring forward his own plan for reform of the House of Lords. The reading was duly adjourned. Three days later, Lord Lansdowne presented his three resolutions to the House.⁶⁰ The first resolution stated that the House was of the opinion that a method should be arrived at for the settling of differences between the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Building upon Lord Rosebery's prior resolutions, Lord Lansdowne advocated a smaller House of Lords as part of the Lords' reform process. The second resolution called for disputes over bills other than Money Bills to be resolved by a joint sitting of members of both Houses. However, should a matter of dispute be of great gravity and had it not already been submitted to the judgement of the people by way of election, it should be submitted for a decision to the electors by referendum. Finally, the Lords would be willing to forego their (claimed) constitutional right to reject or end Money Bills as long as effective provisions were made against 'tacking'.⁶¹

According to Lord Lansdowne, the determination of whether an issue was one of 'great gravity' should be left to a parliamentary tribunal, which would decide on whether an issue should be put to a referendum:

If this procedure by referendum were to be introduced, I should hope to see it introduced not only for the sake of settling differences between the two Houses of Parliament, but also for the purpose of affording, if need be, a check upon legislation even when both houses are agreed.⁶²

The House did not divide on the resolutions.

The resolutions, acknowledged Lord Lansdowne, 'are offered by us as the best substitute which we can provide for the scheme embodied in the Government Bill. They are obviously in the nature of an outline'.⁶³ He anticipated that the opposition would call

⁶⁰ HL Deb 24 November 1910, vol 6, col 838.

⁶¹ The inclusion of non-financial measures in a budget bill

⁶² HL Deb 23 November 1910, col 844.

⁶³ HL Deb 23 November 1910, col 839.

the proposal vague, but pointed out that the House of Lords had been prevented from 'dealing with the Parliament Bill by way of Amendment'.⁶⁴ Lord Rosebery proposed that both his resolutions, accepted the previous week, and Lord Lansdowne's resolutions should be communicated to the House of Commons. His motion was accepted and the order made.

4.2.10 Unionist Party Conference: November 1910

Just prior to the House of Lords' acceptance of Lord Lansdowne's resolutions, the Party held a conference in Nottingham at which Balfour set out the Unionist Party's policies for the forthcoming general election. Among the several policy areas covered during his speech, including tariff reform, agriculture and the Royal Navy, was the Party's policy with regard to House of Lords reform. The Unionists, declared Balfour, believed that a second chamber was necessary, that it should be 'real and not a sham second chamber' and that it should have the role of moderating the first chamber. The House of Commons should remain 'the dominant element'. That the House of Lords needed reform was accepted by the majority of Unionists. The Unionist policy would see a House of Lords that was smaller in terms of membership, and which was comprised of a mixture of peers who were hereditary, peers who were official or qualified by public service and, finally, peers who were elected or chosen.

Perhaps most significantly, Balfour reminded the audience that the House of Lords had under Lord Rosebery's guidance 'accepted the principle that no man, merely because he is a hereditary peer, should have a right to a legislative seat in that Assembly' reiterating 'that is a declaration of opinion which is on record'.⁶⁵

Whilst the extent to which the Lords and the Commons became deadlocked had, Balfour said, 'been grossly exaggerated'⁶⁶ by the opposition, it was true that from time to time both Houses did become deadlocked and a mechanism was required to rem-

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ A Balfour, 'Leader's Speech, Nottingham 1910' (17 November 1910) (<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=78>) accessed 17 October 2016, 5.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

edy that situation. In the first instance, deadlocks should be remedied by a joint sitting of the Commons and a number of members of the House of Lords. There were some issues of sufficient importance on which the two Chambers might dissent, at which point 'there is but one arbiter'.⁶⁷ To loud cheers, Balfour declared that 'The arbiter is the people of the country'.⁶⁸

An evidence of the acceptance by the Unionists of a referendum as a political process to be used, or at least the public utterance of its acceptance, occurred when Balfour himself, as previously mentioned, publicly offered, during a speech at the Albert Hall later in November 1910, to submit Unionist tariff reform proposals to the judgement of the people using the process of a referendum.

Whilst accepting the need for Lords reform, Balfour stated that any changes to this system should be made by modifying the existing second chamber, rather than by replacing it with a completely new chamber, cautioning that the nation 'should graft your reform upon the second chamber which has been handed down to you from immemorial times. That is the way a great and continuous constitution is built up. We have never, and it is our glory, broken with the past. We are built on the past.'⁶⁹

4.2.11 Liberal Party Conference: November 1910

The response to Balfour and Lansdowne came on 26 November when Asquith addressed a Liberal conference at Hull in which he set out Liberal policy for the forthcoming election. In terms of Unionist policy for House of Lords reform, Asquith wondered what the new second chamber was to be. It was, the Unionists said, to be composed of three classes of Lords – but how many were there to be of each class and how many in total? With a House of Lords comprising a ratio of Unionists to Liberal peers of approximately twelve to one, and with an actual voting ratio of approximately five or six to one, did 'any rational man doubt', asked Asquith, 'that, on the basis of this scheme, according to the views of a Tory House of Commons and House of Lords, you will have

⁶⁷ Balfour, 'Leader's Speech, Nottingham 1910' (n 65).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

a second chamber which will be overwhelmingly and primarily Conservative?⁷⁰

Whilst he would not brush aside the usage of joint sessions as a possible way of sorting out deadlock between the Commons and the Lords, it was not clear under what conditions the joint session would take place or what the proportionality of the joint session would be. Until these questions were answered, the concept of a joint session 'from our point of view is wholly meaningless';⁷¹ in fact, it was nothing more than an invitation to 'substitute one set of shackles for another'.⁷²

As for the use of a referendum to settle constitutional deadlock, the Liberal leader objected on a number of grounds. Matters of 'great gravity' would be decided by referendum. The obvious questions were what was meant by a matter of 'great gravity', who would decide on the threshold for an issue being subjected to a referendum. While, Asquith imagined that Irish Home Rule would come under the heading of a matter of 'great gravity', would disestablishment or tariff reform?

Whilst conceding that there may be some extreme cases in which use of a referendum might be justified, Asquith evinced surprise at the Unionist Party's rapid adoption of the referendum. After all, he said, 'Here we have the Conservatives, the Unionists, the constitutional party advocating the device that has been adopted with disappointing results in some of the modern states of the world becoming part of the British constitution'.⁷³

As well as general concerns over the adoption of the referendum into the British constitutional system, Asquith identified three particular disadvantageous outcomes of its adoption. First, if adopted, it would grant to the Lords by statute a power they already claimed and that the Liberal Party disputed: in effect, the power to compel a popular government to dissolve and hold a new general election. For if a popular government were to lose a referendum on a matter of 'grave gravity', how could they survive in office – the answer was that they could not and would be forced to either dissolve or

⁷⁰ HH Asquith, 'Leader's Speech Hull 1910' (25 November 1910) (<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=15>) accessed 16 November 2016, 2.

⁷¹ *ibid* 4.

⁷² *ibid*.

⁷³ *ibid*.

resign. Second, the adoption of a referendum process would seriously impair, if not 'entirely destroy', parliamentary responsibility. MPs would no longer feel compelled to vote responsibly because they could take the view that, in fact, no matter which way they voted, the referendum would have the final say. Its introduction would have the effect of 'sterilising the sense of responsibility which is the very soul of parliamentary government'.⁷⁴ Finally, using a referendum would have the effect of 'destroying the principle of government by representation, which is the great invention of the modern world'.⁷⁵

Asquith, like Balfour, made an appeal beyond the auditorium to the country. He urged voters to disregard the Tory Party's new-found interest in the 'newfangled discovery' of the referendum - a conversion that had occurred with surprising rapidity, and which was 'surely one of the most remarkable and one of the most rapid instances of conversion in the whole of political history'.⁷⁶ He spoke to all democrats and implored them in, 'the interests of those larger and more permanent concerns which are the common property of us all', to think carefully before 'they strike a deadly blow at the very foundation of representative government in this country'.⁷⁷

4.2.12 Arthur Balfour's Pledge

Arthur Balfour's public declaration, before 10,000 Unionists in the Albert Hall, that he would 'have not the least objections of submitting the principle of tariff reform to a referendum' was a significant event. *The Times* wrote that Balfour's declaration was 'wildly popular' among Unionist supporters whilst causing 'ludicrous perturbation in the radical camp'.⁷⁸ Its popularity was, remarked *The Times*, due to the fact that its adoption would allow the voters to escape the 'degrading thralldom and dangers into which the abuse of the party system had gradually brought our politics'.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Asquith, 'Leader's Speech Hull 1910' (n 70) 4.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Editorial, 'The Country and The Referendum' *The Times* (London, 1 December 1910) 11.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

The Times supported the use of a referendum because it considered the political device to be a way of lifting decision-making out of party political sectional interests and the accompanying excessive politicking. Its adoption 'would checkmate the log-rolling system of government'.⁸⁰ Its use would also prevent important policy measures being hidden among the multitude of policy items that often accompanied a general election. Comparing the approach of the Unionist and the Liberal parties, *The Times* considered that the Unionists would never hide contentious or important policy matters in a general election, unlike the Liberal Party, which probably would. So, in the case of tariff reform, whereas the Unionists would expose it to the electorate by way of referendum, the suggestion was that the Liberals might well deal with something like tariff reform by 'hiding it as a financial measure'.⁸¹

For the *Manchester Guardian*, Balfour's statement was clearly 'a personal expression of opinion' as well as being 'an extremely vague expression'⁸² and one that was clearly binding Arthur Balfour to something; the question, however, was what exactly he was being bound to. The question would 'puzzle the wit of a man to say with precision and authority'.⁸³

The strong pro-free-trade sentiment existing in the North West of the country meant that, perhaps not surprisingly, the *Manchester Guardian* spent some time considering what the term 'tariff reform principles' actually meant. Politicians had, it was alleged, offered changing and contradictory interpretations, the interpretation depending on the audience and even the time at which it was given. '[Is] it retaliation? Is it colonial preference? Does it imply taxation of food or all materials and of all materials however defined? Is it intended to foster home industries or terminate the Empire?'⁸⁴ asked one editorial. The answer, it concluded, was that it was impossible to come up with a definition that would make sense to every voter such that 'out of 50 possible definitions

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² George Hamilton, 'Tariff Reform and the Referendum' *The Times* (London, 2 January 1911) 12.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

perhaps any one would serve as well as any other'.⁸⁵

Not only was the term 'tariff reform' ill-defined, but the *Manchester Guardian* highlighted a key weakness in using a referendum and the potential threat posed to the constitutional system. For if a question was put that was not absolutely clear, the risk was that people might vote without really understanding what they were voting for. The outcome of this would, especially if they voted for tariff reform, have a significant adverse impact on the economic system. The editorial was confident that a referendum on tariff reform would never happen whilst the referendum remained a purely abstract concept that rendered it 'unreal and unworkable'.⁸⁶ Furthermore, even if a bill was forthcoming, once the people saw the proposals in the cold light of day they would vote it down.

4.2.13 *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian's* View of the Referendum

The *Manchester Guardian* did not oppose the use of the referendum per se; indeed, it acknowledged its use in resolving potential conflicts between the House of Lords and the House of Commons. However, it did not consider that the referendum could be used in the extant configuration of the House of Lords; instead, 'in order that it may work fairly as between parties and efficiently for the nation it must be applied to a non-bipartisan assembly by one whose fairness and suitability is guaranteed by its popular character'.⁸⁷ To work efficiently and effectively, the referendum would have to be used by a popularly elected Lords or second chamber with its 'special and supreme function which should predetermine what questions ought and what ought not to be submitted to the final arbitrement of the whole body of the nation'.⁸⁸

Whilst there was support for the use of a referendum in the right circumstances, the circumstances were certainly not right currently. Balfour's rhetoric regarding the referendum was stated by the *Manchester Guardian* to be 'unreal and unworkable',⁸⁹ since the language used was purely abstract. The novelty of the concept, and its entry into

⁸⁵ Hamilton, 'Tariff Reform and the Referendum' (n 82).

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

the popular political milieu literally in the preceding few days led the *Manchester Guardian* to state that 'We utterly disbelieve that it will ever come into existence here. The whole subject of the referendum is so new and so imperfectly understood by the mass even of the well-informed, that people may easily be misled'.⁹⁰

Extending the argument, the referendum had definite application to the issue of House of Lords reform, argued *The Times*. It stated its stance with regard to Lords reform and the use of a referendum plainly in an editorial published on 2 December 1910. 'We broadly know what we want',⁹¹ the newspaper declared. First, a second chamber that was both greatly reduced in numbers but equally fair to both major parties; second, a means of escaping a deadlock situation that occurred when the Lords and Commons differed over matters of legislation; and, finally, a means of securing the country from violent changes, changes which the country did not really want, in the judgement of *The Times*. The first two desires could be met by the adoption of Lord Balfour and Lord Lansdowne's proposals and the third could be met by adoption of the referendum.

4.2.14 Avoiding a Revolution

The *Manchester Guardian* questioned the motives for the seemingly eleventh-hour adoption of the referendum principle. The supposed pledge was in fact, it argued, a 'dodge', a plan hatched by some senior Unionists to win over the free-trade north of the country. The plan was unpopular with large numbers of both Liberals and Unionist free traders. It was a trick that had been 'probably repudiated and disowned as a disreputable dodge by the organ of the Conservative forwards'.⁹² In a later editorial, the *Manchester Guardian* stated that, in fact, the tariff form pledge was an attempt to win over the Manchester electorate. Only 'four days before the general election', Balfour had 'reshaped his whole policy' and resorted to what the *Morning Post* professed to be a 'dodge to sweep Lancashire'.⁹³

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Editorial, 'The Popular Policy' *The Times* (London, 2 December 1910) 11, 11.

⁹² Editorial, 'The White Flag Party' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 2 December 1910) 8.

⁹³ Editorial, 'Lord Curzon on the Referendum' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 3 December 1910) 10.

The country faced a potential crisis in that the return of a Unionist government and the adoption of the Lords reform proposals put forward by Lord Rosebery and Lord Lansdowne, coupled with the adoption of a referendum, would leave the House of Lords 'so fortified as to be almost unassailable'.⁹⁴ Under the Rosebery–Lansdowne plan, the

Lords will be reconstructed, still on a solid basis of heredity, with the huge Tory and protectionist majority guaranteed, the King stripped of his corrective power, and with the financial power formally showing in the Commons but in practice assured to the permanent and more one-party house.⁹⁵

The *Manchester Guardian* cautioned that the House of Lords would remain 'sovereign and uncontrolled, with power to abolish the Crown or the franchise, set up and pull down ministries, and to tax us all as it pleased'⁹⁶. These were not, it warned, some spurious warnings but rather the projected outcome of 'sober and thoughtful interpretation' which was undertaken by 'high authorities on the law of the constitution'.⁹⁷

4.3 Conclusion

Although used in Europe and beyond, the referendum had not been employed in the United Kingdom before 1911. An attempt had been made by a temperance organisation to use the referendum in the 1850s, to enable residents to gain control over the granting of liquor licences. The failure to get a referendum accepted in this instance was, it has been suggested, more about the strength of the brewers and distillers and less about innate hostility to the referendum concept. The noted Liberal Unionist lawyer and academic Professor A.V. Dicey strongly advocated the use of the referendum. He saw the adoption of referendums as offering a mechanism for limiting the power of governments to change the fundamental constitutional basis of the United Kingdom.

The adoption of the controversial tariff reform policy agenda by the Conservative Party and Balfour's promise to put the policy before the country by way of a referendum is

⁹⁴ Editorial, 'Lord Curzon on the Referendum' (n 93).

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

a significant milestone in the progress of the adoption of the referendum model. The national leader had publicly affirmed his faith in the referendum model and his willingness to use it on a national issue. The Conservatives' adoption of a referendum was predicated on its usage in matters of 'great gravity'. It remained for the Liberals to ask what criteria or threshold had to be reached for an issue to constitute a matter of 'great gravity' and, as importantly, could or would the Liberals accept that Irish Home Rule was a matter of 'great gravity'? Once the Conservatives had signalled their willingness to use the referendum on a matter of national importance, the obvious extension to acceptance was to consider its use for reforming the House of Lords. It is difficult to imagine any subject being of greater gravity.

Many Liberals and Unionist tariff reformers saw the public affirmation of the referendum principle as little more than a ruse or dodge employed for political expediency to appeal to the tariff reform element in the North West of the country. The key issue with a referendum is its binary nature: the voter is asked to vote yes or no to a question. If Asquith had accepted the challenge of putting Irish Home Rule to the vote, he would have been faced with asking a question the answer to which he could not be certain of. Did people in the United Kingdom want to give Home Rule to Ireland?

Chapter 5

Editorial Coverage of the Referendum

5.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the editorial coverage of the referendum issue by *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* between December 1910 and August 1911. The December 1910 election is considered. A chronology of the significant events on the way to the passage of the Parliament Bill as they relate to the referendum is presented. The failed attempt at the House of Commons report stage to include the use of a referendum in the ambit of the Parliament Bill is examined. Lord Balfour's Reference to the People Bill is considered, as is Lord Lansdowne's Reconstitution of the Lords Bill. The chapter closes by considering the passage of the modified Parliament Bill back to the House of Commons.

5.2 December 1910 General Election

5.2.1 Early Days of the Election

Three days into the election, a *Manchester Guardian's* editorial announced that the Unionists would not be getting a majority: 'the country will give the deepest breath of relief this morning at learning that the House of Lords majority in the House of Commons is now out of the question'.¹ Why had the promised Unionist resurgence not occurred? To answer the question, the *Manchester Guardian* cited the pro-Unionist *Morning Post* newspaper, which had described Balfour's adoption of the referendum as 'indefensible, extraordinary and suicidal'. The *Morning Post* continued by declaring

¹ Editorial, 'A Fine Beginning' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 5 December 1910) 8.

that the setting 'of the snare has done more harm than good, but it must be abandoned and treated as if it had never been tried, and the old-fashioned procedure with plain firearms must be resumed'.²

Nevertheless, the *Manchester Guardian* issued a warning that so early in the election there must be no let-up by the free-trader or Liberal voter; rather, 'they must only add to the vigour of their resistance to food taxes and absolute House of Lords rule a new energy of just indignation at the deceit attempted against them'.³

5.2.2 A New Kind of Politics

For *The Times*, the Liberal Party and its proposed Parliament Bill was a revolutionary measure and not the adoption of a referendal process. Recent years had seen, argued *The Times*, the growing influence of the party in politics and, more recently, increasing amounts of power resting with the Cabinet. The people needed to be saved from the situation they found themselves in, and their salvation would come at the hands of the Unionists by the adoption of the referendum principle into British political life. 'The referendum, which withdraws authority from a party to give it direct to the electorate, is a step in the direction of democratic enlightenment'.⁴ The Liberal Party, it was argued, had, since their election in 1906, led the country awry. The driving spirit that animated the Liberal Government would surely 'lead to tyranny and oppression by force'.⁵ It was vital that any settlement over constitutional change be by consent, for, Lord Rosebery warned, a forced settlement would lead to 'Civil War' if the Liberals were allowed to extend their period in office.⁶

It was now a time for a new sort of politics and a move away from the traditional Unionist-versus-Liberal political dynamic. With the adoption of the referendum, the Unionists, opined *The Times*, offered the chance of making the change. It urged that in the forthcoming general election, all 'sober-minded people capable of thinking for

² Editorial, 'The Coming Victory' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 6 December 1910) 8.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Editorial, 'The Greater Maturity' *The Times* (London, 3 December 1910) 13.

⁵ Editorial, 'Saturdays Political Speeches' *The Times* (London, 5 December 1910) 13.

⁶ *ibid.*

themselves'⁷ should vote for the Unionists and encourage others to do the same.

5.2.3 The Election Results

With the bulk of the results returned, but before the end of the election, the *Manchester Guardian* accused the Unionists of being 'bad losers' since they had, it was alleged, begun to complain about the election result. They reported that Arthur Balfour had said of the current results that 'people should not for one moment think this is going to be the end of the matter'.⁸ In the same editorial, the *Manchester Guardian* argued that the Unionists should in fact be happy with the result. After all, the election had been about a single issue, the Parliament Bill, and the results reflected what the Unionists had long argued for: the people gave a clear verdict 'upon a special political question - that of the Parliament Bill'.⁹ It almost amounted to a referendum on the subject of the Parliament Bill.

The outcome of the election was, in the event, not what either of the major parties had hoped and worked for. Despite polling about 120,000 more votes than the Liberals, the Unionists and Liberal Unionists ended up with one seat fewer, with the Liberals having 272 MPs and the Unionists 271 MPs. However, once the IPP and the Labour Party seats were added to the Liberal total, the Liberals had a composite majority of 122 seats.

The Times reacted to the election results with dismay, arguing that the closeness of the election and the composite majority enjoyed by the Liberals could not be considered to offer a mandate for the major constitutional changes that were to happen once the Parliament Bill was passed. Since the electoral system had failed to 'give the majority of votes in the House of Commons to the party that has the majority of votes from the country, it follows that the House of Commons does not represent the country in the absolute and authoritative manner assumed by Liberal orators'.¹⁰

⁷ Editorial, 'The Greater Maturity' (n 4).

⁸ Editorial, 'Bad Losers' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 14 December 1910) 6.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Editorial, 'The Electoral Situation' *The Times* (London, 12 December 1910) 11.

5.2.4 The Election Postmortem

Once the election was over, the Unionist press held a 'postmortem' on the results of the third consecutive general election the Unionists had lost. As often happens following unsuccessful election campaigns, calls are made for leadership changes. The united front that the Unionists had displayed during the election began to crack following the election results. The *National Review* called for Arthur Balfour's retirement from the leadership role.¹¹ The *Manchester Guardian* reported on the debate over the nature and wisdom of Balfour's declaration of support for the concept of a referendum.

However, not all Unionist newspapers wanted rid of Balfour; the *Daily Telegraph* had called attacks on Balfour's leadership 'fanatical and infantile'.¹² The results had, reported the *Manchester Guardian*, exercised Unionist newspapers to the point that they were so busy 'fighting each other that they had almost stopped hitting at the government'.¹³ Nevertheless, the Unionist-supporting *Morning Post* was cited by the *Manchester Guardian* as arguing that it was no longer possible or desirable to ignore the gravity of the situation into which the Unionist Party has drifted during the past fortnight.¹⁴

The *Manchester Guardian's* analysis of the reason for the Unionists' relatively disappointing showing in the election was their adherence to the policy of tariff reform. However ideologically attractive to a large part of the Unionist Party 'stomach-taxes', as the free-trade lobby characterised tariff reform, were, they were never going to be popular with the majority of the electorate, especially the poor, and even more especially in the free-trade heartlands of the industrial North. The tariff reform argument, sometimes depicted by the pro-free-trade lobby using the 'big loaf, little loaf' idea, was always going to be difficult to sell to the masses.

In the opinion of the staunchly Unionist *Morning Post*, the Unionists would have no

¹¹ Editorial, 'The Opposition's Troubles' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 7 January 1911) 8.

¹² Quoted in *ibid.*

¹³ Editorial, 'The Conservative Quarrel about the "Dodge"' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 16 December 1910) 6.

¹⁴ Editorial, 'Is The Opposition Breaking Up?' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 15 January 1911) 8.

option but to retrace their steps away from the tariff reform policy and abandon it. It took 'for granted that Mr Balfour's pledge is to be repudiated, as well as any notion of any referendum on budgets'.¹⁵ It would also be necessary 'to reassure the moderate men that have been frightened by the spectacle of the Unionist Party proposing practically to scrap the old system of government so as to pacify tariff reformers'.¹⁶

Part of the problem, argued the *Manchester Guardian*, was that Balfour, who was, as previously mentioned, not by any means a tariff reform advocate, had, from the policy's inception, in an effort to please all sides, varied his position with regard to the question of free trade versus tariff reform, finally plumping for supporting tariff reform in the speech.¹⁷ The problem for the Unionists, judged the *Manchester Guardian*, was that the tariff reform referendum promise was not serious and Balfour was 'not even coherent'.¹⁸

The real issue of the election was the Parliament Bill, in the *Manchester Guardian's* view, unlike in the previous election, in January 1910, where the House of Lords' veto, the budget and tariff reform were three clear issues. December's election was dominated by the House of Lords question. The people had spoken. The electorate had chosen the Parliament Bill and rejected the Rosebery–Lansdowne resolutions – but tariff reform was a significant issue contributing to the voters' decision.¹⁹

The Times saw things differently: Liberals had rejected the policy of using a referendum even though they had not rejected the concept out of hand. They had for the duration of the election argued fiercely against the adoption of a referendum as a principle for the election. Why would the Liberals reject that most liberal of political principles of letting the people decide an issue? *The Times* argued that this was because the 'referendum would be fatal to their great projects for instance Home Rule and other significant similar changes',²⁰ which would not be carried out unless a real majority of

¹⁵ Editorial, 'The Government and Home Rule' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 16 February 1911) 6.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Editorial, 'The Opposition's Troubles' (n 11).

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Editorial, 'The Opening of Parliament' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 7 February 1911) 8.

²⁰ Editorial, 'The Popular Policy' *The Times* (London, 2 December 1910) 11.

voters wanted it, and in the case of Irish Home Rule they certainly would not want it. Liberal hostility to the referendum principle was perfectly understandable, argued *The Times*, since it '[W]ould break the party system on which they depend; and give the people the opportunity of deciding important issues which the radicals wish to keep in their own hands when once they have been elected, maybe on entirely different issues.'²¹

The Liberals, concluded *The Times*, hated 'the thought that either the Crown or the people should have any power to check or control them in the game they play against the nation's expense'.²²

5.3 Parliament Bill 1911 Chronology

The Parliament Bill 1911 was reintroduced to the House of Commons in the same form as it had been in the previous April. It received its first reading on 21 and 22 February, when it passed by 351–227 votes. It underwent its second reading debate between 27 February and 2 March, when it passed by 366–243 votes before being sent to the committee stage. The bill passed the committee stage, following 15 days of debate, on 10 May by 295–190 votes. The report stage was passed on 15 May 1911 by 362–231 votes and it passed its third reading on May 15 by 362–231 votes.

On 25 July 1911, an attempt by Asquith to discuss the Lords' amendments to the Bill had to be abandoned, as he was unable to make himself heard in the House when subjected to a barrage of shouts and catcalls for 25 minutes. In almost unprecedented scenes, with yells of 'traitor' and worse, the sitting was abandoned by the Speaker under Standing Order 21.²³ The debate in the Commons was resumed on 8 August when the Commons received the substantially amended bill from the Lords. They rejected the bulk of the Lords' amendments and on a test division the bill passed by 321–215 votes in support of the government rejection of the Lords' amendments. The bill was sent back to the House of Lords.

²¹ Editorial, 'The Popular Policy' (n 20).

²² Editorial, 'The Opening of the Battle' *The Times* (London, 2 December 1910) 11.

²³ Standing Order 21: Speaker adjourns the sitting due to 'grave disorder' persisting in the House.

The Parliament Bill received its first reading in the Lords on 16 May, followed by its second reading between 23 and 29 May. The second reading was passed without division. The bill was in committee in the House of Lords between 28 June and 6 July, at which point key amendments were inserted. A test vote was held and the government lost by 253–46 votes. Further amendments were added whilst the bill was on report on the 13 July and the bill was read without division. The bill's third reading took place without division on 20 July, at which point it was returned to the Commons. After due consideration, the Commons accepted some but rejected the majority of amendments to the bill. The government, at the request of the King, gave the Lords a final opportunity to accept the Bill or face the 'flooding' of the House of Lords with Liberal peers. The Lords received the modified bill from the Commons the next day.

During the debate on the bill, Viscount Morley speaking for the government addressed the Lords thus:

If the Bill should be defeated tonight His Majesty would assent to a creation of Peers sufficient in number to guard against any possible combination of the different parties in opposition by which the Parliament Bill might again be exposed a second time to defeat²⁴

He continued that their Lordships' should be in no doubt of the seriousness of the government in their intention to pass the bill. He cautioned, the threat of the creation of a large number of peers to flood the House of Lords was not an empty promise 'merely made in order to inspire your Lordships with fear'.²⁵ as some Lords seemed to think.

Following further debate the Lords accepted a motion that they would not insist on their amendments being accepted, by a vote of 131–114,²⁶ on the 8 August 1911. The bill once passed, received Royal Assent and became the Parliament Act 1911 on 18 August 1911.

²⁴ HL Deb 10 August 1911, vol 9, col 998.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ HL Deb 10 August 1911, vol 9, col 1075.

5.3.1 George Cave's Amendment

At the Parliament Bill's report stage, the House of Commons rejected an amendment moved by George Cave, Unionist MP and, later, Lord Chancellor, during the committee stage, for a referendum to be required before the Parliament Bill was applied to a number of constitutional subjects, including any legislation that 'affects the constitution or powers of either House of Parliament or the relations of the two Houses one to the other'.²⁷

He proposed that words should be inserted into Clause 2 of the Parliament Bill dealing with bills other than Money Bills such that if a bill should be rejected three times by the House of Lords it could, under an order in Council, be submitted to 'a poll of electors' for a decision. If the electors agreed with the bill, it should be passed. Cave proposed that electors would be given a straightforward question requiring a 'Yes' or 'No' answer.²⁸

The general election had been rushed, argued *The Times*, and, given this, the result did not necessarily represent the 'true feeling of the country'.²⁹ In what might be described as an autocratic stance, *The Times* opined that the public would have to make a decision, something that they were quite competent to do 'provided that the argument was adequately placed before them and sufficient time was given for calm consideration'.³⁰ The Times considered it important that, having lost the election, the Unionist Party now work much harder. As the Parliament Bill entered the committee stage in the Commons, it was important that the Unionists were absolutely clear in explaining to the people its impact on the constitution. The Unionist amendments to the bill ran to nearly 30 pages, of which roughly half were aimed at Clause 1, with the rest aimed at Clause 2. In the event, the Commons rejected George Cave's amendment regarding the implementation of a referendum procedure for dealing with a deadlock between the Lords and the Commons.

²⁷ HC Deb 8 May 1911, vol 22, col 915.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Editorial, 'Upon The Bill on the Situation' *The Times* (London, 27 April 1911) 9.

³⁰ *ibid.*

5.4 Lord Balfour's Reference to the People Bill

Lord Balfour brought forward his Reference to the People Bill on 2 March 1911. Lord Balfour's bill provided that any bill passed by the Commons and rejected by the Lords, or amended in such a way by the Lords as to be unacceptable to the Commons, might at the request of either House be submitted to a poll of the electorate. Further, even if the two Houses did agree on an issue, a petition of 200 MPs could get a matter put to a referendum. The measure was applicable to all bills including Finance Bills. Lord Lansdowne supported the bill but argued that it should not be proceeded with until such time as his Reconstitution of the Lords Bill and the Parliament Bill were actually before the House of Lords. Lord Balfour's bill did receive a second reading on 28 March 1911 but no vote was taken and it ultimately came to nothing as it was adjourned indefinitely, or 'sine die'.

On the same day that the Commons voted on the second reading of the Parliament Bill, Lord Balfour introduced his Reference to the People Bill into the House of Lords. *The Times* found common cause with Lord Hugh Cecil, who remarked in a debate that a referendum would allow in a 'quiet and simple manner what the government actually propose to do by two years of heated discussion throughout the country'.³¹ The referendum would allow the Houses to 'perform their proper duty thrashing out the subject to its last details' before the country decided whether it liked or disliked the proposed measure, whereas the government's proposals would lead to 'inconsistent contests between the two houses' before finally being turned over in a crude condition to the country in the shape of a general election.

In a series of editorials, *The Times* came out strongly in support of Lord Balfour's Reference to the People Bill. An unwritten constitution such as Great Britain's definitely did not need a referendum until such time as a 'crisis which involves the destruction of traditional checks upon meddling with the basis of our polity',³² *The Times* concluded. A referendum should only be employed in the gravest situations and now, with the

³¹ Editorial, 'The Constitutional Struggle' *The Times* (London, 3 March 1911) 9.

³² Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill and the Situation' *The Times* (London, 27 April 1911) 9.

impending Parliament Bill, there was just such a grave situation. A referendum was the only solution to replace the constitutional check the Lords veto provided, 'which the Parliament Bill would abolish'.³³

The decision to employ a referendum should be taken as the final solution in a case of 'irreconcilable differences of opinion upon the question of capital importance when politicians tampered too much with the nation's permanent interests'.³⁴ *The Times* agreed with the Unionists in rejecting the Liberal doctrine that 'nothing is more organic or important than anything else, that any majority confident to pass a gas bill is equally confident to affect the dismemberment of the kingdom'.³⁵

The explanation for the government's contention that the referendum was for the most part unworkable and that it could not be confined to only really grave matters of public interest centred on the idea that the Liberals were being driven by the Irish Nationalist Party. A referendum would obstruct 'the disintegration of the United Kingdom aimed at by the Nationalist party, the Liberal leader', argued *The Times*, saw the 'referendum [as] a deadly blow at the foundations of his government'.³⁶

The Times doubted that the government had any real intention of reforming the House of Lords at all. Rather, the government's actions were purely partisan, with the 'aim of getting rid of a check upon their party schemes'.³⁷ The Liberal Government was being driven by Irish Parliamentary members into a position such that it would be able to pass a Home Rule bill in the absence of a second chamber or referendum or any 'other agency for giving the country a voice in the matter',³⁸ a voice that would undoubtedly reject any scheme of Irish Home Rule. The Liberal prime minister, Herbert Asquith, alleged *The Times*, was demonstrating a singular lack of grace by criticising opposition plans for reform whilst destroying what he held to be essential and having no reconstruction plans of his own. Indeed, in pursuing his partisan approach in the shape of

³³ Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill and the Situation' (n 32).

³⁴ Editorial, 'The Referendum and the Situation' *The Times* (London, 30 March 1911) 9.

³⁵ Editorial, 'Upon The Bill on the Situation' (n 29).

³⁶ Editorial, 'The Constitutional Struggle' (n 31).

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

the Parliament Bill, he was demonstrating a 'dereliction of public duty'.³⁹

The effect of Lord Balfour's bill, claimed *The Times*, was to crystallise for the Unionists the issues facing the country. The bill had been introduced, said Lord Balfour, with 'the object of showing that a referendum could be worked with an ease and simplicity which people do not recognise'.⁴⁰ He rejected the use of the 'somewhat barbarous title of the Referendum', preferring to 'Call it a reference to the people'.⁴¹ There was lot of confusion in what was essentially a simple process; he recounted that:

I was told the other day that a gentleman, who was probably more interested in agriculture than in politics, went to a meeting to hear about the Referendum, under the belief that it was a new kind of turnip that would take the prizes at local shows in the near future.⁴²

Speaking on behalf of Lord Lansdowne, Lord Selbourne said that, whilst 'pledging himself anyway to the details of Lord Balfour's Bill', nevertheless he supported 'the referendum in the plain sense of asking the people themselves to deal with a deadlock, which is the permanent contribution of the Opposition to the solution of the constitutional difficulty, and that from it they will not recede'.⁴³

Lord Balfour's Bill was to be seen as complementing the forthcoming House of Lords Reconstitution Bill promised by Lord Lansdowne. *The Times* had been informed by its parliamentary correspondence that the bills, when taken together, acted as 'a single, well-considered whole',⁴⁴ when in fact the proposals represented the views of the Unionist leadership.⁴⁵

The bill reached its second reading stage on 28 March 1911. For *The Times*, Lord Balfour's bill had done the country a service by bringing forward 'concrete proposals' that embodied 'the principle of enabling the people in the last resort to settle differences which otherwise constitute a deadlock of the constitutional machinery'.⁴⁶ It must be

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ HL Deb 22 February 1911, vol 7, col 255.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Editorial, 'The Constitutional Struggle' (n 31).

⁴⁴ Editorial, 'The Nationalists and the Crisis' *The Times* (London, 20 March 1911) 9.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Editorial, 'The Reference To The People Bill' *The Times* (London, 29 March 1911) 9.

borne in mind, *The Times* cautioned its readers, that the referendum was very much a last resort and that this fact had not been given sufficient emphasis during the bill's discussions.

The *Manchester Guardian* argued that the bill was politically explosive, contending that 'there was something of the tub of [gun]powder of the bill',⁴⁷ in that in abandoning the bill the Lords had decided to leave it lying where it was because it was 'equally unsafe to carry it any further or to take it back'.⁴⁸ The lack of enthusiasm for Lord Balfour's bill from his own side was in part, argued the *Manchester Guardian*, due to the fact that in extreme cases it might have 'interfered with the sacred institution of single chamber government under Conservative cabinets'.⁴⁹ There was also some concern in Unionist ranks, claimed the *Manchester Guardian*, that, however remote the possibility, it was conceivable that the Liberals might invoke a referendum in an attempt to derail Unionist legislation.

A key weakness of the bill from a Liberal perspective was that the referendum process could be triggered by the agreement of only 200 MPs. If the bill was passed, this meant that the Liberal Government was always vulnerable to Unionists triggering a referendum, and, alternatively, should Liberal MPs fall below 200 in number, they could never trigger a referendum. Lord Balfour's bill had pulled off a remarkable feat, claimed the *Manchester Guardian*, in that it was difficult to create a bill that posed as being democratic and yet steered clear of actually being democratic.⁵⁰

5.5 Lord Lansdowne's Lords Reconstitution Bill

Lord Lansdowne eventually introduced his Lords Reconstitution Bill into the Lords on 8 May 1911. The bill proposed to limit the Crown's prerogative to create peerages and the issuing of writs of summons. Since it dealt with the altering of prerogative powers,

⁴⁷ Editorial, 'The Lords' Latest Fiasco' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 31 March 1911) 6.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

the bill would require royal consent in order to proceed,⁵¹ which was granted. Lord Lansdowne argued that the government had dealt with the question of Lords reform and of settling differences between the two Houses separately, whereas the opposition felt that both issues should be dealt with at the same time.

Lords Lansdowne proposed that the new House would consist of approximately 350 members. The members of the new House were to be designated as 'Lords of Parliament': 100 Lords of Parliament would be elected by the hereditary peers from among their own number for a term of 12 years; 120 Lords of Parliament would be elected by colleges consisting of members of Parliament; and 100 Lords of Parliament would be appointed by the Crown from either the existing House of Commons or from outside, based on the proportion of parties in the House of Commons. In addition, 16 peers would be appointed who had held high judicial office, together with seven spiritual Lords. The creation of hereditary peers would be limited to no more than five per year, and those peers who were not Lords of Parliament would be eligible for election to the House of Commons. The bill completed its second reading on 22 May without a division; however, it disappeared when Lord Lansdowne was informed by Lord Morley that the Parliament Bill would go ahead regardless of any reforms initiated by the House of Lords.

5.5.1 The *Manchester Guardian's* view of the Lords Reconstitution Bill

With Lord Lansdowne's bill, the Unionists were, in the view of the *Manchester Guardian*, asking the government and the people to forget the result of the December 1910 general election – an election that had been fought on the Parliament Bill. The losers of the contest were asking the people to engage in discussions over some 'ingenious schemes; that whilst agreeable to themselves had in fact not been sanctioned by the

⁵¹ Consent which relates just to the royal prerogative is known as 'prerogative only consent'. The proposed limitation of the right of the King to create peers represented a change in prerogative power and therefore required the consent of the King. This is distinct from Royal Assent, given as part of the legislative process. Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, *Queens or Princes Consent* (Office of the Parliamentary Counsel 2015) (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/567407/queens__or_princes_consent_november_2016.pdf) accessed 22 November 2016, 2.

people, which, indeed, by implication they had repudiated'.⁵²

The Lords were pushing for acceptance of their reform proposals because it would be to their advantage to have 'some different machinery in place'⁵³ before the Parliament Bill reached the House of Lords. However, things had moved on apace and it was now too late for the Lords scheme to be adopted. The only time when Lords-originated reform schemes might be considered would be when the Commons was confirmed as the primary chamber, i.e. following the passing of the Parliament Bill. Reform of the House of Lords had to be considered in terms of reforming a limited role. Reform of the Lords should be undertaken 'with a view to making it more fit for that limited but still very important purpose'.⁵⁴

5.5.2 *The Times's* view of the Lords Reconstitution Bill

In March 1910, Lord Lansdowne's imminent introduction of his Lords Reconstitution Bill was described by *The Times* as 'interesting and novel', but it declared that it was not possessed of the 'tremendous importance assigned to it in some quarters'. *The Times* accepted that the constitution of the Lords would be altered, which to some degree would affect the exercise of the royal prerogative to create peers. Nevertheless, the proposal was described as really being a matter of etiquette and courtesy rather than having the 'far-reaching political design ascribed to it by alarmed radicals'.⁵⁵ The bill would carry out the reform of the House of Lords that the preamble to the Parliament Bill said was necessary. It had been proposed by Lord Lansdowne and it was accepted that Lord Burleigh's bill would be better postponed until Lansdowne's bill had been passed.

Whilst the Lansdowne bill dealt with the composition of the Lords, the Parliament Bill provided some mechanism or machinery for dealing with irreconcilable differences between the Lords in the Commons. Given this, *The Times* could not see how the

⁵² Editorial, 'The Lords Reform Bill' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 9 May 1911) 8.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Editorial, 'The Referendum and the Situation' (n 34).

question of the use of the referendum could be avoided by the Unionists. Its usage, said *The Times*, would be very limited and it would only be brought into use to deal with the most fundamental questions. However, 'the referendum was necessary to curb the tyranny of the minorities engaged in a log rolling' it would 'be a sanity check upon the worst excesses of party spirit'.⁵⁶

By early May, *The Times* had changed its view on Lord Lansdowne's bill, stating that it would change the British constitution 'more profoundly than any changes which have been made since the Long Parliament'.⁵⁷ It was clear that under Lansdowne's plan the Lords were prepared to make a large sacrifice, despite the 'sneering of Asquith'.⁵⁸ The reason why Asquith and the government opposed the bill and the use of a referendum had not really been explained to the satisfaction of *The Times*. However, *The Times* asserted that the reason for the Liberals' rejection of the referendum in particular was that holding a referendum would be fatal to his 'design of carrying Irish Home Rule and other great social changes without any direct reference to the people',⁵⁹ and that the referendum ran counter to Asquith's strongly held belief in a doctrine that the government that held a majority in its first two years 'must represent on all matters the real will of the nation'.⁶⁰

The Times considered that passing the Parliament Bill would be much less difficult if the Liberals would exempt from its ambit Irish Home Rule, contending that the refusal to exempt it and other controversial policies should be reason enough to alarm the country. The possibility of trying to slip Irish Home Rule through without consulting the electorate was 'the excellent object lesson in the evils'⁶¹ that use of the Parliament Act would expose the country.

he bill had confused the population since it was too big to digest immediately, claimed *The Times*. The bill had taken a complex situation and made it even more complicated;

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Editorial, 'The Houses and the Constitution' *The Times* (London, 8 May 1911) 9.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

it had created a 'new situation, which is superimposed upon an old one itself confused and complicated by the tactics of the government'.⁶²

The Lords Reconstitution Bill should not be seen as a substitute for the Parliament Bill, argued *The Times*, but as its proper complement, for it dealt with the reformed second chamber and not with the relations between the two Houses. Under Lansdowne's bill, the new model House of Lords would, when taken in conjunction with other Unionist proposals regarding conferences, joint sessions and, as a last resort, the referendum, be seen to be at once 'more democratic and less revolutionary than those of the government'.⁶³ Crucially, under the Unionist proposals the people would retain 'the deciding voice on its own affairs when these transcend our interests and disputes of current policies'.⁶⁴ For *The Times*, if the bill had done nothing else it had 'awakened many people for the first time to the fact that a revolution is in progress'.⁶⁵

5.5.3 The Second Reading of the Lords Reconstitution Bill

The second reading of the bill occurred in the House of Commons on 15 May 1911, the same day as the third reading of the Parliament Bill in the Commons. *The Times* praised Lansdowne's bill and judged it preferable to the Liberals' Parliament Bill. Whatever solution was reached, it was important that it was acceptable to both Liberals and Unionists or else it would not be permanent and the whole process would be revisited at some point in the not-too-distant future. Lansdowne's partly elected, partly hereditary chamber utilising the referendum machinery to settle disputes was far preferable to the Parliament Bill, which removed the veto powers of the House of Lords but did not change its composition.

The structure of the constitution had been shaken profoundly by the activities of Asquith and John Redmond, leader of the IPP. *The Times* declared that on 'the whole there is no longer any doubt as to what the essence of the project is'.⁶⁶ Irish Home Rule was

⁶² Editorial, 'That Lords Reconstitution Bill and the Situation' *The Times* (London, 10 May 1911) 11.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Editorial, 'Today and Tomorrow' *The Times* (London, 15 May 1911) 9.

identified as being the political motivation behind the whole Parliament Bill process. The Reconstitution Bill represented ‘an integral part of the counter system’ that the Unionists were assembling for submission to the people as an alternative to the Liberals’ Parliament Bill.

The Lords were making very heavy sacrifices of their position by accepting the need for reform and by adopting the proposals set before them in the Rosebery–Lansdowne plan. The Lords were, *The Times* argued, running true to form in that ‘the Lords have seldom refused to make sacrifices in the interests of the country’.⁶⁷ *The Times* claimed that the Lords realised that the risk posed to the constitution by the Liberal proposals was so acute that ‘no surrender of personal rights would be too great’ in order to ‘prevent the calamity of a single-chamber government’.⁶⁸

5.5.4 The End of Lord Lansdowne’s Bill

After five days of debate, the bill received its second reading in the House of Lords without a division; it was directed to the committee of the whole House, where no further action was carried out, after Lord Lansdowne was informed by Lord Morley that the Parliament Bill would go ahead regardless of any reform process initiated by the House of Lords – that is, on a reformed as well as non-reformed House. At the bill’s introduction, Lord Morley for the Liberals articulated the government’s position that it did not and could not accept the Lansdowne bill as a substitute for the Parliament Bill. The Parliament Bill had been ‘announced on by the country’ and ‘represents what we regard as the indispensable preliminary to progress in negotiating with your Lordships as the proper settlement of the constitution of this House’.⁶⁹

That Lord Lansdowne’s bill had actually been read a second time demonstrated for *The Times* that the Lords had unequivocally recognised that modern society needed a modern answer to government, and that this modern answer did not include ‘exclusive

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ HL Deb 22 May 1911, vol 8, col 684.

hereditary components⁷⁰ in the revising chamber. The House had declared ‘that its ancient constitution stands in need of a thoroughgoing revision to adapt the second chamber to the needs and opinions of the present day’.⁷¹ The question for the country was straightforward argued *The Times* ‘should our second chamber have the power that every other country found indispensable, or were we to have only a first chamber that was not only predominant but supreme and absolute, which would carry out the most profound causes of changes⁷² without any check from either a second chamber or from the country itself?’

5.6 The Parliament Bill - The Final Throw of the Dice

5.6.1 Lord Lansdowne’s Amendment to the Parliament Bill

Whilst the Parliament Bill passed its first and second readings in the House of Lords without division, at the committee stage the Lords began to modify the bill. In Clause 1, which dealt with Money Bills, the Lords amended the bill such that the decision on whether a bill was a Money Bill was to be made by the joint parliamentary committee and not by the Speaker of the House of Commons as in the original draft of the bill. The definition of what actually constituted a Money Bill was also amended and a definition of ‘tacking’ was inserted into the clause. The modified clause was passed without division on 29 June 1911.

Lord Lansdowne proposed the significant amendments to Clause 2 that dealt with non-money bills. Any bill that (a) affected the existence of the Crown or the Protestant succession, or that (b) established a national parliament or assembly in Ireland, Scotland, Wales or England possessing legislative power, or that c) had been referred to the joint committee and in their opinion raised an issue of great gravity on which public opinion had not been sufficiently ascertained should be referred to the voters. In other words, it should be subject to a referendum. The decision as to whether a bill fell within the meaning of paragraph (a) or (b) would be decided on by the joint committee of the two

⁷⁰ Editorial, ‘The Second Reading of the Reconstitution Bill’ *The Times* (London, 23 May 1911) 9.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

Houses. Lord Lansdowne's amendment was carried by 253–46 on 6 July 1911. The bill received its report reading on 7 July and its third reading on 20 July 1911, before being sent back to the House of Commons.

5.6.2 House of Lords Committee Stage

Lord Lansdowne had moved his amendment to Clause 2, which dealt with non-money bills, in what *The Times* described as a 'comprehensive and reasoned speech'; Lansdowne sought to confirm Unionist opinion that the constitution had two types of provision – ordinary legislation, and what had been called 'organic' legislation: legislation affecting the constitution of the legislative authority itself.⁷³ In response to Lord Lansdowne's proposals, *The Times* reported that Lord Morley, speaking for the government, offered 'a blunt reassertion' of the right of any majority that might obtain power through 'any accidental coalition of groups' to do exactly as it pleased with 'the foundations of our liberties, with the basis of our whole polity, just as if they mattered no more than the most trivial subject that can occupy the House of Commons.'⁷⁴

In an editorial dated 5 July, the *Manchester Guardian* reacted far less positively to Lord Lansdowne's amendments'. It reminded its readers that the English constitution was unwritten and that the concept of 'organic and inorganic law is quite unknown to English lawyers'.⁷⁵ There was no justification for distinguishing between bills in the constitution, beyond distinguishing between Money Bills and non-money bills. The only way a *prime facie* case could be made for a distinction would be if the Unionists agreed to waive their right to amend the Parliament Bill, which they had expressly refused to do. The editorial admitted that a vote for the Parliament Bill must be regarded as a vote for Home Rule – but that was not surprising since it had been Liberal policy since 1886. If evidence was needed, it had recently been provided when Herbert Asquith, in a speech in East Fife in December 1910, had reiterated that the Liberal Party was committed to granting Ireland a measure of Home Rule.

⁷³ Editorial, 'Lord Lansdowne's Amendment' *The Times* (London, 5 July 1911) 9.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Editorial, 'The Lords' Debate' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 5 July 1911) 8.

Whilst not in principle opposed to a referendum, the *Manchester Guardian* argued that such measures should be debated on their own merits: it must remain a side issue until such time 'if ever it became one of the opposition institutions'.⁷⁶ The machinery proposed would never function correctly since the proposed *joint committee* would consist of a group of elder statesman responsible to no one, and would be 'a menace to the whole theory of institutionally responsible government'.⁷⁷

5.6.3 Lord Lansdowne's Amendments Rejected

Lord Lansdowne's amendment passed by 253 to 46 votes in the House of Lords. *The Times* complained that the amendment encountered stiff opposition from the government and, worse, 'the obstinate refusal of the government to concede to seriously debate a single point it covered'.⁷⁸ The government had refused to rule out the possible ending of the monarchy, the Protestant succession, and even the integrity of the United Kingdom by what *The Times* saw as 'the caprice of any chance majority in a single House, without the slightest reference to the wishes of the nation'.⁷⁹ Lansdowne's Bill represented, the editorial argued, the bare minimum protection required to guarantee the fundamental liberties of the people and the stability of national institutions. The failure of a government to accept any of the bill's proposals meant that Parliament would allow 'any attack that an avowedly hostile Nationalist party [would like to make] upon anything that the English people hold dear';⁸⁰ the behaviour of the government to change that men could always be found who would be prepared to sell liberties and receive in return 'a lease on power'.⁸¹

Following the division in the Lords committee stage, *The Times* argued that, despite Liberal objections to the referendum process, in fact Great Britain had always had a type of built-in referendum process in operation. Significant changes to the constitution had followed a similar pattern, suggested *The Times*. A measure was usually advoc-

⁷⁶ Editorial, 'The Lords' Debate' (n 75).

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Editorial, 'The Division in the Lords' *The Times* (London, 6 July 1911) 9.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

ated by a small number of reformers before being adopted by a ministry, usually for tactical reasons. The measure would pass through one House by a small majority but be rejected by the other House. The country would mull over the rejected idea for some considerable time before the modified measure appeared, at which point it was not uncommon for the measure to disappear again. However, in the fullness of time, the scheme modified by public opinion would once more make its appearance, ready for it to be passed into law. The nation 'knew what it was about. It took the time to consider the singular definite form, and get it modified until it became acceptable'.⁸² The system was a very effective referendum, argued *The Times*. However, the government was now making the process impossible by claiming the right 'to force any crude scheme into law before the country even knows what is being done'.⁸³ What was needed was the House of Commons' acceptance of Lord Lansdowne's call for a referendum to be part of the Parliament Bill, for, although less efficient, it gave 'the people some chance of saying a word about their own affairs'.⁸⁴

The Times protested that the government's refusal to accept the referendum proposals of Lord Lansdowne demonstrated that the government was playing 'their own party game without regard to the nation' meaning that 'the referendum is the only safeguard left in the degradation of institutions for which they are responsible'.⁸⁵ The referendum was the answer to the cant stemming from the Liberal Government, which accused Unionists proposals of destroying representative institutions. The whole point of representative institutions is that they already represent the people, securing 'the government of the people for the people, by the people'.⁸⁶ The people's representation would disappear under the government's Parliament Bill unless safeguarded by the referendum amendment.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

5.6.4 The Approaching Crisis

As the heavily modified Parliament Bill moved into the Lords report stage, *The Times* warned that the country faced a constitutional crisis and that the adoption of a referendum would be the only way to protect the rights of the people. The real reasons behind the objections to the referendum proposal, argued *The Times*, were that it was novel and that people were very closely wedded to a party view of things. On both sides of the argument, the editorial identified ‘an oligarchic dislike of control by the people’.⁸⁷ Politicians on both sides may have talked a great deal about pleasing the will of the people but ‘the reality was that they always have a will of their own, and a strong desire to have their own way, whether it is exactly the way of the nation or not’.⁸⁸

The Times argued that, in a form of ‘natural selection’, there occurred partisan party politics that characterised the British political system and ensured that ‘the most pronounced partisans came to represent the great majority of cautious and moderate opinion’.⁸⁹ In a situation where the political leaders held the positions they did only as a result of the ‘rude forces of vertical strife and expediency’, it was likely that national interests would not be served. What was needed was a democratic check and there could not be ‘any arbiter in a democratic state except the people themselves’,⁹⁰ who would be consulted under special arrangements.

The *Manchester Guardian*, for its part, rejected the Lords’ amendments to the Parliament Bill. In Clause 1 the Lords substituted a committee for the Speaker of the Commons in deciding what constituted a Money Bill; a July editorial considered it disingenuous of the Lords to leave the Commons appearing to be in control of matters of finance whilst, in fact, the joint parliamentary committee became all-powerful. Regarding amendments to Clause 2, on non-money bills, the same editorial objected to the exclusion from the ambit of the Parliament Bill bills affecting the existence of the Crown,

⁸⁷ Editorial, ‘The Referendum and the Crisis’ *The Times* (London, 12 July 1911) 9.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

bills allowing for the creation of national parliaments for England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales and, particularly, the introduction of the use of the referendum when and if the joint committee felt that the will of the people had not been sufficiently ascertained.⁹¹

The *Manchester Guardian* editorial stated that It was not that ‘we are in principle opposed to the referendum’ on the contrary ‘we have long held that it is in principle sound and progressive, though it could easily become the very reverse if it were applied to wrong matters’.⁹² The key issue, argued the editorial, was that the country had not sanctioned the referendum, and, indeed, ‘has given sanction to a quite different thing’. The referendum might have been part of a practical solution when the Parliament Bill was first proposed and ‘indeed it might become practicable again at some point but here and now it was obviously impracticable’.⁹³

5.6.5 Fundamental Issues

As the Parliament Bill entered its report stage in the Lords, a *Times* editorial highlighted the absolute requirement of letting the people have their say in matters that affected the very fabric of the British constitution. For *The Times*, the existence of the monarchy and its accession and the integrity of the kingdom were fundamental matters ‘which in any state pretending to stability must be held inviolable by any single chamber or government’.⁹⁴ It was important that the people should have a chance to judge, not just ‘a blank proposal, but the completed scheme, and more importantly should be able to stop the scheme via the outcome of a referendum.

The radical press had misled the whole country on the subject of the House of Lords, claimed *The Times*. The reality was that the Unionists had accepted the need to end the hereditary hegemony that had dominated the British constitution for 1,000 years. Should evidence be required of the new-found acceptance of the Lords’ view on the hereditary situation, one need look no further than the fact that the Lords had read

⁹¹ Editorial, ‘The Parliament Bill and the Lords’ *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 12 July 1911) 6.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Editorial, ‘The Parliament Bill on Report’ *The Times* (London, 13 July 1911) 9.

the Parliament Bill a second time. *The Times* argued that the Lords' amendments to the bill did not fundamentally alter the principle of the bill. The Lords were accused of defying the will of the people by attempting to wreck the Parliament Bill, as expressed in the December general election. The reality was, contended *The Times*, that the Lords had sought by their amendments to provide a mechanism for dealing with issues that were 'too important to be left to the vagaries of a single chamber government'.⁹⁵ Fundamental or organic changes to the constitution had to be treated differently from normal, run-of-the-mill constitutional issues. In *The Times's* judgement, Unionists and the Unionist press would be better employed exposing to the nation the essential 'reasonableness and necessity of Lord Lansdowne's amendment'.⁹⁶

In late July 1911, as the Parliament Bill entered the third reading stage in the Lords, a *Times* editorial returned to the idea that the Lords had already accepted change. It declared that the Lords had indeed accepted the curtailment of their powers imposed on them 'following the verdict of the election of December 1910',⁹⁷ repeating the view that the Lords' amendments had amounted to nothing very significant.

After passing the Lords' third reading in July 1911, the heavily modified Parliament Bill was sent back to the House of Commons for the Lords' amendments to be considered. *The Times* declared that, despite the government 'throwing up its hands in horror' at the so-called innovations, in fact 'those particular innovations will seem to many people remarkably sensible'. After all, what could be more sensible than 'to refer the issue to a joint Parliamentary committee'.⁹⁸ At the end of July 1911, Arthur Balfour, leader of the opposition in the Commons, was quoted by *The Times* as saying that the Lords no longer possessed weapons that could effectively resist the Parliament Bill and as such the Lords' resistance was useless: 'Whether they vote, and how they vote, cannot influence its fate'.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill on Report' (n 94).

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill and the Lords' *The Times* (London, 21 July 1911) 9.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

5.7 Conclusion

Depending on one's point of view, the December election results were either an endorsement of the Liberal policy agenda or an endorsement of the Conservatives' policy agenda. The fact that virtually identical numbers of seats were won indicated that there was no massive change in the mood of the electorate.

Balfour's Albert Hall promise regarding the referendum had taken some of his colleagues by surprise. Following the election result, there were some calls for Balfour to resign, with his pledge being blamed for the election outcome. The *Manchester Guardian's* analysis of the situation was that the election outcome was due to the adoption of tariff reform policies rather than the adoption of the referendum. *The Times* focused on the return of a minority Liberal Government as indicating that the Liberal Party did not, as it had always maintained, have the mandate to undertake major constitutional changes both in terms of the Parliament Bill and the changes that would follow once the bill was passed, e.g. Irish Home Rule.

The Conservatives made a number of attempts to introduce a referendum to deal with major issues – issues of 'great gravity'. In the House of Lords, Lord Balfour introduced his Reference to the People Bill. Bills rejected by the Lords or amended by the Lords such that they were unacceptable to the Commons could be submitted to a poll of the electorate. It would also be possible for a petition of MPs to request the process to be triggered. A relatively small number of MPs, 200, could trigger the operation of the bill. It was of concern to the Liberal Party since, even if they were in government, all that was required was for 200 Unionist MPs to request that the process be initiated.

An attempt was made at the House of Commons report stage to include an amendment such that a referendum would be required before the Parliament Bill was applied to matters involving the constitution or the powers of either House or the relations between the House of Lords and Commons, but it failed.

Lord Lansdowne tabled an amendment to the Parliament Bill in the House of Lords at

the committee stage. Lord Lansdowne's amendment called for several categories of bill, and bills that were designated by the committee as being of 'great gravity' were to be subject to referral to the electorate – to be subject to a referendum. The amendment was accepted and, having received its report and third reading, was sent back to the House of Commons. *The Times* was supportive of attempts to introduce a referendum into the British political process. The *Manchester Guardian*, whilst not opposed to the referendum in principle, could not see the justification for adding to the existing classifications of Money Bills and non-money bills a third class of bill: those of great gravity.

Chapter 6

Historical Background: Irish Home Rule

6.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the historical background to the Irish Home Rule issue. The chapter starts by providing an overview of key events in nineteenth-century Irish history. The impact of the Irish Potato Famine of 1845–1849 on relations between England and Ireland is examined, as is the radical nationalism of the Fenian movement and the emergence of the Home Rule for Ireland movement. The Liberal Party's adoption of Irish Home Rule policy and the subsequent schism in the party are considered. A.V. Dicey's view of Irish Home Rule is investigated, as are the Conservative and Liberal parties policies with regard to Irish Home Rule.

6.2 The Neuralgic Issue

In the Victorian and Edwardian era, no single subject concerning Ireland was more contentious than that of 'Irish Home Rule'. The Irish Question has also been a major force in the development of the United Kingdom as an entity and in its political system. The influx of Irish MPs into Westminster following the Act of Union of 1800 meant that the Irish Question became an issue that affected not just Ireland but the balance and exercise of power within Westminster.

A biographer of Andrew Bonar Law, who succeeded Arthur Balfour as leader of the Conservative Party, wrote that:

No one can begin to comprehend the political history of England in the years preceding the First World War, unless he realises the dominating character of the Irish struggle for Home Rule. Until 1914 – indeed until 1922

– the Irish question obsessed English Parliamentary life to an extent seldom equalled – and never surpassed – by any political issue before or since. At times it seemed as if all other problems had faded into the background, as if the Home Rule question had become the sole theme of English politics.¹

6.2.1 Famine 1845–1849

In 1845 the Great Famine began in Ireland. The potato blight causing the famine returned in 1846 and 1848. Although blight spread to England, its impact was much less severe because the potato was not a staple crop to the same extent as in Ireland. The events of the famine were a defining moment in the Anglo–Irish relationship and the consequences resonate to this day. The famine affected those areas of Ireland that depended on the potato crop, i.e. everywhere except the relatively industrialised north-east of Ireland.

The cause of the famine is more complex than is popularly imagined, the populist view of the wicked English deliberately committing genocide of the Irish Catholics is the view that has entered Irish Catholic consciousness. O'Brien argue that a popular view is that the Irish Potato Famine of 1845–1847 was man-made, and Englishman-made at that,² and that the English did little to help relieve the famine, whereas the English view is that to an extent the Irish brought it upon themselves by virtue of their underdeveloped economic and social structures and dependence on the potato crop. The reality, O'Brien³ contends, is that the famine is generally seen as having been inevitable, albeit with recognition that a concentrated effort could have mitigated its outcome to a greater or lesser degree. Inevitable or not, there is no doubt that a great amount of human suffering and misery was visited upon the people of Ireland by the famine. Shultz wrote that the 'memory of the famine continues to inform one of the more contentious debates about both the Irish historical narrative and the Irish national

¹ R Blake, *The Life and Times of Andrew Bonner Law 1858-1923* (Eyre & Spottiswood 1955) 120–121.

² For differing views on the famine and the British response to the it see: TP Coogan, *The Famine Plot: England's Role in Ireland's Greatest Tragedy* (St Martin's Press 2012); Enda Delane, *The Curse of Reason: The Great Irish Famine* (Gill & Macmillan 2012).

³ M Cruise O'Brien and C Cruise O'Brien, *Ireland A Concise History* (Thames and Hudson 1984) 10.

character'.⁴

In 1846, Sir Robert Peel, Conservative prime minister, steered the Importation Act 1846 through Parliament, repealing the Corn Laws that had since 1815 levied a tariff on foreign grain imports. The passing of the Act split the Tories along free trade and protectionist lines. Those who supported Peel's free trade view would later merge with Radicals and Whigs to form the Liberal Party.

The government's effort at relief of the famine was predicated on the belief that market forces would sort the problem out and that government intervention had to be of a type that would not impinge on the free operation of the market. The government was also of the opinion that to offer help to Ireland might result in them becoming dependent on support. Some attempts were made by Westminster to relieve the situation. American maize was imported with the aim of using it to increase supply and thus control prices. The grain was distributed but, as the situation worsened, it soon ran out.

Job creation schemes to provide employment were set up and organisations such as the Quakers ran soup kitchens. The poorhouses were overwhelmed, unable to meet the demand for both 'indoor relief' and 'outdoor relief'. The food that did get to Ireland was insufficient. Catholic priests who tried in vain to offer help in their parishes reported stories of families huddling together in ditches to die and 'of corpses found in the morning outside their churches'.⁵ The famine years saw at one estimate 1 million people die and in excess of 1 million emigrate.⁶ Whilst many Irish emigrants went west to the USA or Canada, others emigrated to work in the factories of Liverpool or Manchester, where they had little option but to join their fellow factory workers living in the squalid conditions of the industrial cities. As a result of starvation, disease or emigration, an Irish population that had surged from 4.5 million in 1800 to 8 million in 1841 fell back to 6.5 million in 1851.⁷

⁴ M Shultz, 'Narratives of Dispossession: The Persistence of Famine in Postcolonial Ireland' (*Postcolonial Text*, 2012) (<http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewFile/1367/1337>) accessed 15 December 2016, 1.

⁵ S Bates, *Penny Loaves and Butter Cheap* (1st edn, Head of Zeus 2014) 85.

⁶ Cruise O'Brien and Cruise O'Brien (n 3) 10.

⁷ *ibid* 102-105.

The influx of Irish immigrants to industrial cities such as Liverpool and Manchester put extra strain on communities already struggling to survive and led to anti-Irish tension and violence. Opposition to the immigrants was not limited to the poor, with whom they directly competed to eke out a living and for accommodation in the squalid slums. Ratepayers in Liverpool complained about the costs of Irish immigration to the city. Neal⁸ identifies three specific perceived issues that exercised Liverpoolian ratepayers: the cost of supporting the Irish poor, the relatively high number of Irish-born people reported in the city's criminal statistics and, finally, the fear of rebellion among the Irish community.

Religiosity played a major role in the objections to Irish Catholic immigrants to England. Strong anti-Catholic feeling exacerbated economic tensions. Although Manchester and Liverpool both experienced severe sectarian tensions and, on occasion, violence, Liverpool's experience was more extreme because of the 'the extent and ferocity of Liverpool's Orangeism',⁹ argues Neal. Nor was the anti-Irish sentiment confined to the North. A leader in *The Times* in 1848 declared that:

Taking all things into account, we do not hesitate to say that every hard-working man in this country carries a whole Irish family on his back. [whilst the Irish are] doing nothing but sitting idle at home, basking in the sun, telling stories, plotting, rebelling, wishing death to every Saxon and laying everything that happens at the Saxons' door.¹⁰

Political violence had not lost its ability to shock. Riots broke out in Belfast after the first Home Rule Bill was lost in 1886. The next year, two senior government figures were assassinated in Dublin in the 'Phoenix Park murders'.

6.2.2 Fenianism

The Irish diaspora took the issues away from Ireland, especially to the USA, which became the major source of financial and emotional support outside Ireland for the revolutionary Home Rule movement. The actual or implicit willingness to resort to

⁸ F Neal, *Sectarian Violence: Liverpool Experience 1819 – 1914* (Manchester University Press 1990) 105.

⁹ *ibid* 105.

¹⁰ Editorial, 'Editorial' *The Times* (London, 26 July 1848) 5.

violence whilst pursuing political goals casts a long shadow over Irish politics to this day. In the late 1850s in the USA, Fenianism emerged as a political movement taking its name from the legendary Irish warriors, the Fianna. Fenianism as a political force had its origins in the anti-British feeling both of recent Irish emigrants to the United States and of the Irish-American diaspora who had settled in the United States during the previous 400 years. At a time when Ireland was relatively prosperous and nationalism was at a relatively low level in Ireland, the flame of Irish nationalism burnt fiercely in the USA.

The Fenians' aim was the overthrow of British rule in Ireland by force of arms. The radical politics of the Fenians was exported to Ireland by Irish-American exiles and found shape in the founding of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in Dublin in March 1858. The IRB drew together radical Irish-American exiles, secret agrarian groups and members of the lower-middle class. Secrecy, antipathy to Britain, good organisation and a willingness for self-sacrifice led to the reinvigoration of Irish nationalism in Ireland.

The IRB took direct action in Ireland and on the British mainland. In March 1867, the IRB launched an abortive uprising in Ireland. It was episodic in nature, and a combination of the British government's anticipation of the uprising from its network of spies and the IRB's insufficient planning and resources meant the rising quickly fizzled out. The participants were hunted down and those who had not escaped were caught, tried and imprisoned but not executed.

In September 1867, an attempt to rescue two Fenians from police custody in Manchester resulted in the death of a police officer. The subsequent arrest and execution of three of those responsible for the attempt at freeing their fellow Fenians resulted in the creation of what became known as the Manchester Martyrs. In the same year, an attempt to free a Fenian leader from Clerkenwell Prison by blowing up the prison wall resulted in the death of 12 people who occupied houses also demolished by the explosion. The rescue attempt, seen as heroic by many in Ireland, engendered the opposite view

in England. Between January 1881 and January 1885 the IRB conducted a bombing campaign on the British mainland. They planted 24 devices, concentrating the majority in London but also targeting Salford, Liverpool and Glasgow. In view of the targets selected - mainline railway stations for example, the number of casualties incurred were relatively small. Approximately 120 people were injured and three IRB members who were planting a bomb on London Bridge were killed. The bombings fuelled the widespread anti-Irish feeling on the mainland. The term 'Fenian' quickly became for the opponents of Irish Home Rule a pejorative term, carrying implications of rebellion, violence and disloyalty to the British Empire.

6.2.3 Irish Home Rule

The Home Rule Association was formed in 1870 under the leadership of Isaac Butt MP,¹¹ who had defended the Manchester Martyrs and had led the Amnesty Association to campaign for the release of those Fenians who had been imprisoned or transported. The Amnesty Association used similar tactics to those employed by Daniel O'Connell.¹² A series of 'Monster' meetings were held both in Ireland and on the mainland. The campaign culminated on 10 October 1869 near Dublin, where tens of thousands of people congregated to demand an amnesty. The British government responded by a gradual programme of prisoner release, although those perceived as the more hardened Fenians were released only on condition of being sent into exile.

In November 1873, the Home Rule Association was renamed the Home Rule League. It was non-sectarian in nature and its aim was the establishment of an Irish parliament to deal with domestic Irish matters. Defence and foreign relations would be left to the Imperial Parliament sitting in Westminster. In March 1874, the association renamed itself again as the Home Rule Party and broadened its agenda, having won a significant number of seats, 60, in the general election in February 1874. However, the Home

¹¹ Butt's defence of Fenians in court led him to embrace Irish Nationalism after 1865. He did not support the Fenians' call for armed rebellion; rather, he supported the idea of electing an Irish Parliament to deal with domestic affairs.

¹² O'Connell campaigned for Catholic emancipation and later the repeal of the Act of Union. He marshalled the Catholic Churches in the furtherance of his cause and to raise funds and made use of very large scale public meetings.

Rule Party was disparate in that its members did not all share Butt's vision of a federal relationship with Great Britain. Butt's leadership was also somewhat lacking in focus in that he had maintained his legal career whilst leading the party.

Charles Stuart Parnell, who entered Parliament as the MP for Meath in April 1875, held more extreme views than Butt. He became the leader of the Home Rule Party after the death of the more moderate Butt in May 1879. Parnell came from a Protestant land-owning family whose American forebears had fought the British in the war of 1812. Parnell used parliamentary procedural rules and filibustering tactics to put forward his Home Rule agenda. However, August 1876 saw the Supreme Council of the IRB withdraw its support from the Home Rule movement.

In 1890, Captain William O'Shea, who had acted for Parnell during his incarceration at Kilmainham Gaol, named Parnell as co-respondent in his divorce petition. The scandal split support for Parnell in Ireland and within the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) in Westminster and, crucially, within the ranks of the Liberal Party. In an age when extramarital affairs that became public knowledge attracted considerable opprobrium, Parnell faced criticism and condemnation from both sides of the Irish Sea. Prior to the divorce, the Catholic Church had supported Parnell. However, in deeply Catholic Ireland, divorce was anathema and Parnell was roundly condemned from the pulpit by the Catholic clergy. In England, strong Liberal Nonconformist feeling over the affair drove Gladstone to issue to the IPP in November 1890 what was in effect an ultimatum: a choice between retaining Liberal support for Home Rule or retaining Parnell as leader of the IPP.

The removal of Parnell had both a moral and political dimension. The IPP realised that without Liberal support Irish Home Rule simply would not happen. The Liberals were concerned about the impact of the divorce on their standing with the electorate. Gladstone, under severe pressure from Liberal Nonconformist supporters, urged Parnell to resign the leadership of the IPP and went as far as to threaten to resign unless Parnell did so. Dr. Thomas Croke, the Archbishop of Cashel who aligned himself closely

with Parnell, the National Land League¹³ and Irish nationalism wrote of Parnell in a telegram:

In God's name, let him retire quietly and with good grace from the leadership. If he does not retire, alliance will be dissolved, election lost, Irish party seriously damaged if not wholly broken up, home rule indefinitely postponed, and the public conscience outraged.¹⁴

The damage to Parnell's reputation was irrecoverable. Parnell was finally deposed as leader of the IPP in December 1890, which caused the party to fragment into factions that were either pro- or anti-Parnell. He continued to campaign in spite of his deteriorating health but lost three consecutive by-elections.¹⁵

In January 1900, the IPP in Westminster was reunited and in February the pro-Parnellite John Redmond was elected leader of the IPP. The IPP had been left in a weakened and fractious state following the Parnell divorce scandal. As well as being a reunified force in Westminster, the United Irish League (UIL), formed in 1898 as a grass-roots nationalist party, began to gain control of county councils in Ireland. Prior to the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898, the Protestant Ascendancy¹⁶ had held sway over local government. The Act, with its boundary reforms and imposition of an English-style county administration organisation, gave local people access to local government, a feature that the UIL used to great effect.

6.2.4 The Land War

The Irish agricultural economy slid into recession in the late 1870s after the relative prosperity of the early 1870s. Farm prices fell due to a combination of the return of potato blight, the importation of grain from USA and Russia, and poor potato harvests in 1877-1878. Famine, with all the associations of the past, was only averted by significant charitable efforts. The impact of the falling farm prices was to reduce the income of the tenant farmers, which led to an increase in those unable to pay their rent and

¹³ Irish political organisation which sought to help poor tenant farmers.

¹⁴ J Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (vol III, Macmillan and Co 1903) 448-9.

¹⁵ Parnell died in 1891 at the age of 45.

¹⁶ Irish Protestant elite

increased rent arrears, and thus drove the rise in evictions and a rise in the number of destitute people.

In October 1879, former Fenian Michael Davitt formed the National Land League (NLL). The organisation campaigned for land reform and for what became known as the three Fs: fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure. Charles Stuart Parnell, leader of the IPP, accepted the presidency of the Land League. The NLL marked the coming together of radicals, revolutionary nationalists and constitutional nationalists, with some support from the Catholic Church, and meant that Land Reform became a political issue bound up with nationalism. The NLL campaigned under the slogan 'The land of Ireland for the people of Ireland'.¹⁷ It also marked the birth of Parnellism, which combined both constitutional and physical force politics.

The campaign against landlords led by the NLL came to be known as the Land War, a campaign that lasted until 1883. During the period of the Land War, more evictions of tenant farmers took place than in the 30 years prior to 1879. The level of violence against people, livestock and property 'in agrarian Ireland'¹⁸ also increased during the campaign. Officially, the NLL did not sanction violence, although boycotting¹⁹ and shunning were forms of coercion that were employed during the campaign. Parnell and his supporters in Westminster sought to distance themselves from violence, but their close relationship with the NLL inextricably linked them to it and left them unpopular with the government, landowners and the British public. The NLL and the IRB reached an informal alliance that saw some Fenians take part in parliamentary politics and the NLL receive some funding from the American backers of the Fenians.

In an attempt to undermine the NLL, Gladstone steered the Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881 through Parliament. The Act went a long way to granting the demanded three Fs. A system of courts was set up to review unfair rents, and the size of government

¹⁷ O Walsh, *Ireland's Independence 1880–1923* (Routledge 2002) 10.

¹⁸ A O'Day, *Irish Home Rule 1867-1921* (New Frontiers In History, Manchester University Press 2008) 68.

¹⁹ Captain Charles Boycott's neighbours had at the behest of the Irish Land League refused to assist in the harvesting of his crops

loans available to tenants who wanted to purchase land increased.²⁰ In the event, the courts were slow in operation and only a relatively small number of tenants applied for the loans.

Parnell had remained publicly non-committal during the course of the passage of the Act, not wishing to alienate either his radical or his moderate supporters. However, eventually Parnell came out against the Land Act and made increasingly extreme speeches. The government attempted but failed to prosecute Parnell and others for organising the Rent Strike, and it passed the Protection of Persons and Property Act (Ireland) Act 1881²¹. In October 1881, the NLL was outlawed, and Parnell was arrested and imprisoned in Kilmainham Gaol. Even from prison Parnell continued to orchestrate his campaign, issuing a 'No Rent Manifesto'. With Parnell seen as a Nationalist martyr, the agrarian violence perpetrated by the secret societies escalated still further in the vacuum left by Parnell's imprisonment, coming close to open rebellion.

In May 1882, Parnell was released after the unwritten Kilmainham 'Treaty' had been agreed between Gladstone and Parnell, which brought the Land War to a close. In exchange for his cooperation with the government, e.g. supporting the Land Act and his efforts to calm the agrarian violence, Parnell gained concessions from Gladstone. Leaseholders and tenants with rent arrears would be allowed to go to the Land Courts from which they had previously been excluded. Detainees would be released and the government undertook not to use the draconian legislation available to it.

6.2.5 The Liberals and Irish Home Rule

During Gladstone's second term as prime minister he had undertaken a measure of land reform and the disestablishment of the Anglican Irish Church.²² Among other things, the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act 1870 included the so called 'Bright Clauses'²³ which made funds available to enable tenant farmers to purchase land. The Act also

²⁰ From two thirds to three quarters of the purchase price at 5% interest over 35 years.

²¹ The Act allowed detention without trial of those suspected of participating in the Land War

²² Irish Church Act 1869.

²³ Named after John Bright MP at whose request provisions for land purchase were included in the act

required compensation to be paid for any improvements on the land made by the tenant once they surrendered their lease. It is suggested that Gladstone's real motivation was less the economic improvement of Ireland and rather more 'his desire to pacify Ireland'.²⁴

Gladstone had in 1885 made a personal commitment to Irish Home Rule. Officially, Gladstone had become converted to the Irish Home Rule cause in 1885, which had become public knowledge after Gladstone's son Herbert had flown the so-called 'Hawarden Kite' by leaking to the Unionists that his father now favoured Irish Home Rule. The decision was described as causing 'the bitterest division in 19th-century political life'.²⁵ It would split the Liberal Party, causing a faction led by the Whig Lord Hartington and a faction led by Joseph Chamberlain to leave the Liberal Party and side with the Conservatives because of Gladstone's and the party's pro-Home-Rule stance.

Gladstone, leading a minority administration, depended on Home Rule MPs to remain in office, and in 1886 Gladstone submitted his first Home Rule bill mostly drafted by Gladstone himself. The bill did not pass the Commons, since the breakaway Whigs and Liberal Unionists sided with the Conservatives to defeat it. Gladstone resigned over the failure to pass his bill and was replaced by a Conservative 'caretaker government' led by the Marquis of Salisbury. Aside from splitting the Liberal Party, the first Home Rule crisis had the effect of crystallising the views of the parties. The Liberals became the party of Irish Home Rule, and the Conservatives became a party of opposition to Irish Home Rule.

Gladstone was returned to power in 1892 in a short-lived Liberal ministry and brought forward a second Irish Home Rule Bill in February 1893. It was passed by a narrow majority in the Commons but was rejected eight months later in September 1893 by a House of Lords dominated by the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. Gladstone resigned once again following the bill's failure.

²⁴ TW Guinnane and RI Miller, 'The Limits to Land Reform: The Land Acts in Ireland 1870–1909' (1997) 45(3) *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 591 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/452292>), 7.

²⁵ I Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party: A History* (I B Tauris 2012) 5.

6.2.6 A.V. Dicey and Home Rule

The views of Professor A.V. Dicey, Liberal Unionist jurist, underpinned the Conservative opposition to Irish Home Rule. Dicey published three books in opposition to the successive Irish Home Rule Bills of 1886, 1893 and 1912, arguing that his academic approach to a very emotive subject would produce an ‘academic’s calmness’. Gladstone’s Government of Ireland Bill 1886 elicited a response from Dicey in the form of a book: *England’s Case Against Home Rule*.²⁶ Dicey first considered an Ireland independent from Great Britain and then one under various forms of Home Rule.

Dicey’s approach would, he said, avoid the ‘poisonous venom of historical recrimination, and all the delusions which are the offspring of the misleading tendency to personify nations’.²⁷ He rejected the idea that the Englishman should ‘feel personal shame for the cruelties of Cromwell’ as well as the notion that ‘Irish Catholics should put on sackcloth and ashes for the massacres of Protestants in 1641’.²⁸

Whilst not unique to Ireland, the importance and connection with its history resonates strongly in Ireland and informs the present. Mansergh cited the seventeenth-century French cleric Cardinal de Retz, who wrote ‘that examples of times past move men beyond comparison more than those of their own times’.²⁹ The events of 300 or 400 years ago in Ireland have great significance and resonance with both Protestant and Catholic communities to this day.

An Independent Ireland

The maintenance of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, whilst problematic, was better than any of the other options that had been put forward and certainly better than Gladstone’s Bill. The breakdown of the Union posed an existential threat to the Empire. It was, argued Dicey, ‘inconceivable that Irish autonomy should not excite or justify claims for local independence which would unloose the ties which bind together

²⁶ AV Dicey, *England’s Case Against Home Rule* (2nd edn, John Murray 1886).

²⁷ *ibid* 9.

²⁸ *ibid* 9.

²⁹ Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question* (Yale University Press 1991) 7.

the huge fabric of the British Empire'.³⁰ The Union performed a role as a 'guarantee against successful rebellion' and in fact the Union had made 'some progress towards national harmony'.³¹ The Union's very existence and power afforded the executive the possibility of 'curbing the violence of religious and political zealots by the interposition of an authority endowed at once with overpowering strength and obvious impartiality',³² for example the recent land purchase acts.

The loss of the Union would heap 'moral discredit on England which would in itself be the cause of serious danger'.³³ Dicey argued that any country that granted independence to a component part, unless 'subject to crushing military defeat, would be sending out signs of declining strength or declining spirit and would in a short time provoke that aggression of rivals and enemies'.³⁴

Home Rule for Ireland?

So, if not independence for Ireland, then why not some form of Home Rule? Dicey set out what he called a 'Touchstone' for an acceptable plan of Home Rule, against which 'any given plan of Home Rule must be tested'.³⁵ To be acceptable, a Home Rule scheme must first be consistent with the ultimate supremacy of the British Parliament, and second, provide that each part of the United Kingdom take a fair share of imperial burdens; that the citizens have equal quality of rights; and that the rights of both individuals and minorities be safely guarded and thirdly it 'must promise finality; it must be in the nature of a final settlement of the demands made on behalf of Ireland, and not be mere provocation to the revival of fresh demands'.³⁶

Federalism required the rebuilding of the British constitution and disruption of the polity 'which centuries of experience have admirably adapted to the wants of the English people, and which has fostered the growth of the British Empire'. Federalism had only

³⁰ Dicey, *England's Case Against Home Rule* (n 26) 134.

³¹ *ibid* 134.

³² *ibid* 138.

³³ *ibid* 142.

³⁴ *ibid*.

³⁵ *ibid* 158.

³⁶ *ibid* 274.

been successful in 'the conditions which the United Kingdom does not possess'.³⁷

Colonial independence required fewer changes to institutions than did federalism. However, the suitability of the colonial approach was 'delusive'³⁸ since the key factors of the colonies and their relationships to the mother country were based on their distance from Great Britain and their relative prosperity. Although colonies derived valuable benefits from the connection with the Empire, they were not 'in reality dependencies: the colonies willingly acquiesced to the supremacy of England, because England protects them gratis but does not govern them at all'.³⁹ None of the above conditions were found in the relationship between England and Ireland. A return to the pre-Union Irish parliament model of 'Grattan's parliament' was dismissed as an option. It was 'an impossibility: The constitution of 1782 belongs to a past age, and cannot by any miracle of political art be at the present day restored to life'.⁴⁰

Gladstone's constitution model represented a hybrid of federalism and colonialism. Whilst it aimed to obtain the advantages of both, in reality the result was 'to combine and intensify the disadvantages of both systems'.⁴¹ Dicey concluded that 'any system of Home Rule, whatever be the form it takes, is less beneficial to Great Britain than is the maintenance of the Union'.⁴²

In the wake of Gladstone's Government of Ireland Bill 1893, Dicey published *A Leap in the Dark*⁴³. The book's preface set out Dicey's conclusions on the 1893 bill: first, that the bill, 'though nominally a measure for the government of Ireland, contains in reality a New Constitution for the whole United Kingdom', and second, that the newly created constitution 'must work injury both to England and to Ireland' and, far from closing the seven-hundred-year-old controversy, instead opened 'a constitutional revolution'. The

³⁷ Dicey, *England's Case Against Home Rule* (n 26) 274.

³⁸ *ibid* 275.

³⁹ *ibid*.

⁴⁰ *ibid* 276.

⁴¹ *ibid*.

⁴² *ibid*.

⁴³ AV Dicey, *A Leap in the Dark: A Criticism of the Principles of Home Rule as Illustrated by the Bill of 1893* (John Murray 1893).

whole aim of the book was to 'warn the people of England against a leap in the dark'.⁴⁴

6.2.7 The Conservatives and Irish Home Rule

The Conservative Lord Rosebery formed another 'caretaker' government in the wake of Gladstone's resignation. A general election in July 1895 saw a Conservative Government, under the Marquis of Salisbury, take office.

During the last years of the nineteenth century, Conservatives adopted a policy that came to be known as 'Constructive Unionism', which aimed to reconcile Ireland to being ruled from Westminster by introducing a series of reforms. These included land and administrative reforms and investment in infrastructure. An alternative view of the policy was that it was attempting to kill the 'Irish Home Rule agenda with kindness'; Gerald Balfour, younger brother of Arthur Balfour, Chief Secretary of Ireland from 1895 to 1900, used the phrase when he addressed a meeting in Leeds in October 1895: 'the government would of course be very glad if they were able by kindness to kill home-rule'.⁴⁵

Lord Salisbury led the Conservative Party to victory in the so-called Khaki Election of 1900, and in 1902 Arthur Balfour replaced Lord Salisbury on his retirement as prime minister. The introduction of the far-reaching land reform legislation emerged in the shape of the Irish Land Purchase Act 1903, or the 'Wyndham Act'. The Act was intended to encourage landlords to sell land and allow tenants to buy it at low prices. The earlier land reform acts of 1885, 1886, 1891 and 1896 had met with only limited success.⁴⁶ Under the Wyndham Act, the government offered full-price loans for terms of 65 years to tenants who wished to buy the land they worked. A bonus was offered to encourage landlords to sell. By 1905, over 390,000 tenants had purchased land. The Act changed land holding and the issue of land reform in Ireland. Land reform, which had been an issue for so long, had been substantially solved, ironically, by a

⁴⁴ *ibid* 1.

⁴⁵ A Gailey, *Ireland and the Death of Kindness; Experience of Constructive Unionism 1890–1905* (Cork University Press 1987) 25.

⁴⁶ Landlords were unwilling to sell partly because they were not paid in cash but instead in land bonds.

Conservative government.

Since the 1830s advocates had made their case for Irish Home Rule, albeit under a different title of 'federalism' or 'devolution' or 'Home Rule all round'. By 1910 the proponents of a federal approach to the United Kingdom's constitution included J.L Garvin editor of *The Observer*, Lord Milner⁴⁷, the Round Table movement⁴⁸, J.S Oliver and Sir Edward Grey. Balfour was put under considerable pressure by, and was receptive to the pro-federal lobbyists. Ultimately, however, he reverted to the traditional Conservative stance of opposing Irish Home Rule. Kendal asserts that the rejection of the federalist approach was in part because there existed a widespread fear among the Unionist rank and file membership that a move towards a federal solution of the United Kingdom's 'constitutional difficulties would weaken rather than strengthen the Union and lead to disintegration rather than a stronger union'.⁴⁹

6.2.8 'One With Britain Heart and Soul'

Gladstone's failed attempt to pass the first Home Rule Bill in 1886 galvanised the already strong opposition to Irish Home Rule in Ulster. Riots had broken out in Belfast following a meeting in the Ulster Hall on 23 February 1886. The Unionist politician, Lord Randolph Churchill had earlier in the day made an incendiary speech in Belfast that included the warning that if a solution could not be agreed '[T]he struggle is not likely to remain within the lines of what we are accustomed to look upon as constitutional action', he continued that 'the Loyalists in Ulster should wait and watch - organise and prepare'.⁵⁰ The aftermath of the riots saw 32 dead and several hundred police officers injured. Churchill would go on to coin the combative rallying cry against Gladstone's

⁴⁷ In 1902 Lord Milner, High Commissioner to South Africa, was appointed Governor of the Orange River Colony and of the Transvaal. He was charged with setting up new systems of local and regional government and reviving the economy. To aid him in the task, Milner recruited approximately a dozen able young men who became known as 'Milner's Kindergarten.'

⁴⁸ The Round Table movement had been set up in late 1909 by former members of Milner's 'Kindergarten'. The movement was both nationalist and imperialist in outlook. It advocated far closer union within the empire to counter the growing threat to the UK's world interests posed by Germany, France, the USA, Russia and Japan.

⁴⁹ J Kendle, *Federal Britain a History* (Routledge 1997) 73.

⁵⁰ Randolph Churchill, *Speeches of the Right Honourable Lord Randolph Churchill M.P* (Louis Jennings ed, vol II, Longmans Greek and Co 1886) 13.

Home Rule bill 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right'⁵¹ in a 17 page letter to William Young⁵², a Liberal Unionist supporter, in May 1886. Large extracts of the letter would subsequently be published in *The Times*.⁵³

On 17 June 1892, 'the Great Convention' was in held in Belfast, organised by the Ulster Unionists, including prominent Ulster Unionist MPs, to set out their opposition to Home Rule and the consequences of its imposition. The purpose-built pavilion was built on donated land⁵⁴ and was hung with banners carrying slogans declaring loyalty to the Union and the Crown. For example, over the speakers' platform a banner carried words redolent of the British imperium, by Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate: 'One with Britain Heart and Soul, One Life, One Flag, one Fleet, one Throne'.⁵⁵

Some 12,000 male delegates heard a series of speakers denounce Gladstone's and the Liberal Party's Irish Home Rule agenda and pledge their opposition to any measure that involved an Irish parliament. The chairman of the convention, Lord Abercom, declared in his opening address with his arm raised 'Men of the North, once more I say, we will not have home-rule'.⁵⁶ The fears of the increasing power of the Catholic Church were evident. One delegate, Sir William Ewart, baronet and former MP, declared that 'Clerical domination will assuredly follow the establishment of a Home Rule Parliament'.⁵⁷ The convention produced a resolution⁵⁸ of six clauses, one of which, Clause 4, gave a dire warning to the people of Great Britain: that any attempts at establishing a Dublin-based parliament would result in 'disorder, violence and bloodshed

⁵¹ WS Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (vol II, The Macmillan Company 1906) 64.

⁵² Young wrote to Churchill to demand that he pledge never to support Home Rule for Ireland. Churchill replied that if Home Rule become law, 'the action of the Northern States of America from 1861 to 1865 would have to be the model for the action of the Tory Party'. When the right time came Ulster would 'resort to the supreme arbitrament of force; Ulster will fight; Ulster will be right'

⁵³ News, 'Lord R Churchill on the Irish Policy of the Tories' *The Times* (London, 8 May 1886) 9.

⁵⁴ The structure measured 224 feet x 153 feet and was covered with approximately a third of an acre of glass.

⁵⁵ Written to mark opening of the exhibition in May 1886: Alfred Tennyson, 'Opening of the Indian Colonial Exhibition' in V Shea and W Whittle (eds), *Victorian Literature: An Anthology* (Wiley & Sons 2015) 156-157.

⁵⁶ L Gordon, *The Great Convention: The Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892* (Ulster Society (Publications) Ltd 1995) 23.

⁵⁷ *ibid* 32.

⁵⁸ A second resolution was subsequently added that called for the holding of a similar convention for Southern Irish Unionists, which was held in June 1892.

such as have not been experienced in this country'.⁵⁹

A response to the second Irish Home Rule Bill was the ultimate establishment of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) in March 1905. The council was an umbrella organisation that led the Ulster fight against Home Rule. It coordinated the various Unionist organisations, lodges and clubs in opposition to Irish Home Rule proposals. The UUC also worked with Irish Unionist MPs and forged strong links with the Conservative Party. Much of the grass-roots support for the UUC came from Orange Order institutions, which originated in eighteenth century Protestant organisations similar to Masonic lodges and had been repeatedly formed and dissolved until finally being reformed in the 1800s in opposition to the land reform movement and embracing the anti-Home-Rule movement.

6.2.9 The 1906 General Election

The outcome of the 1906 general election was, by any measure, a significant victory for the Liberal Party under Henry Campbell-Bannerman, winning as it did an absolute majority. The Liberal Party, winning 400 seats, had gained 214 seats. The Liberal victory was largely at the expense of the Conservatives, who retained 157 seats, having lost 246 seats. The Labour Party made the greatest gains, proportionately, by adding 28 seats to the two they previously held. The Irish Nationalists made a modest gain of five seats to hold 83 seats. Having an absolute majority meant that the political motivation of the Liberals to promote and facilitate Irish Home Rule had diminished. The large majority carried by the Liberals meant that the IPP was no longer 'needed' by the Liberals, who became occupied with other policy areas - social reform, for example. Herbert Asquith, who would become Liberal leader on the resignation of Campbell-Bannerman in April 1908, had written in March 1902 to the Chairman of the East Fife Liberal Association, signalling a change in Liberal strategy regarding Irish Home Rule. Whilst their commitment to the goal remained, the approach to obtaining it was to change. The previous Liberal attempts to introduce Home Rule bills had failed at the

⁵⁹ Gordon (n 56) 24.

hands of the Unionists in 1886 and 1893. The risk of attempting and failing to pass yet another Home Rule bill was too high, since a failed attempt would bring Home Rule to the top of the political agenda and displace the social policy reforms the Liberals were committed to. Asquith wrote that: '[i]f we are honest we must ask ourselves this practical question: "Is it to be part of the policy and programme of our Party that, if returned to power, it will introduce into the House of Commons a Bill for Irish Home Rule?" The answer, in my judgement, is "No"'.⁶⁰

Rather, he continued, 'the reconciliation of Ireland to the Empire can only be obtained by methods which will carry with them, step-by-step, the sanction and sympathy of British opinion. To recognise facts like these is not apostasy; it is common sense'.⁶¹ The 'step-by-step' approach was adopted until 1914, but Home Rule did move to the top of the Liberal agenda once the IPP held the balance of power following the January 1910 general election.

For John Redmond, the leader of the IPP, speaking in Derry in December 1904, Irish Home Rule was very much a current issue: 'Home Rule was a living issue at every election in England, Scotland, and Wales; and in many of those elections Home Rule would be the dominant factor in the decision come to'.⁶²

In a debate on Home Rule in the House of Commons in April 1905, the House was reminded that the Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman had given a speech in Wandsworth in March 1905 in which he had said that 'unless they gave more self-government to Ireland, the state of the country would be as bad in the future as it had been in the past'.⁶³

However, the 'realpolitik' of the situation faced by the Liberal Government in 1910 was very different from that of 1906, and the 'step-by-step' approach was abandoned and Irish Home Rule was forced to the forefront of political issues. Asquith's letter of March

⁶⁰ JA Spender and Cyril Asquith, *The Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith* (vol II, Hutchinson & Co 1926) 144.

⁶¹ *ibid* 144.

⁶² quoted by John Tuff, Unionist MP for Rochester HC Deb 12 April 1905, vol 144, col 1485.

⁶³ *ibid* col 1488.

1902 stands in contrast to his speech given at the Albert Hall in December 1909.

The results of the January 1910 general election, triggered by the House of Lords' rejection of the 1909 People's Budget, saw the Liberals holding 275 seats, against the Conservatives with 273 and the Irish Nationalists with 82. The net effect was a hung parliament, with the Liberals having a majority over the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists of two seats but enjoying a working majority through an agreement with the IPP and the Labour Party.

6.2.10 The Second General Election of 1910

The death of King Edward VII in May 1910 led to degree of rapprochement between the Liberals and the Unionists. The Constitutional Conference was convened, during which settlements on a variety of matters were sought, including the Irish Question. Failure to reach agreement at the conference triggered the second general election of 1910. The attitude of the Conservative and Liberal leadership toward Irish Home Rule on the eve of the second general election can be discerned by looking at speeches given by Balfour for the Conservatives and Asquith for the Liberals in November 1910.

Balfour's Nottingham Speech November 1910

On 17 November 1910, Arthur Balfour gave a lengthy speech, which would prove to be his last public speech as leader of the Unionist Party, to the national party conference in Nottingham. He outlined Conservative policies on a whole range of issues for the forthcoming election.

On the matter of Irish Home Rule, Balfour reserved particular scorn for John Redmond and the IPP. Amid much laughter and cheering, he said that he was quite unable 'to understand precisely what the avowed and official policy of the leader of the Irish parties is'.⁶⁴ Redmond's party had a variety of policies, claimed Balfour: one for the United States, one for Canada and one for Ireland. Warming to his theme, he continued 'and I am not sure that he has not got a Westminster policy as well but that may be because

⁶⁴ A Balfour, 'Leader's Speech, Nottingham 1910' (17 November 1910) (<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=78>) accessed 17 October 2016, 3.

I have not had authentic reports of his speeches and am unable to collate them'.⁶⁵

Balfour was sure that 'the present government talk as if they were going to destroy our constitution in obedience to the will of the British democracy', in reality was they were 'going to destroy the constitution in obedience to the will of American subscribers'.⁶⁶

Balfour alluded to the widely reported funding Redmond had received from Irish supporters on a recent trip to the United States – funding that would support Redmond's intention of using:

The whole of our traditional parliamentary machinery to squeeze out of us, as the conqueror squeezes out of a conquered country, the terms which he insists upon, and that, and that alone, is the real secret of the revolutionary policy of men, who, had they their will, probably are no more revolutionists than you or I.⁶⁷

Was it credible, Balfour asked, that an appeal from a government pressured by socialists and by Irish Nationalists would 'result in the people giving up their heritage'? Answering his own question he said he considered it to be 'highly incredible'.⁶⁸ The Irish Nationalists were not intent on improving the British constitution in any way; rather, the cry was 'Smash the House of Lords, in order that we may get Home Rule!'⁶⁹ The audience was advised to remember that Redmond 'stands where Mr Parnell stood' and therefore he stood exactly where the Irish Nationalist Party stood on two previous occasions 'when the great mass of our fellow countrymen' said 'this is not justice to Ireland that you are asking; it is injustice to Great Britain'.⁷⁰

Balfour warned that the party system could be said to have broken down if either one of the great parties of state (that is, the Liberal Party, he clearly implied) became 'temporary slaves of this section of socialists, that section of home rulers'.⁷¹ If the parties system broke down, 'we would not be governed by absolute monarchs but rather by a

⁶⁵ *ibid* 7.

⁶⁶ *ibid*.

⁶⁷ *ibid*.

⁶⁸ *ibid*.

⁶⁹ *ibid*.

⁷⁰ *ibid*.

⁷¹ *ibid*.

logrolling faction of men who care nothing for your empire or your country'.⁷² Balfour attacked John Redmond's position stating that he was determinedly seeking to 'shatter your constitution'.⁷³

To the audience, risen to its feet, Balfour made an impassioned plea:

To every man, whatever his tradition, whatever be his party, or his upbringing, or his state in life. I ask that if and when we alter the fabric of our immemorial constitution it shall be of own free will – and not at the bidding of those who care nothing for our constitution and nothing for our history. So, and so only, can we hope to retain our self-respect as a nation in respect of those other great nations whose friends and whose rivals we are.⁷⁴

Asquith's Hull Speech November 1910

Asquith gave a speech in Hull on 25 November 1910. He reflected on the unity of the Liberal Party, the cause and the outcome of the January 1910 election. He restated and recommitted to his views given on Home Rule given at the Albert Hall the previous November and spoke about the opportunity afforded by the forthcoming election.

The previous election had, Asquith declared, been caused by the House of Lords rejecting the budget, 'for the first time in our history'. The main but not the sole issue of the election was that of asking the electorate to answer two questions: 'Shall the veto of the Lords in regard to finance be altogether put an end to? [and] Shall the veto of the Lords in regard to our legislation be limited and cut down?'⁷⁵ The electorate had given a clear and unequivocal answer: 'the electorate of Great Britain declared itself in favour of the budget and against the veto of the House of Lords'.⁷⁶

Asquith declared, that the question for the forthcoming election was 'whether we are to continue to carry on the King's Government, or to hand over the duty to our oppon-

⁷² Balfour, 'Leader's Speech, Nottingham 1910' (n 64) 7.

⁷³ *ibid* 7.

⁷⁴ *ibid* 7.

⁷⁵ HH Asquith, 'Leader's Speech Hull 1910' (25 November 1910) (<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=15>) accessed 16 November 2016, 1.

⁷⁶ *ibid*.

ents';⁷⁷ he was confident that the electorate would return a Liberal Government.

On the issue of Irish Home Rule, Asquith said 'I spoke of our views of the proper solution of the problem of Irish self-government. What I then said I repeat; to it I adhere, and I believe the Liberal Party adheres'.⁷⁸ Asquith commented on the criticism of John Redmond's fund raising in the United States. He pointed out that he understood that the largest proportion of the money had actually been raised by Canadians rather than by citizens of the United States. Anyway, he continued, he did not mind whether donations came from great imperial statesman or the 'Poorest Irish exile in Chicago or Milwaukee'.⁷⁹

Asquith made it clear that he saw Irish Home Rule benefiting the Imperial Parliament at Westminster by freeing it from 'much of the local work which congests its machinery and which of necessity does so ill'.⁸⁰ He stated that, based on previous experience of other dominions, he believed we had learned 'how easy it is to combine local autonomy with Imperial loyalty'.⁸¹ However, he urged the audience to concentrate on the first and the greatest task:

The task that lies right to our hands, the task that we are pledged to perform, the task of winning fair play for Liberal legislation and of securing for our people through their own chosen representatives the power of making and of moulding the laws under which they live.⁸²

Following the rejection of the 1909 budget by the Lords, Liberal Home Rule policy was set out by Asquith at a campaign meeting in London at the Albert Hall on 10 December 1909. Regarding the 'Irish Question', Asquith declared that as far as he was concerned Ireland was the 'one great failure of British statesmanship'.⁸³ He said that he and his party believed there was only one solution to the problem of the Irish Question:

A policy which, while explicitly safeguarding the supreme and indefeasible authority of the Imperial Parliament, will set up in Ireland a system of full

⁷⁷ *ibid* 3.

⁷⁸ *ibid* 5.

⁷⁹ *ibid*.

⁸⁰ *ibid*.

⁸¹ *ibid*.

⁸² *ibid*.

⁸³ HH Asquith, *The Three Capital Issues* (Liberal Publication Dept 1909) 6.

self-government in regard to purely Irish affairs. There is not, and there cannot be, any question of separation. There is not and there cannot be, any question of rival or competing supremacy's. But subject to these conditions that is the Liberal policy.⁸⁴

Whilst the current government was unable to undertake such a resolution of the Irish Question, he was sure that in the new House of Commons with a Liberal majority, a Liberal government would 'be entirely free' to resolve the issue.⁸⁵ However, a *Times* editorial reported that the Chief Whip of the Liberal Party, the Master of Elibank, had rowed back from Asquith's apparent commitment to Irish Home Rule and explained that Asquith's speech at the Albert Hall regarding Irish Home Rule 'really meant nothing in particular'.⁸⁶

The Times reported that the two leading Irish Nationalists at Westminster, John Redmond and William O'Brien, took opposing views of Asquith's Albert Hall speech, in which he pledged, or at least it was widely understood and accepted that he pledged, to facilitate Home Rule for Ireland. John Redmond acknowledged that Asquith's support for Home Rule was not 'altogether of the enthusiastic extreme character he might wish'.⁸⁷ The opposing view of William O'Brien⁸⁸ was reported by *The Times*, which said that Asquith's pledge regarding Irish Home Rule was bogus and that 'the cry that Home Rule will be granted in the next Parliament is bosh'.⁸⁹

6.2.11 Battle Lines Drawn

The relationship between England and Ireland had developed over a period of nearly 900 years. The relationship had been about Empire and its potential loss, the ownership and control of land, religious beliefs and practices, self-determination and the pursuit of political, economic and cultural identity and power. It had often been brutal and bloody. Sectarianism had been an important dimension of the relationship, as had

⁸⁴ Asquith, *The Three Capital Issues* (n 83).

⁸⁵ *ibid* 7.

⁸⁶ Editorial, 'The Opening of The Struggle' *The Times* (London, 11 January 1910) 9.

⁸⁷ Editorial, 'Ireland and the Elections' *The Times* (London, 24 January 1910) 11.

⁸⁸ Leader of independent Irish Nationalists in Westminster. An opponent of Parnell, he opposed any solution to the Irish Question that involved partition. Instead he campaigned for an All Ireland Parliament.

⁸⁹ Editorial, 'Ireland and the Elections' (n 87).

the resonance of historical events.

On the eve of the second general election of 1910, the lines were clearly drawn between the Liberal Government and the Conservative opposition. The Liberal Party was committed to providing a measure of Home Rule, one that would not compromise the integrity or well-being of the Empire. This had been a key Liberal policy commitment since 1886. The Liberal Party's time out of office following the 1886 crisis and its landslide victory in 1906 had meant the policy had perhaps moved further down its list of political priorities. Nevertheless, the Liberal Party remained the party of Irish Home Rule.

However, another imperative meant that Irish Home Rule became very important to the Liberal Party. A hung parliament in the first election of 1910, in January, meant that the Liberals were only able to govern with the support of the Irish Nationalists, led by Redmond. The Liberals wanted the House of Lords' veto removed to facilitate the passage of its social reform programme. The Irish Nationalists needed the House of Lords veto removed, for without the removal of the absolute veto a Conservative-dominated House of Lords was never likely to pass an Irish Home Rule measure.

The Conservative Party had opposed Irish Home Rule since being joined by the Liberal Unionists in 1886. The land issue, so long a major issue in Ireland, had to a large degree been resolved by a Conservative administration that sought to mollify the population and distract them from Home Rule aspirations – the adoption of what had been described as 'killing Home Rule with kindness'.

In the face of the Liberal commitment to Irish Home Rule; the political power of the Irish Nationalists by virtue of the hung parliament at Westminster; and the increasing opposition of the Ulster Unionists, the Conservatives were resolute in their opposition to Home Rule. The forthcoming election would be crucial for the direction of the Union and the constitution of Great Britain and Ireland.

6.3 Conclusion

The Irish Question has also been a major force in the development of the United Kingdom and its political system. The influx of Irish MPs into Westminster following the Act of Union of 1801 meant that the Irish Question became an issue that affected not just Ireland but ultimately the exercise of power within Westminster. The influx of Irish immigrants in the wake of the Great Famine to the great industrial cities of the North West of England changed the population's composition. Home Rule became in a sense more of a local issue with the arrival of the Irish diaspora in significant numbers.

The balance of power held by the Irish Nationalist MPs in 1910–1911 meant that they were able to strike a political deal with the Liberal Government, which had since 1886 been committed with varying degrees of enthusiasm to providing Ireland with Home Rule in some shape or form. So divisive was the subject that it caused the Liberal Party to split in 1886, with the Liberal Unionists leaving as a bloc, first allying with the Conservative Party and then ultimately in 1912 being subsumed into a renewed Conservative Party. The price of the Irish MPs' support of the Liberal Party, which had by 1910 held on to power only by entering into a coalition with the Irish Nationalists and the Labour Party, was the reforming of the House of Lords. For the proponents and supporters of Irish Home Rule, it was the implacable opposition of the Lords and their willingness to use their veto powers to strike down potential legislation that had been the major stumbling block in pursuing the political goal of Irish Home Rule. The removal of the Lords' veto powers, coupled with the supportive Liberal Government, notwithstanding the considerable opposition, made Irish Home Rule a distinct possibility.

The Conservative and Unionist opposition were motivated by a variety of factors. Many feared that political freedom for Ireland would presage the break-up of the Union and indeed the British Empire. With the Irish Nationalists to the fore and the promise of Home Rule given by the government, it was perhaps not surprising that other nationalist groups, that is, the Welsh and the Scots, began to get restive. If the Irish Nationalists

could have Home Rule, why not the Welsh or the Scots? The Edwardian era increasingly saw other countries begin to challenge the supremacy of the British Empire. The United States, Germany, Russia and Japan had made great strides economically after initially lagging behind the UK and were now flexing their economic and military muscle on the world stage.

Some saw the demand for Irish land rights as an attack on the holding of land itself and a threat to the landlords in England. It was perceived that such a demand, if it were to be met, would set a dangerous precedent, for it threatened the very thing that had underpinned English society since before the Norman invasion: land ownership. Religiosity played a role in the objections to Irish Home Rule. Protestants on both sides of the Irish Sea were concerned that a reformed House of Lords would remove the thing that guaranteed Protestant political and economic domination. The possession of an absolute veto power on legislation by the House of Lords made the passage of Irish Home Rule legislation a remote possibility, if not impossible. Many Irish estates were held by peers who were from Anglo-Irish families, of the Protestant Ascendancy. The idea of giving up power was unthinkable given that their families had been in Ireland since the Protestant Plantations of the sixteenth century and had fought and died for the land. Also, at some level many felt that it was wrong that the Protestant state should simply hand back land and power to the Catholic majority.

The trajectory of the Irish Home Rule movement and the IPP's holding of the balance of power at Westminster alarmed Protestant Unionists in Ulster. Tensions increased as the Parliament Bill proceeded through the various stages of the legislative. After the passing of the 1911 Parliament Act, there came a point, in 1912, when a British army mutiny in Ireland became a distinct possibility. When elected and unelected Conservative politicians' publicly expressed views that were tantamount to support for armed insurrection in Ulster,⁹⁰ the Liberal Government faced the prospect of a breakdown in

⁹⁰ Andrew Bonar Law succeeded Arthur Balfour as leader of the Conservative party in November 1911. A fierce opponent of Irish Home Rule, he condemned the Third Home Rule Bill in an address to a meeting at Blenheim Palace on 24 July 1913. If Home Rule was forced on Ulster he warned 'I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support

the democratic process.

them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.' Quoted in: EA Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma In Ireland. Occupation Politics, 1886-1914* (University Press of Kansas 1991) 168-69.

Chapter 7

Editorial Coverage of Irish Home Rule

7.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the editorial coverage by *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* of the Irish Home Rule issue between December 1910 and August 1911. The general election result of December 1910 made very little difference to the distribution of seats between the parties such that the Liberal-led coalition remained intact. The situation in Ulster with regard to Irish Home Rule is also examined. The general election result galvanised the Protestant Unionist movement that was already greatly exercised by the prospect of Irish Home Rule. The Irish Nationalist attempt to dampen down Ulster Protestant and English fears of Home Rule is examined in the context of editorial articles. The chapter closes by considering the relevance of Lord Lansdowne's amendment to the Parliament Bill and its bearing on the issue of Irish Home Rule.

7.2 Editorial Coverage

7.2.1 The General Election

The Opening Salvos

The British constitution faced an existential crisis, argued *The Times* in a series of leaders published immediately prior to the general election in December 1910. The Liberal Government, driven by the IPP, socialists and American money, was out to destroy the constitution, it claimed. The Conservative Party 'were ready to fight' to save the constitution and maintain the integrity of the United Kingdom. A *Times* leader claimed the 'revolutionary' government was being driven by the 'Socialists and the Irish

party'¹ and 'obedience to the will of American subscribers'.² However, the chief culprits were the IPP: 'the forced character of the crisis makes it plain that Mr Asquith is being driven',³ argued *The Times*. The present government was 'toeing the mark',⁴ as it had done at the last election.

Commenting on a speech given by Asquith in November 1910, the day after the general election date was announced, at the National Liberal Club, *The Times* evinced sorrow at seeing the prime minister, a 'man who respected and loved his country' who was only 'kept in office as the price of compliance with the wishes of a gang of political adventurers subsidised by the enemies of England on both sides of the Atlantic'.⁵ However, it reminded its readers that they should not forget that Asquith knew that he held his position due to 'a grotesque misrepresentation of the people, which gives 1500 ignorant Galway peasants as much influence over legislation as 40,000 intelligent voters in an English constituency'.⁶ The call for the election and the policies laid out in Asquith's speech had all been orchestrated by John Redmond, with only one part, that of Home Rule, 'carefully kept out of sight; and if he remains in power after the election he will be Mr Redmond's lieutenant as he now is his advocate'.⁷ Even though Asquith's speech had not mentioned Irish Home Rule, it was clear, *The Times* concluded, that 'the motive power of the whole liberal policy at present is Home Rule and nothing else'.⁸

For the *Manchester Guardian*, the Irish Home Rule issue was a smokescreen put up by the Lords and their supporters to obscure the true issue of the election: who actually ruled England. The Lords had repaired once more 'to those tried places of controversial refuge, the horrors of Irish Home Rule, the extremists of Mr Redmond, the revolutionary

¹ Editorial, 'The Unionist Position' *The Times* (London, 10 November 1910) 9.

² *ibid.*

³ Editorial, 'The Dissolution' *The Times* (London, 19 November 1910) 9.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Editorial, 'The Opening of the Campaign' *The Times* (London, 21 November 1910) 7.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

instincts of radicals, and the taint of American dollars'.⁹ The Conservative opposition to Home Rule was not, the *Manchester Guardian* alleged, as clear-cut as people might have thought. It doubted that the Conservatives were as anti-Home-Rule as they liked to believe; indeed; it argued the actual extent of their opposition would depend on the outcome of the forthcoming election. It identified several quality press newspapers, *The Observer*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Standard* and *The Times*, as being what might in modern terms be called cheerleaders for the House of Lords. The group of titles of the 'Lords' press chorus' led by J.L. Garvin of *The Observer*, took on the role rather of a fugleman¹⁰ in their attitude towards devolution.

All of the newspapers had from time to time published arguments for and against Home Rule, 'each set just as good as the other'.¹¹ The *Manchester Guardian* could 'foresee that if the general election resulted in a certain particular distribution of friendly forces, in the Lords there would be a Home Rule party in a week, why not when they have published sound reasons already?'.¹² It continued that 'whoever may be rigidly opposed to Home Rule, the Lords party are not. It is simply an open question with them'.¹³

Much criticism had been made by conservative newspapers of Redmond's and the Irish Nationalist fundraising in the United States and Canada. However, the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out that the Lords also received funding from the United States, and the *Morning Post* announced that \$120,000 had been received from 'America' to forward to the Conservative cause via its 'new friend Mr O'Brien in England'.¹⁴ Even more extreme was the allegation that the House of Lords formed 'the chief political committee' of Irish landlords, a group of individuals who had received, a Royal Commission had calculated, in excess of \$80,000,000 in 10 years from 'American maidservants, shop men, and labourers as part of the rack rents of Irish cabins and farms'.¹⁵

⁹ Editorial, 'Forested by Themselves' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 23 November 1910) 6.

¹⁰ A soldier who stands in front of a regiment or company demonstrating and maintaining time in drilling exercises.

¹¹ Editorial, 'Forested by Themselves' (n 9).

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

The Election Proper

The Times shared the Conservatives' view that the government, under the direction of John Redmond, had managed to keep the subject of Irish Home Rule out of its campaigning before the election. This would explain, in *The Times's* view, the lack of change in public opinion¹⁶ since the last election. This view of the government's suppression of the topic of Irish Home Rule fitted in with the rush to the election and the withdrawal of the Parliament Bill from both the House of Commons and House of Lords. It was, argued *The Times*, all part of the plan engineered by 'the government and their dictator Mr Redmond' to ambush the electorate or, as *The Times* put it, to 'catch the country unawares'.¹⁷

Only when the election was halfway through, reported *The Times*, did Asquith, at a public meeting in Fife, respond to a heckler by saying that if the Liberals were returned to power the government 'intended to grant to Ireland a measure of Home Rule'.¹⁸ The silence regarding Home Rule, alleged *The Times*, was because 'the destruction of the power of the upper house has to be accomplished before Home Rule can be dealt with'.¹⁹ The Liberals knew that Irish Home Rule did not look attractive to the voters and so it was with 'remarkable discipline Liberals have to a large extent abstained from allusion to the cornerstone of the policy'.²⁰ There had been something of a *volte-face* with regard to mentioning Home Rule. Asquith had gone from 'saying nothing to saying a lot about Home Rule' to now suggesting it would be a mild form of devolution,²¹ although exactly what that meant remained vague. What was much less vague was Redmond's statement that the abolition of the Lords veto 'means with mathematical accuracy establishment of Home Rule'.²²

The *Manchester Guardian* took a different approach to the election. It focused more

¹⁶ Editorial, 'The Election' *The Times* (London, 7 December 1910) 11.

¹⁷ Editorial, 'The First Day of Polling' *The Times* (London, 5 December 1910) 13.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Editorial, 'The Election and its Object' *The Times* (London, 9 December 1910) 11.

²² *ibid.*

on Ulster and less on the lack of campaigning on Irish Home Rule by the Liberal Party. Things had changed in Ulster in the past 15 years, it argued. Ulster Protestants were expressing what seemed to be a sincere confidence that since 1895 'Ulster bigotry and intolerance was dying a natural death'.²³ The change was being driven by improvements in agriculture, education and the economy. The old battle cry of 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right' seemed to be diminishing in its usage and power to the point where it was now used only 'in the nature of hoaxes on rather gullible Unionist newspapers',²⁴ declared the *Manchester Guardian*. Ulster would not fight following the granting of some self-government to Ireland because they would all be too busy in the 'scramble for places in the new administration'.²⁵

Concerns were expressed about rumours that Conservative supporters had placed tender request advertisements for arms and ammunition in German newspapers with a view to arming anti-Home-Rule Protestant forces. Arthur Balfour was urged to take action to discourage such propaganda, which was capable of fanning the flames of sectarianism. The situation could not have been clearer, based on Asquith's Albert Hall speech in 1909: the elimination of the House of Lords veto would be followed by Home Rule for Ireland.²⁶ The *Manchester Guardian* noted the loss of the seat of the independent Irish Nationalist Tim Healy, who had been subject to the 'dollar dictation cry', which had been an attack on all Irish candidates. That said, his defeat was the result of 'the natural and proper revulsion of feeling against Mr Healy's allies'.²⁷ However, overall, the *Manchester Guardian* noted that attempts to stir up anti-Irish agitation by Conservative activists had by and large failed.²⁸

The *Manchester Guardian* opined that the problem Arthur Balfour had with the Liberal policy on Home Rule was not so much that the Liberals supported Home Rule but that they had not disclosed the policy to the electorate and made clear during the course of

²³ Editorial, 'Ulster and Liberalism' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 8 December 1910) 8.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

the election that they were in fact pro-Home-Rule. However, it was pointed out that in fact the Conservatives' view of Home Rule had changed, and the editorial argued that Unionists, or at least some Unionists, now advocated Home Rule for all four parts of the United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.²⁹

A Fragile Coalition

As early as 9 December 1910, a *Times* editorial forecasted the outcome of the election result as one in which no real change in the distribution of seats would occur, leaving 'the parties very much where they were in regard to parliamentary strength'.³⁰ Faced with a second election within 12 months, the electorate had become bored: the already low level of interest in the election 'visibly wanes, the election is becoming a bore, in spite of exhortations to take it seriously in which we have played our part'.³¹

The government, based on a fragile coalition, was seeking the moral authority to change the constitution in the new election. In *The Times's* view, a repetition of January's election results would give some weight to the government's claim of legitimacy. However, the editorial wondered whether the results meant that the coalition was differently configured? The actual composition of the coalition was important since the 'character of the majority claimed by the government is a vital factor in the situation'.³² Whatever the composition of the Liberal coalition, 'no one can seriously pretend that a body of this sort, which is only kept together by bargaining, not by conviction, is just the same as a homogeneous majority of the ordinary kind'.³³ Still less, it continued, could anyone pretend that a government with a majority of this kind had any moral authority to fundamentally change the constitution of the country.

The election results were, as *The Times* predicted, virtually unchanged from January's results, with the Liberals having lost two seats, the Conservatives gaining one seat and the third-biggest group the IPP gaining three seats. *The Times* took issue with Liberal

²⁹ Editorial, 'The Election and Home Rule' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 12 December 1910) 8.

³⁰ Editorial, 'The Election and After' *The Times* (London, 10 December 1910) 11.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

reasoning, which, it said, amounted to the idea that since the two majorities were about the same size 'Mr Asquith may now do anything Mr Redmond bids him to'.³⁴ The result was not, contrary to the Liberal view, like the victory the Conservatives gained in the 1900 general election. The difference was that whereas the Unionists 'had a homogeneous majority over the other parties and groups in the House of Commons put together, Mr Asquith is in no such position'.³⁵

Mr Asquith's coalition majority, argued *The Times*, comprised Labour MPs who 'in general policy do not trust him or believe him' and Irish Nationalist MPs who 'are hostile to the great interests of his empire'.³⁶ Asquith, whose primary duty was to guard the Empire, was actually 'bent on destroying at once the constitution and unity of the kingdom'; it amounted, argued *The Times*, to a 'flagrant abuse of an electoral accident'.³⁷ However, *The Times* declared, it would not believe in the success of the present 'roughshod policy until we see the completion of what Mr Balfour justly declares as being one of the greatest crimes in history'.³⁸

The Times described as amusing both the argument put forward by Asquith that John Redmond furnished only a small proportion of the government's supporters and his indignation at 'the suggestion that his policy was being deflected or driven by Redmond'.³⁹ On the contrary, the editorial ran, the IPP were the major part of the Liberal minority, and Redmond had energised the Liberal Party in the same way as a percussion cap ignited a cartridge. 'A percussion cap is only a minute portion of the cartridge, but there is no explosion without it. The world at home and abroad is very well aware that Mr Redmond is equally the energiser of the Liberal Party in Parliament';⁴⁰ put simply, without Redmond's assistance, the Liberals could not pass Irish Home Rule or the budget.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Editorial, 'The Electoral Situation' *The Times* (London, 13 December 1910) 9.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Editorial, 'The Political Situation' *The Times* (London, 16 December 1910) 11.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

The Electorate Ambushed?

As the election drew to a close, with the majority of results returned the *Manchester Guardian* reported on a speech given by Asquith at Glossop on 14 December. The speech was described as ‘the best statement of the Liberal case that has been made during the election’.⁴¹ The newspaper endorsed Asquith’s strong rejection of the allegations that Home Rule had been ‘sprung on the country when the election was half over’.⁴² The reality was that the Conservatives had been using a stock argument that the Liberal policy was for a measure of Home Rule in the wake of the abolition of the Lords veto for over a year prior to the election. The Conservatives had introduced and endlessly repeated the charge that the Liberals were subject to ‘dollar dictation’, alluding to the American funding of the Irish Nationalist cause. It was petty ‘to blame the Liberals because the [anti-Irish] thunderbolts have fallen harmlessly’.⁴³

The truth, contended Asquith, was that Home Rule had been a key Liberal policy plank for nearly a generation and the party would deserve ‘excoriation and contempt if it deserted principles for which it has fought so long in vain just at the moment when they are about to become popular’.⁴⁴ The *Manchester Guardian* claimed that the real issue for the Conservatives was not that ‘Home Rule has not been adequately discussed, but that it has ceased to be unpopular’.⁴⁵ The Conservatives were, it was argued, out of touch with the feeling regarding Home Rule in the country. Once a Home Rule Bill had been brought forward by the Liberal Government, the Conservatives would find that ‘it will not go an inch beyond the change in opinion that has been going on silently all these years’.⁴⁶ Such a bill would be ‘popular; it may even, some shrewd observers think, be passed by consent’.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Editorial, ‘Mr. Asquith’s Speech’ *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 15 December 1910) 8.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

7.2.2 The Ulster Situation

On 6 January 1911, *The Times* published Redmond's manifesto in the shape of an article that was also to appear in the *Reynolds Newspaper* on 7 January 1911. For *The Times*, the article summed up all that it objected to with regard to the behaviour and attitude of John Redmond and the Irish Nationalists towards the government and the Irish Home Rule issue. Redmond's article, claimed *The Times*, sought to remind the government of the commanding position that Redmond and the Nationalists now held over the Liberal Government. Redmond argued that the election had given Asquith an unequivocal mandate to carry on with the implementation of policies, including Home Rule, in line with Asquith's Albert Hall speech of December 1909. The election result 'demonstrates again to his own satisfaction that the two elections clothe himself and his allies with ample authority to do anything that he requires'.⁴⁸

Redmond, *The Times* explained, acknowledged there had been misunderstandings with the Irish Nationalists but the reality was that the Nationalists had 'always been the true friends' of the British. *The Times* reported, with ill-concealed incredulity, that the 'hatred and contempt of the British people [so] seditiously preached by nationalists for generations' had in fact according to Redmond, been animated from first to last by love of the British people.⁴⁹

Perhaps the most striking claim to come from the article, argued *The Times*, was Redmond's claim that in fact there was no Ulster Question. Redmond said Ulster was not different from the rest of Ireland – 'it is not peculiarly Protestant, nor peculiarly Unionist, nor peculiarly wealthy, nor, in fact, peculiarly anything except intolerant'.⁵⁰ The article described the Irish as a tolerant race, '[except] when they happen to be Protestants, and then for some mysterious reason they become persecutors of the worst type'.⁵¹ Notwithstanding the assertion regarding the intolerance of Protestants, *The*

⁴⁸ Editorial, 'The Cries of Battle' *The Times* (London, 6 January 1911) 9.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Editorial, 'Ulster and Home Rule' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 20 January 1911) 6.

Times rather doubtfully recounted Redmond's statement that when Nationalists were properly outvoted 'in an Irish parliament, toleration and brotherly love will rule throughout the land'.⁵²

Following the general election, *Manchester Guardian* leader writers became increasingly alarmed over the nature of the recent headlines in Conservative-supporting newspapers. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that *The Standard* had written the previous week that 'Ulster will fight and who will say that Ulster would be wrong?'.⁵³ Worse was to follow: 'There will be the revolt of a stern, resolute, and indomitable population with arms in their hands', which would only be controlled 'by calling in the King's troops', claimed one unnamed London newspaper; 'of course, this invitation to Ulster to imitate Sidney Street will not be accepted',⁵⁴ stated the *Manchester Guardian*.

The *Manchester Guardian* reported on an article by a Belfast-based correspondent of the Unionist-supporting *Morning Post*, which had claimed that the Orange Order had been collecting funds to purchase rifles and ammunition and had stated that 'if we are driven to it those arms will be used'.⁵⁵ The *Morning Post* article continued, 'the Grand Orange Lodge had issued a manifesto calling on its members to volunteer for insurrection'.⁵⁶ The *Manchester Guardian's* response was to argue that the Orange Order's call to arms meant that they were probably guilty of high treason and 'in danger of a disagreeable penalty'.⁵⁷ The *Morning Post*, it was argued, was probably guilty as an accessory to treason, whose punishment on conviction was 'merely hanging – ordinarily hanging, with a doubtful privilege of being hanged in public instead of in jail'.⁵⁸

The *Manchester Guardian* did have some sympathy with Redmond's view regarding the status of Ulster. In its view the demands to treat Ulster separately from the rest

⁵² Editorial, 'The Cries of Battle' (n 48).

⁵³ Editorial, 'Ulster and Home Rule' (n 51).

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Editorial, 'Playing at Treason' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 23 December 1910) 6.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

of Ireland would 'almost certainly be dropped'.⁵⁹ Ulster was an integral part of Ireland; 'how could she decently, on the plea of protecting a sturdy minority in the North, leave the Unionists in the rest of Ireland in a helpless minority?'⁶⁰

7.2.3 England's Need for Irish Home Rule

England needed Irish Home Rule, argued the *Manchester Guardian*. There was political support for that view, not least of all from some Conservative elements, both politicians and newspapers. The whole notion of Irish Home Rule had become more attractive and accessible. The headline 'Imperial Home Rule' had become a familiar one in Conservative newspapers and, continued the *Manchester Guardian*, 'there were more Home Rule leaders in Conservative papers last year than Liberal ones'.⁶¹ It supported Irish Home Rule on the basis that it would be undertaken by making Ireland subject to a similar model to that of other self-governing dominions and colonies. It noted that, whilst the '*Daily Telegraph* might be lukewarm, the *Morning Post* is a convert and Mr Garvin's advocacy is strongest of all'.⁶²

Even if the *Manchester Guardian's* view that England needed Irish Home Rule had been accepted by *The Times* (which it most certainly had not), in the view of *The Times* John Redmond and Irish Nationalists would wait until 1912 before pushing for Home Rule. The nationalists realised that there was still one part of the budget to pass before the Parliament Bill could be passed, both conditions being required before Home Rule could become possible. Redmond, *The Times* reported, had said at a banquet in Dublin that he would 'not press his claims in 1911 but rather wait to 1912'.⁶³

Aside from the lack of parliamentary time, the announcement that King George V would travel to Ireland as part of his accession in July 1911 meant that Irish Home Rule would not happen in 1911, because it would be impossible for the King to visit Dublin whilst

⁵⁹ Editorial, 'Ulster and Home Rule' (n 51).

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Editorial, 'England's Need of Irish Home Rule' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 19 January 1911) 6.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Editorial, 'The Political Problem' *The Times* (London, 21 January 1911) 11.

it was suffering the 'strongly exacerbated feelings which such a measure cannot fail to excite'.⁶⁴

7.2.4 The King's Speech Amendment

No mention had been made of Home Rule during the King's speech of 6 February 1911 at the opening of the new Parliament. On the eighth day of debate in the Commons following the speech,⁶⁵ Ian Malcolm (Conservative) moved an amendment to be added to it. The amendment reflected Conservatives' concerns that 'the obscure and conflicting declarations of your Majesty's ministers on the subject of Home Rule were hampering the deliberations on the proposed changes to their relations between the Lords and the Commons'.⁶⁶ The amendment concluded that it considered the openly avowed attainment of Home Rule is 'subversive of the unity of the United Kingdom and of the well-being of all its parts'.⁶⁷ The amendment was put to a vote and was lost by 213 to 326 votes.

For *The Times*, the issue was not only the lockstep between the Parliament Bill and Irish Home Rule but also what Redmond and the Nationalists actually meant by Irish Home Rule. According to *The Times*, Redmond had often explained Home Rule as meaning 'Parnellite Home Rule'.⁶⁸ The key issue for *The Times* was that whilst it was all very well for John Redmond to claim to stand where Parnell stood, there was a need for evidence as to where exactly Parnell had stood, since what Parnell declared to be 'an instalment cannot be guaranteed to be a final settlement of Home Rule'.⁶⁹ The shifting nature of the Nationalists' policy hid from the British people, *The Times* argued, the reality of the situation, which was that the Irish Nationalists campaigned for what was seen as a small Home Rule bill 'with the full knowledge that it could be—and would be used as—a lever to get what would scare the British people if they were allowed to

⁶⁴ Editorial, 'The Royal Visit To Dublin' *The Times* (London, 26 January 1911) 9.

⁶⁵ HC Deb 15 February 1911, vol 21, 1067.

⁶⁶ *ibid* col 1067.

⁶⁷ *ibid*.

⁶⁸ Editorial, 'The Election and its Object' *The Times* (London, 12 December 1910) 11.

⁶⁹ Editorial, 'The Home Rule Amendment' *The Times* (London, 16 February 1911) 6.

see it as a whole'.⁷⁰ The IPP were disingenuous in that they were now campaigning for funds, especially in the US and Canada, where they offered up 'one version of Home Rule in the US and a wholly different one in Canada'.⁷¹

Lord Hugh Cecil, who had seconded Malcolm's amendment to the King's speech, had railed against 'the ambiguity and contradictions of government policy'⁷² regarding Home Rule. In particular, Asquith's contention that any settlement would not impact upon imperial sovereignty was greeted by *The Times* with some doubt, since it was not clear, it argued, what was meant by imperial sovereignty in the context of Ireland, which was unlike 'any other portion of his Majesty's white dominions'.⁷³ When pressed as to what Asquith meant by imperial sovereignty, he responded 'solvitur ambulando'.⁷⁴

The attempt to decouple House of Lords reform and the Parliament Bill from the issue of Irish Home Rule reflected the beliefs of many Conservatives and Conservative supporters that the driver of the Parliament Bill was Irish Home Rule. Following the debate, the question was put and the amendment was rejected by 327 to 213 votes.

7.2.5 Home Rule Does Not Mean Rome Rule

The phrase 'Home Rule equals Rome Rule' had an emotive and powerful effect on the Protestant population of Ireland and beyond, conjuring up as it did images of sectarian violence and the Protestant minority suffering at the hands of the Catholic majority during the Irish rebellion of 1798. John Redmond had written an article for the *Reynolds Newspaper* entitled 'Does Home Rule – mean Rome Rule?'. A sceptical *Times* had obtained an advance copy. In the article, wrote *The Times*, Redmond described his anger at the statement, 'most absurd and offensive and insulting to the feelings of Ireland, [is the notion] that Home Rule would mean Roman rule that is to say, that the Irish parliament would have its policy dictated by the Holy See'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² HC Deb 15 February 1911, vol 21, col 1083.

⁷³ Editorial, 'The Home Rule Amendment' (n 69).

⁷⁴ Latin 'It is solved by walking' - The problem is solved by a practical experiment.

⁷⁵ Editorial, 'Home Rule And Rome Rule' *The Times* (London, 24 February 1911) 14.

Redmond argued that the great influence of the Catholic Church had declined over the last century, which meant that ‘any illegitimate exercise of influence by Rome would be an absolute impossibility’.⁷⁶ Ireland had resented the interference of the Catholic Church and had ‘asserted her own independence’.⁷⁷ Suggestions that an Irish parliament would oppress Protestants were ill-founded since ‘the continued supremacy of the Imperial Parliament would remain to prevent such an abuse of the Irish parliament’s powers’.⁷⁸

A controversial and widely reported example of the alleged power and influence of the Catholic Church being directed against the Protestant faith was the case of Agnes McCann. In 1907 the papal decree of *Ne Temere* meant the Catholic Church would not recognise a marriage between a Protestant and a Catholic unless it took place in a Catholic church. The decree required children of mixed marriages to be raised Catholic. In the case of Agnes McCann, her children had been taken by her Catholic husband because she, a Presbyterian, had refused to comply with the decree to remarry in a Catholic church and bring the children up in that faith.

Redmond argued that the facts of the case had not been established and even if the claim were true the events had taken place under an imperial parliament and not Home Rule. The decree did not change the law of the land and Redmond argued that ‘the pretence that it has been, or ever will be, used to break up families or to oppress Protestants is the grossest imposture’.⁷⁹ *The Times* reported that Redmond declared that he and his friends would ‘fight to the death against any such proposal’ made by an Irish parliament to oppress the Protestants. Redmond concluded by saying that the English should ‘understand once and for all that by Home Rule we mean the rule of her own affairs by Ireland herself’ this meant that ‘Home Rule can never be Rome rule’.⁸⁰

London’s Conservative newspapers had been complaining about the decline in oppos-

⁷⁶ Editorial, ‘Home Rule And Rome Rule’ (n 75).

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

ition to Irish Home Rule among Unionist supporters in Ireland, claimed the *Manchester Guardian*. It declared that efforts to revive the slogan 'Home Rule equals Rome Rule' had largely failed, despite the best efforts of some to inflame the current situation in an attempt to return Ireland to a time of 'bitter and gloomy days'.⁸¹ The old cry had, in the face of the Land Purchase Act, the Local Government Act and the recent Irish intellectual and cultural revival, largely failed. Relations between 'most Irishmen and most Englishmen [had] passed into a phase of sanity and incipient mutual understanding, as those of England and America have'.⁸² The evidence of the success of the South African Home Rule experiment should the *Manchester Guardian* claimed encourage hopes of a similar success with Irish Home Rule; after all, 'evidence is evidence'.⁸³

7.2.6 Conciliatory Noises

The Times warned that for all the conciliatory noises being made, Redmond's assurances, given his poor track record, were not worth anything. Redmond claimed to find the idea that Home Rule would lead to the oppression of Irish Protestants 'a gross insult to Irish people', and no more 'valid as an objection to Home Rule than the contention that Irishmen are disloyal and not to be trusted'.⁸⁴ He offered, reported *The Times*, the Irish minority and the British people the 'pledges and declarations of men like himself'.⁸⁵

The Times posed the question, somewhat sceptically, 'is it possible they [the Protestant minority] will not like the security of Mr Redmond's statements?' The safeguards offered were to be 'backed by any paper safeguards the wit of man can devise' and 'would be upheld by "the unimpaired supremacy" of the Imperial Parliament'⁸⁶ – a 'Parliament that has already proved itself more than willing to interfere with its dominions in Canada, Australia, or South Africa'.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Editorial, 'Mr. Birrell's Speech' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 25 March 1911) 8.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Editorial, 'The Nationalists and the Crisis' (n 44).

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

The Times argued that Redmond had indicated that he would be content with a subordinate Irish parliament, as long as it held sway over such questions as 'land, education, and the other questions which are purely Irish'.⁸⁸ Redmond was likely to be happy to let foreign policy rest with the imperial parliament, banking on retaining influence by virtue of the Nationalist members remaining at Westminster.

The Times doubted that the large minority in Ireland would be much affected by Redmond's eloquence or his 'earnest intones [and] emphatic expression'.⁸⁹ It also doubted that British opinion would be much moved by either, since to the British its subject and its significance were transparently clear – as clear as the reasons for nationalist violence against the House of Lords. It would 'expect Englishmen and Scottish men to judge nationalist promises and assurances by the nationalist record'.⁹⁰

Nationalists, it was claimed, had a marked character of vengefulness that did not encourage the Irish minority or the English people to grant politicians 'large powers over the enemies they have so often denounced'.⁹¹ *The Times* pointed to Mr Redmond's indiscretion in declaring that the House of Lords before God and man was 'responsible for every agrarian crime committed during the land wars', and asked whether Nationalist supporters might not rejoice at the opportunity that Home Rule would give them 'to pay back the debt which in some sense they owe' to others beside the House of Lords.⁹²

Similar pledges had been given prior to the implementation of the Irish Local Government Act of 1898, when it was promised that Nationalists would use all their power and influence to see it bring about 'a spirit of freedom, of toleration, and of justice to all creeds and classes'.⁹³ The intention might have been good but in practice it had not worked; in 'every case Protestant unionists have been deprived of all share in local

⁸⁸ Editorial, 'The Nationalists and the Crisis' (n 44).

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

government where there is a nationalist majority amongst the electoral laws'.⁹⁴ Based on their experience of Irish Nationalist control, asked *The Times*, were 'Irish Unionists justified as men of common sense in judging the future by the past?'.⁹⁵

7.2.7 'A Fraud Upon the Constitution'

As the Parliament Bill entered its committee stage in the House of Commons in early April 1911, *The Times* took exception to the delay, enshrined in the preamble to the Parliament Bill, in developing the new second chamber to replace the House of Lords. For *The Times*, the delay was not the result of accident or the pressure of parliamentary time or the sheer complexity of undertaking such a large constitutional reform; no, the delay had been deliberately engineered to enable the government to pass through under the auspices of the Act 'at least one vast constitutional change, which they may reasonably apprehend that any second chamber which really reflected the views of the British people would reject'.⁹⁶

Home Rule would, under 'the collective and temporary dictatorship which the House of Commons is to assume under the Parliament Act, be passed'.⁹⁷ The opposition of the Lords to Home Rule and the consequences of Home Rule represented 'the head and front of their offending',⁹⁸ in the eyes of the Irish Nationalists. Lawyers spoke of the perpetration of 'fraud upon a power'; it was 'by something not unlike fraud upon the Constitution that Mr Redmond and his American paymasters are to receive their price'.⁹⁹ The government would do what it was told, for everyone knew that 'Mr Asquith cannot remain in office'.¹⁰⁰ without the support of the Irish Nationalists.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Editorial, 'The Constitutional Struggle' *The Times* (London, 3 April 1911) 9.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

7.2.8 Home Rule Choir

The Conservative Party seemed, argued *The Manchester Guardian*, to be in a state of some confusion regarding Irish Home Rule. On one hand, Arthur Balfour had recently given a speech in the same vein as he had done before, in which he fanned ‘the ashes of the old anti-Irish spites which have stood his party in good stead for so many years’.¹⁰¹ Yet only the previous year the newspaper’s staff had been reading with amusement ‘the advocacy of Irish Home Rule in one form or another of the chief London organs of the opposition’.¹⁰² Some had called for devolution and some a federation, but everyone saw at once the reality that it was ‘simply home-rule rechristened for form’s sake’.¹⁰³

The Manchester Guardian argued that Balfour had led in the autumn of 1910 a ‘fairly orthodox Home Rule party’ and had displayed none of his new-found fears about the dreadfulness of approaching the ‘golden mean’, the golden mean being good enough for *The Times* and *The Observer* and the other leaders of the ‘Unionist home-rule choir the previous year’.¹⁰⁴

Now Balfour was, the *Manchester Guardian* claimed, trying to obscure the Conservatives’ previous support for Home Rule. If people doubted that the Conservatives had to a degree embraced Home Rule, albeit temporarily, then they could examine the party journals stored at the British Museum, which would make it impossible for the Conservative Party ever again to claim to be immovable upholders ‘of the union as the union existed for more than a century’.¹⁰⁵

The opposition mounted another attempt to decouple Lords reform from Irish Home Rule. Sir John Lonsdale (Irish Unionist) moved an amendment in the Commons committee stage of the Parliament Bill ‘to exclude entirely from the operation of this Bill any measure of Home Rule for Ireland [such that] no attempt will be made to satisfy the

¹⁰¹ Editorial, ‘Mr. Balfour’s Speech’ *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 7 April 1911) 6.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

demands of the Nationalist Party, during the time the Second Chamber is in a state of suspended animation'.¹⁰⁶ Lonsdale's argument was that the government was going to take advantage of the interval between the destruction of the Lords and the creation of the new chamber to perpetrate 'a fraud upon the nation'.¹⁰⁷ However, Lonsdale recognised, argued *The Times*, that he had little or no chance of being listened to since 'this is what Mr Redmond insists that the government shall do' because Redmond 'has the government in the hollow of his hand'.¹⁰⁸

For *The Times*, Asquith and the Liberals had gone to a great deal of trouble to convince the electorate that since even before the general election in January Irish Home Rule was a key plank of Liberal policy. However, facts did not support the contention, claimed *The Times*. Irish Home Rule had not made an appearance in their programme in the 1906 election because the 'Liberals knew the country does not want Home Rule for Ireland'.¹⁰⁹ It did not arise in their 1906 parliament 'because no one wanted it and Mr Redmond could not impose it'.¹¹⁰ Its appearance in 1910 had 'resulted in the loss of 100 seats, thus depriving government of the independent majority without which as, Mr Asquith once proudly declared, no serving Liberal Minister could undertake the government of the country'.¹¹¹

The refusal of Asquith to say exactly when the new chamber to replace the Lords would be instituted led *The Times* to return to the idea of the delay being predetermined to enable the government 'to secure a period of absolute freedom from check or control for the coalition which now supports him'.¹¹² The survival of the coalition, argued *The Times*, was entirely in the gift of Redmond, and one thing he wanted as a condition for the maintenance of the coalition was that 'it should be able to do exactly what he dictates without allowing either of the other branches of the legislature or the nation at

¹⁰⁶ Editorial, 'The Vote of Censure' *The Times* (London, 7 August 1911) 7.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill and Home Rule' *The Times* (London, 25 April 1911) 9.

¹⁰⁸ Editorial, 'The Vote of Censure' (n 106).

¹⁰⁹ Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill and Home Rule' (n 107).

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² Editorial, 'The Report Stage of the Parliament Bill' *The Times* (London, 11 May 1911) 11.

large to have any other voice in the matter'.¹¹³

7.2.9 'Swept in a Trance'

The idea that the voters had not thought about Irish Home Rule during the election campaign was, argued the *Manchester Guardian*, nonsense, when one took into account the speeches, posters and cartoons used by both the Liberals and the Conservatives.¹¹⁴

So much was made of Irish Home Rule by both sides that it was 'difficult to tell which side was more clear and emphatic'¹¹⁵ on the subject, argued a *Manchester Guardian* leader. Prior to the election, the Unionist press had been of one mind: 'it was simply a home-rule election, to judge by their words'.¹¹⁶ After all, had not *The Observer* said that 'the nation recognises the emergency?'¹¹⁷ However, now the situation seemed to have been reversed, and Unionists were claiming that the electorate had been 'swept in a trance' and had in a sense sleepwalked their way to and through the election oblivious of the Irish Home Rule issue. This was, the *Manchester Guardian* argued, simply not true, for again and again Unionists had proclaimed the importance of Irish Home Rule in the nation's vote against the Lords during the course of the election.

The *Manchester Guardian* detected a feeling of apathy in the population, at least in mainland Britain, regarding Irish Home Rule. There was a sense that people felt that since Home Rule had worked well in South Africa, it was 'rather shabby',¹¹⁸ to refuse the people of Ireland a freedom similar to that which South Africa enjoyed.

7.2.10 The Delay in Reforming the House of Lords

The Times reported that Asquith stated that he saw a government obligation to undertake reform of the Lords, 'time permitting'.¹¹⁹ However, *The Times* suggested that in

¹¹³ Editorial, 'The Report Stage of the Parliament Bill' (n 112).

¹¹⁴ Editorial, 'Mr. Max Beerbohm's Caricatures' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 22 April 1911) 8.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Editorial, 'The Preamble Debate' *The Times* (London, 4 May 1911) 9.

fact time would not permit because 'probably Mr Redmond is too insistent and other persons too clamorous'.¹²⁰ The editorial argued that it would appear to many people that the Liberals had avoided doing anything to bring into effect the preamble to the Parliament Bill, i.e. the creation of a new chamber to replace the House of Lords, within a measurable time. However, it seemed, *The Times* continued, that Asquith had all along been pledging himself 'not to rest content'¹²¹ until the preamble was undertaken. However, that view was at variance with the view of the Irish Nationalists, who were desirous of delaying the preamble and its accompanying creation of a new second chamber, which it saw as a threat to its Home Rule ambitions.

With the Parliament Bill passing its report stage and moving towards its third reading, and with Lord Lansdowne's House of Lords Reconstitution Bill receiving its first reading, *The Times* restated in a series of editorials its position and its opposition to the Parliament Bill and Irish Home Rule.

7.2.11 A Permanent National Settlement Required

For *The Times*, the issue before the nation was not just that of reforming the Constitutional position of the House of Lords. Had that been the case, then it was confident that the government would 'no doubt have adopted the current concurrent treatment of the two branches'¹²² – that is, it would have dealt with the House of Lords and the House of Commons at the same time. However, since Redmond held the key to the continued existence of the Liberal Government, his requirement for passage of Home Rule meant that the constitution must be held in abeyance for 'an undefined period'. This meant that Lord Lansdowne's bill for the reconstitution of the House of Lords was very unwelcome to 'those champions of democracy'¹²³ since it would not put the constitution into abeyance. The real reason that the Parliament Bill would not be, in *The Times's* judgement, a device to amend the constitution but would, rather, 'suspend or

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² Editorial, 'That Lords Reconstitution Bill and the Situation' (n 62).

¹²³ Editorial, 'The Report Stage of the Parliament Bill' (n 112).

destroy [it] altogether [was that it suited] Mr Redmond to serve his purposes'.¹²⁴

As the Parliament Bill received its first reading in the Lords and the House of Lords Reconstitution Bill its second, *The Times* considered that rarely had the Lords been faced with more serious issues than the ones before them: 'The whole framework of the constitution has been shaken by Mr Asquith's and Mr Redmond's project. There is no longer any doubt as to what the essence of the project is'.¹²⁵ It was the passing of Irish Home Rule. *The Times* was dismissive of Asquith's and Redmond's claim of possessing authority for the 'sweeping revolution [that is to be found] in the sanction given by the last election to their parliament bill' and that the Parliament Bill needed 'no further ratification'.¹²⁶

The Parliament Bill could not pass, argued *The Times*, 12 days before the House of Lords was to give the Parliament Bill its second reading. Why, it asked could the government not see that constitutional reform required a permanent national settlement? Any settlement that went against 'the considered judgement of the fixed determination of half the nation was an absurdity'.¹²⁷ In *The Times's* judgement, the entire Unionist half of the country and a large proportion of the Liberal part of the country were 'utterly opposed to the creation of an unfettered cabinet' and all that it entailed.

7.2.12 Divisions in Ulster Unionism

Late May 1911 saw the second reading of the Parliament Bill in the House of Lords, where it passed without division. Early June saw the nation consumed by interest in King George V's coronation. But once the coronation excitement was over, political tension rose as the Parliament Bill moved into its final stages.

Whilst it was common to consider Ulster Protestants to be uniformly opposed to Irish Home Rule, the *Manchester Guardian* believed that a new spirit was abroad within Ulster tenants who wished to purchase land from their Ulster landlords. Existing legis-

¹²⁴ Editorial, 'The Report Stage of the Parliament Bill' (n 112).

¹²⁵ Editorial, 'To-Day and To-Morrow' *The Times* (London, 1 June 1911) 11.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Editorial, 'The Preamble Debates' *The Times* (London, 4 May 1911) 1.

lation did not allow for compulsory purchase of land from Ulster landlords by tenants. A compulsory purchase clause in the Birrell Land Purchase Bill of 1909 had been deleted by the House of Lords.

The *Manchester Guardian* reported that a sizeable number of Unionist tenants were supportive of the passage of the Parliament Bill, in expectation that, once it was passed, compulsory purchase of landlords' land would be possible. Ulster unionism was 'definitely against the people of Ulster',¹²⁸ in that it perpetuated the maintenance of a 'system which is putting them at a disadvantage compared with other Irishmen'.¹²⁹

7.2.13 Lord Lansdowne's Amendment

As has previously been discussed, in the committee stage of the Parliament Bill in the House of Lords, Lord Lansdowne had tabled and had had accepted amendments to Clause 2 of the Parliament Bill. Among his proposed amendments was one stating that any bill that established a national parliament or assembly in Ireland, Scotland, Wales or England that possessed legislative power and on which public opinion had not, in the opinion of the joint committee, been sufficiently ascertained should be referred to the voters. In other words, it would be subject to a referendum.

For *The Times*, the matter was straightforward and the acceptance of Lord Lansdowne's amendments by the House of Lords at the committee stage of the Parliament Bill was absolutely correct. There were some matters that were so fundamental, including the 'integrity of the kingdom' that any state 'pretending to stability, must leave [them] inviolable by any single chamber of Parliament'.¹³⁰

The *Manchester Guardian* saw the matter differently. It considered that the government was quite correct to indicate its refusal of Lord Lansdowne's amendments to the bill. The Commons rejected the amendments on three grounds. The English constitution was organic, and to distinguish between organic and inorganic law was alien to the English constitutional system. There were only two sorts of bill: Money Bills and every

¹²⁸ Editorial, 'The New Spirit in Ulster' *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 20 June 1911) 8.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Editorial, 'The Parliament Bill on Report' (n 94).

other sort of bill. The Commons refused to acknowledge the existence of a third type: the Constitutional Bill. Finally, the government's position was clear – a vote for the Parliament Bill must be regarded as a vote for Irish Home Rule.

Whilst the *Manchester Guardian* did not oppose the concept of a referendum in principle, it argued that a referendum had to be debated on his own merits and that to propose 'a referendum as an amendment to the parliament bill is to give an example of the very abuse against which the referendum is intended to safeguard'.¹³¹

7.2.14 'A Knife at the Government's Heart'

After the passing of the third reading by the House of Lords, *The Times* counselled Conservative politicians to allow the Parliament Bill to pass into law. The country, a *Times* editorial argued, had two choices – what it described as 'a choice of evils, but, of the evils to which it is restricted, one is conspicuously and immeasurably greater than the other'.¹³² As unpalatable as passing the Parliament Bill was, at least if it were passed things would be reversible and reparable; however, should the House of Lords be flooded by the threatened influx of Liberal peers, the likelihood was that Home Rule in Ireland and in Wales, and religious disestablishment in Wales, would soon follow. It was clear, *The Times* maintained, that once the Lords was flooded with new Liberal Lords, Irish Home Rule would be passed very quickly.

The government, despite doubts in some quarters, was, warned *The Times*, very serious about the threat of the creation of peers to overwhelm the Conservative majority in the Lords. The government only held office at the 'pleasure of the Nationalists';¹³³ this meant that the government must either go or do 'what suits Mr Redmond's policies'.¹³⁴ However, *The Times* still harboured some hope that the government might yet 'shrink from a course which they know to be one of extreme and unjustifiable violence'.¹³⁵

The Times returned to a recurring theme in its treatment of the Irish Home Rule issue

¹³¹ Editorial, 'The Lords' Debate' (n 75).

¹³² Editorial, 'Banquet To Lord Halsbury' *The Times* (London, 27 July 1911).

¹³³ Editorial, 'A Choice of Evils' *The Times* (London, 9 August 1911) 9.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

– the power of the IPP leader John Redmond and the weakness of the Liberal Government. The nation should be clear: the government was very much at the mercy of John Redmond, who held it ‘in the hollow of his hand’.¹³⁶ The Liberal Government valued being in power more than anything else, in the opinion of *The Times*, and its members knew that John Redmond would throw them out of office if they did not ‘toe the line at Mr Redmond’s bidding. That is the long and short of the whole crisis’;¹³⁷ as long as ‘Mr Redmond’s knife is at their hearts, [the government] would not flinch from any abuse of the prerogative or any abasement of the House of Lords that party expediency might dictate’.¹³⁸

The Parliament Bill received its third reading in the House of Lords on Thursday 20 July 1911, and it, together with Lord Lansdowne’s amendments, was returned to the House of Commons for their consideration. After due consideration, on 8 August 1911 the Commons returned the bill to the Lords to consider its responses to the Lords’ amendments. The amendment excluding Irish Home Rule was in effect one of the amendments that the House of Commons rejected. The Lords considered their position during 9–10 August, and ultimately agreed not to insist on their amendments. The bill passed 131 votes to 114 on 10 August and went forward for Royal Assent on 18 August 1911.

The Times’s and the *Manchester Guardian*’s editorials took opposite views of the government’s motive for the introduction and passing of the Parliament Bill. For *The Times*, the real motivation had always been Irish Home Rule. *The Times*’s commented that whilst it was not uncommon for men to swallow principles to achieve power it was extraordinary to sell one’s principles and then be told to breathe someone else’s principles.¹³⁹ This was the situation in which the Liberal Government found itself with the Irish Nationalists.

For the *Manchester Guardian*, the Parliament Bill and the curbing of the power of the

¹³⁶ Editorial, ‘The Vote of Censure’ (n 106).

¹³⁷ Editorial, ‘Mr Asquith’s Coup D’Etat’ *The Times* (London, 22 July 1911) 11.

¹³⁸ Editorial, ‘The Debates’ *The Times* (London, 9 August 1911) 1.

¹³⁹ Deerhurst, ‘The Parliament Bill and the Home Rule’ *The Times* (London, 8 August 1911) 7.

House of Lords was the main political issue facing the country, not Irish Home Rule. Attempts to argue otherwise were morally wrong and were a ‘fantastic perversion of the truth’.¹⁴⁰

7.3 Conclusion

December’s election results, which *The Times* had forecast correctly, created effectively no change in the seat numbers held by the major parties. This, claimed *The Times*, was because the Liberals had not kept Irish Home Rule policy in front of the electorate either in the run-up to the election or during much of the election itself. It was only, *The Times* alleged, after a meeting in Fife when Herbert Asquith was heckled that he responded with a statement that Irish Home Rule would happen and would take the form of mild devolution.

The *Manchester Guardian* concurred with *The Times*’s view that in fact Liberals had not ‘pushed’ Irish Home Rule policy before the electorate while they were campaigning. However, it contended, the election results were not due to the low profile of Irish Home Rule during the Liberal campaign, but rather to the fact that people were not as concerned about the prospect of Irish Home Rule as the Conservatives felt they were. The real issue, therefore, was not that of the Liberals keeping the issue quiet but, rather, that one of the Conservative certainties – that the people strongly objected to Irish Home Rule – proved to be incorrect.

Whatever views *The Times* had espoused in the previous year, they were staunchly anti-Irish-Home-Rule and staunchly anti-John-Redmond. John Redmond was, *The Times* contended, a dictator and an orchestrator and he had the Liberal Government under his total control. What is more, Redmond and the Irish Nationalists were disingenuous: in effect, they sold different versions of Irish Home Rule to different audiences depending on where they were located. It was not at all clear what Irish Home Rule meant, and the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out that a large section of the Conservative press had in the previous year expressed quite pro-Home-Rule sentiments. Indeed,

¹⁴⁰ Editorial, ‘Mr. Asquith’s Triumph’ *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 8 August 1911) 6.

Balfour had seemingly been pro-Home-Rule. In fact, the Conservative Party seemed to be in an insoluble quandary about its feelings on Irish Home Rule, even though its leader had of late reverted to the traditional Conservative opposition stance to Irish Home Rule. A campaign was underway to rewrite history, alleged the *Manchester Guardian*; however, the British Museum kept an extensive collection of Conservative Party documentation and its consultation would show the truth about the newspaper's claims.

In the view of the *Manchester Guardian*, the Ulster situation had improved in the last 10 or 15 years. A new mood had seen the rejection, to a degree, of ideas that were previously strongly held. Attempts to resurrect and energise Ulster's old battle cry of 'Home Rule means Rome Rule' had largely failed to take flight, despite the best efforts of some conservative newspapers. There had been a concerted campaign from John Redmond to try to reduce the tension in the Northern Irish communities and their supporters on the mainland. However, *The Times* argued that whatever conciliatory noises were emerging from the Irish Nationalists, the simple truth was that they were not to be trusted. It was not reassured by John Redmond's claim that the Imperial Parliament would have the responsibility of preventing persecution of the Protestant minority. Previous pledges concerning the representation of Protestants under the Irish Local Government Act had in reality produced very few Protestant local councillors.

The Times was certain that the Liberals, at the behest of Redmond, were seeking to put the constitution into abeyance, during which time Irish Home Rule would be made real. The delay built into the preamble was less about the work involved in setting up a new chamber to replace the House of Lords and more about buying time to pass Irish Home Rule. The conflict over the Parliament Bill was for *The Times* quite clear: the Liberal Government valued being in government more than safeguarding the nation's interest and had been driven by Irish Nationalists, socialists and United States financiers. The *Manchester Guardian* declared that Irish Home Rule was not the issue; rather, it was a smokescreen put up by the House of Lords to obscure the fact that the true issue of

the election was who ruled the country.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 The Parliament Act 1911

The decision, by a majority of 17, in the House of Lords on Thursday 10 August 1911 not to insist on their amendments being applied to the Parliament Bill marks a watershed in British constitutional history. Control of national finances passed to the House of Commons on a statutory basis. No longer would the House of Lords be able to control the budget process, in pursuit of its own political agenda.

The preamble to the Act was seemingly unequivocal in anticipating that the new second chamber, when it eventually appeared, would be constituted on the basis of a popular as opposed to a hereditary basis.¹ It also indicated that until the new second chamber was established, the existing House of Lords would have its powers restricted as set out in the body of the Act². However, since the preamble of an Act has no legal effect, it could be argued that it was aspirational only. If the government had been determined to abolish the House of the Lords, it could have given the desire legal force by making it a section in the Act, rather than part of its preamble. Perhaps the abolition of the House of Lords in 1911 was too radical a step even for the reforming Liberal Government.

The Act removed the absolute veto from the House of Lords over Money Bills,³ which meant the House of Lords was unable to delay a Certified Money Bill for more than

¹ 'And whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation.'

² 'And whereas provision will require hereafter to be made by parliament in a measure effecting such substitution for limiting and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber, but it is expedient to make such provision as in this Act appears for restricting the existing powers of the House of Lords.'

³ Parliament Act 1911, s 1[1].

one month, after which time it would be presented for Royal Assent. What constituted a Money Bill was to be the decision of the Speaker of the House of Commons⁴ but a Money Bill had to concern it self strictly with taxation, government debt and the administration of public money. A certificated Money Bill was significantly, put beyond the authority of the courts to challenge.⁵

The Act also provided that a non-money bill⁶ that was passed in the Commons in three successive sessions with at least two years between its first reading in the first session and its third reading in the third session could be presented for Royal Assent. The absolute veto over legislation the Lords had enjoyed for perhaps a thousand years was replaced by a suspensive veto; at best, the Lords could delay legislation for two years. Finally the Act reduced the maximum life of a parliament from seven to five years.⁷ Bills to extend the life of a parliament beyond a five-year term were not included, thus preventing the Commons being able to use the Parliament Act to extend the life of a government.

The Act did have limitations. It only applied to Public Bills⁸ originating in the Commons. The reality was that many bills, normally uncontroversial in nature, originated in the Lords. Nevertheless, the centre of gravity of the legislative process had shifted decisively toward the representative democracy as embodied in the House of Commons and away from the unelected and hereditary House of Lords.

The Times had opposed the introduction of the Parliament Act but ultimately decided that its introduction would be better for the House of Lords and the country than the threatened flood of 500 additional Liberal peers to the House of Lords. The decision made by the Lords to pass the Bill was a source of relief for *The Times* describing itself as 'glad, because we are profoundly convinced that it entails the lesser by far of two evils'.⁹

⁴ [Parliament Act 1911](#), s 1[2].

⁵ *ibid* s 3.

⁶ *ibid* s 2(1).

⁷ *ibid* s 7.

⁸ Bills that change the law as it applies to the general population and the most common type of bill

⁹ Editorial, 'The Passing of The Parliament Act' *The Times* (London, 11 August 1911) 7.

The use of the creation or threat of the creation of peers to ‘encourage’ the Lords to acquiesce to demands by monarchs or government had a long tradition. Queen Anne had created 12 Tory peers for the House of Lords in order to force through parliament the acceptance of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, to end the War of Spanish Secession.¹⁰ A threat to create peers had been made to enable the passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1832.

The *Manchester Guardian* for its part supported and welcomed the introduction of the Parliament Act. It declared that the Lords, which it described ‘as a weak and vicious burlesque’ had treated the country as ‘a bullying drover might treat a very small donkey, with short, impatient expressions of contempt’.¹¹ However it cautioned, that as good as the passage of the Act was, it did not go far enough in curbing the power of the House of Lords, ‘Even the sobering effect of the loss of its misused absolute veto can hardly amount to absolute reformation’.¹²

8.2 The Referendum Issue

Arthur Balfour had made a bold step in offering to put Conservative tariff reform to the people in a referendum, challenging Asquith to do the same – in effect calling his bluff. There was some surprise, if not consternation, from the Conservative Party at Balfour’s ‘pledge’. As has previously been remarked, the issue with a referendum is that it asks people a binary question on a policy issue. It is inconceivable that a politician would call a referendum and not expect to win the vote, for losing a vote on a referendum amounts to the rejection of that policy.¹³ The issue with tariff reform policy is that the people were never likely to vote for tariff reform once the Liberals framed the argument as being about the ‘big loaf’ of free trade versus the ‘little loaf’ of tariff reform, aided

¹⁰ Cited by Professor Douglas Savoury, Ulster Unionist MP for Queen’s University of Belfast: HC Deb 31 October 1949, vol 469, col 105.

¹¹ Editorial, ‘The Quarrels of the Peers’ *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, 10 August 1911) 6.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ The June 2016 referendum on whether Britain should remain in the EU shows the political risk of a prime minister initiating a referendum, backing one side over another and losing. Lord Peter Mandelson, a former British European Commissioner, said that David Cameron had taken a ‘tactical risk, which then turned into a strategic blunder’ quoted in G Parker, ‘How David Cameron lost his battle for Britain’ *Financial Times* (London, 18 December 2016) 4.

powerfully by a press and poster campaign.

The Conservatives and *The Times* were in favour of the adoption of the referendum device. They believed that, if given the opportunity to vote on the single issue of granting Ireland Home Rule, people on the mainland of the United Kingdom would reject it. The Conservatives also considered that growth of the party system, especially the whip system, had had a detrimental effect on British politics, the accusation being that the British political system was driven by logrolling.¹⁴ Finally, the Conservatives seemed to favour the adoption of a referendum since it would expose to public scrutiny policies that the Liberal Party had, in its judgement, kept hidden from the electorate, namely Irish Home Rule.

An attempt by the Lords to introduce a referendum bill failed. As did, an attempt to amend the Parliament Bill so as to require a referendum on issues of great gravity, an attempt rejected by the Commons. After a short game of parliamentary 'ping-pong', the Lords voted not to insist on their referendum amendment.

Asquith had indicated that the Liberal Party was not opposed in principle to the concept of a referendum. However, from their perspective, the referendum undermined the election results of both elections in 1910. The charge was that the Conservatives were 'sore losers' who were trying to overturn the legitimate mandate given to the Liberal Party by the electorate. Asquith declared that December's election was almost like a referendum in that it had been about one issue: the Lords veto.

The *Manchester Guardian*, too, claimed not to be opposed to the use of a referendum in principle. It shared Liberal concerns that the Conservatives were seeking to bypass the result of the December election. It also objected to the timing of its introduction. It did not consider that such a constitutional innovation should be introduced into the constitution at the same time as the Parliament Bill was being passed.

¹⁴ The exchanging of favours in politics

8.3 Irish Home Rule Issue

As has already been stated, part of the appeal of a referendum for the Conservatives was that it would force the government's Irish Home Rule policy to be placed in front of the electorate for a decision. *The Times* repeatedly echoed the Conservative claim that the Liberal Party had kept Irish Home Rule away from the centre of its campaigning before and during the December election. *The Times's* editorials agreed with the Conservatives that the reason for this was simple: the people did not like the prospect of Irish Home Rule and would vote for the Conservatives in preference as a result.

The *Manchester Guardian* expressed some sympathy with the view that the Liberals had not campaigned strongly on Irish Home Rule per se. It pointed out that the Liberal Party had split over Irish Home Rule in 1886, Asquith had repeatedly promised Irish Home Rule and the Liberals were now in coalition with an Irish Home Rule party. *The Times* argued that in fact the Parliament Bill was ultimately all about Irish Home Rule, whereas in the view of the *Manchester Guardian*, the issue driving the Parliament Bill was the issue of who ran the country: Irish Home Rule was in its view a smokescreen put up by the Lords and the Conservatives to cover the real issue.

Ultimately, the Conservatives' view that the Parliament Act would be used to pass an Irish Home Rule measure proved to be correct. The second time the Parliament Act 1911 was used, was to pass the Government of Ireland Act 1914. However, the outbreak of the First World War led to the suspension of the Act. Irish Home Rule did not occur until the Government of Ireland Act 1921 was passed.

In considering the editorial outlook of both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* on Irish Home Rule and the referendum debate, two things stand out. First, *The Times* supported the Conservatives over the issues, and the *Manchester Guardian* supported the Liberal Government over the issues. That is to say, *The Times* was in favour of the referendum and opposed to Irish Home Rule and it opposed the Parliament Bill. The *Manchester Guardian* opposed the use of a referendum in terms of the timing of its adoption and its use to bypass the general election result. It supported Irish Home

Rule and the introduction of the Parliament Bill.

Second, the lasting impression created by reading the editorials is just how much dislike *The Times* had for John Redmond and the Irish Nationalists, but especially John Redmond. Whilst it was usually polite, the distinct impression emanating from the pages of *The Times* is that of a dislike verging on contempt; scarcely was his name appear without some accompanying adverse comment. He was described as controlling or dictatorial or as dominating the Liberal Government. The Liberal Government fared little better. In *The Times's* editorials, Asquith and the Liberals were continually described as weak and submissive and as placing the party's interests before those of the nation. In late July 1911, a *Times* editorial charged that Asquith 'has played a contemptible part in subservience to an avowedly disloyal faction, and this present coup d'état puts the seal on his dishonour'.¹⁵

8.4 Further Research Avenues

Whilst the study goes some way towards examining the constitutional crisis between December 1910 and August 1911, it is of necessity a snapshot due to constraints of both time and length. There are two or perhaps three areas of additional research that would prove interesting.

The first is to broaden the analysis to include letters to the editor of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* to learn how published correspondence compared to the editorial views. Were correspondents broadly sympathetic or antipathetic to the views expressed by the editorials? The second avenue of potential research is to move the starting date constraint back in time to the first election of 1910 to consider either editorials alone or both editorials and correspondents' feedback on the issues. The third avenue, which would require a large investment of time and effort but would potentially be very interesting, is to undertake a longitudinal survey, perhaps moving the starting point to 1906 when the Liberal Government took office.

¹⁵ Editorial, 'Mr Asquith's Coup D'Etat' (n 137).

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